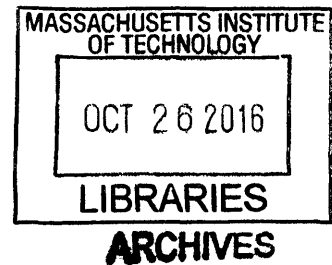


Organization and Community: The Determinants of Insurgent Military Effectiveness

by

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B.A. Government
Colby College (2007)



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Submitted to the Department of Political Science on September 9, 2016 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

ABSTRACT

The United States and other members of the international community have expended billions of dollars and thousands of lives confronting insurgent organizations across the globe. Strikingly, however, there has been little analysis of how some groups have developed the military capacity to challenge superior forces. The importance of this question has been illustrated by the recent rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Yet, existing research provides limited insight as (1) it has not conceptualized military effectiveness in a sub-state context, and (2) it is focused on structural determinants of insurgent behavior. Thus, I construct a conception of insurgent military effectiveness capturing distinctions such as insurgents' (in)ability to keep ceasefires or to control who is targeted by violence as well as a theory arguing that it is not the resources organizations have that determine effectiveness, but how well their organizational structure allows them to leverage those resources. In particular, the theory focuses on both informal structures of social support and formal military structures such as logistics, command and control, and personnel management systems in explaining how some insurgent organizations achieve relatively high levels of military effectiveness and others do not.

After using a large-N analysis to demonstrate that structural factors are poor predictors of organizational structure and conflict outcomes, I test the theory with in-depth case studies of groups from Vietnam (1940-1975) and Iraq (2003-2016) using archival documents, interviews, and secondary sources. These two countries represent promising areas to study organizations as there is a high-degree of variation in structural and organizational factors as well as in military effectiveness. The empirical chapters provide strong support for the theory, demonstrating the importance of my organizational approach. In addition, the empirical analysis untangles puzzles such as how, in Vietnam, the Việt Minh and People's Liberation Armed Front (also known as the Việt Cộng) became so successful while other nationalist and religious groups did not or, in Iraq, how the Islamic State has operated with such military prowess. The findings also help to clarify existing research—such as the study of fragmentation and the role of factors such as external support and community structure—while providing precise suggestions about managing sub-state violence by helping to better identify and train partners, to craft and maintain peace agreements, and to address poor governance that perpetuates conflict.

Thesis Supervisor: Roger Petersen

Title: Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The rise of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria from 2013-2015 shocked many as the organization took control of enormous swaths of territory in both countries. IS defeated the United State (US)-supported Iraqi armed forces in a number of battles and was able to resist onslaughts from the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad as well as a host of other Islamist rebels in Syria. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's success has also continually confounded analysts. The same was true in Vietnam where the rise and success of the Việt Minh during the First Indochina War was unforeseen by French intelligence, culminating in the infamous defeat at Điện Biên Phủ. Similarly, the staying power of the Việt Minh's predecessor, the People's Liberation Armed Front (PLAF, also known as the Việt Cộng) continually confounded many US policymakers during the 1960s and 1970s.

This begs the question, how have some insurgent organizations developed the military capacity to challenge superior forces? Strikingly, even though the United States and other members of the international community have expended significant resources and thousands of lives confronting insurgent organizations across the world, there has been little systematic analysis of how some in-

insurgents fight better than others. In response, this project sets out to better understand the ways in which insurgent organizations fight and what makes some insurgent organizations more militarily effective than others. To answer this question, I propose an organizational theory focused on the intersection of informal structures of social support and formal military structures such as logistics, command and control, and personnel management systems. Organizations need both a committed and well-controlled social foundation *and* an explicit military apparatus if they are to fight with high levels of effectiveness.

This dissertation moves beyond existing research in two important ways. First, existing work does not provide a reliable way to categorize military effectiveness in a sub-state context. Much research into military effectiveness at the sub-state level often mirrors studies of state militaries by equating it to factors such as outright victory, the number and types of weapons possessed, or the number of troops controlled. In addition, a growing literature has equated military effectiveness to whether or not insurgents are “fragmented” or not. Both of these sets of factors are undoubtedly related to military outcomes. But, while high degrees of capacity are necessary to militarily defeat a state during a civil war, much of the action during sub-state conflict occurs at a lower level of conflict. In this context, research into the causes and implications of broad outcomes such as fragmentation obscures significant variation in rebel behavior and organization. Many conflict processes are driven by the (in)ability of insurgents to keep ceasefires, to control who is targeted by violence, or to coordinate activities across disparate geographical areas.

Second, much existing research has focused on structural determinants of insurgent behavior. Current explanations emphasize factors such as pre-existing community structures, state strength, and access to territory, resources, and external support to explain fragmentation and insurgent military effectiveness. But, oftentimes, these structural factors does not change during the conflict mean-

ing that they cannot account for changes within organizations over time or for drastically different organizational configurations resulting from similar conditions. Thus, while important, structural factors cannot capture differences in effectiveness between organizations operating in similar structural conditions such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Hezbollah and Amal in Lebanon, the Việt Minh and Quốc Dân Đảng Front (QDD Front) in Vietnam, Fedayeen forces and al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), or the Badr Organization, Special Groups, and Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) also in Iraq. Indeed, as the dissertation shows, many organizations become effective without access to external patrons, territorial sanctuary, or strong pre-existing primary groups. Instead, insurgent groups are adaptive and diverse military actors, meaning that variation in their behavior is driven by their organizational composition and ability to change.

1.2 The Argument

To explain the puzzle of how some organizations fight better than others, the dissertation makes two theoretical steps. First, I construct a conception of insurgent military effectiveness more fitting for the types of combat common in civil wars. The dissertation disaggregates effectiveness into five categories: organizations that disintegrate under fire (Combat Ineffective), those able to carry out simple activities such as ceasefires or preventing large-scale defections (Limited Structural Integrity), those able to ensure that their units carry out specific orders under fire such as only attacking particular populations or areas (Complete Structural Integrity), and, those able to carry out more coordinated military tasks such as handling weaponry, ambushes, retreats, and hit and run operations (Guerrilla Capacity). Finally, organizations with higher levels of military effectiveness can fight in a manner similar to conventional forces by employing combined arms, conducting static defenses, and carrying out attacks that involve larger fighting units (Quasi-conventional Capacity).

To explain variation in these categories of effectiveness, the dissertation develops a theory arguing that it is not the structural conditions in which organizations operate that determine effectiveness, but how well their organizational structure allows them to leverage those conditions. Joining many scholars, I argue that the foundation of any effective organization is strong primary group ties that unite soldiers at the unit-level. However, in contrast with current literature, I argue that organizations are not doomed if they cannot import already existing strong social ties *and* that, in either case, strong social ties alone are insufficient to explain organizational behavior.

Organizations that cannot draw upon pre-existing social, religious, or communal ties can *build* them organically. Insurgents can achieve this task in the same manner that many conventional armies do: by using bootcamp and indoctrination to re-socialize new recruits thus creating strong bonds between fighters and even generating *esprit de corps*. While many organizations follow this approach, it is also possible for organizations to build strong social ties in a “negative” manner by forcing recruits to go through horrific experiences to bind individuals together through fear or guilt. Whether or not organizations import pre-existing ties or build them organically, to benefit from the power of these social structures, insurgent leaders must actively leverage them. Without leveraging those ties, these strong informal structures can come into direct *competition* with the formal hierarchy of an organization or can *substitute* for the organization when personal ties are used in place of formal channels.

Thus, to move beyond Combat Ineffective and attain Limited Structural Integrity, I argue that organizations must leverage primary groups with resource control by centralizing the provision of resources such as weaponry and food. When organizations are able to directly and exclusively provide strong primary groups with the key things they need to fight and live, members of the group are strongly incentivized to maintain access to these goods. Deployed fighters are motivated

to self-police by using group norms to encourage others to comply, but only when their behavior can be *directly* observed and thus sanctioned. As a result, leaders will be able to ensure compliance with highly visible orders such as maintaining ceasefires or not retreating. In these cases, the central leadership can readily see whether soldiers are fighting or not and sanction units for violations. But, such organizations will struggle to manage how those units employ force, whether it be the tactics they use or the targets they select, since the leadership cannot observe and then sanction behavior taking place during combat.

To further increase military effectiveness and attain Complete Structural Integrity by ensuring that soldiers comply when not observed, leaders must cultivate a lower-level officer cadre committed to the organization and trusted by their soldiers. This task requires indoctrinating and selecting the most committed officers and putting in place command arrangements that cultivate trust such as appointing officers to manageably-sized units and ensuring they face risk equally with their soldiers. These cadre serve as focal points for the primary group, meaning that their example and commitment to the organization redirects the behavior of the group to support organizational goals. In such situations, not only do preferences of foot soldiers begin to align with the organization's preferences, but the normative power of the primary group is mobilized to sanction and correct any deviant behavior.

Only organizations with this foundation can reach Guerrilla Capacity by adding explicit military institutions. This includes providing training for cadre in small-unit tactics and basic military skills. Along with this training, promotion and selection of small-unit leaders should be driven mainly by military performance, meaning that the best leaders are those at the forefront. These cadre in turn must be positioned to train their fighters through "on the job" training. Thus, experienced and inexperienced fighters should be inter-mixed and training should be conducted regularly within

the units. Finally, flexible and quick-moving operations are only possible if forces are organized into small and functionally differentiated units. Larger units are too unwieldy for these types of operations.

Though it is rare, insurgent organizations may become even more effective and develop into conventional forces that can militarily challenge a state. These organizations will be organized into units above the company level and train in such larger formations. As a result, nearly all soldiers are trained in dedicated training camps. These larger units will need heavier weaponry that can be deployed in coordination with infantry components. As a result, they need a dedicated logistical back-end to move troops and equipment throughout a conflict zone.

Importantly, the logic of the theory and its predictions are iterative. Organizations that have heavy weapons and military training but do not have strong primary groups or a cadre system are unable to fight with high levels of effectiveness. Similarly, organizations without external support or territorial sanctuary can still develop fairly high levels of capacity when they implement the organizational characteristics the theory specifies.

1.3 Research Design and Scope Conditions

The central contention of the dissertation is that insurgents' informal and formal organizational attributes, rather than their structural conditions, determine their ability to employ force. As a result, the theory generates a number of hypotheses and mechanisms linking particular organizational characteristics with a given level of military effectiveness. In order to evaluate these hypotheses, I crafted a research design that could isolate the effect of organizational from structural factors. Moreover, I have collected detailed data about the internal operations of insurgent organizations by drawing upon archival materials, interviews, and significant historiographies.

Observable Implications. In order to productively test the theory, it is necessary to specify its observable implications, or what should be observed if the theory is correct.¹ Thus, the theory clearly presents observable implications so it is possible to distinguish the theory from alternative explanations and thus feel confident in deriving policy and substantive lessons from my findings. The most general implication that I test is that the conflict environment alone should be unable to explain either the structure of insurgent organizations or the way in which those organizations operate. To more directly test each aspect of the theory, I also lay out specific observable implications for each level of organizational structure.

To begin with, I expect that organizations that do not have strong primary groups ties or have not attempted to leverage such ties will be unable to fight with any effectiveness. However, organizations which do have strong ties binding their soldiers together and have centralized the provision of resources in tandem with systems to punish deviant behavior should be able to ensure compliance with easily observable orders such as keeping ceasefires or preventing large-scale defection (Limited Structural Integrity). But, those organizations will be unable to control less observable day-to-day combat activities, such as the targets of violence during particular engagements. Beyond these behavioral outcomes, I also expect that interviewed soldiers should state that they complied when fearing sanctions and did not comply when believing their behavior was not visible.

For organizations that have put in place procedures to train and select a lower-level officer cadre and to empower those cadre to represent and serve their troops, the theory predicts that these organizations should not only be able to control observable behaviors like ceasefires, but also be able to control how violence is used (Complete Structural Integrity). In such cases, soldiers interviewed

1. For the importance of specifying and testing observable implications to causally separate competing explanations in the complex environment of civil war, see Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Transnational Dynamics of Civil War," in *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War*, ed. Jeffrey T. Checkel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 3–30.

should state that they followed orders because of their trust in lower-level cadre and lower-level cadre interviewed should be more loyal to the central organization than their footsoldiers.

Finally, only organizations that have combined the above organizational features with clear military training procedures and appropriate command structures should be able to consistently conduct military operations such as retreats, hit and runs, or ambushes (Guerrilla Capacity). If the theory is correct, disparate units across the insurgent organization should behave in a similar fashion. Further, members of those units should state that they have been trained and feel able to translate their training into action on the battlefield. Organizations that have wider-scale training, heavy weapons, and large units should be able to fight with Quasi-conventional Capacity. Given the logistical and organizational demands of fighting this way, it is likely that these organizations will require some form territorial sanctuary and external support.

Research Design and Evidence. To isolate the importance of organizational versus structural factors and directly test the above observable implications, I adopt a two-stage approach. First, using a compilation of existing civil war datasets, I employ a number of statistical models to demonstrate that structural variables are poor predictors of both insurgent organizational structure and civil war outcomes. This analysis is accompanied by empirical examples illustrating how structural factors cannot account for much of the variance we observe across diverse conflict environments.

Second, to explicitly test the theory, I conduct in-depth case studies adopting a methodology that allows me to compare organizations which share similar structural conditions. In particular, I study ten organizations in Vietnam from 1940-1975 and fifteen organizations in Iraq from 2003-2016 (See Table 1.1 for a full list). For each organization, I trace its organizational development and characteristics to identify if the theory's mechanisms are present and contribute to organizational behavior. Given the level of specificity in the theory, this careful process tracing is critical to

Table 1.1 Organizations Studied

Vietnam		Iraq	
First Indochina War	Second Indochina War	Sunni Organizations	Shiite Organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Việt Minh • Cao Đài Forces • Liên Minh (Cao Đài) • Hòa Hảo Forces • Nguyễn Giác Ngộ (Hòa Hảo) • Ba Cụt (Hòa Hảo) • QDD Front 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLAF Main Force • PLAF Guerrilla Force • PAVN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • al-Qaeda in Iraq • Islamic State • Islamic Army of Iraq • 1920 Revolution Brigade • Jaysh Muhammad • Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshbandia • Tribal Militias (6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jaysh al-Mahdi • Badr Organization • Special Groups

identifying and evaluating causal processes.

These two countries represent promising areas for organizational study. Within both conflict zones, organizations exhibit a high-degree of variation in the strength of pre-existing community networks, access to resources and external partnerships, organizational structure, and military effectiveness. Moreover, both countries are relatively data-rich conflict environments given the presence of the United States, other international actors, and the media.

In addition to the causal process observations collected in evaluating the theory's mechanisms as they apply to each group, the sub-national approach allows for a number of most similar comparisons between organizations by holding constant many structural variables. For example, in Iraq from 2003 to 2007, a relevant comparison is between JAM, the Badr Organization, and the Special Groups. While all three are rooted in dense Shiite communities and were heavily supported by Iran, the latter two organizations developed more robust formal structures including clearly specified command and control and differentiated fighting units. In Vietnam, an analogous comparison is between the Việt Minh and QDD Front both of which received external support and attempted to espouse a nationalist ideology. While the former developed effective military structures, the latter did not invest in a similar apparatus.

To further establish that the organizational attributes isolated by the dissertation are central, the project utilizes a number of comparisons between organizations with drastically different structural contexts that nevertheless end up with similar formal and informal structures. These comparisons are feasible within country—for example, between the Việt Minh and Cao Đài forces in Vietnam or AQI and the Special Groups in Iraq—as well as between Vietnam and Iraq. Indeed, there are a number of important differences between the countries in terms of religion, state strength, ethnicity, technology, the main ideologies involved, the terrain and geographic span of conflicts, the state structure in place preceding the conflicts, and the international circumstances accompanying each of the conflicts. Despite these differences, I demonstrate that the same organizational pathways have resulted in similar outcomes across both conflict zones.

Given the specificity of the observable implications I seek to test in each country, I have collected detailed information about the internal dynamics of insurgent organizations. In Vietnam, this process consisted of the collection of archival documents, interviews with ex-combatants, and the use of secondary sources. For the First Indochina War (1945-1954), during nearly five months at the National Archives II in Hồ Chí Minh City, Vietnam, I reviewed thousands of documents including internal records from militants along with extensive French intelligence reporting. For the Second Indochina War (1960-1975), this included analyses by the RAND Corporation, as well as thousands of interviews conducted by the organization, and the review of thousands of documents from The Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University. For the Iraq conflict, I draw heavily on resources from the Harmony Project at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. These include hundreds of captured insurgent documents as well as interviews with combatants. Nonetheless as the conflict in Iraq is on-going, I was unable to collect as detailed data across the board. Still, in addition to the Harmony documents, I am able to use evidence from press reports, intelligence analyses,

first-person accounts, and interviews. Because precise data is hard to come by, I carefully evaluate the less detailed observable implications the theory generates for each level of effectiveness. This approach was effective as the level of information collected in the Vietnam cases provided strong support for the connection between the theory's predictions and the additional observable implications I specify in developing each mechanism.

Scope Conditions. This dissertation applies to militant organizations in sub-state conflicts that seek to use violence with the goal of either joining the state, creating a new state, or deposing the current government. Such organizations are not using violence solely to provoke fear or pursue criminal goals. In addition, the theory applies to specific organizations, not broader movements—so it makes predictions about organizations such as AQI or JAM rather than the broader Iraqi insurgency. The dissertation does not address how these groups behave *after* a conflict has come to end, whether militarily or through a peace agreement.

The theory makes predictions about the military effectiveness of organizations already fighting in a conflict. While decisions made by leaders about how to organize may influence their military effectiveness, the dissertation does not attempt to explain how a movement becomes violent in the first place, why members of a society turn to violence, or why members join a particular organization. Instead, it evaluates how organizations that have already made that decision harness the structural conditions in which they operate

The theory applies to groups irrespective of their underlying motivating principles, whether it be nationalism, religion, separatism, ideology, ethnicity, or greed. Indeed, a core observable implication of the theory is that effective organizations with very different underlying world views will often follow similar organizational pathways. While these differences may influence *how* leaders might decide to use their organizational capabilities—for example, whether to attack civilians or

to contribute to governance—the theory only evaluates the types of military tasks these groups are capable of carrying out.

1.4 Contributions

Through the tests carried out across a large-N sample, as well as the case evidence in Iraq and Vietnam, the dissertation finds that explicit organizational processes, rather than structural conditions drive insurgent military effectiveness. Thus, rather than treating insurgent military forces as particular cases, they fit within the broader spectrum of organizations attempting to use violence in a calibrated manner. These findings have important academic and policy implications.

In terms of the study of civil war, the detailed conception of military effectiveness contributed by the dissertation better positions researchers to untangle civil war dynamics. Instead of focusing on broad categories of insurgent behavior such as whether insurgents are “fragmented” or “cohesive”, this dissertation focuses on both meaningful and tractable categories of insurgent behavior. For example, while organizations with Limited Structural Integrity will never defeat a state outright, this level of control is fundamental since it is a defining feature of what makes organized violence in fact organized. These organizations are capable of maintaining ceasefires that allow them to negotiate peace deals that can facilitate political transitions. Similarly, while the difference between Limited and Complete Structural Integrity will not determine whether an organization can fight like a conventional force, it may very well influence conflict outcomes. While organizations with Limited Structural Integrity cannot prevent their soldiers from targeting civilians, those with Complete Structural Integrity can feel confident that their units will treat civilians as the leadership desires. This level of military effectiveness thus can be central to an insurgent group’s success as it can use violence without risking the loss of civilian support.

Beyond the analytic utility of the dissertation's conception of military effectiveness, the theory's mechanisms that connect organizational formation with these various capabilities makes substantive contributions to our understanding of civil war dynamics. Perhaps most importantly, by focusing on the organization, the theory clarifies the role of structural and conflict factors in contributing to how conflicts play out. By not treating an organization's social structure or resource flows as exogenous, but as deliberate examples of organization-building, I uncover critical variation in insurgent development and behavior.

For example, I demonstrate the conditions under which strong pre-existing community structures will contribute to an organization's success, but also the conditions under which these social foundations might interfere with an organization's operations. Similarly, while access to lootable resources might create a resource curse for some groups, those with well-designed systems to collect and distribute those resources will instead draw advantages from these resources by harnessing their power to support their war efforts. The dissertation also demonstrates that many organizations can reach a relatively high level of capacity *without* access to dedicated territorial sanctuaries or external patrons. Along these lines, the empirical analyses shows that contrary to popular perceptions, insurgents rarely have difficulty in gaining access to the weapons and ammunition they need to fight. In short, structural factors do not determine an organization's trajectory and development, but they do provide organizations with opportunities or challenges for creating and maintaining the organizational tools needed to fight with high levels of capacity.

Moreover, the dissertation emphasizes that variation in military skill matters. Like all armed forces, successful insurgents require specific instruction and organizational features to use violence in a calibrated fashion. In this context, the dissertation contributes to a nascent literature investigating the role of one military institution in civil war: training regimens. This literature looks at the

role of training in re-socializing insurgent fighters. I expand on this research by focusing on the role that military training plays in generating fighting capacity. While organizations can employ force in a limited manner without extensively trained fighters, military training is necessary for organizations to carry out complex, coordinated guerrilla campaigns as well as more complicated conventional-type activities. A key comparison studied is between the People's Army of North Vietnam (PAVN) and the PLAF during the Second Indochina War. While both had similar ideological outlooks, fairly similar access to basic resources, a shared command structure, and similar backgrounds, only PAVN, which had routinized military training programs, was able to employ force in a complex manner on the battlefield throughout the conflict.

Outside of the study of civil war, this research joins a developing trend in comparative politics focusing on the importance of formal and informal structures within organizations. Nearly all fledgling organizations face the challenge of creating or leveraging informal ties that bind their followers or bureaucrats together. Beyond demonstrating that these informal ties are insufficient to create effective formal organizations or bureaucracies on their own, the dissertation provides categories of mechanisms that should apply beyond armed actors. For example, to fully leverage social structures, the theory points to the role of trusted and dedicated mid-level officers or representatives who serve as focal points for their teams. While there are obviously not NCOs or lieutenants in a Ministry of Trade or Social Services, there are important individuals that can motivate technocrats to feel a certain level of commitment to a nascent state-building process.

Importantly, however, the theory underscores that the commitment and social cohesion of bureaucrats or employees is only part of the puzzle. To become effective, organizations must develop specific and unique technical capacities. For example, the particular skills that make an organization a good fighting force will not build the technical capacity to manage state budgets or create electoral

regulations. It is the particular skill-sets present in organizations that determine what tasks they can successfully carry out.

In this context, the dissertation contributes to a budding literature focusing on governance in post-conflict environments. Not surprisingly, researchers are finding that fighting capacity during a conflict is not necessarily connected to how well a group governs after the conflict ends. By focusing on precise organizational features, the dissertation may contribute to this discussion by helping to isolate which institutions within armed groups *do* contribute to successful transitions to governing. While there are multiple pathways toward fighting well, these different approaches have implications for how an organization might behave after the peace agreement is signed. For example, the Việt Minh and PLAF followed a quite different strategy in building social ties than did IS. IS did not try to create a broad population with a shared outlook, instead they only tried to indoctrinate their own members so as to conquer others. By contrast, the Việt Minh and PLAF tried to create a broad national culture that enveloped the entire Vietnamese population. Thus, they created a political and governance infrastructure meant to address to citizens' needs. Therefore, it is likely that while these organizations in Vietnam and Iraq fought similarly, the Việt Minh and PLAF were better prepared to govern.

Beyond these contributions, the dissertation provides tangible guidance to policymakers seeking to mitigate conflict. The unforeseen rise of IS underscores the need to better understand the processes by which insurgent organizations to become effective. When insurgent organizations become strong fighting forces, it becomes harder to defeat them without precipitating increasingly intense cycles of violence. Similarly, when facing weaker fighting forces, failing to recognize when they are capable of keeping peace treaties will amplify violence and often make it less manageable. The dissertation emphasizes that policymakers will not be able to make such distinctions from

broad structural factors alone. Instead, analysts need to take into account insurgents specific organizational attributes to best respond to them and thus mitigate conflict. Below, I illustrate how the theory supports efforts to reduce the intensity of violent conflict in three ways.

First, the dissertation highlights the types of organizations that policymakers should seek to partner with and prescribes the types of programs that should be implemented to make these partners stronger and more dependable. As the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan have illustrated, it is critical to find reliable allies. Yet, it has been quite difficult to identify and successfully support partners. The dissertation helps to inform the selection of partners by pointing to observable institutional characteristics that provide a foundation that outside support can build upon. In particular, organizations that have imported or built strong social ties between unit members have significant room to grow. Yet, simply handing out arms or basic training to them will not be sufficient to bolster these partners. Instead, outside patrons must help these organizations to create resource control and a strong network of lower-level cadre. These recommendations also apply to US efforts to find state partners, whether Shiite militias in Iraq, Malian Special Forces, or the Afghanistan National Army.

Second, the dissertation supports conflict resolution by demonstrating which actors are capable of making peace while giving mediators tools to help persuade states to make such peace deals rather than attempting to entirely destroy rebel actors. Ceasefires represent an important step in getting parties to the table and limiting violence. Though governments often do not seek such agreements as they either do not expect insurgents to abide by the agreements, or because they seek to militarily destroy rebels, the dissertation introduces a somewhat counterintuitive policy recommendation. Though it might appeal to policymakers to use overwhelming force against weaker actors, I show that this approach can actually precipitate far more—and less controllable—violence. Attempting to

forcibly remove the social support of insurgent leaders can reduce their ability to make deals and hold ceasefires that limit violence. By bringing actors to the negotiating table, conflict mediators can take advantage of the social support that rebel leaders have and leverage that to maintain peace.

Finally, the dissertation provides guidance about when good governance and rule of law reforms may help to win “hearts and minds.” While it is hard to wrestle resource control away from organizations that have put in place robust distribution systems, attempts to address problems earlier in the conflict are likely to be more successful. The theory highlights that organizations will not be able to take control of fighting forces without creating resource control. Oftentimes, insurgent groups are able to centralize resources by taking advantage of deficiencies in government provision of services or security. Moreover, when institutions are weak and corruption is possible, insurgents that join the government can use existing infrastructures to bolster their cause at the expense of the state. As the empirical analysis demonstrates, both of these processes were common in Iraq and Vietnam, and are visible in other conflict areas such as Afghanistan and Lebanon. As a result, reforms that improve the transparency, accountability, and reach of government services not only may improve support for the government, but can make it far more difficult for insurgents to gain the allegiance of broad swaths of the population in the first place.

1.5 Road Map

The dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature related to the formation and behavior of insurgent groups. This chapter illustrates how this research does not allow us to accurately predict and conceptualize military effectiveness. I make this point in two ways. First, a large-N analysis tests the explanatory power of structural factors in capturing conflict dynamics and organizational structure. Second, I walk through the empirical and theoretical reasons that ex-

isting explanations are poor predictors of organizational structure and behavior. For example, while many organizations receive external support, only some of them have the institutions in place to take those resources and distribute them throughout the organization in a manner which maintains the centrality of the central leadership.

Chapter 3 presents the theory. I first develop my five-level conception of military effectiveness and discuss the importance of studying military effectiveness. Next, I develop the theory and engage with research into conventional military effectiveness, rebel fragmentation, collective violent action, and the intersection of formal and informal structures in comparative politics. The theory presents the logic for how each level of organizational structure is linked to military effectiveness. Finally, it includes a discussion of how organizational pathologies may prevent some organizations from developing to become more effective.

With the theory specified I turn to testing it in Iraq and Vietnam. In Vietnam, I study the First and Second Indochina War. In Chapter 4, I test the theory in the First Indochina War by evaluating a wide-range of organizations, both temporally and cross-sectionally. The theory is able to demonstrate how, even though the French most feared the nationalist QDD Front, it was Việt Minh that developed to be a greater foe. Turning to the Second Indochina War, Chapter 5 evaluates the PLAF versus PAVN. The theory uncovers that training regimes are directly linked to the complexity of operations a military force can conduct.

Building on the findings from Vietnam, the Iraq cases from 2003 to 2016 allow me to explicitly address the role of pre-existing social structures. In Chapter 6, I study Sunni groups. These groups could not draw upon strong pre-existing community ties, yet, I show that despite this impediment, some organizations became quite effective while others were unable to operate with military prowess. This chapter also uses the theory's mechanisms to explain how AQI developed into

the highly effective IS. Finally, moving to Shiite groups, Chapter 7 evaluates three organizations that all had access to strong pre-existing social structures. Yet, while the Special Groups and Badr Organization developed a high-degree of capacity, JAM was only able to turn violence on and off. Nonetheless, as the chapter walks through, this base level of control explains how JAM kept two ceasefires in 2007 that were central to the success of the US Surge in Baghdad.

Chapter 2

The Organization and Existing Approaches

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing research into why and when insurgencies are successful or unsuccessful. While some literature discounts the independent role of rebel organizations in determining how civil wars play out, a significant body of research highlights the importance of the “cohesion” or “fragmentation” of insurgent organizations in determining how conflicts end and how violent they are. The following literature review demonstrates that these families of explanations are insufficient to explain much of the variation that we see in sub-state conflicts. In doing so, the chapter produces two major conclusions.

First, the indeterminacy of existing explanations is due to a failure to treat organizations as critical—and independent—actors in shaping violence. There is significant variation between different types of organizations within and across conflicts that plays a major role in determining the way in which civil wars play out. Second, though some existing explanations do have some analytical traction, the amount of variation they explain is very small relative to the major shifts in violence that occur—often quite quickly—during substate conflicts. Put quite simply, only by understanding

Table 2.1 Existing Explanations and the Role of Organization

Role of Organization	Categories of Variables		
	Social Structures	Material Resources	Conflict Dynamics
Organization Irrelevant	Social networks → Rebel success	External support → Incumbent defeat	COIN policy → Incumbent defeat
Organization Blackboxed	Existing networks → Cohesion Ideology → Cohesion	Resources → Fragmentation/cohesion Sanctuary → Cohesion	COIN policy → Fragmentation/cohesion Relative power → Fragmentation/cohesion

the ability of organizations to employ force can we understand how dramatic upticks or decreases in violence are possible and thus how to predict these patterns.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I present the existing approaches and demonstrate a set of theoretical and empirical inconsistencies that limit the explanatory power of existing research. Second, building on this literature review, I present a set of observable implications that should be true if my criticisms are valid and use a set of large-N datasets to test these broad patterns.

2.2 Current Approaches

There are two central approaches to explaining conflict outcomes such as duration, termination, intensity, and violence against civilians. In the first approach, organizations are relatively unimportant as conflict processes are driven by structural factors or state policies. In the second approach, organizations are blackboxed and serve as a pass-through for conflict processes that cause all organizations to either “fragment” or remain “cohesive” which in turn determines if these organizations will be successful or not.

Theories falling under both of these approaches employ similar sets of variables including social structures, material resources, and conflict dynamics. While the variables employed are similar, the

causal logics are distinct. Table 2.1 on the preceding page sorts the categories of variables into the two broad approaches about the role of organization.

Explanations that focus on community and social structures highlight the role of pre-existing social networks, ethnicity, and ideology in either generating “decentralized” fighting organizations or creating “cohesion” in more organized fighting groups. Scholars employing material resources such as weapons, external support, or supplies as causal factors sometimes find resources to be critical to insurgent success, while others argue that access to significant goods creates a “resource curse” stymieing the development effective insurgent institutions. The final set of variables focus on conflict dynamics such changes in relative power, territory, and state policies. While some find that territorial gains or harsh state tactics generate cohesive rebels, other find that such expansion or indiscriminate violence can instead destabilize rebels.

The following sub-sections walk through each of the categories of variables and the predictions they engender before demonstrating the shortcomings of each of the categories as well as the deficiency of either ignoring or blackboxing organizations.

2.2.1 Community Structure and Social Cohesion

A significant body of work has focused on the importance of social networks and community structure in determining the cohesion and efficacy of insurgent organizations. For researchers that discount the role organizations, community structure alone determines the extent to which members of organizations will be united together and obviates the need for extensive formal organization as these informal structures are more resilient during conflict. Those blackboxing organizations argue that strong pre-existing social structures are a necessary and sufficient condition for organizations to build the institutions needed to control their soldiers.

2.2.1.1 “Decentralized” Networks

The underlying structure of communities and social environments has played a valuable part in explaining the level of commitment of individuals to violent causes. Strong communities are able to employ status rewards based on solidarity, enforce norms of fairness, ensure monitoring and concomitant sanctioning of undesired behavior, and share information about the potential for success or widespread community participation in rebellion.¹ When strong community features are paired with well-placed “first movers” who span across connected community clusters, collective behavior moving individuals along the scale of action from neutrality to organized combat is more feasible.² These communities are often associated with cohesive ethnic groups or tribal-based societies, though communities with shared ideologies or deep cultural histories may hold such qualities.³

While scholars such as Petersen, Tilly, and McAdam have focused on the role of communities in generating support for rebellion and getting the “ball rolling,” others have attributed a much larger role to social structures in determining the shape and outcome of conflicts. In this context, much research into the recent insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan emphasizes that these rebel movements have been successful since they are “new insurgent types” built upon “decentralized, leaderless networks” made possible by the dense social ties underpinning these societies.⁴

1. Roger Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001); James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); C. Tilly, D. McAdam, and S. Tarrow, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001).

2. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*: 75-76; A seminal work on this problem is Doug McAdam, “Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer,” *American Journal of Sociology* 92, no. 1 (1986): 64-90; See also David A. Siegel, “Social Networks and Collective Action,” *American Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 1 (2009): 122-138.

3. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation,” *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (1996): 715-735; Roger Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Chaim Kaufmann, “Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars,” *International Security* 20, no. 4 (1996): 136-175; Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic groups in conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); James Habyarimana et al., “Why Does Ethnic Diversity Undermine Public Goods Provision?,” *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 04 (2007): 709-725.

4. See, for example, Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); David Ronfeldt, “Al Qaeda and Its Affiliates: A Global Tribe Waging Segmental Warfare?,” *First Monday* 10, no. 3 (2005): 197-221; M.

In contrast to “formal hierarchies,” networks have dispersed decision-making, rely on trust for internal compliance, and are often rooted in personal relationships.⁵ Due to these strong ties of friendship or kinship, they draw upon high levels of trust that encourage and sustain collective behavior. Moreover, because decentralized groups operate with no “constraining” and overt bureaucratic elements, they are thought to have flexibility as the “decentralized yet tightly interconnected nature” of networks allows information to be acquired, processed, and acted on without the delays and hiccups of hierarchy and without risking detection—this argument is advanced in reference to the adaptability of IED-producing networks in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶ In addition, due to their lack of hierarchy, they are thought to be resilient to decapitation and other forms of violence as the removal of any given individual or set of individuals does not impact the operational viability of the overall group.⁷

2.2.1.2 Community Structures and Organizations

Instead of seeing social networks as a substitute for formal organizations, others argue that strong social networks are necessary for the creation of robust insurgent organizations. The role of social networks in formal organizations is captured by Granovetter’s popularized notion of embeddedness that recognizes that “informal” social forces are central in creating trust and reducing malfeasance in formal interactions. In short, the strength of underlying social ties directly influences the ability of formal organizations to motivate collective behavior: “observers who assume firms to be structured

Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

5. Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Calvert Jones, “Assessing the Dangers of Illicit Networks: Why al-Qaida May Be Less Threatening Than Many Think,” *International Security* 33, no. 2 (2008): 10.

6. M. McFate, “Iraq: The Social Context of IEDs,” *Military Review*, May-June 2005, 37-50; See also, Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Jones, “Assessing the Dangers of Illicit Networks: Why al-Qaida May Be Less Threatening Than Many Think”: 13-14; Walter Powell, “Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization,” *Research in Organizational Behavior* 12 (1991): 18-22.

7. Jenna Jordan, “When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation,” *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009): 719–755; Grahame Thompson, *Markets, Hierarchies and Networks: The Coordination of Social Life* (Sage, 1991): 144.

in fact by the official organization chart are sociological babes in the woods.”⁸

In this context, a significant body of literature has pointed to the cohesion of military organizations as the most important factor in determining if and when soldiers will fight under duress. Substantive bonds with fellow group members have been found to motivate soldiers, provide them security, provide them positive esteem, as well as create and improve the enforcement of group norms.⁹ The notable role of “cohesion” is often voiced by veterans of conflict who point to the importance of their relationships with fellow fighters. This image pervades many depictions of conflict as illustrated by the aptly named *Band of Brothers*.¹⁰

With respect to insurgents, Weinstein argues that “activist” organizations “founded on social endowments” have “shared beliefs about the purpose and conduct of the war.”¹¹ If rebels can draw on the shared cultures and relationships of potential members they can provide long-term social goods that fuse “personal and collective interests, providing rebel leaders with the tools they need to attract soldiers and manage their behavior in accordance with the goals of the group.”¹² “Opportunist” organizations without access to these social endowments or those with access to material resources will not take the time to generate institutions that leverage social endowments as they will instead pay-off or over compensate their followers.

Staniland powerfully expands on Weinstein’s work by focusing on the particular pre-war social

8. Mark Granovetter, “Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness,” *American Journal of Sociology*, November 1985, 502; See also, B. Uzzi, “The Sources and Consequences of Embeddedness for the Economic Performance of Organizations: The Network Effect,” *American sociological review*, 1996, 674–698; M. Tina Dacin, Marc J. Ventresca, and Brent D. Beal, “The Embeddedness of Organizations: Dialogue & Directions,” *Journal of Management* 25, no. 3 (1999): 317–356.

9. Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1948): 280–315; Guy L. Siebold, “The Essence of Military Group Cohesion,” *Armed Forces & Society* 33, no. 2 (2007): 286–295.

10. See a discussion of this trend in Robert MacCoun, Elizabeth Kier, and Aaron Belkin, “Does Social Cohesion Determine Motivation in Combat? An Old Question with an Old Answer,” *Armed Forces & Society* 32, no. 4 (2006): 646–654.

11. Jeremy Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2007): 139.

12. *Ibid.*: 48–50.

and political structures—such as political parties and social support groups—that support insurgent organizations in developing armed power. He finds that only some networks are suited to building insurgent organizations and that these networks will be operative whether or not organizations have access to plentiful material resources. As a result, “The pre-war networks in which insurgent leaders are embedded determine the nature of the organizations they can build when a war begins.”¹³ The most successful organizations are “integrated,” meaning that they can draw on pre-existing political and social “networks that combine strong horizontal links that pull together organizers across localities” with “vertical ties that embed them in local communities.”¹⁴ These inter-locking ties “incorporate and socialize new members” that generate institutions “that operate in a similar fashion across space and time” and ensure a “unity of purpose.”¹⁵

Others argue that the most important element of an organization’s social structure is the extent to which there is an ideology that ties together the members of the group. As the development of armed nationalist groups illustrates, these ideologies help organizations to generate shared understandings between soldiers with heterogeneous preferences or goals.¹⁶ Perhaps the most developed connection between ideology and rebellion comes from the study of Marxist insurgencies, including those in Malaya, China, and Vietnam.¹⁷ The organizational precepts of Marxism were described

13. Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014): 2.

14. Paul Staniland, “Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia,” *International Security* 37, no. 1 (2012): 150.

15. Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*: 6.

16. B. Oppenheim et al., “True Believers, Deserters, and Traitors: Who Leaves Insurgent Groups and Why,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 5 (2015): 794–823; John A. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791-94* (Westview Press, 1996); Barry Posen, “Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power,” *International Security* 18, no. 2 (1993): 80–124.

17. Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Technique of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam*, 2nd Edition. (The MIT Press, 1966); Howard L. Boorman and Scott A. Boorman, “Chinese Communist Insurgent Warfare, 1935-49,” *Political Science Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (1966): 171–195; Lucian W. Pye, *Guerilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956); Stathis N. Kalyvas and Laia Balcells, “International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict,” *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 03 (2010): 415–429.

as prescriptions for using ideology to bind together disparate populations. According to Selznick, “The bolshevik emphasis on the power of the vanguard and on the consistent application of approved ideas operates to make political education paramount” were critical to turning a group of individuals into an “organizational weapon.”¹⁸

More recently, scholars have focused on the role of ideology in motivating Islamist fighters.¹⁹ As Wood argued in an essay in 2015, “The reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic. Very Islamic. Yes, it has attracted psychopaths and adventure seekers, drawn largely from the disaffected populations of the Middle East and Europe. But the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam.”²⁰ In a similar vein, scholars have argued that the power of such ideologies has attracted followers from across the globe, allowing organizations to act cohesively by integrating followers based on their religious beliefs, not personal preferences.²¹

2.2.1.3 Why Social Structures Are Only Part of the Puzzle

There is no doubt that social and political networks play an important role in limiting (or empowering) insurgent organizations. But, despite the importance of informal structures, the divergence between organizations with similar social underpinnings—such Amal and Hezbollah, the Badr Organization and Jaysh al-Mahdi, or the Taliban and Hizb-i-Islami—underlies the importance of focusing on the particular ways in which formal organizations generate military power. Below, I demonstrate why formal organization matters *and* why organizational structure is not determined by pre-existing social structures.

18. Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960): 11.

19. James A. Piazza, “Is Islamist Terrorism More Dangerous?: An Empirical Study of Group Ideology, Organization, and Goal Structure,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 1 (2009): 62–88.

20. Graeme Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants,” *The Atlantic*, March 2015.

21. Monica Duffy Toft and Yuri M. Zhukov, “Islamists and Nationalists: Rebel Motivation and Counterinsurgency in Russia’s North Caucasus,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 02 (2015): 222–238; Glenn E. Robinson, “The Battle for Iraq: Islamic Insurgencies in Comparative Perspective,” *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2007): 261–273; Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

Networks Cannot Replace Formal Military Organization. While initial accounts of the Iraqi insurgency emphasized its “networked” structure, scholars have since found that it was not simply a “decentralized network” supported by pre-existing social ties. The most successful organizations looked markedly different than those that disintegrated or were ineffective.²² This refinement demonstrates the reality that very few, if any, insurgent organizations are pure “networks.”²³ A binary distinction between “centralized” and “decentralized” obscures a spectrum of organizational structures with varying levels of central control over the entire organization as well as particular operational elements.

Armed organizations are rarely “networked” as such a decentralized structure is not optimal for fighting and maintaining territory. In this respect, a failure to evaluate insurgent groups in the military context omits the advantages of hierarchy which include stability, common operating procedures, application of authority and discipline, and organized distribution of resources.²⁴ Indeed, ensuring the necessary discipline, consistent communication, and chain of command to calibrate force “almost by definition, demands a high degree of centralization.”²⁵

For example, insurgent groups need to carefully balance violence with potential backlash that can damage achievement of political goals. This requires crafting and disseminating specific orders and guidance. But, as social movement scholars note, since dense networks are only well-designed to

22. Austin Long, “Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace? Institutionalization and Leadership Targeting in Iraq and Afghanistan,” *Security Studies* 23, no. 3 (2014): 471–512; Chad Serena, *It Takes More than a Network: The Iraqi Insurgency and Organizational Adaptation* (Stanford, California: Stanford Security Studies, 2014).

23. Patrick Johnston, “The Geography of Insurgent Organization and its Consequences for Civil Wars: Evidence from Liberia and Sierra Leone,” *Security Studies* 17, no. 1 (2008): 109; See also, Major Derek Jones, *Understanding the Form, Function, and Logic of Clandestine Cellular Networks: The First Step in Effective Counternetwork Operations*, Monograph (School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2009).

24. J. Arquilla and D. F. Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Washington D.C.: RAND Corporation, 2001): 168; Powell, “Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization”: 303; Jeremy Weinstein, “Resources and the Information Problem in Rebel Recruitment,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 4 (2005): 622.

25. Henry Bienen, *The Military and Modernization* (Transaction Publishers, 2008): 214.

spread simple and easily digestible messages, this limits the ability of using social networks to spread more complicated plans.²⁶ Thus, Patel observes that Muqtada al-Sadr could use Shiite networks to mobilize violence but was unable to use those same networks to spread more specific plans about how and where to use violence. While the shared community experiences and norms made it easy to purvey concepts such as resistance to the United States occupation of Iraq, they did not provide the organization's leadership with the cues, monitoring capacity, or shared knowledge base necessary to spread specific orders or promote the nuanced application of violence.²⁷

All military organizations also need to be able to adapt and respond to new actors. But, while strong networks have many shared understandings, they often lack diverse sets of skills, particularly when they are focused on sets of particular occupations or receive only particular trainings. As Varshney finds in India, many robust urban economies were dependent on diverse combinations of skills and occupational backgrounds brought to the table by different ethnicities.²⁸ Studying the Iraqi insurgency, Serena finds that while networks could sometimes absorb information faster, they were not able to consistently improve and expand their tactics.²⁹ Along these lines, Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Jones observe that conflict between "equals" in non-hierarchical, or less centralized networks can prevent strategic thinking and induce rash short-term decisions that limit future options.³⁰

On the other hand, hierarchy makes it easier to collect and apply lessons learned. Eric Hegin-

26. David A. Siegel, "When Does Repression Work?: Collective Action and Social Networks," *Journal of Politics*, 2011,

27. David Patel, "Islam, Information, and Social Order: The Strategic Role of Religion in Muslim Societies" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2007): Chapter 3.

28. Ashutosh Varshney, "Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond," *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001): 378, 385-388; Similarly, many economists have found that homogeneous social pools can potentially damage productivity by limiting the skills and productive benefits which come from diversity, E. La Ferrara and A. Alesina, "Ethnic Diversity and Economic Performance," *Journal of Economic Literature* 43, no. 3 (2005): 762-800; Edward P. Lazear, *Culture and Language*, Working Paper 5249 (National Bureau of Economic Research, September 1995); Andrea Prat, "Should a Team Be Homogeneous?," *European Economic Review* 46, no. 7 (2002): 1187-1207.

29. Serena, *It Takes More than a Network*.

30. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Jones, "Assessing the Dangers of Illicit Networks: Why al-Qaida May Be Less Threatening Than Many Think": 21-22.

botham finds that centralization improved adaptability in the U.S military versus the British military during WWII. He argues that the decentralized training and information diffusion systems of the British armed forces resulted in less cohesive outcomes on the battlefield and an inability to pass along lessons from one unit to the next. For example, the 7th Armored Division only trained as a complete body for two weeks during the war and did not share lessons during post-combat brigade or division level exercises. On the other hand, “in the American Army, channels of communication were redundant, sophisticated, and frequently exercised...The battles in which American divisions fought reflected their more coordinated, standardized, and centralized training methodology.”³¹

Finally, there is substantial evidence that more centralized structures are resilient to security breaches and attack. Militaries have well-defined bureaucracies that consistently replace removed leaders. As Austin Long notes, this “process is so normal and routine in conventional military organizations that it is simply taken for granted.”³² Further, empirical studies find that centralized groups tend not to be severely damaged by decapitation.³³

Strong Networks Do Not Guarantee Strong Organizations. While it is clear that “decentralized networks” do not generate effective fighting forces, do the same social networks provide the tools for organizations to create centralized and cohesive military institutions? Though these networks can sometimes be of use, just because an organization is embedded in such social structures does not guarantee that they can capitalize on the community mechanisms of collective violence iden-

31. Eric Heginbotham, *The British and American Armies in World War II: Explaining Variations in Organizational Learning Patterns*, DACS Working Paper 96-2 (Defense and Arms Control Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, February 1996): 40, 49-50.

32. Austin Long, “Assessing the Success of Leadership Targeting,” *CTC Sentinel* 3, nos. 11-12 (2010): 11-12.

33. Alex Wilner, “Targeted Killings in Afghanistan: Measuring Coercion and Deterrence in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 4 (2010): 307-329; Jordan, “When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation”; K. M. Carley et al., “Destabilizing dynamic covert networks,” in *Proceedings of the 8th international Command and Control Research and Technology Symposium* (National Defense War College, Washington DC, 2003).

tified by Petersen and others. While Staniland and Weinstein are correct in noting the importance of pre-existing ties, commitment to an organization can be drastically changed by the actions the organization takes. As Dacin et al. observe, the ability of formal organizations to benefit from informal underpinnings is not given: “while the density of embedded ties can be managed to a point, not all firms have the same capabilities to do so. Some firms can manage ties better than others and, therefore, it’s not simply the existence of ties that makes a difference, but the ability to manage and leverage ties that creates value for firms.”³⁴

Thus, it is not surprising that many effective organizations built around “pre-existing” political or social structures *explicitly* developed those structures in preparation for political or armed conflict. For example, while the Việt Minh did not engage in widespread conflict until the mid-1940s, it had been constructing a cadre system and set of horizontal and vertical ties for nearly two decades.³⁵ While Staniland is right to observe that not all leaders can foresee the onset of war, many organizations see the possibility of, and thus actively prepare for, conflict, often long before its onset. Treating such “pre-existing” networks as exogenous instead of as explicit examples of organization-building not only obscures critical variation in insurgent development, but neglects the mechanisms that create such institutions.

Without such organization building, pre-existing social structures do not generate organizational cohesion or good fighters. Illustratively, King, studying Pals Battalions who fought for the U.K. in WWI and were formed according to primary kinship groups in civilian life, finds that “there are many counterexamples where intimate comradeship between primary groups has not in and of itself produced effective military performance.” Indeed, he finds that the battalions exhibited

34. Dacin, Ventresca, and Beal, “The Embeddedness of Organizations”: 338.

35. Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État Né de la Guerre 1945-1954* (Paris: Colin, 2011).

low collective tactical skill and were ill-positioned to fight effectively.³⁶ Similarly, while the strong Shiite community of Muqtada al-Sadr generated primary groups willing to fight against the United States in 2004, Sadr's Mahdi Army did not yet have the organizational mechanisms in place to ensure that those units fought as they were directed or stopped fighting when ordered. As Cockburn observes, "It was the strength of Muqtada that he could mobilize the Shia masses, the millions of angry and very poor young men whom nobody else in Iraq represented. His weakness was that he could not control them."³⁷

What is more, when an organization does not put in place institutions to actively harness pre-existing social networks, these ties can *detract* from the organization's overall capabilities. Drawing on evidence from both military and non-military settings, there are a number of reasons why the existence of strong primary groups may not support formal organizations.³⁸ Indeed, informal groups can *compete with* or *substitute for* formal structures. These forms of interference can significantly limit the efficacy of the formal rules and procedures put in place by the central leadership. Stewart dubs this phenomenon the "dark side of social cohesion."³⁹

When informal ties compete with the formal organization, members' allegiances to each other and to their broader social networks are stronger than are allegiances to the organization. In such cases, strong social relationships within fighting units can interfere with the goals of the organization or with the internal culture of the organization. Differences in goals may encompass short-term disagreements about how and where to use force or may encompass longer-term disagreements

36. Anthony King, "The Word of Command: Communication and Cohesion in the Military," *Armed Forces & Society* 32, no. 4 (2006): 496.

37. Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq* (Simon and Schuster, 2008): 147-48.

38. For a discussion of many of these different approaches, see Robert MacCoun, "What Is Known About Unit Cohesion and Military Performance," in *Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy: An Update of RAND's 1993 Study* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010): 137-165.

39. Nora K. Stewart, *Mates and Muchachos: Unit Cohesion in the Falklands/Malvinas War* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's, 1991): 18.

about the utility of fighting. In terms of the former, units' allegiances can be intimately aligned with a particular community or location meaning they will be compelled to defend their locales at the expense of the organization's broader military needs. For example, Gould describes how the Paris National Guard collapsed in 1781 as its units scattered from the main fronts of battle to protect their *arrondissements* rather than meeting the advance of the French army head-on.⁴⁰

When community members have larger disagreements about the utility or need for force, fighting units often share "deviant" norms or beliefs that challenge the authority structure of the organization.⁴¹ For example, norms of fatalism within dense *campesino* communities were often paralyzing to recruiting and motivating insurgents in El Salvador before the introduction of new liberation ideologies by insurgent organizations.⁴² Relatedly, Goodwin finds that emotional ties can dampen participation in insurgencies when those ties evoke clashes between kinship and organizational ties or if organizations fail to regulate social interactions in the same way the broader community might.⁴³ In the same vein, close relationships promoting drug use and rejection of authority among United States troops in Vietnam have been linked to the poor performance of many deployed units there after 1968.⁴⁴ Such disagreements may even lead soldiers to defect as is illustrated by higher rates of desertion among Confederate units recruited on a local basis in the American Civil War and by the role of "good comrades" in encouraging desertions from the Wehrmacht as WWII came to an end.⁴⁵

40. Roger V. Gould, "Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871," *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 6 (1991): 716–729.

41. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*.

42. Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Petersen also observes that the configuration of norms in communities may very well mean that strong communities are less likely to rebel depending on their underlying shared norms and experiences Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*.

43. Jeff Goodwin, "The Libidinal Constitution of a High-Risk Social Movement: Affectual Ties and Solidarity in the Huk Rebellion, 1946 to 1954," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 1 (1997): 53–69.

44. Charles C. Moskos, "The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam," *Journal of Social Issues* 31, no. 4 (1975): 25–37.

45. Elizabeth Kier, "Homosexuals in the U.S. Military: Open Integration and Combat Effectiveness," *International*

Even without an explicit difference in overall goals or beliefs, the norms and relationships shared between members of the primary group may compete with the culture of the formal organization. This may be because members value their personal friendships more than the authority structure. As Davis observes, “pleasure from interaction itself, in cohesive groups, sometimes exceeds the task-specific motivation, and greater energy is devoted to interpersonal relations than to overcoming the task obstacles. Hence performance suffers.”⁴⁶ A common manifestation of such relationships arises when members do not report or cover up deviant behavior in order to protect their comrades.⁴⁷ This type of behavior made it very difficult for the United States to prosecute soldiers for fraggings in Vietnam.⁴⁸ Similarly, studies have found that close primary group relationships dissuade reporting of violence or predatory behavior directed toward civilians.⁴⁹

Informal ties may also substitute for formal channels thus making them irrelevant. For example, when individuals show greater allegiance to social leaders rather than the leaders selected by the formal organization, they will follow those leaders rather than the formal leaders.⁵⁰ In such cases, individuals simply ignore the authority of officers who are not in a higher social position within the primary group. Erickson lays out this point clearly: “suppose for example, that a new recruit to a cell has prior ties to people in other cells. If these ties are allowed to become part of the [organization]...then a pure hierarchy cannot be maintained, since people’s ties do not naturally occur in suitable hierarchical patterns. On the other hand, a hierarchy can be maintained if ties are incorpo-

Security 23, no. 2 (1998): 16; For a similar example in the Spanish Civil War, see Theodore McLaughlin, “Desertion, Terrain, and Control of the Home Front in Civil Wars,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 8 (2014): 1419–1444.

46. J.H. Davis, *Group Performance* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969): 73.

47. Robert MacCoun, “What Is Known About Unit Cohesion and Military Performance,” in *Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1993): 283–331.

48. Moskos, “The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam.”

49. Donna Winslow, “Misplaced Loyalties: The Role of Military Culture in the Breakdown of Discipline in Two Peace Operations,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 6, no. 3 (2004); Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*: 146–147.

50. Ajay Mehra et al., “The Social Network Ties of Group Leaders: Implications for Group Performance and Leader Reputation,” *Organization Science* 17, no. 1 (2006): 64–79; P. Balkundi and M. Kilduff, “The Ties That Lead: A Social Network Approach to Leadership,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (2006): 419–439.

rated into the secret society only when they fit an overall hierarchical pattern.”⁵¹

Moreover, group-think or reliance on pre-existing relationships and information often limits utilization of formal tools such as intelligence systems or functional differentiation as individuals may simply reject new information or will seek support or information from friends and acquaintances rather than the best-positioned elements of the organization.⁵² For example, if a community has fought using a certain set of tactics for a long period of time, they are likely to discount new ways of fighting or engaging the enemy. Indeed, strong pre-existing ties tend to entrench modes of behavior meaning it is quite difficult to change the opinions or actions of highly-linked individuals due to the redundancy of relationships. As a result, behavioral change rarely occurs within such groups without actively introducing new individuals or structure into the group.⁵³ Similarly, trust based on friendship or social ties may lead members to minimize the value they place on the completion of specific military tasks mandated by the organization. When friendship substitutes for performance in tying soldiers individuals are less likely to be sanctioned or excluded by their compatriots for performing poorly.⁵⁴ For example, researchers have found that air crews that serve together for long periods of time become “overconfident” in the team’s abilities.⁵⁵

And ideology alone can’t motivate and control soldiers. While a number of scholars have downplayed the role of ideology in generating military cohesion,⁵⁶ there is no doubt that beliefs and

51. Bonnie H. Erickson, “Secret Societies and Social Structure,” *Social Forces* 60, no. 1 (1981): 198.

52. MacCoun, “What Is Known About Unit Cohesion and Military Performance”; I. Janis, *Groupthink*, 2nd Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).

53. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*; Mark Granovetter, “Threshold models of collective behavior,” *American journal of sociology*, 1978, 1420–1443.

54. King, “The Word of Command: Communication and Cohesion in the Military.”

55. Dennis K. Leedom and Robert Simon, “Improving team coordination: A case for behavior-based training,” *Military Psychology* 7, no. 2 (1995): 109–122.

56. Shils and Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II”; Moskos, “The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam”; William Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat: Leadership and Societal Influence in the Armies of the Soviet Union, the United States, North Vietnam, and Israel* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1985).

motivation play a part in convincing soldiers to fight and continue fighting. Nonetheless, like pre-existing social structures, ideology, separate of how it is employed, cannot explain organizational behavior. There is significant work remaining to uncover the mechanisms that connect ideology with commitment—both in joining and remaining a part of—to a cause. Many Marxist, Islamist, and Nationalist organizations have faltered or fragmented while organizations without such an ideological cache have succeeded. As my theory lays out, the power of ideology often comes in generating a committed core of cadre rather than changing the opinions of masses of people—a challenge hard enough in times of peace, let alone during war. Thus, I argue, the role of ideology is often driven by how organizations use their cadre to create focal points that tie individuals to the organization, rather than by aiming to indoctrinate each follower. Though focusing on the importance of Leninist teachings, Selznick recognized this important distinction:

For Lenin, organization was an indispensable adjunct to ideology. He did not believe that he could win power by propaganda alone. Rather, he urged the need to forge a group which, beginning with an ideological commitment, would use whatever means were available to influence decision in society. For him, the task was not so much to spread the 'truth' as to raise to power a select group of communicants. Given such a perspective, the role of ideology in bolshevism, while significant, differs markedly from its role in a simple propaganda organization. Many costly errors in appraising communist activities have been made because too little attention was paid to the hidden organizational meaning of seemingly straight-forward propaganda activities.⁵⁷

2.2.2 Resources

Material and physical resources are no doubt critical to an insurgent organization and play a role in sparking and sustaining armed rebellion. Organizations must be able to clothe, feed, compensate, equip, and support their fighters. Yet, existing studies have produced divergent findings about the role that material resources play in civil war.⁵⁸ While some emphasize the necessity of resources,

57. Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon*: 8.

58. Michael Ross, "What Do We Know About Natural Resources and Civil War?," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 337–356.

others find that insurgent organizations with access to lootable resources will be trapped by a “resource curse.”

Proponents of the “resource curse” argument blackbox insurgent organizations and postulate that access to plentiful resources, whether external support or diamonds, generates incentives for organizations to “buy-off” their soldiers, thus attracting those who seek compensation, not those most committed to the cause. As these groups will have no reliance on the general population, they will feel little need to compel their soldiers not to predate on these civilians. The result is “thuggish” or “opportunistic” behavior in which footsoldiers defect, target civilians, or engage in criminal activity.⁵⁹ At the same time, these organizations may turn into “profit-seeking” actors and focus on capturing additional material wealth rather than pursuing whatever the original goals of a rebellion might have been.⁶⁰

On the other hand, many have found that resources play a central role in developing robust and effective insurgents. For some, the introduction of external resources to a conflict zone will create a strong opposition and thus reduce the probability of the state winning. In such explanations, rebel organizations are unimportant, it is simply the interest of an outside actor that drives whether or not the state wins.⁶¹ For scholars that treat the organization as a blackbox, resources—whether domestic or from external actors— provide insurgents with the weapons and logistics needed to fight and allow formal leaders to compensate their members for their service.⁶² In addition to material

59. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*.

60. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004): 563–595; James D. Fearon, “Primary Commodity Exports and Civil War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 4 (2005): 483–507.

61. Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars,” *International Organization* 63, no. 1 (2009): 67–106; Jeffrey Record, *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win* (Potomac Books, Inc., 2007).

62. Paul Staniland, “Explaining Cohesion, Fragmentation, and Control in Insurgent Groups” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010); Johnston, “The Geography of Insurgent Organization and its Consequences for Civil Wars”; Daniel Byman et al., *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (RAND Corporation, 2001); Idean Salehyan, *Rebels Without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics* (Cornell University Press,

resources, some scholars also find that holding territory is a critical component of insurgent success. Along these lines, Sinno finds that organizations developing with a sanctuary are better positioned to develop stronger and more centralized military organizations.⁶³

2.2.2.1 Why there are Divergent Findings about Resources

The challenge of taking in resources and using them to benefit the central leadership is not unique to insurgent organizations. As Thelen and Mahoney identify, nearly all viable formal institutions have access to some resources and, as a result, must respond to the concomitant “distributional consequences” of how they use those resources.⁶⁴ Thus, it is how organizations distribute resources that determines how those resources influence their behavior, not what they have access to. As a result, like all other organizations, rather than fall into a “resource curse,” insurgent organizations can funnel and centralize the provision of resources to build up their power.

This theoretical observation is borne out in the empirical record. Many organizations with access to both internal and external resources have developed to become effective either by harnessing those resources without falling victim to a resource curse. For example, Lynn observes, the post-Revolutionary French Army sought to move away from remunerative rewards as they “may encourage the men to place self-interest above all other criteria.”⁶⁵ Organizations as widespread as the Taliban, Hezbollah, al-Qaeda in Iraq, the Viet Cong and Viet Minh, the LTTE, and the FARC.⁶⁶

2009).

63. A. H Sinno, *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

64. James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, “A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change,” in *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, ed. Kathleen Thelen and James Mahoney (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 8.

65. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*: 25.

66. Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (Columbia University Press, 2009); Magnus Ranstorp, “Hizbollah’s Command Leadership: Its Structure, Decision-Making and Relationship with Iranian Clergy and Institution,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6, no. 3 (1994): 303–339; Goscha, *Vietnam*; Pike, *Viet Cong*; Rohan Gunaratna, “Sri Lanka: Feeding the Tamil Tigers,” in *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance*, ed. Jake Sherman and Karen Ballentine (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003): 197–223; Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, “Criminal Rebels? A Discussion of Civil War and Criminality from the Colombian Experience,” *Politics & Society* 32, no. 2 (2004): 257–285.

Similarly, organizations without access to stable sanctuary, such as JAM in Iraq as well as both the Viet Minh and Viet Cong were able to generate military power and find small pockets of territory to train their soldiers covertly. Indeed, it is quite rare that organizations start with access to a large swath of territory. Thus, the relationship often goes the opposite direction in that effective organizations are able to take control of territory. In this context, recent research indicates that sanctuary has mixed effects: it can sometimes weaken insurgents if they do not closely impose order as their soldiers are more free to desert and disagreements over power and resources comes to the forefront.⁶⁷

2.2.3 Conflict Dynamics

Beyond these structural or pre-existing factors, an increasing number of scholars have looked at how conflict processes change how organizations or groups can operate. This includes dynamics internal to the organization or internal to a broader resistance movement, as well as dynamics introduced by the strategic relationship between the state and rebel groups. Like in the previous sections, there are many conflicting findings about the role of these on-going factors.

2.2.3.1 Power and Competition

A growing number of scholars focus on the role of power dynamics both between and within organizations in explaining whether they will fragment or not. A first set of explanations address power in terms of the number of social, political, or economic factions that fall within an organization or broader movement. According to these arguments, organizations with more factions will be less powerful. Factions make it more difficult to agree on goals, structure, and strategies.⁶⁸ Cunningham

67. McLaughlin, "Desertion, Terrain, and Control of the Home Front in Civil Wars."

68. Wendy Pearlman, "Spoiling Inside and Out: Internal Political Contestation and the Middle East Peace Process," *International Security* 33, no. 3 (2009): 79–109; Fotini Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, Kristin M. Bakke, and Lee J. M. Seymour, "Shirts Today, Skins Tomorrow: Dual Contests and the Effects of Fragmentation in Self-Determination Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012): 67–93; Mia M Bloom, "Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 1 (2004).

contends that more factions will result in more “veto players” that limit the ability of any centralized leadership to institutionalize control of an organization.⁶⁹ Similarly, Asal et al. find that the more factions there are within an organization, the more likely it is to fragment into splinter groups.⁷⁰ Krause argues that such disagreements are least likely when one group is hegemonic.⁷¹ Similarly, Bakke et al. find that when power is decentralized amongst factions, it limits the capacity of movement leaders to centralize the message and development of an organization.⁷²

Others focus on power in terms of territorial or geographic reach. Christia argues that many within-organization processes are driven by battlefield wins and losses.⁷³ Losses, particularly when asymmetrically distributed within a group, will push warring parties to fragment along pre-existing cleavages by either defecting from the overall organization or attempting to take it over. On the other hand, “battlefield wins will foster intra-group cohesion by convincing subgroups that they are on the winning side.”⁷⁴

By contrast, given the difficulties of managing activities in active combat zones, some argue that battlefield gains can weaken organizations. Gates argues that the distance of rebels from the insurgent leadership increases the share of resources and payment that the leadership must employ to ensure that their orders are obeyed.⁷⁵ The more spread out that individuals are, the more demanding it is for leaders to retain cohesive forces. Similarly, Johnston finds that when rebel organizations

69. David E. Cunningham, “Veto Players and Civil War Duration,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006): 875–892.

70. Mitchell Brown, Victor Asal, and Angela Dalton, “Why Split? Organizational Splits among Ethnopolitical Organizations in the Middle East,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012): 94–117.

71. Peter Krause, “The Structure of Success: How the Internal Distribution of Power Drives Armed Group Behavior and National Movement Effectiveness,” *International Security* 38, no. 3 (2014): 72–116.

72. Kristin M. Bakke, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and Lee J.M. Seymour, “A Plague of Initials: Fragmentation, Cohesion, and Infighting in Civil Wars” (2011): 11–13.

73. Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*.

74. *Ibid.*: 33.

75. Scott Gates, “Recruitment and Allegiance: The Microfoundations of Civil War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002): 111–130.

expand, they face significant principal-agent challenges in “broadcasting” their power over subordinates as there are information asymmetries between leaders and fighters and asymmetrical payoffs for deployed units. As such, organizations facing such situations find it difficult to maintain robust formal structures, or in Johnston’s parlance, “U-form” hierarchies (as opposed to less centralized “M-form” hierarchies).⁷⁶

Woldemariam has a more nuanced approach and finds that both losses and gains often result in fragmentation while stalemates engender stability. As he argues, “static military contexts allow the constituent units of rebel organizations to believe that two conditions are true: the organization appears viable, because it is not losing, but is perceived as vulnerable to external threats, because it is not winning. In other words, stalemate produces an equilibrium that enhances organizational solidarity and cooperation, by creating perceptions that incentivize collaboration and deter infighting.”⁷⁷

Issues with Relative Power Arguments. The indeterminacy of the above research indicates that changes in relative power and factional differences cannot explain how some organizations remain cohesive while others do not. To begin with, much of the above literature does not carefully differentiate between broader rebel “movements” and specific “organizations.” It is definitely more challenging to manage a diverse set of insurgent organizations rather than the members of an individual insurgent group. As a result, variables will not influence broader movements in the same manner that they do specific organizations that have their own hierarchy and institutions. With respect to the Iraqi insurgency, Serena emphasizes that it is difficult to understand conflict outcomes when focusing on a broad movement rather than the constitutive organizations within it.⁷⁸

76. Johnston, “The Geography of Insurgent Organization and its Consequences for Civil Wars.”

77. Michael Woldemariam, “Battlefield Outcomes and Rebel Cohesion: Lessons From the Eritrean Independence War,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, July 15, 2014, 4.

78. Serena, *It Takes More than a Network*.

For example, while factions exist in both organizations and broader movements, organization theorists point out that factions or cliques are quite common in all formal organizations.⁷⁹ Nearly all insurgent organizations have factional differences or internal disagreements, yet while some organizations are able to minimize divisions, others are paralyzed by “spoilers.” Thus, “a proper understanding of the organizational process must make it possible to interpret changes in the formal system—new appointments or rules or reorganizations—in their relation to the informal and unavowed ties of friendship, class loyalty, power cliques, or external commitment.”⁸⁰ As a result, fragmentation can actually improve the overall cohesion of an organization. For both JAM and the Viet Minh in south Vietnam, fragmentation allowed them to simplify their command procedures and restart the organization-building process. Similarly, Kenny finds that “in the both the IRA and KNU cases, several organizational splits were followed by an increase, not a decrease, in the effectiveness of military activity.”⁸¹

The difference between movements and organizations underscores a related argument: the effect of changes in power, whether it be territory or access to weaponry, are dependent on the organizational structure of insurgent groups. For example, few analysts of established conventional militaries would predict that territorial gains would generate fragmentation within the ranks of an institutionalized military force. Thus, it is not surprising that organizations such as the Islamic State, Hezbollah, or the Taliban have gained significant territory without disintegrating.⁸² Still, military

79. See for example, Johnston, “The Geography of Insurgent Organization and its Consequences for Civil Wars”: 114; Philip Selznick, *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation* (University of California Press, 1957): 93-94; W. Richard Scott, *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems*, 3rd ed. (Prentice Hall, 1991): 175.

80. Philip Selznick, “Foundations of the Theory of Organization,” *American Sociological Review* 13, no. 1 (1948): 27; For a similar observation, see C. Waldstrom, *Informal Networks in Organizations: A Literature Review* (Aarhus School of Business, Department of Organization and Management, 2001): 24.

81. Paul D Kenny, “Structural Integrity and Cohesion in Insurgent Organizations: Evidence from Protracted Conflicts in Ireland and Burma,” *International Studies Review* 12, no. 4 (2010): 553.

82. Michael Knights, “Saddam Hussein’s Faithful Friend, the King of Clubs, Might Be the Key to Saving Iraq,” *New Republic*, June 24, 2014, <https://newrepublic.com/article/118356/izzat-ibrahim-al-douri-saddam-husseins-pal-key-stopping-isis>; Ranstorp, “Hizbollah’s command leadership”; Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*.

scholars recognize that territorial expansion does pose risks as it has the potential weaken organizations by stretching out supply lines. Yet, strong military forces and insurgents can overcome these challenges. Illustratively, a major part of the French failure at Điện Biên Phủ was due to their underestimation of the Việt Minh's logistical capabilities.

On the other hand, territorial losses do not necessarily signal large losses for a military that might be “trading space for time.” This sort of strategy characterizes the Islamic State and al-Shabab's quick withdrawal from urban centers while maintaining significant military power. In short, like with material resources, some organizations will be able to gain and lose power without significantly changing their organizational composition.

This observation identifies a final problem with theories of power shifts. Given that organizations' capacity actively shapes conflict processes, changes in relative power are often the result of organizational behavior. As a result, rather than changes in territory or power influencing insurgent groups, they are often evidence of already existing dynamics. A focus on the effect of prominent disagreements between factions or internal violence does not shed light on why those factions became important or why violence erupted. Organizations in a downward spiral may often begin to disintegrate into internal melee, but these developments do not explain why the organization was in a downward spiral. As the next chapter lays out, with a framework for assessing insurgent capabilities, it should become apparent which organizations will be destabilized by expansion as well as those that will not be disintegrate when facing adversity.

2.2.3.2 State Policies

Another set of explanations focus on the relationship between state tactics and the development and behavior of insurgent groups. A first set treats the state as the central actor in civil war outcomes: the tactics or strength of a state use lead them to win or lose. Most basically, some argue that weak states

are more likely to lose as they will not have the capacity to smother rebellions. These difficulties are compounded when states are attempting to govern large territories or there is mountainous terrain that makes it harder for state forces to seek out insurgents.⁸³ Focusing on tactics, Lyall and Wilson argue that mechanized militaries are less likely to defeat rebel foes as their reliance on technology and concomitant lack of contact with the population means they cannot gain information and support from civilians.⁸⁴ Others focus on regime type, arguing that democracies are unable to employ force with enough vigor or consistency to defeat rebel movements.⁸⁵

Those that blackbox organizations highlight the role of state actors in shaping the opportunities and paths for development of insurgents.⁸⁶ State policies can cause cohesion within insurgencies as members rally around the center in response to indiscriminate violence from the state as there is “no other way out.”⁸⁷ In such cases, civilians have few options but to seek out insurgent groups to provide them with security and to gain strength in numbers.⁸⁸ This sort of violence may also push civilians to provide information and support to insurgents, even if they do not directly join the insurgency.⁸⁹ States may also generate support for insurgents when they do not provide public goods or resources to their populace, opening the door for insurgent organizations to fill this void.⁹⁰

83. James D. Fearon and David Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75–90.

84. Lyall and Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines.”

85. Ivan Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 93–128; Jonathan D. Caverley, “The Myth of Military Myopia: Democracy, Small Wars, and Vietnam,” *International Security* 34, no. 3 (2010): 119–157; Yuri Zhukov, “Examining the Authoritarian Model of Counter-insurgency: The Soviet Campaign Against the Ukrainian Insurgent Army,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18, no. 3 (2007): 439–466.

86. Robert H. Bates, *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Christian Davenport, “State Repression and Political Order,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, no. 1 (2007): 1–23.

87. Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Matthew Adam Kocher, T.B. Pepinsky, and Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Aerial Bombing and Counterinsurgency in the Vietnam War,” *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 2 (2011): 201–218.

88. Stathis N. Kalyvas and Matthew Adam Kocher, “How “Free” Is Free Riding in Civil Wars?: Violence, Insurgency, and the Collective Action Problem,” *World Politics* 59, no. 02 (2007): 177–216.

89. Luke N. Condra and Jacob N. Shapiro, “Who Takes the Blame? The Strategic Effects of Collateral Damage,” *American Journal of Political Science* 56, no. 1 (2012): 167–187.

90. Alexis G. Grynkewich, “Welfare as Warfare: How Violent Non-State Groups Use Social Services to Attack the

On the other hand, some argue that state repression can weaken support for organizations or cause fragmentation as disagreements arise.⁹¹ State violence can convince civilians to withdraw their support from insurgents by raising the costs of associating with them.⁹² On the other hand, states can weaken or divide an insurgency by playing divide-and-rule tactics by targeting some factions and not others⁹³ or by decapitating the leadership, thus provoking discord, confusion, or surrender.⁹⁴

Issues with State Centric Arguments. State policies no doubt help to shape the opportunities that insurgents have, but states are only one actor in the strategic game. States rarely have the tools to fully influence the course of a conflict. As Kalyvas points out, even the strongest counterinsurgents face a daunting challenge: “once a civil war is on, the military requirements for the establishment and preservation of control over the entire territory of a country are staggering.”⁹⁵ Despite the United States’ overwhelming military and political presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, both conflicts were rarely entirely under control and even explanations of major successes, such as the Surge, cannot be attributed to state policy alone.⁹⁶

State,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31 (2008): 350–370; Eli Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism* (MIT Press, 2009); Melani Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon* (Cornell University Press, 2014).

91. Lyall and Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines”; Adria Lawrence, “Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism” (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2008); Stephen J. Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes,” *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 5–53.

92. Jason Lyall, “Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks?,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 3 (2009): 331–362; Efraim Benmelech, Claude Berrebi, and Esteban Klor, “The Economic Cost of Harboring Terrorism,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 2 (2010): 331–353; Efraim Benmelech, Claude Berrebi, and Esteban Klor, *Counter-Suicide-Terrorism: Evidence from House Demolitions*, NBER Working Paper 16493 (National Bureau of Economic Research, October 2010).

93. Siegel, “When Does Repression Work?”; Lawrence, “Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism”; Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, “Divide and Conquer or Divide and Concede: How Do States Respond to Internally Divided Separatists?,” *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 02 (2011): 275–297.

94. Jordan, “When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation”; Wilner, “Targeted Killings in Afghanistan: Measuring Coercion and Deterrence in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency”; Siegel, “When Does Repression Work?”; Patrick B. Johnston, “Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns,” *International Security* 36, no. 4 (2012): 47–79.

95. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2006): 138–141.

96. Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman, and Jacob Shapiro, “Testing the Surge: Why Violence Declined in Iraq in 2007,” *International Security* 37, no. 1 (2012): 7–40; Marc Lynch, “Explaining the Awakening: Engagement, Publicity, and the Transformation of Iraqi Sunni Political Attitudes,” *Security Studies* 20, no. 1 (2011): 36–72; Austin Long, “The Anbar Awakening,” *Survival* 50, no. 2 (2008): 67–94.

In addition, many explanations that emphasize the role of states assume that civilian support is the primary channel through which state actions influence insurgent behavior. While civilian support is often an important part of any insurgency, organizations can thrive with limited civilian support and certainly do not need support from the entirety of the population as long as they have a generally committed fighting force.⁹⁷ Moreover, insurgents that actively try to re-shape public opinion and provide basic governance often have some control over the way in which violence is received by the population.⁹⁸ In this context, insurgent behavior is often not directed at the state, but instead at internal constituencies or other societal groups.⁹⁹

Again, these observations are supported by the empirical record. There is broad variation in the ability of insurgents to withstand—and actively respond to—environmental and counterinsurgent pressures. As evidenced by the enormous variation in insurgent behavior during the First Indochina War, some organizations can turn states' use of indiscriminate violence into a rallying cry while others are fragmented by state violence and divide and rule tactics.¹⁰⁰ The theory presented in this dissertation argues that some insurgent groups are able to develop in the face of strong state pressure, whether it be decapitation strikes or indiscriminate violence.¹⁰¹

97. Fearon and Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War"; Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*, R-462-ARPA (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1970); Stephen Peter Rosen, "Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 5–31.

98. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*; Condra and Shapiro, "Who Takes the Blame?"; Jason Lyall, Graeme Blair, and Kosuke Imai, "Explaining Support for Combatants during Wartime: A Survey Experiment in Afghanistan," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 04 (2013): 679–705.

99. Peter Krause, "The Political Effectiveness of Non-State Violence: A Two-Level Framework to Transform a Deceptive Debate," *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013): 259–294; H. Fjelde and D. Nilsson, "Rebels against Rebels: Explaining Violence between Rebel Groups," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 4 (2012): 604–628.

100. Goscha, *Vietnam*.

101. Long, "Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace?"; McLauchlin and Pearlman make a similar observation, finding that the impact of state actions is mitigated through the existing institutional milieu of the group: those that are institutionalized will remain cohesive while those with divisions are more likely to fragment. Theodore McLauchlin and Wendy Pearlman, "Out-Group Conflict, In-Group Unity? Exploring the Effect of Repression on Intramovement Cooperation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012): 41–66.

2.3 Testing These Implications With Cross-National Data

The previous section presented a set of theoretical and empirical arguments demonstrating that existing explanations seeking to explain civil war outcomes by either ignoring or blackboxing organizations are indeterminate or incomplete. While the empirical examples came from a relatively limited number of organizations, the critiques advanced generate four observable implications that can be tested across a wide-range of cases using existing civil war datasets. The first two implications address both types of explanations while the third deals with explanations that ignore organizations and the fourth with those that blackbox organizations:

1. Given the indeterminacy of many existing explanations, both due to conflicting findings as well as theoretical imprecision, there should be a great deal of uncertainty surrounding existing explanations. This means that the substantive effects should be close to zero as variables are pulled in multiple directions and the variance of estimates should be quite large.
2. While existing explanations may play some role in explaining organizational structure or outcomes, the overall variance explained should be fairly small, indicating room for more detailed explanations.
3. Existing explanations that downplay the role of organizations should be poor predictors of how civil wars terminate, whether in rebel victory, state victory, or some type of peace agreement.
4. For those studies that blackbox the role of organizations, these explanations should not do a good job in predicting whether organizations remain cohesive, or retain centralized control.

The following two sub-sections test these observable implications by employing the widely used UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset¹⁰² complemented with data on organization-level attributes¹⁰³ as well as conflict termination data.¹⁰⁴ In the following analysis, I only include conflicts that resulted

102. Nils Petter Gleditsch et al., “Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 5 (2002): 615–637; Lotta Themnér and Peter Wallensteen, “Armed Conflicts, 1946–2013,” *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 4 (2014): 541–554.

103. David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, “Non-state actors in civil wars: A new dataset,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 30, no. 5 (2013): 516–531.

104. Joakim Kreutz, “How and When Armed Conflicts End: Introducing the Ucdp Conflict Termination Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 2 (2010): 243–250.

in 1,000 cumulative deaths as most of the explanations should only be operative in full-on civil conflicts.¹⁰⁵ The results indicate that existing explanations that ignore organizations do a poor job of predicting civil war outcomes while those blackboxing organizations do not explain much variation in insurgent cohesion. While this exercise is by no-means causal—the existing large-N data is not nearly precise enough to test many of the mechanics introduced above—it demonstrates that the critiques presented above are operative across a wide range of intrastate conflicts.

2.3.1 Ignoring Organizations

I first turn to approaches that discount the role of organizations. Since these explanations focus on the role of non-organizational factors in determining how civil wars end, the dependent variable captures whether civil wars end in victory for one side or the other, or a peace agreement. In the presentation below, I employ a dichotomous outcome variable that codes insurgent victory or peace agreement as a “1” and incumbent victory or low-level violence under 25 deaths per year as a “0.”¹⁰⁶ While this dependent variable simplifies reality, it accords with the predictions of the theories introduced above.¹⁰⁷

To assess social structure-based explanations arguing that strong networks alone determine civil war outcomes, I employ two measures. The first measures whether a conflict is ethnic in nature. Since, as presented above, scholars believe that ethnic groups engender strong social networks defined by shared norms and beliefs, such organizations should be associated with more rebel victories. I also use a measure of whether or not insurgents receive support from a non-state diaspora

105. I also conduct the analysis with the 25 annual battle death threshold employed by UCDP/PRIO. The results are generally similar and appear in Appendix 2.A and Appendix 2.B.

106. My treatment of “low-level” activity as synonymous with incumbent victory draws on Govinda Clayton, “Relative Rebel Strength and the Onset and Outcome of Civil War Mediation,” *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 5 (2013): 609–622.

107. In addition, I also conduct all of the analyses using other versions of the dependent variable and see little change in the results. In the first, the categories include rebel victory, draw/peace agreement, as well as incumbent victory. The second adds a category for “low-level violence” as it is coded in Kreutz, “How and when armed conflicts end.”

community. While this measure is not ideal, authors theorize that the existence of a diaspora community willing to actively contribute to a war effort indicates strong social connections.¹⁰⁸ Neither of these are excellent metrics for strong communities, but, assuming a large effect, they should capture noticeable variation.

To test explanations arguing that external support independently determines civil war outcomes, I employ two measures. The first records if any organization in a conflict received external support, whether military, material, or political during the civil war. The second only captures military support, including weapons, ammunition, or even the deployment of troops.¹⁰⁹

To test conflict dynamics based on state policies, I employ a number of measures. First, to assess whether or not “divide and rule” tactics might play a role in conflict outcomes, I count how many rebel actors there are in a conflict (coded as “0” for one group, “1” for two groups, and “2” for more than two factions) and also employ the Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization Index (ELF) that measures the diversity of ethnic groups in a given country. These two variables should be good measures for whether governments can attempt to divide and rule the opposition as a greater number of actors should make it easier to employ such a strategy. To get at whether the nature of the government’s military influences outcomes, I use a measure of how mechanized the incumbent’s military force is, ranging from low to high mechanization.¹¹⁰ Similarly, to proxy for the role of regime type, I use a dichotomous measure for democracies and non-democracies.¹¹¹ Finally, to test measures of state strength commonly thought to determine outcomes, I employ GDP/capita and a measure of the

108. Idean Salehyan, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and David E. Cunningham, “Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups,” *International Organization* 65, no. 04 (2011): 719.

109. Both of these measures are constructed from Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan, “Non-state actors in civil wars.”

110. This data comes from Lyall and Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines.”

111. A democracy has a score greater than ‘6’ on the Polity II index. The results are similar when employing the continuous Polity II measure.

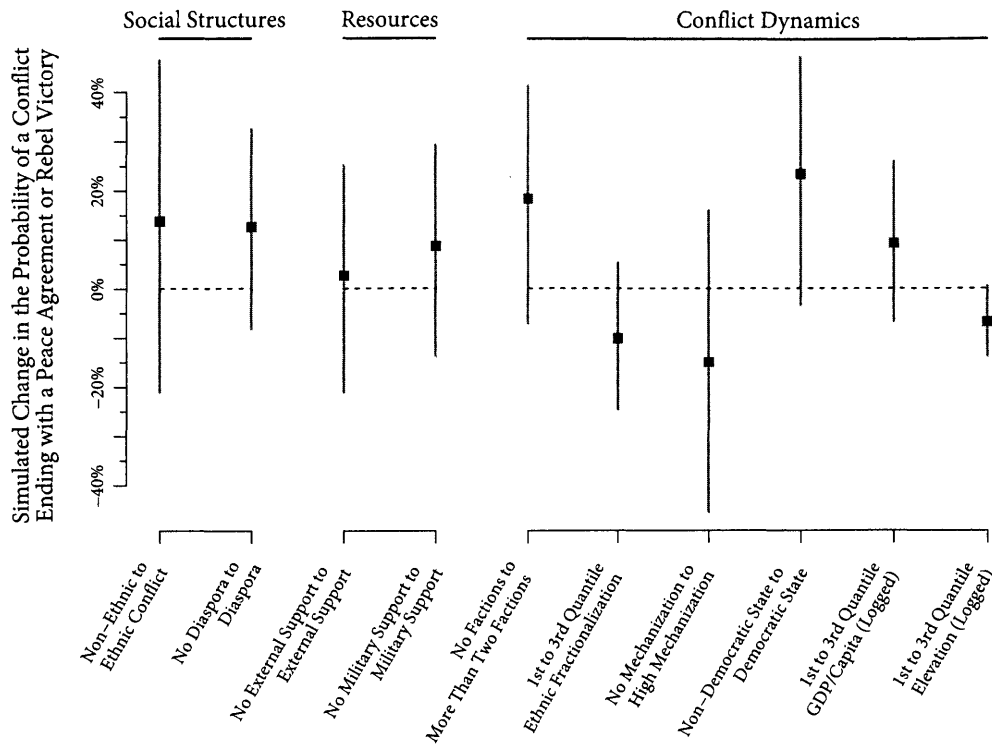


Figure 2.1 Excluding Organizations: The Relationship Between Social Structures, Material Resources, Conflict Dynamics and Conflict Outcomes

elevation in conflict areas.

The relationship between these variables and civil war outcomes is presented in Figure 2.1.¹¹² The analysis employs logistic regression across 129 conflicts and the plot presents the change in the probability of the rebels winning or getting a peace agreement when moving between values of the explanatory measures.¹¹³ The 95% confidence intervals are presented in gray for each of these estimates.¹¹⁴ For example, the first estimate demonstrates that when moving from a conflict without ethnic groups to one with ethnic groupings, the probability of the rebels winning or reaching a peace agreement increases by around 13%, though there is a great deal of uncertainty as the confidence

112. The results are presented in tabular form in Appendix 2.A.

113. In both this analysis and the next, the models include all of the explanatory variables as they should all, in theory, be related to the outcome. However, this means that the coefficients should be interpreted as predictive, rather than in a causal sense. Nonetheless, nearly all of the bivariate relationships are even weaker than those shown in this saturated model (see Table 2.A.2).

114. To provide a precise test the competing explanations, the model presented includes only the competing explanations. In Appendix 2.A, I include additional control variables to show that the results stay the same.

intervals span far across zero.

The results in Figure 2.1 confirm the above observable implications.¹¹⁵ Across nearly all of the explanations, there is a high degree of uncertainty as evidenced by the wide range of the confidence intervals—nearly all of which cross zero. What is more, excluding the role of regime type and the number of factions, the substantive size of the changes are quite small, indicating that the direction of the effect is often indeterminate. The only category that receives some support are the conflict dynamic variables related to regime type and the number of organizations. While insignificant at the 95 and 90% level, it appears that the number of factions active in the conflict is associated with a positive change in the probability of insurgents winning or reaching a ceasefire. This effect is in the opposite direction of theories expecting the state to win by dividing and ruling the opposition. The estimate on democracy is more substantial, indicating that the type of regime is associated with predicting who wins and loses in civil wars. Moving from a non-democracy to a democracy increases the probability of the rebel side winning or reaching an agreement by nearly 25%—though the level of uncertainty is fairly large. While this is a large association, there is significant variation remaining to be explained, indicating the importance of further research to explain much larger portions of how civil wars end.

115. These explanations also accord with the two existing studies that have focused on understanding outcomes by trying to take into account organizational variables. Cunningham et al. find that measures of organizational strength relative to the government are far more important than non-organizational factors in understanding outcomes, David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, "It Takes Two A Dyadic Analysis of Civil War Duration and Outcome," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (2009): 570–597; Similarly, Kalyvas and Balcells find that the types of tactics used by rebels are far more predictive of outcomes than other structural factors, L. Balcells and S. N. Kalyvas, "Does Warfare Matter? Severity, Duration, and Outcomes of Civil Wars," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 8 (2014): 1390–1418.

2.3.2 Blackboxing Organizations

Rather than moving directly to outcomes, this set of explanations treats organizations as a black-box through which structural and conflict variables move through in order to generate cohesion or fragmentation which in turn influences conflict outcomes. Thus, this section tests whether these variables actually do predict organizational cohesion and control. The dependent variable is a dichotomous measure of “centralized control” of an organization at the end of a conflict as adapted from the NSA categorical variable of organizational control that codes organizations as having “no,” “low,” “medium,” and “high” organizational control.¹¹⁶ While this measure does not capture the level of detail described and tested in subsequent chapters, it provides a good initial categorization of groups that are fragmented versus those that are not.

To test the role of social structures, I once again use the measures of whether an organization is an ethnic-based group or receives support from a diaspora population. Given the range of other explanations that focus on social structures in the blackbox category, I add additional variables in this analysis. First, given the theorized role of ideology and nationalism in generating cohesion in the above explanations, I include variables capturing whether organizations were based on ideologies (including Marxist and Islamist) or nationalist themes. Testing Staniland’s notion that pre-existing political parties play a role in organizational cohesion, I also include a variable measuring whether the organization has a separate political wing.

To test the role of resources, I add to the measures of external and military support a measure of whether the organization could draw upon lootable resources such as gems, diamonds, or hydrocarbons¹¹⁷ as well as a measure of whether the organization had access to a territorial sanctuary

116. I code “no” and “low” organizational control as “0” and “medium” and “high” control as “1.” I present the dichotomous measure as the categorical measure performs even worse. See Appendix 2.B for those results.

117. This data comes from Halvard Buhaug, Scott Gates, and Päivi Lujala, “Geography, Rebel Capability, and the Du-

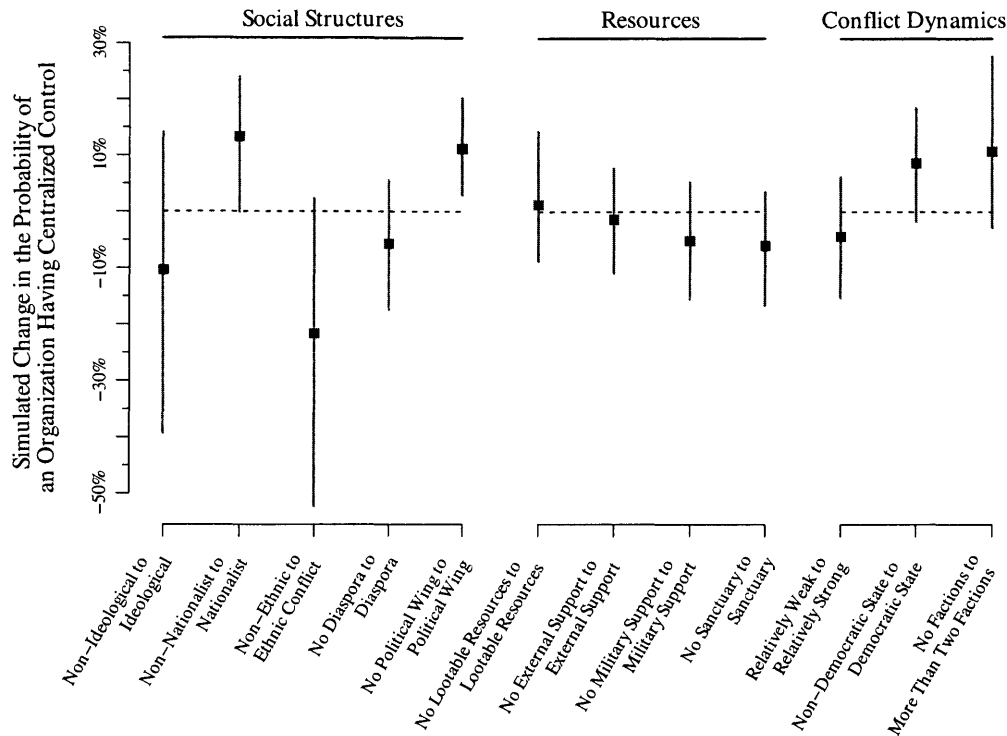


Figure 2.2 The Relationship Between Social Structures, Material Resources, Conflict Dynamics and Organizational Structure

inside or outside the country. These measures should capture whether organizations with access to resources fall victim to a resource curse or whether they can use these factors to centralize control.

Finally to test conflict dynamics, I again include the measure of regime type and the number of factions in an organization. In addition, I add a measure of the relative power of the organization in the conflict environment to test whether relative power versus the state and other groups predicts cohesion. While regime type gets at how governments interact with organizations, both the relative strength and number of factions gets at explanations that purport that more factional and worse-off (or better-off) organizations will be more likely to fragment.

The analysis of the relationship between these variables and the level of central control of a given organization includes 284 organizations and is presented in Figure 2.2.¹¹⁸ The figure shows the

ration of Civil Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (2009): 544–569.

118. This analysis includes a single observation for each organization. Again I conduct this analysis with a saturated

percent change in the probability of an organization being more centralized. Again, the gray lines depict the 95% confidence intervals for the estimate of each variable. Like above, the results align with the observable implications I laid out. Most of the estimates are quite close to zero, indicating that there is much indeterminance in the individual role of these variables. What is more, outside of the social structures explanations, the size of the effects is quite small, indicating that these factors do not contribute much to understanding variance in organizational control.

Given the centrality of social structures in many existing accounts, it is unsurprising that these variables play a bigger role in explaining how organizations can operate. While the estimates about the role of ideology are quite imprecise, there is more evidence of some role from ethnic and nationalist causes, as well as political parties. Nonetheless, the effect of an organization being built around an ethnic group reduces cohesion, the opposite expected effect from existing explanations, lending credence to the discussion above about the “dark side” of social cohesion. While both nationalist causes and the existence of political parties have a statistically significant association, both are fairly small at around a 10% change in the predicted probability of an organization having central control.¹¹⁹ In short, while these factors matter, there is a significant degree of variation left to explain, emphasizing the independent role of organizations in developing robust formal institutions.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has laid out existing explanations that either attempt to explain conflict outcomes without involving organizations as well as those that blackbox organizations and treat them as

model that includes all the explanatory variables included in the the figure (see Table 2.B.2 for the bivariate relationships). Appendix 2.B presents the the results in tabular form as well as the results for other thresholds and with additional control variables.

119. It is also quite feasible that the role of political parties is simply capturing those organizations that have become strong enough to participate in political processes rather than the existence of a political wing driving an organization’s cohesion in the first place.

passthrough mechanisms for structural factors and conflict dynamics. However, as I have demonstrated, these explanations are often indeterminate as studies have conflicting findings and theoretical approaches do not clearly specify convincing pathways. Building on that discussion, I showed in a large-N sense that existing explanations are imprecise and few of them explain meaningful variation in important dependent variables.

Thus, it is apparent that organizations must play a larger role in understanding how conflicts develop and play out. This means isolating out a meaningful set of insurgent behaviors and the mechanisms that help to explain how some organizations carry out these behaviors and others do not. As evidenced in this chapter, depictions of how rebel behavior influences conflict processes have been overly simplified. Rather than disaggregating how particular insurgent behaviors influence how conflicts develop, explanations have treated organizations or movements as either “fragmented” or “cohesive.” As a result, the current dependent variables obscure a great deal of important variation in insurgent behavior. Thus, it is not surprising that the vast majority of research has contradictory or divergent findings with respect to insurgent behavior and many conflict outcomes. Since researchers have worked to explain such imprecise outcomes, there is much room to open the blackbox and isolate the mechanisms that explain insurgent capabilities. Thus, the subsequent theory chapter lays out particular mechanisms that explain analytically meaningful categories of insurgent behavior such as the (in)ability to keep ceasefires, to control who is targeted by violence, or to employ increasingly complex guerrilla or conventional tactics.

Appendix

2.A Ignoring Organizations

Table 2.A.1 on the facing page presents the results for the dichotomous outcome variable used to generate Figure 2.1 on page 62. The first column of the table shows the estimates depicted in Figure 2.1 employing the 1,000 battle death threshold. The second column repeats the analysis using the 25 annual battle deaths threshold. Finally, the third column adds in additional controls from the literature to further test the robustness of the results. As is apparent, the results stay generally the same with the effect of democracy increasing in the final specification. Table 2.A.2 on page 70 presents the bivariate relationships. The relationships remain generally the same, though most of the associations are actually smaller.

Table 2.A.3 on page 71 presents the results for the categorical conflict termination variable. This analysis treats the various outcomes (Government Victory, Peace Agreement, Rebel Victory, and Low-level Violence) as unordered outcomes and estimates the effect of each variable on each of these outcomes using a multinomial logistic regression. The base category is government victory, meaning that each column shows the log odds of the listed outcome versus a government victory. While there are some small changes, it is apparent that the existing variables are not particularly strong predictors of these various outcomes and the relationships accord with the results above.

Table 2.A.1 Logistic Regression for Dichotomous Civil War Termination (Government Victory/Low-level Violence—Peacefire/Rebel Victory)

	Dichotomous Civil War Termination Type		
	1,000 Cumulative Battledeaths	25 Annual Battledeaths	Additional Controls
Ethnic Conflict	0.47 (0.82)	0.44 (0.53)	-0.64 (0.95)
Diaspora	0.39 (0.45)	0.44 (0.33)	0.54 (0.56)
External Support	-0.66 (0.97)	0.34 (0.63)	-0.01 (1.16)
Military Support	0.92 (0.92)	0.27 (0.58)	0.49 (1.13)
Number of Factions	0.38 (0.26)	0.32 (0.22)	0.31 (0.29)
ELF	-0.98 (0.73)	-0.32 (0.57)	0.94 (1.09)
Mechanization	-0.26 (0.23)	-0.16 (0.17)	-0.27 (0.25)
Democracy	0.97 [†] (0.57)	0.03 (0.42)	2.09** (0.75)
GDP/Capita (Logged)	0.23 (0.21)	0.20 (0.15)	0.21 (0.23)
Elevation (Logged)	-0.33 [†] (0.19)	-0.41* (0.16)	-0.18 (0.24)
Ideology			0.14 (0.16)
Nationalist			-0.19 (0.81)
Resources			-0.51 (0.63)
Population (Logged)			-0.68** (0.23)
Number of Conflicts	127	221	120

Standard errors in parentheses

[†] significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Finally, Table 2.A.4 on page 72 treats the conflict termination variable as an ordered categorical outcome (Government Victory, Peace Agreement, Rebel Victory) and conducts an ordered logistic regression. In the first column, low-level violence is included in the government victory category

Table 2.A.2 Bivariate Logistic Regressions for Dichotomous Civil War Termination
(Government Victory/Low-level Violence—Peacefire/Rebel Victory)

	Dichotomous Civil War Termination Type (1,000 Cumulative Battledeaths)									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ethnic Conflict	-0.15 (0.59)									
Diaspora		0.50 (0.33)								
External Support			0.17 (0.38)							
Military Support				0.37 (0.36)						
Number of Factions					0.24 (0.21)					
ELF						-1.02 [†] (0.60)				
Mechanization							-0.11 (0.16)			
Democracy								0.57 (0.44)		
GDP/Capita (Logged)									0.10 (0.14)	
Elevation (Logged)										-0.30 [†] (0.16)
Number of Organizations	156	153	152	152	159	156	140	154	159	151

Standard errors in parentheses

[†] significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

while in the second column, low-level violence is excluded (hence the drop in the number of observations). Again, there is little evidence that existing explanations are good (or precise) predictors of civil war termination.

Table 2.A.3 Multinomial Logistic Regression for Civil War Termination Type (Government Victory—Peace Agreement—Rebel Victory—Low-level Violence). Base category is incumbent victory.

	Civil War Termination Type (Unordered)		
	Peace Agreement	Rebel Victory	Low-level Violence
Diaspora	1.82* (0.75)	-0.77 (1.27)	1.13 (0.72)
External Support	0.35 (1.62)	0.35 (1.62)	1.54 (1.30)
Military Support	0.45 (1.54)	-0.42 (1.57)	-1.09 (1.23)
Number of Factions	0.55 (0.39)	0.08 (0.53)	0.01 (0.38)
ELF	1.66 (1.13)	-1.08 (1.39)	2.87** (1.08)
Mechanization	-0.27 (0.35)	-0.39 (0.43)	-0.09 (0.33)
Democracy	1.68† (0.97)	-0.63 (1.35)	0.11 (1.00)
GDP/Capita (Logged)	0.74* (0.36)	0.06 (0.49)	0.50 (0.34)
Elevation (Logged)	-0.25 (0.26)	-0.05 (0.25)	0.46 (0.30)
Number of Conflicts	129	129	129

Standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients indicate effects on log odds of outcome over incumbent victory.

† significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 2.A.4 Ordered Logistic Regression for Civil War Termination Type (Government Victory—Ceasefire—Rebel Victory). First column includes low-level violence as a government victory, second column does not include low-level violence.

	Civil War Termination Type (Ordered)	
	Including Low-Level Violence	Excluding Low-Level violence
Ethnic Conflict	0.36 (0.75)	1.11 (1.03)
Diaspora	0.08 (0.42)	0.17 (0.53)
External Support	-0.75 (0.97)	0.34 (1.42)
Military Support	0.85 (0.93)	-0.41 (1.34)
Number of Factions	0.24 (0.23)	0.10 (0.30)
ELF	-1.27 [†] (0.69)	-0.06 (0.88)
Mechanization	-0.25 (0.22)	-0.25 (0.25)
Democracy	0.67 (0.51)	-0.08 (0.66)
GDP/Capita (Logged)	0.15 (0.18)	0.21 (0.22)
Elevation (Logged)	-0.26 (0.16)	-0.11 (0.19)
Number of Conflicts	127	75

Standard errors in parentheses

[†] significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

2.B Blackboxing Organizations

Table 2.B.1 on the next page presents the results for the dichotomous central control variable used to generate Figure 2.2 on page 65. The first column of the table shows the estimates depicted in Figure 2.2 employing the 1,000 battle death threshold. The second column repeats the analysis using the 25 annual battle deaths threshold. Finally, the third column adds in additional controls from the literature to further test the robustness of the results. As is apparent, the results stay generally the same with democracy increasing in size and precision in the model including additional controls. Table 2.B.2 on page 75 presents the bivariate relationships. The relationships remain generally the same, though many of the associations are actually smaller. The only exception is for ethnic conflicts where the effect grows larger (in the opposite direction of expectations from the existing literature) and becomes significant.

Table 2.B.3 on page 76 disaggregates the central control variable above into the four categories coded by Cunningham et al.¹²⁰ These categories go from no central control, to low, to medium, to high central control. The analysis treats these outcomes as ordered and employs an ordered logistic regression across both thresholds and using the additional controls. While there is some evidence that diaspora populations might result in a very small change in the level of central control, the results are generally less precise than those in the previous table, again indicating that existing explanations are poor predictors of central control.

120. Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour, "Shirts Today, Skins Tomorrow."

Table 2.B.1 Logistic Regression for Dichotomous Measure of an Organization's Central Control (No/Low Central Control—Medium/High Central Control)

	Dichotomous Central Control		
	1,000 Cumulative Battledeaths	25 Annual Battledeaths	Additional Controls
Ideological	−0.11 (0.12)	−0.12 (0.10)	−0.16 (0.13)
Nationalist	1.31 [†] (0.69)	0.78 (0.58)	1.88* (0.80)
Ethnic	−1.11 (0.71)	−1.15 [†] (0.60)	−1.24 (0.79)
Diaspora	−0.31 (0.41)	0.05 (0.36)	−0.25 (0.47)
Political Wing	0.92* (0.37)	0.50 (0.32)	0.81* (0.39)
Lootable Resources	0.06 (0.42)	−0.03 (0.39)	0.16 (0.51)
External Support	1.18 (1.09)	1.40 (1.06)	1.19 (1.12)
Military Support	−1.39 (1.08)	−1.91 [†] (1.06)	−1.35 (1.11)
Sanctuary	−0.44 (0.36)	−0.03 (0.33)	−0.57 (0.39)
Relative Strength	−0.14 (0.21)	−0.07 (0.19)	−0.25 (0.23)
Democracy	0.71 (0.44)	0.59 (0.36)	1.39** (0.54)
Number of Factions	0.33 (0.24)	−0.02 (0.21)	−0.11 (0.31)
ELF			0.33 (0.74)
GDP/Capita (Logged)			−0.56 [†] (0.29)
Elevation (Logged)			−0.19 (0.25)
Population (Logged)			−0.43* (0.19)
Number of Organiza- tions	284	348	277

Standard errors in parentheses

[†] significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 2.B.2 Bivariate Logistic Regression for Dichotomous Measure of an Organization's Central Control (No/Low Central Control—Medium/High Central Control)

	Dichotomous Central Control (1,000 Cumulative Battledeaths)												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Ideological	-0.03 (0.05)												
Nationalist		0.37 (0.32)											
Ethnic			-1.47** (0.49)										
Diaspora				-0.13 (0.30)									
Political Wing					0.56* (0.28)								
Lootable Resources						0.23 (0.35)							
External Support							0.02 (0.28)						
Military Support								-0.14 (0.27)					
Sanctuary									-0.07 (0.27)				
Relative Strength										-0.18 (0.14)			
Democracy											0.79* (0.34)		
Number of Factions												0.05 (0.17)	
Number of Organizations	354	354	354	333	350	348	335	335	352	353	304	354	

Standard errors in parentheses

† significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 2.B.3 Ordered Logistic Regression for an Organization's Level of Central Control (No—Low—Medium—High Central Control)

	Central Control (Ordered)		
	1,000 Cumulative Battledeaths	25 Annual Battledeaths	Additional Controls
Ideological	0.02 (0.07)	0.03 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.08)
Nationalist	0.19 (0.39)	-0.07 (0.39)	0.75 (0.46)
Ethnic	-0.96 (0.60)	-1.16 [†] (0.60)	-0.80 (0.66)
Diaspora	-0.54 [†] (0.30)	-0.19 (0.30)	-0.70* (0.34)
Political Wing	1.03*** (0.27)	0.67* (0.27)	1.05*** (0.29)
Lootable Resources	-0.38 (0.36)	-0.14 (0.36)	-0.21 (0.40)
External Support	0.50 (0.52)	0.27 (0.52)	0.44 (0.54)
Military Support	-0.70 (0.53)	-0.62 (0.53)	-0.54 (0.54)
Sanctuary	0.06 (0.28)	0.21 (0.28)	0.07 (0.30)
Relative Strength	0.11 (0.15)	0.18 (0.15)	0.03 (0.15)
Democracy	0.27 (0.28)	0.28 (0.28)	0.79* (0.34)
Number of Factions	0.01 (0.18)	-0.12 (0.18)	-0.20 (0.19)
ELF			0.75 (0.57)
GDP/Capita (Logged)			-0.22 (0.21)
Elevation (Logged)			-0.03 (0.19)
Population (Logged)			-0.42** (0.13)
Number of Organiza- tions	284	348	277

Standard errors in parentheses

[†] significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Chapter 3

A Theory of Insurgent Military Effectiveness

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter made it clear that structural factors do not explain insurgent military effectiveness. We cannot predict how these groups will fight or the types of behaviors they can carry out by simply looking at their pre-existing endowments and the environment they operate in. Instead, this study joins a growing trend in the study of military effectiveness by carefully assessing the how the organizational make-up of insurgent groups determines their fighting capacity. In other words, it is what insurgents *do* with what they have, not what they have, that matters.

Before turning to these organizational mechanisms, Section 3.2 presents a conception of effectiveness more fitting for the types of combat common in civil wars and underlines its importance to understanding how conflicts unfold. While some insurgents fight like conventional forces, this discussion disaggregates lower levels of effectiveness into four categories: organizations that disintegrate under fire (Combat Ineffective), those able to carry out simple activities such as cease-fires or preventing large-scale defections (Limited Structural Integrity), those able to ensure that their units carry out specific orders under fire such as only attacking particular populations or areas

(Complete Structural Integrity), and, finally, those able to carry out simple military tasks such as handling weaponry, ambushes, retreats, and hit and run operations (Guerrilla Capacity). Finally, organizations reaching higher levels of capacity can carry out large-scale coordinated operations with heavier weaponry (Quasi-Conventional Capacity).

Second, in order to develop an organizational theory of military effectiveness, Section 3.3 introduces the informal and formal elements that insurgent organizations may draw upon or create. Using these elements, Section 3.4 presents the theory and explicates its logic by laying out how varying constellations of organizational characteristics will determine different levels of insurgent military effectiveness.

The theory paints a more complete picture of insurgent organizations by accounting for the importance of both informal structures of social support and formal military structures in explaining how some insurgent organizations achieve relatively high levels of military effectiveness. While the theory treats strong social ties as an important foundation for insurgent groups, it argues that these ties need not be pre-existing, but instead can be built by insurgent groups. More importantly, whether or not organizations import or build informal ties, the way in which they interact with and expand upon these relationships is the central determinant of military effectiveness. Though strong ties are necessary, organizations will fight with limited effectiveness if they do not actively link themselves to those informal structures. If organizations do build a strong foundation by leveraging these horizontal ties, they must put in place logistical, command and control, and personnel management systems to be able to fight with increasing capacity.

This theory applies well-beyond the study of military effectiveness to other types of institutions and organizations. While there is a growing recognition that the intersection of formal and informal structures is crucial to understanding institutional outcomes—particularly in countries or institu-

tions which have nascent formal structures¹—there is little work which actively studies the mechanisms which mediate that intersection. This theory not only presents a set of clear mechanisms which explain how the intersection of these informal and formal elements will shape the capacity of formal organizations, but it clearly shows that this intersection *will not* be beneficial unless formal leaders explicitly mold it.

Finally, while the predictions uncovered by the theory generate comparative statics—given a set of organizational attributes, it explains how effectively an organization will operate—the theory also speaks to why some organizations develop certain features while others do not. Thus, Section 3.5 briefly discusses how the logic underlying the theory provides some guidance on understanding how leaders' initial choices may contribute to the development or underdevelopment of key organizational features.

3.2 The Dependent Variable: Military Effectiveness

Military effectiveness is the relative capacity of organizations to convert resources, manpower, and technology into military power.² Though related, it is not the same as military success. Highly effective forces can still be defeated by larger foes or idiosyncratic conditions, such as climate or topography. Nonetheless, more militarily effective groups will have higher rates of battlefield success. Thus, a focus on military effectiveness should be a major factor in helping to predict outcomes.

1. For example, states attempting to expand their bureaucratic reach must address and respond to the existing social structures. On this point, see Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States* (Princeton University Press, 1988); Peter B. Evans, "Predatory, developmental, and other apparatuses: A comparative political economy perspective on the Third World state," *Sociological Forum* 4, no. 4 (1989): 561–587.

2. Allan R. Millett, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth H. Watman, "The Effectiveness of Military Organizations," *International Security* 11, no. 1 (1986): 37–71; Caitlin Talmadge, "Explaining Military Effectiveness: Political Intervention and Battlefield Performance" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011); Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006); Risa A. Brooks, "Making Military Might: Why Do States Fail and Succeed?: A Review Essay," *International Security* 28, no. 2 (2003): 149–191.

Though operations researchers and sociologists have studied military effectiveness for some time, it has recently been taken on by a more diverse set of researchers.³ Some research has equated military effectiveness with broad factors such as population or military size, loss-exchange ratios, and territorial control or highly technical analyses of weapons systems. Others have equated it with whether insurgents are “fragmented” or “cohesive.”⁴ In contrast, this dissertation conceptualizes military effectiveness in terms of the combat activities that conflict actors employ.⁵

While the combat activities employed by militants are no doubt influenced by strategic choices—in other words selecting feasible and internally consistent goals for the use of force—the conception of military effectiveness presented below focuses on operational and tactical level. While many have pointed out why guerrilla strategies are effective, there is much less understanding of *how* organizations gain the capacity to implement these strategies.⁶ Indeed, though many insurgent groups have at least a basic understanding of the strategic necessities of fighting an insurgency, they are often most limited by their inability to carry out cohesive and consistent military operations against counterinsurgents. Thus, this study is focused on how efficient insurgent fighting forces are on the battlefield in response to the structural constraints of the fighting theater and the actions of their foes.

3. Brooks, “Making Military Might”: 150-152.

4. Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Paul Staniland, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Insurgent Fratricide, Ethnic Defection, and the Rise of Pro-State Paramilitaries,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012): 16–40; Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*; Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*.

5. For other studies explicitly holding that the tasks that a formal organization can carry out separate effective from less effective militaries, see Biddle, *Military power*; Risa Brooks and Elizabeth A. Stanley, *Creating Military Power: The Sources of Military Effectiveness* (Stanford University Press, 2007); Kenneth M Pollack, *Arabs at war: military effectiveness, 1948-1991* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Talmadge, “Explaining Military Effectiveness: Political Intervention and Battlefield Performance.”

6. David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2009); Lyall and Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines”; David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006); Ivan Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

3.2.1 Defining Military Effectiveness

To reach the highest levels of effectiveness, insurgents must be able to carry out three increasingly challenging categories of tasks. First, units must be able to control the way in which their soldiers use violence, or retain Structural Integrity. Within this category, insurgents can either control when their soldiers use violence (Limited Structural Integrity) or both when and *how* their soldiers use violence (Complete Structural Integrity). Second, building on this control, units must then be able to conduct defined military tasks representing Guerrilla Capacity; and (3) units as well as combinations of units must be able to carry out integrated and complex activities representing Quasi-conventional Capacity.⁷ In the following paragraphs, I walk through what each category entails and then present their synthesis.

Limited and Complete Structural Integrity. One of the base requirements of any military organization is ensuring that its members fight when they are ordered to and stop fighting when similarly ordered. In order to allow units to keep fighting under fire, organizations must also be able to actively recruit and deploy additional soldiers in response to attrition or expanding objectives—i.e. force generation. In a most basic sense, this means that organizations must ensure that units remain intact and capable of military behavior when under fire and in times of peace. While this notion of fighting under fire is often referred to as cohesion,⁸ this dissertation uses the term “Structural Integrity” in its place as cohesion is often ill-defined and imprecisely applied.⁹

7. This discussion draws on Talmadge’s excellent formulation of battlefield effectiveness in conventional actors. While that dependent variable is focused on increasingly complex sets of tactics, much of the action in this dissertation occurs at much lower levels of capacity Talmadge, “Explaining Military Effectiveness: Political Intervention and Battlefield Performance”: Chapter 1.

8. See for example, Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat*; Shils and Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II”; Leonard Wong et al., *Why They Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War* (Strategic Studies Institute - U.S. Army War College, 2003).

9. See for example, Kenny, “Structural Integrity and Cohesion in Insurgent Organizations”; MacCoun, “What Is Known About Unit Cohesion and Military Performance”; MacCoun, Kier, and Belkin, “Does Social Cohesion Determine Motivation in Combat?”; Guy L. Siebold, “The Evolution of the Measurement of Cohesion,” *Military Psychology* 11 (March 1999): 5–26.

Though it is rarely studied in tandem with battlefield performance, Structural Integrity as measured by this dissertation also focuses on whether soldiers follow orders to *cease* violence. While seemingly less involved than ensuring soldiers to fight under fire, even strong military actors face significant challenges in controlling the behavior of their foot soldiers during downtime as there are often incentives for foot soldiers to continue using violence whether for personal or group gain.¹⁰ Failure to ensure compliance with such orders can significantly damage the political and military position of insurgents by jeopardizing strategic positioning, political deals, or exposing the organization to harmful retributive violence.¹¹ Illustratively, Muqtada al-Sadr's inability to gain the compliance of his foot soldiers during 2004 led to a near decimation of his fighting forces as they continued to engage far superior military units.¹²

When units of an insurgent organization lack any semblance of Structural Integrity, they disintegrate under fire and in periods of peace. Such military organizations are unable to either convince or compel their soldiers to take up arms when facing enemy forces or to refrain from using violence during periods of ceasefire. Thus, while individual units or groups of soldiers may continue to fight, disparate elements will cease to operate as a military organization across the battle space. Such organizations are characterized as Combat Ineffective.

Still, there are mid-points between such ineffectiveness and complete Structural Integrity. Organizations with Limited Structural Integrity are able to ensure that very basic tasks are undertaken when units face either the pressures of battle or the incentives of peace. Units in such organizations

10. Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat*; Moskos, "The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam"; Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*.

11. Max Abrahms and Philip B.K. Potter, "Explaining Terrorism: Leadership Deficits and Militant Group Tactics," *International Organization* 69, no. 2 (2015): 311–342; Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*; Edward C. O'Dowd, "Ho Chi Minh and the Origins of the Vietnamese Doctrine of Guerrilla Tactics," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24, no. 3 (2013): 561–587.

12. T. Walsh, "The Fight for Kufa: Task Force 2-37 Armor Defeats Al-Sadr's Militia," *Armor Magazine*, 2004, 26–30; Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*.

do not defect *en masse* and they follow orders to stop using violence. However, such organizations are not able to order their units to carry out specific tasks under fire or in times of peace, whether it be attacking a particular location, not targeting civilians during violence, or not acting in a predatory manner toward civilians during periods of non-combat. In short, organizations which can turn violence “on and off” have attained Limited Structural Integrity while only organizations that are able to control how violence is employed during battle and peace have Complete Structural Integrity.

Guerrilla Capacity. While Structural Integrity is a prerequisite for combat effectiveness, it is not sufficient to carry out guerrilla-type operations. Such capacity includes the ability for units to execute maneuvers such as hit and run operations, ambushes, whether with small arms fire or through the coordinated use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), and targeted assassination campaigns. These tasks represent a base-level of coordination of military activity at the small-unit level as these operations require coordination at the company-equivalent (80-20 individuals) or below. As far as insurgencies go, such operational capacity represents a relatively high level of effectiveness, indicating the ability to engage in brief, intense interchanges with counterinsurgents without significant losses and even a chance of tactical success. Nonetheless, Guerrilla Capacity only allows for limited offensive operations.

Quasi-conventional Capacity. Military organizations with these capabilities are able to carry out attacks that coordinate across large-fighting units (battalion and above), execute flanking maneuvers, re-group and respond to changing battlefield conditions, and adapt tactics in a timely manner. Further, their troops and weaponry must be mobile so it can be moved broadly within an area of operations and quickly within specific engagements. In addition, these forces must be able to carry out defenses, both by preparing static defensive positions and being able to retreat in a generally orderly manner. For example, one of the defining features of the Taliban’s offensives after 1995 was

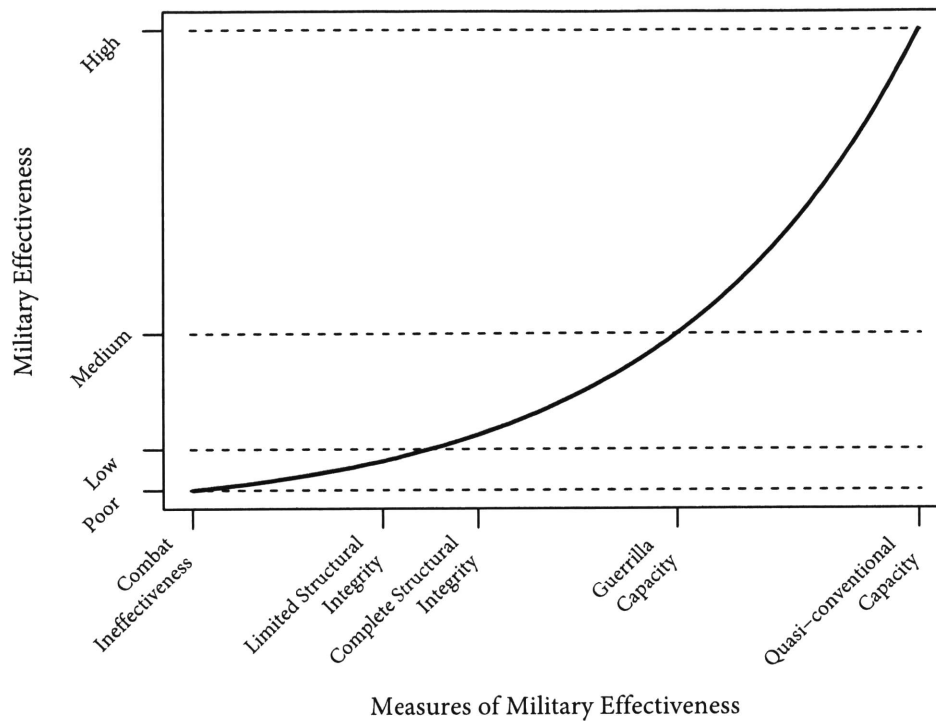


Figure 3.1 Coding the Level of Military Effectiveness

its employment of mobile warfare which combined infantry movements with support from basic artillery and rocket launchers. This approach positioned Taliban “mobile columns” to rapidly overrun opposing forces across a broad range of terrain. As Davis notes, “these Blitzkrieg tactics proved strikingly successful and again it bears emphasizing, marked a sudden shift to mobile warfare that caught the government completely off balance.”¹³ This level of military effectiveness is fairly rare in insurgencies and often is held by insurgent organizations capable of carrying out near-conventional operations such as those performed by Hezbollah in Lebanon, elements of the People’s Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF, also known as the Việt Cộng) in Vietnam, or the Badr Organization in Iraq.

While these three components are all necessary and work in tandem to achieve high levels of military effectiveness, they do not contribute equally. As such, the relationship between these com-

13. Anthony Davis, “How the Taliban Became a Military Force,” in *Fundamentalism reborn*, ed. William Maley (New York University Press, 1998): 62.

ponents and military effectiveness is not linear. While it is important that soldiers stand and fight, they will only consistently win battles against capable foes when they also have military know-how. Figure 3.1 on the preceding page displays these distinctions, indicating that the three categories of tasks are exponentially related to military effectiveness. Insurgent actors do not slowly progress toward higher degrees of effectiveness. Instead, when organizations carry out more challenging tasks on the battlefield, they drastically expand the efficacy of the violence they employ.

3.2.2 Why Care About Military Effectiveness?

Two common threads in the recent study of civil war seem to downplay the importance of military effectiveness. In responding to these arguments, I highlight the importance of military effectiveness in understanding both the military *and* political dynamics of civil war. The first thread argues that insurgents are simply grappling to survive in the face of much stronger and superior counterinsurgents.¹⁴ According to this logic, even if these groups wanted to become more militarily effective, they do not have the time or resources to devote toward such endeavors, making it irrelevant to carefully study the differences between these groups. While there is no doubt some validity to these claims, this dissertation finds insurgent groups to be far more dynamic and proactive actors than this logic would indicate.

Not only is there broad variation in the ability of insurgents to withstand—and actively respond to—environmental and counterinsurgent pressures, but appreciating such variations in capacity significantly improves our understanding of how insurgencies operate. Indeed, a core takeaway of the theory presented here is that some insurgent groups are able to develop in the face of strong state

14. For example, a central assumption of Fearon and Laitin's quite influential study of conflict onset is that insurgents are in a constant struggle with the environment and counterinsurgents to find the basic space, resources, and recruits to survive. In this context, they argue that insurgents can only expand past this focus on survival when facing very weak states. Fearon and Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War."

pressure. As Kalyvas points out, even the strongest counterinsurgents face a daunting challenge: “once a civil war is on, the military requirements for the establishment and preservation of control over the entire territory of a country are staggering.”¹⁵ Given that insurgents often have some latitude to operate, the question this dissertation emphasizes is: what are they able to do with what they have?¹⁶ For example, the Việt Minh were able to absorb a massive “French onslaught” from 1947 to the early 1950s and still develop increasing military capabilities.¹⁷

Perhaps just as importantly, even when groups are not particularly militarily effective, differentiating the capabilities of seemingly “ineffective” organizations is fundamental to interacting with these actors. For example, while organizations with Limited Structural Integrity are not that militarily effective, they are capable of maintaining ceasefires. Though they may appear weak to observers, this level of control makes such groups far better positioned to negotiate peace deals than organizations without such control. Moreover, counterinsurgents may very well shoot themselves in the foot by conducting operations which strip such organizations of that level of control as the result will often be the unleashing of violence that insurgent leaders can no longer direct. Though resultant attacks may be less damaging if they are not organized, they will be much harder to stop and the counterinsurgents will have dismantled an actor capable of making peace.

A second common thread about the limited importance of military effectiveness is that insurgency is more political than military: gaining popular support wins civil wars, not militarily defeating the state. Berman et al. sum up this conception, arguing that “unlike other forms of warfare, counterinsurgency is fundamentally a struggle over people, not territory.” As a result, the support

15. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*: 138-141.

16. McLauchlin and Pearlman make a similar observation, finding that the impact of state actions is mitigated through the existing institutional milieu of the group: those that are institutionalized will remain cohesive while those with divisions are more likely to fragment. McLauchlin and Pearlman, “Out-Group Conflict, In-Group Unity?”

17. Christopher E. Goscha, “Colonial Hanoi and Saigon at War: Social Dynamics of the Viet Minh’s ‘Underground City,’ 1945–1954,” *War in History* 20, no. 2 (2013): 222–250.

of the population “is critical for insurgent success.”¹⁸ Following this logic, the goals of most organizations may not even require the development of significant military power, making the study of military power irrelevant.

To begin with, while the loyalty of the people is often of great importance, it is difficult—if not impossible—for insurgent movements to promote their political program without the military capacity to repel the state and provide stability and security in their areas of control. Kalyvas, who emphasizes the importance of civilian support, recognizes that civilian cooperation comes only with the military capacity to control territory: “If collaboration is endogenous to control, then what determines the distribution of control? There are good reasons to think that control hinges largely on military effectiveness.”¹⁹ While the Việt Minh and then PLAF emphasized their political message, they recognized that the political struggle was reliant on the use of calibrated military force. As a PLAF indoctrination pamphlet from 1962 recounted:

We have learned that the only way to organize revolutionary forces and make preparations in all areas to smash the enemy’s machinery of violence is to use the appropriate form of armed struggle...In the beginning the people pursued the legal and illegal political struggle but soon discovered they were not strong enough or effective enough to prevent enemy mopping up operations and the killing and imprisoning of people. Therefore from the masses’ struggle movement there emerged a new struggle form, the armed struggle...It did not contradict the political struggle but supplemented it and paved the way for the political struggle to develop.²⁰

Even when organizations do not place a priority on military capabilities, their military capacity will limit the ways in which they can use violence to pursue their political goals. Whether or not they seek to attain greater levels of effectiveness, the organizational tasks insurgents are able to carry out will provide useful information about what they are capable of and what they could potentially use force to achieve. For example, the difference between Limited and Complete Structural

18. Eli Berman, Jacob Shapiro, and Joseph H. Felter, “Can Hearts and Minds Be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq,” *Journal of Political Economy* 119, no. 4 (2011): 773.

19. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*: 132.

20. Document qtd. in Pike, *Viet Cong*: 101.

Integrity can be crucial for an insurgency attempting to win over a population. While organizations with Limited Structural Integrity cannot prevent their soldiers from targeting civilians, those with Complete Structural Integrity can feel confident that their units will treat civilians as the central leadership desires. This level of military effectiveness thus can be central to an insurgent group's success as they can use violence without risking the loss of civilian support.²¹

In addition, explicitly evaluating military effectiveness can help to uncover the underlying goals and motivations of an organization. To the extent that organizations only choose to invest in as much military effectiveness as they think they need, then the magnitude of that investment signals their intentions much more clearly than rhetoric. Similarly, when insurgents lessen their military capacity they make strong signals about their intentions. For example, if as part of a peace agreement an insurgent organization allows some of their forces to be integrated into the state military, they are making a clear signal as they are losing the capacity to use those troops. In this vein, Realist scholars studying state-to-state conflict argue that intentions cannot be inferred from rhetoric or proclamations.²² As Jervis posits, the core of the security dilemma stems from the reality that “the other’s intentions must be considered to be co-extensive with his capabilities.”²³ Thus, the level of military effectiveness that an insurgent organization attains provides not only information about how large of a threat they pose, but also provides a much less noisy signal of what the insurgent group actually wants to achieve.

21. Abrahms and Potter, “Explaining Terrorism: Leadership Deficits and Militant Group Tactics”; Reed M. Wood, “Rebel Capability and Strategic Violence Against Civilians,” *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 5 (2010): 601–614; Devorah Manekin, “Violence Against Civilians in the Second Intifada: The Moderating Effect of Armed Group Structure on Opportunistic Violence,” *Comparative Political Studies*, June 25, 2013, Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, “Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 3 (2006): 429–447.

22. For the two most prominent expressions of this sentiment, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (McGraw-Hill, 1979); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2003).

23. Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976): 64-65.

3.3 The Informal and Formal Structures within Insurgent Organizations

Having conceptualized military effectiveness as sets of combat activities, this dissertation focuses on the mechanisms which limit or increase an organization's ability to utilize what they have. Before turning to the theory in the following section, this section lays out the informal and formal structures that insurgent militaries can draw upon while seeking to attain various levels of effectiveness.

3.3.1 Informal Structure

Informal structure represents the interpersonal relationships that are not mandated by the rules of the formal organization. They can be pre-existing ties imported into an organization or arise endogenously as a result of joining an organization.²⁴ By focusing on the importance of informal structures which are pre-existing as well as those endogenous to an organization, this dissertation combines wide-ranging approaches to understanding organizations. In organization theory, informal structure is thought of as ties created because of the organization. Informal relationships are built by daily interaction and the need to get tasks done.²⁵ On the other hand, sociological, economics, and political science treatments of embeddedness or informal support tend to focus on pre-existing networks around which organizations are built.²⁶

The relationship between these two forms of informal structure can be likened to Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity.²⁷ In the case of mechanical solidarity, co-

24. Waldstrom, *Informal Networks in Organizations: A Literature Review*.

25. Krackhardt and Hanson thus refer to informal structure as "the networks of relationships that employees form across functions and divisions to accomplish tasks fast." D. Krackhardt and J. R. Hanson, "Informal Networks," *Harvard Business Review* 71, no. 4 (1993): 104.

26. Staniland, "Organizing Insurgency"; Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*; Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1998); McAdam, "Recruitment to high-risk activism"; Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*; Granovetter, "Economic action and social structure."

27. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (Free Press, 1984): 84.

hesion and inclusion stem from pre-existing ties, shared experiences, shared norms, and sacred symbols that tie together a population of individuals. As such, if an organization is to capitalize on the power and legitimacy of mechanical solidarity, it must appeal to symbols, ties, and norms which unite the community. On the other hand, as organization theorists point out, and further elaborated below, organizations also breed their own informal structures. When these informal structures are closely tied to the ethos of the organization and create individual commitment to the broader cause, the legitimacy obtained by the organization closely represents organic solidarity. Importantly, it is quite feasible that these different pathways toward legitimation will breed contrasting organizational responses and thus produce dissimilar organizational development pathways.

The most relevant informal structures in the course of rebellion are the horizontal relationships between members of the organization. These ties generate the core primary groups within an organization. Primary groups represent the relationships at the squad, team, or even platoon level including between three to approximately fifty soldiers. When there are strong relationships between individuals horizontally, whether created before or after they enter the organization, these individuals will generate strong primary groups when joined together in the context of a military unit. Strong primary groups are characterized by bonds of kinship, friendship, or affection which result in norms regulating group behavior. Military sociologists describe this condition as social cohesion, or “the nature and quality of the emotional bonds of friendship, liking, caring, and closeness among group members.” Groups are socially cohesive “to the extent that its members like each other, prefer to spend their social time together, enjoy each others company, and feel emotionally close to one another.”²⁸

Some insurgent organizations are built within communities which have the qualities that gen-

28. MacCoun, “What Is Known About Unit Cohesion and Military Performance”: 291.

erate strong primary groups. Taylor describes such communities as being composed of individuals that interact often, hold diverse relationships (spanning social and economic matters), and share common base beliefs and a 'rough' equality of conditions.²⁹ Individuals taken at random from parts of the community will share significant experiences, norms, goals, and worldviews. These are not "village-like" communities where small pockets of the population share such ties. Instead, they are societies in which horizontal ties do not stop at the outer wall of the village.³⁰

Such pre-existing ties indicate that the relationships which create strong primary groups exist entirely independent of the organization. For example, the Shiite community that underpins Jaysh al-Mahdi in Iraq shares a significant set of collective experiences based on Saddam Hussein's persecution of Shiites as well as norms deriving from Shiism and generations of shared practices. Moreover, community members participate in overlapping of social and economic activity as individuals interact in both capacities frequently.³¹ Thus, Jaysh al-Mahdi benefited from the fact that the individuals from those Shiite communities brought these shared underlying experiences and close ties with them when joining the organization. Beyond this example from substate conflict, similar arguments have been made about the role of shared ethnicity in allowing conventional militaries to "import" already strong relationships which in turn generate strong primary groups.³²

On the other hand, some insurgent groups are faced with divided communities or communities which lack strong bonds horizontally. These organizations are then faced with the challenge of building strong primary groups. Without actively addressing this deficiency, these groups will have

29. Michael Taylor, *Rationality and Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); For a similar treatment of communities, see Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*.

30. For a good explication of this point, see James Moody and Douglas R. White, "Structural Cohesion and Embeddedness: A Hierarchical Concept of Social Groups," *American Sociological Review* 68, no. 1 (2003): 103–127.

31. Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*; Patel, "Islam, Information, and Social Order: The Strategic Role of Religion in Muslim Societies."

32. Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat*; Rosen, "Military Effectiveness"; Sergio Catignani, "Motivating Soldiers: The Example of the Israeli Defense Forces," *Parameters* 34, no. 3 (2004): 108–121.

face significant challenges in recruiting, motivating, and retaining members. For example, writing about Renamo, Weinstein observes that since the Renamo leadership was unable to draw upon pre-existing communities and did not invest in building ties between their soldiers upon membership, “commanders and combatants in Renamo did not trust one another.”

3.3.2 Formal Structure

Formal structure consists of the rules and practices that are readily observable through written documents or procedures that are determined and executed according to formal position. Like other organizations, militaries have structures and procedures meant to support the employment of calibrated military force. Three sets of military structures are relevant to this theory: logistics systems, personnel management systems, and command and control systems. While these elements no doubt overlap and there are other important military features, I show that these three categories provide a great deal of purchase in capturing what is required to generate the type of military power insurgents tend to need.

Personnel management systems encompass the promotion, discipline, and training of foot soldiers and officers. Promotion procedures refer to the reasons for advancement within the command structure. For example, are officers promoted based on performance during battle, training, or other military activities or are they promoted based on personal relationships, political affiliations, ethnic status, or other non-military factors? Disciplinary procedures refer to both the types of acts which are punishable as well as the types of punishment. It is important for militaries to make clear what type of behavior is deviant and to design punishments which are sufficient to dissuade such deviant behavior without destroying morale.³³ Finally, training procedures include both the type of subjects

33. Lynn notes that when a disciplinary system is “consistent with the soldier’s standards of justice, severity, and honor,” it will enhance motivation. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*: 37.

as well as the breadth of involvement across units. Training can include non-combat indoctrination and re-socialization as well as combat training ranging from simple weapons familiarization to tactical movements. Tactical movement training can be geared at the individual, unit, platoon, company, or even higher.

Command and control systems encompass the command structure, the command arrangements, and information distribution. Command structure refers to order of battle, or the way in which the formations of the armed actors are configured. For the most part, this study focuses on the order of battle at the company level and below. The key characteristic of study is the size of these units, in particular, the officer to non-officer ratio. Command arrangements encompass the relationships between each echelon of the command structure. In short, at what level are disciplinary, commendation, and operational/tactical decisions made? Information distribution refers to the way in which intelligence, lessons learned, and information are shared both horizontally and vertically. For example, are units able to communicate with each other in real-time, and are higher echelons of the command structure frequently receiving feedback from lower echelons and in-turn altering their behavior in response to that feedback?

Finally, logistics systems refer to the mechanisms in place to support troops in the field by providing resources, medical care, and maintenance as well as facilitating movement. Basic logistical systems provide units with at least some modicum of food, water, and weapons. This can be through distributions of caches, deals with local communities, payment of troops so they can seek their own resources, or through mobile re-supply elements. More complex logistical systems are able to repair broken equipment, move larger equipment and troop formations quickly, and evacuate wounded soldiers to areas with better medical care.

3.4 An Organizational Theory of Militarily Effectiveness

This section lays out a theory which explains how certain constellations of organizational elements are needed to achieve each of the levels of military effectiveness. The theory begins by recognizing that the ability or inability of organizations to draw upon pre-existing strong communities will generate different baseline needs for leaders. Those organizations that are unable to rely on such communities will first need to build the requisite relationships between their members to ensure that there are strong primary groups. However, whether or not an organization starts with strong pre-existing ties, it will be unable to fight with any effectiveness if it does not actively link itself with its lower-level officers and foot soldiers thus leveraging the power of the ties uniting strong primary groups. In short, all organizations must establish the same logistical, command and control, and personnel management systems should they want to be able to fight with increasing capacity.

Table 3.1 on the facing page lays out the predictions of the theory. It illustrates the organizational characteristics which must be implemented to attain each level of effectiveness (the characteristics are cumulative, so only the additional characteristics needed are listed in each row). Importantly, it shows that the presence or absence of pre-existing strong ties does generate different needs for organizations to gain Limited Structural Integrity. But, once they have built that foundation, all organizations must implement the same formal structures to attain higher levels of effectiveness. This section proceeds by explaining the logic at each row of how the different formal characteristics can leverage strong primary groups and then generate military power. That logic underscores that it is not implementation of particular systems which results in increasing effectiveness, it is the synthesis of these elements that activates the mechanisms I describe.

Table 3.1 Theory Predictions

Organizational Characteristics		→	Military Effectiveness
Personnel Management Large-Unit Military Training Logistics Systems Movement Systems Advanced Armaments Command and Control Integrated Communications Systems Company-sized Units and Above			Quasi-conventional Capacity
Personnel Management Cadre Military Training Militarily-Motivated Promotion Patterns Command and Control Basic Communications Systems Functionally Differentiated Units Experienced Troops and Recruits Intermixed			Guerrilla Capacity
Personnel Management Officer Selection Standards Command and Control Manageable Small Units Officers and Soldiers Intermixed			Structural Integrity
Personnel Management “Bootcamp” or More Basic Disciplinary Procedures Logistics Systems Resource Distribution Systems	Personnel Management Basic Disciplinary Procedures Logistics Systems Resource Distribution Systems		Limited Structural Integrity
Personnel Management Recruitment Procedures Command and Control Basic Command Structure and Arrangements			Combat Ineffective
Pre-existing Primary Groups No	Pre-existing Primary Groups Yes		



3.4.1 Combat Ineffective

To exist as an insurgent actor, organizations must have at least basic recruitment procedures to attract new members and a basic command structure to integrate those recruits into fighting units.

Still, simply having a collection of loosely organized individuals—no matter how many can be recruited—will not position an organization to use those troops to achieve coherent military tasks. As the discussion below reveals, without any additional procedures, leaders will have no way to direct and count on their soldiers. As a result, organizations that have only implemented these procedures will be unable to employ force in a militarily effective manner—they are characterized as Combat Ineffective.

This could come about because organizations lack strong primary groups or have not leveraged them. Organizations that cannot draw upon pre-existing social ties to create strong primary groups and have not built such ties, will be unable to create units with Structural Integrity let alone develop any other forms of military capacity. As Weinstein elaborates, when soldiers are not linked together through shared norms, relationships or ideas, these soldiers tend to “avoid engagement with the opposing military force” or even change sides.³⁴ Indeed, research has found that individuals joining violent causes have a wide-set of individual preferences. These divergent long and short-term preferences can include seeking prestige or personal pleasure through the use of violence, gaining personal or familial profit, protecting their families’ safety at the expense of the broader fighting force, or simply fleeing combat.³⁵ As a result, these fighting forces cannot be sure that each individual is committed to the organization’s strategy because there will be “considerable variation in the extent to which fighters are motivated by collective rather than private goals.”³⁶ This often leads organizations to try to buy-off or coerce their fighters.³⁷

34. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*: 139.

35. For example, see, Krijn Peters and Paul Richards, “‘Why We Fight’: Voices of Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone,” *Africa* 68, no. 02 (1998): 183–210; A. M. Arjona and Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Rebelling Against Rebellion: Comparing Insurgent and Counter-Insurgent Recruitment” (Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, 2009); M. Humphreys and J. M. Weinstein, “Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War,” *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2008): 436–455.

36. Humphreys and Weinstein, “Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War”: 432-33.

37. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*; Kyle Beardsley and Brian McQuinn, “Rebel Groups as Predatory Organizations: The Political Effects of the 2004 Tsunami in Indonesia and Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (2009): 624–

Studies of conventional militaries as well as other institutions come to similar conclusions. When soldiers do not share relationships rooted in similar professional goals as well as trust, performance falters as soldiers shirk from combat or directly disobey orders.³⁸ Indeed, as states attempted to raise mass armies at the turn of the 19th century, those that did not generate these types of ties were unable to capitalize on the mass of new recruits entering those forces.³⁹ Similarly, institutions and state organizations which are characterized by anomie and a lack of strong shared norms are though to perform poorly as corruption abounds and bureaucrats shirk their tasks.⁴⁰

However, as laid out in the previous chapter, even when organizations have strong primary groups, they will not necessarily support the dictates or goals of the leadership. The “Dark Side” of social cohesion may lead members to explicitly disregard the orders of the organization, or to treat them as secondary to more pressing personal and group-based relationships. In sum, while organizations without strong ties uniting soldiers will fight ineffectively, so too will those organizations which have either imported or built strong ties without actively leveraging them. Such organizations will be unable to ensure that their members direct their behavior in a manner which supports group goals. The following sub-section lays out how organizations can leverage those ties and thus achieve higher levels of military effectiveness.

3.4.2 Structural Integrity

Given both the importance of primary groups in uniting soldiers as well as the potentially deleterious effects of these strong informal ties, organizations which have not either built or leveraged strong

645.

38. MacCoun, Kier, and Belkin, “Does Social Cohesion Determine Motivation in Combat?”; Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat*.

39. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*; Posen, “Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power.”

40. Evans, “Predatory, developmental, and other apparatuses”; Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and B.S. Turner (Psychology Press, 1991).

primary groups will face significant challenges in attaining Structural Integrity. In other words, they will be unable to ensure that their units act in concordance with orders about how and when to use violence while facing pressures to act otherwise, whether to flee, surrender, or exploit civilians. As a result organizations must ensure that the ties uniting members of primary groups are directed toward the goals of the organization in a coherent way across the entire fighting organization. Thus, attaining Structural Integrity is not an accident or predetermined outcome of strong kin groups, that level of effectiveness must be actively fostered by formal organizations maximizing the quality of connections to the primary group.⁴¹ The following two-subsections posit that organizations can build strong primary groups and leverage them by establishing basic logistics and personnel management systems to attain Limited Structural Integrity and more advanced personnel systems to attain Complete Structural Integrity.

3.4.2.1 Creating and Leveraging Primary Groups: Organizational Attributes Need to Achieve to Limited Structural Integrity

Organizations that have Limited Structural Integrity are able to rely on their units to follow orders about when to use violence. As a result, they can turn violence “on and off” but will be unable to closely control the way in which military power is used once it is activated. To achieve Limited Structural Integrity, the theory first explains how organizations not built around strong communities can use military and political indoctrination to build the ties needed to create strong primary groups at the unit level. I then elaborate how organizations can leverage those strong primary groups while preventing the ties embedded within them from undermining the reach of the formal organization.

In particular, establishing basic logistical and disciplinary procedures will achieve Limited Struc-

41. Henderson aptly observes that “recognizing that small-group norms can militate against the organization, some writers prefer to use the term ‘military cohesion’ to signify that small-unit norms are in congruence with army objectives and goals. More specifically, cohesion has been defined as ‘the bonding together of members of an organization/unit in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment other, their unit, and the mission.’” Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat*: 4.

tural Integrity including the ability to maintain ceasefires and ensure that soldiers do not defect when facing violence.

Building Strong Primary Groups. As the military ineffectiveness discussion pointed out, it is nearly impossible for organizations to use force effectively if there are not strong relationships linking soldiers in fighting units. However, organizations which are unable to import pre-existing ties are not doomed. Indeed, many conventional militaries start without strong primary groups. As Kier observes, “few modern armies attempt to create homogeneous groups on the basis of common ethnicity, race, class, regional origin, age, personality traits, or upbringing...Militaries take pride in bringing together disparate individuals, submerging individual identities, and creating a group identity.”⁴² While insurgent organizations may be more limited in terms of the resources and territory to conduct such processes, they are still capable of it.⁴³ The following section walks through the basic building blocks needed.

Organizations can build strong primary groups in a “positive” or “negative manner.” The positive approach focuses on “esteem-building” through the creation of basic personnel management systems which include political indoctrination and training for new recruits. Such activities familiarize new recruits with the realities of combat, the requirements for discipline, the importance of the organization’s overall mission, and begin to build trust between recruits. The intensive nature of introductory training programs often form the foundation of strong primary groups. As Henderson observes,

Creating a cohesive unit requires an intensive resocialization process. The determinants of the new recruit’s day-to-day behavior must be replaced by a new set of rules based on his perceptions of what his new fellow soldiers and his leaders expect. This type of resocialization is best created through a rites-of-passage process that totally consumes

42. Kier, “Homosexuals in the U.S. Military”: 21-22.

43. For a description of such dynamics in covert small group situations, see C. R McCauley and S. Moskalenko, *Fraction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2011).

the soldier's attention and efforts for an extended period and from which he emerges with a new or adapted set of operating rules for his daily life. These norms must be firmly grounded in the bonds and expectations formed between him, his fellow soldiers, and his immediate leaders.⁴⁴

Moreover, to the extent that this training encourages soldiers to work together to complete particular tasks according to official procedures, it helps to generate concordance around those sets of procedures but also creates esteem as soldiers complete these tasks as a group. As King finds with respect to British infantry units, "perhaps surprisingly, the basis of genuine military comradeship may not be located in private and personal exchange. In reality, the bonds of friendship may grow out of military proficiency and the performance of collective drills; comradeship may be the function of collective drills not their prerequisite."⁴⁵ In this situation, the members of the unit become dependent on each other as there is no one else to turn to.⁴⁶ This training will be far more effective when individuals trained together are to be deployed together.

However, group ties can also be generated in a more negative manner. This approach is often taken in attempting to re-socialize children recruited or forced into armed combat. In many cases, these children go through horrific experiences meant to bind individuals together through fear or guilt. Initiation procedures may require children to kill, rape, or desecrate civilians.⁴⁷ Such activities are intended to strip children of their existing socialization while binding them together as joint perpetrators of awful deeds. Similarly, researchers studying sexual violence in conflict have found that organizations often encourage such behavior at least in part to socialize new recruits.⁴⁸ Cohen

44. Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat*: 18; See a similar argument from King, "The Word of Command: Communication and Cohesion in the Military"; and Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*: 27.

45. King, "The Word of Command: Communication and Cohesion in the Military": 509.

46. For a study of similar dynamics in the radicalization of terrorist recruits, see McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*.

47. Christopher Blattman and Bernd Beber, *The Industrial Organization of Rebellion: The Logic of Forced Labor and Child Soldiering*, Working Paper (New York University; Yale University, July 2011); Scott Gates and Simon Reich, eds., *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

48. Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Variation in Sexual Violence during War," *Politics & Society* 34, no. 3 (2006): 307–342; Dara Cohen and Ragnhild Nordas, "Recruitment Practices and Violence by Militias in Recent Armed Conflicts," in *American Political Science Association 2013 Annual Meeting* (Chicago, Illinois, August 2013).

argues that “group rape serves to create and to maintain intragroup social cohesion in armed groups where such social bonds are lacking.”⁴⁹ As will be discussed below, it is probable that such strategies to generate strong primary groups will limit the utility of such groups to the organization.

Finally, while many organizations focus on those members already recruited, others may attempt to shape a broader society. Posen and Lynn find that this was a critical part of nationalist messages in 17th century European militaries.⁵⁰ This tactic will be critical for organizations seeking to recruit a large-number of individuals as it will make it easier to appeal to a wide-range of people and will make it faster to integrate new recruits. As such, it is quite likely that organizations that end up with Quasi-conventional capacities will have at least attempted to shape the population from which they are recruiting.

Leveraging Strong Primary Groups. As strong primary groups can pose significant challenges to the leaders of organizations if the ties binding soldiers together are not directed toward the organization, to attain Limited Structural Integrity, organizations must establish links with their members. There are three basic ways that organizations could achieve this linkage. The first is through the use of harsh disciplinary strategies to force compliance. The second is through the provision of incentives, or resources, to encourage compliance, and the third is by attempting to match deployed soldiers’ preferences with those of the leadership. While forcing compliance rarely works in insurgencies, I argue that providing incentives through resources generates Limited Structural Integrity while attempting to shift preferences with trusted lower-level cadre is necessary to achieve Complete Structural Integrity and beyond.

Perhaps the most obvious way to incite compliance is through threats or fear.⁵¹ However, while

49. Dara Cohen, “Explaining Sexual Violence During Civil War” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2010): 8.

50. Posen, “Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power”; Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*.

51. Jason Lyall, *Forced to Fight: Coercion, Blocking Detachments, and Tradeoffs in Military Effectiveness*, Working Paper

this may be feasible in well-developed militaries or entrenched state apparatuses, it is much harder in civil wars where insurgents have limited resources and it quite costly to police units due to the difficulty of closely monitoring footsoldier activity.⁵² For example, evaluating Renamo in Mozambique, Young finds, “the control mechanisms applied to the conscripted soldiers (execution, deprivation and displacement) are poor methods of command and the high rate of desertions and the disinterest in Renamo political propaganda both paint a picture of an ineffective command system.”⁵³ Moreover, as few insurgent organizations operate in a vacuum, attempting to elicit compliance through harsh punishments—particularly threats of death to soldiers or their families—will often foment discord and research underscores that such extreme violence dampens motivation or will push individuals to find alternative organizations.⁵⁴

Thus, many insurgent groups turn to incentivizing compliance by providing resources. But, in doing so, leaders of insurgent organizations face an important challenge: they must ensure that their deployed units have the resources they need to fight well—that they are bonded together and have access to weapons, food, and protection—while also ensuring that their fighters do not take advantage of these goods to pursue their particular interests at the expense of the organization. As much of the activity in civil wars is decentralized and carried out by dispersed units, overcoming this challenge is paramount.⁵⁵ How do leaders prevent soldiers from defecting to seek profit elsewhere

(December 2015).

52. Johnston, “The Geography of Insurgent Organization and its Consequences for Civil Wars”; Scott Gates and Ragnhild Nordås, “Recruitment, Retention and Religion in Rebel Groups,” in *American Political Science Association 2013 Annual Meeting* (Chicago, IL, 2013); Jacob Shapiro, *The Terrorist’s Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organizations* (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013).

53. Eric T. Young, “The Victors and the Vanquished: The Role of Military Factors in the Outcome of Modern African Insurgencies,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 7, no. 2 (1996): 184.

54. Staniland, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place”; Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*; Shapiro, *The Terrorist’s Dilemma*.

55. Shapiro makes a similar argument about terrorist groups. However, the core challenge he identifies, that of remaining covert without losing operational capacity, is less relevant to organizations in open rebellion. Shapiro, *The Terrorist’s Dilemma*.

or participating in illicit economies beyond the reach of the organization? Similarly, when soldiers are bound together by tight community or social ties, how do leaders prevent their soldiers from defecting to protect their homes or disobeying orders that might clash with community norms?

This challenge is not unique to insurgents. As Thelen and Mahoney identify, nearly all formal institutions have access to some resources and, as a result, must respond to the concomitant “distributional consequences” of how they use those resources.⁵⁶ It is not the resources that organizations have access to that determines their control of deployed units, but *how* organizations distribute resources—both pecuniary and non-pecuniary. Instead, organizations must develop resource control, or the ability distribute essential resources in a manner that positions them to credibly sanction deployed units by withholding resources. Resource control contains two components: directness and exclusiveness. Directness refers to whether resources are directly provided or controlled by the central leadership and exclusiveness requires that the organization be the main provider of those resources. Critically, resource control encompasses both what is provided and how it is distributed. To achieve resource control, organizations should be able to provide a wider range of pecuniary and non-pecuniary resources relative to other organizations. The direct and exclusive provision of unimportant or minimal resources will not motivate soldiers to comply in order to maintain access to trivial goods.

Direct provision means controlling the way that the goods soldiers need to fight and live are supplied. Direct resource distribution often relies on logistics networks that transport goods to the field, centralized offices that soldiers can go to, or regulated depots in the combat zone. While some of these resources—such as money or arms—can be provided to an organization by external actors, many of the core necessities such as jobs or access to healthcare can only be supplied domestically.

56. Mahoney and Thelen, “A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change”: 8.

In contrast, with, indirect distribution, organizations are not central in providing goods to their soldiers. Oftentimes this occurs when organizations with access to “lootable” natural resources or significant local cash flows do not institutionalize the way these resources are accessed by their followers. For example, Weinstein, Fearon, and Ross note that reliance on lootable resources can provide incentives for deployed units to accumulate wealth rather than stick to the dictates of group leadership.⁵⁷ Johnston describes this situation in his analysis of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, which launched missions such as “Operation Pay Yourself,” and, as a result, its deployed units shared little “common ideology” with leaders.⁵⁸ Christia identifies an analogous dynamic whereby local economic incentives can cause factions to defect and “undermine group unity.”⁵⁹ Importantly, access to lootable resources does not preclude direct resource provision or doom organizations to failure. Organizations such as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the FARC in Colombia put in place systems to use such resources to centralize their control over soldiers.⁶⁰

Even when the leaders of insurgent groups directly distribute resources, the utility they gain is limited when it is not exclusive and other members of the organization, the broader rebellion movement, or the state can also supply access to the same resources, whether food, weapons, or welfare.⁶¹ Exclusivity requires that organizations provide resources others cannot, or do a better job of distributing those resources. As Berman finds, “members who would have considered leaving the club when outside options were good will instead remain demonstrably loyal if the club sud-

57. James D. Fearon, “Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others?,” *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 275–301; Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*; Michael Ross, “How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases,” *International Organization* 58, no. 1 (2004): 35–67.

58. Johnston, “The Geography of Insurgent Organization and its Consequences for Civil Wars”: 122.

59. Fotini Christia, “Following the Money: Muslim versus Muslim in Bosnia’s Civil War,” *Comparative Politics* 40, no. 4 (2008): 461–480.

60. Benjamin Bahney et al., *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa’ida in Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010); Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Antonio Giustozzi, “Networks and Armies: Structuring Rebellion in Colombia and Afghanistan,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 9 (2010): 836.

61. Gates, “Recruitment and Allegiance: The Microfoundations of Civil War”: 121.

denly becomes their sole provider of necessary services.”⁶² Organizations able to provide such club goods set themselves apart from competing organizations. For example, while both Islamic Jihad and Hamas can provide solidary and religious goods, Hamas provides a wide range of other material resources that make them more important to followers than Islamic Jihad.⁶³

When organizations are able to directly and exclusively provide strong primary groups with the key things they need to fight and live, members of the group are strongly incentivized to maintain access to these goods by ensuring good behavior and containing individuals’ motivations. While some individuals may not respond to inducements alone, in strong primary groups, they are far more likely to be motivated by pressure from peers. Thus, instead of threatening to withhold resources from individuals, organizations can make threats to the entire primary group.

As a result, rather than having to identify and deal with each case of non-compliance, organizations can rely on their deployed units, which have the normative power to regulate collective action, to self-police through the use of group norms and the threat of public shaming or expulsion to detect and punish non-compliers. Thus, instead of having to expand their monitoring to collect information about individuals’ behaviors, organizations can utilize the information they already had: broad evidence about whether particular units were keeping ceasefires or failing to fight in the first place. In other words, organizations can side-step many information asymmetries by leveraging the normative infrastructure imparted by strong primary groups.⁶⁴

While organizations with strong primary groups that have established resource control will be positioned to turn violence on and off, their control of other types of behavior by soldiers will still be limited. Such organizations are able to discipline strong primary groups that do not follow ceasefire

62. Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent*: 113.

63. Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

64. I thank Scott Gates for this observation.

orders or do not fight when ordered because compliance with such orders is apparent since leaders only need to observe whether units are fighting or not. By moving compliance from the individual to the group, organizations with resource control have side-stepped some information asymmetries, allowing them to turn violence on and off.

But, leaders still face significant information asymmetries when attempting to evaluate compliance with orders to carry out other types of activities. Given their separation from deployed units, leaders are ill-positioned to carefully observe behavior when there are multiple and conflicting accounts from fighters on the ground. Even when outcomes can be observed, it is difficult to tell if these were due to non-compliance or extenuating circumstances. For example, leaders cannot know if civilians were targeted intentionally, or if it occurred as collateral damage. Similarly, leaders cannot be sure if a particular attack failed because soldiers did not try very hard, or because of variables beyond their control. As Shapiro observes, difficulty in monitoring makes it hard for leaders “to detect whether a failed mission was due to insufficient effort or just bad luck.”⁶⁵

What is more, unit members are often unwilling to report each other’s deviant behavior.⁶⁶ As the noted above, because of how varied fighters’ preferences are, individuals and units often have many reasons to use violence in support of local objectives, giving them reasons to mislead the central leadership. Thus, when units know their compliance with orders cannot be monitored, they are not incentivized to self-police because leaders cannot credibly threaten to withhold resources. Illustratively, Axelrod finds that the “live and let live” system of trench warfare during WWI was possible because the command was unable to observe and thus punish deviant behavior by the units on the line:

With few exceptions, the headquarters could enforce any orders that they could directly

65. Shapiro, *The Terrorist’s Dilemma*: 108.

66. Winslow, “Misplaced Loyalties”; Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*: 131-32, 146-47.

monitor. Thus the headquarters were able to conduct large battles by ordering the men to leave their trenches and risk their lives in charging the enemy positions. But between large battles, they were not able to monitor their orders to keep up the pressure. After all, it was hard for a senior officer to determine who was shooting to kill, and who was shooting with an eye to avoiding retaliation. The soldiers became expert at defeating the monitoring system.⁶⁷

3.4.2.2 Creating a Cadre System: Organizational Attributes Needed to Achieve Complete Structural Integrity

When the central leadership is only linked to deployed units via resource control, those units will cohere around a desire to further their interests rather than best achieving the task at hand. While those soldiers will often have allegiance to each other, that will not necessarily transfer up the chain of command which is why these organizations only have Limited Structural Integrity. As a result, to ensure that their members follow orders about not only when to use force, but how to use force—to achieve Complete Structural Integrity—organizations must generate more substantive connections with their fighting units.

The need for such additional linkages helps to explain why there is little empirical evidence that socially cohesive militaries fight more effectively.⁶⁸ Instead, studies of military and non-military institutions have observed a far greater relationship between commitment to specific tasks and goals and positive organizational outcomes. Groups with task cohesion are “composed of members who share a common goal and who are motivated to coordinate their efforts as a team to achieve that goal.”⁶⁹ Since soldiers are so often operating without direct supervision, units will only do as the organization wishes when the unit *wants* to do as the organization wishes. As Mao observed,

In all armies, obedience of the subordinates to their superiors must be exacted...but the basis for soldier discipline must be the individual conscience. With soldiers, a discipline of coercion is ineffective, discipline must be self-imposed, because only when it is, is the

67. Robert Axelrod, *Evolution of Cooperation*, First Edition (New York: Basic Books, 1984): 81-82.

68. MacCoun, Kier, and Belkin, “Does Social Cohesion Determine Motivation in Combat?”

69. MacCoun, “What Is Known About Unit Cohesion and Military Performance”: 291.

soldier able to understand completely why he fights and how he must obey. This type of discipline becomes a tower of strength within the army, and it is the only type that can truly harmonize the relationship that exists between officers and soldiers.⁷⁰

In other words, organizations can only attain Complete Structural Integrity when they have generated linkages with their members which encourage the latter to act in the organization's best interests even when not facing the direct threat of sanction. I argue that the linkages needed to operate with Complete Structural Integrity come when organizations have a lower-level officer corps that is well-integrated into the formal organization and retains the trust and support of their soldiers—such officers are often referred to as cadre in resistance movements. Integrated lower-level officers are able to redirect the allegiance and behavior of strong primary groups by actively tying the desires, actions, and behavior of rank-and-file members with the completion of specific tasks supporting the overall organization. These cadre serve as focal points for the primary group, meaning that their example and commitment to the organization redirects the behavior of the group to support organizational goals. In such situations, not only do preferences of foot soldiers begin to align with the preferences of the organization but the normative power of the primary group is mobilized to sanction and correct deviant behavior.

The importance of lower-level officers committed to the organization *and* trusted by their soldiers is central in Shils and Janowitz's study of the Wehrmacht. While strong primary group relationships from training and shared misery were important, they were only directed toward the goals of the overall military through the allegiance to and belief in both non-commissioned and junior officers who represented the "hard core" and were imbued "with the ideology of *Gemeinschaft*." As they emphasize, "the stability and military effectiveness of the military primary group were in large measure a function of the 'hard core.'"⁷¹ It is only with such a trusted cadre that organizations can

70. Mao qtd. in Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat*: 5.

71. Shils and Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II": 286.

carry out decentralized operations as they will trust the instinct and commitment of the unit leaders leading a mission.

Creating reliable lower-level officers means that these cadre must be tied into the goals of the formal organization. This task is best achieved with personnel management systems which first indoctrinate and train officers and second select the most committed officers. Such training should introduce an organizational ethos which encompasses officers and NCOs. Such an ethos can be generated through religious devotion, political ideology, or identification with the army—i.e. *esprit de corps*.⁷² While it is rare for the vast majority of soldiers to identify with such an organizational ethos, it is critical that a core set of cadre or officers do retain this commitment. While it may be argued that the content of an ideology or motivation scheme is central, the previous chapter—as well as the coming empirical chapters—underscores that this is often not the case. The most important thing is simply the generation of a consistent and well-formed message which is used for socialization.⁷³

Once creating such a unifying theme, organizations must ensure that they select the lower-level officers who show commitment to said values. Selection of officers can be achieved by evaluating performance during training, through the assessment of political cadre alongside military officers, or processes which select officers based on previous involvement in less organized forms of resistance. For example, the PLAF had three tiers of military service including local defense units, guerrilla units, and main force units. Oftentimes officers only moved to the guerrilla and main force units after service in local defense or guerrilla units.⁷⁴ This type of sorting process maps well onto Petersen's description of commitment to resistance movements which can be envisioned as a spectrum moving from basic participation such as provision of information or shelter, to involvement

72. On this point, see Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*: 27-30.

73. For a similar argument, see Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): Chapter 1.

74. Pike, *Viet Cong*.

in locally based defense units to participation in mobile and armed units.⁷⁵ When working to maintain Structural Integrity, organizations may be—understandably—more interested in the *political* allegiances of their officers, rather than their military capacity.

Independent of how reliable those officers are, they can only link primary groups with the overall organization when they are trusted and central to the rank-and-file. They must be seen as focal points: many PLAF soldiers described their squad and company political and military leaders as their “mothers and fathers.”⁷⁶ To create bonds between the officer corps and foot soldiers, the organization must implement command systems ensuring that officers live with their soldiers,⁷⁷ face risk equally with their soldiers,⁷⁸ have manageable-sized units, and are empowered to advocate for their soldiers.⁷⁹

3.4.2.3 Force Generation, or Maintaining Structural Integrity

Once organizations have the systems in place to achieve Limited or Complete Structural Integrity, they must ensure that it can be maintained as the group suffers operational losses. This means either or both footsoldiers and cadre must be able to be replaced. In this context, organizations which start with strong primary groups will find it easier to recruit in a manner which allows consistent force generation. By providing selective resources that are attractive to a broader community, organizations with resource control will expand their ability to recruit from pre-existing networks to fill manpower shortages.⁸⁰ This advantage will be particularly helpful when such communities have

75. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*; Roger Petersen and Jonathan Lindsay, “Varieties of Counterinsurgency: A Case Study of Iraq, 2003-2009,” in *CIWAG Symposium, Naval War College* (Center for Irregular Warfare and Armed Groups, 2011).

76. J. C. Donnell, *Viet Cong Recruitment: Why and How Men Join*, Memorandum RM-5486-1-ISA/ARPA (RAND Corporation, December 1967).

77. King, “The Word of Command: Communication and Cohesion in the Military.”

78. Paul D. Kenny, *Organizational Weapons: Explaining Cohesion in the Military*, HiCN Working Paper 107 (Households in Conflict Network, 2011).

79. Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat*.

80. Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent*.

previously engaged in or prepared for conflict.⁸¹ For example, Jaysh al-Mahdi was able to massively increase the number of recruits it could attract after taking control of social welfare ministries in the Iraq following elections in 2005.⁸²

Organizations not built around a strong community do not have such a clear population to recruit from. Even for highly organized, trained, and committed organizations, force generation in such circumstances can be a monumental challenge. As noted above, the ideal outcome is for such an organization to create an ideological outlook which encompasses an entire population. However, this is often not feasible in the time-frame rebels have. Instead, logistics systems which provide security, staples, and pay may be used to attract members who then must follow through the personnel schemes above.⁸³ More importantly, military effectiveness often endogenously builds social cohesion and broader civilian support.⁸⁴ As such, when organizations implement the elements necessary for Structural Integrity or Guerrilla Capacity will become more attractive to potential recruits, improving the extent to which they can generate new forces.

3.4.3 Becoming an “Organizational Weapon” and Making the Jump: Organizational Attributes Needed to Achieve Guerrilla and Quasi-conventional Capabilities

If organizations have structural integrity, they can use that foundation to create the formal structures needed to attain basic and perhaps Quasi-conventional Capacities. The following paragraphs walk through the logistics, personnel, and command and control systems which are necessary to

81. Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*.

82. International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?*, Middle East Report 55 (July 2006); Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent*.

83. For an account of why such schemes may provide civilians with incentives to join insurgent groups for safety, see Kalyvas and Kocher, “How “Free” Is Free Riding in Civil Wars?: Violence, Insurgency, and the Collective Action Problem.”

84. On the first point, see MacCoun, “What Is Known About Unit Cohesion and Military Performance”; On the second, see Janet Ingram Lewis, “How Rebellion Begins: Insurgent Group Formation and Viability in Uganda” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2012); Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*.

achieve first basic and then Quasi-conventional Capacities. Importantly, these systems will result in increases in effectiveness if implemented after attaining Structural Integrity.

The personnel management systems needed to attain Guerrilla Capacities are the provision basic weapons training—whether in camps or “on-the-job”—for footsoldiers and more complex movement or tactical training for officers. Basic maneuver training for officers—that they then pass down to their units—includes guidance on conducting ambush operations, hit and run operations, or basic raids such as the use of IEDs or similar tactics. Such training helps to cement movement and combat patterns in new recruits to make these basic tasks second-nature.⁸⁵ Perhaps more important than training, this requires that officers and cadre are promoted or positioned based on their military performance—thus encouraging so-called “combat Darwinism.”⁸⁶ Thus, promotions should occur based on performance during operations or training as well as based on aptitude. Importantly, these skills may not match with the attributes which are central to creating well-trusted and integrated officers to achieve Structural Integrity. Political considerations about commitment to the organization or a broader *esprit de corps* do not necessarily imply military expertise.

The command and control systems needed to achieve Guerrilla Capacity are the creation of small, functionally differentiated units, the inter-mixing of experienced and non-experienced members in units, and systems to pass at least basic tactical orders up and down the command chain. For example, an ambush requires carefully selecting a target, planning a viable route to attack, planning an attack that uses part of the force to stop the target with small-arms fire or explosives, and then breaking contact without suffering heavy losses. This requires units to collect intelligence to plan routes and select targets, as well as a division of labor within attacking units to focus on different elements of the attack. Without these elements, it will be very difficult to plan maneuvers which re-

85. King, “The Word of Command: Communication and Cohesion in the Military.”

86. Ahmed Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq* (Cornell University Press, 2005): 47.

quire small teams to carry out distinct tasks of a broader operation. Similarly, if all forces are lumped into large units, they will be too unwieldy for many quick operations. Similarly, without command and control systems in place to collect and communicate intelligence about targets or troop movements, the central leadership will be unable to select targets for missions and communicate those targets to the correct unit, whether it be a part of an assassination campaign or an attempt to defeat part of another insurgent group. Finally, while training is important, much combat learning happens “on-the-job” meaning that organizations which structure units to include experienced and newer soldiers will be able to get those recruits up to speed much faster.

To attain Quasi-conventional Capacity, the above personnel management systems need to be supplemented with large-unit training exercises. Training must take place at the company level or above. It also must involve multiple differentiated parts of the insurgent military organization. This training must be recurrent and realistic for units to prepare for major engagements.

Command and control systems need to be more expansive for Quasi-conventional Capacity. There must be larger formations—such as companies and above—that can be combined and detached during combat. Further, the command structure must allow these units to communicate in real time with the leadership and other fighting forces so decisions about movement and changes in plans can be coordinated across multiple units.

Finally, while Guerrilla Capacity does not require significantly new logistics systems, Quasi-conventional Capacity does. To achieve more Quasi-conventional Capacities, logistics systems should be put in place to move units across the battle space. These may include aircraft or vehicles suitable to the terrain. Further, given the range of weaponry and mobility needed to achieve Quasi-conventional Capacity, it is unlikely that organizations will achieve this level of military effectiveness without some external intervention or the ability to capture or purchase such equipment on

the open market. Indeed, as the empirical chapters lay out, while many groups got as far as guerrilla operations without extensive external support or linkages, they often needed these relationships to make the jump to Quasi-conventional operations.

Does Winning Breed Effectiveness? One potential concern with drawing a connection between the organizational systems theorized to generate Guerrilla and Quasi-conventional Capacity is that they are simply endogenous to winning. In other words, while we see these traits in successful insurgents, these traits do not themselves cause insurgents to be successful.

Without a doubt, there are few substitutes for victory in terms of building morale and generating support.⁸⁷ However, the extent to which a given victory can be capitalized on is dependent on whether an organization can take advantage of it. For example, as noted above, winning will only help organizations generate force by attracting new recruits if they are able to train and deploy those recruits. Similarly, military training conducted using sanctuary from newly-won areas will only make units more effective if they already have Structural Integrity. Indeed, Renamo used territorial sanctuary to conduct extensive and often very specific military training but its units still operated in a militarily ineffective manner. Moreover, while taking new territory through victory can potentially help insurgent groups, they can only benefit from such victories if they have the systems in place to manage the behavior of their deployed units while keeping them informed and supplied.⁸⁸ Along these lines, victory often produces incentives for defection as there are greater spoils to be taken for personal gain. Only a well-organized leadership can maintain control of logistics systems in the face of such pressures.⁸⁹

But, perhaps most importantly, winning only benefits organizations when they internalize the

87. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*; Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat*.

88. Johnston, "The Geography of Insurgent Organization and its Consequences for Civil Wars."

89. Michael Woldemariam, "*Cohesive Stalemates*" and *the Logic of Insurgent Solidarity: Ethiopia's Long War in Historical Perspective*, Working Paper (Boston University, 2012); Christia, "Following the Money."

lessons learned from victory and replicate them across the battlefield. In other words, organizations must learn to turn victory into victory.⁹⁰ Organizations must have officers who can actively identify lessons on the battlefield and the communications systems necessary to pass that information both vertically and horizontally. Organizations which do not have those systems in place will not be able to capitalize upon them. For example, comparing US and British infantry units during WWII, Heginbotham finds that a major reason that US units were more effective on the battle field as their “channels of communication were redundant, sophisticated, and frequently exercised.”⁹¹

3.4.4 Observable Implications

The theory provides clear mechanisms that connect particular organizational features with various levels of military effectiveness. However, the mechanisms also produce a set of additional observable implications that we should observe if the theory is correct. These observable implications are important as it is often difficult to collect detailed information about the inner-workings of militant groups. As a result, the theory can be more powerfully tested by also looking for additional evidence that the theory’s mechanics are operative. Indeed, if these observable implications are not visible it provides evidence that the theory is falsified. In Table 3.2 on the next page, I present the organizational features predicted to achieve each level of military effectiveness along with the observable implications that should be present if each of the sets of mechanisms are operative.

90. For an overview of the importance of organizational learning, see Linda Argote, *Organizational Learning: Creating, Retaining and Transferring Knowledge*, 2nd ed. 2013 edition (New York: Springer, 2012); For recent studies of military learning during insurgencies, see John A. Nagl and Peter J. Schoomaker, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); Janine Davidson, *Lifting the Fog of Peace: How Americans Learned to Fight Modern War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011); Theo Farrell, “Improving in War: Military Adaptation and the British in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2006–2009,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 4 (2010): 567–594; Richard Shultz, *Organizational Learning and the Marine Corps: The Counterinsurgency Campaign in Iraq*, CIWAG Case Study (US Naval War College: Center on Irregular Warfare and Armed Groups, 2012).

91. Heginbotham, *The British and American Armies in World War II*: 49-50; See also, Richard D. Downie, *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1998).

Table 3.2 Predictions and Observable Implications

Overall Observable Implications		
1. Structural conditions such as external support, sanctuary, pre-existing social ties, or factional divisions should not predict effectiveness		
2. Within categories of organizational characteristics, all factors should be necessary for the prediction to be borne out		
3. The iterative nature of the theory matters: sanctuary, training, or external support without strong primary groups, a cadre system, and resource control will not achieve higher levels of capacity		
Specific Predictions and Observable Implications		
Organizational Characteristics	Observable Implications	Military Effectiveness
MAKING THE JUMP —Large-unit organization and training —Movement and integrated communications —Heavy weapons	1. Organizations are likely to be receiving heavy weapons from an external patron 2. Organizations will have substantial territorial sanctuary	Quasi-conventional Capacity
BECOMING AN “ORGANIZATIONAL WEAPON” —Military training and selection for cadre —Basic communication —Functionally differentiated, small units with recruits/veterans mixed	1. Interviewed soldiers will feel confident in their cadre’s military skills 2. Central leaders will tend to decentralize decision-making as cadre lead operations	Guerrilla Capacity
CREATING A CADRE SYSTEM —Officer Selection Standards —Manageable Small Units	1. Interviewed soldiers will put great stock in their leaders 2. Interviewed cadre will be more committed to the organization than their soldiers	Structural Integrity
CREATING/LEVERAGING PRIMARY GROUPS —Pre-existing primary groups or “bootcamp” —Resource control	1. Units do not follow orders about <i>how</i> to use violence 2. Units actively hide their behavior from leaders	Limited Structural Integrity
BASELINE —Recruitment procedures —Basic command structure	1. Disagreements between individuals and factions will be at the forefront and influence behavior 2. Organizations will be reliant on harsh discipline or pay offs	Combat Ineffective

Beyond the observable implications for each of the categories of mechanisms, the theory also produces a set of macro predictions that should be observed if the framework is apt. Mostly basically,

organizations should not be limited by the extent or type of existing endowments and there should be evidence of organizations generating resource control, primary groups, and more. As a result, there should be evidence that organizations are expressly seeking to generate such institutions with the goal of gaining greater control of their fighters' behavior.

Next, the iterative nature of the theory generates necessary conditions for higher levels of effectiveness. To begin with, within each category, the theory argues that the conditions listed are *necessary* for an organization to be able to carry out activities at that level of military effectiveness. To gain Limited Structural Integrity, organizations need both resource control and strong primary groups. In addition, the factors necessary for higher levels of effectiveness must be paired with the foundational elements necessary for lower levels of effectiveness. Thus, military training, external support, access to sanctuary, and access to significant weaponry will not make organizations fight better when they are not paired with resource control, strong primary groups, and a well-developed cadre system. While training might help individuals fight better, if the theory is correct, it will not get units to follow the dictates of the leadership or fight in a coordinated manner with other units. Similarly, according to the theory, while heavy weaponry is important to Quasi-conventional Capacity, it should not be in anyway sufficient for an organization to fight with Quasi-conventional Capacity. In short, if theory is operative, the foundational organizational factors will be *necessary* for higher levels of capacity.⁹²

3.5 What Explains How Organizations Develop?

The theory produces comparative statics: at a given time, the existence of a given set of organizational characteristics generate predictions about insurgent behavior. But, why do some organiza-

92. James Mahoney, "Comparative-Historical Methodology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): For the power of necessary conditions in testing theories, see.

tions develop these organizational features? The most obvious potential concern with the theory is that some factor explains both why organizations establish resource control and how they are able to ensure compliance with orders to turn violence on and off. Do the types of resources organizations start with determine how they will develop?⁹³ Or, do already successful insurgents get access to additional resources from external supporters seeking to pick winners?⁹⁴ Relatedly, do relatively stronger organizations find it easier to attract and keep followers?⁹⁵ On the other hand, perhaps organizations with access to strong communities would be popular and thus both illicit compliance and have access to resources. Similarly, organizations with access to sanctuary may have the freedom to develop more fully and also have the space to better control their members behavior.⁹⁶

However, as Chapter 2 explains in-depth, this sort of endogenous process is not empirically supported. Organizations with similar material and social endowments develop at different speeds and along different pathways. Moreover, as the empirical chapters lay out, to generate robust institutions, most organizations significantly expand on their initial endowments.

If existing structural explanations cannot explain how organizations develop and fight, what does? The above theory provides some guidance by isolating the role of leaders in recognizing that they must either seek out or expand upon the material and social endowments they begin with. Thus, it is not surprising that in his analysis of insurgent groups across Africa, Young finds that the key variables missing from existing studies are the role of the leadership and the command structure of the organization. He finds that the way that the leadership and command structure respond to

93. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*.

94. Staniland, "Organizing Insurgency"; Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham, "Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups."

95. Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*; Kristin M. Bakke, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and Lee J. M. Seymour, "A Plague of Initials: Fragmentation, Cohesion, and Infighting in Civil Wars," *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 2 (2012): 265–283.

96. Sinno, *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond*.

their environment, “although often neglected by academics,” is “better suited for determining the ultimate outcome of insurgency conflicts in Africa.”⁹⁷ Similarly, an increasing number of IR scholars have pointed to the importance of leader’s choices and experiences in shaping their behavior and approach toward institution-building, particularly with respect to military organizations.⁹⁸

Nonetheless, there are complex pathways that lead some “good” leaders to be successful while others fail. Studying why the leaders of conventional militaries make decisions about whether or not to invest the resources needed to develop strong military institutions, Talmadge finds that “leaders’ choice of intervention practices is highly contingent and not easily predicted *ex ante* by examining other large structural variables in a given case.”⁹⁹ It is likely that these decisions are even less systematic for insurgent leaders who operate in much less structured institutions and environments.

For example, though Mao’s rise to power—and his central role in the Chinese Revolution—is taken for granted, the circumstances that put him at the head of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were by no means predetermined or entirely in his control. One of the key events that built up his legitimacy and secured his leadership, the Long March, was nearly his undoing. As Esherick finds, “the Long March is replete with instances in which the party and the Red Army were almost eliminated, saved only by a combination of extraordinary determination, incompetent adversaries, and plain old luck.”¹⁰⁰ Terrill also finds that Mao “enjoyed a good deal of luck. His own body escaped

97. Young, “The Victors and the Vanquished”: 179.

98. Daniel Byman and K.M. Pollack, “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In,” *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 107–146; A.B. Kennedy, *The International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru: National Efficacy Beliefs and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Jessica L. Weeks, “Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict,” *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 02 (2012): 326–347; Michael C. Horowitz and Allan C. Stam, “How Prior Military Experience Influences the Future Militarized Behavior of Leaders,” *International Organization* 68, no. 03 (2014): 527–559; Todd S. Sechser, “Are Soldiers Less War-Prone than Statesmen?,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 5 (2004): 746–774; Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator’s Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

99. Talmadge, “Explaining Military Effectiveness: Political Intervention and Battlefield Performance”: 40.

100. Joseph W. Esherick, “Ten Theses on the Chinese Revolution,” *Modern China* 21, no. 1 (1995): 53.

the knife by a hair's breadth three or four times. He gained control of the CCP at the end of the Long March in part because his archrival had bad luck while struggling through Tibet."¹⁰¹

Despite the many pathways that can lead to resource control, military training, or strong logistics backends, the theory, by specifying the mechanisms determining how organizations interact with their environment, demonstrates that these organizational features are not the result of an endogenous conflict process. Nonetheless, these processes influence leaders as they must respond to external actors, competition within the conflict zone, as well as the struggles of winning and losing. While changes in these structural factors do not determine an organization's trajectory and development, they do provide leaders with opportunities or challenges for creating and maintaining the institutions they need to fight well. Along these lines, the theory does identify some patterns that might influence development once insurgents have *started* the process.

3.5.1 Organizational Development and Path Dependence

The combinations of the formal and informal elements discussed above present a clear theoretical logic for how militaries with certain linkages and structures should be able to operate. But, how are some groups able to move between the different levels of effectiveness? To begin with, the theory uncovers two major channels of insurgent development which are under-researched and under-appreciated in current approaches: (1) organizations built around weak communities—i.e. those that cannot rely upon strong pre-existing primary groups—are not destined to become ineffective military forces as they may compensate for a lack of strong bonding ties by constructing informal structures through indoctrination and integrated lower-level officers; and (2) organizations which can draw on already strong primary groups may not develop into effective military entities if they

101. Ross Terrill, *Mao: A Biography* (Stanford University Press, 1999): 460.

do not leverage those pre-existing ties.

Both of these channels help to specify how the decisions insurgent organizations make during their early developmental phase may raise or limit the ceiling of their military effectiveness. There is a substantial literature underscoring how institutional decisions can be path dependent, or sticky. In these cases, the sequencing of events can place restrictions on future behavior.¹⁰² While there are “other choice points...the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice.”¹⁰³ Such path dependence is most common when it empowers actors who have incentives to stymie change or limits the influence of actors who seek change.¹⁰⁴ In this context, the initial decisions that leaders make about how to either generate or leverage strong primary groups can lock-in patterns that condition the organization’s future development.

While one of the contributions of the theory is to highlight the potential for organizations to generate and leverage informal ties, these tasks are challenging to carry out *while* resisting pressures from the environment. As a result, insurgents will be motivated to build and then leverage these informal ties as quickly as possible. The outcome of these decisions to act rapidly can empower primary groups at the expense of the organization or limit the military leeway that leaders will have in the future by routinizing ineffective systems.

When organizations attempt to generate informal ties quickly, they may choose “easy” targets such as children or indoctrination procedures which rely on negative inducements. In these cases, they may succeed in building strong primary groups, but they risk that these primary groups will be

102. Paul Pierson, “Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics,” *The American Political Science Review* 94, no. 2 (2000): 251–267; Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C. R. Taylor, “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms,” *Political Studies* 44, no. 5 (1996): 936–957.

103. Margaret Levi, Alan S. Zuckerman, and Mark Irving Lichbach, eds., “A Model, a Method, and a Map: Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis,” in *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, 1st (Cambridge University Press, 1997): 28.

104. Mahoney and Thelen, “A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change.”

internally-focused rather than tied into the organization. Indeed, Cohen finds that while initiation procedures relying on sexual violence “allow armed groups who forcibly recruit their fighters to create and to maintain a fighting group in the most basic of senses,” they do not contribute to creating more effective fighting units.¹⁰⁵

Similarly, while child soldiers may be re-socialized to use violence, children in such situations are often too physically and mentally strained to participate in training programs let alone apply lessons from training during battle. For example, Denov uncovers how the cadre of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone had to explicitly expand on traumatic initiation procedures as “newly abducted children were clearly terrified, full of despair, and profoundly disoriented. Moreover, they were highly uncommitted to the RUF as a whole.” As a result, the only units which developed further were those in which RUF leaders ensured “that children gradually internalized and adopted the values, norms, and practices of the militarized world that was forced upon them...using physical, technical, and ideological training.”¹⁰⁶ When following such “negative” forms of development, it is quite likely that organizations will face significant challenges in directing the behavior of those primary groups to support the organization. Further, when part of this socialization process is giving soldiers access to drugs or other contraband, these groups develop incentives to obtain more of these goods rather than focusing on fighting.¹⁰⁷

Even when organizations do recognize the importance of cadre in re-socializing and leveraging primary groups, they have incentives to explicitly select officers for entirely political or personal reasons rather than military prowess and to use command structures with highly centralized

105. Cohen, “Explaining Sexual Violence During Civil War”: 23.

106. Myriam S. Denov, *Child Soldiers: Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front* (Cambridge University Press, 2010): 98; For a similar point, see also, Scott Gates and Simon Reich, “Introduction,” in *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010): 3–12.

107. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*.

decision-making. As Selznick notes, at such early stages, a combination of “specialized training, permanent status, and personal dedication is, of course, optimum, *but the latter is most essential in the cadre.*”¹⁰⁸ What is more, in the short-run, the central leadership may be dubious of militarily capable lower-level officers as they may be able to break-off from or even challenge the central leadership. Likewise, when there are strong pre-existing community leaders who are separate from the organization, organizational leaders may fear the infiltration of representatives of these community leaders into the command structure. As a result, the pool of potential cadre is limited as leaders will not select well-placed community members who are qualified for leadership positions.

As a result, these organizations follow promotion patterns which at best do not take into account military factors and at worst actively avoid them. In addition, leaders will take decision-making power away from lower-level officers, limiting the flexibility of the organization *and* the extent to which these officers and units develop military skill and decision-making.¹⁰⁹ Such promotion procedures and command structures may very well stunt the development of training programs as well as the officer corps needed to move organizations from Structural Integrity to Guerrilla or even Quasi-conventional Capacity. Not only will the organization have empowered a host of officers who will seek to protect their own status, but they have routinized institutional patterns which emphasize loyalty above military skill. A similar observations is made by those studying coup-proofing: when leaders select highly loyal officers, they insulate themselves from coups or internal pressure while detracting from the ability of the military to prepare for and fight wars.¹¹⁰

Beyond expediting the selection of cadre, leaders of organizations which have engineered some degree of Structural Integrity may be motivated to use violence prematurely. These motivations are

108. Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon*: 19, emphasis added.

109. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*: 145-149; Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat*.

110. James T. Quinlivan, “Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East,” *International Security* 24, no. 2 (1999): 131–165; Brooks, “Making Military Might.”

often magnified when the organization is attempting to establish itself as an important actor in an already strong community or in an environment in which many other insurgent groups are operating.¹¹¹ For example, these leaders may desire to differentiate themselves by being the first actor to use violence or to mobilize a high number of individuals.¹¹² Organizations which can draw upon fighting units which have strong primary group ties may overestimate the military power of such units.¹¹³ Knowing that their soldiers will fight when ordered, leaders may choose to start a rebellion or provoke a riot since they know their followers will turn out. However, such use of violence can often backfire. Not only will this weaken the organization as they are often not prepared to fight militarily superior foes, but it will short-circuit broader organization-building processes as leaders are forced to focus on on-going violence rather than planning for future campaigns.

For example, Patel finds that after violence started in 2004, Muqtada al-Sadr, instead of trying to develop more complex formal organization, shifted his strategy to simply take advantage of the urban slums of Sadr city.¹¹⁴ Illustratively, when attempting to generate more centralized control in 2008, Sadr drastically reduced the size of JAM and tried to “start over” with a much smaller group of loyal cadre.¹¹⁵ The Việt Minh in south Vietnam followed a similar path, attempting to use force *en masse* before reaching a higher level of capacity.

111. Krause, “The Political Effectiveness of Non-State Violence.”

112. Bloom, “Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding”; Krause, “The Political Effectiveness of Non-State Violence.”

113. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*; Staniland, “Organizing Insurgency.”

114. David Patel, *Ayatollahs on the Pareto Frontier: The Institutional Bases of Shiite Religious Authority in Iraq*, Working Paper (Cornell University/Stanford University, 2005).

115. Babah Rahimi, “The Return of Moqtada al-Sadr and the Revival of the Mahdi Army,” *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 6 (2010); “Al-Sadr: New force to fight U.S. in Iraq,” *CNN*, June 13, 2008,

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented a theory of insurgent military effectiveness which emphasizes the importance of organizational characteristics and choices. While structural factors are no doubt important, organizations must leverage and build upon (or build) informal structures through the use of formal procedures if they are to achieve any level of military effectiveness. They can only guarantee the control of their soldiers under fire and in times of peace when they link the organization with strong primary groups through a combination of logistics and personnel management systems. With that foundation, they can prepare those units to act in a militarily coherent manner through dedicated military structures. Like in all fighting forces, only those with a sufficient degree of command and control, training, and logistical back-end can fight with increasing effectiveness. Thus, “networks” do not represent a modern way of warfare that dismisses the lessons of the past.

While this theory does not present a logic explaining why insurgents end up the way they do, it does introduce a set of mechanisms which may make development path dependent based on the initial choices and constraints of insurgent organizations. Further, this logic extends far beyond insurgent military effectiveness. The theory specifies the ways in which formal organizations can leverage informal ties and also how those informal ties can severely limit the organization. These processes are central to building new state institutions both in environments with strong pre-existing communities or in those with highly divided societies. As Weber elaborated, states (and non-state institutions) which want to build institutions to collect taxes, regulate businesses, or monitor government behavior must explicitly capture the informal ties under-girding the state and the members of those institutions.¹¹⁶

116. Weber, *From Max Weber*.

Chapter 4

Insurgent Military Effectiveness During the First Indochina War

4.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have argued that existing research has been unable to explain insurgent military effectiveness for two reasons: (1) it has not conceptualized military effectiveness in a sub-state context, and (2) it is focused on structural determinants of insurgent behavior. In response, my theory chapter constructed a conception of effectiveness more fitting for the types of combat common in civil wars and then developed a theory arguing that it is not the structural conditions in which organizations operate that determine effectiveness, but how well their organizational structure allows them to leverage those conditions. Thus, breaking from much of the current literature, it closely links insurgent behavior to their organizational structure, rather than assuming that insurgents are predestined based on their environmental conditions. In particular, the theory focuses on the intersection of informal and formal structure.

To briefly recapitulate, while some insurgents do fight like conventional forces, the dissertation disaggregates lower levels of effectiveness into four categories: organizations that disintegrate under

fire (Combat Ineffective), those able to carry out simple activities such as ceasefires or preventing large-scale defections (Limited Structural Integrity), those able to ensure that their units carry out specific orders under fire such as only attacking particular populations or areas (Complete Structural Integrity), and, finally, those able to carry out simple military tasks such as handling weaponry, basic unit coordinate, and hit and run operations (Guerrilla Capacity). Only organizations with such a base may develop to fight in a manner similar to conventional forces by combining arms, carrying out attacks that coordinate across disparate fighting units, executing flanking maneuvers, regrouping and responding to changing battlefield conditions, and adapting tactics in a timely manner (Quasi-conventional Capacity).

Before insurgents can fight with any military effectiveness, they have to leverage strong primary groups—which must be imported or built—using formal tools. To move beyond Combat Ineffective and attain Limited Structural Integrity, I argue that organizations must leverage primary groups by centralizing the provision of resources such as weaponry and food and instituting disciplinary procedures to withhold those resources for disobeying orders. To avoid the withholding of resources as punishment, deployed fighters are incentivized to comply and use group norms to encourage others to comply when their behavior can be *directly* observed and thus sanctioned. As a result, leaders will only be able to ensure compliance with highly visible orders such as maintaining ceasefires or not retreating.

To further increase effectiveness and attain Complete Structural Integrity by ensuring that soldiers comply when not observed, leaders must cultivate a lower-level officer cadre committed to the organization and trusted by their soldiers. This task requires indoctrinating and selecting the most committed officers and putting in place command arrangements that cultivate trust such as appointing officers to manageable-sized units and ensuring they face risk equally with their soldiers.

Only organizations with this foundation can reach Guerrilla Capacity, among other things, instituting military training systems, inter-mixing experienced and non-experienced members, and ensuring that orders can be passed to dispersed units reliably. Though it is rare, insurgents organizations may become even more effective and develop into conventional forces that can militarily challenge a state. These organizations have highly differentiated and well-specified units—such as distinct artillery and infantry components—militarily-proven officers, reliable logistics systems, and realistic training programs.

The following chapter tests the theory by evaluating the capabilities of four organizations that fought during the First Indochina War from 1945-1954. These organizations include two “nationalist” organizations, the Việt Minh and the QDD Front, as well as two “religious” groups, the Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo. Nearly all of these organizations have multiple observations as their organizational—and structural—conditions changed over time. This conflict allows me to isolate the role of structural versus organizational factors, thus providing an excellent test for the theory as there is great variation in military behavior across and within organizations with similar structural conditions. For example, the Việt Minh developed to be a strong military actor despite its inability to draw on strong pre-existing community structures or external support (before 1950). On the other hand, the Hòa Hảo, a religious group with a dense community base and access to extensive French resources, did not become a unified or effective fighting force. While all of the organizations had sufficient access to resources and sanctuary, only the Cao Đài and Việt Minh made good use of these elements and developed a successful organization.

After giving a brief background about the conflict, the chapter codes each organization based on the key explanatory variables as well as the structural conditions they faced. For many organizations, there are multiple codings either based on geographic or temporal differences—for example, the Việt

Minh is coded for both the north and south for both 1946 and 1951. With each organization fully described, I then trace the manner in which organizational attributes and structural conditions were related to the military behavior of each actor.

4.2 Background and the First Indochina War

Vietnam has a long history of conflict including a thousand year struggle against Chinese control as well as conquests to the south and west. While only 127,300 square miles, it encompasses diverse geographic conditions. In the north, the starting place of Vietnamese history, the Red River Delta cuts through mountain ranges and has both agriculture and raw materials. The central portion of Vietnam is a narrow strip of land criss-crossed by rivers and dependent on agriculture and the sea. The south, a major rice producer, includes the Mekong Delta as well as forests, swamps, and jungle. Given the extensive forests, jungles, and swamps, nearly 90 percent of the population lives in 20 percent of the country's land.

While there are many ethnic groups within Vietnam, the majority of the state is ethnic Kinh. Nonetheless, Vietnam has a complex social milieu. To begin with, the Vietnamese village has served as the bedrock of social organization. Each village cultivated its own identity, often set against the "outside world."¹ As Elliott observes, these relationships were stultifying, but were "tightly cohesive."² Oftentimes, villages in the northern part of the country are described as even more internally cohesive, with southern villages more individualistic.³

Beyond village relationships, in the mid-20th century there were three major social groupings

1. Pham Van Bich, *The Vietnamese Family in Change: The Case of the Red River Delta* (Routledge, 1998); Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979): 88-95; Ellen Joy Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955* (Stanford University Press, 1966): 62-63.

2. David Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta*, vol. 1 (Armonk, N.Y.: East Gate Book, 2001): 15.

3. Ibid.



Figure 4.1 Map of Vietnam

based on religious ties. The Hòa Hảo and Cao Đài were fairly new millenarian religions with major followings in the south while the Catholic Church was brought to Vietnam in the 17th Century and was strongest in northern and central Vietnam. In those areas, supported by the government bureaucracy, the Catholic faith had upwards of 20 percent of the population as adherents.⁴ The Cao Đài, officially formed in 1926, build on a long tradition of syncretism in Vietnam, drawing on

4. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*: 190.

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.⁵ The Hòa Hảo, officially founded in 1939, draw on the rich tradition of the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Buddhist ministry and is distinctly millenarian.⁶

4.2.1 The First Indochina War

At the turn of the 19th century, Vietnam—as well as Cambodia and Laos—took on increasing importance for the French. By 1887, France had officially formed French Indochina consisting of all of Vietnam as well as Cambodia. The French ruled with a heavy footprint and actively sought to restructure Vietnamese society and governance.⁷ In part due to the overwhelming French presence, the 1920s and 1930s saw a number of rural rebellions protesting French rule that were put down violently and quickly.

However, the onset of WWII weakened France's position in Vietnam and allowed Japan to move in. While Japan only officially took the reins of power from France in March 1945, it had de-facto control of Vietnam from late 1940 onward. Since Japan could only afford to station a small contingent of soldiers in Vietnam, they left most of the governing to the enfeebled French officials.⁸ The Cao Đài, Hòa Hảo, and many nationalist groups cooperated with the Japanese, but the Việt Minh, directly opposed Japanese rule. Japan also faced resistance from Chinese nationalists across the border. This time period loosened pressure on all resistance movements as the French and Japanese were both focused elsewhere.

This window of opportunity was opened wider in 1945. First, during that period a devastat-

5. Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983): 84-85.

6. *Ibid.*: 145-148.

7. Alexander Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976): Chapter 1; For example, while Britain governed 325 million people in India with 5,000 British civil servants, France governed Indochina with the same number of civil servants. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955*: 73; Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis* (Praeger, 1966): 35.

8. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955*: Chapter 1.

ing famine hit all of Vietnam, though it was by far the worst in the north. Neither the French nor Japanese adequately responded to the grave situation, opening the door for non-state actors to take on a governance role in providing to the needy. Moreover, as the Japanese war-time situation worsened in 1945 and it feared an allied invasion of Indochina, it opted to entirely depose the French bureaucracy on March 9, 1945. In less than 24 hours, it disarmed the French security forces and dismantled the French administration. These moves gave all of the non-state actors an opportunity to fill the void in governance and security. The puppet government instituted by the Japanese was nearly powerless and after the Japanese defeat, the Việt Minh “overthrew” this government with the August Revolution when the leader of the Việt Minh, Hồ Chí Minh, declared the independent Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRV).

This independence was short-lived. In the aftermath of WWII, Vietnam was divided at the 16th parallel into a northern and southern zone with China to occupy the north and the British the south. The Chinese recognized the government declared by Hồ Chí Minh and would leave by 1946. However, in the south, Britain handed rule back to the French quite rapidly. In September 1946, the French overthrew the Việt Minh representatives in Saigon sparking the First Indochina War. After a March 1946 agreement, the French began to re-establish control in the north—though, they were to withdraw fully by 1952. However, they would not abide by this agreement and their military presence grew substantially. As a result, fighting reached the north by the end of 1946 despite a peace agreement in March of that year. In early 1947, French troops re-occupied north Vietnam pushing the Việt Minh into the “maquis.” Fighting would continue throughout the country until the battle of Điện Biên Phủ in 1954.

The French military forces were split into operational zones covering the north, center, and south of Vietnam. The French troop presence, drawn from the Corps Expéditionnaire Français en

Extrême-Orient (CEFEO), would go from around 15,000 troops in country in 1946 to 100,000 in 1954. They complemented these forces with perhaps 300,000 Vietnamese troops who first served in the French ranks and then moved into the National Army of Vietnam.⁹ At the outset, the French had a fairly static posture, often organized into territorial divisions designed to hold fixed locations. As a result, the French installed a large network of fortifications and outposts, including watch towers manned by Vietnamese troops. As the war progressed, the French shifted to a less rigid strategy and began relying on mobile infantry battalions as well as elite Parachute troops.¹⁰

Along with their change in military strategy, so to did the French political approach change. At first, the French ruled directly in the south and north via the High Commissioner of France in Indochina. Facing pressure from Vietnamese supporters, the French ceded power to a provisional government in 1948 before the establishment of the independent “State of Vietnam” in 1949 with Bảo Đại, the former emperor of Vietnam, as the head of state. After 1950, the French aided in the founding and development of the National Army of Vietnam that also integrated forces from the religious sects. Nonetheless, the French remained the actual deciders as Vietnam remained an associated state of France.¹¹ As the Cold War picked up, the United States played an increasingly active role in bankrolling the French war effort.

4.3 The Việt Minh

The following two sections compare two organizations that did not have access to pre-existing community structures and instead appealed to a universal “Vietnamese” identity. The Việt Minh would

9. François Guillemot, “‘Be Men!’: Fighting and Dying for the State of Vietnam (1951–54),” *War & Society* 31, no. 2 (2012): 184–210.

10. Major Peter D Jackson, “French Ground Force Organizational Development for Counterrevolutionary Warfare Between 1945 and 1962” (US Army Command and General Staff College, 2005): Chapter 3.

11. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955*: Chapter 10.

become highly effective despite a lack of external support during much of its rise, while the QDD nationalist front (discussed in the following section) quickly disintegrated.

While the Việt Minh would become the most powerful group opposing the French, they developed from a shattered resistance movement and with little external support. The Việt Minh grew from the Indochinese Community Party (ICP) which was founded by Hồ Chí Minh (then Nguyễn Ái Quốc) in Hong Kong. The movement was mostly confined to China during the 1930s as French purges often erased representatives in-country. During the Japanese occupation, they began re-entering Vietnam to build a mass-based movement.¹² Following the August Revolution, they organized their fighting forces into village defense forces meant to provide local security, regional forces meant to operate across provincial areas, and main force units designated for direct combat.

The Việt Minh case is a hard test for the theory as many existing theories would suggest that the Việt Minh would be incapable of developing military power. To begin with, they began without any strong communities to draw upon and only had limited access to resources and no external support. They were fighting a strong French foe with many troops and the support of the United States. Moreover, they had to contend with many other armed actors within Vietnam. However, they became the only insurgent force in the 20th century to defeat a major power in a set-piece battle.

The theory explains this development by focusing on their organizational characteristics. To begin with, the Việt Minh were able to build strong primary groups through indoctrination and training, were able to link those primary groups to the organization with well-defined resource distribution and an empowered lower-level cadre. While they would remain a guerrilla force in the south, in the north, the Việt Minh became militarily potent, even more so after beginning to receive

12. Jacques Dalloz, *The War in Indochina 1945-54* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1990): Chapter 2.

Table 4.1 Việt Minh Coding and Predicted Military Effectiveness

	South Vietnam		North Vietnam	
	1946-1948	1948-1955	1946-1951	1951-1955
Background Variables				
Sanctuary	X	X	✓	✓
Pre-Existing Primary Groups	X	X	X	X
Access to Resources	✓	✓	✓	✓
External Support	X	✓	X	✓
Factions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Organizational Variables				
Creating/Leveraging Primary Groups				
—Creation of Primary Groups	✓	✓	✓	✓
—Resource Control	✓	✓	✓	✓
Creating a Cadre System				
—Officer Selection Standards	X	✓	✓	✓
—Manageable Small Units	X	✓	✓	✓
Becoming an “Organizational Weapon”				
—Military Training for Cadre	X	✓	✓	✓
—Basic Communications Systems	✓	✓	✓	✓
—Functionally Differentiated Small Units	X	✓	✓	✓
Making the Jump				
—Large-unit Organization and Training	X	X	X	✓
—Movement and Integrated Communications	X	X	X	✓
—Heavy Weapons	X	X	X	✓
Predicted Military Effectiveness	Limited Structural Integrity	Guerrilla Capacity	Guerrilla Capacity	Quasi-conventional Capacity
Prediction Correct?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Chinese war material after 1949.

Table 4.1 presents the coding of the Việt Minh across the north and south as well as the theory's predicted level of military effectiveness. The table lays out coding of environmental factors as well as the organizational qualities that the theory predicts are associated with how well an organization can employ force. The following discussion presents each category in depicting how the Việt Minh built their organization in both the north and south.

4.3.1 Background Variables

As Table 4.1 demonstrates, the structural variables most prominent in existing explanations cannot capture the variation across time and space for the Việt Minh. In each case, the organization did not have access to strong primary groups while it did have access to resources. And while external support played an important role in the Việt Minh's jump to conventional capacities, it was able to become a highly effective guerrilla force in both the north and the south before receiving any of this support.

Unlike non-nationalist organizations, the Việt Minh sought to recruit from across the Vietnamese population. Rather than focusing on a distinct social group, they recruited from “multitudes of small-group attachments.”¹³ As a result, they found themselves in direct competition with those groups trying to recruit from these specific social or religious communities.¹⁴ Some, such as the Đại Việt (DVQDD), French, and Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng (VNQDD) recruited based on nationalist themes, others such as the Cao Đài, Hòa Hảo, and Catholics recruited based on religious identities, and finally others were closer to “bandits” such as the Bình Xuyên. For the most part, the groups attempted to recruit from across classes and in both rural and urban areas. Furthermore, within the organization, there were a number of factions including leaders of the Vanguard Youth, the Trotskyists, and remnants of the ICP throughout Vietnam.

In those areas where pre-existing ties did exist, they were not directed toward an overall Vietnamese identity—indeed, whether any such an identity ever existed is hotly debated¹⁵—but instead they were driven by tight kinship or village connections.¹⁶ Across these villages, there was little in-

13. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*: 179.

14. *Ibid.*: 182.

15. For a summary of this debate, see Tuong Vu, “Vietnamese Political Studies and Debates on Vietnamese Nationalism,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2, no. 2 (2007): 175–230.

16. William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*, 2nd Edition (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996): 102; John T. McAlister, *Viet Nam: The Origins of Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969): 195–97.

teraction and many areas did not share common base beliefs. This reality was even firmer when comparing north and Central Vietnam with the south. Given that the south was historically more of a frontier for ethnic Vietnamese, pre-existing village ties were rare and, though a generalization, many referred to it as far more individualistic than the rest of Vietnam.¹⁷ Thus, as Popkin found, this meant that “in Annam [the north] and Tonkin [the center], the challenge to the Communists was to restructure villages. In Cochinchina [the south] the challenge was to create villages.”¹⁸

They were similarly in competition for resources, both to fight the war and for the sustenance of their fighters. In the north, the Việt Minh were still dealing with on-going famine and drought that limited their ability to stockpile and distribute food. Moreover, as of March 1945, the entire armed component of the Việt Minh was estimated at 1,000 individuals and was poorly armed.¹⁹ If anything, access to weapons was even worse in the south. As one account notes at the time of the August Revolution, “a single musket was a rare commodity.”²⁰ This situation would change in the north by the end of 1945 as the Việt Minh reportedly had up to 30,000 regular troops, between 40,000 and 75,000 rifles, and between 3,000 and 8,000 light machine-guns. This massive increase in soldiers was due to the systems put in place in rural areas described below. In terms of armaments, like other groups in the north, they seized weaponry from the Japanese or bartered for it with the occupying Chinese troops. Beyond arms manufactured domestically, they would get no access to additional resources until 1950.²¹

In 1950, with the Communist victory in China, the Việt Minh would get substantial material and technical support. Yet, as Goscha finds, while this external support was of import after 1950,

17. Paul Mus, “The Role of the Village in Vietnamese Politics,” *Pacific Affairs* 22, no. 3 (1949): 265–272.

18. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*: 236.

19. McAlister, *Vietnam*: 154; Goscha, *Vietnam*: 115.

20. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*: 68.

21. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955*: 55-57; George K. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare: From the Vietminh to the Viet Cong* (Praeger, 2006): 1-2.

“long before Chinese aid arrived in 1950, the DRV had already started to assemble a regular army with a staff, an officers corps, and officer schools which worked in tandem with an intelligence, communications, and logistics systems. Chinese and Soviet assistance from the Communist block undeniably helped to transform and strengthen the DRV. But neither the Soviets nor the Chinese created the Vietnamese People’s Army in the middle of 1950.”²²

Until the middle of 1946, in the north, the Việt Minh also had fairly free access to territory and sanctuary to train their forces and recruit new adherents. Nonetheless, they were still under pressure from the occupying Chinese to consult and include other nationalist parties in the political process. While it was rare, the occupying force of 180,000 soldiers did occasionally use force to encourage compliance. This allowed the nationalist forces to re-take control of many areas taken by the Việt Minh during the August Revolution.²³ After the French return to north Vietnam in late 1946, the Việt Minh were pushed into rural and mountainous areas.

The situation in south Vietnam was different. To begin with, given the British and French presence, these forces could collect fewer resources locally. Moreover, the generally flat terrain provided less protection than the mountainous north, limiting the areas in which they could seek sanctuary to small areas in the Mekong Delta, in particular the wetlands of the Plain of Reeds. At most, they had 25,000 troops in central and southern Vietnam, many of whom were actually members of other groups such as the Vanguard Youth. Many of these troops were also inexperienced or unarmed.²⁴

In short, the Việt Minh faced similar situations in the north and south, though conditions were always more challenging in the south. While they had limited access to resources and external support in both areas, access was even further limited in the south. Further, with the onset of violence

22. Goscha, *Vietnam*: 106.

23. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 114.

24. John T. McAlister, *Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution (1885-1946)* (Washington D.C.: American University, Center for Research in Social Systems, 1968): 98-99.

upon the French return to the south, they had less time and space to develop. In both cases, they were in competition with other insurgent groups for recruits and could not draw upon any strong pre-existing social structures to easily control adherents. Yet, despite these challenges, both forces would develop into relatively strong insurgent actors.

4.3.2 Organization Building

Given these structural conditions, the Việt Minh faced challenges in both the north and south—though they certainly had more work to do in the south. In both cases, the theory predicts they would have to build strong primary groups from scratch and leverage those primary groups with resource provision and disciplinary procedures. Only with that foundation could they move onto constructing a cadre system and beyond. In contrast, existing theories would predict that the Việt Minh would be poorly positioned to develop military capacity as they did not have access to strong social structures, had limited access to resources, had limited sanctuary, and lacked external support.

4.3.2.1 Building the Foundation of Strong Primary Groups

While the Việt Minh began with a small circle of highly-trusted revolutionaries, there were only hundreds of these individuals as 1945 came to an end.²⁵ Moreover, they had not actively sought to recruit mass numbers of individuals to fill their fighting ranks. They only began to try to expand their ranks with the events of 1945.²⁶ As a result, they were in desperate need of generating groups of individuals committed to the cause and the organization. What is more, where pre-existing ties did exist, they were too localized to be of use to the organization: “village solidarity presented a challenge to both revolutionaries and their opponents...their own [the revolutionaries’] activities were closely scrutinized and harsh actions against fellow villagers could have widespread repercussions.”²⁷ Thus,

25. *Ibid.*: Chapter 3.

26. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*: 234.

27. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*: 43-44.

the Việt Minh followed a three-part strategy to build primary groups.

First, and most importantly, they sought to socialize new recruits. As early as 1943—in both the north and the south—Việt Minh forces were indoctrinating “lower-level” cadre from urban and rural environments.²⁸ As will be discussed in greater detail below, the Việt Minh had village, regional, and main force units. Upon joining the lowest level, the Việt Minh focused almost entirely on political indoctrination, having recruits attend classes together and participate in limited small-arms training. As Tanham observes, members were only allowed to join village forces after “they had been politically indoctrinated and had received some very rudimentary discipline.” Later in the conflict, they further entrenched this indoctrination program by assigning regional and main force cadre to lead these “bootcamps.”²⁹

Second, beyond those directly in the organization, they sought to re-structure village social relations to generate values universal across geographic areas. The main strategy was the creation of mass-participation organizations. Each of these villages would elect representatives who would in turn elect representatives for regional organizations. As McAlister underscores, “these groups were organized in such a way that they went beyond being units for village action [and] reinforced their role of restructuring village society by giving them a meaning in the larger context of the tumultuous events of the August Revolution.”³⁰ While not always active—or accepted by villages—these popular participation associations laid the groundwork to recruit soldiers from among the most committed followers. Indeed, it was not necessary for all, or even most, of inhabitants to pledge alliance to the Việt Minh effort as long as they could have reliable levels of recruitment.³¹

28. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*: 48-55; Anthony James Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped Our World* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010): 94.

29. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*: 30-35.

30. McAlister, *Vietnam*: 125.

31. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*: 249.

These popular committees played a central role in re-organizing land distribution, taxation, and the appointment of officials.³² As Lockhart argues, “because the organizational structure suggested links with similar groups everywhere, it provided a conceptual foundation for the integration of the people into a network that would harness the military energy of the nation.”³³ However, the implementation of these programs was staggered. While the Việt Minh had already started to put in place such strategies in the north before 1945, it would only be in 1947 and onward that such programs became common place in the south.³⁴

Third, they sought to build broader social connections via education programs promoting literacy. Referred to as the “cultural-teaching movement,” cadre would lead classes for illiterate peasants, both adults and children. They would read works by Hồ Chí Minh and the sessions would end with “cultural tests.”³⁵ These courses were supplemented with banners, slogans, and other propaganda in villages. Elliott, studying southern villages in the Mekong Delta, finds that in a typical district, that of Thạnh Phú, nearly 70% of residents could read by the end of the program.³⁶

Finally, recognizing the need to act quickly, the Việt Minh imported organizations that already had strong primary group ties into a broad national front—the Hội Liên Hiệp Quốc Dân Việt Nam. One subset they focused on most intently was members of sports and youth programs organized by the French. Once such group was the Vanguard Youth that had a major presence in south Vietnam. The Vanguard Youth, created by the French who cultivated strong ties between members, was re-purposed during the short Japanese rule as a martial organization. The Việt Minh would also, at

32. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*: 220-225.

33. Daniel Moran, Arthur Waldron, and Greg Lockhart, eds., “In Lieu of the Levée En Masse: Mass Mobilization in Modern Vietnam,” in *The People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization Since the French Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2006): 223.

34. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*: 122.

35. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*: 221.

36. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*: 88.

least temporarily, integrated units of Hòa Hảo, Cao Đài, and Catholic militias.³⁷

4.3.2.2 Leveraging These Primary Groups with Resource Control

Given that the Việt Minh was able to build the foundations of primary groups, they theory predicts that they needed to find a way to direct the behavior of the members toward the dictates of the central organization. Only by taking these steps can organizations ensure that the ties between the members will encourage group compliance with leadership dictates. The theory expects that the most straightforward manner of achieving this task is centralizing the provision of resources in tandem with clearly defined disciplinary procedures. That is exactly what the Việt Minh sought to do from 1945 onwards. In particular, they implemented an extensive land re-distribution system to give land to soldiers and their families as well as a large scale logistical network to distribute food, weapons, clothing, and employment opportunities.

In north Vietnam, the Việt Minh took advantage of the lax response by the French and Japanese to an on-going famine that had claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. Indeed, there was often rice in silos that the Japanese were not distributing. The Việt Minh took control of these silos and put in place systems to distribute rice to villages. This system included opening harvest roads and transporting salt.³⁸ As they took power in 1945, the Việt Minh became further involved by suggesting plants to be grown such as corn and employing a vast portion of the population to work in the fields.³⁹ With official ownership of food warehouses, they implemented a distribution network to ensure that citizens facing the prospect of high inflation were still able to get access to food and instituted a system requiring permits for purchase or transport of large quantities of rice.⁴⁰ The opinions of the sister of Duong Van Mai Elliott, whose family lived in the north during this period,

37. Goscha, *Vietnam*: Chapter 3; Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: Chapter 6.

38. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*: 232-33.

39. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955*: 145-46.

40. David G. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, Revolution, 1945-1946* (University of California Press, 2013): 320-335.

captures the impact of these programs: “she concluded that a movement that distributed food to the starving, tried to end the famine, promised to help the poor achieve equality...deserved her allegiance.”⁴¹ Despite these direct measures to respond to the famine, perhaps the most important part of the response, land re-distribution, had far broader implications.

Many have referred to land re-distribution as evidence of the Communist nature of the Việt Minh. However, during the mid to late 1940s, they actually went to great lengths to downplay any Marxist tone.⁴² Instead, in both the north and south, land redistribution took on a role of placating lower and middle class peasants, as well as tying those individuals to the Việt Minh. To begin with, communal lands which had been in use by notables were distributed in small chunks via an auction system—and the payment was not due until *after* the harvest. Next, communal lands were distributed to equalize holdings rather than in order of rank and seniority as every citizen had an equal chance at every parcel. The lands of those that fled were similarly distributed to other villagers. Taxes on these lands were then replaced with a progressive income tax with exemptions for each adult and child. Moreover, rents were reduced for all peasants renting private or public land. Importantly, the Việt Minh also put in place systems to give land to wives whose husbands were in combat units deployed outside the village.⁴³

As Elliott finds in the Mekong Delta, the land redistribution policies had the effect of increasing production, tying peasants to the revolution, and providing incentives for them to pay taxes and “send their children off to fight.”⁴⁴ As one peasant told Elliott in the village of Hai De, “[B]y 1947 or 1948, the people who had received land zealously supported the [Việt Minh] Front and the Rev-

41. Duong Van Mai Elliott, *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1999): 129.

42. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: Chapter 5.

43. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*: 225-227.

44. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*: 122.

olution because they had an interest in doing so. Before, [the poor peasants] didn't go to meetings very much and they didn't want to stand guard, but after they had received some land they would zealously attend meetings, stand guard, and participate in guerrilla warfare."⁴⁵ There were two direct reasons this was the case: (1) if they defied Việt Minh orders, their land could be taken away or worse and, (2) if the revolution was lost and the landlords returned to power, they would similarly lose their land and perhaps worse. This dynamic was why these peasants also dutifully paid taxes directly to the Việt Minh as thanks for rent reduction or land assignments.

While these systems were important means of resource distribution for the village forces, in the regional and main force units, the DRV and Việt Minh directly provided them with weapons and resources. By the late 1940s, each main force soldier received 1.2kgs of rice per day which served as their pay and could be partially allotted to their families at home. These soldiers were supplied through an extensive porter system whose members carried 45lb loads for 15-20 miles per day through the jungle and mountainous terrain. These porters moved between mid-way depots with food and armaments.⁴⁶

Given that DRV could not rely on consistent trade networks or imports from other countries, fighters in rural areas were highly dependent on the distribution networks of the Việt Minh in Hanoi, Saigon, and Hue which were supported by female guides, children, street vendors, and students. When the Việt Minh was forced out of Saigon in 1945 and then Hanoi in 1946, they put in place systems to retain access to urban sources of weaponry, medicine, intelligence, and footwear and clothing.⁴⁷ These networks were perhaps most important in the south where there were so few areas for the organization to form a rear guard. While these southern soldiers could capture some

45. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*: 126.

46. Bernard Fall, *The Viet-Minh Regime: Government and Administration in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam*. (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1956): 84-86.

47. Goscha, "Colonial Hanoi and Saigon at War."

resources from the French or other groups, “such sources of supply were not adequate to make the south self sufficient, and the government [the Việt Minh] moved in many directions to help make up the short-fall.”⁴⁸ The Việt Minh leadership openly recognized the importance of such resource provision, as according to French intelligence, they “made a great effort to organize the supply of weapons and equipment to the south.”⁴⁹

4.3.2.3 Building a Cadre System

According to the theory, this basic leveraging of primary group relationships only can get organizations so far. In short, these groups will do as commanded when their behavior is visible, but not when they can hide their actions. To gain a greater level of control, the theory argues that organizations must build a lower-level officer cadre who are both vetted by the organization *and* trusted by their soldiers. This means indoctrinating and selecting officers as well as giving them the tools to gain their soldiers trust—for example, insuring they command small units, can stand up for those soldiers’ needs, and hold the levers of discipline. Since the Việt Minh in the south did not generate such a cadre system until later in the war, the theory predicts that they would have limited control of their fighters. However, in the north, the organization quickly deployed the systems needed for such a cadre.

In fact, they had already started to build and dispatch this cadre before resource control was in place in many locations. In this context, the Việt Minh’s limiting factor was often the extent of its cadre.⁵⁰ The core of the Việt Minh cadre were united during the 1920s and 1930s both abroad and in the French prisons of Indochina. From the first military unit formed in 1944, all units would

48. Greg Lockhart, *Nation in Arms: The Origins of the People’s Army of Vietnam* (Sydney; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1990): 160.

49. Quoted in, *ibid.*

50. McAlister, *Vietnam*: 120.

have both political and military cadre.⁵¹ As one Việt Minh training manual put it, the aim of the training the cadre was to “create a number of command cadres and political cadres with the ability to command a platoon and become the soul and strength of the National Salvation Army.”⁵²

The cadre went through both political and military training—indeed, all cadre needed to become Communist party members. For much of the late 1940s, the core of this training took place in an officer school founded in mid-1945. There was much work to be done as few Vietnamese had been trained as officers by either the French or Japanese.⁵³ There was a significant focus on political education and loyalty. This training was based on manuals that provided a history of the army, a description of French oppression, an emphasis on the role of cadre in spreading propaganda and attracting recruits, and finally a description of the way in which force would be used to counter the French.⁵⁴ The potential cadre faced poor living conditions—often lacking food and constantly threatened by malaria—meaning that those who stayed had demonstrated some base level of commitment to the cause.⁵⁵ Moreover, the camps were often forced to move, or hit by French attacks, further thinning the ranks. As a result, while many individuals joined or were recruited, the cadre who ended up commanding fighting units had shown their allegiance to the organization.

There were separate courses for different officer ranks. In the main officer training school, a six month course would include 200 to 500 students. A junior officer training school and a school for NCOs lasted 3 months. In an auxiliary school, there was combined training which lasted three months and had foreign instructors (including at least some Japanese and Chinese teachers, as well

51. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 83.

52. Lockhart, *Nation in Arms*: 124.

53. Christopher E. Goscha, “Belated Asian Allies: The Technical and Military Contributions of Japanese Deserters, (1945–50),” in *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, ed. Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco (Blackwell Publishing Company, 2006): 37–64.

54. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*: 33.

55. Elliott, *The Sacred Willow*: 168-170.

as Germans and Italians).⁵⁶ For those officers who were recruited from the French armed forces or other parties, they were required to go through a political training program to demonstrate their commitment to the Việt Minh leadership.⁵⁷

These training camps expanded as the war persisted. The schools had careful selection procedures, ensuring that cadre showed ideological commitment, but also had studied the key documents, including Ho Chi Minh's explanation of how to be a communist cadre as well as the party history. As emphasized by one of the Việt Minh leaders, Trường Chinh, these procedures were necessary to train more cadre so as to create a lower-level core which was unified in "ideology and action." Goscha stresses that going through this training and becoming a party member did not signify that you would be an accepted cadre any more so than "being Catholic makes you a priest."⁵⁸

As the Việt Minh expanded in size, they used other procedures to identify trusted cadre. One of the most important of these systems was reliance on the three-level organization including village, provincial, and main force units. While there would be limited training and indoctrination of the village defense forces, only those who showed commitment and reliable behavior in those lower units would be brought to higher levels of the military echelon.⁵⁹ Particularly after 1947, the provincial leadership took an active role in selecting and vetting cadre based on their commitment and social background.⁶⁰

Having ensured that cadre were dedicated to the organization, these cadre were put in a position

56. Gilbert Bodinier, *La Guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954: Textes et Documents*, vol. 1 (Vincennes: Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, 1987): 97.

57. *Ibid.*: 115.

58. Goscha, *Vietnam*: 90-92; Similarly, Bodinier, summarizing captured Việt Minh documents, emphasizes that the leadership carefully evaluated who was accepted into cadre training programs and who graduated, Bodinier, *La Guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954*: 97.

59. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*: Chapter 2; Edgar O'Ballance, *Indo-China War, 1945-54* (London, England: Faber & Faber, 1964): 66-67; Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988): 42.

60. Goscha, *Vietnam*: 100.

to win the allegiance of their troops and to keep a close watch on them. Even in crafting the military doctrine, Hồ Chí Minh emphasized the importance of small units with political representation at nearly every level.⁶¹ The base unit of every military formation—from training through combat—was the cell, composed of three soldiers.⁶² Within each squad (tiểu đội), were often two cells as well as a junior officer, NCO, and sometimes a political cadre. Similarly, the platoon (trung đội) was composed of 3-5 squads as well as a junior officer, NCO, and political cadre. This system of “3’s” continued up the command chain. Oftentimes, these NCOs and junior officers were selected by their soldiers, though subject to the approval of the higher command. As a result, officers were in constant contact with their soldiers. Both the military and political cadre were instructed to speak with their soldiers every day, both to hear their concerns and to keep their morale high.⁶³

They were also in charge of discipline. This meant punishing soldiers and units for improper behavior. But it also meant pro-actively preventing misbehavior or malcontent. In this context, one of the central Việt Minh tools was that of self-criticism. In these sessions, soldiers pointed out faults with their actions and with other members’ actions. This process gave soldiers confidence that they could bring up concerns to their superiors while also allowing officers to gauge the feelings and morale in their units.⁶⁴ As a result, this cadre became the center of their units’ daily life by fighting with them, providing them with social and material support and guidance, and disciplining them for improper behavior.

Again, this process would be delayed in the south and never reach the level of institutionalization as the north. As of early 1949, there was only one party member for every 250 soldiers. This would begin to change in 1947 and 1948 with the implementation of reforms and careful selection of cadre

61. Translation in O’Dowd, “Ho Chi Minh and the Origins of the Vietnamese Doctrine of Guerrilla Tactics”: 568.

62. Davidson, *Vietnam at War*: 63.

63. Bodinier, *La Guerre d’Indochine, 1945-1954*: 117-1212.

64. Davidson, *Vietnam at War*: 63-64.

as well as the deployment of cadre from the north to the south.⁶⁵ The centerpiece of this effort was the opening of a training Academy that sought to re-start cadre education “from scratch.”⁶⁶

4.3.2.4 Developing an Organizational Weapon and Beyond

With this foundation of a robust cadre and resource dependent units, the theory argues only by complementing these organizational features with explicit military training and preparation will organizations become viable guerrilla and even conventional forces. The Việt Minh would implement increasingly advanced training programs, create a large “tail” to move weaponry to their forces, and finally redesign and re-purpose units for large-scale military engagements.

Training and Concomitant Units. The Việt Minh leadership were committed to developing a modern military and believed this would only come with a commitment to training their troops.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, training varied substantially over time, space, and across the different levels of the combat force. In every case, however, technical training was seen as only useful either in concordance with, or after, political training.⁶⁸ For much of the First Indochina War, official training was only conducted for cadre. Much of the remaining training was conducted “on-the-job” by these officers and NCOs. As Vietnam training materials emphasized, “old soldiers lead new soldiers, skilled people help unskilled people.”⁶⁹

For the third tier, made up of guerrilla forces and self-defense forces, training was conducted in an informal nature by regional force troops. They often received basic instruction on the use of weapons or perhaps sabotage.⁷⁰ This training often took about 15 days with five devoted to military

65. Lockhart, *Nation in Arms*: 157-59.

66. Goscha, *Vietnam*: 101-103.

67. For the extent to which they sought out military assistance, see Christopher E. Goscha, “Building Force: Asian Origins of Twentieth-Century Military Science in Vietnam (1905-54),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34, no. 3 (2003): 535–560.

68. Lockhart, *Nation in Arms*: 122-124.

69. Quoted in, *ibid.*: 123.

70. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*: 30-31.

training and the rest to physical fitness and political education.⁷¹ The training for the guerrilla forces was often slightly more advanced, perhaps including close order drills or instruction on small-unit tactics, sabotage, or the use of automatic weapons.

For the regional units, soldiers were transferred into training after “graduating” from third tier service. They received rudimentary training on unit tactics as well as the use of more complex weapon systems or specialty skills. These training programs were lead by main force officers and often these units would participate in combat during the training process meaning that they served in tandem with more experienced fighters.⁷² This level of instruction remained consistent throughout the entire First Indochina War.

It is in the main force units that training would develop the most and was most complex from the outset. Soldiers entering main force units were carefully selected based on their performance in regional units—though, during periods of heavy attrition this selection process was lessened. For main force units, training tended to be conducted by specialized cadre and sometimes foreign instructors. All soldiers received basic infantry training including close-order drills, careful weapons instruction, and significant instruction on camouflage and navigation.⁷³ This intensity was present from just after the August Revolution, often with the assistance of Japanese officers who had defected. Particular topics of instruction included sabotage, “smash-and-grab attacks,” ambush, and night combat.⁷⁴ This would come to include training on scouting, patrolling, night patrolling, night firing, diapering, and use of terrain.

By the late 1940s, this training was often supplemented with specialized skills. This included training for those to be assigned to fire elements that trained with heavy weapons such as machine

71. Bodinier, *La Guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954*: 116-117.

72. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*: 31.

73. *Ibid.*: 32.

74. Goscha, “Belated Asian Allies”: 50-51.

guns, bazookas, recoilless rifles, and mortars. Other specializations included logistics, engineering, reconnaissance, and medical care. However, these specialties would only become consistently schooled later in the conflict. This shift occurred with the onset of significant Chinese support after the victory of the Chinese communists. The flow of new weapons and supplies allowed the Việt Minh to create larger troop formations and to begin assault training at the battalion and even regimental level. With these larger movement units, many Việt Minh officers, from NCOs to company-grade staff officers were sent to China for training.⁷⁵ As a result, according to the theory, they had put in place the requisite units and skill level necessary to carry out more complex operations.

Moreover, additional skill sets were developed to counter French advantages. For example, dedicated artillery units were taught how to employ their weapons and use them in pitched battle—as evidenced by their performance at Điện Biên Phủ. Similarly, training in newly supplied anti-aircraft weapons lessened the French aerial advantage—and would similarly pose large threats to the United States during the Second Indochina War. In 1950 alone, 3,100 Việt Minh cadre went to China, producing 1,200 infantry officers, 400 artillery, 150 communications, 200 cryptography, 300 air force, and 200 navy. Overall, between 30 and 40,000 Việt Minh soldiers would be trained in China by 1954.⁷⁶

Logistics and Communication. In the north, the Việt Minh moved beyond the basic redistribution systems introduced above to provide for a conventional army. As early as 1946, the Việt Minh attempted to start manufacturing equipment and it is reported that in one of their factories during the first six months of 1948, they were able to produce 38,000 grenades, 30,000 rifle cartridges, 8,000 light machine gun cartridges, 60 bazooka rounds, and 100 mines. However, the biggest effort

75. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*: 32-33.

76. Goscha, “Building Force.”

would be the systems of human porters to bring food, munitions, and weapons to the combat troops. To respond to these needs, the Việt Minh created the “auxiliary service” which was organized into groups of 15 porters.⁷⁷ Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese took part in this service: it is estimated that during the battle of Hòa Bình alone, from late 1951 to early 1952, that 333,200 porters worked 11,914,000 working days.⁷⁸ It was this “tail” that allowed them to keep up with mobile French units and “take the fight” to their opponents.

Also put in place were courier systems to carry orders from the north to the south and within each area of battle.⁷⁹ The provincial and village committees would also pass along messages, particularly when moving orders from north to the south.⁸⁰ Later in the conflict, field radio sets were employed allowing communication between division headquarters and regiments as well as between regiments and their battalions and sub-units.

4.3.3 Military Effectiveness: How Did they Fight?

Based on the above coding, the theory generates the set of predictions previously illustrated in Table 4.1 on page 135. The codings presented are the average level achieved by the main force units. They are generalized and there is obviously variation across the organization at given times. The following discussion of military effectiveness more carefully engages with the organizational details and concomitant military behavior for the Việt Minh through the conflict zone and conflict period. The previous discussion makes clear that if the theory’s predictions are correct, structural variables alone cannot explain the differences as the Việt Minh in the south was able to move to higher levels of effectiveness without any structural changes and that the organization in the north and south was

77. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*: 34-35.

78. Christopher E. Goscha, “A ‘Total War’ of Decolonization? Social Mobilization and State-Building in Communist Vietnam (1949–54),” *War & Society* 31, no. 2 (2012): 156.

79. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*: 103.

80. Lockhart, *Nation in Arms*: 132.

able to achieve basic and advanced military capabilities without the structural advantages presented in the literature. In particular, the Việt Minh would fight effectively and with great success for an extended period of time with no external support.

In both the north and south, the Việt Minh were outmatched by French forces. While they would have time to prepare in the north—though they were fighting other nationalist groups before the French return—that was not the case in the south. In both cases, they openly recognized that they had limited combat power. The following discussion covers the cases from the north (1946-1951 and 1951-1955) and south (1946-1948 and 1948-1955)

The North. The theory predicts that the main force units, and to a lesser extent the regional forces, of the Việt Minh would be able to carry out basic coordinated, “guerrilla,” operations before the introduction of Chinese support in 1950. Such operations would include coordinated sabotage, ambushes, brief battles, and orderly withdrawals. However, for the local defense forces, the theory predicts a much lower level of effectiveness as they did not have vetted cadre or military training. In the middle of 1946, it is thought that the Việt Minh had perhaps 30-50,000 main force troops as well as 30 to 50,000 combined regional and guerrilla forces.⁸¹ Until 1949, the Việt Minh mainly employed the regional and local defense forces to harass the French.

The first major conflict in the north took place in the city of Hanoi where the Việt Minh leadership had deployed local forces—the lowest of the three tiers of Việt Minh forces—to meet the French at the end of 1946. There were 10,000 members of the militias including some militias on the outskirts of the city. Many of these guerrilla forces had gone through indoctrination and were dependent on the Việt Minh leadership for weapons and support. However, while there were 5-6,000 weapons and limited ammunition, other key supplies were not provided for by the Việt Minh

81. Davidson, *Vietnam at War*: 42.

and these fighters did not have any developed cadre or military training.⁸² As a result, these local militia forces, are predicted to flee or fight in an uncoordinated manner.

Indeed, despite some valiant efforts, the resistance fell apart basically before it started as 8,000 militia members fled. Moreover, the Việt Minh leadership had attempted to set up a large-scale ambush upon the approaching French troops. However, demolition throughout the city did not take place as scheduled, if at all, and many militants began attacking too early, leaving their flanks unprotected. As a result, the French took control of all of Hanoi quite quickly minus a small section known as the Chinese quarter. By that time, an additional 1,000 militants had fled and the Việt Minh leadership attempted to re-group the soldiers. These forces were unable to conduct any coherent operations and eventually the Việt Minh even tried to recruit children to fill their ranks.⁸³

Similar plights would meet guerrilla forces in the other cities of north Vietnam. However, the regional forces and main force units performed with greater military capabilities. The first major combat came with the French “Operation Lea” launched in the autumn of 1947. It deployed 15,000 soldiers across 20 battalions to eradicate the Việt Minh forces in north Vietnam. The attack included concurrent attacks by paratroopers, armored, infantry, and artillery elements.⁸⁴ While the operation started off well with the near capture of Hồ Chí Minh and Võ Nguyên Giáp, Việt Minh forces were able to employ basic military tactics such as ambush and sabotage across the entirety of the French columns. Importantly, the Việt Minh limited their exposure with orderly and timed retreats leading many French soldiers to admonish that they simply “disappeared” into the jungle.⁸⁵ One of their most effective tactics was ambushing French support and logistics units. When main force units carried out such attacks they would break into four groups, sometimes as large as companies, to

82. Goscha, “Colonial Hanoi and Saigon at War”: 235-240.

83. Ibid.: 240-245.

84. Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 4th ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1964): 27-29.

85. Davidson, *Vietnam at War*: 48-52.

surround these French units and simultaneously attack from both sides as well as the front and rear.⁸⁶

For main force units, the types of attacks and operations were adapted as Operation Lea continued. For example, in October 1947, Giáp directed main force units to continually change their names and designations to confuse French intelligence. Main force units were directed to refer to themselves as popular troops or propaganda wings while they were to refer to the actual popular forces by the call signs of the main force units. These same units were similarly ordered to relocate and carry out hit-and-run operations in specific locations including on French forces moving on Route #4 and naval reinforcements going up the Claire River.⁸⁷ Importantly, there were many internal reviews of Operation Lea by the Việt Minh. These focused on responding to paratroop attacks as well as highlighting how ambushes were improved by the use of heavy weaponry such as mines and bazookas.⁸⁸

After 1948, the Việt Minh started focusing on the development of a more modern military. By 1950 Võ Nguyên Giáp had directed the creation of seven divisions. In February of that year, he announced the transition from guerrilla warfare. During this period, the regional forces were ordered to operate in conjunction with main force units to serve as either combat support by protecting flanks or directly fighting or in a diversionary role. Before moving to set piece battles, the Việt Minh forces started carrying out complex operations against French outposts. Perhaps the first such operation occurred in February 1950 when five battalions, supported by 81mm mortar teams took the

86. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*: 48.

87. Intelligence Bulletin N. 5649/2 (French northern Command), "Việt Minh Document Seized in the Vu-Nhai region, 27-10-1947: Orders of Võ Nguyên Giáp With Respect to the French Offensive in Central and northern Regions," 3 December 1947. Printed in Bodinier, *La Guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954*: 327.

88. Intelligence Bulletin N. 292 A/Sect./2 (Haiphong Sector), "Việt Minh Document Seized in the Dong Trieu region, 2-12-1947: Official Losses of the Autumn Offensive across the north Vietnamese Front," 29 January 1948. Printed in *ibid.*: 344-48.

French garrison of Lao Kai. Another such operation defeated a French garrison held by 800 soldiers in Dong Khe. In this combined arms attack, artillery was used to soften the post before the infantry moved in.⁸⁹

In the summer of 1950, 24,000 regional troops were upgraded to main force units, creating a total of 60 battalions. With two infantry divisions fully equipped with heavy mortars, anti-aircraft guns, and machine guns, the Việt Minh launched a major offensive in the fall of 1950. During this period, the Việt Minh both took French fortifications *and* pursued retreating French troops. This action required quickly re-grouping combat battalions.⁹⁰ These rapid advances caused panic among the French advisory staff and many posts were abandoned. One press correspondent, after being evacuated to Hanoi, wrote that “the Việt Minh are now functioning as a coordinated military force employing Western strategies. They are no longer primitive guerrilla forces...They have learned to maneuver with restraint and to take advantage of opportunities during combat.”⁹¹

By the beginning of 1951, the Việt Minh forces had taken nearly all of the territory from the Halong Bay to Laos. In these victories, the Việt Minh captured 13 artillery pieces, 125 mortars, 950 machine guns, 1,200 sub-carabines, and over 8,000 rifles in addition to perhaps 450 trucks.⁹² With these supplies, the Việt Minh finished outfitting all five divisions. At the beginning of January 1951, they challenged the French to a set-piece battle for the first time as they started a campaign to attempt to re-take Hanoi. The campaign started with an attack on French posts at Vinh Yen that employed two divisions against the French installations in a night time attack. After beginning with diversionary attacks and pushing aside most of the French defense, they then ambushed the French

89. O'Ballance, *Indo-China War, 1945-54*: 109.

90. *Ibid.*: 113-117.

91. “Telegramme de Presse,” Hanoi, 17.10.1950, Folder 1320: Tập tài liệu của Nha Tổng Giám đốc Cảnh sát và An ninh quốc gia tháng 5-10.1950, National Archives II, HCMC.

92. O'Ballance, *Indo-China War, 1945-54*: 118.

Mobile Group dispatched in response. Despite these successes, the Việt Minh lost this first battle due to an enormous French airlift rushing troops from the south up to the combat zone. In addition, further air power was brought in and employed heavy force including extensive use of napalm. As a result, the combat leaders called off the assault and ordered a withdrawal.⁹³

However, after falling back, the Việt Minh at once re-deployed soldiers, including troops who had just left combat to try to break the French lines at Mao Khe. During night time attacks, the Việt Minh were able to take a number of French positions. Again, they were repulsed by overwhelming French fire power including both destroyers and aircraft. Even with this defeat, the Việt Minh launched another assault against major French positions. In this case, the Việt Minh relied on two infantry regiments that had infiltrated nearly 30 km behind French lines. This regiment was joined by forces from two other Divisions who pinned down French reserves while the two infiltrating regiments attacked the rear. During this attack, the Việt Minh also ambushed naval craft with bazookas and recoilless rifles. Once again, the Việt Minh were only turned back by massive airlifts of French re-enforcements and aerial bombardment.⁹⁴

As a result, this campaign was a failure for the Việt Minh. They were unable to break French lines and move on Hanoi. However, they had demonstrated significant military capacity and were only stymied by the commitment of the new French commander, Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, who had moved at the last moment to relocate the resources and aerial power to meet the Việt Minh head on. What is more, there was significant internal debate about the tactics used and adaptations were suggested for countering the French without a full conventional tet-a-tet.

The French tried to build on their victories at the end of 1951 to take Hòa Bình—a critical point on the road connecting Việt Minh forces in the north and Center. However, in response, Giap was

93. Fall, *Street Without Joy*: 36.

94. *Ibid.*: 43-47.

able to mobilize five divisions with supporting artillery, anti-aircraft, and engineering units. The Việt Minh divisions broke into regiments to conduct infiltration and flanking maneuvers. This coordinated strategy allowed the Việt Minh forces to attack all fronts of the French outpost. In this battle, the Việt Minh forces had developed clear tactics for neutralizing French armored pieces through a combination of close-range explosives and recoilless rifles.⁹⁵

Using these tactics, the Việt Minh were able to effectively use pincers to contain the French to a single front. From there, the Việt Minh took high points to set up anti-aircraft weaponry. They launched a final assault on the remaining French troops by camouflaging themselves around a French patrol and then following that patrol back onto the base to avoid minefields. As Fall recounts: “with incredible speed, indicating that the whole operation had been carefully rehearsed not only on the map and at the sand table, but also through individual visual reconnaissance, Việt Minh assault troops began to mop up the bunkers one by one.”⁹⁶ French troops commented on the discipline and cohesion of the Việt Minh forces during these assaults. The Việt Minh would pursue the French throughout a protracted retreat from Hòa Bình.

The Việt Minh took advantage of the French focus on Hòa Bình by attacking elsewhere and then transferring units from Hòa Bình to re-enforce attacks elsewhere. Relying on careful camouflage, the Việt Minh continued to surprise French posts with complex attacks. French attempts to re-take Việt Minh territory would meet strong defense positions as well as ambushes. These ambushes became increasingly complex. For example, in one attack, the Việt Minh infantry attacked, but then observing a French counterattack, withdrew in unison to allow their machine guns and mortars from hidden sites to push back the French.

More generally, Việt Minh forces rarely were drawn into engagements which might pit full

95. Fall, *Street Without Joy*: 50-53.

96. *Ibid.*: 57.

French firepower against their troops. Indeed, a common Việt Minh tactic was to break the French lines into more manageable segments that individual Việt Minh units could overpower. By blocking the road with boulders or explosives, the Việt Minh could launch coordinated attacks from all flanks of the stopped French units.⁹⁷ This tactic was used repeatedly on Route 1, the highway connecting north and south Vietnam. Due to the continued use of this tactic, Bernard Fall referred to this stretch of road as the “street without joy.”⁹⁸ As Võ Nguyên Giáp would later recall about Điện Biên Phủ, but fitting for most of the post-1952 period, the French command was “strategically surprised because it did not believe that we would attack—and we attacked; and it was tactically surprised because we had succeeded in solving the problems of concentrating our troops, our artillery, and our supplies.”⁹⁹

Điện Biên Phủ—the battle that put an end to the First Indochina War—illustrated the full capacity of the Việt Minh. Điện Biên Phủ was unknown before 1954. It was a small outpost in an isolated, hilly, part of northwestern Vietnam. Given its isolation, French leadership selected it as a propitious location for a large force-on-force confrontation in which the French Expeditionary Forces could destroy the Việt Minh main force units. Given France’s airlift capabilities, they believed they could keep the outpost continually supplied while the Việt Minh would be unable to bring and then coordinate their artillery. Yet, from January to March of 1954, the Việt Minh undertook a logistical tour-de-force and coordinated the activities of hundreds of thousands of porters as well as their infantry divisions. 261,451 porters, 20,991 bicycles—each carrying between 200-300kg—and 11,000 boats who supplied the army and transported the artillery pieces.¹⁰⁰ The final assault included two entire divisions, regiments from two other divisions as well as a Heavy Division with 105mm guns. The

97. Simon Dunstan, *Vietnam Tracks: Armor in Battle 1945-75* (Osprey Publishing, 2004): 15.

98. Fall, *Street Without Joy*.

99. Quoted in, *ibid.*: 106.

100. Goscha, “A ‘Total War’ of Decolonization?”

Việt Minh assault began by damaging the French airstrip to prevent French re-supply. Over a nearly one month period, they slowly wore down the French defenses and conventional overwhelmed the significant French presence.

Throughout all of the offensives after 1951, Việt Minh troops kept fighting under highly challenging and punishing circumstances. Given their relative disadvantage in artillery, they often employed human wave tactics, throwing masses of soldiers at the French lines. Yet, defections were rare and combat cohesion was common. As O'Ballance describes Điện Biên Phủ, "although he won, it had been no easy walk-over for Giap, and his forces suffered another 10,000 casualties in the final stages of the battle, making his total up to at least 20,000, of whom at least 8,000 had been killed. The Việt Minh soldiers too had shown magnificent bravery and discipline."¹⁰¹

The South. In 1946, in the south, the Việt Minh were not as well off. They had limited cadre and did not have the selection procedures to vet and produce new cadre. Further, many of the troops in their "front" were actually receiving resources from elsewhere. As a result, the theory predicts that the sets of soldiers dependent on the Việt Minh would comply with broad observable orders to not defect or to keep ceasefires. However, these forces would not follow orders about specific tactics or targets as the central leadership would be unable to gain information about those attacks and there were not trusted cadre to report unsanctioned behavior. This situation changed in 1947 as the Việt Minh focused on producing new cadre and transported some cadre from the north.

In 1946, the number of units directly connected to the Việt Minh by resource control was quite low in the south—particularly around Saigon. While many organizations were within the Việt Minh "front," it is estimated that at most 3 units were actually receiving resources and orders from Nguyễn Bình, the Việt Minh leader in the south. Moreover, many of these units were not well trained or

101. O'Ballance, *Indo-China War, 1945-54*: 235.

united internally. In either case, the full coterie of troops was no more than 25,000.¹⁰²

As a result, the forces in the south unleashed a spate of largely uncontrolled violence in the beginning of 1946. In the urban areas, including Saigon, this included widespread terrorism and some political assassinations—though often a political assassination simply meant killing a French civilian. Indeed, there are countless reports of “grenade” attacks during the late 1940s in Saigon in which grenades were simply thrown into groups of people or restaurants. These attacks were often carried out by loosely affiliated units.¹⁰³ Even when particular individuals were targeted, it was often despite pressure from the central leadership to be more discriminating.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, “urgent” orders sent by the Việt Minh leadership to the southern cadre emphasized that political repercussions would always outweigh the military benefits of widespread violence. As a result, they called for “extreme caution and prudence” in using any “terrorist” tactics.¹⁰⁵

In response to this burst of violence, the Viet Minh leadership rushed to put in place a ceasefire to re-gain control of their troops. As the theory predicts, while the leadership could not control the targets or day-to-day use of force of their troops, they could get the units to which they provided resources to put down their arms. So, when the leadership in the north decided that violence must be “turned off” to avoid a full-on conflict with the French, Bính was able to control his units despite the costliness of such a ceasefire. As Goscha observes, “turning on and off this southern type of war, however, would not be easy. That said, while Nguyễn Bính was most definitely independent-

102. McAlister, *Vietnam*: 141.

103. See, for example, “explosion d’une grenade au Cafe de la gare a cholon,” 8 November 1948, Report N. 15939 of the Security Services of Cochinchina, and “Jet de deux grenades à l’interieur du cinema Nam Việt,” 10 August 1949, Report N. 1283/PSE-S LB.S, Commissioner of the French Republic of Cochinchina, Folder 1351: Hồ sơ về hoạt động của Việt Minh năm 1947-1950, National Archives II, HCMC.

104. Christopher E. Goscha, “La Guerre par d’autres Moyens: Réflexions Sur la Guerre du Việt Minh dans le Sud-Vietnam de 1945 À 1951,” *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains*, no. 206 (2002): 46.

105. Quoted in, François Guillemot, *Dai Việt, Indépendance et Révolution au Việt-Nam: L’échec de la Troisième Voie* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2012): 372-373; See, also, Jessica M. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013): 31-33.

mindful, he remained loyal to Hồ during the tense months when the DRV asked him to agree to a cease-fire...Bính agreed to a cease-fire in the south, even though he had been against such an accord and knew full well that it could undermine his military strength in the south.”¹⁰⁶

However, Bính was not able to control the behavior of units in the broader Việt Minh front. Bính attempted to make up for the fact that these groups were not resource dependent through the use of strict discipline and brutality. Instead of garnering compliance, these tactics lead Hòa Hảo and Cao Đài forces to side with the French, pitting these forces directly against the DRV and Bính.¹⁰⁷ In the violence that followed in 1947, these forces fought directly with the Việt Minh. Throughout this violence, there were many massacres of civilians in direct defiance of the orders of the Việt Minh central leadership.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, this violence was not reported by local forces to the central leadership.¹⁰⁹ After action reports by Việt Minh leadership would argue that targeting was carried out “indiscriminately on Cao Dai loyalists and reactionaries of the religion resulting in damage within the community...this error had serious consequences...It took a long time to recover from the negative impact of these errors.”¹¹⁰

Moreover, in fighting these other forces, Việt Minh units did not carry out basic military tasks to protect themselves during this period. For example, after the launch of a Cao Đài attack against Việt Minh forces, three task forces were organized for “joint military operations.” However, even though Nguyễn Bính called on these task forces to concentrate all their efforts against the Cao Đài, “on the ground, while the Cao Đài launched offensives on all fronts (military, political, economic),

106. Christopher E. Goscha, “A “Popular” Side of the Vietnamese Army: General Nguyen Binh and War in the South,” in *Naissance d'un Etat-Parti: Le Việt Nam Depuis 1945 (The Birth of a Party-State: Vietnam Since 1945)*, ed. Christopher E. Goscha and Benoît de Tréglodé (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004): 340.

107. *Ibid.*: 342-43.

108. François Guillemot, “Autopsy of a Massacre: On a Political Purge in the Early Days of the Indochina War (Nam Bo 1947),” *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2010): 257-58.

109. *Ibid.*: 258-59.

110. Quoted in, *ibid.*: 260.

Force B was neither co-coordinated nor synchronized. Instead of concentrating its forces tactically on the Tay Ninh front, it scattered them over three areas.”¹¹¹

Outside of Saigon, mainly in the Mekong Delta, the major Việt Minh partner was the Vanguard Youth. While they were well-organized and had strong primary group ties, their cadre were not devoted to the central Việt Minh leadership—indeed, there were on-going political conflicts between Vanguard Youth cadre and those of the Việt Minh. As a result, these cadre were not vetted or tied into the central leadership’s ideological core. Thus, they would not be inclined to bring their soldiers’ behavior in line with the dictates of the core Việt Minh leadership. As a result, violence was used indiscriminately. As a party history later concluded, most of the Việt Minh fighters “came from a civil servant or student background, and had participated in the above-ground mass organizations [such as the] Vanguard Youth, whose degree of revolutionary enlightenment was still low...so they met with a lot of difficulties, to say nothing of making many mistakes in arrests and trials, which had a bad influence among the masses.”¹¹²

In both Saigon and the rest of the southern front, the Việt Minh began to operate with a higher degree of capacity based on the changes in cadre and training implemented in 1948 and onward. To begin with, while the violence within the broader Việt Minh front was harsh during 1947, purging the different ethnic and religious groups from the Việt Minh did allow Bính to change his approach and began focusing on the creation of strong bonded and connected primary group units. As early as late 1947, in the Mekong Delta, the Việt Minh had assembled three main force “regiments,” which, though nothing like the north, were lead by trained Việt Minh cadre and supplied by the central leadership. By 1950, Bính had formed 15 battalions.

The evidence of these changes was apparent in military behavior. In 1947, in perhaps the most

111. *Ibid.*: 240.

112. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*: 91.

complex operation to date in the south, a multiple unit sabotage of a French convoy with a high-level delegation was carried out.¹¹³ After this period, there was an uptick in sabotages and ambushes, always at the battalion level or below. An example of these tactics is described in a 1949 Việt Minh after-action report of 924th battalion of the 308th Regiment. The commanding officer details a mission against a police post in the An Giang province in southwestern Vietnam. The report carefully sketches out what the French capabilities were and how squads from the company were broken up to attack the base from multiple fronts. Starting in the evening, they launched 61mm rounds into the base. After French troops began moving on this squad, the other squads came up behind them and after moving the French troops aside, burned the post. The report ends with lessons learned, pointing out that the Việt Minh withdrawal after the attack was not well-organized, allowing them to be targeted by French counterattacks.¹¹⁴

However, the Việt Minh would show strategic shortsightedness by attempting to transition to a conventional confrontation with the French in the early 1950s. According to the theory, they definitely did not have the capacity to carry out such attacks given that these forces lacked modern weaponry, let alone any training in combined or joint operations—especially since the French Expeditionary Forces were prepared for just such a battle. Thus, it is unsurprising that Bính's forces were unable to carry out conventional operations when he ordered them to do so at the end of 1949. Not only were they unable to coordinate large-scale movements across their units, but the French had overwhelming firepower. The result was a devastating set of losses that drastically weakened the Việt Minh in the south.¹¹⁵ Indeed, combat was mostly passed off to village militias which were

113. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*: 117.

114. “Traduction de Document RDV: Trung Doan 308 Nam, Tieu Doan 924, N. 56. Zone de Saigon Cholon. Compte rendu de l’attaque du poste de police et du poste de phu lam dans la nuit du 22 Mai 1949,” 28 May 1949, Folder 1351: Hồ sơ về hoạt động của Việt Minh năm 1947-1950, National Archives II, HCMC.

115. Goscha, “A “Popular” Side of the Vietnamese Army: General Nguyen Binh and War in the South”: 348-49.

a weak match for the French who re-took much of the Mekong Delta.

It was only after re-building their forces in the Plain of Reeds of the Mekong Delta that the Việt Minh would be able to carry out unified operations again. They were able to do this despite the French presence in the Mekong Delta as the French simply did not have enough troops to move in force without vacating other areas. By 1953, the Việt Minh were prepared to fight with basic military capacity again. For example, in a French assault on the Plain of Reeds in 1953, members of the 309th battalion had built well-fortified defenses and were positioned to carry out a coordinated ambush on the French troops. Similar attacks would continue in 1953 and 1954 before the war came to end through the conventional victory of the Việt Minh at Điện Biên Phủ in the north.

4.4 Non-Communist Nationalists Groups

The Việt Minh were not the only force employing nationalist themes. Drawing on a long line of small nationalist parties, three nationalist parties were active during and after WWII. These were the Đại Việt Quốc Dân Đảng (DVQDD or Đại Việt), Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng (VNQDD), and the Đồng Minh Hội (DMH). The VNQDD, formed in 1927, had faced extreme French repression in the early 1930s. The DVQDD was founded in 1939, had many university students and professors and drew some VNQDD members. The DMH was founded in 1942 with heavy Chinese sponsorship and had many prominent Vietnamese nationalists as members. Drawing on the history of the Vietnamese secret societies as well as Japanese and Chinese support, these groups developed similarly and often joined their efforts. Indeed, after the August Coup, the nationalist groups officially joined their forces to create the a nationalist front (the QDD Front).

Table 4.1 on the following page presents the level of development they achieved. While these groups had previously selected a devoted cadre core through a secretive cellular structure, these

Table 4.1 QDD Front: Coding and Predicted Military Effectiveness

	1945-1947
Background Variables	
Sanctuary	✓
Pre-Existing Primary Groups	X
Access to Resources	✓
External Support	✓
Factions	✓
Organizational Variables	
Creating/Leveraging Primary Groups	
—Creation of Primary Groups	X
—Resource Control	✓
Creating a Cadre System	
—Officer Selection Standards	✓
—Manageable Small Units	X
Becoming an “Organizational Weapon”	
—Military Training for Cadre	✓
—Basic Communications Systems	X
—Functionally Differentiated Small Units	X
Making the Jump	
—Large-unit Organization and Training	X
—Movement and Communications	X
—Heavy Weapons	X
Predicted Military Effectiveness	Combat Ineffective
Prediction Correct?	Yes

organizations did little else to leverage a broader member base. Instead of expanding by creating manageable units and centralizing the provision of resource, they haphazardly added new soldiers and combined fighting units from the different nationalist parties. Thus, despite significant external support and many analysts seeing them as major actors in 1945 Vietnam, they would be decisively by the Việt Minh in 1946 as their units disintegrated under fire.

4.4.1 Background Variables

The three nationalist parties faced the same challenges as the Việt Minh in terms of finding pre-existing communities to recruit from. For the most part, the nationalist parties were more focused on recruiting from an elite set of urbanites, students, and academics.¹¹⁶ Oftentimes recruitment tapped into the social networks of these members, appealing to family members and friends.¹¹⁷ They presented a narrative asserting a long history of Vietnamese nationalism from the founding of Vietnam in 1010 and linked this history to the need to remove any “imperial occupiers.”¹¹⁸ While presented as distinct, this nationalist call very closely approximated that used by the Việt Minh.¹¹⁹

Like many of the other insurgent groups, all of these nationalist forces received support and some resources from the Japanese. Perhaps the most important aspect of this support was Japanese protection of these organizations from the French Sûreté. Nonetheless, the Japanese only provided limited access to weapons or training. After the Japanese coup, and particularly after their defeat, the remaining Japanese soldiers began providing training and many of their weapons.¹²⁰

However, the main support of the nationalist parties came from the Chinese nationalists. As noted above, after the Potsdam Conference, Britain took control of south Vietnam and the Chinese of the north. While the British basically handed the south to the French, in the north, the Chinese openly supported all three nationalist elements, attempting to empower them vis-a-vis the Việt Minh. China had up to 180,000 troops in the north through 1946. The Chinese provided weapons,

116. Tuong Vu, “Triumphs or Tragedies: A New Perspective on the Vietnamese Revolution,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 45, no. 02 (2014): 248.

117. Guillemot, *Dai Việt, Indépendance Et Révolution Au Viêt-Nam*: 159-60.

118. *Ibid.*: 124.

119. *Ibid.*: 133.

120. François Guillemot, “Vietnamese Nationalist Revolutionaries and the Japanese Occupation: The Case of the Dai Viet Parties (1936-1946),” in *Imperial Japan and National Identities in Asia, 1895-1945*, ed. Li Narangoa and R. B. Cribb (Psychology Press, 2003): 234-236; Bui Diem and David Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999): 41.

training, and military protection, allowing each of the parties to take significant territory in north Vietnam.¹²¹ Beyond supplies, nationalist forces had a haven in China, both during WWII and during the 1945-1947 period. They often went to China for training and fled there after losses. The Chinese also built sanctuaries for these nationalist groups in north Vietnam.

In short, the nationalist parties faced the same challenge as the Việt Minh: building primary groups rather than relying on pre-existing social structures. Unlike the Việt Minh, they had access to significant outside support and the space to develop. At the outset, French intelligence even guessed that it might be one of the nationalist parties, rather than the Việt Minh to succeed. They argued that by March of 1945, the Đại Việt had become a major force in north Vietnam: “Since March 9, 1945 [the day of the Japanese coup], the Đại Việt has expanded extensively, placing it far ahead of other parties...It is led by educated and young people, many with education in France. They have recruited many such good people.”¹²² Similarly, French analysis of the DMH reported that “The Đồng Minh Hội’s Army has been formed in China. The cadres have been trained by the Chinese...The units have been equipped by the Chinese on the same scale as the units of the central government (i.e. Chinese). This army therefore represents a solid force (of around 5,000).”¹²³

4.4.2 Organization Building

4.4.2.1 The Failure to Create Primary Groups

The QDD front failed to position those cadre to win over new recruits and footsoldiers. To begin with, these nationalist groups did not attempt to create primary groups from which to recruit from.

Rather than using organizational tools such as village councils to unite disparate social groups, the

121. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955*: 84-85; Guillemot, *Dai Việt, Indépendance Et Révolution Au Việt-Nam*: 184-88, 282-83; McAlister, *Vietnam*: 104-108.

122. Quoted in, Guillemot, *Dai Việt, Indépendance Et Révolution Au Việt-Nam*: 191.

123. Quoted in, Lockhart, *Nation in Arms*: 165.

nationalist groups only relied on nationalist propaganda to attract followers. Further, they only recruited amongst urban networks, significantly limiting their reach.¹²⁴ Perhaps more importantly, they did not put in place systems to compete with the Việt Minh in terms of local governance or land distribution. Illustratively, despite the low popularity of the French, the nationalists were able to recruit far fewer individuals than the Việt Minh despite starting with very similar numbers of individuals in 1945.¹²⁵ In short, they were stuck with the disconnected social structure described above that the Việt Minh initially recruited from.

Though they did not build strong primary groups, the QDD Front did establish resource control by controlling the distribution of weaponry, ammunition, and other supplies it was receiving from the Chinese. Further, given the limited amount of food in north Vietnam, the meals (rice and soup) provided by the QDD were often the only food source for their soldiers.¹²⁶ Given the difficulty of accessing weaponry—and its importance to nationalist fighters—this provision was central. For example, speaking of the arrival of smuggled weapons at a QDD outpost near the end of the Japanese rule, one QDD member recounts that:

The arrival of arms, brought in great numbers by local area peasants to a training camp, provoked enthusiasm in the recruits and gratitude to the young activists [who had smuggled the weapons]. The arms gave reality to the revolutionary mission and the importance of the nationalist ‘maquis.’ They arrived at the camp hidden in bundles of heating wood or in sacks of rice carried by the young, or...in a guitar case which held 5 rifles...The transport of the arms obviously required a great deal of caution. The simple movement of cadre, fearing capture by the Japanese or the French, was not without danger.¹²⁷

Unlike the Hòa Hảo in the south, the QDD Front maintained order in distributing resources and weapons, with most units getting access to these goods at bases in the “maquis.” While the Chi-

124. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*: 224.

125. *Ibid.*: 222-224.

126. Guillemot, *Dai Việt, Indépendance Et Révolution Au Việt-Nam*: 217.

127. Summarized in, *ibid.*: 218.

nese remained in-country, this pattern was even stronger as the Chinese would assist the QDD by transporting goods with cargo trucks.¹²⁸

4.4.2.2 Half of a Cadre System

Like the Việt Minh, the individual nationalist groups had a tight core of devoted and often well-trained followers who had been organized into secret societies during the early 1940s. These included many cells of students who acted autonomously without knowing the mission or identity of other cells. The selection of these individuals was rigorous. For example, the DVQDD had a well-developed code of conduct covering member behavior within the cell as well as in their personal life. These cadre had to be 18, have a pattern of good behavior, accept the party's politics, and state the oath of membership upon commission. They were required to study the party's history, to be able to carry out multiple functions, and to see themselves as equal to all other cadre. Promotions followed similar patterns, as cadre had to exhibit good behavior and success in operations.¹²⁹ Those selected as cell leaders carried out discipline, picked tactics, reported to the central leadership, and conducted training for new recruits.¹³⁰ Discipline for these cell leaders went up a strict hierarchy including city, provincial, and central leadership levels.¹³¹

However, with the creation of the QDD front, these individual cadre systems did not result in a single unified system. When the nationalist groups joined forces, the cadre from each group were neither committed to, nor could be trusted by the central leadership. As a result, internal disputes about access to fighting resources as well as disagreements over ideology resulted in a divided officer

128. François Guillemot, "L'Élimination de l'Opposition Nationaliste et Anticolonialiste dans le Nord du Viet Nam (1945-1946)," in *Naissance d'un Etat-Parti: Le Viet Nam Depuis 1945 (The Birth of a Party-State: Vietnam Since 1945)*, ed. Benoît de Tréglodé and Christopher E. Goscha (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2004): 211.

129. Guillemot, *Dai Viet, Indépendance Et Révolution Au Viet-Nam*: 150-65.

130. *Ibid.*: 154-155.

131. *Ibid.*: 159.

corps.¹³² These divisions went from the lower-level officer all the way up to the general staff.¹³³ Illustratively, Guillemot finds that new cadre joining the organization tended to find that it was a like a “serpent without a head.” This also was evidenced by internal fighting over the control of, and content provided by, the cadre training schools.¹³⁴

Moreover, with the formation of the QDD Front’s military arm, they did not inter-mix units or ensure equivalent training or structure across their fighting units.¹³⁵ As a result, there were a diverse set of units that were not designed to empower cadre as they were not small enough to manage and did not have individuals joined together into strong primary groups. As these units swelled with new recruits, the officers were unable to gain these soldiers trust. This reality leads Guillemot to conclude that the primary weakness of the QDD Front laid in “the disunion of the forces formed under the QDD banner. In effect, each of the parties continued to evolve according to its own principles and guidelines.”¹³⁶

4.4.2.3 Training, Logistics, and Communication

With support from the Chinese nationalists, the QDD Front received significant military training. After 1945, the QDD joined its training efforts across the three parties and established or built upon training camps throughout north Vietnam. While these camps were mostly in the nationalist “maquis,” they had at least a few small centers in Hanoi. These infantry training camps were designed for officers and courses were run by Japanese and Chinese advisors.¹³⁷ These camps carried out political and ideological indoctrination, calisthenics, weapons handling, marching, instruction

132. Ibid.: 362.

133. Ibid.: 330-345.

134. Ibid.: 362-363.

135. Ibid.: 302.

136. Guillemot, “L’Elimination de l’Opposition Nationaliste et Anticolonialiste dans le Nord du Viet Nam (1945-1946)”: 210-211.

137. Guillemot, *Dai Viêt, Indépendance Et Révolution Au Viêt-Nam*: 303-304.

in small-unit tactics, and some training in guerrilla tactics and strategy. These schools trained hundreds of NCOs and lower-level officers.¹³⁸

However, this military training was not matched by a logistical “tail” that could quickly move people or large weaponry across a battle space. Similarly, there were few systems in place of real-time communication between units or with the central leadership. As one QDD officer lamented,

Our military forces were superior to those of the Việt Minh...but apart from that, we were weaker on most levels: our infrastructure of cadres, our political cunning, our daring, our bloody character...and the most unforgivable fault: in a war zone with 300 soldiers, there was not a single radio station, which made troop movements adventurous and purely formal.¹³⁹

Thus, even though the QDD forces had received fairly advanced military training from the Japanese, the theory predicts that they did not have the organizational back-end to supply units during combat—particularly when losing Chinese logistical support.

4.4.3 Military Effectiveness: How Did they Fight?

While the nationalist organizations had a strong inner core and access to significant resources and training, they did not use Chinese support and the sanctuary provided by the Chinese in the 1945 and 1946 period to develop the concomitant organizational infrastructure needed to build relationships between their footsoldiers and select the cadre needed to further leverage those connections. Unlike the Việt Minh, who managed to build primary groups within their units, the nationalists were stuck with the original hardcore they started with. In short, military training without a requisite focus on the social infrastructure of organization is not sufficient. Moreover, military training in advanced tactics can only work when matched with the logistical capacity to move troops and

138. Diem and Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History*: 41; Guillemot, *Dai Việt, Indépendance Et Révolution Au Việt-Nam*: 216-218.

139. Guillemot, *Dai Việt, Indépendance Et Révolution Au Việt-Nam*: 242-43.

weapons in a coordinated manner. As a result, the theory expects that soldiers and units would disintegrate under combat and that the organization would be unable to recruit new members, or to re-generate force. For those units that might have directly fought, they would not be able to coordinate their movements in the battle space nor get re-supplied while facing losses. Further, given the lack of strong primary groups, if the theory is correct, we would expect to see internal divisions at the forefront. The following analysis illustrates that these predictions are borne out.

With the Japanese coup, like the Việt Minh, the nationalist groups started organizing for combat. While they would be left out of the August Revolution, the Chinese occupation allowed them actively assemble and protect their forces. These forces were divided into three geographical areas. The first zone, in the general area of Hanoi had 10,000 troops and several thousand more “reserve” troops. The second zone, north of the Hanoi, had around 13,000 troops. The final zone in northwest Vietnam had over 2,000 troops. Of those troops, French intelligence estimated 4-5,000 well trained nationalist soldiers.¹⁴⁰

With Chinese backing, these forces held territory during 1946. However, they still were under pressure from the Việt Minh.¹⁴¹ But, as the Chinese departure neared and then came about, the Việt Minh launched a set of offensives that lead to the disintegration of the nationalist forces. For the most part, the nationalist troops simply fled, deserted, or defected. In the rare cases where they stood and fought, the Việt Minh demonstrated military dominance. For example in late 1946, a Việt Minh force of perhaps 5,000 was able to encircle nationalist forces by breaking into smaller assault elements near Yen Bai (the strong nationalist holding in the north). With the use of artillery and quick moving tactics, the Việt Minh overwhelmed the nationalist units that were not organized in a

140. Ibid.: 346-52.

141. Ibid.: 351.

manner to push back the assault.¹⁴² Similarly, in Lạng Sơn province, the Việt Minh set up blockades isolating nationalist forces. This tactic led the nationalist forces to flee *en masse*.¹⁴³

With no systems in place to re-supply or distribute resources to the troops, in many places the soldiers simply ran out of ammunition despite central depots of stores from the Chinese.¹⁴⁴ One desperate plea from a deployed commander to the central leadership—that never arrived as they were using couriers due to limited radio access—summarized the picture:

To defend the village of Kỳ Lừa, I should have had 2,000 [3,000?] soldiers. We have only 100 guns and our soldiers are living very poorly because of the blockade the Việt Minh has subjected us to...Within days, the Việt Minh launched an offensive against our troops. We held for seven days and seven nights, waiting in vain for reinforcements from Central Command...Currently, there are more than 10,000 soldiers stationed a four day march from here. It is necessary that you send me money so I can feed these troops for four days.¹⁴⁵

Nonetheless, in most locations, the nationalists forces didn't even put up a fight. Low morale led to desertions and flight to China. Officers from the different nationalist forces began fighting internally leading some to defect with their forces—one VNQDD officer was reported to have defected to the Việt Minh with 500 soldiers.¹⁴⁶ In other cases, the Việt Minh bought off local commanders, convincing them to switch sides or to turn over their weapons and return home. In short, the nationalist forces were no match for the Việt Minh. As Guillemot observes:

Immediately after the withdrawal of the Chinese, the Việt Minh launched a vast offensive to reconquer all the QDD Front's territory, depriving them of any logistical support. In six months, from June to December, the north was pacified by the Việt Minh troops. The QDD forces, weakened more and more each month, retreated to Yên Bái, Lào Cai, and Chapa and finally passed over into China. The luckiest QDD forces survived and regrouped. A large number either defected or were executed upon capture. Obviously, the reconquest became an unequal battle. The QDD forces had lost their weapons, were dressed in tatters, and had no unified leadership. The Việt Minh used French artillery furnished by the Japanese and had well trained troops.¹⁴⁷

142. Guillemot, *Dai Việt, Indépendance Et Révolution Au Việt-Nam*: 351.

143. *Ibid.*: 347.

144. *Ibid.*: 348-49.

145. Quoted in, *ibid.*

146. *Ibid.*: 349.

147. *Ibid.*: 353.

While the nationalist parties would continue to operate throughout the First Indochina War and some of their members would join the National Army of Vietnam in the mid-1950s, they never again engaged in any combat.¹⁴⁸

4.5 The Cao Đài

The following two sections study organizations that had access to strong pre-existing community structures—in this case, religious ties and institutions—access to resources and external support, and military training. The theory emphasizes that despite these advantages, only those groups leveraging their members with resource dependence and a committed cadre would be able to take advantage of these community structures and support networks. While the Cao Đài implemented the organization to achieve this goal, the Hòa Hảo did not.

Unlike the Việt Minh and nationalist groups, the Cao Đài built upon pre-existing community structures. While only formed in 1925, the religion drew upon many religious and social themes in Vietnam, giving it access to a wide range of followers and traditions. Unlike the Việt Minh, they actively allied with the Japanese, using the WWII period as an opportunity to build and deepen their organization. However, unlike the Hòa Hảo, that drew upon Japanese—and then French—support, as well pre-existing social and religious ties, the Cao Đài developed fairly impressive military capacity.

Thus, even though they had a similar number of adherents to the Hòa Hảo, the Cao Đài played a much larger military role in the south of Vietnam. Even though the Hòa Hảo would receive a great deal of military training and equipment, it would not be able to rely on their units to use this training to further the organization's goals. By contrast, the Cao Đài, for the most part, exercised close control

148. Guillemot, “‘Be Men!’: Fighting and Dying for the State of Vietnam (1951–54).”

Table 4.1 Cao Đài Coding and Predicted Military Effectiveness

	1947-1951, 1953-54	1952, 1955
Background Variables		
Sanctuary	✓	✓
Pre-Existing Primary Groups	✓	✓
Access to Resources	✓	✓
External Support	✓	✓
Factions	✓	✓
Organizational Variables		
Creating/Leveraging Primary Groups		
—Creation of Primary Groups	NA	NA
—Resource Control	✓	✗
Creating a Cadre System		
—Officer Selection Standards	✓	✓
—Manageable Small Units	✓	✓
Becoming an “Organizational Weapon”		
—Military Training for Cadre	✓	✓
—Basic Communications Systems	✓	✓
—Functionally Differentiated Small Units	✓	✓
Making the Jump		
—Large-unit Organization and Training	✗	✗
—Movement and Integrated Communications	✗	✗
—Heavy Weapons	✗	✗
Predicted Military Effectiveness	Guerrilla Capacity	Combat Ineffective
Prediction Correct?	Yes	Yes

over their units and thus use them in coordinated and complex ways throughout the entire conflict. This control would stay in place despite the factional nature of the Cao Dai religion—as the theory predicts, factions only take on importance when organizations do not directly provide resources to those members. The coding and the theory’s predictions are in Table 4.1.

4.5.1 Background Variables

The Cao Đài actively embraced and sought after pre-existing social ties. As defined in Chapter 2, these communities contained the building blocks of strong primary groups as they encompassed

shared experiences, norms, beliefs, and economic interactions. The Cao Đài faith drew upon secret sects and traditional religious sects that had come and gone throughout the 1800s and early 1900s. As Popkin observes, the Cao Đài “was based on long-standing beliefs and small local organizations that predated the French conquest; it was not, therefore, a wholly new religion.”¹⁴⁹ In this context, the Cao Đài promoted traditional morals and ideals, particularly in response to the French dismantling of the Confucian bureaucratic system: “responding directly to the colonial fragmentation of Vietnamese society, it not only rehabilitated the ancient Confucian virtues but cast into artificial institutional forms the religious syncretism which had always existed implicitly in Vietnamese peasant religion, but which now needed to be defined explicitly against the pressure of an alien culture.”¹⁵⁰ Based on this appeal, the Cao Đài had upwards of 2 million followers by 1941.

These followers shared a strict set of behavioral norms covering marriage, eating, economic life, social activities, as well as worship.¹⁵¹ These communities often became insular, relying on the Cao Đài organization to develop livelihoods and direct economic activities. Their allegiance was driven by a commitment to the Cao Đài mysticism and spirituality captured by the centrality of mediums who speak through an ouija board or “Corbeille à Bec.” As Colonel Antoine Savani, head of the French 2ème Bureau of Military Intelligence and the French representative to the Sects, observed, “Through spiritualism, they [the Cao Đài leadership] obtain a complete submission from their adherents due to the mystical core of the faith. Through the Corbeille à Bec...and their chosen mediums, those in charge can impose their intentions and wills through divine messages from the spirits...No follower would dare doubt the divine origin of these message no one would dare violate the concomitant prescriptions.”¹⁵²

149. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*: 195.

150. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*: 186.

151. Victor L. Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism: A Study of Religion in Vietnamese Society* (BRILL, 1976): Chapters 2-3.

152. A. M. Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme* (1954): 122-23.

Beyond their social foundations, during WWII, Cao Đài forces had significant access to resources due to their collaboration with Japan. The Cao Đài quickly allied with the Japanese hoping to join arms with a fellow Asian force to displace the French. While the Japanese were not willing to entirely back the Cao Đài or arm them, they supplied those forces with a wide range of resources. These included fuel, clothing, food, medicine, matches, and even cash transfers.¹⁵³ As the Japanese withdrew, they handed over a significant stock of weapons—mostly rifles and munitions—and others supplies to the Cao Đài rather than surrendering them to the French.¹⁵⁴ However, with the Japanese withdrawal, the Cao Đài were deprived of continued access to resources, and external support. This lack of resources contributed to the Cao Đài decision to ally with the French in mid-1946 and more officially in early 1947, though they would continue to struggle to retain access to reliable resource flows.

During WWII, the Cao Đài had access to some sanctuary in Cambodia as their main spiritual leaders were in exile during this period. For the most part, they used this territory for religious practices.¹⁵⁵ During the First Indochina War, after making agreements with the French, the Cao Đài had sanctuary in the administrative districts that were nominally put under their control. In particular, their core territorial base was in the Tây Ninh province that also housed their main temple.¹⁵⁶ Nonetheless, they would face military pressure from the French, Việt Minh, and Hòa Hảo forces in this stronghold.

Finally, the Cao Đài also had many “factions,” both within the broader movement and within the armed forces. Most of the splits within the broader movement—estimated to be as many as 50—

153. Tran My-Van, “Japan and Vietnam’s Caodaists: A Wartime Relationship (1939-45),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1996): 190.

154. Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaïsme*: 37.

155. My-Van, “Japan and Vietnam’s Caodaists”: 184.

156. Special Operations Research Office, *Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam: The Cao Dai*, Ethnographic Study Series SORO/CINFAC/R-0133-65 (American University, Department of the Army, 1966).

happened in the mid-1920s and mid-1930s.¹⁵⁷ Importantly, none of these factions developed any significant military forces. Only the Tây Ninh movement, made up of the Cao Đài mainstream, would develop a robust civilian and military infrastructure. However, even within the Cao Đài armed forces, there were many competing factions and individuals. But, before 1954, only *one* of these factional fights would result in a split of the movement as Trình Minh Thế left with 2,000 soldiers (and, as discussed below, it is unclear if this was even a true “split”). Indeed, the rules and procedures of the Cao Đài army—or, the Forces Armée Cao Daistes (FACD)—managed those internal divisions and actively re-organized in response to them. After 1954, however, these factions would take on greater importance as the CIA and Ngô Đình Diệm’s regime inhibited the central leadership’s ability to provide resources by cutting off aid flows to the Cao Đài leadership.

4.5.2 Organization Building

4.5.2.1 Leveraging the Strong Cao Đài Primary Groups

As opposed to the nationalist groups and Việt Minh, the Cao Đài did not have to start from scratch in producing strong primary groups. Their adherents shared similar world views, economic statuses, cultural history, and moral perspectives. Those followers inherited their beliefs not just from their allegiance to the Cao Đài faith, but from the deeper religious trends that the Cao Đài drew upon. As a result, the Cao Đài had two main needs to ensure strong primary groups. First, they had to ensure that new militants were committed to the Cao Đài faith, and second, they needed to leverage those beliefs in order that the Cao Đài group norms would be directed toward the Cao Đài military organization.

Given the high number of Cao Đài adherents, it was crucial to ensure that individuals were

157. Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism*: Chapter 4.

actually part of the Cao Đài community. The organization achieved this task in a few manners. First, they used highly symbolic and physically challenging tests of faith. For example, the in some villages in the Plain of Reeds, Cao Đài leaders would impel true believers to swallow live toads in order to protect them against French bullets.¹⁵⁸ Less radical, all adherents were to be baptized and carry around an identity card listing personal information.¹⁵⁹ Adherents also had to attend services at their local Temple and carry out other rituals on a regular basis.

However, the main challenge was ensuring that Cao Đài adherents were responsive to the needs of the central organization. My theory emphasizes that to achieve this task, the organization would have to distribute resources to their followers directly, and for the most part, exclusively. Only by implementing such programs could they threaten to withhold those resources and thus compel compliance. To this end, the Cao Đài attempted to model themselves off of the Catholic hierarchy and, to a lesser extent, the Việt Minh. To this end, one of the major Cao Đài organizational programs was centralizing the provision of resources such as welfare, justice, and employment. In the 1930s and then 1940s, they saw a clear opening for such a strategy as the French land management system disadvantaged peasants and small landholders.

In particular, they implemented institutions from the village level up to the central executive branch administered by the Cao Đài leader (the Hộ Pháp) from the main temple (the Holy See) in Tây Ninh. At its peak, there were nearly eleven thousand offices. These offices implemented programming from a host of Cao Đài institutions governing welfare, justice, education, *et cetera*.¹⁶⁰ For example, these offices at the village level included charitable houses that provided food, housing, and other goods while also serving as recruitment centers. In addition, the Cao Đài infrastructure pro-

158. Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 123.

159. *Ibid.*: 95.

160. *Ibid.*: 159-160.

vided employment in villages and some vocational training. All of these services were distributed from Cao Đài temples in the village, meaning that these temples “became the focal point of the peasants’ lives.”¹⁶¹

Importantly, all Cao Đài members had to pay taxes that were returned to the central administration and then directly distributed.¹⁶² The leadership used these taxes to maintain a judicial system that openly protected small landholders and peasants, ensuring that they continued to benefit from the services provided by the organization. As a result, this system, combined with welfare support, meant that followers were actively protected from the “inequities of French courts, marauding nobles, and large landlords.”¹⁶³ Throughout the First Indochina War, the Cao Đài distributed propaganda emphasizing that the Cao Đài armed forces were critical to the personal safety of all adherents vis-a-vis both the French and the Việt Minh.¹⁶⁴ In addition, the central leadership demanded that all illicit activity be reported up the chain of command so proper disciplinary action could be taken—and French intelligence reports showed that this reporting was commonplace.¹⁶⁵

The Cao Đài leadership also used their alliance with the French to ensure a steady and substantial flow of resources to distribute to their followers. Each time they reached an agreement with the French, they demanded that all resources be given directly to the Cao Đài leadership to then distribute to deployed troops.¹⁶⁶ After the French imposed a blockade on many areas in south Vietnam after 1947, these resources would become even more important as Cao Đài soldiers and followers became dependent on the leadership for access to food, weapons, and other staples.¹⁶⁷ Moreover,

161. Jayne Susan Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism: Peasant and Priest in the Cao Dai in Viet Nam*, Monograph Series 23 (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1981): 33.

162. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*: 194-95; Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 182.

163. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*: 196.

164. Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism*: 45.

165. Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 182.

166. Jayne Susan Werner, “The Cao Dai: The Politics of a Vietnamese Syncretic Religious Movement” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1976): 321-323.

167. *Ibid.*: 305-307.

French intelligence believed that the Cao Đài were smuggling significant resources from Saigon to their deployed forces.¹⁶⁸ In short, the Cao Đài administration became the focal point for their military and community members:

As the Cao Dai Army grew and Cao Dai membership expanded, the sect indeed came to constitute a community largely independent of other social forces. Symbols of Cao Dai power, the Cao Dai military units and colorful Cao Dai temples could be seen all over Cochinchina. Peasants who joined the Cao Dai Army received education and training benefits. Children in Cao Dai villages were given Cao Dai schooling (taught by the School of Religion and Virtue), the wounded were treated in Cao Dai hospitals, the able-bodied could find work in Cao Dai enterprises—forest-cutting, brick-making, rice-milling, and farming church fields. The Social Services, back in operation, provided free food to the destitute. Cao Dai political organizations issued propaganda information about the war, and sermons by the Superior and dignitaries kept Cao Dai believers informed about political events. The Cao Dai hierarchy was well organized and disciplined—committees set up at the Holy See had their local branches in the provinces, since the Tay Ninh hierarchies were duplicated at the local level.¹⁶⁹

They actively reminded their followers of this role and threatened to withhold resources or protection for units or areas acting in non-compliance.¹⁷⁰

For the most part, this position would only be challenged in 1955 when Ngô Đình Diệm sought to wrestle support from the Cao Đài to create a unified Vietnamese Army. After the Geneva Accords in 1954, the French were directed to stop supporting the Vietnamese sects by January 1955.¹⁷¹ This positioned Ngô to alter the government's relationship with the sects. With support from the United States, Ngô would be able to re-direct this resource flow from the centralized Cao Đài leadership, crippling its ability to control the military.

168. Werner, "The Cao Dai": 322. For example, one such French intelligence report found that Cao Đài representatives in Saigon had sent forces in My Tho pharmaceuticals, many containers of fuel, a case of saltpeter (for use in making gunpowder), explosives, a case of fuses, gun making tools, radios, and typewriters, "Ravitaillement des Caodaistes de mytho et de Caibè en produits manufactués et pharmaceutiques" 6 jan 1952, Folder 1470: Tập Bản tin tức hàng ngày của TW Tỉnh báo Cuộc về tình hình an ninh, chính trị tháng 01.1952, National Archives II, HCMC.

169. Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism*: 47; See also, Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism*: 55.

170. Werner, "The Cao Dai": 344-348.

171. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance*: 88.

Diệm and Edward Lansdale, the head of the United States' Saigon Military Mission, focused on plying away the chief of staff of the FACD, General Nguyễn Thành Phương, and General Trình Minh Thế, the head of the only other major Cao Đài military force. Phương was given \$3 million USD to integrate his 20,000 troops into the national army. As was observed at the time, "it seems now that the principal effect of the army transfer is that the Government will have to pay the soldiers."¹⁷² Lansdale took a particular interest in Trình and met with him at his mountain headquarters multiple times.¹⁷³ Trình not only received monetary support for his troops, but also weapons and other supplies.¹⁷⁴ The tax base and monetary holdings of the Cao Đài leadership in Tây Ninh could not compare to this influx of resources.

4.5.2.2 Building a Cadre System

While beginning to leverage strong primary groups through the provision of resources, the theory argues that insurgents will only be able to exercise control of the non-visible behavior of deployed units when they put in place a trusted lower-level officer core. Like the Việt Minh—but unlike the other sect militaries—the Cao Đài focused on developing such a cadre both ensuring the commitment of the cadre and positioning them to gain the trust of their soldiers. Nearly from the start of their military organization around 1942, the Cao Đài focused on developing lower level officers. This system relied on their religious organization by transferring the religious hierarchy into the Cao Đài military. In the religious and social service hierarchy, individual leaders at the local level were carefully selected based on their religious devotion and service. For example, village leaders and

172. Robert Alden, "Sect Head Bars Vietnam Fealty: Cao Dai Pope Says He Stays in Opposition Front Though Troops Transfer to Army," *The New York Times*, April 2, 1955, 2.

173. Trình is perhaps best known as a key player in Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*. Though it is unclear if he actually received US support in 1951, he was central in 1954 as Lansdale referred to him as the leader of a potential "Third Force." Of Trình, Lansdale wrote in a classified memo, "Up close, I discovered The to be kin in spirit and political ideals to our forefathers who once stood against the Redcoats on Lexington green and Concord bridge, finding their own unconventional doctrine of how to fight for what they believed in." Quoted in, Werner, "The Cao Dai": 423.

174. Serguei A. Blagov, *Honest Mistakes: The Life and Death of Trinh Minh the (1922-1955) South Vietnam's Alternative Leader* (Huntington, N.Y: Nova Science Publishers, 2001): Chapter 4-5.

assistants were required to have received a “good testimony, adequate time to demonstrate faithfulness as an adept, and an adequate degree of vegetarianism.” Similarly, members of the social affairs branch had to be approved by the centralized authorities. For all positions, those promoted had to have the support of their local communities and were often elected prior to going through the full vetting process.¹⁷⁵

The FACD military structure closely mirrored the Japanese system, with the base unit being the company (đại đội). However, company sized varied drastically and they were more often referred to loosely as detachments (chi đội). Most non-static operations were conducted at by the “mobile brigade,” which had around 60 soldiers.¹⁷⁶ Like the Việt Minh, they added religious cadre at operational levels as well as at higher levels such as the battalion (tiểu đoàn).¹⁷⁷ Due to the small unit sizes, FACD officers were able to closely observe their soldiers and exercise discipline.

Oftentimes, officers were peasants or other menial laborers, unlike many of the leaders in the broader movement who were dignitaries.¹⁷⁸ The officers were expected to directly distribute goods to their soldiers. Their position as local representatives of the Hộ Pháp meant that their orders carried his approval.¹⁷⁹ Thus, in this role, the deployed officers and political cadre became focal points for their mobile brigades or static defense detachments.

However, some officers would damage their position in this role as the Cao Đài expanded and faced little opposition in the 1951-1952 period. In particular officers took advantage of their position by withholding resources from their soldiers. In response, the Cao Đài administration actively replaced officers and addressed disagreements. Perhaps the most famous example was the removal

175. Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism*: 118-121.

176. Special Operations Research Office, *Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam: The Cao Dai*: 10; A. M. Savani, *Visage Et Images Du Sud Viet-Nam* (Saigon: Imprimerie Francaise D'Outre-Mer, 1955): 80.

177. Werner, “The Cao Dai”: 315.

178. *Ibid.*: 316.

179. Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 120-21.

of, General Nguyễn Văn Thành, the chief of the FACD, who was notoriously corrupt. This removal was matched by a major re-organization of Cao Đài discipline to reduce corruption, a centerpiece of which was the launching a cadre training school in 1952.¹⁸⁰ But, such interventions were not limited to higher ranks.¹⁸¹ A French intelligence bulletin described a disagreement between an FACD captain and 2nd Lieutenant in the city of Rạch Giá (over 300km from Tây Ninh) after the 2nd Lieutenant accused the captain of corruption. The disagreement escalated up the chain of command and Tây Ninh sent an investigator who agreed with the 2nd Lieutenant. As a result, the army leadership removed the captain and replaced him with the 2nd Lieutenant.¹⁸²

Importantly, the major reforms in 1952 and 1953 indicated that the Cao Đài organization actively responded to their environment. Instead of falling victim to growing corruption and disorganization—as afflicted the Hòa Hảo—the leadership re-ordered their military organization to re-assert the legitimacy of the deployed officers and to ensure that these officers continued to distribute resources in a manner that captured the normative power of the Cao Đài primary groups.

4.5.2.3 Training, Logistics, and Communication

The majority of the Cao Đài forces received some training either from the French or from FACD cadre. FACD cadre had received their training from the Japanese during WWII. In particular, near the end of the WWII, the Japanese were providing guidance in small arms use, mobile attacks, and static defenses. After the Japanese coup, and then the Việt Minh victory, the Cao Đài picked up this training quickly—and were assisted by Japanese officers who stayed behind.¹⁸³ Cadre were trained at a Cao Đài officer training school in Tây Ninh. This course lasted eight months and was lead by

180. *Ibid.*: 205-209.

181. Werner, “The Cao Dai”: 358-59.

182. “B.Q. (bulletin quotidien) Dirsurna n4 du 7-1-52. Etat du Viet-Nam direction generale des services de police et surete nationales, service central de renseignements. n. 42/scr” 28 Dec 1951, 1470: Tập Bản tin tức hàng ngày của TW Tỉnh báo Cuộc về tình hình an ninh, chính trị tháng 01.1952, National Archives II, HCMC.

183. My-Van, “Japan and Vietnam’s Caodaists”; Goscha, “Building Force.”

cadre who had gone to the French officer training school in Dalat.¹⁸⁴ The Cao Đài had some elite units to which only the most qualified and proven officers would be recruited. These units, the Shock Troops (Hắc Y) would carry out assassination missions and other covert activities. Upon selection, these individuals were sent to Tây Ninh for specific training.¹⁸⁵

New recruits were also sent to Tây Ninh to receive intensive training in preparation for fights against either the French or the Việt Minh.¹⁸⁶ This process would pick up in 1946 and 1947 as Cao Đài military leaders sought to prepare their units to carry out both offensive and defensive operations. They put in place training systems to deal with the massive increase in troop detachments after 1946. This training approach was paired with the creation of distinct units to carry out mobile vs. static tasks. Some units were trained for movement-based and “shock” activities while others were trained for defensive operations holding outposts or guard towers on main roads.¹⁸⁷ The French mainly focused on training the FACD forces to defend static positions.

In addition, using materials from the Japanese and French, the Cao Đài put in place a wide communications and logistics systems. They had a large radio transmitter at Tây Ninh and kept in close contact with deployed political and military representatives.¹⁸⁸ They also had vast transportation networks to move around military supplies as well as commercial goods such as timber and rice. They were able to supplement this network with French vehicles, including transport trucks.¹⁸⁹

184. Werner, “The Cao Dai”: 321.

185. *ibid.*; “Bulletin Quotidien Special, N. 69 du 30 Aout 1950. Sous-Direction Régionale de la Police & de la Sureté Nationales au Sud-Viêtname. 1ère Section. A/Nh/10” 8 Aug 1950, Folder 1319: Tập tài liệu của Nha Tổng Giám đốc Cảnh sát và Công an Quốc gia về tình hình an ninh, chính trị năm 1950, National Archives II, HCMC.

186. Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 37-38; My-Van, “Japan and Vietnam’s Caodaists”: 187.

187. Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 181-185.

188. Werner, “The Cao Dai”: 322.

189. Military Convention to the Franco-Cao Đài Accord of 8 January 1947, included in, *ibid.*: 638.

4.5.3 Military Effectiveness: How Did they Fight?

Given that the Cao Đài had resource control over strong primary groups and complemented that foundation with a strong cadre who were trained and able to train their soldiers, the theory predicts that the Cao Đài would be able to carry out guerrilla operations. Not only would they be able to maintain ceasefires, but they would be able to use their troops in offensive ways to expand territory and to attack stronger foes without being destroyed. However, in the times when resource control faltered (1951-1952 and 1955), the theory predicts that the organization would be unable to control how their soldiers used force—as the observable implications highlight, resource control is foundational, so higher levels of effectiveness should not be observed without it. Thus, while they had a high level of skill, individual units would not use that skill to fulfill the orders of the central leadership.

4.5.3.1 The Ups and Downs (Mostly Ups) of 1947-1953

As alluded to in the Việt Minh analysis above, the Cao Đài were a force to be reckoned with in southern Vietnam. Before allying with the French, they participated in the Japanese coup and then briefly fought the French Expeditionary Forces in league with the Việt Minh. During that period, they actively resisted Việt Minh attempts to integrate the Cao Đài detachments into the Việt Minh forces.

Upon joining the French, the Cao Đài were allowed 12 mobile brigades and 16 defensive posts in Tây Ninh. While the agreement only allowed for 2,000 troops, it is estimated that the Cao Đài quickly had upwards of 10,000 troops.¹⁹⁰ These troops were put the test as the Việt Minh responded to the Cao Đài agreement with the French in full force. The Việt Minh attempted to take control of FACD posts in Tây Ninh and Tân An provinces. The FACD repelled the attack and counter-attacked,

190. Ibid.: 306.

inflicting heavy losses.¹⁹¹ During operations in 1947 and 1948, the FACD reported 400 killed and 500 injured. Though there is no official number, French intelligence believed the FACD had inflicted heavy losses on the Việt Minh. For example, the Cao Đài reportedly lost 163 of their own weapons and returned 340 Việt Minh weapons to the French. Given the scarcity of weapons in the south, this was a marker of successful operations (particularly since they probably kept many of the weapons rather than returning them to the French forces).¹⁹² These operations were matched by similarly effective engagements with Hòa Hảo forces in June of 1947 in which FACD suffered 10 dead versus 40 for the Hòa Hảo.¹⁹³

As a result, the Cao Đài marginalized the Việt Minh in Tây Ninh and the Cao Đài had a major presence in the provinces of Gia Định and Tân An and the cities of Mỹ Tho, Long Xuyên, Vĩnh Long, and Sa Đéc.¹⁹⁴ Drawing on these new population centers and their ability to provide services to these areas, the FACD was able to recruit many new soldiers and send them to Tây Ninh for training.¹⁹⁵ Emphasizing the strength of Cao Đài defensive positions, Werner argues that “the Cao Đài not only contributed to French pacification and kept large areas out of the Việt Minh hands (which otherwise would have supported the Việt Minh as was shown in the 1956-58 when Ngô Đình Diệm eliminated the Cao Đài zones) but they also helped the French maintain their holding action by being one of the strongest sponsors of Bảo Đại and a Saigon regime.”¹⁹⁶

Despite this support for the French, the Cao Đài operated independently. Moreover, they used their military capabilities—in particular the ability to control when violence was used and who it

191. Guillemot, “Autopsy of a Massacre: On a Political Purge in the Early Days of the Indochina War (Nam Bo 1947)”: 233-34; Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 179-180.

192. Werner, “The Cao Dai”: 309-310; Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 181-182.

193. Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 181.

194. Werner, “The Cao Dai”: 341.

195. *Ibid.*: 345-48.

196. *Ibid.*: 353.

was employed against—to shape that relationship with the French. Unlike the other sects, they used the threat of force, and the threat to withhold force, to better their situation. This included the use of occasional violence against the French, or particular French targets, to show the potential of FACD power.¹⁹⁷ The most notorious example of such control came in 1949.

The leader of the Cao Đài called on France to allow the sect to make Tây Ninh a neutral sector entirely under Cao Đài control. The French refused. In response, the Hộ Pháp unilaterally declared a neutral zone while the head of the FACD, General Thánh issued orders for the FACD forces to stand down.¹⁹⁸ Compliance was nearly complete and stuck despite intrusive Việt Minh operations. Indeed, the Việt Minh forces did not accept a truce and started actively targeting FACD outposts. This response made the ceasefire quite costly for local FACD forces. Nonetheless, they maintained the truce.

However, after a month of such attacks, General Thánh issued secret orders calling on the FACD to only use defensive force to hold posts and protect population centers. These orders included patrolling all areas under FACD control, moving mobile brigades to areas where the Việt Minh were threatening, and moving to help French units under attack.¹⁹⁹ After one more month, Thánh ordered a complete return to offensive operations to remove Việt Minh forces from Cao Đài strongholds. Not long after this order was issued, for example, four mobile brigades in Trang-Bang actively sought out and dislodged a Việt Minh detachment, killing 10 and capturing six guns and one mortar shell.²⁰⁰

It is a matter of dispute whether this return to offensive operations was linked with French concessions. It seems that the French may have armed additional Cao Đài forces and accepted a set

197. Ibid.: 350.

198. Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 188-89.

199. Ibid.: 190-91.

200. Ibid.: 192-93.

of Cao Đài dignitaries into the central government.²⁰¹ In either case, the Cao Đài showed their ability to carefully calibrate violence. As one report observes, “This system of alternating support and opposition as a means of extracting favors was indicative of the opportunism characteristic of French-Cao Dai relations.”²⁰² Indeed, by the early 1950s, the FACD had grown to 25-30,000 troops.

Regression in 1951-1952. With these victories against the Việt Minh and the Việt Minh’s conventional failure in the south 1950, the FACD slowly lost some of its internal discipline. Due to the poor material conditions of the troops—often caused by officers corruptly collecting money—morale and motivation was at an all time low. Savani observed at the time that the FACD “troops, long-stationed in territorial posts, led a very static existence and lost their initial aggressive spirit. In short, the potential of the FACD was mostly lost.”²⁰³ As a result, during this period, FACD forces rarely sought out conflict with the Việt Minh and there were many reports of deployed units making deals with Việt Minh forces.²⁰⁴

However, with the reforms put in place in 1952 and 1953, the main Cao Đài forces, now more directly under the control of the Hộ Pháp, displayed greater military effectiveness. They began taking the lead, or active roles, in French attacks on Việt Minh positions.²⁰⁵ These changes lead Savani to change his tone, observing that “the Cao Đài troops once again began demonstrating very satisfactory behavior.”²⁰⁶

There was one exception to the poor performance of 1952 and 1953. It came with Trình Minh Thế’s forces, the Liên Minh army. Trình Minh Thế had served as a FACD general before splitting off in June of 1951. While the details of the split are unclear, Trình claimed it was his hatred of

201. Bernard B. Fall, “The Political-Religious Sects of Viet-Nam,” *Pacific Affairs* 28, no. 3 (1955): 241.

202. Special Operations Research Office, *Selected Groups in the Republic of Vietnam: The Cao Dai*: 11.

203. Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 206.

204. Werner, “The Cao Dai”: 402-405.

205. *Ibid.*: 333.

206. Savani, *Visage Et Images Du Sud Viet-Nam*: 83.

the French. Nonetheless, it appears that the split was at least in part manufactured by the head of the Cao Đài, the Hộ Pháp, to create a more radical force. Indeed, there are many reports claiming that Tây Ninh supported Trình for much of 1952 and even some of 1953.²⁰⁷ Trình brought along around 2,000 troops—a fairly small contingent given the overall size of the FACD—many from the Shock Troops he had carefully trained. These forces were disciplined and dependent on Trình for resources as they had set up their headquarters in the isolated Bu Lu Forest. During 1951 and early 1952, they expanded their zone of influence throughout many hard to reach areas.²⁰⁸ In addition, they launched a number of terrorist attacks in Saigon which not only showed their ability to conduct covert operations far from their home base, but also their ability to use modern explosives.

However, these attacks resulted in a strong French response. Though the French were unable to fight the Liên Minh directly, they destroyed most of their munitions and food stuffs as a part of “Operation Brigade.” At the same time, the French put significant pressure on the Tây Ninh leadership to cut off their support to Trình. As a result, Liên Minh lost resource control and many troops defected quickly.²⁰⁹ It would only take on importance again in 1954 when the CIA actively began supporting Trình.

4.5.3.2 Buying Off the General Staff: 1954-55

With the Việt Minh victory at Điện Biên Phủ and the pursuant Geneva Accords, the FACD position was changing in late 1954 and 1955. As described above, the most important element of these changes was the cessation of French assistance. Instead, Landsdale and Ngô sought to integrate the Cao Đài forces into the Vietnamese National Army—though Ngô always intended to entirely dismantle the military power of the Sects. While the military was initially opposed to this integration,

207. Werner, “The Cao Dai”: 410; Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 197-200.

208. Blagov, *Honest Mistakes*: 31.

209. Savani, *Notes sur le Caodaisme*: 201-202.

they gave up their opposition as they were under pressure to keep the military force viable: “as military chieftains, they faced the termination of French funding of the Cao Đài army in January 1955...After January 1955, the problem of financing their troops would become acute.”²¹⁰ At the time of his defection, the FACD chief of staff, General Nguyễn Thành Phương, cited that his main reason was the inability of the Cao Đài organization to pay for and supply the military.²¹¹

Consequently, the political and religious leader of the Cao Đài, the Hộ Pháp, lost the ability to support the military as the Cao Đài orthodoxy could no longer provide the military with the resources it needed to operate. Thus, his orders for the military to fight Ngô were not-obeyed as the military forces defected to the government army. Suddenly, the Cao Đài army looked to be Combat Ineffective: its deployed officers were unwilling to follow orders given by the Cao Đài leader.

However, while the organization appeared Combat Ineffective in relation to the Hộ Pháp, it was remained a viable military entity since it retained its military infrastructure despite switching sides. As a result, there were no mass defections from the FACD troops despite the remarkable change in conditions that occurred when General Nguyễn Thành Phương marched his troops into Saigon for an official handover ceremony. They conducted operations against both the Cao Đài and other sects—to which the FACD soldiers had recently been allied with. These operations included joining the Vietnamese National Army in fighting the Bình Xuyên and Hòa Hảo. Still, the most impressive test came when the FACD forces were ordered to attack Tây Ninh and disarm the Hộ Pháp’s personal protection force. Though this behavior alienated the FACD from the broader Cao Đài community, it was carried out successfully without any defections.²¹²

The same was true of Trình Minh Thế’s Liên Minh. While it had managed to gain access to

210. Werner, “The Cao Dai”: 443.

211. Blagov, *Honest Mistakes*: 128.

212. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance*: 126-27; Werner, “The Cao Dai”: 457.

some resources via Trình's wife after 1952, it was only in 1954 with U.S. support that it regained its previous organizational capacity. Though it had probably continued to receive some assistance from Tây Ninh, in early 1955 Trình made it clear to the Hộ Pháp that he was no longer in anyway affiliated with the FACD.²¹³ With the newfound support, the Liên Minh had at least 9 battalions of around 70 fighters each. These units had taken control of a good deal of territory in the south west. They showed some success in ambushing French and Việt Minh units before the Geneva Accords.²¹⁴ They would then play a central role in fighting intense urban warfare to remove the Bình Xuyên from Saigon during 1955.

Despite the success of Trình and Phương, their forces would ultimately be completely integrated in to the Vietnamese army. Once hostilities had ended, the strength of American pressure empowered Ngô to slowly dismantle the organizational infrastructure of their units. Thus, despite the success of the Cao Đài, their organization could not withstand this drastic shift. As Werner argues: "In the twilight of the war, the Cao Đài had built up, by the strength of its local organization, a large civilian and military apparatus, one which did not seem likely to disappear overnight. But there were many forces at work to undermine it."²¹⁵ However, because the Cao Đài had been able to transfer their soldiers *en masse* to the national army, they had avoided complete annihilation as met many of Ngô's other opponents.

This incident introduces an important lesson about civil-military relations in insurgent organizations, or nascent militaries. While the political leadership led the development and selection of armed forces and its officers, it perhaps sowed the seeds of its loss of control over these armed forces. By generating a military culture that sought to protect the armed forces, these military lead-

213. Blagov, *Honest Mistakes*: 98.

214. *Ibid.*: Chapter 4.

215. Werner, "The Cao Dai": 417.

ers became willing to leave the broader political organization to safeguard the military efficacy of the FACD.

4.6 The Hòa Hảo

Like the Cao Đài, the Hòa Hảo provides an easy test for explanations focusing on the role of community structure, access to resources and external support, as well as sanctuary since the Hòa Hảo had all of these things. In contrast, it provides a hard test for my theory for the exact same reasons. The following section walks through why the organization failed to take advantage of these structural endowments.

The Hòa Hảo, like the Cao Đài, built upon pre-existing community structures. Though officially formed in 1939, the religion drew upon many millenarian and Buddhist trends in Vietnam, giving it access to a wide range of followers and traditions. They too actively allied with the Japanese, using the WWII period as an opportunity to build and deepen their organization. As with the Cao Đài, they allied with the French, getting access to significant resources, weaponry, and training. However, they did not develop the infrastructure to distribute resources to their soldiers and followers so they could not leverage these ties, severely limiting their military capabilities. Even though there were many “well-trained” units, they rarely used force in line with the calls from the central leadership.

As Table 4.1 on the facing page demonstrates, the theory predicts that despite having strong community ties, access to resources, and military training, the the Hòa Hảo would be unable to transfer these elements into sustained and coordinated military behavior. Indeed, the organization would be riddled with fragmentation and desertions and fail to carry out an unified military activities across space. One exception came with the small contingent of forces under the command of Nguyễn Giác Ngộ, who implemented systems to vet and deploy his cadre while centralizing the

Table 4.1 Hòa Hảo: Coding and Predicted Military Effectiveness

	1946-1955	Nguyễn Giác Ngộ 1949-1955
Background Variables		
External Support	✓	✓
Sanctuary	✓	✓
Pre-Existing Primary Groups	✓	✓
Access to Resources	✓	✓
Factions	✓	✓
Organizational Variables		
Creating/Leveraging Primary Groups		
—Creation of Primary Groups	NA	NA
—Resource Control	✗	✓
Creating a Cadre System		
—Officer Selection Standards	✗	✓
—Manageable Small Units	✓	✓
Becoming an “Organizational Weapon”		
—Military Training for Cadre	✓	✓
—Basic Communications Systems	✓	✓
—Functionally Differentiated Small Units	✗	✓
Making the Jump		
—Large-unit Organization and Training	✗	✗
—Movement and Integrated Communications	✗	✗
—Heavy Weapons	✗	✗
Predicted Military Effectiveness	Combat Ineffective	Guerrilla Capacity
Prediction Correct?	Yes, excepting Ba Cụt forces (Limited Structural Integrity)	Yes

provision of resources to his soldiers and their dependents.

4.6.1 Background Variables

Huỳnh Phú Sổ, the founder of the Hòa Hảo religion, drew directly from the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương tradition. This Buddhist offshoot was founded in the mid-19th century by a mystic who claimed himself as a living Buddha—the “Buddha Master of Western Peace”—and was thought to be able to cure cholera. The adepts of this tradition formed their own communities, being drawn from across

southern Vietnam. In those villages “the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương religion substituted visions of a glorious and prosperous future for nonexistent family ties or the shared experience of a common past, and it provided a much-needed bond among the adepts. Religiously sanctioned discipline supplied norms of behavior that were recognized by all and along which communities could be organized.”²¹⁶ Thus, while the Hòa Hảo was only formed in 1939, it drew upon a rich tradition in Vietnam. As Tai observes, “Western observers, who failed to take this vitality into account, were started by the phenomenal growth of the Hòa Hảo sect under Huỳnh Phú Sổ...Huỳnh Phú Sổ, for one, made no secret of his debt to the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương religion and in fact took great pains to identify himself with the Buddha Master of Western Peace.”²¹⁷

By the beginning of 1939, Huỳnh Phú Sổ had already accumulated ten thousand followers by preaching a millenarian message and linking the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương message with modern trends. During the Japanese occupation, the membership expanded like an “ink-blot,” and took root in many villages, appealing to mostly peasants but also some landowners and administrators. As a part of this process, the Hòa Hảo absorbed many other smaller Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương communities. Through this process, it is estimated that the Hòa Hảo had upwards of one million followers by 1944.²¹⁸

The major themes of the faith were asceticism, a strong sense of social welfare, and a rejection of Western civilization. Thus, followers were to uphold the Three Bonds between ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife and to observe the Five virtues of benevolence, loyalty, propriety, intelligence, and integrity and “above all, they were to live in accord with one another.” These norms bound together Hòa Hảo communities. As Tai finds,

216. Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam*: 14.

217. *Ibid.*: 19.

218. *Ibid.*: 126-132.

Whatever the usefulness of such a code of ethics in a modern, industrial society, it was quite effective within the confines of the average Hòa Hảo village. Travelers regularly marveled at the piety and solidarity which were evidence in areas with large Hòa Hảo populations. Village solidarity allowed the peasants to pool their resources, exchange services, and undertake collective endeavors that brought benefit to all; piety induced the better-off to offer a measure of relief to the less fortunate...Among themselves, the adepts relied on trust and did not bother to put doors on their houses to guard thier belongings.²¹⁹

In short, though it was a relatively new religion, the Hòa Hảo faith encouraged very strong social groupings joined together by shared norms, trust, experiences, and economic conditions.

Given their sheer size, the Japanese were both keen on supporting the Hòa Hảo to attempt to gain their allegiance. First, the Japanese protected the Hòa Hảo from the French administration during WWII which sought to limit the influence of sectarian groups. This included giving Huỳnh Phú Sổ a sanctuary near the Japanese headquarters. The Japanese also protected the Hòa Hảo from French pressure, allowing them to proselytize throughout Vietnam. Both before and after the coup, the Japanese also provided the Hòa Hảo with training and weaponry.²²⁰ By 1946, this support allowed them to arm 2,000 soldiers and perhaps 10,000 self-defense forces.²²¹ This support lead Thien Do to conclude that “The Japanese were...instrumental in militarizing the Hoa Hao.”²²²

After a brief alliance with the Việt Minh, the Hòa Hảo turned to the French to continue to this level of support. Given the extensive following of the sect, the French came to beneficial terms with the Hòa Hảo leadership. This support included the provision of weapons, training, sanctuary, and political representation. Indeed, right after the agreement was reached in 1947, the French sent 250 rifles to Hòa Hảo positions. By the end of the year, they had armed at least another 500 Hòa Hảo

219. Ibid.: 154.

220. Tran My-Van, “Beneath the Japanese Umbrella: Vietnam’s Hoa Hao During and After the Pacific War,” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 84.

221. Ibid.: 99.

222. Thien Do, “The Quest for Enlightenment and Cultural Identity: Buddhism in Contemporary Vietnam,” in *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth Century Asia*, ed. Ian Harris (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001): 270.

soldiers.²²³ Throughout the entire First Indochina War, Hòa Hảo units would have little trouble gaining supplies and weapons from the French.

Beyond these supplies, the Hòa Hảo leaders had access to income from a diverse set of industries. Most importantly, the Hòa Hảo strongholds in the Mekong Delta were central areas of rice production in Vietnam making them an economic boon as they benefited from the majority of rice purchasing and milling by re-selling rice to large enterprises in Saigon.²²⁴ Hòa Hảo leaders also gained money from gambling establishments in the Mekong Delta.²²⁵ For the most part, the French stayed out of Hòa Hảo affairs, giving them a de-facto sanctuary in southwestern Vietnam—mainly in what is now An Giang province.

Like the Cao Đài, the Hòa Hảo also had a number of factional leaders. These included military, political, and spiritual leaders who either started with or joined the movement during WWII. There were at least five such factional leaders.²²⁶ Unlike in other organizations, however, the Hòa Hảo would not be able to control and limit the behavior of these factions.

4.6.2 Organization Building

4.6.2.1 A Failure to Generate Resource Control or Develop a Cadre

From the outset, the Hòa Hảo sought to build strong local institutions. The core of this structure was a village council that look after social welfare and conducted religious rituals. Oftentimes, these village councils would also adjudicate land disputes and at times collect some taxes.²²⁷ These local institutions aided in sustaining the strong ties joining Hòa Hảo adherents described above.

However, the Hòa Hảo did not implement systems to transfer those resources to the central

223. A. M. Savani, *Notes sur la secte PGHH* (1954): 43-44.

224. Werner, “The Cao Dai”: 325; Fall, “The Political-Religious Sects of Viet-Nam”: 249.

225. Fall, “The Political-Religious Sects of Viet-Nam”: 249.

226. Savani, *Visage Et Images Du Sud Viet-Nam*: 91-96.

227. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*: 202-212.

leadership, or similar systems to transfer goods from the central level to deployed units. As Woodside finds, “Like their communist rivals, the Buddhist revivalists were not especially interested in searching for legally guaranteed forms of socially dispersed power, or for legal systems which defined the rights and duties of groups and individuals. Unlike their communist rivals, however, they shunned questions of economics, and of the distribution of economic resources.”²²⁸ With the lack of a centralized system, local leaders sought to collect funds to enrich themselves. As Fall notes of the two largest factions within the Hòa Hảo: “The hapless farmers under the rule of the maniacal Ba Cụt fared worst, for the latter is given to fits of incredible cruelty and has no sense of public duty. Next were the fiefs of Soai where farmers were practically ‘taxed’ into starvation in order to satisfy Soai’s and his wife’s greediness.”²²⁹

Moreover, the Hòa Hảo did not have systems in place to select and train lower-level cadre, meaning that they could not circumvent this lack of resource control. They had no systems for selection and promotion of loyal members. This deficiency meant that many of the core military officers often were explicitly not spiritual leaders in the movement—the exception being Nguyễn Giác Ngộ.²³⁰ As Hill observes, “the lack of a formal structure and strict doctrine plus So’s desire to save as many souls as possible meant that admission procedures were very simple. Conversion was to be demonstrated by one’s actions in society.” These actions were not judged in relation to their support of the religion or organization: “The religion stressed the accumulation of merit for future life, but its definition of merit was revolutionary: merit was acquired by performing good deeds, not by supporting the monastic order.”²³¹ Indeed, the absence of clear procedures for selecting and promoting officers and administrators meant that those without qualification or commitment to the organization could rise

228. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*: 197.

229. Fall, “The Political-Religious Sects of Viet-Nam”: 249.

230. *Ibid.*: 247-48.

231. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*: 203.

quickly. As Hill continues, perhaps the most important factor explaining the “fragmentation was the ability of the entrepreneurial warlords to establish themselves in Hòa Hảo areas by usurping the positions of the laymen responsible for the local activities of the sect.”²³²

There was one major exception. Nguyễn Giác Ngộ choose to leave the military leadership in 1947, seeking instead to pursue religious matters. However, in 1949, he felt compelled to return to arms based on the behavior of Hòa Hảo forces and established the Nguyễn Trung Trực (NTT) forces. Savani observed at the time that Nguyễn, “contrary to the other [Hòa Hảo] leaders,” had adopted a giving attitude toward those in his areas and engaged in commercial activities that benefited his followers rather than enriching himself.²³³ Similarly, he explicitly used funding from the French to pay and equip his forces—this would be crucial to those forces as, unlike other Hòa Hảo elements, they consistently engaged with the Việt Minh.

Illustratively, one of his major requests to the French was that they supply his forces with uniforms so as to help with morale.²³⁴ Similarly, Nguyễn actively sought out medical supplies from the French to help wounded soldiers and keep them fighting.²³⁵ Nguyễn basically built his forces from scratch, starting with a self-defense units, thus allowing him to select and train his troops and organize them into functionally differentiated units including infantry and ordinance teams. This lead French officers to observe that his officers and soldiers seemed particularly committed.²³⁶

232. Frances R. Hill, “Millenarian Machines in South Vietnam,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 3 (1971): 332, 399.

233. Savani, *Notes sur la secte PGHH*: 100.

234. Forces Armees Nguyen Trung Truc, n. 480-Cht. Nguyen Giac Ngo - Commandant des Forces-Armees Nguyen Trung Truc a son excellence le president du gouvernement du vietnam, 19 juin 1952, Folder 1460: Hồ sơ về hoạt động và sát nhập vào Quân đội quốc gia của Quân đội Nguyễn Trung Trực năm 1952, Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng Quốc Gia Việt Nam, National Archives II, HCMC.

235. Situation D'effectif, Force “Nguyen Trung-Truc,” 1.10.1951, Folder Q0 - 74 Forces Nguyen Trung Truc, Phòng Phủ Thủ Hiến Nam Việt, National Archives II, HCMC.

236. Compete - Rendu à la Monsieur le Gouverneur. Object: Tournée des 17 et 18 Avril à Long Xuyên relative au ralliement de Nguyen Giac, 1686/6 (signed by Le Đốc-phủ-Sứ Thái-Lập-Thành, représentat du Gouvernuer du Sud viet Nam) Region Dinh-Hoà, 26-5-1950, Folder 1382: Hồ sơ v/v qui thuận của ông Nguyễn Giác Ngộ và Quân đội Nguyễn Trung Trực năm 1950-1951, Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng Quốc Gia Việt Nam, National Archives II, HCMC.

4.6.2.2 Military Training

Despite this lack of internal structure, the Hòa Hảo had access to significant training in addition to the material resources provided by the French. Not only were their soldiers sent to French training schools, but French trainers were often integrated into units.²³⁷ For example, one of the Hòa Hảo factions was documented as having 60 officers trained at various training schools in southern Vietnam and had a set of military instructors who had been certified by those school.²³⁸ This level of training was common across all of the Hòa Hảo forces. Indeed, embedded French officers commented at the military aptitude of individual Hòa Hảo units: “The Hòa Hảo soldiers is an excellent soldier who knows how to work in dispersed formations and marches at the enemy with courage and tenacity.”²³⁹

4.6.3 Military Effectiveness: How Did they Fight?

With the exception of the Nguyễn Giác Ngộ’s forces, the theory predicts that despite their strong community foundations, access to resources and weapons, training, as well as *de facto* sanctuary, the Hòa Hảo forces would not be able to be able to keep ceasefires or prevent defections, let alone carry out more complicated military behaviors. These predictions are, with the exception of Ba Cụt, met. The Hòa Hảo kept their territory as the French did not seek to take it over, but made no additional gains and would consistently lose area and forces to Việt Minh attacks. Further, internal divisions were at the forefront and soldiers placed little faith in their leaders.

237. Fall, “The Political-Religious Sects of Viet-Nam”: 241.

238. Forces Armees Nguyen Trung Truc, n. 480-Cht. Nguyen Giac Ngo - Commandant des Forces-Armees Nguyen Trung Truc a son excellence le president du gouvernement du vietnam, 19 juin 1952, Folder 1460: Hồ sơ về hoạt động và sát nhập vào Quân đội quốc gia của Quân đội Nguyễn Trung Trực năm 1952, Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng Quốc Gia Việt Nam, National Archives II, HCMC.

239. Savani, *Notes sur la secte PGHH*: 90.

4.6.3.1 1946-1954

After the Japanese departure, the Hòa Hảo faced the same question as the Cao Đài: whether to ally with the French or the Việt Minh. Until 1947, they would vacillate, both seeking peace with and fighting the Việt Minh. During this period, the Hòa Hảo forces had around 2,000 fighters organized into four regiments—they would grow to have over 30,000 troops.²⁴⁰

While these forces were never challenged in majority Hòa Hảo areas, they were often pushed back when trying to move out of their population centers. For example, these forces were defeated in battles to attempt to take the city of Cần Thơ in 1945, the largest city in the Mekong Delta. They would suffer further losses during the beginning of 1947 as they were pushed out of Việt Minh territory.²⁴¹

More importantly, during this period, deployed forces acted in direct opposition to orders from Huỳnh Phú Sổ to not use violence in response to Việt Minh executions of Hòa Hảo leaders. In response, it was common to “see the bodies of Communist cadres floating down the rivers and canals of the delta, tied together like flotillas of boats.”²⁴² Savani similarly describes Hòa Hảo troops activity as pirate-like and terrorist.²⁴³ As Tai concludes, while Hòa Hảo communities were internally controlled,

When they went on the rampage in non-Hòa Hảo areas, they showed scant respect for the property of others and looted or burned everything that came across their paths. Huỳnh Phú Sổ did not openly condone these acts and was often impelled to remind his followers of the Buddhist ideal of universal love. But without a clear sense of purpose and a program of action, he could only curb their wilder excesses; he was powerless to channel their energies into more constructive endeavors.²⁴⁴

240. Colonel Frisco W. Short, *The Influence of Small Religious / Political / Military Groups on National Politics: A Case Study the Phat Giao Hoa Hao Republic of Viet Nam*, unpublished manuscript (1974).

241. Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam*: Chapter 8; Savani, *Notes sur la secte PGHH*: 24-29.

242. Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam*: 139.

243. Savani, *Notes sur la secte PGHH*: 29; See also Guillemot, “Autopsy of a Massacre: On a Political Purge in the Early Days of the Indochina War (Nam Bo 1947)”: 251-255.

244. Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam*: 154.

This led many Hòa Hảo political and spiritual representatives to loudly decry the leader of the military forces, Trần Văn Soái.²⁴⁵

In response to this situation Huỳnh Phú Sổ sought to rein in the deployed Hòa Hảo units. In particular, he relieved many commanders, including demoting Trần who was reassigned to a mobile unit deployed in a Cao Đài area. However, despite a brief respite in indiscriminate violence, such attacks picked up again.²⁴⁶ Moreover, Trần's forces weakened the Hòa Hảo position by targeting Cao Đài forces against the orders of Huỳnh Phú Sổ.²⁴⁷ At the end of 1946, Việt Minh internal documents discussing a potential alliance with the Hòa Hảo specifically pointed to the lack of control within the Hòa Hảo and its high degree of fragmentation as reasons to avoid such an agreement.²⁴⁸

This situation further degenerated when the Việt Minh captured and then executed Huỳnh Phú Sổ in April 1947. Not long after Huỳnh's death, Trần rallied to the French side to gain a steady stream of materials. However, this move only resulted in the complete fragmentation of the Hòa Hảo military forces. As Tai finds, most "serious was the power vacuum created by the death of Huỳnh Phú Sổ. As with the apostles of earlier times, the relationship between various Hòa Hảo leaders was ill defined. This lack of definition was compounded by the proliferation of sectarian bodies such as the various political and administrative committees...and the Hòa Hảo regiments."²⁴⁹ Unlike the Cao Đài and Việt Minh, who had continued to operate when their key leaders were either arrested or killed, the Hòa Hảo did not have the institutional infrastructure to select new officers or keep existing troops within the resource net of the central organization. As a result, "for the French, the Hòa Hảo sect proved as fractious an ally as it had been for the Communists."²⁵⁰

245. Savani, *Notes sur la secte PGHH*: 30.

246. *Ibid.*: 35-36.

247. Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam*: 143.

248. Savani, *Notes sur la secte PGHH*: 33.

249. Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam*: 161.

250. *Ibid.*

After 1947. When Trần moved over to the French side in 1947, the Hòa Hảo forces broke into four fragments, which were in turn loosely organized. As a result, the Hòa Hảo military lost any ability to fight coherently across their areas of operation. The breakdown of forces is reported in Table 4.2 that includes the range of estimates collected by intelligence sources.²⁵¹

Table 4.2 Hòa Hảo Factions

Faction	Troop Numbers
Trần Văn Soái	7,000 - 10,000
Lâm Thành Nguyên	2,600 - 5,000
Nguyễn Giác Ngộ	1,500 - 2,000
Lê Quang Vinh (Ba Cụt)	1,000 - 13,000

Nearly from the outset, desertions became quite common. When Trần joined the government, many of his forces left to either join Lâm or Lê. Indeed, the different factions started putting in place campaigns to encourage defections.²⁵² As a result, nearly intact units sometimes defected. Many of these units began attacking both Trần's forces as well as the French troops. For example, in March 1948 it appears that five distinct units deserted with their weapons.²⁵³ Many of these groups were summarily disarmed and defeated by French troops in the middle of 1948.²⁵⁴ Throughout the First Indochina War, Trần continuously tried to reign in all the Hòa Hảo forces but was unable to create such a unified fighting force.²⁵⁵ Moreover, major desertions would continue as units went to the government, resistance, and other Hòa Hảo fighting elements.²⁵⁶ Even when troops did not desert, Savani observed that their poor treatment by their officers—who often sought personal enrichment—lead many Hòa Hảo forces to attempt to intercept or hide French assistance for their

251. Savani, *Visage Et Images Du Sud Viet-Nam*: 96; Short, *The Influence of Small Religious / Political / Military Groups on National Politics: A Case Study the Phat Giao Hoa Hao Republic of Viet Nam*: Chapter 3.

252. Savani, *Notes sur la secte PGHH*: 79.

253. *Ibid.*: 51-52.

254. *Ibid.*: 53.

255. *Ibid.*: 65.

256. *Ibid.*: 76.

own use.²⁵⁷

Lâm's forces did not fare much better. His forces were losing ground to the Việt Minh, the French, and even other Hòa Hảo factions. While Lâm and his commanders profited, they did not distribute these resources, leading to defections and demands for rents from many in his ranks. As Savani writes, Lâm "did not have control of his troops. Harassed by rebels [the Việt Minh], attacked by the French, pestered by his subordinates (to content them, he was obliged to create 20 units)...In addition, the many acts of piracy committed by his fighters provoked the discontent of the population."²⁵⁸ Lâm would switch back and forth between dissidence and allying with Trần's forces, often losing troops in the progress.²⁵⁹

Ba Cụt was perhaps the worst of the bunch, deemed the "terrible child" by both French and Hòa Hảo. He ruled with an iron fist, sought personal profits, and allowed his personal relationships to dictate the shape and direction of his forces. While his harsh tactics sometimes elicited compliance, on the whole his troops acted beyond his control. For example, he faced major defections when he went to great lengths to divorce his old wife and marry a new bride. Officers commented on his use of resources to pursue this personal goal. As a result, he spent much of his time trying to reign in his soldiers who seemed persistently "turbulent" and "inclined to piracy at the expense of defending the population."²⁶⁰ As a result, while he maintained control of a small fiefdom, he did not expand, and lost territory to other Hòa Hảo forces, in particular those of Nguyễn Giác Ngộ.

Despite this overall lack of military effectiveness across all of the factions, there were many accounts of how individual Hòa Hảo units could fight quite well—and with commitment and ferocity

257. Ibid.: 91.

258. Ibid.: 57.

259. Ibid.: 63-65.

260. Ibid.: 97.

as they were well-supplied and had good training.²⁶¹ However, while these deployed units could fight well, they rarely directed their fighting power toward the goals or orders of the central leaders. As a result, these units could not be used consistently by the central leadership or as a part of coordinated campaigns. As Savani notes, Hòa Hảo units only showed interest in missions or holding territory when there were “tangible economic interests” even when such missions served an important tactical or strategic purpose.²⁶² Similarly, a French Colonel embedded with Hòa Hảo units observed that at the local level, Hòa Hảo units appeared to have great “cohesion.” However, that unity dissipated above the company level. The colonel found that although deployed units would gain some material goods from the center “it appeared that the allegiance gave them a lot of freedom. It seemed to me that the Hòa Hảo sect, as I experienced it, was a sort of confederation of ‘companies’ in several ‘big companies’; those of Trần Văn Soái, Lâm Thành Nguyên, Nguyễn Giác Ngô, [and] Lê Quang Vinh.”²⁶³ As a result, units were often locally-focused and “were reluctant to fight outside their areas of control.”²⁶⁴

This reality was evidenced by the Hòa Hảo performance during the Sect crisis of 1954-1955. While the Cao Đài forces were able to move *en masse* to the government, the Hòa Hảo factions did not act with any unity, allowing them to be destroyed piece-wise by the government forces. Operations in May of 1955 dismantled the forces of Trần who often disregarded orders and even defected in large formations. French intelligence estimated that 2,338 deserted while 552 were taken prisoner.²⁶⁵ In follow up operations in June, five Hòa Hảo battalions surrendered “almost immediately,”

261. Savani, *Notes sur la secte PGHH*: 90.

262. *Ibid.*: 91.

263. Denis Bogros, *La Secte Hoa Hao Contre le Nationalisme ou l'équivoque Hoa Hao* (Centre de Hautes Etudes Administratives Sur L'Afrique et L'Asie Modernes., 1958).

264. Long Thanh Nam Nguyen, *Hoa Hao Buddhism in the Course of Vietnam's History* (New York: Nova Science Pub Inc, 2004): 102.

265. Bilan des Forces Armées Vietnamiennes au 31 Décembre 1955, République du Vietnam, Ministère de la Défense Nationale, Etat-Major General, Bureau Des Etudes Generales, 31.12.1955, pg. 99-104, Folder 3987: Báo cáo tổng kết hoạt động Quân đội VNCH năm 1955 của Bộ Tổng Tham mưu, National Archives II, HCMC.

upon the start of combat.²⁶⁶

Interestingly, Ba Cụt's forces were far more resilient. They retreated into the jungle and would fight for five months before being defeated by the Vietnamese military. This experience does indicate that extreme discipline and threats can be used at least in the short-term to motivate compliance. This outcome requires further investigation as Ba Cụt's force during this period was relatively small, perhaps indicating that he was better able to monitor behavior, thus making extreme threats more credible.

4.6.3.2 Nguyễn Giác Ngộ's Nguyễn Trung Trực Forces

While Nguyễn Giác Ngộ never had a significant number of fighters, their behavior was distinct from the other Hòa Hảo units. Indeed, the NTT was inspired by righting Ba Cụt's behavior. As demonstrated below, in contrast to other Hòa Hảo forces, NTT fighters were loyal to their cadre and had great respect for them. Relying on this foundation, Nguyễn used NTT forces to remove Ba Cụt from the district of Chợ Mới. This was no small feat given that the NTT forces were much smaller than other Hòa Hảo factions. Building on this victory, Nguyễn rallied his troops to the government. Unlike other Hòa Hảo factions, there were no major defections after this transition, allowing Nguyễn to bargain with the French in a similar way that the Cao Đài forces did.

For example, in late 1951, the NTT forces carried out significant activities against the Việt Minh using combined arms—and supposedly captured Việt Minh locations that other French affiliated forces had been unable to take. They overran the locations with a coordinated river crossings and an extended battle, capturing artillery pieces, rifles, machine guns, and grenades.²⁶⁷ After these months

266. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance*: 126.

267. Forces Armees Nguyen Trung Truc, n. 480-Cht. Nguyen Giac Ngo - Commandant des Forces-Armees Nguyen Trung Truc a son excellence le president du gouvernement du vietnam, 19 juin 1952, Folder 1460: Hồ sơ về hoạt động và sát nhập vào Quân đội quốc gia của Quân đội Nguyễn Trung Trực năm 1952, Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng Quốc Gia Việt Nam, National Archives II, HCMC.

of operations, Nguyễn demanded increased French support. In particular, he asked for the weaponry to create dedicated mobile companies, increased funding, advance payment to build fixed defensive positions, uniforms, and a GMC and jeep to facilitate communications during battle.²⁶⁸ The French granted the request, citing the organization and dependability of the NTT forces.²⁶⁹

Further, as laid out above, most of the Hòa Hảo forces targeted civilians contrary to the wishes of the leadership and often disobeyed orders to use force in particular ways or at particular times. In contrast, the NTT forces were commended for their internal control and reliable chain of command. A French captain observed that while the other Hòa Hảo forces would brutalize the population and steal cars, rice, pigs, utensils, blankets, and mosquito nets, the NTT forces did not engage in such behavior, meaning that they had far greater support from the population. A colonel observed that “Ngo has the confidence of his soldiers and the people in his area. This explains the perfect discipline of his troops.”²⁷⁰

This level of control allowed Nguyễn to maintain neutrality during the Sect wars as his NTT forces were loosely allied with the government and did not defect back and forth. While they were engaged in some operations against the Bình Xuyên, the NTT mainly did not employ force during this period. As a result, the NTT remained basically intact and was integrated in the the Vietnamese National Army as battalions 513, 522, 528, 550, 551, and 552.²⁷¹

268. Ibid.

269. Le Gouverneur du sud Vietnam a monsieur le ministre de la defense nationale. n. 1798/Cab. Mil. 27.6.1952, Saigon, Folder 1460: Hồ sơ về hoạt động và sát nhập vào Quân đội quốc gia của Quân đội Nguyễn Trung Trực năm 1952, Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng Quốc Gia Việt Nam, National Archives II, HCMC; Note pour monseieur le president du gouvernement au sujet des troupes de nguyen giac ngo, 7.7.1952, Folder 1460: Hồ sơ về hoạt động và sát nhập vào Quân đội quốc gia của Quân đội Nguyễn Trung Trực năm 1952, Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng Quốc Gia Việt Nam, National Archives II, HCMC.

270. Compete - Rendu à la Monsieur le Gouverneur. Object: Tournée des 17 et 18 Avril à Long Xuyên relative au ralliement de Nguyen Giac, 1686/6 (signed by Le Đốc-phủ-Sứ Thái-Lập-Thành, représentat du Gouvernuer du Sud viet nam) Region Dinh-Hoà, 26-5-1950, Folder 1382: Hồ sơ v/v qui thuận của ông Nguyễn Giác Ngộ và Quân đội Nguyễn Trung Trực năm 1950-1951, Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng Quốc Gia Việt Nam, National Archives II, HCMC; Requête de Nguyen Ba Phuoc - Traduction Litterale, Longxuyen, le 4 Mars 1950, A monseieur le gouverneur du sud-vietnam, Folder 1382: Hồ sơ v/v qui thuận của ông Nguyễn Giác Ngộ và Quân đội Nguyễn Trung Trực năm 1950-1951, Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng Quốc Gia Việt Nam, National Archives II, HCMC

271. Nguyen, *Hoa Hao Buddhism in the Course of Vietnam's History*: 130.

4.7 Alternative Explanations

4.7.1 Structural and Environmental Factors

As laid out in Chapter 2, most existing explanations of insurgent behavior and civil war outcomes focus on structural factors. As noted throughout this chapter and elsewhere, the key arguments are that access to resources, access to sanctuary, access to external support, and the strength of pre-existing communities determine how well organizations will fight or the success they will gain. As demonstrated by the cases and the research design, these structural factors are unable to disentangle how some groups fought well while others did not. Nearly all organizations had access to resources, yet some—including the Việt Minh and Cao Đài—used those resources to bolster their organization, well others such as the Hòa Hảo fell victim to a “resource curse.”

For the most part, nearly all organizations had access to sanctuary. Yet while some used it to train and protect their soldiers, others did not take advantage of this sanctuary. For example, the nationalist forces had a robust sanctuary in China, but could not translate this into effective forces as they failed to put in place systems to leverage the ties of their members. Similarly, external support was given to nearly all the groups—indeed many organizations across all civil wars get access to some external resources. Still, access to that support only helped some organizations while weakening others. Illustratively, the Việt Minh explicitly considered how to deal with support from China to ensure that it did not negatively influence the organization they had put in place.²⁷²

Finally, ideology or community structure also cannot explain the differences presented. While the Việt Minh had no access to pre-existing social structures—in fact it actively sought to destroy any ties that existed—it was able to build from a small secretive structure to generate primary groups

272. Lockhart, *Nation in Arms*: 240.

and a cadre system that tied its members in. On the other hand, other nationalist parties attempted to achieve the same thing by appealing to nationalist ideologies alone, this was unsuccessful. While the Cao Đài used its pre-existing social structures to fight well, the Hòa Hảo were unable to do so. While its members strongly adhered to each other, they did not adhere to the dictates of the central commanders.

4.7.2 French/Opposition Tactics

One possible alternative explanation for the cases in this chapter are the tactics used by the French. Perhaps the French resolve weakened and their use of force was thus less effective over time, helping to explain how the Việt Minh became so powerful. This is not the case. The French grew increasingly skilled at counterinsurgency, deploying mobile units and increasing their troop presence and troop reach as the war went on.²⁷³ What is more, just at the time that the Việt Minh was becoming more powerful (1950), the French threw a new commander, General Jean Marie de Lattre de Tassigny, at the conflict who increased morale and instilled a new offensive spirit.²⁷⁴ Moreover, as the war progressed, the United States took an increasingly active role in supplying and supporting the French troops, dedicating significant weaponry and technical assistance.²⁷⁵

In addition, as evidenced by their alliances with most groups, the French rarely used extensive force against any of the groups besides the Việt Minh. As a result, the sect forces in the south were fighting against the southern Việt Minh in tandem with the French. Yet, only the Cao Đài were able to develop and fight well against this foe. Moreover, the Việt Minh, despite operating at a disadvantage in southern Vietnam still developed Guerrilla Capacity.

273. Jackson, "French Ground Force Organizational Development for Counterrevolutionary Warfare Between 1945 and 1962": Chapter 3.

274. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955*.

275. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance*.

4.7.3 World War II Repression

Perhaps the level of French repression during and before WWII created a legacy that dictated development. While appealing, this is not the case. The French actively repressed the Việt Minh and nationalist forces during WWII. They destroyed many of the cells within each of these groups, limiting their development.²⁷⁶ They also arrested some Hòa Hảo and Cao Đài leaders, but for the most part left those sects be. What is more, while the Japanese tolerated the Việt Minh and nationalists, they actively supported the sects.

Despite this war time legacy, the Việt Minh would start from scratch and re-build. Similarly, the nationalists would re-build a core in 1944 and even more forces returned from sanctuary in China in 1945. On the other hand, the Hòa Hảo, despite a relatively “easy” WWII experience did not use that time to develop greater organization while the Cao Đài did.

4.7.4 Force Size

Perhaps fighting well is simply a matter of force size. Indeed, by the end of the conflict, the Việt Minh had a large army with hundreds of thousands of soldiers. However, this was not the case at the outset. As many quoted French intelligence documents show, the Việt Minh was not the strongest actor at the beginning of the conflict and had far fewer adherents than the sects. The sects drew from populations in the millions who were already committed to their size.

Yet, the Việt Minh would expand quickly, as would the sect armies. The key to the Việt Minh’s successful expansion was its focus on force generation. They did not simply add recruits, but ensured that those recruits were trained and positioned to follow the dictates of the organization. Further, they provided key services to their followers, distributing food, weapons, and even employment.

276. Guillemot, *Dai Việt, Indépendance Et Révolution Au Việt-Nam*; Lockhart, *Nation in Arms*.

So, while the Việt Minh size was crucial to its eventual conventional victory, it achieved a great deal of success before reaching this large size, particularly in comparison to the sect forces and the nationalist parties. Thus, it is not the size of the force, nor the size of the population from which the force is recruiting from that dictates effectiveness, it is what the organization does with those individuals.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter provides an excellent test of the role of organizational versus structural factors. It shows that while structural factors no doubt played an important role in the conflict, it is the intersection of informal institutions of social support and formal military characteristics that determines how effective an organization becomes. This theory helps to explain how the Việt Minh, which looked quite weak at onset of the war, developed into one of the most successful insurgent militaries in the 20th century. On the other hand, it teases out the immense challenges that all of these actors faced when trying to translate material and non-material endowments into military power.

The chapter also highlights some other important lessons. First, it is necessary to analyze insurgent groups—and other institutions—in terms of their component parts. While the Việt Minh was weaker in the south, its strength in the north doubt helped it to survive and then prosper. Indeed, insurgent groups can expand from their bases without falling apart as the distance between their leadership and deployed units grows. Similarly, not all units will be alike, so analyzing an organization as a single actor can be misleading. While the Hòa Hảo were ineffective, the French recognized and were able to take advantage of the relatively higher capacity of Nguyễn Giác Ngộ NTT forces.

Second, as is also evidenced in the Iraq cases, it is not nearly as challenging to gain access to weaponry as it is often depicted. Nearly all of the forces in Vietnam rarely suffered for lack of guns

and ammunition. Not only were they able to get access to external support, but operating in a war zone meant that they often could acquire armaments either in battle or through theft. What separates organization is how they take advantage of the resources that they have.

Finally, the way that an organization's military forces develop influences its political options and its post-war make-up. For example, while the Cao Đài developed an effective military arm, its political and military leadership was distinct. As a result, the military developed a separate set of goals and preferences, leading it to defect from the political leadership when the going got tough in 1955. On the other hand, the close coordination of the military and political leadership in the Việt Minh allowed for a more smooth transition to governance as the military was conditioned to support political and social goals.

Chapter 5

Insurgent Military Effectiveness During the Second Indochina War

5.1 Introduction

This chapter follows the development of the Việt Minh as it participated in the Second Indochina War in opposition to the United States (US) and South Vietnamese regime, the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). While the previous chapter studied the full-range of development of insurgent organizations, this chapter focuses on groups with more robust organizational features. In particular, it compares three separate elements of the Communist fighting force: the forces of the Northern Regime, or the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), as well as two groups within the southern resistance of the People's Liberation Armed Front (PLAF, also known as the Việt Cộng): Main Force units and Guerrilla Force units. PAVN and Main Force elements developed a high-degree of capacity while the Guerrilla Force, though following orders about *how* to use violence—Complete Structural Integrity—did not develop any advanced military capacities.

Thus, while the dissertation disaggregates lower levels of military effectiveness into four categories, this chapter does not focus on organizations that disintegrate under fire (Combat Ineffec-

tive) or those able to carry out simple activities such as ceasefires or preventing large-scale defections (Limited Structural Integrity). Instead, it evaluates those able to ensure that their units carry out specific orders under fire such as only attacking particular populations or areas (Complete Structural Integrity), those able to carry out simple military tasks such as assassination campaigns or launching hit and run operations or ambushes, whether using small arms fire, explosives, or mortars (Guerrilla Capacity), and those that can fight in a manner similar to conventional forces by employing combined arms, conducting static defenses, and carrying out attacks that coordinate across disparate fighting units (Quasi-conventional Capacity).

After building the requisite foundations needed for Limited Structural Integrity, the theory argues that to ensure that soldiers comply when not observed—Complete Structural Integrity—leaders must cultivate a lower-level officer cadre committed to the organization and trusted by their soldiers. This task requires indoctrinating and selecting qualified officers and positioning them to gain their soldiers' trust by, among other things, appointing them to manageably-sized units and ensuring they face risk equally with their soldiers. These cadre serve as focal points for deployed units, meaning that their example and commitment to the organization redirects the behavior of the group to support organizational goals.

Only organizations with this foundation can reach Guerrilla Capacity by, among other things, instituting military training systems for cadre, inter-mixing experienced and non-experienced members, and ensuring that orders can be passed to dispersed units reliably. Organizations that reach Quasi-conventional Capacity have access to heavy weaponry, reliable logistics systems, and large-unit organization and training.

PAVN, Main Force, and Guerrilla Force elements provide an excellent opportunity to test the theory's emphasis that higher levels of capacity require dedicated military training. First, all three

groups had the same foundations. Not only did they all develop from the Việt Minh, but they all shared the same base organizational structure. All three developed cadre and indoctrinated new recruits in the same fashion. While the Guerrilla Forces stopped with these foundations, PAVN and Main Force Units had additional logistics components and dedicated military training. Second, all three groups operated in similar areas and faced the same opponents. Finally, while the Guerrilla Forces were limited in their access to weapons, both the Main Force Units and PAVN had access to similar, and often advanced, weaponry.

Drawing on these comparisons, the chapter demonstrates that the Guerrilla Forces could control *how* violence was used because they had a strong cadre system, but did not have the training to carry out more organized violence. By contrast, the Main Force units, until 1965, and PAVN units had training at the company-level and above. As a result, they could carry out Quasi-conventional activities. However, with the US intervention, the level of training that Main Force units received was reduced, limiting their ability to regenerate capable forces, particularly at the large-unit level. As a result, they were only able to conduct guerrilla-type operations—and their capacity to do so became more variable.

This approach helps to clarify key dynamics during the Second Indochina War. For example, it shows that a major part of the failure of the Tet Offensive was that Communist leaders ordered Main Force units to carry out Quasi-conventional operations when they did not have the capacity to do so. Thus, despite significant surprise, many of these Main Force elements were not able to carry out the operations expected of them.

The chapter proceeds as follows. After a brief background about Second Indochina War, the remainder of the chapter codes PAVN, Main Force, and Guerrilla Force elements based on the key explanatory variables as well as the structural conditions they faced. With each organization fully

described, I then trace the manner in which organizational attributes and structural conditions were related to the military behavior of each actor.

5.2 Background

The First Indochina War came to an end with the Geneva Settlement in 1954. That settlement created a demarcation line at the 17th parallel to separate North and South Vietnam and called for all hostile or belligerent forces to withdraw into the appropriate zone within 300 days (see Figure 6.1 on page 270). According to the agreement, the two areas were to be unified after general elections in 1956 which were to create a single Vietnamese government. As a result of the agreement, nearly 860,000 refugees moved from the North to the South (500,000 of whom were Catholics and perhaps up to 190,000 fighters from the Franco-Vietnamese forces). In addition, up to 80,000 Việt Minh fighters moved from the South to the North.

Both the North and the South violated major stipulations of the agreement. To begin with, the Communist regime in the North, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), instructed many Viet Minh cadre to stay behind, estimated to be between 10,000 and 15,000.¹ The DRV also heavily invested in building the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) in violation of the accords. In the South, in 1955, Ngô Đình Diệm, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), launched a "Denounce the Communists" campaign.² This fairly successful program sought to dismantle any remaining Việt Minh infrastructure, and led to the arrest and deaths of many Việt Minh supporters as well as their families. After the program was intensified in 1957, Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) troops carried out large operations in the Plain of Reeds. In 1956, Ngô refused to hold the

1. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 183.

2. J. J. Zasloff, *Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960: The Role of the Southern Vietminh Cadres*, Memorandum RM-5163/2-ISA/ ARPA (May 1968): X.



Figure 5.1 Map of Vietnam Post-1954

referendum to unify Vietnam.

In large part due to the RVN's behavior, resistance, at least in part directed by the DRV, picked up in the South. While the DRV was generally supportive of a resistance movement in the South, DRV leaders were in disagreement about the level of support to provide as they sought to state-build in the North. In 1960, the Southern resistance, in tandem with the DRV, created the National Liberation Front (NLF) and re-constituted the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) to connect the NLF with the DRV. The NLF was meant to unite opposition elements in the South and included civil institutions as well as its armed component, the PLAF, often referred to as the Việt Cộng. During the early 1960s, the DRV actively started infiltrating "regroupees" back into South Vietnam.

In response to the growing resistance, US advisors escalated their assistance to the RVN to check

the growing “Communist threat.” By mid-1960, the US expanded on the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), which had been supporting the French effort, and began committing greater resources and advisors to Vietnam. By 1962, the US had put in place the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). One of the first components of this renewed effort was assisting the Ngô regime in implementing the Strategic Hamlet Program, meant to consolidate hamlets and villages into self-contained and secure areas to limit the ability of the NLF to proselytize. In addition, US advisors began assisting ARVN with operations and South Vietnamese officers were sent to the US for education. This support did little to turn the tide as the GVN suffered losses and suffered internal turmoil, most notably the removal of Ngô by a coup in 1963.³

By 1964, the US already had 23,000 advisors in Vietnam. But, as the the PLAF took increasingly large portions of Vietnam, the US opted for a full intervention and had 184,000 troops in-country by the end of 1965. Under the leadership of General William Westmoreland, the US launched widespread operations to confront and root out PLAF forces throughout 1965 and 1966. As the conflict continued, the US conducted increasingly large operations and deployed forces throughout the country. This was matched by large-scale air bombardment campaigns targeting PLAF and PAVN forces in the South as well as military and industrial targets in the North.

In response, the DRV began infiltrating larger and larger PAVN units and bolstering PLAF forces with Northern cadre and supplies. As the conflict went on, PAVN and PLAF units attempted to respond to the US escalation with large operations. Perhaps the best known was the Tet Offensive, launched in 1968. This major operation by PAVN and PLAF forces targeted a vast majority of South Vietnam’s major cities and provincial capitals. While the attack, which caught the US and RVN by surprise, was a military failure, many point to it as a turning point in the conflict as breadth and

3. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: Chapter 9.

shock of the offensive weakened US commitment. After Tet, as the US started handing responsibility over to RVN in 1970, US and ARVN forces sought to weaken the PLAF and PAVN by targeting supply networks from the North to the South and attacking strongholds in Cambodia. In 1972, the DRV launched the Easter Offensive which took vast territory in South Vietnam. These gains were only turned back by overwhelming use of US air power. The US began a complete withdrawal after the 1973 Paris Peace Accords which culminated in PAVN offensives to re-take the South in 1975.

5.3 The PLAF and PAVN

Opposing the US and ARVN was the PLAF and PAVN. Both of them drew legacies from the Việt Minh, however, at least until the early 1970s, they were independent forces.

PAVN developed directly from the Việt Minh as the Việt Minh went from resistance movement to government. In 1955, the force stood at around 200,000 and was subjected to standardization with the addition of clear support units, regulations on service and ranks, and universal conscription in the North.⁴ PAVN reached up to 685,000 troops and was organized in 27 divisions (with around 10,000 troops per division) as well as support, armor, and artillery elements.⁵ PAVN troops were mainly recruited or drafted from within North Vietnam.

At first, PAVN elements did not operate directly in South Vietnam. Instead, they sent “filler packets” to fill in PLAF vacancies and sent cadre as trainers. Between training conducting in the North and the training cadre sent to the South, much of the instruction of PLAF fighters was conducted by PAVN fighters. However, as of 1965, full PAVN units moved into the South. They began carrying out larger attacks, including involvement in the Tet Offensive. After Tet, PAVN units carried out the

4. Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (New York, N.Y: Da Capo Press, 1991): 42.

5. Spencer C. Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*, 2nd ed. (ABC-CLIO, 2011): 1712.

majority of the fighting, leading the Easter Offensive and then final assault to take South Vietnam in 1975.⁶

Like the Việt Minh, the PLAF had tiered elements. The PLAF was composed of Regular Force and Irregular Forces. The Regular Forces included Main Forces and Local Forces that operated at the province or district level. Given their similarities, I refer to the Main and Local forces as simply the “Main Forces” throughout this chapter. Main Force elements were mainly organized into battalions that were supposed to have 500 members, though reports sometimes put them as low as 250.⁷ For some local force elements, they operated as companies, independent of a battalion structure. As of 1964, there were thought to be 30-40 Main Force battalions.⁸

The Irregular Forces were composed of Guerrilla Forces and People’s Self Defense Forces. Given the quite limited mission and organization of the People’s Self Defense Forces, this chapter only studies the Guerrilla Forces. The Guerrilla Forces were organized at the platoon level while self defense forces were often at the squad level, or even cell-level.⁹ Their main tasks were often protecting particular villages or hamlets. As of 1964, there were thought to be upwards of 35,000 Guerrilla forces and 80,000 People’s Self Defense forces.¹⁰

Many of the fighters in both the Main and Guerrilla Forces were recruited or pressed into service from within South Vietnam. However, for the Main Force, particularly before 1965, a vast majority of the cadre were either Việt Minh fighters who had stayed behind after the Geneva Agreements or regroupees sent from North Vietnam.¹¹ Further, as noted above, in the mid-1960s, many PAVN

6. Pike, *PAVN: People’s Army of Vietnam*: 48-49; Pike, *Viet Cong*: 212.

7. Pike, *Viet Cong*: 238.

8. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 246.

9. Maj. Andrew L. Cooley, *The Viet Cong Soldier: His Strengths, Weaknesses and Vulnerabilities.*, Master’s Thesis (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1966): 64-65.

10. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 246.

11. Zasloff, *Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960*.

Table 5.1 PLAF and PAVN Coding and Predicted Military Effectiveness

	PAVN	PLAF: Main Force		PLAF: Guerrilla Force
	1959-1975	1959-1965	1966-1975	1959-1975
Background Variables				
Sanctuary	✓	✓	✓	✗
Pre-Existing Primary Groups	✗	✗	✗	✗
Access to Resources	✓	✓	✓	✓
External Support	✓	✓	✓	✓
Factions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Organizational Variables				
Creating/Leveraging Primary Groups				
—Creation of Primary Groups	✓	✓	✓	✓
—Resource Control	✓	✓	✓	✓
Creating a Cadre System				
—Officer Selection Standards	✓	✓	✓	✓
—Manageable Small Units	✓	✓	✓	✓
Becoming an “Organizational Weapon”				
—Military Training for Cadre	✓	✓	✓	✗
—Decentralized Command	✓	✓	✓	✓
—Basic Communications Systems	✓	✓	✓	✗
—Functionally Differentiated Small Units	✗	✓	✓	✗
Making the Jump				
—Large-unit Organization and Training	✓	✓	✗	✗
—Movement and Integrated Communications	✓	✓	✓	✗
—Heavy Weapons	✓	✓	✓	✗
Predicted Military Effectiveness	Quasi- conventional Capacity	Quasi- conventional Capacity	Guerrilla Capacity	Complete Structural Integrity
Prediction Correct?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

members were sent down to bolster weakened PLAF units.

As the following sections lay out, there were many similarities between the PLAF and PAVN, yet, they had different fighting capabilities. The core of this difference was in the level of training received by PAVN, Main Force, and Guerrilla Force fighters. PAVN was always capable of Quasi-conventional and conventional operations, receiving significant training. Main Force units received similar train-

ing up until 1965, however, this became far more variable after the US involvement and even more so after the Tet Offensive. Thus, despite receiving similar levels of assistance and weaponry, Main Force units became at best able to conduct guerrilla operations. Finally, at not point did Guerrilla Force units receive coordinated training—either for their cadre or fighters. These predictions are laid out in Table 5.1 on the facing page.

5.3.1 Background Variables

As described in the previous chapter, in much of Vietnamese society, social ties were highly segmented, creating strong familial and village loyalties that did not horizontally span large groups of individuals. As a result, both PLAF and PAVN were unable to draw upon strong pre-existing primary groups. What is more, given that both attempted to recruit and field large forces, they had to draw on individuals from across a wide-range of social and geographic backgrounds. As described in greater detail below, the Ngô government sought to undermine much of the community-building that the Việt Minh had carried out in the South.

Though they could not draw on strong pre-existing primary groups, PLAF and PAVN forces were relatively well-supplied throughout the conflict. Forces in the South were able to access weaponry, ammunition, and at least basic medical care for much of the conflict. Much of this support came from the Northern regime, which, in turn, was assisted by Russia and China. This was consistent between Main Force and PAVN units—Guerrilla Force units were not as well-supplied. Despite significant efforts by the US to limit access to these resources, PLAF and PAVN units remained well-supplied and did not face significant manpower shortages. As Gurtov observed, “nevertheless, the increased difficulty of the game did not alter the outcome: able to roam and regroup in the delta,

the VC continued to recruit enough men to replace losses.”¹²

Until 1965, Main Force units had significant territorial sanctuary for training and re-supply. They would retain significant operation freedom, but it became far more limited with heightened US involvement. After 1965, PLAF training centers were under consistent attacks and had to be moved often.¹³ In contrast, while in the North, before being sent South, PAVN fighters had more stable sanctuary. PAVN had dedicated training centers and logistical hubs in North Vietnam. While some PAVN targets were hit by US bombing sorties as a part of Rolling Thunder, Linebacker, and Linebacker II, most of these training camps were not forced to re-locate or re-generate often—in fact there were two main camps that operated consistently.¹⁴ However, once in South Vietnam, PAVN forces and PLAF Main Force units faced quite similar conditions, though Northerners tended to be much less familiar with the terrain—many were from lowlands areas as opposed to the jungles and deltas of the South—and cultural nuisances of some southern areas.¹⁵

Despite the significant indoctrination efforts and similarities in organization building, there were factional differences, oftentimes between Northerners in Southern units or even between PLAF and PAVN units that they were supposed to assist during infiltration. As one Northern cadre relayed, “The Northerners consider themselves better trained than the Southerners in politics, military affairs, and experience on the battlefield. There are always arguments between the Northerners and the Southerners.”¹⁶ These differences also manifested at higher levels of leadership, covering dis-

12. Melvin Gurtov, *The War in the Delta: Views from Three Viet Cong Battalions*, Memorandum RM-5353-1-ISA/ARPA (RAND Corporation, 1967): 9.

13. Cooley, *The Viet Cong Soldier*: 133-35.

14. Ibid.: 128; See also, Intelligence Memorandum: The Current Status of PAVN Infiltration of South Vietnam, 9 April 1966: pp. 6, Folder 66, Box 04, Central Intelligence Agency Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0410466002>>.

15. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Update: The NVA Soldier in South Vietnam - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 49, 18 October 1966, Folder 0173, Box 0023, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230173>>. See also, W. P. Davison and J. J. Zasloff, *A Profile of Viet Cong Cadres*, Memorandum RM-4983-1-ISA/ARPA (RAND Corporation, 1966): 25.

16. Studies of the Chieu Hoi Program: Interviews with the Hoi Chanh Interview No. 29, No Date, pp.

agreements about overall strategy or force employment.¹⁷

5.3.2 Organization-Building

5.3.2.1 Resource Control

The PLAF and PAVN put in place widespread systems to control the distribution of key goods to their fighters. For PAVN and Main Force units, the organizations provided the vast majority of the goods that the fighters needed to fight and live. For Guerrilla Forces, the PLAF provided key staples, but did not fully support their existence.

For Guerrilla Forces, like the Việt Minh, the cornerstone of resource control was land re-distribution. After the Geneva agreements, the RVN dismantled much of the land reform instituted by the Việt Minh with Ordinance #57. In the early 1960s, the NLF made re-instituting these systems a priority. Duiker observes that when the PLAF moved into an area, “the key issue was land reform.”¹⁸ The system generally gave land to middle class peasants and the poor and landless. As a result, “the majority of the peasants in liberated areas approved of the program and such satisfaction as presumably a major factor in the ability of the movement to enlist recruits in the countryside.”¹⁹

In addition to land reform, the NLF also implemented the Việt Cộng Infrastructure (VCI). In controlled or semi-controlled areas, the VCI would provide medical services, justice, and education to civilians.²⁰ The provision of these goods to fighters and their families put the PLAF in position to threaten to withhold these key elements. As a MACV summary of an interrogation with a PLAF fighter lays out: “The soldier fears reprisals against his family if he deserts or is captured. This is

28, Folder 13, Box 04, John Donnell Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0720413005>>.

17. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 229-30.

18. Ibid.: 232.

19. Ibid.

20. Dale Andrade and James H. Willbanks, “Cords/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future,” *Military Review*, October 2006, 9–23.

especially true for the cadre. As one captive stated 'If the VC learned, that a cadreman was captured and had divulged information, his family would easily have difficulties obtaining rice, material, and medicines.'"²¹

Beyond the provision of these goods to villagers, the PLAF provided Guerrilla Forces with weapons and ammunition. As discussed in greater detail below, the DRV and PAVN implemented a significant logistical supply line to move resources from the North to the South. Given the scarcity of ammunition in the South, this was critical for Guerrilla fighters as they sought to carry out missions and defend their home areas. Ammunition and weapons were distributed from centralized depots run by Main Force units and handed out in a regulated manner, making fighters dependent for distribution, but also encouraging controlled use of their weapons.²²

For the Main Force and PAVN, a significant logistical back-end supplied these fighters with food, medicine, weapons, and transportation. The well-known Hồ Chí Minh trail, a massive system of roads, trails, and depots connecting the North to the South, facilitated the transport of weapons, ammunition, and medical supplies. Much of the food for PAVN and Main Force troops was procured locally, oftentimes by the "Rear Service" units, though sometimes soldiers were given a stipend to buy food at the market. In all cases, the distribution was centralized from caches and depots. Since most PAVN and Main Force soldiers were fighting far from home, they were dependent on these supplies.²³

PAVN and PLAF were able to retain a centralized distribution system as all taxes collected or

21. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Update: The NVA Soldier in South Vietnam - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 45, 18 October 1966, Folder 0173, Box 0023, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230173>>.

22. L. P. Holliday and R. M. Gurfield, *Viet Cong Logistics*, Memorandum RM-5423-1-ISA/ ARPA (RAND Corporation, 1968): 17-18.

23. Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA: The Real Story of North Vietnam's Armed Forces* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008): Chapters 6-7.

goods captured by soldiers were passed to the main organization. As Holliday and Gurfield reported, “There is a Viet Cong directive on the subject of war booty. War Booty Councils are established at three levels. All types of war booty, military as well as civilian, are gathered, inventoried, and reported to higher headquarters.”²⁴

Further, while there were clear disciplinary procedures in place to punish soldiers for misbehavior, the PLAF and PAVN did not use harsh punishments to attempt to change behavior. Instead, as with the Islamic State or the Việt Minh, compliance was sought through resource control and the cadre system. As Gurtov reports, “Judging from the private’s account, which is largely corroborated by brief comments from other respondents, the VC tended to be rather lenient. In keeping with the general spirit of the entire control system, punishments aimed at reform rather than coercion and submission, except in extraordinary circumstances, such as repeated violations of Party or military rules.”²⁵

5.3.2.2 Continuing to Cultivate Strong Primary Groups

A core challenge faced by the Việt Minh and then the PLAF and PAVN was building strong primary groups. The PLAF and PAVN openly addressed this problem and focused on developing such strong social ties to unite their fighters from the outset—this approach applied equally to Guerrilla, Main Force, and PAVN recruits.

At the most basic level, the VCI sought to create the foundations for strong primary groups across the Southern population. In particular, the NLF sought to replicate the success of Việt Minh literacy, education, and indoctrination programs in creating shared experiences, norms, and reference points between citizens in South Vietnam. A captured PLAF document lays this out: “an enlightened people if unorganized cannot be a force to deal with the enemy... Therefore organiza-

24. Holliday and Gurfield, *Viet Cong Logistics*: 62.

25. Gurtov, *The War in the Delta*: 43.

tion of the masses is essential, it facilitates our cause in all ways.”²⁶ The core of this was the creation of “functional liberation associations” that served to create a broader social movement. “Agit-prop” cadre were responsible for compelling individuals to join these movements and then using them to instill new social foundations. As Pike observes, this approach “generated a sense of community, first by developing a pattern of political thought and behavior appropriate to the social problems of the rural Vietnamese village...and second, by providing a basis for group action that allowed the individual villager to see that his own efforts could have meaning and effect.”²⁷

Once individuals were recruited into the PLAF or PAVN, they were subject to more intense re-socialization. While military training is discussed below, all initial training included a substantial portion of political instruction.²⁸ From the outset, fighters were organized in to 3-person cells. In these cells, soldiers became highly dependent on each other and were increasingly isolated from their previous experiences through political/Communist indoctrination and task-based expectations. As a result, soldiers were “re-socialized” before being moved into other units.²⁹ Henderson walks through the process by which a local recruit in the South was indoctrinated and connected to his fellow fighters:

In their organization and techniques of control, the PLA understood that soldier’s strong attachment to his family and village made it difficult to organize main force units capable of operating anywhere in South Vietnam. The ingenious PLA technique for dealing with this problem demonstrated its success in harnessing the power of the group of the individual. Aware of the difficulties of drafting a man directly into the main force units, the PLA first inducted him into a local guerrilla force, assigning him to his home area and allowing him to live with his family when possible. Next, the soldier was encouraged to develop loyalty toward a new group. At this point the soldiers, along with his group, was ready for transfer to a main force unit. A PLA indoctrination booklet described main force units as being formed of “young men with combat experience in the

26. Quoted in, Pike, *Viet Cong*: 125.

27. *Ibid.*: 124-25.

28. M. E. Anderson, M. E. Arnsten, and H. A. Averch, “Insurgent Organization and Operations,” 1967, 48.

29. Gurtov, *The War in the Delta*: 11.

Guerrilla Popular Army or territorial forces who have been indoctrinated in ideas of the revolution and class struggle, in organizational methods, and in combat techniques.”³⁰

As described in greater detail below, cadre were critical in continuing this process throughout combat. Cadre sustained these social connections via continued indoctrination as well as “self-criticism” session, or *kiểm thảo*. Self-criticism sessions were held often—sometimes daily—in which soldiers and cadre pointed out each other’s faults and pathways to correct them. As a result, they were meant to solidify group norms and create a “correct” range of behaviors. This process allowed the group to punish and “reform” improper actions through group shaming and humiliation.³¹ As one PLAF fighter stated in an interview: “Criticism is a good method, and it is a token of mutual affection in a unit. If there were any errors we would help each other to correct and avoid them... [Also] criticism is always fair because it is based on the ideas of several people and of the group, not of a single person or a few people.”³²

Demonstrative of the commitment the PLAF and PAVN had to maintaining such social ties, units with low morale were pulled from combat, up to the company-level, and were isolated to undergo re-indoctrination. As Henderson relays from captured PLAF documents, “the purpose of isolation was to separate the unit from all outside contact and turn the primary group inward on itself for rebuilding under the strict guidance of the cadre... fighters from the same village and friends made prior to joining the PLA were kept apart to prevent desertion together or the emergence of old norms.”³³

30. William Darryl Henderson, *Why the Vietcong Fought: A Study of Motivation and Control in a Modern Army in Combat* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979): 55.

31. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - VC/NVA Political and Ideological Training - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 16, 18 May 1967, Folder 0721, Box 0024, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900240721>>.

32. Quoted in, Konrad Kellen, *Conversations with NVA and VC Soldiers in Late 1968/Early 1969: A Study of Enemy Motivation and Morale*, Memorandum RM-6131-1-ISA/ ARPA (RAND Corporation, September 1970): 31.

33. Henderson, *Why the Vietcong Fought: A Study of Motivation and Control in a Modern Army in Combat*: 94.

5.3.2.3 Developing a Cadre System

Like the Việt Minh, the PLAF and PAVN put a premium on creating a core of lower level officers that were well trusted by the organization and their fighters. These cadre included both political and military officers and the same processes were followed from the Guerrilla Force up to Main Force and PAVN units. They were able to select trusted cadre by carefully training and evaluating recruits and officers and then promoting them based on merit. They were able to allow these cadre to gain their soldiers trust by assigning to them to small, manageable units, ensuring that cadre were intimately involved in their fighters' lives, and putting these cadre in charge of evaluating, rewarding, and disciplining their fighters. This commitment was apparent from the outset; as a captured document lays out "The improvement of the three-man cell leader's capability is an even more important task. He must be thoroughly indoctrinated, both in politics and ideology, to become a nucleus to rally the men in his cell around him."³⁴

Building on the legacy of the Việt Minh, the PLAF was able to start in the early 1960s with a strong cadre foundation by drawing upon cadre who had stayed behind after the Geneva Agreement and on regroupees sent down from the North. As a result, these cadre had already proven their commitment. As Duiker observes, these regroupees and stay-behind cadre provided "an element of experience and ideological steadiness to the young and frequently untrained recruits from the rural areas...[they] were all Party veterans with a history of loyalty to the organization."³⁵

Beyond these legacy cadre, they also sought to consistently cultivate new cadre. To begin with, all cadre received significant political training. Most of those entering cadre training programs had

34. "Guidance in Organizing, Consolidating and Conducting Activities of the Three-Man Cell," in The PRPSVN - Part II: COSVN's 1969-1970 Attempt to Revitalize the PRP, February 1972, Folder 06, Box 02, Viet-Nam Documents and Research Notes Collection, Document no. 102, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=3150206001>>.

35. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 229-30.

already served in combat, whether in guerrilla or Main Force units. For example, a PAVN political cadre received 7.5 hours of political indoctrination per day for at least a month.³⁶ This training consisted of reading and re-hashing party documents, focusing on the mission of the PLAF in the South, as well as strategies to monitor, interact with, and respond to footsoldier needs.

Once trained, cadre were carefully selected based on their demonstrated ideological commitment as well as their behavior when deployed. Decisions about appointment and promotion were often made by directly supervising officers and cadre, whether in training camps, or within Guerilla, Main Force, or PAVN units. Drawing upon a significant number of interviews with captured cadre and captured documents, Davison observes that “In effect, the Viet Cong’s policies governing promotion and Party membership made it possible for them to differentiate between those who were motivated by a desire for power and respect, and the men who were more interested in material rewards. The former were steadily advanced into leadership positions, leaving as followers those for whom power and respect had less attraction.”³⁷

Once in their units, cadre were expected to transmit part goals, lead the unit in accomplishing these goals, monitor individual and group performance to ensure compliance, and create “good communist soldiers.”³⁸ They were put in the position to achieve these goals by being appointed to very small units. At the base level, all cells had a cell leader, who was sometimes a cadre. But, at the squad, there was always a cadre member as well as an assistant squad leader. In addition, there were usually political cadre at the squad level and above.³⁹ As a result, cadre often had quite manageable small units. For example, studying three Main Force battalions in Mekong Delta, Gurtov finds there

36. Cooley, *The Viet Cong Soldier*: 129.

37. Davison and Zasloff, *A Profile of Viet Cong Cadres*: 14; See also, Henderson, *Why the Vietcong Fought: A Study of Motivation and Control in a Modern Army in Combat*: 42.

38. Henderson, *Why the Vietcong Fought: A Study of Motivation and Control in a Modern Army in Combat*: 70.

39. *Ibid.*: 34.

was 1 cadre for every 2.6 soldiers.⁴⁰

As a result, cadre members were able to closely observe unit behavior as they could observe it and rely on reports from lower cadre, whether it be cell leaders or squad leaders. As Gurtov relays, two cadre from a Main Force battalion made this level of supervision clear:

In the confinement of the squad, every soldier knew not only that he was obligated to confess some wrongdoing but also that his every action was subject to surveillance by veteran comrades. An assistant squad leader in Bn. 514, observed that “among every group of five persons, [there were] two veterans who were entrusted with the mission of keeping an eye on the new recruits.” And an assistant squad leader in the same company similarly found that “in each squad there were a number of key Party members. If anyone made a slip of the tongue he would be reported right away and taken to the security agency.”⁴¹

This level of information can be observed in captured PLAF/PAVN disciplinary documents that have significant detail about within-squad interactions, beliefs, and relationships.⁴²

At the same time, cadre worked hard to earn their soldiers trust by serving by their sides, democratically taking criticism, and standing up for their fighters’ needs. They served as leaders of self-criticism sessions, and often brought up their own faults while providing critiques *and* commendations for fighters.⁴³ Similarly, they maintained supportive relationships with their fighters. As one captured cadre observed, “we cadres shared everything with our fighters, be a small items, such as a bite of food or a bigger thing, such as money.”⁴⁴

This sentiment was repeated by many interviewed footsoldiers—many of whom had defected and yet maintained a high opinion of their cadre, even referring to them as their mothers, or fathers, or respected elders.⁴⁵ One such soldier said of his political cadre, “The political officer was

40. Gurtov, *The War in the Delta*: 38.

41. *Ibid.*: 41-42.

42. See, for example, Breach of Discipline in 274th Main Force Regiment, VC Military Region 7, 01 April 1970, Folder 10, Box 15, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2131510059>>.

43. Henderson, *Why the Vietcong Fought: A Study of Motivation and Control in a Modern Army in Combat*: 74-75.

44. Quoted in, *ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*: 78.

a very gentle and very pleasant person. No one ever complained about him. We all liked him and considered him our eldest brother.”⁴⁶ Another fighter said of his military cadre, “The cadres in my unit were always fair. They liked the men as if they were their brothers. I would even say that their affection for them was warmer than that between brothers in a family.”⁴⁷ In interviews with 20 PAVN and PLAF fighters, most of whom had defected, Kellen finds that 19 had positive views of their leaders, and only 1 held a negative view.⁴⁸

5.3.2.4 Training and Force Composition

While all PLAF and PAVN elements shared the foundation described in the previous two subsections, when assessing the level of training, there were notable differences between the different forces as well as within the Main Force units over time. The Guerrilla Force received by far the lowest level of military training, whereas as Main Force as well as PAVN received far more substantial military training. However, with the increased US involvement, many of the PLAF elements received reduced military training.

Guerrilla Forces. As the second tier of the the PLAF fighting force, the Guerrilla Force was seen as a key support element for Main Force and PAVN fighters. They were often organized at the squad level, and occasionally into platoons. While they received significant political training and indoctrination, a MACV report found that “although VC resolutions and after-action reports cite requirements for ambitious and varied training programs, guerrillas actually receive little formal training.”⁴⁹

In reality, they received 7-10 days of training including basic weapons training, a quick lesson on ambush tactics and the use of booby traps, and “perhaps rudimentary combat movement and

46. Quoted in, Kellen, *Conversations with NVA and VC Soldiers*: 25.

47. Quoted in, *ibid.*: 26.

48. *Ibid.*: 143.

49. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - The Viet Cong Guerrilla - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 6, 20 June 1969, Folder 0675, Box 0027, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900270675>>.

hand-to-hand combat” instruction.⁵⁰ Importantly, this training often occurred at the cell level, and occasionally, at the squad level, but never above.⁵¹ Moreover, there was no repetition or drilling of any of these lessons.⁵²

PLAF Main Force. Main Force fighters were organized, at least on paper, into divisions. Nonetheless, throughout the early 1960s, they operated at the regimental and battalion-level—most battalions had three infantry companies and a heavy weapons company.⁵³ In line with this organizational, Main Force soldiers received significant military training focused on guerrilla, and in the early 1960s, conventional-type tactics. Many fighters received up to two months of classroom and hands-on training at the squad and platoon level. This training spanned from weapons familiarization and camouflaging to coordinated rehearsals of platoon, company, and even battalion-level operations, often in tandem with specialized explosives or artillery instruction.⁵⁴ Sometimes large-unit training was even carried out in training camps in the North.⁵⁵ Cadre received more intense training focusing on planning the employment of force and coordinating unit movements.⁵⁶

This training was realistic, as one cadre noted, “hard field training saved blood in combat.”⁵⁷

Training exercises were sand tabled and practiced piece by piece for days or even weeks before full

50. Ibid.

51. Study, Order of Battle Studies - NO 67-033: Employment of Guerrillas with LF and MF Units - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 7, 06 January 1967, Folder 0685, Box 0021, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900210685>>.

52. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - The Viet Cong Guerrilla - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 6, 20 June 1969, Folder 0675, Box 0027, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900270675>>.

53. Warren Wilkins, *Grab Their Belts to Fight Them: The Viet Cong's Big Unit-War Against the U.S., 1965-1966* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011): 15.

54. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - NVN/VC Training System - Record of MACV Part 2, 10 December 1970, Folder 0451, Box 0028, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900280451>>. See also, Cooley, *The Viet Cong Soldier*: 140.

55. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 203.

56. Anderson, Arnsten, and Averch, “Insurgent Organization and Operations”: 161; Henderson, *Why the Vietcong Fought: A Study of Motivation and Control in a Modern Army in Combat*: 81-82.

57. Quoted in, Cooley, *The Viet Cong Soldier*: 142.

rehearsals of combined movements such as ambushes or raids on fixed targets. For both raids and ambushes—the most typical Main Force operations and thus the focus of training—soldiers were instructed to follow the “one slow, four quick” approach. This included slow and meticulous planning and reconnaissance before an attack and then when carrying out an operation to advance quickly, assault quickly, and then clear the battlefield of weapons and equipment before withdrawing quickly. Training continued once soldiers entered units, as squads and platoons were consistently involved in “learn on the job” type training and also carried out weapons, movement, and camouflage training throughout their down time.⁵⁸

Until the mid-1960s, this training was fairly uniform across units within the Main Force. However, with the US involvement and then the aftermath of the Tet Offensive, there was far greater variability in Main Force training. To begin, as training camps became mobile, it was not possible to carry out large-unit exercises.⁵⁹ Moreover, cadre were oftentimes the only members of a squad with extensive military training as training was sometimes reduced to less than a week as training camps were targeted and depleted units needed new members. For example, captured documents show that as of 1966, the 514th battalion—a Main Force battalion—was taking members who had only 8 days of training. Given the intensity of operations, they could not quickly further train these soldiers within the battalion.⁶⁰

This reality became apparent in interviews with Main Force members who were worried about their level of training:

58. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - The Enemy Soldier - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 3-4, 01 May 1969, Folder 0698, Box 0027, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900270698>>. See also, Anderson, Arnsten, and Averch, “Insurgent Organization and Operations”: Appendix E.

59. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - NVN/VC Training System - Record of MACV Part 2, 10 December 1970, Folder 0451, Box 0028, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900280451>>

60. Anderson, Arnsten, and Averch, “Insurgent Organization and Operations”: 159.

One VC private, on the other hand, stated that he was well-enough armed but, not properly trained. (K-19) And another VC private reported precisely the same—sufficient armament, insufficient training. (K-15) The same private, when asked whether the troops in his unit were seasoned, replied: “I think that they were not seasoned troops. If they were good combat soldiers, they would not have sustained so many casualties.” (K-18) Still one more VC private (K-22) stated that he was well-prepared but not properly trained.⁶¹

There was also evidence of declining military prowess amongst cadre. One interviewee stated that:

Because of heavy losses, most of the company, platoon, and squad leaders were new replacements...The new cadres weren't as good as the earlier ones. They didn't know much about strategy and had no experience in tactics. In the last months, many fighters showed no respect and less obedience to platoon and squad leaders because most of those people didn't deserve the appointment and were not up to their tasks.⁶²

PAVN. PAVN training was quite similar to Main Force training. However, there were two notable differences. First, PAVN fighters trained in both conventional and guerrilla operations. As a MACV study found, the PAVN “training is broader in scope. While the NVA does not neglect squad and platoon operations like raids and ambushes, considerable attention is given to coordinated maneuvers on battalion and regimental scale. Area defense, mobile warfare, and conventional tactics are emphasized to a greater extent by the NVA than by the VC.”⁶³

Second, PAVN training tended to run a longer course, and while it was reduced as the conflict went on, it stayed far more rigorous than for the PLAF Main Force. For example, in assessing interviews with captured PAVN fighters, a MACV study finds that average training was reduced to 89 days in 1968 from 95-98 days in 1967.⁶⁴ Moreover, many of these units had “pre-infiltration”

61. Kellen, *Conversations with NVA and VC Soldiers*: 20.

62. Quoted in, Henderson, *Why the Vietcong Fought: A Study of Motivation and Control in a Modern Army in Combat*: 83.

63. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Update: The NVA Soldier in South Vietnam - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 13, 18 October 1966, Folder 0173, Box 0023, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230173>>.

64. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - The Enemy Soldier - Record of MACV Part 2, 6-8, 01 May 1969, Folder 0698, Box 0027, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900270698>>. For a further discussion of the con-

preparation as a unit in addition to basic training before being sent to South Vietnam, meaning that they had up to five months of training.⁶⁵ As a result of the length, there was a greater opportunity for specialized training. This included specialized training in artillery, anti-aircraft procedures, engineering, medical services, reconnaissance, and logistics.⁶⁶ Finally, like the PLAF Main Force, there was an emphasis on on-the-job training and continued unit training during down time once in South Vietnam.⁶⁷

5.3.2.5 Communications, Logistics, and Heavy Weaponry

Like the Việt Minh, PAVN/PLAF had a significant logistical back-end to supply their fighters with weapons, food, medical care, and other key staples. The movement of goods from north to south, much of it passing through Laos, was better organized in the Second Indochina War and drew extensively upon PAVN's Rear Services units as well as on human porters—the route from north to south was known as the Hồ Chí Minh trail.

Group 559, which became an official division in the early 1960s, was the logistical back-end that took care of the major movement of supplies. They maintained a network of roads, trails, and water crossings as well as a number of way stations able to accommodate troops and equipment. Many of these way stations had extensive underground facilities with tunnels meant to hide them from US and ARVN forces. Group 559 would eventually grow to nearly 50,000 members.⁶⁸ Through these

sistency of training of PAVN soldiers even as the war pressed on, see Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Update: The NVA Soldier in South Vietnam - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 17-18, 18 October 1966, Folder 0173, Box 0023, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230173>>.

65. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Update: The NVA Soldier in South Vietnam - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 16-17, 18 October 1966, Folder 0173, Box 0023, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230173>>.

66. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - NVN/VC Training System - Record of MACV Part 2, 10 December 1970, Folder 0451, Box 0028, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900280451>>.

67. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Update: The NVA Soldier in South Vietnam - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 19, 18 October 1966, Folder 0173, Box 0023, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230173>>.

68. Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam*: 47.

systems, both PAVN and Main Force units were able to maintain access to heavy weaponry, machine guns, ammunition, and parts for much of the conflict.⁶⁹

Once supplies were in the South, rear service units connected either to regiments or battalions distributed items to combat units from dispersed storage caches. As Holliday and Gurfield find from studying a range of units, “these groups range in size from 300 to 3000 men and support Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Main Force units operating within their area of responsibility. They purchase, produce, transport, store, and distribute large quantities of food and supplies; also, they operate various types of workshops and provide medical facilities for the units within their operational areas.”⁷⁰ Much of the time, they relied on conscripted porters to carry supplies, dig tunnels, purchase goods from local markets, and conduct other miscellaneous tasks.⁷¹ Further, while many of the weapons and other supplies came from the North, many of the food stuffs were supplied by local populations, either through taxes or direct purchase—regiments supposedly had a 30-day supply of rice that would be replenished when half consumed.⁷²

Both PLAF Main Force and PAVN units had communications elements, who were composed of fighters who had received signals training.⁷³ Many battalions did lay down field-telephone systems that allowed communications with headquarters. In addition, companies were authorized one radio. However, radio communication was not used that often and instead most communication was carried out by couriers.⁷⁴ As a result, it was often difficult for units to communicate in real time,

69. Lanning and Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA*: 105-06: There is some evidence that PAVN forces had slightly larger quantities of these weapons, see Study, Order of Battle Studies - NO 66-54: Combat Effectiveness-VC vs. NVA - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 2, 02 June 1966, Folder 0528, Box 0021, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900210528>>.

70. Holliday and Gurfield, *Viet Cong Logistics*: 5.

71. Lanning and Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA*: Chapter 7; Holliday and Gurfield, *Viet Cong Logistics*: 61.

72. Holliday and Gurfield, *Viet Cong Logistics*: 13.

73. Anderson, Arnsten, and Averch, “Insurgent Organization and Operations”: 162.

74. Holliday and Gurfield, *Viet Cong Logistics*: 56.

particularly during fast-moving operations.⁷⁵

5.3.3 How Did They Fight?

The theory predicts that there should be observable variation between the PLAF and PAVN as well as within the PLAF. Because of their training and equipment base, the theory predicts that PAVN should be capable of Quasi-conventional fighting. By contrast, the Main Forces should be capable of Quasi-conventional fighting before 1965, but afterwards should not be able to carry this out as their training regimes changed markedly. Finally, the Guerrilla forces should only be capable of Complete Structural Integrity as they did not have dedicated military training for their cadre or soldiers.

5.3.3.1 PLAF

Guerrilla Force. Guerrilla forces were intended by the PLAF to support Main and Local Forces by carrying out ambushes and other harassing attacks against US and ARVN forces.⁷⁶ As a result, as noted above, on paper they were to receive a wide-range of training. However, this was not actually the case and Guerrilla Forces were unable to conduct any sort of coordinated operations. Nonetheless, as they had a cadre system, the Guerrilla Forces did follow orders about when and how to use violence, demonstrating Complete Structural Integrity.

A clear example of the Guerrilla Force's ability to control how violence was used is illustrated by their work in policing and keeping order in villages. Guerrilla Forces were often involved in "preparing" a village to move to PLAF control by arresting, intimidating, or killing particular individuals.

As Davison finds from studying Guerrilla Force village operations carefully through interviews with

75. Study, Order of Battle Studies - NO 67-028: Command and Control - Record of MACV Part 2, 06 January 1967, Folder 0623, Box 0021, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900210623>>.

76. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - The Viet Cong Guerrilla - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 6, 20 June 1969, Folder 0675, Box 0027, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900270675>>.

hundreds of respondents, “However grisly some of their methods are, they do not use terror indiscriminately. Officials and government sympathizers who are killed are likely to have been either intensely unpopular, on the one hand, or able and well liked and therefore particularly dangerous to Viet Cong purposes, on the other.”⁷⁷

In addition, while collecting taxes, there was little evidence that Guerrilla Force extorted civilians or hide money before returning it to the center. This behavior is clearly juxtaposed with ARVN behavior as many villagers complained about ARVN fighters stealing food and other goods from them.⁷⁸ What is more, infractions by Guerrilla Forces were quickly dealt with by cadre.⁷⁹

However, Guerrilla Forces were often unable to carry out more complex attacks that required any demonstration of military skill. By far the most successful contribution the Guerrilla Forces made was setting one-off booby traps and mines. While dangerous for US and ARVN forces, they were rarely paired with ambushes or coordinated attacks.⁸⁰ This lack of more advanced capabilities was apparent early in the conflict. While Main Force elements fought with Quasi-conventional Capacity at Ap Bac in 1963, their officers observed of the Guerrilla Forces that “they were not well trained in combat.”⁸¹ This continued to be the case as the conflict persisted. In fact, there is some evidence it got worse as many of the best Guerrilla Force soldiers—and sometimes even units—were “upgraded” to the Main Force.⁸² As a MACV report finds in 1969:

77. Walter Phillips Davison, *Some Observations on Viet Cong Operations in the Villages*, Memorandum RM-5267/2-ISA/ARPA (RAND Corporation, May 1968): X.

78. Nathan Leites, *The Viet Cong Style of Politics*, Memorandum RM-5487-1-ISA/ARPA (RAND Corporation, May 1969): 46.

79. Davison, *Some Observations on Viet Cong Operations in the Villages*: 41.

80. Report Draft, Democratic Republic of South Vietnam - The Viet Cong Irregulars - CIA Research Reports (Supplement), pp. 246-48, No Date, Folder 0819, Box 0003, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F029200030819>>.

81. Quoted in, David M. Toczek, *The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam: They Did Everything But Learn From It* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007): 70.

82. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Upgrading of Viet Cong Forces - Record of MACV Part 2, 29 April 1967, Folder 0589, Box 0024, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900240589>>.

According to many interrogation reports and captured documents, the guerrilla is not effective in combat, largely because his organization is weak, training is minimal, personnel turnover is great, and his units lack the discipline of LF and MF groups. For example, a recently captured document evaluating guerrilla warfare in various villages of Tuy An District, Phu Yen Province, indicates that poor training and weak political motivation have made guerrillas in those villages ineffective fighters who have a tendency to “always rely on higher echelons” rather than on themselves.⁸³

1960-1965: Main Force. As described above, the Main and Local Forces had significantly more developed military training, as well as access to heavy weaponry. Moreover, many of their officers and fighters were dedicated veterans from the First Indochina War. As a result, the theory predicts that, as long as this training continued, these forces would be capable of guerrilla tactics as well as Quasi-conventional operations. As the following discussion lays out, this is exactly how the Main Force PLAF fought, with perhaps the best example being the Battle of Ap Bac in 1963.

After describing the regular preparation and conduct of raids and ambushes, I present a couple of examples of actual attacks. Raids and ambushes were a common tactic for the Main Force during this period. In raids, attacks were carried out against fixed locations. In ambushes attacks were carried out against mobile units. In both cases, there was careful reconnaissance and planning before attacks, often with sand tables and mock-ups as well as strict fire plans.⁸⁴ In an attack on a fixed target, there would often be 3-4 squads involved. An attacking sapper element would set up explosives. Then, two squads would set up flanking positions to protect the attacking squads. The attacking squads would be broken into one to breach after the sapper's detonated their charges and another would quickly move through the breach to carry out objectives within the target. After the initial attack,

83. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - The Viet Cong Guerrilla - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 4, 20 June 1969, Folder 0675, Box 0027, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900270675>>.

84. Study, Order of Battle Studies - NO 67-027: VC/NVA Attacks on Fixed Installations - Record of MACV Part 2, 06 January 1967, Folder 0610, Box 0021, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900210610>>.

the withdrawal was “focused and coordinated” to quickly break contact.⁸⁵

All components of this process are apparent in examples from the 261st Battalion of the PLAF Main Force. A member of a reconnaissance team describes close target reconnaissance of a military post to be attacked:

Once I got into the middle of Cai Be post where the district chief’s office was. It was fifteen days prior to the attack and take-over of the post by our battalion ... At one hundred meters from the post I started crawling and quietly approached the post entrance with the two comrades following me... At the post entrance there was a barbed wire barricade on which hung two grenades. Behind the barricade stood a guard. I made my way between the barricade and the stakes holding up the barbed wire fence. I waited in the dark for the moment when the guard lit his cigarette. I passed two meters away from him and sneaked through the entrance. On that occasion I was unable to find out where the munitions depot was but I did discover the positions of two machine guns and the radio room. I got out at the back of the post by cutting my way through the barbed wire.⁸⁶

Drawing on such information, the attack was planned and rehearsed: “The drawing of the post which was going to be attacked was hung up in front of the soldiers... To Thao (battalion commander) pointed out to the soldiers the various posts in the Ba Dua subsector, enumerated the numerical strength of the unit which guarded each post.”⁸⁷ Then, the attack was signaled by the successful infiltration of sappers:

We crawled towards the post silently. When we reached the first barbed-wire fence, the first sapper destroyed it with a mine. The second sapper jumped ahead immediately after the first blast and destroyed the second barbed-wire fence by exploding a second mine. The third sapper did the the same after the second blast, then, a sort of wooden bridge was thrown down over the ditch and the fourth sapper rushed ahead to blow up the blockhouse wall. All this was done so quickly that the soldier who manned the blockhouse did not react in time and got killed, while the four sappers were still alive.⁸⁸

85. Study, Order of Battle Studies - NO 67-027: VC/NVA Attacks on Fixed Installations - Record of MACV Part 2, 06 January 1967, Folder 0610, Box 0021, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900210610>>; Anderson, Arnsten, and Averch, “Insurgent Organization and Operations”: 111.

86. Quoted in, *ibid.*: 105.

87. Quoted in, *ibid.*: 108.

88. Quoted in, *ibid.*: 111.

After this, the initial assault team attacked, followed by the main attack element. As a result, as an interviewee recounted, "When the 261st battalion attacked a post and if its position was not revealed, it was almost sure that it would come out a victor because it always applied a great number of soldiers and weapons against weak defenders."⁸⁹ MACV analyses showed that such performances were quite common across a range of locations across areas of operations.⁹⁰

Ambushes were consistently carried out with similar coordination. After significant reconnaissance and preparation, ambushes often were completed in 20-30 minutes and were composed of a lead-blocking component, main assault team, rear-blocking squad, all supported by observation and command posts (oftentimes including elements from the battalion headquarters). These units were scaled to larger components for bigger ambushes.⁹¹ Indeed, a key strategy was to use multiple assault teams to break up the enemy column, reducing any fire superiority that ARVN or US forces might have had.⁹² Further, there were often reinforcements on call. As Main Force units became more comfortable countering helicopters (see below with respect to Ap Bac), they often sought to "entice" helicopter-borne troops into ambush situation.⁹³

Particularly in ambushes, significant responsibility was placed on squad and platoon leaders to guide their soldiers and respond to unforeseen problems. As a MACV study observes from careful observation of ambush tactics over the early to mid-1960s, "Control of the unit is accomplished by prior training and through the efficient Use of subordinates. Subordinate leaders, down to and

89. Quoted in, *ibid.*: 110.

90. Study, Order of Battle Studies - NO 67-027: VC/NVA Attacks on Fixed Installations - Record of MACV Part 2, 06 January 1967, Folder 0610, Box 0021, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900210610>>.

91. Anderson, Arnsten, and Averch, "Insurgent Organization and Operations": 116.

92. Study, Order of Battle Studies - NO 67-026: VC Ambush Tactics - Record of MACV Part 2, 06 January 1967, pp. 7, Folder 0563, Box 0021, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900210563>>.

93. Know Your Enemy: The Viet Cong, 1966, pp. 19, Folder 04, Box 02, Calvin Chapman Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0380204001>>.

including squad leaders, are heavily relied on to influence the action throughout the conduct of the ambush. These individuals are also responsible for maintaining fire discipline and coordination to assure complete control by the VC commander.”⁹⁴

An illustrative example of such an ambush occurred in 1961 in Bình Dương, just north of what was then Saigon. Communication and movement between Main Force units was restricted because of an ARVN post between them. Every Sunday, an ARVN convoy went into a nearby town to re-supply the bases, so an ambush was planned to target this convoy. After 15 days of observation, an ambush site was selected at a stretch of highway with poor road conditions and the attack force rehearsed the operation for two days. An attack was drawn up with five squads that were divided in a flank security force and main attack force. The main attack force was divided into a fire support squad, a strike squad, and an assault squad, which was to detonate a mine under the convoy to start the attack. While the mine only disabled the truck, “The ambush was laid according to plan, and executed in eight minutes.”⁹⁵

A more complex ambush by the Main Force’s 514th Battalion is described by Anderson et al. based on an interview with cadre member who defected:

The 514th Battalion left Tam Binh and moved toward the GVN battalion at the Ba Dua post at Long Tien. To cover its movements, the 514th moved to Long Tien by way of My Long. It took two nights to reach its destination, taking positions for the ambush at 0100 hours the second night. The 514th command staff knew that the GVN battalion left the post at the intersection every day and moved toward My Long...At 1300 hours the GVN moved out of the Ba Dua post. The 514th’s second company opened the assault when the GVN forces were strung out. The attack of the first company split the GVN forces. The rear of the column was forced back toward the post. The GVN company at the front of the column was isolated and encircled by the second and third companies. The fighting lasted 45 minutes and resulted in the alleged loss of the entire GVN forward company. Viet Cong losses were allegedly one dead and five wounded.⁹⁶

94. Study, Order of Battle Studies - NO 67-026: VC Ambush Tactics - Record of MACV Part 2, 06 January 1967, pp. 6, Folder 0563, Box 0021, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900210563>>.

95. The full operation is described in, Cooley, *The Viet Cong Soldier*: 158-65.

96. Anderson, Arnsten, and Averch, “Insurgent Organization and Operations”: 112.

As Main Force units training and experience increased, they began carrying out more and more Quasi-conventional type operations. Identifying this trend, Anderson et al. observed that “before 1964, military activities in the Delta were conducted by relatively small guerrilla units. From 1964 on, the Viet Cong military forces were concentrated into battalions and regiments.”⁹⁷ This period was marked by the Main Force creating static defenses and preparing battlefields for direct confrontations with ARVN forces. Perhaps the best known example of this is the battle of Ap Bac in 1963.

Ap Bac is a village in the Mekong Delta that lies amidst rice paddies and swamps and is divided up by a number of canals. Main Force fighters had been carrying out operations in the vicinity throughout late 1962 and became aware that ARVN forces intended to conduct sweeps to dislodge the Main Force units. While Main Force fighters had carried out ambushes and harassing attacks before, in this case, two companies (1st Company, 261st Battalion and 1st Company, 514th Battalion) with additional squads and support units dug in to directly counter the ARVN forces. The companies were positioned around Ap Bac in defensively fortified positions with mortars and automatic weapons.⁹⁸

As the battle began, PLAF forces were outnumbered 4:1 by ARVN forces that were supported by US advisors. The fight started when PLAF forces from the 261st began attacking from concealed positions and then responded with a counterattack once ARVN forces had been stalled. The same company withstood a number of ARVN counterattacks while platoons broke off to carry out attacks on the ARVN flanks. Later in the attack, the 514th forces worked in tandem to the 261st to launch further counterattacks with the support of grenadier cells. Throughout the battle, PLAF anti-aircraft squads were able to down a number of helicopters. After a full day of fighting, the PLAF Main Force

97. Ibid.: 28.

98. Toczek, *The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam*: Chapter 3.

elements withdrew in a coordinated manner, with platoons left in contact while the majority of forces retreated.⁹⁹

Summing up the attack, Talmadge points out that the PLAF forces “displayed superb fire discipline,” good use of terrain to conceal positions, and accurate use of firepower. More broadly, the PLAF forces,

Successfully demonstrated the ability to conduct relatively complex operations. Although it was only lightly armed, it successfully established interlocking fields of fire with its machine guns, maximizing the benefit of its defensive positions. PLAF commanders also reacted quickly to the different prongs of the ARVN attacks, fighting them off in turn and frequently shifting forces from part of the line to another to cope with the substantially larger enemy force.¹⁰⁰

While the poor performance of ARVN forces definitely contributed to the battle’s outcome, Main Force units showed the ability to plan and carry out larger operations.¹⁰¹

1965-1975: Main and Local Force. After the US intervention, given that training was curtailed for all units, was highly variable across and within regiments, and no longer had any large-unit components, the theory predicts that Main Force units would *not* be able to carry out Quasi-conventional operations. This reality was clearly evidenced during the Tet Offensive when PAVN units were far more effective than Main Force units. While both PAVN and Main Force units failed to achieve their objectives, there were marked differences in the way in which they fought. Beginning in 1966, Main Force elements showed little ability to carry out such complex operations. Nonetheless, even with this loss of sanctuary, while there some greater variation in effectiveness, Main Force units were still able to carry out Guerrilla-type operations. It was only after they were decimated when attempting to fight conventionally, that the Main Force units were mostly taken out of the picture.

99. Cooley, *The Viet Cong Soldier*: 166-72.

100. Talmadge, *The Dictator’s Army*: 84.

101. Toczek, *The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam*: 124.

Indeed, despite the significant pressure US forces put in PLAF units, Main Force units kept pressure on US forces by launching a wide set of ambushes and raids. These attacks, relying units at the company-level and below proved quite frustrating for US forces.¹⁰² As a MACV study found in assessing PLAF operations during this period:

Because of overall Allied superiority in manpower and firepower, the VC/NVA commander plans his attack carefully and at great length... Execution of the attack plan is marked by good security, silence, and speed. Attacking units make maximum use of terrain and move aggressively into the perimeter to isolate and destroy the opposing force piecemeal. Withdrawals are quick, orderly, and well-executed. Once the attack starts, great emphasis is placed on the individual initiative of subordinate commander, especially the platoon leader and squad leaders... VC/NVA tactics and techniques used in attacking fixed installations are well conceived and have proved to be effective in numerous cases.¹⁰³

Nonetheless, as the US presence increased, PLAF internal assessments pointed to difficulties with force generation as poorly trained soldiers were entering the ranks of the Main Force. As Cooley found, "The lack of uniformity in recruit training, or unit training for that matter, does not allow the Viet Cong to readily transfer units of individuals throughout the country."¹⁰⁴ Captured documents from the PLAF uncovered these trends. One assessment, cited in a CIA analysis, found that

Soldiers fail to observe discipline. Camouflage and guard duty are not performed carefully... cadres and units seek ways to avoid fighting the enemy. Most soldiers are fearful of the enemy air and artillery activities. They fail positively to conduct attacks and raids on a large scale against the enemy. They fail to comb their area in search of [GVN] personnel. Soldiers lack patience in waiting for the enemy.¹⁰⁵

Accounts showed that variation in combat power and behavior were driven by how experienced and well-trained the fighters in units were. For example, the 261st Battalion had a "high percentage

102. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 259-72.

103. Study, Order of Battle Studies - NO 67-027: VC/NVA Attacks on Fixed Installations - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 5-6, 06 January 1967, Folder 0610, Box 0021, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900210610>>

104. Cooley, *The Viet Cong Soldier*: 148-49.

105. A Study Prospects For The Viet Cong, December 1966, pp. 16, Folder 04, Box 01, Walter Wylie Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=10980104004>>.

of veterans,” meaning that all of its heavy-weapon platoons could be filled with veterans. As a result, it “was clearly the elite unit in the Dinh Tuong area.” By contrast, the 514th Battalion, operating in the same area, had a higher percentage of recruits, and was seen as “far inferior to Bn. 261 in quality of personnel, weaponry, prestige, and even courage.”¹⁰⁶ Even for the better trained units, their ability to carry out large operations was curtailed. As Gurtov continues, “Bn. 514 (LF) did not fight a major battle during 1966, while Bns. 261 and 263 (MF), which bore the brunt of the heavy fighting between 1963 and 1965, became much more selective in their targets and sought to avoid meeting the ARVN head-on.”¹⁰⁷

The clear inability of Main Force units to conduct larger operations was demonstrated during the Tet Offensive. Tet represented the major part of the Communist 1968 Winter-Spring offensive and consisted of attacks on thirty-six of the forty-four provincial capitals, five of six autonomous cities, and 24 of 242 district capitals.¹⁰⁸ The vast majority of these attacks were carried out by Main Force rather than PAVN forces and DRV leaders hoped that Main Force units would score large victories against ARVN, inspiring a “general uprising” amongst the the Southern population. Despite these attacks coming almost as a complete surprise for ARVN and US forces, most of the Main Force thrusts were quickly put down.

The DRV and NLF attributed this failure to a lack of preparation for large-unit coordinated attacks, a lack of training, and a lack of sufficient reconnaissance.¹⁰⁹ Summing up the situation as

106. Gurtov, *The War in the Delta*: 13-14.

107. *Ibid.*: 7.

108. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 292.

109. See, for example, Press Release Captured Document Assesses Viet Cong Operations in Saigon Suburbs, 06 March 1968, Folder 10, Box 07, John Donnell Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0720710009>>; Department of Defense Intelligence Information Report re: VC Assessment of the Tet Offensive on Saigon - Support Document from Project CHECO Report #193, 21 May 1968, Folder 0132, Box 0006, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F031100060132>>; Enemy Captured Document (CDEC) - Assessment of Tet Offensive by COSVN & HQ, SVNLA, 01 May 1968, Folder 01, Box 11, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University.

of 1969, the Communist Party Congress noted that despite success, “Our guerrilla warfare has developed slowly. Our province and district local forces, and even main force units of some military regions, are not effective. Their combat effectiveness is poor.”¹¹⁰ US assessments of each of the conflict zones during Tet found similar inconsistency in Main Force performance.¹¹¹

Interviews with Main Force fighters who were captured or defected during Tet illustrate these patterns. A battalion commander in charge of an attack on the city of Pleiku, the capital of Gia Lai Province, recounts that,

My battalion was not a seasoned unit, but we were assigned with the task of launching a prong attack on the southwestern side of the town where the administrative offices were located. Our combat plan was simple, because this was not an attack on a fixed target, but it was an attack on an immense area. Combat conditions were rather complicated. Actually I didn't know anything about the situation and the terrain of the town...In other words, we simply split the battalion into two groups to plunge head-on into the town. We didn't assign particular tasks to specific companies as when we planned to attack a post or a fixed target. [As a result] the results were poor [because] coordination between the combat units was too loose...the ability of our troops wasn't fully employed [and] there were a lot of shortcomings in organization, planning, and combat leadership.¹¹²

Repeating a common theme amongst PAVN analyses and interviews with captured or defecting officers, an Assistant Squad Leader, involved in attacking the Provincial Capital of Binh Duong, attributed their failure to an inability to operate in urban environments.¹¹³ He noted that the difficulty of massing large attack forces in cities highlighted the Main Force's inability to coordinate

<<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2121101031>>.

110. Resolution Nine Of The July 1969 Party Conference, July 1969, pp. 7, Folder 11, Box 08, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2320811003>>.

111. For summary, see, Summary, Office of Information - U.S. Army Military History Institute Summary - re: Significant Events of 1968 - Record of MACV Part 1, 01 March 1969, Folder 0875, Box 0006, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015800060875>>.

112. Interviews Concerning the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam # TET-VC-41, 03 May 1968, pp 3-5, Folder 13, Box 10, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2131013007>>.

113. For a structured discussion of the PLAF analysis of this problem, see PLAF/PAVN Urban Military Tactics August 1969, August 1969, Folder 07, Box 10, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2131007010>>.

large unit movements and its inability to adapt in real-time and provide reinforcements. Before describing these deficiencies, the Assistant Squad Leader began quite optimistically, pointing to how well equipped his regiment was and the support they hoped to receive in this large attack:

The reasons I felt so positive about it were the following: first, we had rarely been defeated; second, in the coming offensive my unit was going to be reinforced by air-defense fire power, mortars, and even an engineer company; third, the all-zone coordination of the offensive gave us all a greater confidence because up to that time we had never had the occasion to participate in any battle of such big importance. Moreover, considering the ratio of forces participating in the offensive, I found that the VC side was able to move such a big force, and so we felt all the more enthusiastic. [But, he continued] In my opinion, in the last offensive, militarily, some of our unit did achieve some victories, but these were too small as compared to the main objectives of the offensive. I want to stress that of the 10 units participating in the attacks, only one or two achieved some success. The rest were defeated with a relatively high number of casualties. The VC defeat in the last offensive, in my opinion, was due to many factors: first, combat tactics in the city forced the VC to disperse their forces, so they were not able to concentrate them for human-wave attacks like they used to do on the open battlefield. Because they were forced to disperse their forces, their command and co-ordination got disrupted, and sometimes lost... Secondly, the VC troops were not familiar with the terrain in the provincial town and didn't know how strong the opponent's defenses were at the targets. Hence, when the fight started many units were still far from the targets. This took away a very important factor in any fighting—that of surprise.¹¹⁴

As a result of such losses, by the end of the Tet Offensive, Main Force units had been decimated and would not recover. As Duiker reports, by the end of 1968, there were supposedly 125,000 Main Force troops in the South, and 85,000 of them were PAVN fighters.¹¹⁵

Despite these losses, Main Force units kept fighting without widespread defections, even participating in multiple additional waves of attacks as the DRV sought to salvage some tangible gains from the Tet Offensive. Indeed, US analysts were continually impressed by the level of morale of Main Force fighters as they continued to follow orders to attack during these later offensives.¹¹⁶ While

114. Interview With Vietnam War Participant # TET-VC-40, 29 April 1968, pp. 2-7, Folder 13, Box 10, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2131013014>>.

115. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 303.

116. Report, U.S. Army Center of Military History - The General Offensives of 1968-69, 1981, Chapter 5, Folder 03, Box 05, Michael Sloniker Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=8850503001>>.

morale was definitely somewhat lowered, RAND interviews showed that many units continued to be held together by cadre and strong primary groups. Summarizing these interviews, post-Tet, Kellen observes that:

To anyone experienced in interviewing soldiers in war, the results are—as were the results of previous similar investigations into the VC/NVA— extraordinary: enemy morale appears high indeed, particularly in view of the enormous disproportion in power and resources of the two contenders... The enemy soldier trusts his leaders, likes his political officer, gains strength from self-criticism and the three-man cell, draws pride from his military successes, is encouraged by what he sees as the unalterable support and sympathy of the people, and relies heavily on what he insists is the righteousness of his cause. This parallels the findings of some of the 1965, 1966, and 1967 RAND studies on the same subject.¹¹⁷

Nonetheless, the significant losses at Tet cemented the declining trends within the Main Force units. After 1968, this led to even more variable and poor performance as Guerrilla Forces and other irregulars were promoted to Main Force units without training.¹¹⁸ Guidance issued by the Main Force military leadership in 1970 demonstrated that basic tenets of coordinated combat were no longer being followed as it reminds its commanders that:

We should carefully camouflage fortifications and counter sweep operations to wear down enemy forces. Raids require quick attacks and complete annihilation of enemy troops. We should attack the right targets to increase the effectiveness of combat tactics and gain great successes. The combat coordination plan must meticulously point out all possibilities. Every unit should be absolutely faithful to the coordinated plan (after agreement on it has been reached).

Cadre and soldiers should strengthen their determination to maintain combat positions to the end, and not withdraw without permission. They should conserve ammunition. Cadre of all levels should be able to carry out safe withdrawals without leaving weapons or clothing behind. Heavy weapons units should have priority to withdraw first and be protected by infantry troops. (An infantry unit is responsible for protecting an attached heavy weapons element.) Troop formations must suit the attack plans and promote effective fields of fire for heavy weapons units¹¹⁹

117. Kellen, *Conversations with NVA and VC Soldiers*: 101-102.

118. Brief, Intelligence: DIP - re: Manpower Situation of Viet Cong Guerilla Forces - Record of MACV Part 1, No Date, Folder 0243, Box 0019, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015800190243>>.

119. Activity Plan, 1696 Main Force Battalion, Long An Sub-Region, COSVN, 02 July 1970, Folder 05, Box 16, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2131605015>>.

As a result of this lowered performance, much of the real fight shifted to be between PAVN and the US and ARVN. This reality was acknowledged by a US Special Forces detachments who noted that their clearing operations after Tet “became extremely effective against Viet Cong, but less effective against main-force NVA.”¹²⁰

PAVN. Given their consistent training and supply, the theory predicts that PAVN fighters would be able to sustain Quasi-Conventional Capacity throughout the conflict. PAVN forces fought a number of guerrilla and conventional battles from 1965 onwards. While Northern fighters had served as “fillers” earlier in the conflict, by 1965 entire PAVN units, up to the battalion were moving into the South.¹²¹ PAVN’s resilience and continued able to operate is strongly contrasted with Main Force performance during Tet and throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.

An early example of PAVN capacity came with one of the first encounters between PAVN and US forces, the Battle of Ia Drang Valley in November 1965. This engagement included elements from three PAVN regiments, the 66th, 33rd, and 304th. They faced off against three US battalions from the 1st Cavalry Division. The valley was surrounded by high mountains and had varied terrain including thick forests, open fields, and many streams.¹²² The pre-text for the US operations came after two PAVN regiments conducted a coordinated assault on a US camp at Plei Me in October of 1965. During this assault, they “poured small-arms, mortar, and recoilless rifle fire into the camp while carrying out intermittent probes and larger attacks to maintain the pressure.”¹²³ After the extended siege—including ambushing reinforcement columns—the US forces from the 1st Cavalry

120. Robin Moore and Michael Lennon, *The Wars of the Green Berets: Amazing Stories from Vietnam to the Present* (Skyhorse Publishing, Inc., 2015): 19.

121. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 274.

122. Publication, People’s Army Publishing House, Hanoi - English Translation by Merle Pribbenow - Battles During the Liberation War, Volume 5, 1996, Folder 04, Box 01, Merle Pribbenow Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=16900104001>>.

123. John Carland, *Stemming the Tide: May 1965 to October 1966*. (Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2000): 100.

Division were sent to dismantle the PAVN presence.

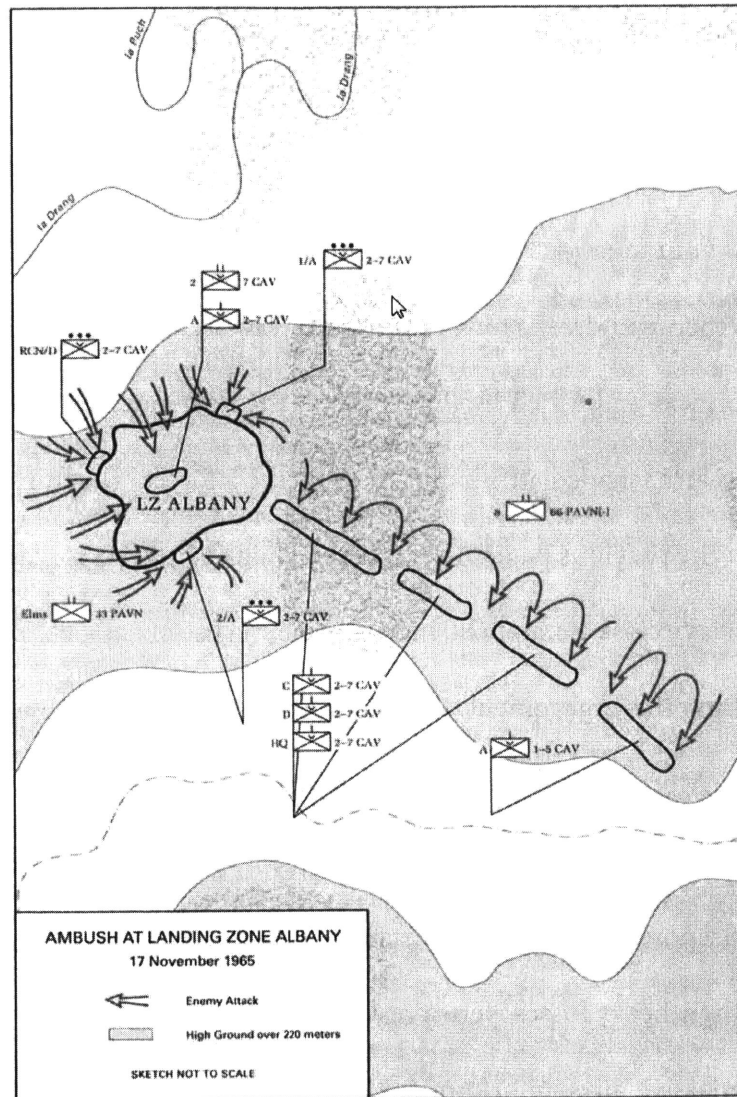


Figure 5.1 Assault on Landing Zone Albany, from John Carland, *Stemming the Tide: May 1965 to October 1966*. (Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2000): 139.

The Battle of Ia Drang Valley began on November 17, after forces from two US battalions entered the valley by helicopter and quickly made contact with the PAVN forces. After a day of fighting, PAVN forced launched a large assault on the second day of the battle, carrying out an extended attack from three fronts on the US position at landing zone “X-Ray.” The “enemy fire was so intense that any movement inside the American position was dangerous. Striking from the south, southeast, and

northeast in less than half an hour, the North Vietnamese commander had committed a thousand men to a full-scale attempt to overrun X-RAY.”¹²⁴ During the assault, US forces noted that PAVN units shifted the brunt of the attacks multiple times, attempting to flank US forces. The assault was only stymied after B-52s provided air support, dropping nearly 5,000 bombs. PAVN forces launched four more assaults throughout the night that were eventually turned back with heavy artillery fire.

PAVN and US forces then withdrew. However, despite heavy PAVN losses, the battle continued after another US battalion was ambushed by PAVN forces the next day. The ambush included coordinated mortar-fire and an L-shaped attack that enveloped US forces. The full scale of the assault is shown in Figure 5.1 on the previous page. After a sixteen hour battle, US forces were only able to extract themselves with heavy close air support, including liberal use of napalm. While PAVN forces suffered major losses during the engagement, they demonstrated the ability to attack *en masse* for extended periods of time. Moreover, their close coordination had allowed them to partially offset the effects of the heavy US air assault. By operating very close to US forces, PAVN fighters were able to mitigate some of the firepower deficit as US air assets could not attack without risking friendly casualties. Nonetheless, their heavy losses were a result of US overwhelming air power. As Carland noted, “the presence of massive air support and artillery was the only real edge [US forces] had, providing the margin between life and death.”¹²⁵

PAVN’s capacity was demonstrated in stark contrast to the Main Force during Tet. As noted above, Main Force units were not particularly effective during Tet, and were defeated quickly in a number of engagements. In contrast, in the locations that PAVN forces fought, they were able to carry out coordinated Quasi-conventional operations over extended time periods. While they were ultimately defeated by US forces, they showed markedly higher capacity than the Main Force units.

124. Carland, *Stemming the Tide*: 129.

125. *Ibid.*: 149.

The two major engagements were at Huế and Khe Sanh. At Huế, two PAVN regiments were committed and supported by six Main Force battalions. They fought against limited US forces, as well as one of the most capable ARVN elements, the 1st Division.¹²⁶ The attack began with a PAVN assault started by a rocket barrage. PAVN forces attacked from multiple directions in a synchronized attack, that, according to the PAVN history required careful execution as “a large number forces” had to “divide the approach march into many columns, cross many rivers and streams, and bypass many enemy outposts.”¹²⁷ When faced with resistance, PAVN forces were able to re-direct units in real-time. They took much of the city within a day of fighting and set up defensive positions and were able to maintain control of major parts of city for 26 days despite the use of significant US artillery.¹²⁸

Summing up the PAVN performance, Talmadge observes that:

The North Vietnamese showed their ability to aggregate tactical actions into complex operations. They repeatedly combined arms and coordinated the activities of multiple units to produce maximum effect, both offensively and defensively. . . Communist forces proved themselves able to conduct impressive defensive operations that again combined arms and coordinated activities across different types of units. Both ARVN and U.S. histories noted that the North Vietnamese skillfully established complex defensive positions with interlocking fields of fire.¹²⁹

The other major engagement for PAVN forces during Tet occurred at Khe Sanh. Throughout 1967, PAVN forces had conducted sustained attacks on border posts near Laos. As a part of these operations, in early 1967, PAVN forces had already carried heavy artillery attacks and a major ground assault on Khe Sanh, an isolated base near the demilitarized zone between the North and South and close to the Laotian border.¹³⁰ PAVN dedicated 15,000 fighters from two divisions. They faced off

126. Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*: Chapter 3.

127. Quoted in, *ibid.*: 96.

128. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 295; William Thomas Allison, *The Tet Offensive: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Routledge, 2008): 53-55.

129. Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*: 96-97.

130. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 282.

against 6,000 US Marines and a small number of ARVN fighters, who could call on continuous air support. The battle lasted for three months.

During the battle, PAVN forces launched multiple coordinated operations combining heavy artillery, small arms fire, and full-on assaults. In particular, US forces noted the precision and skill of the PAVN artillery teams. These heavy caliber artillery stations were “the enemy’s masterful job of camouflage, his cautious employment, and the extreme distance from friendly observation posts. The NVA gunners fired only a few rounds every hour so that continuous muzzle flashes did not betray their positions and, after each round, quickly scurried out to cover the guns with protective nets and screens.”¹³¹

Moreover, throughout the three-month period, PAVN forces launched complex assaults at different targets in coordination. For example, early in the battle, on February 7 and 8, PAVN forces overran a Special Forces Base and launched a major assault on a main Marine installation outside of the Khe Sanh base perimeter. The assault on the Special Forces base at Lang Vei was fast-moving and involved a armor, artillery, and infantry:

Within 13 minutes, 9 PT-76 Soviet-built tanks churned through the defensive wire, rumbled over the anti-personnel minefields, and bulled their way into the heart of the compound. A battalion from the 66th Regiment, 304th NVA Division , equipped with satchel charges, tear gas, and flame-throwers, followed with an aggressive infantry assault that was coordinated with heavy attacks by fire on the 26th Marines.¹³²

A follow-on attack on Hill 64, near the main Khe Sanh Base was even larger:

Elements of the 101D Regiment, 325C Division launched the first daylight attack against the 26th Marines. At 0420, a reinforced battalion hit the 1st Platoon, A/1/9, which occupied Hill 64 some 500 meters west of the 1/9 perimeter. Following their usual pattern, the North Vietnamese tried to disrupt the Marines’ artillery support with simultaneous bombardment of the base. To prevent friendly reinforcements from reaching the small hill the enemy also shelled the platoon’s parent unit and, during the fight, some 350

131. Captain Moyers S. Shore, II, *The Battle for Khe Sanh* (Washington D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3 Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1969): 58.

132. *Ibid.*: 66.

mortar and artillery rounds fell on the 1/9 positions. The NVA assault troops launched a two-pronged attack against the northwestern and southwestern corners of the A/ 1/9 outpost and either blew the barbed wire with bangalore torpedoes or threw canvas on top of the obstacles and rolled over them. The enemy soldiers poured into the trenchline and attacked the bunkers with RPGs and satchel charges. They also emplaced machine guns at the edge of the penetrations and pinned down those Marines in the eastern half of the perimeter who were trying to cross over the hill and reinforce their comrades.¹³³

This attack was only turned back with heavy close air support. Despite taking heavy losses, PAVN forces continued to launch major assaults throughout February before beginning to withdraw their forces. In the end, US forces flew up wars of 27,000 sorties to bomb PAVN positions and forces.¹³⁴

While the Main Force was decimated after Tet, PAVN units continued carrying out major operations, if at a reduced clip. This included major operations in Laos in 1971 as ARVN attempted to interfere with PAVN's ability to use the country to re-supply the South. During these operations, one ARVN officer observed that "The enemy effectively coordinated all his capabilities, to include antiaircraft, artillery, mortars, and massive infantry formations."¹³⁵

In March 1972, PAVN launched the Easter Offensive, which consisted of major attacks through the entirety of central and southern Vietnam. In the northern sector, PAVN forces took much of the Quang Tri province with armor-infantry operations, mostly launched from Laos. With the province taken, PAVN forces moved to attack Huế. It took nearly three months for ARVN and US forces to turn back these gains as PAVN forces were highly effective in defensive operations. The key factor was enormous US air support, including 6,000 sorties in May of 1972 and significant artillery and B-52 attacks in the following months.¹³⁶ While PAVN forces were most successful in the North, the operations in the center and south demonstrated similar combat power.¹³⁷

133. Ibid.: 69.

134. Allison, *The Tet Offensive*: 35.

135. Quoted in, Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*: 107.

136. Lt. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong, *Indochina Monographs: The Easter Offensive of 1972*. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980): 75-77; Phil Haun and Colin Jackson, "Breaker of Armies: Air Power in the Easter Offensive and the Myth of Linebacker I and II in the Vietnam War," *International Security* 40, no. 3 (2016): 139-178.

137. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 321.

With the US withdrawal, PAVN was positioned to carry out conventional operations without US close air support. By 1974, PAVN forces were engaging ARVN throughout South Vietnam. They made a final push with multiple divisions and combined arms attacks. As Duiker observes, this campaign “progressed with truly lightning speed, stunning the Saigon regime and even surpassing the expectations of the Party leadership in Hanoi. In three weeks, eight provinces had fallen to the Communists. Virtually all forces in Saigon’s I and II Corps were wiped out. ARVN had lost almost half its main forces units and more than half its aircraft.”¹³⁸ Saigon fell on April 30, 1975 to columns of PAVN armored vehicles.

5.4 Alternative Explanations

This chapter argues that the clear variation in the behavior and capabilities of the PLAF units—both Guerrilla and Main Forces—and the PAVN is driven by the level of explicit military training. In particular, the Guerrilla Forces had quite little, if any, organized training, whereas the Main Force units had large-unit training up until 1965, before it became much more limited and less consistent. By contrast, PAVN was able to keep fairly similar training plans throughout.

The chapter is able to parse out these differences to test the theory as it holds constant many potential confounding factors. The PLAF Main Force and PAVN had access to similar resources and types of equipment. They both received significant external support. They both fought the same US and ARVN foes. They operated in the same general theaters, and often in tandem. Nonetheless, what are the alternative explanations, what else might explain this difference?

138. Duiker, *The Communist Road To Power In Vietnam*: 344-45.

5.4.1 Popularity

Was it about popularity? Was PAVN more popular and thus receiving more committed recruits, thus allowing it to fight better? This was not the case. Particularly by the mid-1960s, the PLAF Main Force and PAVN were increasingly disliked by the Southern populace. This was particularly true of PAVN who were seen as “impostors.”¹³⁹ If anything, it was the Guerrilla Force that were most popular as they often served in their home areas. Yet, they were the least effective.

Demonstrative of this lack of popularity, both the PLAF and PAVN were forced to start conscripting soldiers on a mass-scale early in the conflict. In the North, starting in 1958, all men between sixteen and forty-five were eligible for a draft and were tracked down if they did not report.¹⁴⁰ After 1964, draftees term of service was indefinite. Moreover, some PAVN fighters were actually conscripted Southerners.¹⁴¹ Conscription into Main Force units was often even more coerced and sometimes was done via specific threats against family members. Further, many fighters were actually tricked. They were told they were joining Guerrilla Force or village units, but were quickly transferred to Main Force training camps.¹⁴² In 1967, some RAND analysts believed that upwards of 66 percent of Main Force fighters were drafted.¹⁴³

5.4.2 Strategy

What about strategy? Were PAVN forces the strongest simply because the PLAF was created to fight a “guerrilla style” war? To begin with, even if this were the case, the empirical analysis shows that the mechanism by which the PLAF was shaped was through training and force organization. As study

139. Gurtov, *The War in the Delta*: 25.

140. Lanning and Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA*: 39.

141. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Update: The NVA Soldier in South Vietnam - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 49, 18 October 1966, Folder 0173, Box 0023, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230173>>.

142. Donnell, *Viet Cong Recruitment*: 103-107.

143. Lanning and Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA*: 52.

of the Guerrilla Force makes clear, the PLAF was explicit about giving these units less training. So, even if the Northern leadership had intended for the entire PLAF to be a limited force, the theory captures *the manner* in which they would have achieved this goal.

However, while the Guerrilla Force was limited, the differences in training between the Main Force and PAVN were not intended. As introduced in the discussion of training, on paper, Main Force training standards remained quite sophisticated and in-depth and analyses did not find significant differences between the intended standards between the two organizations.¹⁴⁴ Because this training was conducted according to plan, this is why, pre-1965, Main Force units were capable of more complex operations. The confidence and expectations that the Northern leadership placed in the PLAF units is further evidenced by their choice to use Main Force units in a semi-conventional fashion during Tet. Indeed, the Communist leadership did not think that the forces were meant to serve drastically different purposes. As Wilkins finds, the Main Force troops were “envisaged as a companion force to the ‘main force fist’ of the NVA, main-force units were transformed to reflect the force structures and firepower capability commensurate with the task of partnering up with the NVA.”¹⁴⁵

5.4.3 Originating in the North versus the South

There are clearly some underlying differences between the North and the South. What role do those play in explaining outcomes?

Intensity of US and ARVN Operations. First, did the US and ARVN conduct fewer or less severe operations against PAVN forces versus PLAF units? While the US did launch a number of bomb-

144. Study, Order of Battle Studies - NO 66-54: Combat Effectiveness-VC vs. NVA - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 2, 02 June 1966, Folder 0528, Box 0021, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900210528>>.

145. Wilkins, *Grab Their Belts to Fight Them*: 16.

ing campaigns against the North's military infrastructure, there is no doubt that PAVN units had a freer reign to train and plan before deploying to the South. This reality contributed to the capability differences between PAVN and the PLAF Main Force as the war progressed.

However, once moving South, PAVN and PLAF forces were similarly targeted. As PAVN grew in strength, the US dedicated great efforts toward countering them, including launching unauthorized operations into Cambodia in 1971 to target PAVN installations. In addition, the US expended significant resources on attacking key junctures on the Hồ Chí Minh trail, inflicting major PAVN losses in terms of manpower and equipment as they moved South. Once in the South, PAVN units did not return North, meaning that they did not have a superior "sanctuary" to fall back upon. Re-training and upkeep of units occurred in the South.

Thus, both PAVN and PLAF units suffered significant casualties throughout the later 1960s as they often were involved in joint operations or attacked similar targets.¹⁴⁶ Despite these casualties and the best efforts of the US to limit PAVN and PLAF access to weapons via interdiction along the Hồ Chí Minh trail and within South Vietnam, both forces maintained decent access to weapons and supplies. As Pike observes, "PAVN and the PLAF received adequate quantities of the best military equipment that the Communist world could produce."¹⁴⁷

Education or Ideological Commitment. Another difference between those in the North and the South was that Northerners tended to be better educated.¹⁴⁸ Not only had many of them received slightly more education than their Southern counterparts, but they had received in Northern

146. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Update: The NVA Soldier in South Vietnam - Record of MACV Part 2, 18 October 1966, Folder 0173, Box 0023, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230173>>.

147. Douglas Pike, *War, Peace, and the Viet Cong*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969): 123-24.

148. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Update: The NVA Soldier in South Vietnam - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 48-49, 18 October 1966, Folder 0173, Box 0023, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230173>>.

schools. As a result, perhaps their greater intelligence and exposure to DRV indoctrination made them better fighters.

While these differences may have played some role, there is much evidence that they were not that important. To begin with, nearly all fighters in the North and South came from similar socioeconomic backgrounds—mainly they were poor peasants. Furthermore, for much of the war, many of the lower level cadre in PLAF units were from the North or were trained in the North and were highly skilled.¹⁴⁹ These cadre worked hard to educate southern recruits and many of these recruits underwent significant political indoctrination. And, they were successful. Despite any potential differences in the intelligence or commitment of southern recruits, the PLAF performed quite well throughout the early 1960s and continued to operate with Guerrilla Capacity until Tet decimated them.

What is more, there is some evidence that PAVN units had lower morale than their PLAF counterparts. Many of them were far from home, in the very different southern climate—many were open about their discomfort with jungle living—were not well accepted by Southerners, and had no clear notion of when they would be able to return to the North.¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, these units consistently fought with Quasi-conventional Capacity.

In short, a major strength of PAVN and PLAF was its ability to re-socialize individuals and keep them linked to the organization via a set of lower level cadre who served as focal points. Beyond this, the cadre were well-trained and played a major role in providing a high-level of military skill to their fighters, irrespective of their backgrounds. Pike describes these fundamental qualities in assessing PAVN and PLAF fighters:

149. Zasloff, *Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960*.

150. Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Update: The NVA Soldier in South Vietnam - Record of MACV Part 2, pp. 52, 18 October 1966, Folder 0173, Box 0023, Vietnam Archive Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=F015900230173>>.

Americans and others often assumed that the NLF army members were fanatics. Because they performed well in combat, it was argued, they were highly motivated, which meant dedication to an ideological cause. Thus the search was for the essence of this belief. It proved elusive, largely because it did not exist. The best of the military units—the main force units—were highly effective because they were composed of professionals. These were not green young Vietnamese farmers, only recently introduced to the rifle, but experienced guerrillas who had been fighting most of their adult lives. What impelled them was not ideology so much as professional competence, much like the United States Marine or the French Foreign Legionnaire. The men in the best of these units were very good; their discipline was superb; they were well skilled in small-unit tactics...they trained hard, rehearsed and practiced attack until letter perfect, and then they fought hard.¹⁵¹

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that variation in the capabilities of the Main Force, Guerrilla Force, and PAVN was driven by explicit military characteristics. In particular, a strong logistical back-end and high-degree of training prepared PAVN to fight in a Quasi-conventional manner for the entire war and similarly allowed the Main Force to do the same until the US intervention. Guerrilla Force units were unable to fight with any coordinated capabilities.

Beyond demonstrating the viability of the theory, this chapter makes three contributions. First, disaggregating insurgent military behavior helps to better understand how different levels of capacity contribute to the ways in which organizations are able to use violence in the course of the conflict. While the US and ARVN were able to significantly curtail the space that the PLAF could train and re-group in, that only reduced them to Guerrilla Capacity. They were still capable of significant coordinated violence that allowed them to weaken US and ARVN forces and take objectives and push RVN governance institutions out of much of South Vietnam. As is demonstrated in Chapter 6, studying Sunni organizations in Iraq, it is common for groups to be able to carry out significant,

151. Pike, *Viet Cong*: 377.

though lower-level, training without extensive physical sanctuary.

On the other hand, even though the Guerrilla Forces had a relatively low-level of capacity, they played an important role in the NLF's war effort. Because leaders could rely on them to use violence when ordered without close supervision, Guerrilla Forces were able to provide support for Main Force units, collect taxes, police PLAF held-areas, and serve as a training platform for the Main Force units. As is demonstrated by the study of Jaysh al-Mahdi in Iraq, organizations and elements with lower levels of capacity can still play an important role in conflict outcomes and processes.

Second, military capacity and the ability to adapt are hallmarks of successful organizations, whether insurgents or major conventional armies. As demonstrated by the proliferation of IED technologies and responses in Iraq and Afghanistan,¹⁵² countering insurgent groups means remaining agile. For example, some analysts pointed to the overwhelming conventional training of PAVN forces as evidence that they would be unable to fight effectively in the South and bolster PLAF units. However, PAVN training adapted over time to integrate more unconventional tactics, and perhaps, more importantly, their units were able to draw on their consistent small-unit training to adapt to new situations and perform both guerrilla-type attacks as well as major offensives. Similarly, PLAF and PAVN units quickly became able to counter some of the advantages of US airpower, both through extensive anti-aircraft training, but also by operating quite close to US and ARVN forces to make it harder for heavy weaponry to discriminate between enemy and friendly forces.¹⁵³

Finally, a persistent theme in this dissertation is that the study of capacity points to the need to better understand strategy selection. Why were the DRV leaders willing to launch the Tet Offensive despite the lack of capacity in the Main Force units? Was it a lack of reliable internal assessments driven by the continued emphasis on the importance of high-level training even though that train-

152. McFate, "Iraq."

153. Wilkins, *Grab Their Belts to Fight Them*; Toczek, *The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam*.

ing was no longer occurring? Or, like the in the previous chapter, were civil-military relations dynamics influencing outcomes? Were the political gains of a strong stand seen as trumping some of the objections from key military leaders?

Chapter 6

Insurgent Military Effectiveness of Sunni Organizations in Iraq (2003-2016)

6.1 Introduction

Thus far, I have argued that insurgent military effectiveness is not driven by pre-existing structural endowments or conditions. Instead, successful insurgent groups explicitly use a combination of informal and formal organizational tools to fight with increasing capacity. The previous two chapters examined organizations in Vietnam from 1945-1975. The following two chapters turn to the Iraqi insurgency. While this chapter examines Sunni insurgent groups, the next will examine Shiite groups.

To briefly recapitulate, the dissertation disaggregates lower levels of military effectiveness into four categories: organizations that disintegrate under fire (Combat Ineffective), those able to carry out simple activities such as ceasefires or preventing large-scale defections (Limited Structural Integrity), those able to ensure that their units carry out specific orders under fire such as only attacking particular populations or areas (Complete Structural Integrity), and, finally, those able to carry out simple military tasks such as assassination campaigns or launching hit and run operations or

ambushes, whether using small arms fire, explosives, or mortars (Guerrilla Capacity). Organizations with higher levels of military effectiveness can fight in a manner similar to conventional forces by employing combined arms, conducting static defenses, carrying out attacks that coordinate across disparate fighting units, executing flanking maneuvers, re-grouping and responding to changing battlefield conditions, and adapting tactics in a timely manner (Quasi-conventional Capacity).

To explain variation in insurgent military effectiveness, the theory focuses on the intersection of informal structures of social support and formal military structures. The existence of strong social ties—whether imported from pre-existing community structures or built organically by the organization—is insufficient. Instead, insurgent organizations must actively link themselves to their members by directly and exclusively providing resources such as weaponry and food—what I term “resource control.” To maintain access to these resources, deployed fighters are incentivized to comply and use group norms to encourage others to comply—but only when their behavior can be clearly observed and thus sanctioned by the central leadership. Leaders with resource control can ensure compliance with highly visible orders such as maintaining ceasefires or not retreating because they can readily observe soldiers’ behavior and sanction units for violations. But, such organizations will struggle to manage how those units employ force, whether it be the tactics they use or the targets they select, since the fog of war makes it difficult to observe and then sanction behavior during discrete combat episodes.

To further increase military effectiveness by ensuring that soldiers comply when not observed, leaders must cultivate a lower-level officer cadre committed to the organization and trusted by their soldiers. This task requires indoctrinating and selecting qualified officers and positioning them to gain their soldiers’ trust by, among other things, appointing them to manageably-sized units and ensuring they face risk equally with their soldiers. These cadre serve as focal points for deployed

units, meaning that their example and commitment to the organization redirects the behavior of the group to support organizational goals.

Only organizations with this foundation can reach Guerrilla Capacity by, among other things, instituting military training systems for cadre, inter-mixing experienced and non-experienced members, and ensuring that orders can be passed to dispersed units reliably. Though it is rare, insurgent organizations may become even more effective and develop into more advanced fighting forces that can militarily challenge a state. These organizations have highly differentiated and well-specified units—such as distinct artillery and infantry components—militarily-proven officers, reliable logistics systems, and realistic training programs.

While insurgent groups in Vietnam were fairly diverse in terms of their pre-existing social structures and resource endowments, Sunni organizations in Iraq were more similar. Unlike Shiite groups, Sunni insurgent groups, for the most part, could not rely on strong pre-existing community structures. However, they could draw on significant access to financial and military resources as well as a generally receptive public. Yet, some groups developed to be highly successful while others either petered out or became ineffective military actors. In fact, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the organization with the least social grounding in Iraq and fewest connections to the military skill and weapons caches of the former Baathist regime developed to be one of the most effective insurgent groups. Similarly, while many tribal militias—which could draw upon dense tribal relationships and military experience—faltered, other groups such as the Islamic Army in Iraq were successful despite needing to build strong primary groups from scratch.

The chapter proceeds as follows. After a brief background about structural conditions shared by many of the Sunni groups, the remainder of the chapter codes each organization based on the key explanatory variables as well as the structural conditions they faced. For many organizations, there

are multiple codings either based on geographic or temporal differences. With each organization fully described, I then trace the manner in which organizational attributes and structural conditions were related to the military behavior of each actor.

6.2 Background

6.2.1 The Legacy of Saddam Hussein

While the United States (US) quickly defeated Saddam Hussein's regime in March 2003 as a part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, a Sunni insurgency had already started to develop by the following month.¹ The majority of the insurgency operated in the Sunni Triangle. This is a heavily populated region that stretches from Baghdad in the south to Tikrit in the north, and from the outskirts of Ramadi in the west to Baqubah in the east, to Ramadi, in the west, and up to Tikrit in the north—see Figure 6.1. This area, mainly encompassing Anbar province, includes other key cities including Fallujah, and Samarra. Beyond these densely settled urban areas, there are many rural and desert areas with scattered villages, particularly further to the west as the Syrian border approaches. Tribal and clan power structures are more active in these more “provincial” areas. In addition, major transit routes run through this region, and were active during the Saddam era as smuggling networks linking Iraq with Syria and Jordan.

Even though Sunnis are a minority, the Ottoman and British legacy as well as Saddam's reign, had given them much influence. Based on its predominance of Sunnis, the Sunni triangle was the geographic center of Saddam Hussein's authority—Hussein was born just outside Tikrit and belonged to the al-Bu Nasir tribe. Many of the Sunni residents in that area were employed by the government, whether in the security services or government bureaucracies. Within these communities, Saddam

1. Ahmed Hashim, “Chapter One: Origins, Causes and Composition,” *The Adelphi Papers* 48, no. 402 (2008): 13–24.

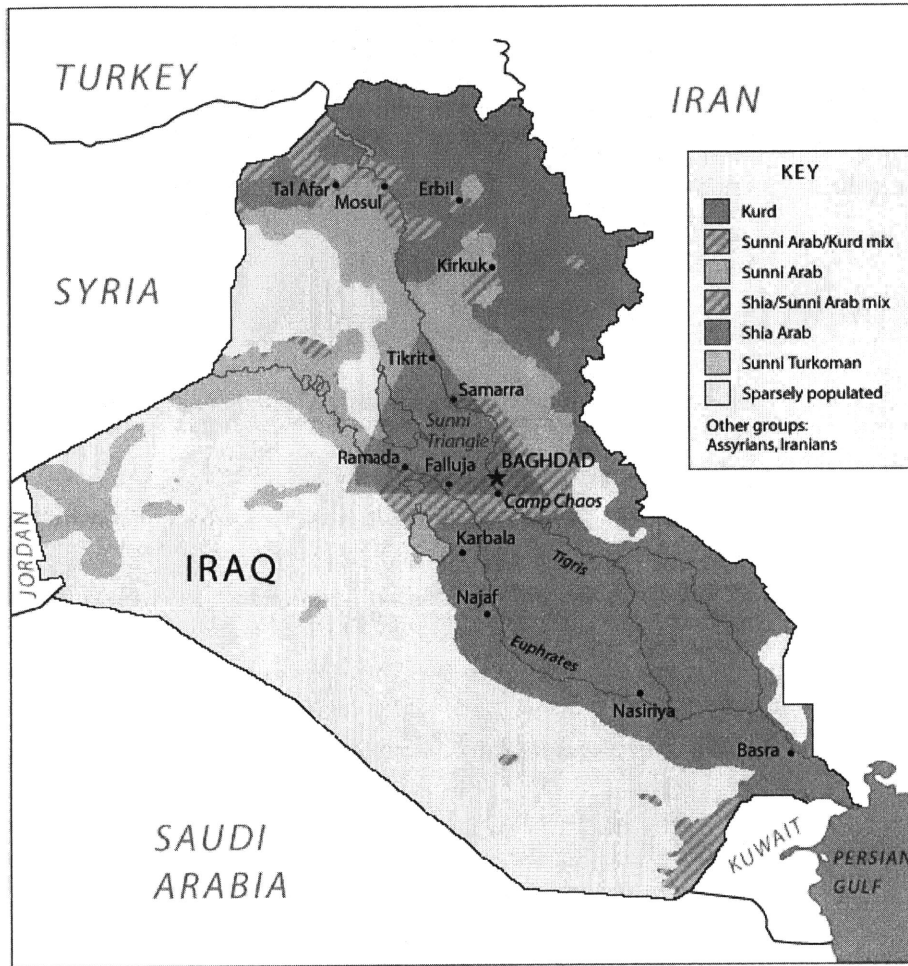


Figure 6.1 Map of Iraq, including the Sunni Triangle

had highly centralized control, using patrimonial distribution of services, infrastructure, and wealth to re-direct tribal connections to support his rule. As Karam observes, “during Saddam Hussein’s rule the real decision-making power become concentrated in the hands of Sunni Arabs hailing from tribes usually called al-Takarita...At times all the members of the executive body of the regime, the Revolutionary Command Council, were from the Tikrit tribes, creating a form of social contract based upon the politics of patriarchy and geared solely towards ensuring regime survival.”²

The US invasion dismantled this institutionalization of Sunni rule. Many Sunnis were excluded from new governance institutions—perhaps the most infamous examples came with the call for De-

2. Salam Karam, “The Multi-faced Sunni Insurgency: A Personal Reflection,” *Civil Wars* 9, no. 1 (2007): 93.

Baathification and the disbanding of the Iraqi security forces with Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Orders One and Two. For many of these Sunnis, “the Coalition invasion and occupation of the country that they had dominated and built in their own image for eighty-three years constituted a massive blow...Indeed, many are not fighting to restore their privileges but to survive.”³

These Sunni groups, on paper, did have a strong basis for starting an insurgency. Many of the officers and soldiers from the disbanded military had tactical training and expertise—some units even remained intact.⁴ Further, while Saddam’s army had collapsed, arms depots were scattered throughout the country. At the same time, the Coalition did not have the requisite manpower to re-establish the provision of basic services and security, further disenfranchising Iraqis.

6.2.2 The Insurgency

After little opposition during the invasion, culminating with the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, Iraq faced significant violence in the following decade. By the fall of 2003, US forces were being targeted extensively with mortars, missiles, suicide attacks, RPGs, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Further there were many attacks on Iraq’s infrastructure. Soon after, large attacks on international and civilian targets began, often using suicide or car bombs. As a result, Coalition forces began conducting operations to engage with these insurgents. In March 2004, insurgents in Fallujah ambushed and killed four private military contractors from Blackwater USA. This sparked the First and Second battles for Fallujah in April and November of 2004. Similarly large operations occurred elsewhere in the Sunni Triangle, in particular Ramadi.

Violence against civilians increased in January 2005 when Sunni groups targeted those participating in national elections. The elections also further diminished Sunni involvement in the political

3. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 68.

4. International Crisis Group, *In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency*, Middle East Report 50 (February 2006): 5.

process as most Sunnis boycotted. During 2005, fighting spread to Baghdad and surrounding areas, including a massive assault on Abu Ghraib prison. During 2006, a civil war erupted as sectarian violence overtook much of Iraq following the February 2006 bombing of the al-Askari mosque—a holy Shiite mosque. This fighting significantly increased the level of violence in Iraq, impacting civilians, Coalition forces, as well as members of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)—ISF includes both the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police Force. Moreover, ethnic cleansing occurred across Baghdad and other parts of Iraq as mixed Sunni and Shiite populations were forcibly separated by insurgents from both sects.

The violence abated in 2007 after the Sunni Awakening and the US Surge of additional troops to Iraq. By convincing tribal Sheiks to support the Iraqi Government, the Awakening and ensuing Sons of Iraq (SOI) program recruited upwards of 100,000 Sunni tribe members to join Coalition and ISF forces in targeting insurgent groups. This development temporarily convinced many members of various Sunni insurgent groups to stop fighting against the government. While violence declined markedly, attacks did continue in 2007 and 2008, including some major bombings of civilians and ISF targets, as well as continued low-level attacks on Coalition forces.

After 2008, US forces began drawing down before a full withdrawal in 2011. Throughout this process, the US was training and equipping ISF and began using ISF instead of US forces as the drawn down approached. After the US withdrawal, the Shiite-dominated government, lead by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki sought to dismantle the Sons of Iraq program and limit the influence of Sunnis in the political process. In turn, after 2011, violence returned to quite high levels. Starting with massive attacks on civilians, Sunni insurgents, now dominated by the Islamic State, have launched major offensives and pushed the Iraqi government out of areas of Iraq. After the replacement of al-Maliki, the US has stepped up its involvement in supporting the Iraqi government to fight these insurgents, providing aerial support and training.

6.2.3 Structural Conditions

Despite the presence of the US and explicit efforts to limit the insurgency, Sunni insurgent groups did not have difficulties in attaining gain resources thought necessary to fight. These included access to finances, weaponry, sanctuary, and external support. While there was some variation between groups—and will be addressed in the discussion of each organization—on the whole, the insurgency faced positive structural conditions. In the following discussion, I'll go through the baseline structural endowments for Sunni organizations as the insurgency began and developed.

Resources. While Saddam Hussein's military forces crumbled, his regime did leave behind a significant number of arms depots that included, guns, ammunition, and other explosives. While former Baath officials often were best positioned to locate these depots, many of these locations were raided by a wide-range of actors in the aftermath of the US invasion. As Steinberg reports,

One important advantage for the insurgents is that weapons, munitions and explosives are cheap and readily available in mass quantities in Iraq. The Baath regime had set up numerous decentralized arms depots in the nineties, most of them located in the Sunni west. Although US troops have uncovered many of these depots since 2003, the majority of them had already been looted by Iraqis or they are still in existence. In addition, the former members of the army and security forces kept their handguns when they were discharged in spring 2003.⁵

Beyond weapons, this also included training manuals and manufacturing equipment.⁶

The same generally held for financing. Insurgents were able to draw on external support, money from incoming foreign fighters, charities, kidnapping, ties with corrupt government officials, and criminal activities.⁷ For groups such as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), support from foreign elements,

5. Guido Steinberg, *The Iraqi Insurgency: Actors, Strategies, and Structures*, SWP Research Paper (Berlin, Germany: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs, December 2006): 23.

6. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 163.

7. Anthony Cordesman and Emma R. Davies, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict* (Prager Security International, 2008): 168; John F. Burns and Kirk Semple, "U.S. Finds Iraq Insurgency Has Funds to Sustain Itself," *The New York Times*, November 26, 2006, nytimes.com.

whether al-Qaeda central or arriving recruits,⁸ was substantial. Nonetheless, besides Iranian support for Shiite groups, other states were not strong supporters of the insurgency.⁹ In either case, Eisensdat observed in 2005 that, “the insurgency’s varied activities require a steady income stream and extensive and sophisticated financing operations. Though data on this topic are scarce, the insurgents do not appear to lack for financial resources, despite coalition and Iraqi government efforts to disrupt their funding.”¹⁰

Sanctuary. While the Sunni insurgents had few classic territorial sanctuaries within Iraq, they were still able to establish functional areas both inside and outside of the country. Insurgents made significant use of western Iraq and Syria.¹¹ As movement across the border was poorly regulated, fighters could move back and forth with relative ease. There were also many “mobile camps” in the desert of western Iraq—best known is the Rawah camp in Anbar province.¹²

However, havens were common elsewhere in Iraq, both in the north and around Baghdad. For example, there were many camps in Diyala province, east of Baghdad. In one such camp, US troops found that “the insurgents had built a labyrinthine network of trenches in the farmland, with sleeping areas and weapons caches. Two antiaircraft guns had been hidden away.”¹³ Camps in Diyala were moved to areas northwest of Baghdad after US operations flushed out many fighters.¹⁴

8. Brian Fishman and Joseph Felter, “The Demographics of Recruitment, Finances, and Suicide,” in *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al-Qa’ida’s Road In and Out of Iraq*, ed. Brian Fishman et al. (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2008).

9. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 135.

10. M. Eisenstadt and J. White, *Assessing Iraq’s Sunni Arab Insurgency*, Policy Focus 50 (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 2005): 16; See also, Patrick Graham, “Beyond Fallujah: A Year with the Iraqi Resistance,” *Harper’s Magazine*, June 2004, 43.

11. Cordesman and Davies, *Iraq’s Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*: 55.

12. Truls Hallberg Tønnessen, “Training on a Battlefield: Iraq as a Training Ground for Global Jihadis,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 4 (2008): 549.

13. Edward Wong, “Some Fighters in Iraq Adopt New Tactics to Battle U.S.,” *The New York Times*, November 24, 2006, nytimes.com.

14. Patrick Gaughen, *Summer Operations Northwest of Baghdad: Denying Sanctuary to Al-Qaeda in Iraq*, Backgrounder, Iraq Project 17 (Institute for the Study of War, December 2007).

Insurgents also used urban areas—whether whole cities, pockets, or safehouses—to train and equip their fighters even when proximate to US forces. For example, insurgents used control of Fallujah and Ramadi in parts of 2004 to build make-shift headquarters and organize their forces.¹⁵ During this period, “Fallujah became an indoctrination and training center, an arms depot and a ‘processing’ station for foreign fighters.”¹⁶

As the US took greater control of urban areas, insurgents came “to rely on safe houses in the cities.”¹⁷ Tønnessen describes a training film issued by Jaysh al-Sunna which “shows a group of mujahidin listening to a religious lecture inside a house. Thereafter, another man explains to the mujahidin how to operate a handgun, and shows how it is taken apart, put together, and loaded.”¹⁸ Thus, while perhaps not ideal, Sunni insurgent groups did have space to operate.

Social Networks. While these Sunni groups were not stretched in terms of material resources, their pre-existing social structures were in shambles upon the fall of Saddam Hussein. In order to exercise control over the Sunni population of Iraq, Saddam actively sought to dismantle or re-direct civil society and existing social connections. As a result, Saddam removed many of the features that are necessary for generating strong primary groups. Drawing on his work in Baghdad after the invasion, Patel describes the social context:

A conspicuous legacy of the Saddamist Baath regime is the profound weakness of civil society and low density of connecting informational ties between Iraqi Arabs. Most independent associational forms were either subsumed into the Baath Party or destroyed. Public gatherings were rare and always closely monitored, leaving few public rituals and social processes that could be used to generate common knowledge. The Baath regime controlled individuals through a complex and extensive apparatus of overlapping security agencies... It was personally dangerous for Iraqis to associate closely with people they did not know well; internal security institutions often assumed guilt by associ-

15. Anne Barnard and Farah Stockman, “US Bombs Gut Insurgent Bunker Complex,” *Boston Globe*, November 15, 2004, bostonglobe.com.

16. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 44.

17. Tønnessen, “Training on a Battlefield”: 550.

18. *Ibid.*: 551.

ation. Trust in society is extremely low; surveys typically show around 90% of Iraqis saying ‘you have to be very careful in dealing with [other] people.’ ...Under Saddam, the average Iraqi was intimately connected with and confided in only a few other Iraqis, often immediate family or first cousins. In social network terms, clusters of strong ties were small and connected by only a few weak ties, a network structure that hinders the generation of wide common knowledge.¹⁹

In contrast to Shiites and Kurds who could fall back on “individuals and parties that have wide bases, influence, and a rich political experience,” after the fall of the Saddam state, Sunni Iraqis did not have social or political networks that would unite them or that insurgent groups could use as repertoires for recruitment.²⁰ As described in the next sub-section, Sunni mosques and religious networks were a potential replacement for this loss, however, given the decentralized nature of the Sunni faith, there was often little unity created beyond the attendees of a given mosque.²¹

The one major exception is Iraq’s tribal structures. Iraq is a tribal society, with over 75% of the population in a tribe or related to a tribe by kin—there are nearly 150 tribes and over 2,000 clans.²² Many of these tribes have the foundations for strong primary groups: their members interact often, they share similar experiences and backgrounds, and have similar socio-economic conditions. Nonetheless, as developed below, those groups based on tribal identities, for the most part, were quite militarily ineffective. In fact, many of their failures exhibited the “dark side of social cohesion,” presented in Chapter 2. In particular, the social ties embedded in these tribal networks did not motivate individuals to follow orders from tribal leaders about how to use force and also lead them to ignore pleas to fight outside of their home areas.

19. Patel, *Ayatollahs on the Pareto Frontier*: 4-5.

20. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 73.

21. Patel, *Ayatollahs on the Pareto Frontier*: This contrast is discussed in greater depth in the chapter on Shiite organizations.

22. Hussein D. Hassan, *Iraq: Tribal Structure, Social, and Political Activities*, CRS Report for Congress RS22626 (The Library of Congress, March 2007): 1.

Competition. Because there were so few existing social ties, Sunni insurgent groups worked to unite followers around a mix of nationalist and religious messages. Given that both of these narratives were under-developed and vague, there was significant competition between the many Sunni insurgent groups. What is more, given the Sunni populations' feelings of resentment and exclusion, there were many individuals vying to join the resistance.²³

Religion would become one of the most important identities used by Sunni insurgents in mobilizing recruits. During the last ten years of Saddam's regime, the Baath party played up the role of Islam, supporting mosques and encouraging piety. However, there is much less structure in Sunni Islam than Shiism. Sunnis in Iraq had a wide-range of beliefs depending on their local cleric and were not united by ties of trust, shared information, or shared religious repertoires.²⁴ As a result, religious messages were widespread, some internal to Iraq, others driven by external religious leaders. Some were quite extreme, such as the Salafist perspective of al-Qaeda, while others were more moderate.²⁵ The ubiquity of Islamist narratives made it difficult for organizations to capture the commitment of individuals. As Tønnessen finds, since "The ideology of jihadism is easily accessible throughout the world through the Internet...it was necessary to socialize the recruits in order to avoid defection to some of the other insurgent groups, and to apply the global jihadi-salafi ideology to the local Iraqi context."²⁶

Many of the more moderate Islamists were also motivated by nationalist themes. While these nationalists narratives were powerful, as in Vietnam during the First Indochina War, they were general ideas without specific components that Iraqis coalesced around. Some nationalist narra-

23. For the power of resentment as an emotion and motivating force, see Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*.

24. Patel, "Islam, Information, and Social Order: The Strategic Role of Religion in Muslim Societies": Chapter 2-3.

25. Amatzia Baram, *Who Are the Insurgents? Sunni Arab Rebels in Iraq*, Special Report 134 (United States Institute for Peace, April 2005).

26. Tønnessen, "Training on a Battlefield": 555.

tives emphasized the power of the Baathist causes. At the outset of the insurgency, many US policy makers pointed to this cause as a major motivator of “regime dead-enders.” However, these individuals were not united internally and the Baathist message was not popular with many Iraqis. In interviewing a host of insurgents, the International Crisis Group concluded that “The notion that the former elite formed a cohesive group that was lavishly rewarded by Saddam Hussein’s regime and was in a position to coalesce quickly after the tyrant’s fall in an effort to stage a comeback is a myth.”²⁷

Another nationalist narrative, employed by a range of groups, was motivated by opposition to occupation. These groups capitalized on US treatment of Sunnis during operations, whether in urban or village areas. When particular tribes were targeted, individuals were often convinced to join insurgent groups for the sake of revenge or honor.²⁸ As a result, there was competition between groups using nationalist narratives as the nationalist message was often mixed up with tribal, regional, or personal distinctions.

In short, the Sunni insurgents operated in a crowded marketplace. Most groups had access to a similar toolset: significant resources—both money and arms—as well as partial sanctuary. However, the pre-existing social structures they could draw upon were quite limited. Nearly all groups tried to make up for this deficit with combinations of religious and nationalist narratives. So why were some more military effective than others? There were clear differences in organizational development. The following sections walk through a set of these Sunni insurgents to test the dissertation’s theory.

27. International Crisis Group, *In Their Own Words*: 5.

28. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 99-104.

6.3 al-Qaeda in Iraq

al-Qaeda in Iraq developed from Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al-Jihad (JTJ). Zarqawi first moved toward radical Islam in the late 1980s, traveling from his home country of Jordan to Afghanistan, before being imprisoned in Jordan until 1999. Upon his release, he moved to Afghanistan where, with al-Qaeda support, he began forming JTJ and established training camps in western Afghanistan. Zarqawi and his followers followed a Salafi ideology and carried out attacks against foreign nationals as well as Shiites in Jordan. With the US invasion in 2003, Zarqawi relocated to Iraq, importing many of his fighters and organizational infrastructure. For much of the insurgency, AQI was the most militarily effective Sunni group, and its next iteration, the Islamic State, has operated with even greater military prowess.

However, given AQI's lack of a social foundation in Iraq, existing theories would not predict its success. What is more, it was not best-positioned to draw on the arms caches left by Saddam's forces nor the smuggling networks that Iraqi tribes had access to. Furthermore, while it was weakened in 2007-2010 by the Sunni Awakening, AQI did not cease to operate despite a significant lack of support from the Iraqi population. Instead, their explicit organization building allowed AQI to operate successfully. Table 6.1 on the following page shows the coding and predictions for AQI during these periods.

This section draws heavily on sets of internal AQI documents captured during the Iraq War and housed at the Harmony Program in West Point's Combating Terrorism Center. The majority of the documents come from three collections. These collections are the "Travelstar" documents that were captured in 2007 in Anbar from an AQI's financier's hard drive, a set of documents captured in Tuzliyah that describe AQI's administration of western Anbar, and finally the Sinjar documents,

Table 6.1 al-Qaeda in Iraq Coding and Predicted Military Effectiveness

	2003-2006	2007-2010
Background Variables		
Sanctuary	✓	✓
Pre-Existing Primary Groups	✗	✗
Access to Resources	✓	✓
External Support	✓	✓
Factions	✓	✓
Organizational Variables		
Creating/Leveraging Primary Groups		
—Creation of Primary Groups	✓	✓
—Resource Control	✓	✓
Creating a Cadre System		
—Officer Selection Standards	✓	✗
—Manageable Small Units	✓	✗
Becoming an “Organizational Weapon”		
—Military Training for Cadre	✓	✗
—Basic Communications Systems	✓	✓
—Functionally Differentiated Small Units	✓	✓
Making the Jump		
—Large-unit Organization and Training	✗	✗
—Movement and Integrated Communications	✗	✗
—Heavy Weapons	✓	✓
Predicted Military Effectiveness	Guerrilla Capacity	Limited Structural Integrity
Prediction Correct?	Yes	Yes

captured north of Anbar in Ninewa province, that provide a wider picture of AQI’s administration outside of Anbar.²⁹ While there are inherent biases involved in using these documents, they provide an important insight into the organization—as Long observes, their existence alone is evidence of AQI’s level of development.³⁰

29. The Harmony Project documents can be accessed at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program>.

30. Long, “Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace?”

6.3.1 Background Variables

While AQI faced similar structural conditions to all Sunni groups as discussed in Subsection 6.2.3, it was actually worse off than many of these groups. To begin with, had even fewer social foundations to build on than most Iraqi groups. The majority of AQI members came from Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Yemen, and Tunisia.³¹ While they believed in the concept of “global jihad,” these recruits came from disparate social backgrounds and often had little else in common with recruits coming from other areas. What is more, their conceptions of the Salafi approach often varied and rarely shared in specifics—for example, whether to target the “near” or “far” enemy.³²

Beyond its members sharing disparate backgrounds, it was a distinctly “foreign” organization. As a result, many Iraqis viewed AQI with caution. From the outset, it was often viewed as an outsider, particularly based on its extreme use of violence and open call to target Shiites.³³ Long comments on just how disconnected AQI was in summarizing their situation in Fallujah, the first major city they operated in: “Zarqawi was a foreigner, with neither tribal nor religious ties in Fallujah. AQI’s main commander in Fallujah, Omar Hadid, was from Fallujah but is reported to have been absent from Fallujah since the mid-1990s.”³⁴ Nonetheless, by putting great stock in re-socializing and indoctrinating its recruits, in particular its cadre, AQI was able to overcome its disparate roots and lack of connections amongst Iraqis.

31. Joseph Felter, *Al-Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records*, The Harmony Project (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2007).

32. Thomas Hegghammer, “The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 9 (2009): 26–45.

33. Fishman and Felter, “The Demographics of Recruitment, Finances, and Suicide.”

34. Long, “Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace?”: 491.

6.3.2 Organization Building

6.3.2.1 Using Islam as a Foundation to Create Strong Primary Groups

Salafi Islam provides a starting place to build strong primary groups. As the International Crisis Group observes, “Salafism benefits from the strength of weak ties: the ability to bind together people who may share little else. On the one hand, requirements for being a ‘good Muslim’ (and even the best of Muslims) are simple and easily met, since fighting a jihad satisfies the obligations of a pious life.”³⁵ But, as noted above, this also means that it’s not substantive enough to generate strong primary groups alone.

An AQI cell commander emphasized that religion on its own could not unite AQI forces in a memo to the central leadership. He stresses that foreign fighters often had idealized or non-concrete views of Jihad—for example, they likened it to the movies. What is more, these foreign fighters had their own “culture and traditions before entering Iraq whether they were influenced by bad religious scholars or by out-dated traditional customs.” He continues, then, that without specific indoctrination “How is he going to continue without faith??? And how will he be patient and withstand all the troubles and divisions without the spirit of hope????”³⁶

Unlike other organizations, AQI addressed this challenge head-on. Zarqawi had already launched indoctrination sessions during training in Herat in the early 2000s and imported this approach to Iraq, using training camps in Syria, western Iraq, and safe houses to indoctrinate soldiers before they were deployed.³⁷ The training schedule at the Rawah camp demonstrates the premium they put on this approach:

The idea behind the camp was to prepare the recruits for the battles ahead through a

35. International Crisis Group, *In Their Own Words*: 11.

36. Harmony Document: NMEC-2008-612449

37. M.J. Kirdar, *Al Qaeda in Iraq*, AQAM Futures Project Case Study Series 1 (Homeland Security & Counterterrorism Program: Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2011).

combination of military and spiritual training. The daily schedule for the recruits illustrates this point. The day began with a prayer, followed by morning exercise and a theoretical lecture about arms. Later the youths received lectures in al-fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and in reciting (al-tajwid) and memorizing the Quran. They also sometimes received a spiritual lecture before morning exercise.³⁸

This challenge was particularly great for Iraqi recruits as they often did not share the same Salafist background as AQI's foreign recruits.³⁹ In addition, pre-existing tribal identities interfered with AQI's messaging. When most of AQI's fighters were foreigners, this posed less of an issue as it was more straightforward to indoctrinate these recruits. As more Iraqis entered the movement, AQI worked to use safehouses in Anbar Province to isolate and then indoctrinate new recruits: "To stay together with fellow mujahidin in 'dark places with no hot water or electricity' and with the shades down for extensive periods must have had a profound effect on the residents."⁴⁰ To track the background and training of each member, AQI kept careful personnel records recording information about each of its fighters.⁴¹ Similarly, each new member was required to sign a pledge of allegiance to AQI, and "disavow any party or armed group that works against" it.⁴²

6.3.2.2 Leveraging These Primary Groups with Resource Control

From the beginning, JTF and AQI showed a significant commitment to developing resource control by both controlling distribution of resources to its soldiers *and* reducing the role of other Sunni institutions in being able to provide to their followers. By dividing their forces into up to 15 battalions and dividing Iraq into a set of clearly-specified areas of operation, they put in place systems to directly distribute money, food, weapons, and information to deployed units.⁴³ This was demon-

38. Tønnessen, "Training on a Battlefield": 550.

39. Michael Knights and Brooke Neumann, "A New Afghanistan? Exploring the Iraqi Jihadist Training Ground," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 18, no. 7 (2006): 29–36.

40. Tønnessen, "Training on a Battlefield": 555.

41. See, for example, Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-657674 and Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-657796

42. See, for example, Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-636883.

43. International Crisis Group, *In Their Own Words*: 1.

strated by the significant degree of paperwork discovered in raids of AQI locations. Describing the “Travelstar” documents, Bahney et al. observe:

AQI’s financial documents depict a hierarchical organization with a centrally controlled bureaucracy that directly funded and influenced the operations of the group’s subsidiary “sectors” of Anbar. Using communications data to model terrorist groups as social networks fails to capture the hierarchical aspect of relationships, which may partially explain why hierarchy has, except for Shapiro (2008) in the CTC–West Point study of the Sinjar documents, largely gone unnoticed in the case of AQI and of contemporary terrorism more generally. In these documents, a provincial general emir and an administrative emir served as key decisionmakers for the allocation of finances between the sectors, directing funds to and collecting revenues from each.⁴⁴

Even when facing the challenges of the Surge and Awakening, this structure remained generally intact.

These systems included registers of weapons and financing as well as payroll figures and tracking of vehicles and supplies used in IED and suicide attacks.⁴⁵ Their major sources of income came from illicit activities as well as donations from foreign suicide bombers. These incoming funds were centralized to the emir. What is more, there is evidence of close tracking as balance sheets were updated bi-weekly and sets of memos went back and forth from center to periphery attempting to account for missing funds.⁴⁶ The same was true for weapons and vehicles, as rosters accounted for individual soldiers’ weapons.⁴⁷

In addition to providing these goods, AQI sought to differentiate itself as the ultimate source of Islamic jurisprudence. This included carrying out patrols to ensure compliance with religious principals as well as a concerted propaganda effort.⁴⁸ One AQI statement clearly sought to carve out its niche vis-a-vis other Sunni groups as well as Shiites: “The Shari’a Court of Al-Qaeda in Iraq will

44. Bahney et al., *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa’ida in Iraq*: 31.

45. Brian Fishman et al., *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al-Qa’ida’s Road In and Out of Iraq*, Harmony Project (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2008).

46. Bahney et al., *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa’ida in Iraq*: 43-44.

47. For example, see Harmony Document: MNFV-2007-000329.

48. See, for example, Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-638026 and Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-657767.

act in accordance with Allah's decree, and will kill anyone who appoints himself partner to Allah and drafts a constitution of falsehood by whose laws people will act in matters of livelihood, life and death, honor, and domestic and foreign policy."⁴⁹ Illustratively, a security directive from an AQI office to new recruits made clear that "obedience" is "the doorway to you're rewards, our gracious God orders us to be more than trivial and he will double our rewards more and more, their [is] no better way to come closer to God than doing your religious obligations."⁵⁰

Perhaps AQI's clearest example of this approach was its establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in October 2006. ISI was meant to join a wide range of Sunni Muslims and organizations across central and western Iraq. The organization represented a clear attempt to establish AQI as the key representative of Islam in Iraq, particularly as the Awakening was starting in Anbar. As Fishman elaborates, "by establishing a concrete political institution supposedly dedicated to Islam, AQI hoped to coerce tribal and insurgent groups, particularly those in the new Awakening Councils, from rebelling against its dictates. After all, rebellion against true Islamic rule is generally prohibited among Muslims."⁵¹ While this move did not substantially increase AQI's cache, it demonstrated its commitment to being a primary provider for its followers.

To further differentiate itself, AQI also wrestled control of key economic resources away from the Sunni tribes. This task was made simpler by the US dismantling the smuggling networks in western Iraq which AQI helped to re-establish with force. Further, the lack of employment and basic services in big cities like Ramadi and Fallujah gave AQI the opportunity to displace tribal leaders who had once distributed Saddam's patronage to address their followers' basic needs. One of the central ways AQI appealed to these impoverished fighters was by offering to continue paying

49. "RAF Applying New 'Netwar Strategy To Counter Insurgency," *Defense Daily* 226, no. 49 (2005).

50. Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-636916

51. Brian Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned from Inside Al-Qa'ida in Iraq*, Harmony Project (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2009): 6.

soldiers' dependents their full salary if they were killed—perhaps the only form of “insurance” for those in Anbar province.⁵² As a whole, “The AQI financing model...could be characterized as local, religiously radical, and politically destabilizing; it encompassed vigorous independence (specifically, local financing), exploitation based on radical religious belief, sensitivity to the perception of the average Sunni, and an explicit attempt to subvert the power of a number of key tribes.”⁵³

Importantly, while AQI is known for brutality, it shied away from harsh disciplinary procedures within its ranks. It sent memos to deployed units inquiring about misbehavior and making threats about withdrawing or changing the distribution of resources. As Shapiro describes, AQI “seemed reluctant” to take “aggressive action” against its fighters.⁵⁴ Instead, it made clear to deployed units what resources they would be given by the central finance hubs and relied on its deployed cadre to motivate fighters and keep them in line.

6.3.2.3 Building a Cadre System

Perhaps the most important factor setting AQI apart from many other Sunni groups was its insistence on cultivating a set of lower-level cadre and officers that were committed to the cause and were in a position to gain the trust of their fighters. These cadre were selected based on either their previous Jihadi credentials—oftentimes in Afghanistan—as well as their behavior in Iraq. For example, in a Martyr's biography for Abu Turab, one of the founder's of AQI's anti-aircraft brigade, the author started with a statement of Turab's faith and determination, he “studied Islam, memorized the Quran by heart, and was a respected son of good lineage. He came from an affluent and wealthy family. His father is the owner of an aluminum factory and, together with his older brother,

52. Bahney et al., *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa'ida in Iraq*: 55.

53. Bahney et al., *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa'ida in Iraq*: 39; See also, Kirdar, *Al Qaeda in Iraq*: 7.

54. Jacob Shapiro, “Bureaucratic Terrorists: Al-Qa'ida in Iraq's Management and Finances,” in *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq*, ed. Brian Fishman et al. (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2008): 164.

they frequently tried to dissuade him from joining the jihad, but to no avail. Abu Turab was determined.”⁵⁵ Similarly, upon his promotion to be a lower-level commander, the Martyr biography of Khallad al-Najdi noted that he “was tenacious and fervent about two things: military training and religious studies.”⁵⁶

The same was true of Iraqis. For example, as AQI moved into the village of Zaganiyah in Diyala province, they sought out openly religious citizens to receive ideological and military training. One of these leaders, Ali Latif was sent to a training camp for military instruction and religious indoctrination. As the commander of Alpha Troop, 5-73 Recon (Airborne) relays, only after proving himself in the latter, did Latif receive “acceptance as a full-fledged card carrying member of AQIZ.”⁵⁷

These officers were expected to lead by example, and were chastised when failing to do so or failing to remain closely involved with their soldiers. In one Harmony Document, the Anbari AQI leadership emphasizes the responsibility and importance of their deployed commanders. In a letter to Abu Osama, a lower-level officer, they criticize him for not asserting better control of his fighters. They write that “I have a feeling you are going very easy with the brothers in Al-Anbar...If you did not issue the order who did? We have to charge whoever did it no matter who it was so it will be an example for everybody else, because we are going through a very sensitive period with people and we have to hit anyone that helps the enemies. Immediately.” However, they also emphasize that “You know, I like you working with us and I love you more than the members of my family, and we our hopes on you are great, so do what we ask you to do.”⁵⁸

55. The Counterterrorism Blog, “Al-Furqan Media Wing - Al-Qaida’s Distinguished Martyr #28: Abu Turab al-Liby,” February 24, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060326204556/http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0306/iraqmartyr0306.pdf>.

56. The Counterterrorism Blog, “Biography of Al-Qaida Commander Khallad al-Najdi (a.k.a. Khaled al-Mani) from Saudi Arabia,” March 1, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060326204556/http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0306/iraqmartyr0306.pdf>.

57. Captain James M. Few, “The Break Point: AQIZ Establishes the ISI in Zaganiyah,” *Small Wars Journal*, April 17, 2008, 6.

58. Harmony Document: IZ-060316-02.

These officers were given the opportunity to gain the trust of their soldiers. First, AQI units were often quite small, with officers managing 5-30 individuals.⁵⁹ Second, they were directed to take the lead in planning and executing attacks—as evidenced by the emphasis on bravery in both of the Martyr’s biographies cited above. Finally, given their religious status, they were seen by fighters as legitimate and as sources of authority that could help them better practice Islam.

However, AQI’s expansion and then the Surge and Awakening put significant pressure on this cadre system. As AQI reached new geographic areas, it was forced to recruit and promote cadres who had not passed through the full indoctrination and training sequence.⁶⁰ It also sought more cadre as it attempted to diversify the complexity of its attack. New functional specializations required increasing number of officers who often were promoted or selected quickly. These processes were compounded as the Surge and Awakening resulted in the loss of many of AQI’s mid-level commanders and their associates. US forces used information gathered from new tribal allies to target a significant number of AQI cadre.⁶¹ As an internal assessment noted, promotions according to necessity meant that cadre being promoted during this time period had a lack of “lack of military, security and leadership experience.”⁶²

These problems apparently affected all levels of the organization. One high-level AQI leader sent a plea to al-Qaeda central, noting that Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the head of AQI’s military apparatus, was not nearly discerning enough in selecting and disciplining cadre.⁶³ Judge Abu Sulayman al-Utaybi, the former head of the legal system of ISI, argued that instead of disciplining emirs that “corrupt the

59. Malcolm W. Nance, *The Terrorists of Iraq: Inside the Strategy and Tactics of the Iraq Insurgency 2003-2014, Second Edition* (CRC Press, 2014): 113; Michael Knights, “Al-Qa’ida in Iraq: Lessons from the Mosul Security Operation,” *CTC Sentinel* 1, no. 7 (2008).

60. William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015): Chapter 2.

61. Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline*.

62. Harmony Document: NMEC-2008-612449.

63. McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*: 40.

organization and the State from the inside, intellectually, methodologically and ethnically,” Masri instead was “weak in facing their danger, and he was not in possession of the firmness required to remove them or deal with them properly. Instead, he was far more focused on preparing for the return of the Mahdi and the ensuing apocalypse.”⁶⁴

This dilution of the cadre ranks had notable implications. Reports started coming into AQI leadership that cadre were not providing resources to their followers. As one report says “Many of the Emirs mishandled their authorized powers by the Head of the State [Islamic State] and use it for their own benefit and became arrogant... Fuel, food, beverages, and dorms were misused which created a problem between Emirs and their subordinates.”⁶⁵ Similarly, a lack of religious authority from the cadre brought disagreements between foreign and Iraqi fighters to the forefront, particularly as cadre started giving orders that put footsoldiers in unnecessary danger—and often did not accompany them into battle.

The same internal assessment cited above thus notes that this created “barriers” between cadre and “their soldiers due to the lack of concerns about them [the soldiers] and not attaching importance to their conditions.” As a result, “the soldiers in their divisions are isolated in the desert without any advisors.”⁶⁶ AQI’s increasing lack of trust in its cadre was exhibited by its attempts to centralize decision-making for day-to-day operations, demanding greater reporting and permissions from deployed units.⁶⁷

64. Bill Roggio, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, and Tony Badran, “Intercepted Letters from al-Qaeda Leaders Shed Light on State of Network in Iraq,” *The Long War Journal*, September 12, 2008, longwarjournal.org.

65. Harmony Document: NMEC-2008-612449.

66. Harmony Document: NMEC-2008-612449, 17-21.

67. Shapiro, *The Terrorist’s Dilemma*: 97-98; McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*: Chapter 2.

6.3.2.4 Training, Logistics, and Communication

In addition to ideological selection and indoctrination, AQI also had well-defined and diversified training programs for many of its cadre. Further, though AQI was hierarchical, most of its command decisions were made in a decentralized fashion, giving deployed units flexibility in how they carried out operations.⁶⁸ These units had functional differentiation focusing on infantry roles, artillery and anti-aircraft, intelligence, explosives (including the production of IED and suicide bombers), logistics, and finances.⁶⁹

The training for cadre purportedly include five phases: Traffic Control Points, Basic Rifle Marksmanship, Infantry Tactics, Explosives, Suicide Operations.⁷⁰ Oftentimes this training was based on former Baathist manuals or was given by fighters with experience in previous conflicts.⁷¹ This approach was combined with a significant effort to critique and revise unit tactics following battles. For example, before the second major AQI assault on Abu Ghraib prison in 2005, they conducted 3-months of training directly guided by the failures of the first assault. Nonetheless, only select sets of AQI soldiers received training in coordinated use of arms or coordinated guerrilla movements.⁷²

Beyond the officers, there was some task-specific military training. Most recruits received at least two weeks of direct military training, and were selected based on previous military experience. Their training included lectures from experienced fighters as well as videos of previous operations.⁷³ However, many recruits referred to this military training as limited. As a result AQI explicitly sought to inter-mix experienced and inexperienced soldiers to allow fighters to “learn on the job.”

This training was supported by a logistics system that moved weapons and resources throughout

68. Bahney et al., *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa'ida in Iraq*: xiii-xiv.

69. Ahmed Hashim, “Chapter Four: Organisation, Targeting, Operational Art and Tactics,” *The Adelphi Papers* 48, no. 402 (2008): 43–52; Shapiro, “Bureaucratic Terrorists: Al-Qa'ida in Iraq's Management and Finances.”

70. Few, “The Break Point: AQIZ Establishes the ISI in Zaganiyah”: 6.

71. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 163.

72. Tønnessen, “Training on a Battlefield”: 552.

73. Ibid.

the conflict zone. This meant that AQI separated its money-making and weapons procurement from active conflict zones. As Bahney et al. find from analyzing documents within Anbar:

The sectors that are farthest from the western border and simultaneously most central to AQI's operations, Fallujah and ar-Ramadi, received the most in net money transfers... This indicates, first, that the organization prioritized operations in these areas, but, second, that the group generated most of its revenues away from the cities where it focused its operations... The provincial administration functioned as both a unit of financial oversight and financial facilitation, enabling high levels of operational tempo across large geographic areas through the sharing of revenue streams.⁷⁴

What is more, these deliveries—whether of people, weapons, or money—were consistent despite attempts by US forces to disrupt this logistics back-end. As a CTC analyst finds, “the Emirate smuggling operation approaches clockwork status. The network delivered a new group of fighters and suicide bombers roughly every 4.5 days, with near perfect reliability, over a span of six months.”⁷⁵

Finally, AQI ensured that it could communicate with deployed units in a fairly regular pattern by using couriers (or the AQI “postal service”), limited use of satellite and burner phones, as well as internet chat rooms.⁷⁶ AQI used the internet not only to spread information and orders, but also to reach out to potential recruits and publicize “victories.”⁷⁷ Their ability to communicate is evidenced by the enormous number of internal memos and letters captured by US forces during raids—in particular the Sinjar records.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, this communication was rarely instantaneous, meaning that central leaders could not communicate with deployed units in real-time.

74. Bahney et al., *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa'ida in Iraq*: 40-41.

75. Anonymous, “Smuggling, Syria, and Spending,” in *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq*, ed. Brian Fishman et al. (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2008): 95.

76. Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-637927

77. Serena, *It Takes More than a Network*: 78.

78. Fishman et al., *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout*.

6.3.3 How Did They Fight?

6.3.3.1 2003-2007

Though AQI could not draw on pre-existing strong primary groups, it created those via indoctrination programs and leveraged those ties with resource control and a committed cadre of lower-level officers who could be relied on by the organization and were positioned to gain the trust of their fighters. Building on that foundation, it added some basic training as well as functional differentiation. As a result, the theory predicts that AQI would be able to operate with Guerrilla Capacity. AQI indeed did operate with these capabilities for much of the 2003-2007 period, conducting targeted assassination campaigns, complex IED attacks, as well as hit-and-run operations and other types of ambushes while decentralizing much of their command decision-making. Further, even though AQI, as compared to other insurgent groups, was particularly violent in its operations, its leadership could still control *who* was targeted with violence.

From the outset, AQI's strategy depended on being able to control a significant degree of insurgent behavior. It included directly targeting US and coalition forces, targeting Iraqi police stations and politicians, international development agencies, and Shiite citizens.⁷⁹ Zarqawi was able to start acting on some of these goals quickly, with bombings of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad, the Jordanian Embassy, and Shia Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf, all in August 2003. Throughout this period, AQI fighters engaged in a wide-range of suicide attacks, demonstrating that they could be ordered to use force and would go through with it under a wide-range of conditions.

AQI—still JTJ during this period—first established a defined territorial presence in Fallujah. As noted earlier, this was the location of AQI's first permanent camps and safehouses in Iraq. AQI absorbed Omar Hadid, a well-established Iraqi Salafist who had had to flee Saddam's Iraq in the

79. Kirdar, *Al Qaeda in Iraq*: 3.

1990s. Hadid became the AQI commander in Fallujah. It appears that during the first (April 2004) and second (November 2004) battles for Fallujah that AQI became the dominant force in Fallujah, paying, recruiting, and training fighters. However, while many US soldiers emphasized the tactical capabilities of fighters during both battles,⁸⁰ it is difficult to assess AQI's performance since there were a large number of other fighters, whether former regime elements or other religious groups.

By the beginning of 2005, it is possible to directly isolate AQI's military behavior. While all of the Sunni insurgent groups had worked together to prevent Sunni participation in the January 2005 elections, many were less opposed to the involvement in elections later in the year. In contrast, one of AQI's first major campaigns was geared toward attempting to dissuade participation in the October and December 2005 elections by targeting specific sets of individuals. As the International Crisis Group reports, AQI "issued threats, but exclusively targeted those who were 'overly active in promoting' the elections."⁸¹ As a result, in comparison with the January 2005 elections which had seen significant violence, AQI was able to control its fighters' use of force in the lead-up to these votes.⁸² Fighters followed these orders even though AQI's membership and objectives did not change—it still emphasized that participation in the election was forbidden by Islam.⁸³

This period also saw AQI use a deliberate strategy to target particular political, tribal, and religious leaders. At this time, AQI leaders were keen on ensuring that operations were targeted and did not overwhelmingly target Sunni civilians. Indeed, letters to AQI leadership emphasize that cadre are explicitly following orders about how to behave when they cannot be observed. Moreover, even though these deployed units worry that using less destructive tactics to target specific individuals

80. Kendall D. Gott and Jennifer Lindsey, eds., *Eyewitness to War. The US Army in Operation AL FAJR: An Oral History*, 2 vols. (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006).

81. International Crisis Group, *In Their Own Words*: 18.

82. It is during this period that a much popularized letter purportedly sent from Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama Bin Laden's second-in-command, warned Zarqawi to be less brutal in his use of force.

83. Jeffrey White and Brooke Neumann, "Iraq's Sunnis Play the Election Card," *Policywatch*, no. 1062 (13, 2005).

might reduce operational effectiveness and that having to ask permission about high-value targets might slow their tempo of operations, they continue to follow the orders of the central leadership.

As one commander wrote:

Our state council forbids us from targeting Sunni police, or killing and eliminating the infidels and traitors without going back to the council, and you know that assassinations are about good opportunities, and monitoring a person could take days or weeks... We have no problem with you saying for us to give the name of the person before killing him, but we owe god, this will only be a delay for us, and time is not on our side, and for you to say to kill him outside his city, sometimes it take months before the person leaves his city, like if it's in Baghdad for example, that's difficult, and time is not on our side, we waited to cut the heads of the renegades in Hit, then 130 renegades came out to us for the reason that we didn't destroy the Islamic Party there, but we're working on it, for example we didn't kill Nasr al-Fahdawi at his home in al-Sajriyah, but the guys waited for him until he got out of the Ramadi province.⁸⁴

He goes on to request permission to target eight tribal and political leaders.

Despite these concerns from deployed units, this level of control positioned AQI to significantly weaken their competition by using force in a reliable and consistent manner.⁸⁵ A Marine Corps Intelligence Assessment in August 2006 made this clear:

AQI effectively has eliminated, subsumed, marginalized or co-opted all nationalist insurgent groups in al-Anbar. This very deliberate AQI campaign against rival insurgent groups began shortly after national elections in December 2005, when nationalist insurgent groups cooperated to prevent AQI from disrupting polling throughout al-Anbar. Faced with this blatant challenge to their hegemony, AQI destroyed the Anbar People's Council of Mohammed Mahmoud Latif through a highly efficient and comprehensive assassination campaign, thereby eliminating the sole rival nexus of insurgent leadership in al-Anbar. Following this calculated purge, AQI cunningly employed their greater financial resources, superior organization, proven leadership, and brutal tactics to consolidate their hold on most other nationalist insurgent cells in al-Anbar...Although most al-Anbar Sunni dislike, resent, and distrust AQI, many increasingly see it as an inevitable part of daily life and, in some cases, their only hope for protection against a possible ethnic cleansing campaign by the central government.⁸⁶

84. Harmony Document: IZ-060316-01.

85. Long, "Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace?": 494-95.

86. United States Marine Corps, *State of the Insurgency in al-Anbar*, I MEF G-2 SECRET//REL MCFI//20310816 (August 2006): 2.

Importantly, the intelligence assessment also makes clear that AQI was not popular during this time period, yet due to its ability to recruit, indoctrinate, and control troops, it remained powerful despite this dearth of communal buy-in.⁸⁷

US Army Captain Few documents a similar progression in the village of Zaganiyah in Diyala province. Even though “AQIZ was neither supported nor established in Zaganiyah prior to 2005. Frankly, population samples conducted as late as August 2006 indicated less than 1% of the populace supported AQIZ.” However, by developing a military advantage by recruiting and indoctrinating local civilians and using a targeted assassination campaign to dismantle opposition, “AQIZ established its zone of control, effectively killing or displacing 5,000 Shia residents, dissolving the Iraqi Government presence, instituting an Islamic government, and implementing Shar’iah law.”⁸⁸ The fight to take back the city was intense and resulted in the deaths of many US and Iraqi troops.

Beyond such targeted assassination campaigns, AQI also carried out other guerrilla activities such as coordinated ambushes, hold and release operations, and even some brief large-scale attacks. This included a string of Vehicle-Borne IED (VBIED) attacks targeting civilian and military targets. These attacks require non-trivial organizational capacity as the building of these devices is difficult and delivery of the explosive loads without killing the attack team requires significant preparation and coordination. Moreover, AQI often employed VBIEDs in a coordinated manner, detonating multiple devices nearly simultaneously.⁸⁹

Building on the Second Battle of Fallujah, AQI developed an urban warfare plan that drew on

87. Kagan describes a similar situation in Ramadi in late 2006 as AQI launched a targeted campaign against local police recruits and members. Kimberly Kagan, *The Anbar Awakening: Displacing al Qaeda from Its Stronghold in Western Iraq*, Iraq Report (Institute for the Study of War, August 2007).

88. Few, “The Break Point: AQIZ Establishes the ISI in Zaganiyah”: 1-2.

89. Jessica Lewis, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, Part I*, Middle East Security Report, Middle East Security Report 15 (Institute for the Study of War, October 2014); Knights, “Al-Qa’ida in Iraq: Lessons from the Mosul Security Operation”; Eric Hamilton, *Expanding Security in Diyala*, Iraq Report (Institute for the Study of War, December 2007–May 2008).

lessons learned from the battle as well as testimony from fighters—US tactics were “scrutinized and dissected.” In particular, they recommended to

[A]void direct confrontation and static positions; focus on quick, sharp armed operations in the heart of the targeted towns to avoid immediate airborne retaliation; vacate targeted cities prior to the onset of cordon and search and seize operations; once an enemy cordon is in place, attack from the outside, using rockets and snipers; and surround the enemy within the very towns it deems re-conquered and pacified.⁹⁰

Illustratively, a set of AQI units implemented this strategy in a show-of-force in Ramadi in December 2005. In this attack, AQI forces “took to the streets of a western Iraqi provincial capital Thursday in a fleeting show aimed at intimidating Iraqi Sunni Arab leaders taking part in dialogue with US Marines in a stronghold of the insurgency.”⁹¹

Similarly, a set of AQI cells were specifically trained for three-months for operations against Abu Ghraib prison in April 2005.⁹² This attack included over 60 insurgents, “improvised explosive devices (IEDs), truck bombs, indirect fire, and a small-unit assault.” As an after-action report details:

The overall attack on the AGIF [Abu Ghraib Internment Facility] began several hours before the first indirect-fire and small-arms rounds hit the base itself. At about 1630 hours there was an IED attack against a passing CF [Coalition Forces] convoy about 4 kilometers northeast of the AGIF. This was the first of a multitude of ambushes and roadblocks on the routes leading to the AGIF in an apparent attempt to isolate the FOB. The primary route that reinforcing CF units would take from the airport to the AGIF was hit with four IED ambushes, four small-arms attacks, three VBIED assaults, and two indirect-fire strikes. Antitank mines were also placed at a key intersection... The attack started with heavy mortar and rocket attacks. An estimated 78 rounds struck the base throughout the assault. An attack with small-arms fire was then initiated from the south. Several minutes later, small-arms fire started coming from the northwest. At about 1935 hours, the enemy tried to suppress base defenses in the area of Tower 4 on the southeast corner of the base with small-arms fire, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and hand grenades. In the midst of this action, a fuel truck was used for an attempted suicide attack against the tower. The truck was detonated about 75 meters short of the tower and the FOB wall, resulting in several casualties. Following that attack, the enemy launched a small-unit ground attack against the area around Tower 4.⁹³

90. International Crisis Group, *In Their Own Words*: 23-24.

91. Ellen Knickmeyer, “Ramadi Insurgents Flaunt Threat,” *The Washington Post*, December 2, 2005, nytimes.com.

92. Tønnessen, “Training on a Battlefield”: 552.

93. Major Robert L. Berry, “Attack on Abu Ghraib: Warrior Police in an Iraq Theater Internment Facility,” *Military Police Professional Bulletin*, no. 1 (Spring 2007).

In short, this was a sophisticated operation relying on rudimentary combined arms, the use of artillery, and closely-fought small arms battles. While much of AQI was not trained sufficiently for such operations, it is clear that they had the small-scale capacity to train some units.

Finally, during this period, AQI was perhaps the most targeted insurgent group in Iraq.⁹⁴ US forces attempted to decapitate and weaken the organization by killing key leaders as well as shutting down AQI's smuggling networks. This campaign was successful in picking off AQI's leadership including the assassination of Zarqawi in June 2006 and his second in command, Sheikh Abdullah Abu Azzam al-Iraqi in September 2005. Yet, as Long argues, "despite successful targeting of 'middle managers' in both Anbar and nationally, AQI continued to increase in capability in this period. The number of monthly violent events in Anbar (most though not all related to AQI) nearly doubled in the course of 2005, from just over 500 in February 2005 to nearly 1000 in February 2006, peaking in October 2005 at more than 1,500."⁹⁵ Instead of being weakened by this tactic, AQI was able to promote new cadre who were trusted by the organization and could be plugged into the existing command structure.⁹⁶

6.3.3.2 2007-2010

As detailed above, the Sunni Awakening combined with the Surge took a major toll on AQI's organizational infrastructure. Most importantly, it weakened their cadre system by removing trained and carefully selected officers while at the same time limiting their ability to train and select new cadre as they faced greater competition from tribal organizations. As a result, the theory expects that they

94. Mark Urban, *Task Force Black: The Explosive True Story of the Secret Special Forces War in Iraq* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2012).

95. Long, "Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace?": 492.

96. As Kirdar notes, "Though Zarqawi's death served an emotional blow to the group, it seemed to have little effect on the tempo and brutality of their operations. He was replaced immediately by senior AQI leader Abu Hamza al Muhajir—an Egyptian with longstanding ties to al Qaeda second-in-command Ayman al Zawahiri—as the group's emir." Kirdar, *Al Qaeda in Iraq*: 5.

would lose the ability to control how violence was used and to carry out more complex guerrilla operations. At this point, individuals would no longer place faith in their cadres and cadres would not be trusted by the organization, meaning that the organization would have a difficult time monitoring specific behaviors. Nonetheless, as they retained resource control, the organization would retain Limited Structural Integrity and thus still be able to control basic combat tasks such as keeping ceasefires and preventing wide-scale defections.

During this period, deployed AQI units began using violence in opposition to the wishes of central AQI leadership—the two core leaders were Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, the head of ISI (after its unveiling in October 2006, AQI officially referred to itself as ISI), and Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the Minister of War. As Fishman concludes about mid-2007, “Effective insurgent and terrorist campaigns depend on tight coordination between political goals, tactical violence, and strategic communications. In the spring of 2007, the ISI’s fighters were brazenly continuing the fight against all who opposed them, whereas its political leaders were trying to halt the political tidal wave that threatened to bury them.”⁹⁷ This reality was evidenced by AQI communications during this period.

Recognizing that many of their fighters were now using violence against improper targets or were simply racketeering, AQI released multiple statements calling for improved behavior. In particular, as they sought to respond to the Awakening, AQI repeatedly called on its soldiers to stop killing members of the Islamic Army in Iraq and the 1920 Revolution Brigade.⁹⁸ This was matched by a host of letters sent by AQI cadre to the central leadership explaining away or justifying their refusal to control who their fighters targeted with violence.⁹⁹

A telling example comes from activities in the Amiriyah neighborhood of Baghdad in the spring

97. Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline*: 11.

98. Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-637001, Harmony Document: MNFT-2007-636896, Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-636880, Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-636888.

99. Harmony Document: SOCOM-2010-0000003, SOCOM-2010-0000002.

of 2007. After AQI fighters killed an IAI fighter—against orders from the leadership to not fight other Sunni insurgent groups—IAI responded by killing some AQI fighters and refusing to return their bodies. The result was a large battle that lasted nearly two days in the streets, further damaging AQI's reputation as the Awakening took hold.¹⁰⁰ The AQI commander, Abu-al-Hasan Safir, wrote a letter to the central leadership attempting to justify his orders, "We, in Baghdad, wish to show the blessed Emirate that we understand the Islamic religious law policy of our state in dealing with the other groups... They didn't conform to religious law. They didn't seek peace. They didn't confess of their crimes."¹⁰¹

During the battle, al-Baghdadi decried the units' actions and called for them to step down. The official press release stated that al-Baghdadi ordered the fighters "to stay in their homes and their locations, he also issue and edicts (Fatwa) to all his soldiers not to become part of the strife and turmoil... He also advises them to bite there wounds and suppress their rage and fury despite any provocations because God is watching them."¹⁰² While the AQI leadership could not prevent the initial misbehavior, *they* were able to exact compliance with this call for a ceasefire as they could clearly threaten the Baghdad fighters with withholding access to the resources they needed to fight—religious approval, money, weapons, and reinforcements.

An AQI internal assessment also paints a picture of soldiers *not* using force when ordered, citing multiple examples of soldiers and deployed commanders finding ways shirk involvement in specific operations. He points to some commanders adopting a "garrison" approach by holding back their forces. As the author observes, this approach meant that "we lost cities and afterward villages, and the desert became a dangerous refuge." He continues, "we lost everything because of our neglect

100. Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline*: 13-16.

101. Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-637011.

102. Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-639155.

for the military work and stopping the desertion of angry soldiers from their units to other units.”

He said this attitude in the cadre significantly reduced soldier’s willingness to carry out specific operations:

It reached a stage where one of the brothers who was stationed close to one of the IEDs that was originally set to target one of the renegades, saw one of the American’s convoy passing by and did not set off the IED off, and he was later asked about his behavior and he answered, and we wish he did not, that he did not have orders to attack the Americans ???!!!! These kinds of Emirs started setting fear in the hearts of Mujahidin through their description of American airdrops, their air superiority and armored vehicles and Hummers, and that we are lacking the effective weapon for confronting them, to include that we are outnumbered and they are better equipped. As soon as the brother Mujahid hears these words about the Americans, fear starts creeping into his heart, as if the Americans were on foot, and one begins comforting himself with the idea of the Americans definitely pulling out and no one else being left except the apostates who they will extract from their roots.¹⁰³

Further, he emphasizes that he is writing the memo to inform AQI leaders of these activities since most cadre were obscuring their behavior by writing false reports.

Despite being markedly weakened, AQI did not cease to employ force. As they could still control if their fighters used violence in observable scenarios, they were able to launch relatively large offensives in Ramadi in August of 2007 and Mosul in early 2008. Further, they carried out more complex operations in localized areas around Diyala where they were able to re-gain some operating space to regenerate their ranks.¹⁰⁴ Beyond these bigger attacks, AQI continued to employ IED attacks somewhat consistently, though they did not carry out more complex operations on a regular basis. Instead, it mainly shifted to suicide attacks, which could be orchestrated and planned from outside Iraq or in safehouses in the country.¹⁰⁵ What is more, many of their organizational structures remained fairly intact—despite high profile decapitation strikes including the killing of

103. Harmony Document: NMEC-2008-612449, 17-20.

104. Hamilton, *Expanding Security in Diyala*.

105. Ibid.

the two key leaders of AQI, Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi.¹⁰⁶ As the next section lays out, AQI learned from its losses as it prepared for the US withdrawal.

6.4 The Islamic State

After the removal of Abu Umar al-Baghdadi and al-Masri, AQI leadership was passed to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2010. al-Baghdadi was Iraqi and his first introduction to AQI probably came while imprisoned at Camp Bucca in 2004. While Abu Umar al-Baghdadi was also Iraqi, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi explicitly sought to integrate Iraqis and non-Iraqis into AQI. Thus, he showed a heavy emphasis on indoctrinating and vetting new members. In addition, while Zarqawi had been hesitant to include ex-Baathists, al-Baghdadi was far more keen—many of IS's leaders are former Baathist military officers. After a set of major operations in 2013, he re-branded the organization the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) and finally the Islamic State (IS) in June of 2014.

Taking advantage of the new space offered by the US withdrawal, IS re-instituted its indoctrination and training institutions, integrating a wide-range of recruits from Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere. Further, it increased the military knowledge in the organization by explicitly recruiting ex-Iraqi soldiers and using them to train recruits and plan operations. Using larger and more secure territorial sanctuaries, more advanced weapons captured in Syria and from ISF, and the establishment of a substantial logistical system, they were able to start planning and training for much larger operations. As the theory predicts given these changes, IS was able to carry out Quasi-conventional operations. Table 6.1 on the next page presents the coding and predictions for IS during this period.

106. Myriam Benraad, "Assessing AQI's Resilience After April's Leadership Decapitations," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 6 (2010): 4–8.

Table 6.1 Islamic State Coding and Predicted Military Effectiveness

	2011-Present
Background Variables	
Sanctuary	✓
Pre-Existing Primary Groups	✗
Access to Resources	✓
External Support	✓
Factions	✓
Organizational Variables	
Creating/Leveraging Primary Groups	
—Creation of Primary Groups	✓
—Resource Control	✓
Creating a Cadre System	
—Officer Selection Standards	✓
—Manageable Small Units	✓
Becoming an “Organizational Weapon”	
—Military Training for Cadre	✓
—Basic Communications Systems	✓
—Functionally Differentiated Small Units	✓
Making the Jump	
—Large-unit Organization and Training	✓
—Movement and Integrated Communications	✓
—Heavy Weapons	✓
Predicted Military Effectiveness	Quasi-conventional Capacity
Prediction Correct?	Yes

6.4.1 Background Variables: What Changed?

While AQI was able to maintain access to weapons and money up until 2011—and faced competition from a host of Sunni and Shiite organizations—there were two major changes that positioned the organization to drastically re-build and expand their organizational infrastructure. First, the United States completed its withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, though it had been scaling back operations since 2008 and began the withdrawal in 2010. As a result, AQI was under significantly less pressure from the decapitation strikes that had been dismantling the cadre. At the same time it was able to exercise new freedom of movement in Iraq, the Syrian civil war provided a further outlet for

AQI to re-build its cadre system.

Second, with the US withdrawal, then Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki dismantled the key components of the Sunni Awakening. In particular, rather than integrating and supporting the Sons of Iraq, al-Maliki removed Iraqi state support for Sunni tribal leaders and militias. As a CTC report summarizes, “This time...Sunni leaders cannot rely on American military might, funding, and leverage over a Shi’a-dominated government to execute a reprise of the Sunni Awakening. More important, thanks to several years of Maliki’s harsh treatment and systematic disenfranchisement of Sunni Iraqis since 2003.”¹⁰⁷

6.4.2 Organization Building

Given that much of the underlying organization and organizational approach did not change from the earlier AQI-incarnation, this section provides evidence of that persistence while making clear the increased commitment to indoctrination, specific military training, and the introduction of a wider-range of weaponry and movement capabilities.

6.4.2.1 Building and Leveraging Primary Groups

During this period, IS began absorbing recruits from across the Iraqi Sunni community, Syria, and a host of other foreign locations. As a result, IS sees it as critical to ensure that their followers have a shared worldview and day-to-day outlook. After an initial interview about the recruit’s background, it seems that all recruits are placed in an extended indoctrination bootcamp.¹⁰⁸ As one account finds, “most who make the journey to Syria are already committed to the hardline worldview...And after 30 days of Islamic study, weapons training and frugal living, they are locked in to

107. Muhammad al-‘Ubaydi et al., *The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State*, Report (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, December 2014): 80-81.

108. Hassan Hassan, “The Secret World of ISIS Training Camps – Ruled by Sacred Texts and the Sword,” *The Guardian*, January 24, 2015, guardian.co.uk.

a lifestyle that few ever rescind.”¹⁰⁹

To simplify this process, IS presents a very basic message rooted in a return early Islam: “new recruits leave the camp feeling that they have stumbled on the true message of Islam.” By reducing complexity and the chance for multiple interpretations, they create a shared worldview. As interviews from a range of recruits finds,

In terms of indoctrination, ISIS generally steers clear of exposing new members to teachings that are not derived from sharia texts. New members are almost exclusively exposed to religious books, while established members or commanders can study manuals such as *Management of Savagery*. . . The restriction of religious training to religious texts is in line with the group’s rhetoric that it is an extension of authentic Islam rather than a new group with its own set of teachings.¹¹⁰

Moreover, the bootcamp ties members together within the IS authority structure. This is also part of clearly laying out IS’s religious credibility. As Speckhard and Yayla conclude from many interviews with IS members:

They teach that under any circumstances, without any questioning, IS members must “hear and obey.” This is a must—members are obliged to obey and carry out the orders of all IS sheiks and emirs. This part of the process is presented as essential in ideology and the indoctrination process of “hearing and obeying” is presented as practicing holiness and keeping the order of Islam. Likewise failing to do so is taught to be threatening to authentic spirituality by claiming that not obeying the IS emirs is one of the greatest sins.¹¹¹

In this context, IS does not appear to coerce recruits to join its ranks. Instead, fighters are not integrated into fighting units until they have voluntarily pledged allegiance to IS.¹¹²

Newly recruited ex-Baathists recruits go through the same process, however for many of the now core IS members, thier ideological testing was undertaken while in US detention centers in Iraq.¹¹³

109. Martin Chulov, “Inside ISIS: From Border Bootcamp to Battle, Jihad Is Run with Ruthless Skill,” *The Guardian*, September 5, 2014, guardian.co.uk.

110. Hassan, “The Secret World of ISIS Training Camps – Ruled by Sacred Texts and the Sword.”

111. Anne Speckhard and Ahmet S. Yayla, “Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 6 (2015).

112. Ibid.

113. Liz Sly, “The Hidden Hand Behind the Islamic State Militants?,” *The Washington Post*, April 4, 2015, washingtonpost.com; Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York, NY: Regan Arts, 2015): 124-26.

In either case, one defector explained the priority placed on re-education and indoctrination for these individuals: “You first get the basics about religion... They cleanse you from religious innovations and Ba’athist ideas.”¹¹⁴ As a result, contrary to some reports, Baathists are often well-integrated into IS. As Patel argues, IS is not defined by “unstable alliance of convenience between ideologically incompatible predispositions, one Islamist and one secular.” Instead IS has “fully [incorporated] former Baathists into its organizational structure without diluting its ideological commitments.”¹¹⁵

At the same time, IS positioned itself as the central provider of resources to its followers and many of its potential recruits. With the US gone and Maliki disfavoring tribal leaders, again IS sought to undermine tribal leaders by conducting a targeted assassination campaign from 2012-2013 to take out key Sunni leaders and limit their influence.¹¹⁶ Though exaggerated, one of the Awakening leaders worried in early 2010 that 40 percent of AQI’s new recruits came from former Sons of Iraq.¹¹⁷ They draw on oil, donations, war loot and taxation in their occupied territories. In those territories, IS also attempts to provide key services to populations—despite their brutality, many interviews attest to them as the only “game in town.” As a summary of a wide-range of interviews with IS defectors recounts:

Because IS takes control of everything in a community they can be very good at incentivizing membership—particularly with young men who hope to be married. As one informant stated, “The IS guys speak with the youth about what they are doing to build an Islamic state. They tell them, ‘If you want to work we can help you and give you money. You can be married. We are the true Islam. We guarantee you. We are brothers, no problem.’ Like this they win trust and make many people to join them. They join for a loaf of bread. Because of these factors, it was very easy for IS to recruit the youth

114. Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*.

115. David Patel, *ISIS in Iraq: What We Get Wrong and Why 2015 Is Not 2007 Redux*, Middle East Brief 87 (Brandeis University: Crown Center for Middle East Studies, January 2015): 3.

116. Bill Ardolino, “Al Qaeda in Iraq Video Shows Series of Attacks Against Iraqi Security Forces,” *The Long War Journal*, January 26, 2013, longwarjournal.org; Bill Ardolino, “Suicide Bomber Kills Iraqi Lawmaker Who Was Prominent Awakening Leader, and 5 Others,” *The Long War Journal*, January 20, 2013, longwarjournal.org.

117. Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*: 91; For similar reporting in 2010, see also, Timothy Williams and Duraid Adnan, “Sunnis in Iraq Allied With U.S. Quitting to Rejoin Rebels,” *The New York Times*, October 16, 2010, nytimes.com.

inside Raqqa.”¹¹⁸

In short, as one IS member who fled said, “The leadership is central to most things. They have a very tight grip on ISIS. No one is prepared to defy them.”¹¹⁹ This control became even more complete as IS units began employing operations for which units required higher-caliber weapons and significant ammunition, which was provided centrally from IS depots.¹²⁰

6.4.2.2 Restoring and Enhancing AQI’s Cadre System

The vast majority of cadre and officers appear to be selected based on their military experience, either in Iraq or other areas such as Chechnya.¹²¹ As of mid-2014, some estimates pointed to around 1,000 cadre, or lower-level field officers.¹²² These commanders are often in charge of smaller combat cells that can be combined into larger force formations. Further, replacement officers are either recruited from within or explicitly wooed from other organizations or ex-Baathist communities. al-Baghdadi has explicitly followed a strategy of recruiting skilled ex-Baathist officers.¹²³ They also have staged multiple prison breaks that freed many experienced AQI fighters who could then be rolled into the command ranks after training.¹²⁴

Like the Viet Minh, they also employ a tiered system of combat, with some general, militia-like units in addition to better-trained and more specialized units. They appear to use such an approach to integrate members from other military forces whether tribal militias or wings of other militant

118. Speckhard and Yayla, “Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State.”

119. Chulov, “Inside ISIS: From Border Bootcamp to Battle, Jihad Is Run with Ruthless Skill.”

120. Ibid.

121. Speckhard and Yayla, “Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State”; Chulov, “Inside ISIS: From Border Bootcamp to Battle, Jihad Is Run with Ruthless Skill.”

122. Zoltán Prantner, “The Military Potential of ISIL,” *Defence Review: The Central Journal of the Hungarian Defence Forces* 143 (Special Issue 2015 2015): 65.

123. Sly, “The Hidden Hand Behind the Islamic State Militants?”

124. Lewis hypothesizes that a decrease in combat activity following these jailbreaks was due to the organization taking the time to indoctrinate, train, and integrate a number of cadre freed during the operations Lewis, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, Part I*.

groups. Only those that perform well are selected to join main force IS units.¹²⁵ Along these lines, there is evidence that IS punishes lower-level officers and cadre more extremely than footsoldiers, indicating the importance they place on these members.¹²⁶ As a result, IS is able to operate with a decentralized command structure, leaving many tactical and operational choices to its cadre.¹²⁷

For the most part, it appears that experienced combatants form the core of the training staff in the many IS training camps spread throughout Iraq and Syria—it is estimated that they have at least 21 camps spread throughout the two countries.¹²⁸ While all recruits receive basic infantry training (apparently two weeks), others receive specific weapons or movement training based on which functional unit they are to be assigned to. For example, some units receive intelligence preparation while others receiving training on heavier weaponry, such as artillery, RPGs, anti-aircraft weapons, as well as Chinese Type 63 107mm Multiple rocket launcher systems and shoulder-fired missiles.¹²⁹ In addition, there are units trained to build and employ VBIEDs as well as IEDs and other large-explosives, such as House-Based IEDs (HBIEDs).¹³⁰ Former Iraqi Army officers are well-positioned to coordinate the use of these weapons, drawing on tactical and operational training for larger-scale operations.

6.4.2.3 Communications, Weaponry, and Logistics

IS has expanded beyond the organizational footprint of AQI by implementing consistent communications systems, finding ways to transport people and material across the battle zone, and collecting more advanced weapons. In terms of communication, IS used a courier system like AQI, though

125. Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*: 229.

126. al-'Ubaydi et al., *The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State*: 75.

127. Jessica Lewis, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, Part II*, Middle East Security Report, Middle East Security Report 15 (Institute for the Study of War, October 2014); Metin Gurcan, "How to Defeat Islamic State's War Machine," *Al-Monitor*, October 14, 2014, al-monitor.com/.

128. Bill Roggio and Caleb Weiss, "Jihadist Training Camps in Iraq and Syria," *Long War Journal*, October 24, 2014,

129. Prantner, "The Military Potential of ISIL": 68-69.

130. Lewis, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, Part I*.

there is evidence that there are a greater number of couriers in the IS organization.¹³¹ More recently, IS has relied on various online communication tools such as Whatsapp, Twitter, and Facebook—orders and real-time communication during battles are often sent using these mediums.¹³² After the US bombing campaign started, IS has moved toward other online mediums that are encrypted. Most recently, “Isis now favours Telegram, a messaging app that advertises its services as ‘heavily encrypted’ with the bonus of a self-destruct feature. For ISIS, the app has another crucial benefit. Users can sign up to secure ‘channels’ that broadcast messages.”¹³³

IS has accumulated a wide-set of arms in battle and through the black market. This has included T-55, T-69 and T-72 tanks—and perhaps a few Abrams tanks—a wide-set of rifles—Chinese, Russian, and American-made—MK-19 grenade launchers, M-46 130mm field guns, Stinger surface-to-air missiles, and a wide-range of other artillery pieces. In addition, they have captured a number of vehicles, including Toyota Hiluxes, Armed Personnel Carriers, armored and unarmored Humvees, and large military-grade trucks.¹³⁴ In addition, they have captured a wide-range of explosives and various caches of ammunition.

Rather than relying on complicated weaponry, IS often uses more simplistic systems. Not only do such systems shorten training time and reduce maintenance, but they can be used quite effectively. Perhaps the most important example is that of the technical—a Toyota Hilux, often outfitted with a higher-caliber machine gun or rocket launcher. Like the Taliban, IS has used these in place of armor and artillery, allowing units to move quickly and overrun ISF defenses.¹³⁵

131. Jessica Lewis, *The Islamic State: a Counter-Strategy for a Counter-State*, Middle East Security Report 21 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, July 2014): 15.

132. Gurcan, “How to Defeat Islamic State’s War Machine.”

133. Sam Jones, “Rise of Encryption Tests Intelligence in Isis Fight,” *Financial Times*, November 18, 2015, ft.com.

134. Prantner, “The Military Potential of ISIL”: 69; Erika Solomon, “Isis: The Munitions Trail,” *Financial Times*, November 55, 2015, ft.com.

135. Davis, “How the Taliban Became a Military Force”; Knights, “Saddam Hussein’s Faithful Friend, the King of Clubs, Might Be the Key to Saving Iraq.”

However, relying on this weaponry has introduced significant logistics needs, both in terms of transporting materials to the battlefield, but also in terms of acquiring enough ammunition to keep troops supplied—apparently the most sought after supplies are rounds for Kalashnikov assault rifles, medium-caliber machine guns, and 14.5mm and 12.5mm anti-aircraft guns. Thus, IS has set-up a well-regulated supply network with vetted suppliers and weapons caches throughout Iraq and Syria. Reports from Peshmerga fighters find that IS is re-supplying units within 24 hours of battles, that units are consistently putting in requests for munitions with code-names such as “Kebab” for heavy-machine guns over WhatsApp or walkie-talkies, and that IS has well-specified contracts with suppliers that set-out their commission and operating terms.¹³⁶

6.4.3 How Did They Fight?

Given that IS returned to AQI’s focus on developing well-trained and trustworthy cadre and combined it with explicit and functional training for fighters, larger-unit configurations, mobility, and more powerful weaponry, the theory predicts that IS would be capable of Guerrilla and Quasi-conventional Capacity. After 2011, IS engaged in a number of campaigns, which, until heavy US involvement, showed increasing sophistication. They began with a set of complex VBIED attacks, moved onto combined arms attacks using VBIEDs or other explosives to breach defenses, began conducting Quasi-conventional operations supported by technicals and artillery, and finally showed moderate ability to defend territory. What is more, while the US bombing campaign did overwhelm IS’s Quasi-conventional operations, like the Việt Minh, they were able to change tactics in response and have continued to hold substantial, though less, territory, and continue a fairly high tempo of operations.

136. Solomon, “Isis: The Munitions Trail.”

IS's first major operations after 2011 came with operation "Breaking the Walls," which began in July 2012. The campaign began with coordinated VBIED attacks on civilian and military targets spanning from northern Iraq to Basra in the south—each attack consisted of at least 8 separate incidents per day.¹³⁷ These thirty or so coordinated attacks hit civilian, military, and government targets—importantly, these were mainly not suicide attacks. In a couple of these early operations, IS also conducted small-scale combined arms attacks on prisons, and freed at least 47 known AQI members. Later in the Breaking the Walls campaign, attacks were more focused, with the use of multiple VBIEDs in a small geographic sector simultaneously. In particular, these attacks targeted specific Kurdish political and military targets. Finally, in the final phases of the campaign, IS targeted Baghdad specifically, often detonating as many as 20 VBIEDs in a single day.¹³⁸ Importantly, these attacks were made possible because of decentralized command arrangements: with the central "command cell setting the date of the attacks but the regional wilayat (provinces) commanders setting their level of participation according to local conditions."¹³⁹

Perhaps the biggest single operation of this campaign was an attack on Abu Ghraib prison, which employed similar tactics to many of the other attacks during this period. The attack, started on July 21, 2013, began with a barrage of VBIEDs and RPG fire which targeted the hardened defense of the prison—between 40 and 100 explosions occurred.¹⁴⁰ After breaching those defenses, IS infantry cells—estimated at 50 fighters—engaged with ISF troops with small arms fire and a set of suicide bombers breached the internal defenses. IS was able to overwhelm the defenders and freed upwards

137. VBIEDs represent a relatively complicated tactic since they require technical expertise to design the bombs as well as clear command and control to synchronize their use, whether across a range of locations or as a part of combined arms operations.

138. Lewis, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, Part I*.

139. Knights, "Saddam Hussein's Faithful Friend, the King of Clubs, Might Be the Key to Saving Iraq": 3.

140. Ned Parker and Raheem Salman, "The Great Escape: How Al Qaeda Broke Hundreds of Bad Guys Out of the World's Most Notorious Jail – and What It Means for America.," *Foreign Policy*, August 16, 2013, foreignpolicy.com.

of 500 prisoners.¹⁴¹ Moreover, the attack occurred simultaneously with a similar attack on the Taji prison north of Baghdad.¹⁴²

Summing up this campaign, Lewis finds that,

AQI executed 24 VBIED waves that showcased the technical, logistical, and training capacity underlying AQI's VBIED program. The enlistment of these functions to deliver synchronized VBIED waves across Iraq reveals the presence of a robust and specialized VBIED planning capability within AQI's military organization. The style of execution of the VBIED waves demonstrates the growth of the VBIED organization in terms of its skilled leadership, its support to combined arms attacks, and its ability over time to train small effective teams.¹⁴³

IS built on this campaign to expand to more complex and quasi-conventional tactics from mid-2013 until the US began supporting Iraqi and Kurdish forces with air strikes.

IS operations after mid-2013 were often large-scale and combined multiple functional elements. IS invested in significant intelligence gathering, assessing the military and political landscape of potential targets and “softening” potential resistance by either recruiting or buying individuals or groups.¹⁴⁴ When staging attacks, they used mobile formations, allowing them to achieve local superiority in numbers despite their smaller strength in comparison to state armed forces, with aggressive platoon-sized or company-sized raiding columns defeating and dislodging successive ISF or Kurdish positions.” Further, “probes and feints appear to be common elements in ISIL offensives, often apparently intended to test opposition, bypass solid defenses, and draw away enemy forces from the main target.”¹⁴⁵ This mobility allows them to also quickly moved to thinning or weakened spots in enemy lines.¹⁴⁶

141. Jessica Lewis, *Al Qaeda in Iraq's "Breaking the Walls" Campaign Achieves Its Objectives at Abu Ghraib*, Iraq Update 30 (Institute for the Study of War, July 2013); Lewis, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, Part II*.

142. Parker and Salman, “The Great Escape: How Al Qaeda Broke Hundreds of Bad Guys Out of the World's Most Notorious Jail – and What It Means for America.”

143. Lewis, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, Part I*: 12-13.

144. Speckhard and Yayla, “Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State.”

145. Knights, “Saddam Hussein's Faithful Friend, the King of Clubs, Might Be the Key to Saving Iraq”: 3.

146. Knights describes one such example of a raid on a Kurdish outpost north of Mosul: “The assault involved several

Indeed, even though IS has captured many heavy vehicles and weaponry, it still relies on technicals, usually 10-30 with machine guns and anti-aircraft cannons, for the majority of its operations to maintain such mobility.¹⁴⁷ Perhaps the most discussed such operation occurred with IS's capture of Mosul on June 6, 2014. In that large-scale operation, IS employed a "motorized infantry column" with hundreds of technicals. They quickly overwhelmed ISF defenses as the ISF forces disintegrated. Obviously this victory spoke as much to the weakness of ISF as to IS's strength. Nonetheless, it was only possible due to the breadth of operations IS was capable of carrying out.¹⁴⁸

IS forces moved from Mosul to Baiji, an oil refinery city in a 60 vehicle convoy and then took control Tikrit, freeing prisoners from both locations. It would advance as far as Samarra and portions of Diyala province (just sixty miles from Baghdad). They held these positions despite strong counter-attacks from Iranian-supported forces. Moreover, while facing these counter-attacks, IS forces launched new offensives across their zones of operation.¹⁴⁹ On June 25th, Prime Minister Maliki was forced to concede that the Iraqi government has lost control of much of northern Iraq.¹⁵⁰

The full range of influence of IS is shown in Figure 6.1 on the facing page.¹⁵¹ After expanding to

ISIL 4x4 pickup trucks with mounted 12.7mm machine guns and at least three armored vehicles looted from ISF bases in Mosul. The raid overran the thin peshmerga (Kurdish militiamen) checkpoint screen on Highway 2 and then continued to exploit behind peshmerga lines for an additional five miles after reaching the pharmaceutical factory—a total penetration of 10 miles." Knights, "Saddam Hussein's Faithful Friend, the King of Clubs, Might Be the Key to Saving Iraq": 3.

147. Ibid.

148. As some analysts have pointed out, ISF is a weak force because it has not trained trusted cadre, does not maintain the allegiance of many of its soldiers, and is perpetually plagued by poor logistics and command and control. See, for example, Yasir Abbas and Dan Trombly, "Inside the Collapse of the Iraqi Army's 2nd Division," *War on the Rocks*, July 1, 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/07/inside--the--collapse--of--the--iraqi--armys--2nd--division/>; Princy George, "Analysis: Why Has the Iraqi Army Struggled to Counter ISIL Advance?," June 15, 2014, <http://www.janes.com/article/39259/analysis-why-has-the-iraqi-army-struggled-to-counter-isil-advance>; Austin Long, Caitlin Talmadge, and Keren Fraiman, "Why the Iraqi Army Collapsed (and What Can Be Done About It)," *The Washington Post*, June 13, 2014, [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com); Caitlin Talmadge and Austin Long, "Why the U.S. (Still) Can't Train the Iraqi Military," *The Washington Post*, September 22, 2015, [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

149. "Iraq Conflict: ISIS Militants Seize New Towns," *BBC News*, June 13, 2014, [bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk); "Half a Million Flee Unrest in Iraq's Mosul," *Al Jazeera*, June 11, 2014, [aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com); Raheem Salman and Maggie Fick, "Iraqi Forces Withdraw From Tikrit as Islamic State Advances," *Haaretz*, July 16, 2014, [haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com).

150. Hamza Hendawi, "Iraqi Officials: We Have Essentially Given Up The North Of The Country," *Associated Press*, June 25, 2014,

151. Map source is "How Did It Come to This?," *The Economist*, June 21, 2014, [economist.com](http://www.economist.com).

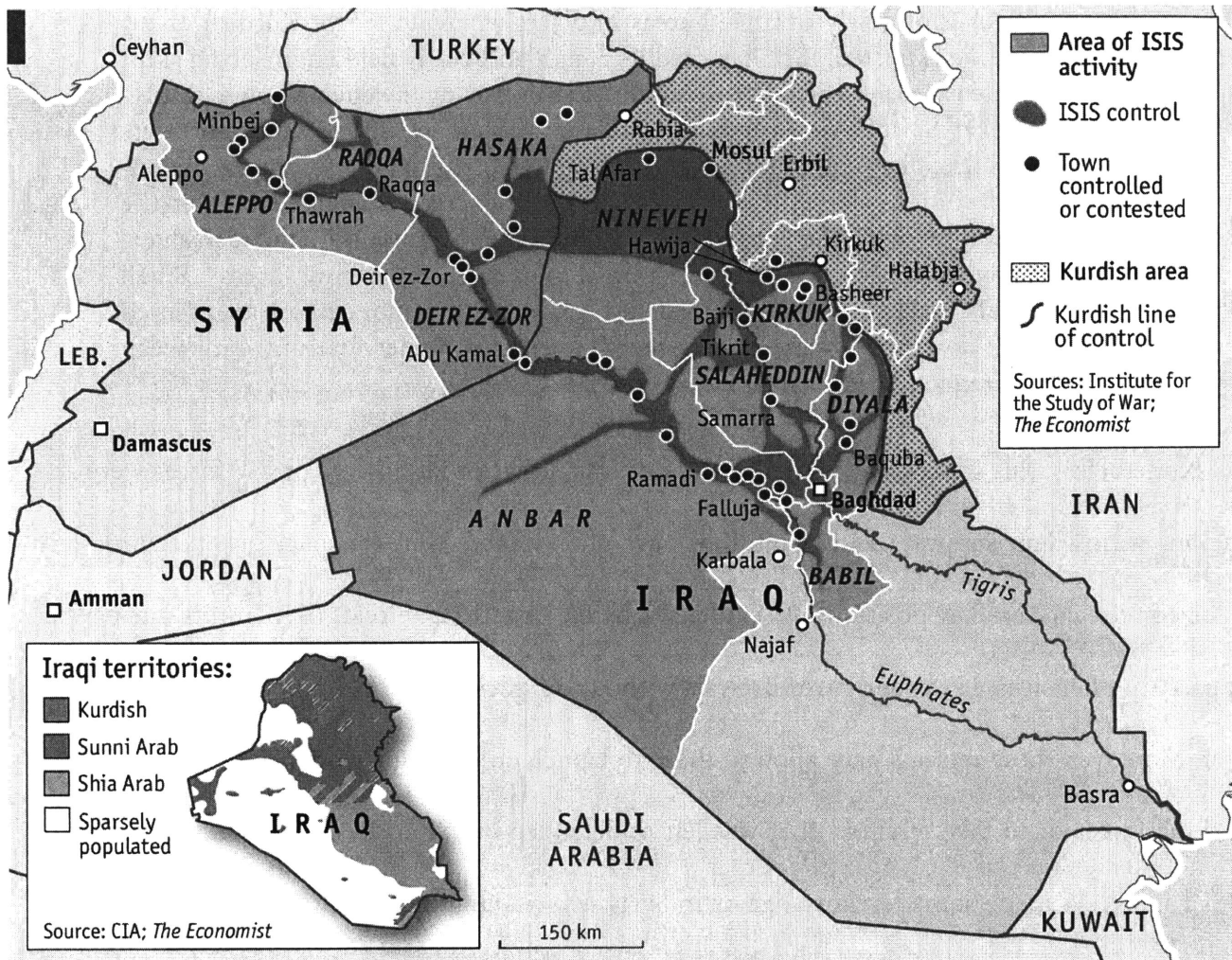


Figure 6.1 IS Operations June 2014

take the entire Raqqa Province in Syria in August 2014, IS would hold most of that territory until mid-2015 and continues to defend key positions as of early 2016.

IS on the Defensive. With the beginning of US air support for ISF and Kurdish forces in August 2014, and particularly as it ramped up in 2015, IS was unable to continue to operate in a Quasi-conventional manner. However, it was still able to hold a great deal of territory and change its tactics in a manner to limit losses. To begin with, IS has shown the tactical capability to set up moderately effective defenses, beginning with layers of IEDs and sometimes including artillery. As Knights finds,

ISIL’s defensive playbook starts with the energetic consolidation of a defensive “crust”

on the outer edges of newly-occupied areas in places where an ISF or Kurdish counterattack could be expected. ISIL has used its rough-and-ready field engineering skills to quickly create extensive earth berms and ditches mirroring the enemy's own hastily-erected frontier defenses. After capturing Jalula on August 11 [2014], ISIL bulldozers immediately blocked key counterattack routes that the Kurds might use, emplacing numerous roadside bombs along these arteries. They further created a denied flank on the Diyala River by destroying the Jalula-Kalar road bridge, a common ISIL tactic to shape local geography to impede counterattacks or reinforcement by enemy forces... Small numbers of well-sited heavy weapons are deployed, with anti-armor defense augmented with single hull-down T-55 or T-62 tanks, recoilless rifles, shoulder-fired anti-tank weapons, and, less frequently, guided anti-tank missiles.¹⁵²

Nonetheless, this sort of static defense was not feasible when Peshmerga or ISF forces were attacking with US air support. As a result, they have often traded "time for space," by executing organized retreats from key positions. As evidenced by the disastrous retreats of ISF units during the June 2014 offensives, IS's orderly withdrawals without significant losses of equipment are no small feat. Moreover, these retreats have allowed them to launch quick counter-offensives to distract attacking forces or to take territory that was left undefended by ISF or Peshmerga advances.¹⁵³ In this context, IS made some territorial gains in Syria while taking Ramadi in Iraq while ISF forces re-captured Tikrit. Further, recognizing the likely loss of Ramadi, they removed forces from there, allowing them to launch offensives against Baiji and Haditha.¹⁵⁴

Moreover, there is evidence that defense capabilities are improving as IS shares information across its units. It has continued to build up strong static defenses in Mosul and Raqqa and was able to fend off attacks by Peshmerga and ISF forces over the summer of 2015. In particular, they have started using mobile defenses with VBIEDs and ambushes to destabilize ISF advances.¹⁵⁵

While 2016 brought evidence that IS facing increasing stress in its defenses, the organization

152. Knights, "Saddam Hussein's Faithful Friend, the King of Clubs, Might Be the Key to Saving Iraq."

153. Knights and Mello argue that some of these counter-offensives may be tactically successful, but strategically weaken IS. There is little evidence of this development so far Michael Knights and Alexandre Mello, "The Cult of the Offensive: The Islamic State on Defense," *CTC Sentinel* 8, no. 4 (2015): 1–6.

154. Jessica Lewis McFate, "The Islamic State Digs In," *CTC Sentinel* 8, no. 10 (2015): 1–8.

155. *Ibid.*

nonetheless was able to hold territory for an extended period of time despite pressure from a wide-range of armed actors and the explicit support of US airpower.¹⁵⁶ Further, though its adversaries in Iraq (and Syria) have been relatively weak, many other organizations in Iraq could have stepped up to fill the void and did not. In this context, despite the weakness of ISF, IS's gains were only possible because it was able to carry out large-scale operations and then hold that territory after the operations.

6.5 Tribal Militias and Armed Groups

As described above, tribes are often central in Iraqi social and political life. Most Iraqi Sunnis are members of a tribe, and, particularly in rural areas, these relationships are socially consequential.¹⁵⁷ As a result, many pointed to the importance of tribes upon the US invasion. They were seen as endowed with legitimacy and had access to weapons and military skills since many of the Iraqi security forces were formed based on tribal identities.¹⁵⁸ However, except for a few brief exceptions, most notably the Awakening, tribal militias were not particularly strong and were often defeated militarily by AQI and other conflict actors.

This is because the strong primary groups that tribal militias built on were not leveraged with resource control by their leaders and those leaders had not planned for conflict like other actors did. Indeed, there is evidence that Tribal Sheikhs expected the US to continue to support them as Saddam had. When this did not happen, despite the tribal leaders' significant social linkages with their members, many individuals sought key resources and protection elsewhere and were not

156. Tim Lister, "A Frontline Report: The Ground War Against the Islamic State," *CTC Sentinel* 8, no. 11 (November/December 2015): 13–19.

157. Tribes are composed of many smaller clans which are in turn broken into lineages, which are divided into houses which are composed of individual families.

158. Amatzia Baram, "Victory in Iraq, One Tribe at a Time," *The New York Times*, October 28, 2003, nytimes.com.

Table 6.1 Tribal Militias Coding and Predicted Military Effectiveness

	Fallujah Uprising, Anbar People's Council, Hamza Brigade	Desert Protectors, Anbar Awakening, Sons of Iraq
Background Variables		
Sanctuary	✓	✓
Pre-Existing Primary Groups	✓	✓
Access to Resources	✓	✓
External Support	✗	✗
Factions	✓	✓
Organizational Variables		
Creating/Leveraging Primary Groups		
—Creation of Primary Groups	NA	NA
—Resource Control	✗	✓
Creating a Cadre System		
—Officer Selection Standards	✗	✗
—Manageable Small Units	✗	✗
Becoming an “Organizational Weapon”		
—Military Training for Cadre	✗	✓
—Communications Systems	✗	✗
—Functionally Differentiated Small Units	✗	✗
Making the Jump		
—Large-unit Organization and Training	✗	✗
—Movement and Integrated Communications	✗	✗
—Heavy Weapons	✗	✗
Predicted Military Effectiveness	Combat Ineffective	Limited Structural Integrity
Prediction Correct?	Yes	Yes

willing to risk their lives to protect the influence of the tribe. Further, even when tribal leaders did establish resource control during the Awakening and Sons of Iraq program, these pre-existing social structures were not sufficient to allow tribal militias to carry out more complex military operations. This section illustrates these dynamics with some examples, mostly from Anbar Province. Table 6.1 shows the coding and predicted military effectiveness for these examples.

6.5.1 A (Mostly) Lack Resource Control

Despite their cultural importance, tribes under Saddam's rule derived much of their power from distributing patronage and control of illicit smuggling and criminal networks. This reality was driven by Saddam's explicit attempt to re-direct tribal identities to support the Baath regime. As Baram observes, "rather than eliminating the tribal shaykh as a sociopolitical power, as dictated by party doctrine, he endeavored to manipulate the shaykhs and, through a process of socialization (or 'Baathization'), turn them into docile tools in the service of the regime."¹⁵⁹ By playing tribes off of each other and using them as patrimonial conduits for the regime, tribal leaders were stripped of traditional sources of authority and instead served an important role to their followers by distributing social services, jobs, and cash.

Thus, with Saddam's removal they were severely weakened by the loss of Saddam's patronage as the US did not treat the tribes in the same manner. Further, the US actively dismantled this trade upon the 2003 invasion. And, as discussed in the previous section, AQI explicitly sought to take control of new smuggling networks. Thus, drawing on his experience in-country, Hashim observes that after 2003 "The Sheikhs simply no longer have control over the young men of their tribes. Indeed, on many occasions Sheikhs told me that they have no authority or rewards with which they can exercise control over the young men. Saddam had provided them with the wherewithal to exert their authority. They expected [the US] to do the same. The failure to do so opened the way for these young men to 'stray.'"¹⁶⁰

Recognizing this dynamic, some tribes attempted to raise forces to try to re-gain resource control. Two prominent examples are the Hamza Brigade and the Anbar People's Council (APC). The

159. Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 1 (1997): 1.

160. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 106; See also, Myriam Benraad, "Iraq's Tribal 'Sahwa!': Its Rise and Fall," *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 1 (2011): 121-131.

Hamza Brigade was the militia of the Albu-Mahal tribe, which had deep roots in the smuggling trade. It managed to put together a basic militia, but was unsuccessful in gaining direct US support.¹⁶¹ APC was organized by tribal sheikhs mainly of the Fahad tribe and drew on the immense popularity of a cleric, Muhammad Mahmoud Latif, who had great “wasta.”¹⁶² However, while some of its forces were integrated into ISF, the APC did not receive significant support from the US in terms of weapons or resources.¹⁶³

However, there were moments when tribal leaders were given the ability to re-gain resource control. One early example occurred from an off-shot of the Hamza Brigade which was able to convince US forces to support them as they re-formed as the Desert Protectors. With this agreement, US forces used the leadership of the Desert Protectors to distribute resources and ammunition. Further, they guaranteed US security support when the Desert Protectors launched operations.¹⁶⁴

The more significant examples happened in later 2006 and 2007 during the Awakening. This process started in Ramadi as Shiekh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, of the Albu Risha tribe, came to an agreement with US forces. After more tribes came on-board in February 2007 and General David Petraeus—who was very supportive of expanding the Anbar Awakening broadly—replaced General Casey as the Commander of Coalition forces in Iraq, the movement morphed as upwards of 100,000 Iraqis in tribal militias joined the “Sons of Iraq” (SOI) program.

US forces propped up these militias to help the fight against AQI, and paid each SOI \$300 per month. But, the support was far broader, as Patel describes the situation:

US military commanders—locally at first, but then in a more systematic and institutionalized fashion, beginning in 2007—effectively allowed a traditional tribal authority, or

161. Long, “The Anbar Awakening”: 78.

162. Long, “Assessing the Success of Leadership Targeting.”

163. Long, “Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace?”; Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro, “Testing the Surge: Why Violence Declined in Iraq in 2007.”

164. William Knarr, *The 2005 Iraqi Sunni Awakening: The Role of the Desert Protectors Program*, JSOU Report 15-4 (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: Joint Special Operations University, October 2015).

sheikh, to be the Don Corleone, as it were, of a fixed geographical area in exchange for keeping AQI out... Tribesmen were trained and paid to participate, with selection and payroll going through the designated sheikh. This allowed the sheikh and his supporters to dominate the delivery of oil and cooking fuel, engage in racketeering and smuggling without competition, and control the flow of some jobs and reconstruction spending in 'his' territory, the boundaries of which the US military demarcated and helped enforce.¹⁶⁵

This positioned tribal authorities to influence their fighters' behavior once again. As Patel continues, "a sheikh's authority largely derives from his ability to deliver goods and services to his kinsmen. The US supported sheikhs who it thought had authority—but that authority was, in many respects, a function of that support: Labeling a sheikh 'real' effectively made him so."¹⁶⁶

While some of these units received more extensive training—and had significant military experience from the Saddam era—none developed any sort of real command control, whether by vetting and selecting military cadre or putting in place clear procedures to promote or select soldiers. The following section walks through how these groups performed, both before, during, and after the Awakening.

6.5.2 How Did They Fight?

The theory predicts that tribal armed groups would not be positioned to fight with any effectiveness. In particular, while they had strong primary groups, they did not have the organizational means to leverage those social connections. As a result, they could not even achieve Limited Structural Integrity, meaning that their units would collapse during combat and the leadership would be unable to compel them to fight consistently when ordered to. On the other hand, for the early examples of tribal groups that got resource control and then a larger set of groups during the Awakening, these

165. Patel, *ISIS in Iraq: What We Get Wrong and Why 2015 Is Not 2007 Redux*: 4.

166. Patel, *ISIS in Iraq: What We Get Wrong and Why 2015 Is Not 2007 Redux*: 4; Similarly, Abu Risha, the prominent face of the Awakening "had been only a second or third-tier shaykh in his own small tribe." Norman Cigar, *Al-Qaida, the Tribes, and the Government. Lessons and Prospects for Iraq's Unstable Triangle.*, Middle East Studies Occasional Papers Series 2 (Marine Corps University Press, September 2011): 39.

groups would achieve Limited Structural Integrity, but little more since they had not put in place systems to train and place lower-level cadre or officers.

To begin with, tribal leaders in Anbar, and the broader Sunni triangle, had difficulty mobilizing their members in 2003-2004. Instead of fighting for tribal leaders, many recruits were drawn to AQI or other nationalist groups. Since tribal elders could not rely on their members to fight, the power of the tribe was often reduced as it was replaced by groups like AQI or other Salafist movements. As LTC Ross Brown, operating just south of Baghdad, recounts from a conversation with a tribal leader about getting his members to put down their arms: “a trusted sheik told me that he could influence the perspective of those 40 years and older, but had very little influence over younger tribe members. Since the vast majority of those I was fighting were younger than 40, the sheiks couldn’t help me much.”¹⁶⁷

Illustratively during the two battles for Fallujah, it was not tribal leaders that controlled the course of violence. Instead, they watched their position lessen as followers ignored their requests and instead either fled the city or joined arms with other fighting groups. Indeed, US forces approached tribal leaders during this period, expecting that they were the key to turning violence off.¹⁶⁸ Yet, Bing West relays that in response to demands from both General Abazid and Major General Swannack, “The sheikhs protested that the 82nd [Airborne] didn’t appreciate the limits of their power. Threatening them would do no good. Improvement projects made no difference to the men with the guns. In the eyes of the sheikhs, power had shifted from them to the young clerics in Fallujah preaching that America was waging a war against Islam and was bringing in Jews to rule Iraq.”¹⁶⁹

167. LTC Ross A. Brown, “Commander’s Assessment: South Baghdad,” *Military Review* 87, no. 1 (January-February 2007): 29.

168. LTC Michael Eisenstadt, “Tribal Engagement Lessons Learned,” *Military Review* 87, no. 5 (September-October 2007): 23.

169. Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (New York: Bantam, 2005): 33.

Even when tribal leaders were able to convince fighters to take up arms, these forces did not behave much differently. Fighters defected after intimidation and AQI's decapitation campaigns lead these groups to disintegrate as they did not have systems in place to recruit, train, or replace lower level cadre. As Long observes of the Hamza Brigade, "By September 2005, the Hamza Brigade, facing ferocious AQI attacks on its members, including its leaders, had been driven out of Al-Qa'im. It appears that the group collapsed."¹⁷⁰

AQI openly recognized that tribal fighters could be intimidated by using force against them. In observing that some tribal sheikhs had begun to call for individuals to stand up to AQI, an AQI situation report notes that "After we took a look at the situation, we found that the best solutions to stop thousands of people from renouncing their religion, is to cut the heads of the Sheiks." Further, they recognized that these tribal organizations could not re-generate when losing social leaders: "The best solution is to cut the head off the snake."¹⁷¹

The same happened to the Anbar People's Council, perhaps the most wide-spread attempt to confront AQI before the Awakening. As Cigar summarizes the situation, despite strong social ties uniting these tribal groups,

The tribes—or the insurgent groups that were often intertwined with the tribes—realistically were no match for Al-Qaida's organization, zeal, and ability to mass mobile forces from multiple locations against isolated tribes. In those cases where the tribes did confront Al-Qaida, such as the attempt to activate the Al-Anbar People's Council in 2005, Al-Qaida won out with its escalation dominance on the ground.¹⁷²

Further, their failure had begun before AQI began targeting them. Since there was no resource control, while their leader, Latif, was quite popular, there were many sub-tribal disagreements that

170. Long, "Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace?": 494.

171. Harmony Document: IZ-060316-01.

172. Cigar, *Al-Qaida, the Tribes, and the Government. Lessons and Prospects for Iraq's Unstable Triangle.*: 26.

could not be contained. As MacFarland and Smith recount, “undermanned and hamstrung by tribal vendettas, [the Anbar People’s Council] lacked strength and cohesion.”¹⁷³

There were a couple of key exceptions. The most cited example before the Awakening was the Desert Protectors. While they did not move beyond leveraging tribal ties with resource control, the Desert Protectors did have the organizational set-up to achieve Limited Structural Integrity, meaning that soldiers would not defect and would continue to serve despite combat or threats from opposition forces. Not only did Desert Protector forces serve on multiple US operations, but they shared significant intelligence in the face of AQI reprisals and attacks.¹⁷⁴ Nonetheless, since their tribal relationships were intricately tied up in a specific geographic location, and tied to defending that locale, Desert Protector forces were unwilling to serve outside of Anbar, limiting the reach of their power.¹⁷⁵ In short, even though the US had, via the tribal leaders, leveraged pre-existing social structures, these pre-existing ties prevented the force from transitioning from protecting specific territory to conducting operations across a wider geographic area.

The forces of the Anbar Awakening and SOIs also demonstrated greater military capacity than other tribal forces. While these forces did not carry out complex military operations—indeed much of the significant fighting was carried out by US forces—their fighters consistently stayed on the battlefield despite severe threats from AQI and also obeyed orders to not use violence in retribution. Perhaps the key contribution during the Awakening was intelligence and ceasefires upheld by tribal leaders to allow US forces to capture or kill members of AQI without launching cycles of tribal violence from retribution killings.¹⁷⁶

173. S. MacFarland and N. Smith, “Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point,” *Military Review*, 2008, 42.

174. Thomas R. Searle, “Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province the Critical Role of Special Operations Forces,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 50 (3rd Quarter 2008): 62–66.

175. *Ibid.*: 66.

176. Cigar, *Al-Qaida, the Tribes, and the Government. Lessons and Prospects for Iraq’s Unstable Triangle.*: 45.

As Colonel MacFarland observes, “Once a tribal leader flips, attacks on American forces in that area stop almost overnight.”¹⁷⁷ Throughout Iraq, tribal forces manned checkpoints and other defensive positions, allowing US forces to carry out additional operations. Unlike earlier instances, these troops did not defect or leave their posts in response to attacks from AQI or other hostile actors—including IEDs targeting checkpoints and recruitment drives, assassination campaigns, and daily threats. And, these threats were real. Sheikh Risha was assassinated in 2007, along with 28 other prominent tribal figures and many other tribal fighters were injured or killed during this period.¹⁷⁸

However, the SOI program changed rapidly when tribal leaders lost the ability to maintain resource control. When the US forces left, many militia members defected, either fleeing or, as noted earlier, joining IS. Among other things, this paved the way for IS’s rise and again weakened the pull of strong pre-existing tribal ties.¹⁷⁹ In short, the strong pre-existing social structures of these tribes were not sufficient to generate military capabilities. As this chapter evidences, *none* of the successful Iraqi insurgent groups relied on tribal ties.

6.6 Nationalist Groups: Islamic Army in Iraq, 1920 Revolution Brigade, Jaysh Muhammad, Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi

While AQI and IS used a mainly religious narrative, this section evaluates four organizations that engaged a combination of nationalist and Islamist ideologies. While all four recruited members from the former Iraqi army, had significant weapons and cash, drew on similar Sunni tribal and social connections, and had generally similar areas of operation, only two of them—the Islamic Army

177. Quoted in, Jim Michaels, “Behind Success in Ramadi an Army Colonel’s Gamble,” *USA Today*, May 1, 2007, usatoday.com.

178. Cigar, *Al-Qaida, the Tribes, and the Government. Lessons and Prospects for Iraq’s Unstable Triangle.*: 46; Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro, “Testing the Surge: Why Violence Declined in Iraq in 2007”: 21.

179. Patel, *ISIS in Iraq: What We Get Wrong and Why 2015 Is Not 2007 Redux*: 4.

in Iraq (IAI) and Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN)—developed any notable degree of military capacity. In contrast to the 1920 Revolution Brigade (1920RB) and Jaysh Muhammad, both IAI and JRTN created primary groups and leveraged those primary groups with resource control and a dedicated cadre system. At this time, there is limited information about each of these groups, so this section draws on what evidence is openly available. The coding and predicted effectiveness is presented in Table 6.1 on the facing page.

6.6.1 Islamic Army in Iraq

IAI recruited a range of Sunnis from tribal, Baathist, and more religious backgrounds by presenting a nationalist narrative that focused on removing the US and integrating the Muslim faith into an ensuing government. Since these diverse recruits did not represent strong primary groups, IAI sought to expand the connections of their members and to directly distribute resources including weapons, pay, and justice. To build strong primary groups within cells, once in the organization, recruits went through a specific military training curriculum, which focused on military discipline and basic weapons usage.¹⁸⁰ These training sessions were often lead by officers from the former Iraqi army. In 2006, IAI made clear that they were careful in selecting new members. After an initial vetting process “inquiring” into at a recruit’s background and allegiances, “[The] Al-Hay’ah al-Shar’iyah will then meet him to present and discuss the group’s policy with him. Members of the Military Command will also meet him to decide the way to benefit from his experience. Later, the leadership will be told that we need this element and he is reliable and committed to the Islamic trend. He will then be accepted in the army.”¹⁸¹

180. Abdul Hameed Bakier, “Military Commander of the Islamic Army of Iraq Describes Rift with al-Qaeda,” *Terrorism Focus* 5, no. 23 (2008).

181. “Iraqi Islamic Army Spokesman on ‘Resistance’ Coordination, Talks with USA,” *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, April 7, 2006, lexisnexis.com.

Table 6.1 Nationalist Groups Coding and Predicted Military Effectiveness

	Islamic Army in Iraq	1920 Rev- olution Brigade	Jaysh Muham- mad	JRTN
Background Variables				
Sanctuary	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-Existing Primary Groups	✗	✓	✗	✗
Access to Resources	✓	✓	✓	✓
External Support	✗	✗	✓	✓
Factions	✓	✓	✗	✓
Organizational Variables				
Creating/Leveraging Primary Groups				
—Creation of Primary Groups	✓	NA	✗	✓
—Resource Control	✓	✗	✗	✓
Creating a Cadre System				
—Officer Selection Standards	✓	✗	✗	✓
—Manageable Small Units	✓	✗	✓	✓
Becoming an “Organizational Weapon”				
—Cadre Military Training	✓	✗	✗	✓
—Basic Communications Systems	✓	✓	✓	✓
—Functionally Differentiated Small Units	✓	✗	✗	✓
Making the Jump				
—Large-unit Organization and Training	✗	✗	✗	✗
—Movement and Integrated Communications	✗	✗	✗	✗
—Heavy Weapons	✗	✗	✗	✗
Predicted Military Effectiveness	Guerrilla Capacity	Combat Ineffective	Combat Ineffective	Guerrilla Capacity
Prediction Correct?	Yes	<i>Partially</i> Combat Ineffective / Limited Structural Integrity	Yes	<i>Partially</i> Complete Structural Integrity

It established itself as critical to these members by dispensing justice, payment, and weapons from the caches it had captured after the invasion.¹⁸² While there was a significant amount of material around, IAI leaders centralized it in key locations, mostly around Baghdad and in Diyala Province.

182. Hashim, “Chapter Four”: 44.

Building on this foundation, IAI focused on developing a cadre system with military expertise. This included procedures to promote soldiers and officers based on military performance, functional differentiation of units, and specialized training for some more elite fighters, in particular IED units and snipers.¹⁸³ Its command arrangements put deployed leaders in charge of small cells and vetted the leaders of these cells—for example, ensuring that cell leaders prayed with higher up leadership.¹⁸⁴ Perhaps best known was their selection and training of an elite set of snipers. Using American military manuals, they conducted shooting training for some of their best shots at camps outside Baghdad. Other functional cells focus on intelligence, service provision, and security.¹⁸⁵ Broader personnel policies helped to select which soldiers were sent to various training sites or assigned to particular units and were used to incorporate lessons learned.¹⁸⁶

In an interview, an IAI spokesperson described the organization-building process:

The Islamic Army began to establish its organizational structure in an institutionalized manner right from the beginning. There are leadership institutions such as the General Command Office. This office is run by the general commander, his two deputies and others. There is also the Political Bureau which charts the general policy and strategic plans of the group. There is also the Shura Council which includes some of the best leaders of the group. You can say that these are the first founders of the group. They are responsible for approving the general policies charted by the Political Bureau. On another level, there are several administrations. It might not be wise to go into details of these administrations. These include the Military Command, Al-Hay'ah al-Shar'iyah, the Central Information Commission and other administrations related to security, intelligence and others.¹⁸⁷

On the whole, IAI looked more professional and organized than similar nationalist groups, perhaps

183. Hashim, "Chapter Four": 44.

184. Joel Wing, "How Iraq's Civil War Broke Out In Diyala Province Interview With Former Interrogator Richard Buchanan," July 28, 2014, <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/2014/07/how-iraqs-civil-war-broke-out-in-diyala.html>.

185. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 175.

186. Tønnessen, "Training on a Battlefield": 554; International Crisis Group, *In Their Own Words*: 12; Wing, "How Iraq's Civil War Broke Out In Diyala Province Interview With Former Interrogator Richard Buchanan."

187. While this account is obviously biased, the fact that the spokesperson uses this language is clear evidence that the organization is aware of the need to generate more robust organization and at least actively pursues this goal. "Iraqi Islamic Army Spokesman on 'Resistance' Coordination, Talks with USA."

positioning to recruit a larger number of individuals—some estimates put it at as high as 17,000 fighters.¹⁸⁸

6.6.1.1 How Did They Fight?

Given that IAI focused on creating strong primary groups and leveraged them with resource control and a cadre system that had specific military components, the theory predicts that they would be able to carry out guerrilla operations. Their cadre would follow orders when not observed and be able to lead semi-complex operations. For the most part, this accurately characterizes IAI's behavior as IAI was perhaps the most effective native Sunni insurgent group.

They carried out a wide range of guerrilla-type operations including ambushes, coordinated hit-and-run operations, and consistently using force against particular targets and not others. Early operations included kidnappings of a wide-range of foreign nationals in Iraq. In one case, two French journalists spoke of being moved around Iraq to a number of locations and interacting with a range of cells. Each of them followed similar procedures and were taking orders from a centralized leadership base. While some hostages were ordered to be killed, others were kept alive for bargaining.¹⁸⁹

Soon after, IAI units began claiming credit for ambushes that often combined IEDs and small arms fire. Larger operations targeted Coalition helicopters. Perhaps the best known set of operations was IAI's use of snipers to harass US forces. In October of 2006 alone, IAI sniper units registered 36 attacks. Many of these were filmed and used as recruitment materials.¹⁹⁰ Steinberg sums up the behavior in comparison to other Iraqi insurgent groups:

[IAI] is mostly involved in classic guerrilla activities against military targets. However, it has also been known to conduct targeted killings of representatives of the new Iraqi state. The effectiveness and professionalism with which the individual cells carry out

188. Steinberg, *The Iraqi Insurgency: Actors, Strategies, and Structures*.

189. Georges Malbrunot, "Du 20 Août au 22 Décembre: Les Carnets de Captivité de Georges Malbrunot en Irak," *Le Figaro*, December 24, 2004, lexisnexis.com.

190. Robert Watson, "Iraqi Rebels Learn from US Sniper Guru," *The Telegraph*, October 28, 2006, telegraph.co.uk.

the majority of their actions suggests that many members of the Islamic Army have received military training.¹⁹¹

Like the Cao Đài in Vietnam, this sort of control allowed IAI to follow a more complex strategy. Since their leadership could call on units to stand down *and* use violence selectively, they were able to pursue negotiations while carrying out attacks against specified targets. As Khalil observed near the end of 2006,

Instead of exclusively focusing on the military fight (as most Sunni insurgents have done), or pursuing their interests solely through negotiations (like many Shiite and Kurdish groups), the Islamic Army's leaders are conducting a two-pronged political-military strategy against coalition forces and the Iraqi government. They have adopted a more sophisticated approach, with militants conducting simultaneous negotiations with, and attacks against, coalition troops.¹⁹²

They pursued a similar strategy when interacting with AQI during the Awakening and Surge. IAI leaders attacked AQI positions and fighters in response to violence against civilians throughout early 2007. However, they shut this violence off in June 2007, calling for a ceasefire—the same ceasefire AQI abided by that is described above.¹⁹³ They showed a similar capacity to turn violence off when calling on their troops to stand down when the US withdrew in 2011.¹⁹⁴

6.6.2 1920 Revolution Brigade

Like IAI, 1920RB relied on former Iraqi soldiers and officers to fill their ranks. However, unlike IAI, 1920RB also recruited based on pre-existing tribal ties and social connections. In fact, the main recruit base for 1920RB was the Zobai tribe, based in Anbar province (they mainly operated in the provinces of Anbar, Diyala, and Baghdad).¹⁹⁵ Further, through a close association with the Muslim

191. Steinberg, *The Iraqi Insurgency: Actors, Strategies, and Structures*: 9.

192. Lydia Khalil, "Islamic Army in Iraq Pursues Strategy of Negotiation and Violence," *Terrorism Focus* 3, no. 41 (2006).

193. Bobby Ghosh, "A Truce Between U.S. Enemies in Iraq," *TIME*, June 6, 2007.

194. "Iraq Crisis: Key Players in Sunni Rebellion," *BBC News*, July 1, 2014, bbc.co.uk.

195. David Kilcullen, "Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt," *Small Wars Journal* Blog Post (August 2007).

Scholars Association, they recruited from religious networks as well.¹⁹⁶ This recruit base provided 1920RB with strong primary groups as their members, for the most part, shared a tribal normative structure.

There is limited evidence that they attempted to leverage this base by providing weapons and armaments. As a 1920RB spokesperson said in an interview, during the early weeks after the US invasion, “[the 1920 Revolution Brigades] tried to collect all the weapons and ammunition it could collect in one or two months and stockpiled them for the future battle in Iraq. We realized right from the beginning that the battle would be long and that occupation would continue for a long time. This required large quantities of weapons and ammunition.”¹⁹⁷ However, there is little evidence of attempts to provide other goods or governance-type services.

Moreover, while many of the initial recruits were trained in the Iraqi Army, there is no evidence of selection procedures for cadre or for procedures to promote and replace existing members. Further, though 1920RB and IAI were pursuing similar goals and called for the use of similar tactics, there is no evidence that the organization sought functional differentiation or used safehouses or training grounds.¹⁹⁸ This reality lead some to argue that despite its attempts to appear more unified, the 1920RB command structure was more of an amalgamation of separate fighting units.¹⁹⁹

6.6.2.1 How Did They Fight?

Given that 1920RB could draw on strong primary groups and perhaps had resource control, but did not have any semblance of a cadre system, the theory predicts that they would at best be able to

196. Daniel Fink and Steven Leibowitz, *The Muslim Scholars Association: A Key Actor in Iraq*, Research Notes 12 (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 2006); “Iraqi Militant Plays up Military Prowess of His ‘Resistance’ Group,” *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, October 30, 2006, lexisnexis.com.

197. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006).

198. Long, “Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace?”

199. Fink and Leibowitz, *The Muslim Scholars Association: A Key Actor in Iraq*; Steinberg, *The Iraqi Insurgency: Actors, Strategies, and Structures*.

retain Limited Structural Integrity and keep ceasefires while maintaining resource control. But, they would not follow orders when not observed by their leaders and would be incapable of coordinated guerrilla operations.

Unlike IAI, the 1920 Revolution Brigades were fairly inconsequential. They carried out fairly simple operations including bombings or the occasional mortar attack. Indeed, in comparing the number of attacks claimed by IAI and 1920RB, there are stark differences—the absolute numbers cannot be trusted as it is obvious that organizations were embellishing, but the relative comparisons are relevant. While the IAI claimed to have killed over 25,000 US and Coalition forces through 2006, 1920RB claimed to have killed 2,000.²⁰⁰ This lead Steinberg to conclude that even though they are composed of similar elements, 1920RB is “somewhat weaker than the Islamic Army in Iraq in terms of personnel and operational capabilities” and tend to only be able to carry out “low-profile guerrilla activities.”²⁰¹

There is evidence that they carried out a few ceasefires early in the conflict. Perhaps most well-known was abiding by the ceasefire ending the first Battle of Fallujah. At the time, a 1920RB spokesperson said, “the Iraqi resistance continued to adhere to the ceasefire despite violations by US forces yesterday and today. We adhered to a response to a call by the Muslim Scholars authority, which asked us not to respond to deprive the American of any excuse and refute their allegations.”²⁰² Nonetheless, it is not entirely clear whether this was simply rhetoric.

However, because it did not have a cadre system to train and select replacements, there were consistent divisions about leadership changes and an inability to react to the operational losses.

200. Daniel Kimmage and Kathleen Ridolfo, *Iraqi Insurgent Media: The War of Images and Ideas: How Sunni Insurgents in Iraq and Their Supporters Worldwide Are Using the Media*, RFE/RL Special Report (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 2007): 41-42.

201. Steinberg, *The Iraqi Insurgency: Actors, Strategies, and Structures*: 10.

202. Quoted in, Fink and Leibowitz, *The Muslim Scholars Association: A Key Actor in Iraq*: 5.

Throughout the 2005-2006 period, AQI, as part of its strategy of targeting tribal leaders, targeted many key figures in 1920RB. As Smith recounts from his personal experience interacting with 1920RB, “Between 2005 and 2008, the leadership of the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades would change due to hostile action six times. By attacking the tribal leaders that formed the leadership of the 1920s Brigades, it is likely that AQI had severed too many links between HAMAS Iraq and the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades for it to form a cohesive body.”²⁰³

More importantly, after the beginning of the Awakening, 1920RB was plagued by factionalism as other tribal actors were able to compete with them in providing resources to their members. The most severe splits came in 2007 with official implementation of the Sons of Iraq program. During that period, increasing numbers of 1920RB fighters and mid-level leaders left the organization to join the SOIs or put down their arms in response to threats from AQI.²⁰⁴ Illustratively, in March 2007, while IAI claimed to have carried out 241 operations, 1920RB claimed no attacks.²⁰⁵ While 1920RB was able to draw on thousands of fighters based on its tribal connections, these relationships did not give it the capacity to fight with anything exceeding Limited Structural Integrity.

6.6.3 Baathist Insurgents

While IAI and 1920RB used a mixed nationalist-religious message, other groups, relied on a Baathist-centric form of nationalism. Most of these groups were fairly successful at the outset of the insurgency, however, few persisted. This discussion touches on two groups: Jaysh Muhammad and Jaysh Rajal Al-Tariqah Al-Naqshbandia (JRTN). While Jaysh Muhammad was operational in 2003 and

203. Major Landgrave T. Smith, “Wrestling the Hydra: Exploiting Organizational Evolution in Terrorist Groups” (Masters Thesis, United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 2013): 60-61.

204. Smith, “Wrestling the Hydra: Exploiting Organizational Evolution in Terrorist Groups”: 60-61; Ann Scott Tyson, “Sunni Fighters Find Strategic Benefits in Tentative Alliance With U.S.,” *The Washington Post*, August 9, 2007, washingtonpost.com.

205. Kimmage and Ridolfo, *Iraqi Insurgent Media: The War of Images and Ideas: How Sunni Insurgents in Iraq and Their Supporters Worldwide Are Using the Media*: 10.

2004, it petered out as its command structure collapsed. By contrast, JRTN, not founded until 2006, developed to be fairly effective. The key distinction was that JRTN developed the systems to create primary groups and a cadre system, positioning it consistently generate force despite operational losses.²⁰⁶

Jaysh Muhammad was founded soon after the US invasion and integrated many officers and soldiers from the disbanded Iraqi Army. As the ICG observes, these former regime official were “ideal” for forming the “vanguard” of any early opposition because they combined “idleness, relevant military and intelligence skills, and knowledge of the whereabouts of vast weapons stockpiles and relatively scarcer cash reserves concealed by the regime in anticipation of the projected defence of Baghdad.”²⁰⁷ In this context, Jaysh Muhammad was quickly able to establish command relationships from Fallujah to Baghdad. The deployed units were organized into small cells and virtually all were composed entirely of former fighters.²⁰⁸ These units operated with a decentralized command structure.²⁰⁹

While these deployed units were lead by former officers and often retained strong primary groups from their earlier military service,²¹⁰ the organization did not develop networks to directly supply or pay their fighters. Instead, many soldiers bought weapons on the open-market or went to existing arms caches.²¹¹ Further, Jaysh Muhammad’s central leadership claimed that many cells were directly supplied with money and weapons by Iran and Syria, not the central leadership.²¹²

206. Two other Baath-centric forces, the Fedayeen Saddam and al-Awdah, failed for similar reasons to Jaysh Muhammad Stephen T. Hosmer, *Why the Iraqi Resistance to the Coalition Invasion Was So Weak* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007): 104.

207. International Crisis Group, *In Their Own Words*: 5.

208. Scott Johnson, “Inside an Enemy Cell,” *Newsweek*, August 18, 2003,

209. MEMRI TV Project Special Report - Commander of Saddam Hussein’s ‘Army of Muhammad’ Confesses: We Received Money and Arms from Syria and Iran, Special Dispath 849 (MEMRI - The Middle East Media Research Institute, January 2005): <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1300.htm>; Johnson, “Inside an Enemy Cell.”

210. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 156-57.

211. Johnson, “Inside an Enemy Cell.”

212. MEMRI TV Project Special Report - Commander of Saddam Hussein’s ‘Army of Muhammad’ Confesses: We Received

Perhaps most importantly, they did not have procedures to recruit or indoctrinate new members, instead relying entirely on the pre-existing relationships they imported into the organization.²¹³

JRTN was formed at the end of 2006 following Saddam's execution and tended to operate in more northern areas including Diyala, Mosul, and Kirkuk. At this time, the Baathist ideology was increasingly unpopular, yet the organization was able to build a robust set of institutions. The organization built on a foundation of Iraqi Naqshbandi Order, a Sufi sect that had served as a central patronage network during Saddam's regime.²¹⁴ Like 1920RB, many of those joining were tied together by tribal and clan ties. For the most part, the initial core of top-level leaders as well as mid-level operatives was drawn from former military and intelligence officers.²¹⁵

As many organizations were weakened during the Surge and Awakening, JRTN became a central provider of weapons, technical assistance, and steady compensation for its fighters—thought to number between 1,500 and 5,000.²¹⁶ Further, it sought to gain recruits and influence by providing “consulting services” to other nationalist insurgent groups including both 1920RB and IAI. JRTN centrally collects funds from extortion, tribal donations, and donations from ex-Baathists in Syria, Jordan, and Yemen to then in-turn distributes them in a “top-down” fashion.²¹⁷

Perhaps most importantly, JRTN is focused on creating a durable command structure rooted in a cadre system. It prefers to use “former members of elite military units” to lead small cells that operate in a decentralized command structure.²¹⁸ Their process for selecting new members and training new cell leaders is geared toward maintaining this structure,

JRTN prefers to use former members of elite military units such as the Special Repub-

Money and Arms from Syria and Iran.

213. Johnson, “Inside an Enemy Cell.”

214. Michael Knights, “The JRTN Movement and Iraq's Next Insurgency,” *CTC Sentinel* 4, no. 7 (2011): 2.

215. *Ibid.*: 3.

216. *Ibid.*

217. *Ibid.*: 5.

218. Rafid Fadhil Ali, “Sufi Insurgent Groups in Iraq,” *Terrorism Monitor* 6, no. 2 (2008).

lican Guard or Republican Guard as operational affiliates. Candidates are identified by personal recommendations, and vetting is undertaken through former regime networks. Training programs are used to refresh military skills and discipline, including extended “90-day” courses where recruits are subjected to physical abuse by former warrant officers.²¹⁹

In short, they built the capacity to integrate new members into the organization and retain a decentralized command structure.

6.6.3.1 How Did They Fight?

Given the coding of each organization, the theory predicts that Jaysh Muhammad might be able to carry out fairly complex operations before suffering any operational losses. However, given their lack of structure to recruit new members or cultivate new leaders, both at the mid-level and above, they would be unable to re-generate force. This is exactly what happened when Jaysh Muhammad suffered its first real losses during the Second Battle for Fallujah. On the other hand, JRTN’s commitment to creating strong primary groups by carefully selecting and indoctrinating new members, its commitment to selecting and cultivating lower-level officers, and its hands-on military training should position it to operate with Guerrilla Capacity. While JRTN did show that it could operate with Complete Structural Integrity—its deployed units followed specific orders about who to target with violence—it did not consistently carry out complex enough operations to be coded as showing Guerrilla Capacity.

Jaysh Muhammad showed some initial tactical prowess, carrying out seemingly complex operations against US forces throughout 2004. These included ambushes against US convoys, coordinated IED attacks, and night-time operations. In addition, it seemed to maintain a fairly high tempo of operations²²⁰ Perhaps its most publicized attacks came with it taking responsibility for the attack on

219. Knights, “The JRTN Movement and Iraq’s Next Insurgency”: 3.

220. Johnson, “Inside an Enemy Cell”; Steinberg, *The Iraqi Insurgency: Actors, Strategies, and Structures*.

the UN headquarters in August 2003 as well downing a US helicopter in November 2003.²²¹

However, the organization suffered a significant blow when its leader, Moayad Ahmed Yasseen, as well as other high-level leaders were captured in November 2004 during the Second Battle of Fallujah.²²² The organization also took heavy losses during the battle—both from Coalition forces and other insurgents. Following these losses, Jaysh Muhammad fairly suddenly ceased operations as its fighters defected, often to other organizations including IAI and AQI.²²³ This development was rapid as Jaysh Muhammad went from appearing to be one of the most powerful insurgent groups in Iraq to near collapse upon the loss of some leadership and soldiers.²²⁴

In contrast, JRTN has operated for an extended period of time despite operational losses. However, its operations are better described as achieving Complete Structural Integrity rather than Guerilla Capacity. They have carried out a significant number of one-off attacks, including some bombings, some grenade attacks, and a few mortar operations.²²⁵ It is possible this is because they run many of their operations by assisting other groups. Further, their operational guidance calls for units to “adopt low-risk tactics (such as sniper fire and rocket attacks) to conserve personnel and to progressively adapt more complex attacks only after patiently profiling the enemy.”²²⁶

However, their attacks are highly discriminating and targeted. Their operational guidance tends to call for attacks only against US forces and for very targeted use violence in other circumstances.²²⁷

221. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 32; Joel Roberts, “U.S. Launches Air Attack In Iraq,” November 19, 2003, cbsnews.com.

222. “Assault Sweeps Sunni Muslim Terrain; U.S. Push in Fallujah Ebbs,” *USA Today*, November 15, 2004, usatoday.com.

223. Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq’s Evolving Insurgency*, Working Paper (Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2005): 97.

224. Steinberg, *The Iraqi Insurgency: Actors, Strategies, and Structures*: 7; International Crisis Group, *In Their Own Words*: 3.

225. Michael Gisick, “U.S. Targeting Insurgent Group in N. Iraq,” *Stars and Stripes*, May 25, 2010, stripes.com; Knights, “The JRTN Movement and Iraq’s Next Insurgency.”

226. Knights, “The JRTN Movement and Iraq’s Next Insurgency”: 3.

227. Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, “Letter from the Jihad Leader of the Iraqi Resistance Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri,” May 29, 2009, www.Jabha-wqs.net.

For example, they have carried out campaigns of “targeting judges, police officers, and the Sons of Iraq with warnings followed by progressively deadly uses of force.”²²⁸

This level of control has been crucial to differentiating JRTN from other insurgent groups. As a result, Knights observes that, “One intelligence officer confided to me that JRTN were “one of the least ‘interfered with’ terrorist groupings” in Iraq because Sunni civilians and even local police accepted the Naqshbandi as legitimate rebels.”²²⁹ As a result, JRTN “emerged as the only Iraqi insurgent group to have grown stronger during and since the US-led ‘surge.’”²³⁰

6.7 Alternative Explanations

By focusing on groups with similar background characteristics, the design of this chapter addresses many existing alternative explanations. Nearly all of the Sunni groups could not draw on pre-existing social structures. In fact, those that could, the tribal groups and 1920RB, were among the least effective organizations studied. On the other hand, those organizations that explicitly built strong primary groups tended to fight with greater unity. Further, given this fragmented social milieu, nearly all groups were plagued with internal divisions and factions. But, it was only the groups that developed resource control that could limit the effect of these internal factions.

Beyond these social characteristics, nearly all of the groups could operate with some basic degree of sanctuary, whether in urban safehouses or rural camps. As the theory would predict, the only big exception with IS which was able to operate with large sanctuaries in Syria and Iraq, positioning it to reach Quasi-conventional Capacity. Like sanctuary, all of the organizations had access to resources—weapons, cash, and ammunition—as well as some degree of external support. And,

228. Knights, “The JRTN Movement and Iraq’s Next Insurgency”: Footnote 37.

229. Michael Knights, “ISIL’s Political-Military Power in Iraq,” *CTC Sentinel* 7, no. 8 (2014): 1–6.

230. Knights, “The JRTN Movement and Iraq’s Next Insurgency”: 2.

given the small social and political space they were operating in, these groups all faced similar types of competition. Yet, there was significant variation in military capacity and insurgent behavior. This section addresses additional confounding factors.

6.7.1 US Tactics and Popular Support

One potential argument is that variation in insurgent capabilities or ability to operate was driven by how the US interacted with them. For the most part, the United States treated each of the non-tribal groups with a similar approach. This included a mix of leadership strikes, psychological operations, targeted raids, community presence, and political interventions. Perhaps the most targeted group during all periods after 2004 was AQI. Similarly, it was definitely the least popular group in the Sunni Triangle. Nonetheless, it remained quite resilient until well into the Surge and Awakening. On the other hand, other groups such as 1920RB or Jaysh Muhammad were severely weakened by increased tempo US operations.

Further, popular support in many examples was obviously endogenous to organizational capabilities. While AQI and IS have been unpopular, their victories often lead to new recruits and to at least some increased public approval. On the other hand, LAI and JRTN were able to set themselves apart from other groups as they had the capability to carefully select targets. This not only led them to appear stronger, but meant that they could carefully appeal to certain segments of the population with the use of violence against specific “enemies.”

Finally, there is no doubt that the US withdrawal—combined with the Syrian civil war—contributed to the rise of IS. As evidenced by the ability of US air strikes to slow IS operations, there is no way they could have operated as they do before 2011—though AQI had already picked up its tempo of operations in 2010. That said, many other Sunni organizations, whether LAI, 1920RB, or JRTN, did

not begin fighting with the same capacity as IS despite facing similar persecution from the central government. IS was successful because it took advantage of an opening by developing the organizational structures needed to fight in a Quasi-conventional way. The same was true in Syria where IS has operated with greater capacity than its competitors, across the entire religious spectrum.

6.7.2 Goals

Perhaps some groups had different overall goals and thus different organizational structures. To begin with, even if different goals were related to different structures, the theory lays out that it is still important to be able to assess the match between rhetoric and action by observing organizational qualities. For example, the groups with the most limited reach were regional tribal actors—though some tribal federations sought much more widespread control. However, instead of assessing the institutional structure of these tribal groups, the US thought that these tribal militias could simply build on their pre-existing social connections to fight across Iraq. This led to an overestimation of the potential impact and durability of the Awakening and Sons of Iraq. Moreover, this outlook stymied earlier attempts to harness tribal federations as US forces did not recognize the importance of supplementing these tribal ties with resource control.²³¹

Another group that was thought to perhaps have “limited” objectives was AQI.²³² Many have argued that AQI was just a “terrorist” group and thus faced different pressures than the rest of the insurgent groups as it simply sought to disrupt. However, if this were true, it would not explain how AQI developed *superior* capabilities. In any case, there is a great deal of evidence that AQI sought to hold territory and fight for population control from early in the conflict.²³³

231. Eisenstadt, “Tribal Engagement Lessons Learned.”

232. Brian Fishman, “After Zarqawi: The Dilemmas and Future of Al Qaeda in Iraq,” *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2006): 19–32.

233. Bill Roggio, “Al Qaeda and Its Role in the Iraq Insurgency,” *Long War Journal*, July 13, 2007, longwarjournal.org.

On the other hand, all of the nationalist groups had similar expressed goals and all sought to be the leading actor in the Sunni insurgency. This included removing US forces from Iraq, removing Shiite governmental power, and restoring “Sunni” influence. Though there might be disagreements about the extent to which that state should follow Islamic precepts, it is unclear why this should significantly alter organizational structure.²³⁴

6.7.3 Ideology

What if different ideologies are better suited for building strong organizations? As the two Vietnam chapters lay out, it does not appear this is the case, as groups using similar approaches and appeals had massively different operational capabilities. In Iraq, rather than ideological separation, throughout the conflict, there was ideological consolidation. Nearly all groups appealed to a mix of religious and nationalist principles.²³⁵ Further, there is significant evidence that recruits were drawn to groups for a wide-range of reasons.²³⁶ It was what organizations *did with* these recruits that ended up determining the organization’s ability to mold and employ these fighters.

Nonetheless, the tribal groups point to the importance of further addressing the link between ideology and strategy. There is no doubt that the implicit outlook of Iraqi tribal groups meant that they were unlikely to seek greater power or widespread military capacities.²³⁷ As a result, some ideologies, by setting the bounds of potential strategies, may, through that channel contribute to the level of organizational development.

234. Ahmed Hashim, “Chapter Three: Objectives and Strategy,” *The Adelphi Papers* 48, no. 402 (2008): 37–42.

235. Baram, *Who Are the Insurgents?*

236. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq*: 100-103.

237. I thank Lee Seymour for this perspective and important point.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of both informal and formal organizational structures in understanding how well insurgent organizations can fight. Like in Vietnam, successful organizations all followed similar pathways regardless of their starting point. Also, as in the First Indochina War, the most successful groups, AQI and IS, perhaps started from the worst initial position. AQI, in particular, came to Iraq as a foreign entity with little connection to the existing social and political system. It employed tactics that made it unpopular and sought to weaken existing social structures, yet it became far more effective than those it was competing against. Further, it persisted despite a coordinated and massive campaign by the US to destroy it.

The chapter also introduces some additional observations. First, like in Vietnam, access to weapons and fighting resources was abundant despite the strong counter-insurgent. Again, the only important weapons that organizations could not find in-country were those necessary for fighting in a Quasi-conventional Capacity. Access to weapons in civil war is *not* a limiting factor in most cases.

Second, overall numbers of insurgents are not the most important metric. To begin with, measuring the total number of individuals fighting in Iraq without looking at the specific organizations does not paint a useful picture of the threat posed by the insurgency. Similarly, simply looking at the biggest groups is not particularly useful either. 1920RB and SOI attracted massive numbers of individuals, yet were not particularly militarily effective. On the other hand, a generally small organization in AQI and JRTN were able to influence the battlefield in a more consistent way and drive large trends in violence.

Finally, as the theory underlines, recruitment is not equivalent to force generation. The reasons that individuals join insurgent organizations often *do not* predict the organization's capabilities.

Nearly all of the Sunni groups in Iraq recruited from similar pools of individuals and many joined for strong ideological reasons, whether religious or nationalist. However, it was what organizations did with those recruits *after* they joined that explained how some groups could continue to refill their ranks with reliable and committed fighters while other organizations could not.

What is more, this focus on force generation underscores that the initial military organization and training that a group has cannot be sustained without explicit efforts. Unlike other organization-types, in the course of conflict, it is impossible to avoid attrition, oftentimes at a quick pace. As a result, even organizations that emerge from highly capable military actors—such as Jaysh Muhammad—have a shelf-life as that expertise will be lost in the course of conflict.

Chapter 7

Insurgent Military Effectiveness of Shiite Organizations in Iraq (2003-2016)

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter studying Sunni organizations in Iraq demonstrated that strong pre-existing primary groups are not a necessary condition for military effectiveness. Instead, some Sunni groups that began without such communal structures were unable to develop high levels of effectiveness. This chapter, comparing Shiite organizations in Iraq, shows that access to strong pre-existing primary groups does not guarantee high levels of effectiveness. In particular, I look at three organizations: Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM), the Badr Organization, and the Special Groups. All three drew upon similar social structures, yet JAM began as Combat Ineffective and only reached Limited Structural Integrity while Badr and the Special Groups were able to reach higher levels of capacity.

To briefly re-state the theory, the dissertation disaggregates military effectiveness into increasingly complex categories: organizations that disintegrate under fire (Combat Ineffective), those able to carry out simple activities such as ceasefires or preventing large-scale defections (Limited Structural Integrity), those able to ensure that their units carry out specific orders under fire such as only

attacking particular populations or areas (Complete Structural Integrity), and, finally, those able to carry out simple military tasks such as assassination campaigns or launching hit and run operations or ambushes, whether using small arms fire, explosives, or mortars (Guerrilla Capacity). Organizations with higher levels of military effectiveness can fight in a manner similar to conventional forces by employing combined arms, conducting static defenses, carrying out attacks that coordinate across disparate fighting units, executing flanking maneuvers, re-grouping and responding to changing battlefield conditions, and adapting tactics in a timely manner (Quasi-conventional Capacity).

To explain variation in insurgent military effectiveness, the theory focuses on the intersection of informal structures of social support and formal military structures. The existence of strong social ties—whether imported from pre-existing community structures or built organically by the organization—is insufficient. Instead, insurgent organizations must actively link themselves to their members by directly and exclusively providing resources such as weaponry and food—what I term “resource control.” To maintain access to these resources, deployed fighters are incentivized to comply and use group norms to encourage others to comply—but only when their behavior can be clearly observed and thus sanctioned by the central leadership. Leaders with resource control can ensure compliance with highly visible orders such as maintaining ceasefires or not retreating because they can readily observe soldiers’ behavior and sanction units for violations. But, such organizations will struggle to manage how those units employ force, whether it be the tactics they use or the targets they select, since the fog of war makes it difficult to observe and then sanction behavior during discrete combat episodes.

To further increase military effectiveness by ensuring that soldiers comply when not observed, leaders must cultivate a lower-level officer cadre committed to the organization and trusted by their

soldiers. This task requires indoctrinating and selecting qualified officers and positioning them to gain their soldiers' trust by appointing them to manageably-sized units and ensuring they face risk equally with their soldiers. These cadre serve as focal points for deployed units, meaning that their example and commitment to the organization redirects the behavior of the group to support organizational goals. Only organizations with this foundation can reach higher levels of military effectiveness by, among other things, instituting military training systems, inter-mixing experienced and non-experienced members, and putting in place logistics systems to move weaponry and troops in a coordinated manner.

While the comparison between JAM, the Special Groups, and the Badr Organization clearly demonstrates that pre-existing social networks do not determine effectiveness, the comparisons between the three groups are less tight than in previous chapters. In particular, while all three organizations received support from Iran, both Badr and the Special Groups received more guided assistance including explicit training and organization-building assistance. As a result, they had clear structural advantages that JAM did not have. In addition, the Badr Organization had a long organizational history and had fought in previous conflicts. Nonetheless, the chapter is still able to test the theory by relying on within-case variation and carefully tracing the development processes for both Badr and the Special Groups.

First, the chapter is able to use JAM's temporal development to show that it was Combat Ineffective in 2004 but gained Limited Structural Integrity after 2007 by using resource control to leverage strong primary groups. While JAM was unable to keep a ceasefire in 2004—and suffered great losses as a result—it was able to keep a costly ceasefire in 2007. This prediction is unique to the dissertation's theory. As I show, very few analysts in academia, the private sector, or government expected JAM to be able to keep this 2007 ceasefire, arguing that the organization was highly “fragmented.”

Nonetheless, it was able to keep the agreement, which was a central part of the success of the Surge in Baghdad.

Second, though Badr had an extended institutional legacy and opted to join the government, the comparison between the Special Groups and Badr is still powerful. Despite their differences, there is one important similarity: Iran provided very similar training and organizational advice to Badr and the Special Groups—this support is similar in content to that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard has provided to other groups, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iranian support focused on developing a cadre system and constructing small, functionally differentiated units. As a result, the chapter is able to walk through how Badr and the Special Groups followed similar pathways and thus developed comparable military capacity organizational features. As discussed in the conclusion, this comparison also highlights the importance of carefully disaggregating typically studied civil war variables: rather than simply giving these organizations material resources, Iran directly contributed to organization-building.

The chapter proceeds as follows. After a brief background about structural conditions shared by the three groups, the remainder of the chapter codes each organization based on the key explanatory variables as well as the structural conditions they faced. For JAM and Badr, there are multiple codings based on temporal differences. With each organization fully described, I then trace the manner in which organizational attributes and structural conditions were related to the military behavior of each actor.

7.2 Background

The previous chapter laid out the reversal in fortunes faced by Iraq's Sunni population with the removal of Saddam Hussein. Iraqi's Shiites were in a different position. As the majority population—

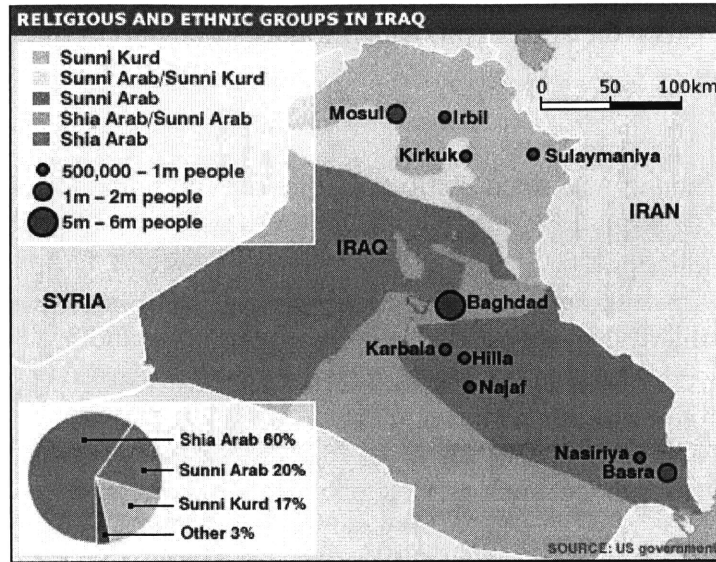


Figure 7.1 Ethnic Map of Iraq

southern Iraq is Shiite, stretching from Basra to Baghdad and including the key holy cities of Najaf and Karbala—they were keen to get involved in governing given their disenfranchisement under Saddam (for a breakdown of the Sunni and Shiite populations, see Figure 7.1). Shiite parties from across the political spectrum would take firm control of the government from 2005 onwards.

Beyond this political empowerment, Shiites faced a different social situation than Iraq's Sunnis. As noted in the previous chapter, Saddam had actively dismantled Iraq's Sunni social networks, but did not do the same thing with Iraq's Shiites. What is more, the Shiite faith has a far more vertical structure, giving more potential power to Ayatollahs as they attempt to create unified social perspectives.¹ As a result, while in post-2003 Baghdad, Patel observes that "Shiites always know which Ayatollah their mosque and preacher are affiliated with... An Ayatollah can generate common knowledge among tens of thousands, in a few cases millions, of followers on any given Friday. Ayatollah networks generate common knowledge over a wide set of people, allowing Shiites to know what Shiites they will never meet or see know. These networks create 'imagined communities' through

1. Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The 'Ulama' of Najaf and Karbala'* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

common knowledge generation.”² Indeed, all three organizations studied in this chapter drew on these religious networks to recruit and manage their members.

7.2.1 Iraq’s Shiite and the Iraqi Civil War

While the Sunni insurgency began quickly, most Shiite parties supported participation in the political process. The most influential leader calling for significant Shiite participation was Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, perhaps the most revered Shiite cleric in Iraq, and a Marja-e-taqlid (source of emulation). He advocated for quietism, or separating political and religious leadership. While Sistani went along with US calls for elections, he consistently pressured the US to move faster in handing over control to Iraqis. Another major force, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and its militia, the Badr Organization, generally went along with the political process. However, due to its history (described below), it was closely linked with Iran.

The only large Shiite opposition came from the Sadrist trend and its militia, JAM. In creating JAM, its leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, built on his father’s heritage. His father was distinctly non-quietist, and in part drawing on that legacy, Muqtada al-Sadr advocated for a Shiite government similar to neighboring Iran along with the expulsion of US forces from Iraq. In this context, Sadr sought to elevate the status of his movement—many followers of the Sadrist trend were impoverished and felt that Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani was not representative of their needs. As a result, JAM broke from the Shiite mainstream and began using force against the US and the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) as early as 2004.

However, after 2005, JAM shifted the focus of their violence and was joined by the Badr Organization which also took up arms. The major target for both groups was competition from Sunni insur-

2. Patel, *Ayatollahs on the Pareto Frontier*: 14.

gent groups, including both nationalist and religious groups. This inter-sectarian violence peaked during 2006 as Iraq entered a civil war. The result was significant casualties and major population movements—including ethnic cleansing—particularly in Baghdad.³ As Shiite groups took control of new territory, intra-sectarian fighting broke out between JAM and the Badr Organization over control of these areas. US efforts to stop this civil war and intra-sectarian violence led Shiite forces such as the Special Groups to once again start using violence against US and Iraqi forces.

Finally, after the US withdrawal, with the rise of the Islamic State, Shiite forces turned back to targeting Sunni groups, in particular the Islamic State. Indeed, given the weakness of the Iraqi government, much of the fighting has been carried out by groups like the Badr Organization. As a result, while Shiite forces did not directly threaten the Iraqi government in the same manner that Sunni insurgent groups did, they were engaged in significant violence throughout the period studied.

7.3 Jaysh al-Mahdi

JAM had an enormous following and significant latent potential, making it a major force during the conflict. However, despite this popularity and size, it began with quite little military capacity and was only able to reach Limited Structural Integrity. JAM only reached this level of effectiveness despite support from Iran, access to strong pre-existing primary groups, and access to significant resources from the Iraqi government. Still, it was stronger than many analysts believed it be. During 2007, many analysts thought the group would disintegrate given how “fragmented” it appeared.

This section walks through its organizational development and thus shows how, despite seeming “weak,” it was able to use resource control to leverage its followers. Before establishing resource control, JAM had little control of its fighters despite its fiercely cohesive Shiite foundation. During

3. Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro, “Testing the Surge: Why Violence Declined in Iraq in 2007.”

the summer of 2004, its fighters did not follow two separate ceasefire orders, and, as a result, JAM took significant losses, taking it off the battlefield for nearly two years. It was only in 2005 after it gained access to resources and put in place systems to establish control that it was able to turn violence on and off. Thus, though many believed it would be unable to, JAM was able to keep two costly ceasefires in 2007 that were a central part of the success of the US Surge in Baghdad. Still, JAM could not control how violence was used. Many fighters targeted civilians, carried out racketeering schemes, and disobeyed orders about targeting Sunni areas. Table 7.1 on the following page shows the coding for JAM during these periods.

7.3.1 Background Variables

JAM is rooted in the movement of Muqtada al-Sadr's father, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, and uncle, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr. In contrast to the majority of the Shiite clergy in Iraq, they espoused a non-quietist approach, calling for the removal of Saddam Hussein and establishment of an Islamic government in the mold of their Iranian neighbors. After reaching a deal with Saddam Hussein in the mid-1990s—before later changing his tune—Sadr was given access to patronage which he could distribute to his followers, thus solidifying his position in this Shiite community.⁴ Using this support, Sadiq sought to formally connect the religious establishment with Iraq's large and underprivileged Shiite community. His efforts built a strong persona, deep patronage networks, and garnered vast public support. These networks were built around shared religious views, the hierarchy of religious cadre, shared interactions, similar economic backgrounds, and a shared experience of persecution under Saddam Hussein.⁵

Muqtada al-Sadr directly recruited from these networks in 2003. As Krohley notes, "The Mehdi

4. Nicholas Krohley, "Opportunity In Chaos," *Foreign Affairs*, August 26, 2015, 49.

5. Yusri Hazran, "The Rise of Politicized Shi'ite Religiosity and the Territorial State in Iraq and Lebanon," *The Middle East Journal* 64, no. 4 (2010): 521–541.

Table 7.1 Jaysh al-Mahdi Coding and Predicted Military Effectiveness

	2003-2005	2005-2008
Background Variables		
Sanctuary	✓	✓
Pre-Existing Primary Groups	✓	✓
Access to Resources	X	✓
External Support	X	✓
Factions	✓	✓
Organizational Variables		
Creating/Leveraging Primary Groups		
—Creation of Primary Groups	NA	NA
—Resource Control	X	✓
Creating a Cadre System		
—Officer Selection Standards	X	X
—Manageable Small Units	X	X
Becoming an “Organizational Weapon”		
—Military Training for Cadre	X	✓
—Basic Communications Systems	✓	✓
—Functionally Differentiated Small Units	X	X
Making the Jump		
—Large-unit Organization and Training	X	X
—Movement and Integrated Communications	X	X
—Heavy Weapons	X	X
Predicted Military Effectiveness	Combat Ineffective	Limited Structural Integrity
Prediction Correct?	Yes	Yes

Army’s growth in Baghdad occurred through the absorption of pre-existing local networks. Taking advantage of the latent base of popular support...the Mehdi Army mobilized thousands of foot soldiers.”⁶ The commitment to these followers was driven by their allegiance to Sadiq Sadr. In 2003, Cockburn relates the words of a young Shiite after the fall of Sadr city to U.S. forces: “We believed Sadr II [Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr] was like the Prophet Mohammed because he did so many things for our community. We, his followers, had a sense of failure and guilt that we had not been able to

6. Krohley, “Opportunity In Chaos”: 79.

stop him being killed, so we felt it our duty to support his son.”⁷ Soon after the invasion, that son, Muqtada, took the leadership of a nascent movement rooted in the accomplishments and legend of his father.

As a result, Krohley observes that, following the US invasion, JAM was one of the only organizations with strong pre-existing primary groups:

[W]ith the White Lion’s son, Muqtada, at the resurgent Sadrist movement’s helm...the Sadrists possessed a rare and valuable commodity that would fuel their ascent: the ideological bond that had been forged among the masses of Iraq’s Shi’a underclass by Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr. On a national landscape where the populace had been systematically atomized and depoliticized over a period of decades, the Sadrists’ ability to build from a genuine, grassroots mass-base was an extraordinary asset.⁸

Nonetheless, as described in the discussion of resource control, the movement started with little access to material resources. To the extent that it had any real resource base in 2004, it was materials provided by Iran. Iran began supporting JAM in 2004, though the extent of that support is unclear. There is some evidence that they received weaponry and training, though that is not verifiable. However, as of mid-2005, Iran was providing JAM with some military training and supplies, perhaps bolstered with greater support from Hezbollah.⁹ As discussed below, this support contributed to JAM’s generation of resource control. However, Iran withdrew its support as of late 2006 as it sought to diversify from JAM and began supporting other groups, including the Special Groups.¹⁰

With respect to sanctuary, for the most part, JAM had access to territory and a clear home base in Sadr City for much of the conflict. Given this base, JAM generally operated in the same general areas throughout the conflict. It reached its peak in terms of territory in 2006, during which period

7. Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 117.

8. Nicholas Krohley, *The Death of the Mehdi Army: The Rise, Fall, and Revival of Iraq’s Most Powerful Militia* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015): 61.

9. Kimberly Kagan, *Iran’s Proxy War Against the United States and Iraq*, Iraq Report (The Institute for the Study of War, August 2007).

10. Kagan, *Iran’s Proxy War Against the United States and Iraq*; Michael Knights, “The Evolution of Iran’s Special Groups in Iraq,” *CTC Sentinel* 3, nos. 11-12 (2010); M. Cochrane, *Special Groups Regenerate*, Iraq Report (The Institute for the Study of War, 2008).

it also faced less intense pressure from US and Iraqi forces. However, with the beginning of the Baghdad Security Plan in 2007, JAM lost significant territory and was under far greater pressure from US forces.¹¹

Despite Sadr drawing on the legacy of father, he was not unopposed in his claim to the Sadrist trend. A number of followers of his father, including Muhammad al-Yacoubi, Ayatollah Kazem al-Haeri, Hasan al-Sarqi, Abu Dura, and Qais Khazali had greater religious credentials than Sadr and laid claim to the Sadrist legacy.¹² Each of these factional leaders had networks of mosques and clerics following them, allowing them to dispense information and guidance at Friday sermons and through local offices.¹³ Importantly, while these factions existed throughout the time period studied, their relative importance varied based on the organizational attributes of JAM.

7.3.2 Organization-Building

7.3.2.1 No Resource Control to Resource Control

Up until 2005, Sadr sought to capitalize on the social networks that had developed around the charity and support of his father's movement. He appealed directly to urban Shiites to join the Sadrist movement. As illustrated by community statements such as the one relayed by Cockburn above and the popularity of Sadr mosques opened after the fall of Saddam Hussein, Sadr's organization had access to strong primary groups as it was embedded within the poor Shiite community of Sadr city and surrounding areas of Najaf and Karbala.¹⁴ Further, he was a potential first-mover as his relationships with various Shiite actors put Sadr at the crossroads of many mosque networks within the

11. Anthony Cordesman and J. Ramos, *Sadr and the Mahdi Army: Evolution, Capabilities, and a New Direction* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008).

12. M. Cochrane, *The Fragmentation of the Sadrist Movement*, Iraq Report 12 (The Institute for the Study of War, 2009): 14-15; Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War* (Macmillan, 2005): 187-93.

13. Patel, *Ayatollahs on the Pareto Frontier*.

14. *Ibid.*: 13.

Shiite community.¹⁵

However, as noted above, Sadr faced competition in winning the allegiance of those followers. His ability to exclusively provide religious and social goods—such as mosque sermons, local charity, payment, and spiritual guidance—was limited. On account of his young age and limited religious training, Sadr could not match Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's claim to the Shiite community.¹⁶ Beyond the lack of exclusivity, Sadr did not directly provide material resources to his followers either.¹⁷ During 2004, JAM members were not paid and were forced to buy their own weapons and provide their own transportation. Similarly, in May 2003, Sadr infamously issued a fatwa allowing looters and thieves to keep their spoils as long as they paid requisite Islamic taxes on such loot.¹⁸

However, this changed after 2005. As noted by some of Sadr's aides released from prison at the end of August 2005 to observe that JAM had developed "clearer lines of communication, a more structured hierarchy, and a sprawling social services network."¹⁹ During this period, working through three channels, Sadr made significant progress in positioning JAM's leadership to directly and exclusively provide resources.

First, by joining the government in 2005, Sadr took control of a number of ministries—JAM had 30 lawmakers and six Cabinet ministers. Sadr explicitly sought out ministries that would contribute to resource control. Unlike other political rivals, JAM did not seek "high-value" ministries such as interior, oil, or defense. Instead, Sadr sought ministries in health, human services, and transporta-

15. Patel, *Ayatollahs on the Pareto Frontier*: 25; Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War*: 207.

16. In 2003, Sadr was at best a Mujtahid, allowing him to interpret Islamic law, but not placing him in the position to be emulated. He was not known as a dedicated scholar and definitely lacked his father's status of Ayatollah—a rank that many of those competing for control of the Sadrist movement had.

17. International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?*: 18-19.

18. Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 130.

19. Anthony Shadid, "Sadr's Disciples Rise Again to Play Pivotal Role in Iraq," *The Washington Post*, August 30, 2005, washingtonpost.com.

tion, allowing for the capture and provision of resources that people needed to survive.²⁰ These services were directly distributed by Sadrist neighborhood offices (*Maktab al-Sayyid al-Shahid*) where citizens had to access them.²¹ From these offices, they distributed jobs, food, and other social support to both resident citizens and those displaced from elsewhere in Iraq. Illustrating how dependent followers were on JAM, those who received jobs were required to donate 50,000 dinars (about \$40) while simply being a JAM member required a 10,000 dinar monthly donation—these payments guaranteed that if a militia member was killed in combat, their family would receive assistance.²²

As a part of this process, Sadr placed many JAM members in the police and to a lesser extent the army, making them dependent upon him for employment and goods.²³ Recognizing the importance of JAM's provision of supplies, one US trainer observed, "Who's feeding the Iraqi Army? Nobody. So JAM will come around and give them food and water... We try to capture hearts and minds, well, JAM has done that. They're further along than us."²⁴

The second change was the increasing role of Iran in supporting JAM.²⁵ This support provided a limited number of JAM fighters training on tactical maneuvers, explosives, and communication.²⁶ Beyond this, throughout 2005 and 2006, Iran provided JAM with a significant cache of weapons, ammunition, and explosives.²⁷ While Iran would later try to marginalize Sadr by directing this funding to JAM factions, during this period, Iran worked closely with Sadr and Akram al-Kabi, the head of

20. Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism*: Chapter 7; International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?*: 14.

21. Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 271.

22. Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism*: 202.

23. International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?*: 4-5.

24. Tom Lasseter, "Mahdi Army Gains Strength Through Unwitting Aid of U.S.," *McClatchy Newspapers*, February 1, 2007, mcclatchydc.com.

25. Kagan, *Iran's Proxy War Against the United States and Iraq*.

26. Latif Nizar and Phil Sands, "Mehdi Fighters Trained by Hizbollah in Lebanon," *The Independent*, August 20, 2007, Michael R. Gordon and Dexter Filkins, "Hezbollah Said to Help Shiite Army in Iraq," *The New York Times*, November 28, 2006, nytimes.com; Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 168-69; Gordon and Filkins report notes that as many as 2,000 fighters may have been trained in Lebanon.

27. Joseph H. Felter and Brian Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and 'Other Means'*, Occasional Paper Series (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, October 2008): Chapter 4.

JAM military operations, and his associate, Qais Khazali.²⁸ Like with resources gained from joining the government, Sadr was able to distribute these goods from Iran directly through the neighborhood offices.

Finally, a narrative emerged venerating the 2004 operations in the Shiite tradition of resistance, particularly as disillusionment with the US occupation grew.²⁹ Thus, Sadr was able to make up for some of his lack of religious status by serving as the most widely known cleric to openly oppose the occupation.³⁰ He took advantage of the *Maktab al-Sayyid al-Shahid* to provide religious guidance and governance. Sadr created the Mahdist Institute to teach basic principles of faith and established a code of conduct enforced by a Judgment Committee which disciplined those violating the rules.³¹

In short, JAM retained strong primary groups while establishing direct and exclusive provision of key resources. Because it had resource control, JAM members were dependent on the organization. As Berman observes, during this period, “al-Sadr’s forces became the most reliable providers of basic services.”³² As a result, “with its grassroots presences at the neighborhood and village level, it was easy for representatives of [JAM] to identify supporters, even marginal sympathizers who had not undertaken highly costly or risky activities on behalf of the organization. A Sadrist official...noted that the movement branch offices relied on personal knowledge of which families are loyal to the organization in determining whom to reward with social benefits.”³³

28. “Iraq’s Al-Mahdi Army Restructures, Gains New Commander,” *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, May 23, 2007, lexisnexis.com; Cochrane, *The Fragmentation of the Sadrist Movement*: 17-19.

29. Anthony Shadid, “For Rebuilders of Sadr City, Gratitude Tainted by Mistrust,” *Washington Post*, December 17, 2004, washingtonpost.com.

30. International Crisis Group, *Iraq’s Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?*: 12-15.

31. *Ibid.*: 13, 20.

32. Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent*: 113; Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 171-72.

33. Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism*: 203.

7.3.2.2 Failing to Develop a Cadre System

While JAM had strong primary groups, it did not work to select and train dedicated cadre. Instead, they relied on pre-existing authority structures in order to select mid-level leaders. As Krohley finds, JAM “‘went local’—recruiting not only agents and informants, but also entire operational networks...Either working out of mosques...or from Sadrist offices, representatives of the Mehdi army would recruit from the surrounding area, establishing what amounted to local ‘franchises.’”³⁴

While JAM did have procedures requiring recruits to prove they had no criminal record and submit written statements from three known community members vouching for their good character,³⁵ there was no attempt to indoctrinate or select the most committed individuals to serve as lower-level cadre.³⁶

If anything, there was even less effort put into integrating new members after 2006 as JAM expanded rapidly.³⁷ As a result, Krohley describes the challenges faced during this period: “the relationship between the Mehdi Army’s cadre leadership and its local tribal allies was not one of commander and subordinate. On the contrary, rather than resembling the structure of a modern military organization, the dynamic between the militia’s core and its local proxies evoked the segmentary tribal confederation of Mesopotamia’s traditional past.”³⁸

7.3.2.3 Training and Logistics

While, as noted above, JAM was capable of distributing resources to its fighters, those fighters were not trained to use force in complex ways. A limited portion of JAM fighters received training in Iran and Lebanon. Nonetheless, this was a small number of fighters and there is little evidence that their

34. Krohley, *The Death of the Mehdi Army*: 79.

35. Hamza Hendawi and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, “Al-Sadr Overhauling His Shiite Militia,” *The Washington Post*, September 10, 2007, washingtonpost.com.

36. For a discussion of mid-level commanders, see International Crisis Group, *Iraq’s Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?*: 20.

37. Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 184.

38. Krohley, *The Death of the Mehdi Army*: 166-67.

training was used in a coherent manner by the organization.³⁹ As Cordesman and Rose observe, “the scale and success of that training is far from clear.”⁴⁰ Unlike the Special Groups or Badr, JAM did not attempt to use these members to train others through a train-the-train type approach.

7.3.3 How Did they Fight?

7.3.3.1 2003-2005

Given that JAM had strong primary groups but lacked resource control, the theory predicts that despite drawing upon these strong pre-existing social structures, JAM’s lack of formal structures to leverage those ties would limit the leadership’s ability to turn violence on and off. As a result, they would be combat ineffective.

At the turn of 2004, the US sought to stymie JAM by shutting down Sadr’s newspaper, *al-Hawza* on March 28 and then arresting a top Sadr aide.⁴¹ Sadr attempted to respond by treading a fine-line and using “just enough of military challenge.”⁴² The strategy to limit the deployment of force did not play out. Following mass riots in Shiite strongholds, JAM forces were engaged in a full-scale offensive across six cities. Though Sadr was able to kick-start this offensive given his position in the Shiite network, he quickly lost control of the movement. As Cockburn illustrates: “It was the strength of Muqtada that he could mobilize the Shia masses, the millions of angry and very poor young men whom nobody else in Iraq represented. His weakness was that he could not control them.”⁴³

Following heavy losses, Sadr attempted to craft a ceasefire but could not garner consensus within JAM. As Knights and Williams conclude from interviews with local Iraqis and British intelligence

39. Gordon and Filkins, “Hezbollah Said to Help Shiite Army in Iraq”; Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 169.

40. Cordesman and Ramos, *Sadr and the Mahdi Army: Evolution, Capabilities, and a New Direction*: 27.

41. Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 145.

42. Cordesman and Davies, *Iraq’s Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*: 97-99.

43. Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 147-48.

officials, during this period, “the centralized leadership’s inability to stop an uprising became clear: the Jaish al-Mahdi did not answer to centralized command. In a sign of desperation, Sadr secretly requested Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to issue a statement to demobilize the Jaish al-Mahdi.”⁴⁴ Despite reaching out to revered Shiite leader, Sistani refused to intervene.⁴⁵

Though Sadr unilaterally declared a truce, his troops did not adhere to the order—despite acknowledging him as their leader. Very few JAM fighters returned home and put down their arms. Cockburn interviewed one member who asserted that “Muqtada gave an order saying everybody had to go back to his family. . . . But many of our men stayed inside Najaf saying that the truce was just a lie, and they also moved into nearby regions such as Mashkab, Haidaria, and Abbasia.”⁴⁶ As such, violence completely resumed in August as JAM members attacked coalition and Iraqi forces.⁴⁷

With the resumption of conflict, JAM suffered as many as 1,000 casualties.⁴⁸ Sadr unsuccessfully ordered his fighters to stand down and again appealed to Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani who, this time, intervened and persuaded the fighters to stand down.⁴⁹ The agreement resulted in the demilitarization of Najaf and Kufa and thus forced Sadr’s departure from his home in Najaf. Summing up the course of the two conflicts, Cockburn observes that the “outright winner of the August battle in Najaf was Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who showed his immense authority over the Iraqi Shia.”⁵⁰

How was Sistani able to convince Sadr’s followers to stand down? While Sistani did not advocate

44. M. Knights and E. Williams, *The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq* (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2007): 18.

45. Alex Berenson, “U.S. Forces Clash With Rebel Cleric’s Militia in Najaf,” *The New York Times*, August 5, 2004, nytimes.com; Nimrod Raphaeli, “Understanding Muqtada al-Sadr,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2004, 33–42.

46. Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 153; See also, Edward Wong, “Clashes in Najaf and Kufa Put the Cease-Fire in Peril,” *The New York Times*, May 30, 2004, nytimes.com.

47. Scott Baklauf and Dan Murphy, “Uneasy Truce Evaporates in Najaf,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 6, 2004,

48. Walsh, “The Fight for Kufa”: 30.

49. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Top Cleric Brokers Deal To End Battle In Najaf,” *Washington Post*, August 27, 2004, washingtonpost.com; Michael Howard and Brian Whitaker, “Sistani’s Intervention Pulls Najaf Back from the Brink,” *The Guardian*, August 27, 2004, guardian.co.uk; Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 162.

50. Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: 162–63.

violence, his distribution of resources to Shiites placed him in the position to turn violence “off.” Of all the religious leaders in post-Saddam Iraq, Sistani had by far the most centralized distribution of religious and material resources, relying on an extensive mosque network and access to significant religious tax income.⁵¹ As Patel observes, “Sistani inherited the essential infrastructure of his network from his mentor, Ayatollah al-Khoei, who built an impressive network of followers in Shiite communities...Sistani’s agents, therefore, are experienced, respected in their local communities, and well-funded.”⁵² Nonetheless, Sistani did not build a military apparatus, instead remaining true to his quietest tendencies. By contrast, after 2005, Sadr sought to bolster JAM’s military apparatus by instituting resource control.

7.3.3.2 Mid-2005 to 2008

With the establishment of resource control, the theory predicts that JAM would reach Limited Structural Integrity and thus be able to enforce ceasefires and ensure that its soldiers used violence when ordered, but not control how violence was used since JAM had not further leveraged their followers with a cadre system. This prediction is notable: if Sadr was simply becoming more legitimate and accepted by his followers, they would follow all orders, not follow some orders and defy others. Further, the theory predicts that the factions which had been influential in 2004 would fall in-line during this period.

Sadr re-mobilized JAM after the February 22, 2006 attacks on the Askariya shrine in Samarra. During this period, Sadr reconciled with the Khazali faction while other factions decreased in importance or simply blended back into JAM.⁵³ Sadr’s forces continued to use violence against US

51. Babak Rahimi, “Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and the Democratization of Post-Saddam Iraq,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 8, no. 4 (2004): 13.

52. Patel, “Islam, Information, and Social Order: The Strategic Role of Religion in Muslim Societies”: 64.

53. Cochrane, *The Fragmentation of the Sadrism Movement*.

forces as well as other Sunni and Shiite actors.⁵⁴ Overall, 2006 saw a marked up-tick in sectarian violence and population movements that allowed JAM to expand into broad swaths of Baghdad.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, during 2007, Sadr turned violence off twice. By the end of 2006, US forces were gearing up to confront JAM, referring to the organization as “[t]he group that is currently having the greatest negative affect on the security situation in Iraq.”⁵⁶ At the beginning of 2007, the United States launched the Baghdad Security Plan and emphasized that it would launch a full-scale offensive against JAM if it did not stand down.⁵⁷ Sadr responded to this pressure from the United States and was able to stand down JAM’s forces. As a result, the period following the January stand-down resulted in a significant reduction in violence.⁵⁸

After Sadr ordered his soldiers to resume fighting during the summer of 2007, JAM forces engaged in brutal conflicts with other Shiite parties, mainly the Badr Organization. This violence came to a head in August of 2007 when clashes near the Imam Ali shrine in Karbala killed fifty civilians and wounded 200 others.⁵⁹ Responding to the damages that these types of attacks were having and fearing a spiral of violence, Sadr once again called on his militia to stand down and issued explicit warnings that deployed units violating the agreement would be punished.

One JAM member noted that these threats were motivating, even to soldiers with “rackets on the side.”: “a member excommunicated by the sheikh immediately loses his immunity. . . . If a member

54. Julian E. Barnes, “Sadr Army Is Called Top Threat In Iraq,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 2006, latimes.com.

55. Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro, “Testing the Surge: Why Violence Declined in Iraq in 2007.”

56. U.S. Department of Defense, *Report to Congress: Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, Report to Congress (November 2006): 19.

57. Kimberly Kagan, *Enforcing the Law: The Baghdad Security Plan Begins*, Iraq Report (The Institute for the Study of War, February 2007): 8.

58. Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq’s Sectarian and Ethnic Violence and Its Evolving Insurgency*, Working Paper (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007); International Crisis Group, *Iraq’s Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge*, Middle East Report 72 (February 2008); Ernesto Londoño and Sudarsan Raghavan, “118 Shiite Pilgrims Killed in Iraq Attacks,” *The Washington Post*, March 7, 2007, washingtonpost.com: One JAM member interviewed by the Washington Post said, “We are still committed and comply with the words of our leader, Moqtada Sadr, which call for calm and self-restraint.”

59. Cochrane, *The Fragmentation of the Sadrism Movement*: 29.

is expelled for two months, for example, he must survive during that period without Mahdi Army support or protection.”⁶⁰ Similarly, after the ceasefire order, JAM halted the provision of martyr and pension payments to the families of soldiers’ killed in combat.⁶¹

This ceasefire represented a central moment during the US Surge. As a result, sectarian violence declined drastically as Baghdad stabilized.⁶² However, few analysts in academia, the government, or the private sphere expected the ceasefire to hold. They pointed to the supposed fragmentation of JAM, arguing that Sadr did not have sufficient control of the organization to ensure that his movement would put down its arms.⁶³ As a professor in Baghdad told the International Crisis Group: “Everybody was surprised by the degree to which militants obeyed Muqtada al-Sadr. At first, I expected about half of the Mahdi Army members to ignore him.” As one US military official incorrectly predicted at the time, “As far as Sadr, I wouldn’t put too much stock into what he says...He’s been spending most of his time in Iran and, because of that, probably has little control over some of the more militant factions of the Mahdi Army...As the leadership has been picked off, so has his influence.”⁶⁴

Instead, compliance was widespread and the ceasefire stuck despite intrusive operations by Coalition and Iraqi forces.⁶⁵ JAM fighters continued rely on the organization for employment, justice, weapons, and welfare. Factional leaders who had allowed their soldiers to target civilians against Sadr’s wishes maintained the ceasefire. For example, the al-Araji brothers had been assassinating

60. International Crisis Group, *Iraq’s Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge*: 8, 16.

61. *Ibid.*

62. Cordesman and Davies, *Iraq’s Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*; Ann Scott Tyson, “Petraeus Says Cleric Helped Curb Violence,” *The Washington Post*, December 7, 2007, washingtonpost.com.

63. For example, see Sabrina Tavernise, “Cleric Said to Lose Reins of Parts of Iraqi Militia,” *The New York Times*, September 28, 2006, nytimes.com; Hamza Hendawi and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, “Shiite Militia May Be Disintegrating,” *Associated Press*, March 21, 2007, washingtonpost.com; Cordesman, *Iraq’s Sectarian and Ethnic Violence and Its Evolving Insurgency*; Staniland, “Explaining Cohesion, Fragmentation, and Control in Insurgent Groups”: 40.

64. Joshua Partlow and Saad Sarhan, “Sadr Orders ‘Freeze’ on Militia Actions; Iraqi Cleric’s Edict Comes After Killings At Shiite Festival,” *The Washington Post*, August 30, 2007, washingtonpost.com.

65. International Crisis Group, *Iraq’s Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge*: 17.

and hassling political rivals during 2006 and early 2007. However, they actively enforced the ceasefire, personally reading the command to their soldiers in August 2007.⁶⁶

Obeying the ceasefire was not an easy choice for JAM members. Footsoldiers and mid-level commanders lost significant territory and personal prestige which had come from their victories in 2006. Moreover, by putting their weapons down, they were defenseless against attacks from other Shiite militants—some higher-ranking JAM members were even forced to flee Baghdad fearing retribution.⁶⁷ They also faced attacks from Sunni tribal groups that had been empowered by the Sons of Iraq program, a central part of the Surge.⁶⁸ As a result, compliance came even though many fighters openly disagreed with the decision to put down their arms. The International Crisis Group interviewed a number of followers abiding by the ceasefire who expressed both the costliness of the ceasefire, but also their commitment to Sadr:

Muqtada al-Sadr is wise; he does not want to provoke fitna [i.e. internal conflict]... That said, I believe our problems will never be solved. We are simply awaiting a signal, an order from Muqtada al-Sadr, to burn them all [*another added*]: We are impatiently waiting for Muqtada al-Sadr to announce a resumption of the Mahdi Army's activities. You'll see what we'll do with those... The only reason we are not reacting now to Badr's attacks is that we respect Muqtada al-Sadr's decision. The day before yesterday, a Karbala delegation went to Najaf to see Muqtada al-Sadr and discuss the situation of Sadrists in Karbala. They told him that the Badrists were persecuting them. Muqtada al-Sadr replied: 'Be patient. We will be stronger than before.' For now, Muqtada al-Sadr's strategy is to urge calm.⁶⁹

There was one notable exception to this compliance: the Special Groups. Sadr did not have resource control over these units because Iran was training them and providing significant resources such as explosives and communications technology.⁷⁰ As Kagan, Cochrane, and Knights detail, Iran

66. Cochrane, *The Fragmentation of the Sadrism Movement*: 26, 29.

67. International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge*.

68. Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro, "Testing the Surge: Why Violence Declined in Iraq in 2007?"

69. International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge*: 14.

70. Knights, "The Evolution of Iran's Special Groups in Iraq."

sought out these factions in late 2006 and into 2007 as they “diversified” from supporting Sadr.⁷¹ Indeed, the goals of Iran were often at odds with those of mainstream JAM—often noted by al-Sadr and his close associates.⁷² This division was illustrated in May 2007 when Sadr purged Akram al-Kabi, who had been the head of JAM military operations, accusing him of allegiance with Iran.⁷³ The Special Groups, under the command of al-Kabi, directly supported by Iran, carried out coordinated campaigns against US and Iraqi forces and “by late 2007, it was clear that Iranian-backed groups were the primary driver of violence in the capital.”⁷⁴

Despite the Special Groups, the ceasefire continued through the beginning of 2008 and was extended by Sadr for an additional six months in February. After some brief skirmishes in March of 2008, Sadr re-imposed the ceasefire. The ceasefire held and Sadr’s forces have basically remained frozen since, allowing him to develop an increasingly robust political and social presence.⁷⁵

However, while Sadr was able to rely on his fighters to fight when ordered, throughout this period, he faced significant challenges in controlling *how* they employed violence. Significant targeting of civilians during this period came despite guidance from JAM to its units to limit civilian casualties. This dynamic was evidenced by the use of torture by deployed JAM units. As one member told the International Crisis Group: “[Sadr] had received numerous complaints concerning the Mahdi Army’s behavior, including from parents whose sons were killed. Some parents had proof, such as pictures of their sons tortured to death by the Mahdi Army.”⁷⁶ As Krohley observes from his time in-country, “Although the Sadrists’ ability to channel legions of able-bodied young men into the

71. Kagan, *Iran’s Proxy War Against the United States and Iraq*; Knights, “The Evolution of Iran’s Special Groups in Iraq”; Cochrane, *Special Groups Regenerate*.

72. See, for example, Ned Parker, “Cracks in Sadr’s Army,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 2007, latimes.com.

73. “Iraq’s Al-Mahdi Army Restructures, Gains New Commander.”

74. Cochrane, *The Fragmentation of the Sadrists Movement*: 31.

75. Michael David Clark and Renad Mansour, “Rethinking Sadr: From Firebrand to Iraqi Statesman?,” November 20, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=57279>; Rahimi, “The Return of Moqtada al-Sadr and the Revival of the Mahdi Army.”

76. International Crisis Group, *Iraq’s Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge*: 16.

Mehdi Army had been, and would remain, central to the movement's advances, the radicalism and brutality of their most ardent followers vexed efforts at reform."⁷⁷

This was despite significant efforts to track down these extreme members. This included the use of harsh punishments and attempts at careful monitoring by "Sadrist Justice Committee" and "Golden Brigades." However, as the theory predicts, these institutions were unable to modify soldiers' behaviors. As relayed by a Sistani cleric, "An old friend, a Sadrist religious student, told me that Muqtada runs prisons in the Najaf cemetery, which abound with Mahdi Army troublemakers. But it makes no difference. There are so many of them within the Sadrist current."⁷⁸ A Sadrist officer lamented that as the group sought to ensure that fighters followed specific orders, such as "clear orders not to attack Sunni mosques...we discovered how difficult it had become to control them [fighters disobeying such orders]."⁷⁹

In sum, the theory explains how JAM was able to keep a costly ceasefire in 2007 by using resource control to provide—and threaten to withhold—key resources and enforcing such threats by relying on JAM's strong primary groups. Further, it explains how resources generated compliance for the majority of the organization, but not for the Special Groups, over which Sadr did not have resource control. Nonetheless, the range and depth of resources provided by JAM—including items key to life in a conflict zone such as steady employment and welfare support—allowed it to maintain control of the vast majority of its movement despite efforts by Iran to wrestle control from Sadr.

77. Krohley, *The Death of the Mehdi Army*: 68.

78. International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge*: 8.

79. *Ibid.*

7.4 Special Groups and Badr Organization

While JAM reached Limited Structural Integrity, two other Shiite groups operated with significantly higher capacity. The Special Groups developed out of JAM and were quite active in 2007 and 2008, mainly targeting US and Iraqi forces, and, to a lesser extent, Sunni groups. The Badr Organization, which was formed during the Iran-Iraq War and stayed in Iran during the 1990s, was partially incorporated into the Iraqi Police and Army upon its return in 2003. Nonetheless, it continued to act independently and engaged Sunni groups as well JAM forces in 2006 and 2007. More recently, it has been significantly involved in countering the Islamic State.

Like JAM, both the Badr Organization and Special Groups received assistance from Iran. However, Iran's support to Badr and the Special Groups was far more focused. Though Iran supplied weapons to Badr and the Special Groups, their key input was in terms of training and capacity building. Both Special Groups and Badr cadre were known to travel to Iran to visit training camps and their leaders were in consistent contact with advisors from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.

Though this Iranian support is a clear confounding factor, this section is able to partially test the theory by showing the manner in which the Special Groups development differed from that of JAM. This difference in organization and behavior arose despite the fact that, because they emerged from JAM, the Special Groups drew on the same networks and often operated in the same areas.⁸⁰ Moreover, while they had the added benefit of Iranian support, the Special Groups faced very heavy pressure from US forces. US forces used the JAM ceasefire to identify and track down Special Groups cells. Despite capturing Special Groups leaders, including Khazali, the units continued to operate throughout 2007 and 2008.

80. Marisa Cochrane, *Asaib Ahl al-Haq and the Khazali Special Groups Network*, Backgrounder 38 (Institute for the Study of War, January 2008): 3-4.

By contrast, the Badr Organization had a different legacy and past than the Special Groups and JAM. The Badr Organization, the military arm of SCIRI (now the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI)) was formed with support from Iran in 1983 during the Iran-Iraq War. Thus, it had a significant head start on both groups and had experience in combat before the current conflict. On the other hand, because of its significant support from Iran and sanctuary there during Saddam's reign, it is also seen as "foreign" in Iraq.

Despite these differences, there is a major point of similarity between Badr and the Special Groups that provides a good opportunity to trace the theory's mechanisms. Iran provided very similar training and organizational advice to Badr and the Special Groups. While Badr had received this training for a longer-period of time, the support provided to the Special Groups after 2006 followed a similar template. Beyond Badr and the Special Groups, Iran has employed such an approach in its support to groups such as Hezbollah. Across these organizations, Iranian guidance has focused on developing a cadre system and constructing small, functionally differentiated units. As a result, the discussion below is able to demonstrate that Badr and the Special Groups ended up with quite similar organizational infrastructures and fought with similar capacity. The coding and predictions for the Special Groups and Badr Organization are in Table 7.1 on the next page.

7.4.1 Background Variables

While there were a few "Special Groups" supported by Iran, this analysis focuses mainly on one of those groups, Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH). AAH was led by Qais Khazali after he left JAM with the assistance of Akram al-Kabi—the former head of JAM military operations. As he emerged from JAM, the Special Groups drew upon similar social networks. Khazali was prominent in the Sadrist trend, so was able to draw on the legacy and activate similar social connections.

Table 7.1 Special Groups Coding and Predicted Military Effectiveness

	Special Groups	Badr Organization	
	2006-2010	2003-2012	2012-2016
Background Variables			
Sanctuary	✓	✓	✓
Pre-Existing Primary Groups	✓	✓	✓
Access to Resources	✓	✓	✓
External Support	✓	✓	✓
Factions	✓	✗	✗
Organizational Variables			
Creating/Leveraging Primary Groups			
—Creation of Primary Groups	NA	NA	NA
—Resource Control	✓	✓	✓
Creating a Cadre System			
—Officer Selection Standards	✓	✓	✓
—Manageable Small Units	✓	✓	✓
Becoming an “Organizational Weapon”			
—Military Training for Cadre	✓	✓	✓
—Basic Communications Systems	✓	✓	✓
—Functionally Differentiated Small Units	✓	✓	✓
Making the Jump			
—Large-unit Organization and Training	✗	✓	✓
—Movement and Integrated Communications	✗	✗	✓
—Heavy Weapons	✓	✓	✓
Predicted Military Effectiveness	Guerrilla Capacity	Guerrilla Capacity	Quasi-conventional Capacity
Prediction Correct?	Yes	Yes	Yes

Unlike JAM and the Special Groups, Badr had a more limited set of pre-existing community structures to draw upon. Badr was formed by Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim who had a real following in Iraq.⁸¹ As a result, Badr was able to tap into Shiite social networks and take advantage of the hierarchical structure that gave Ayatollahs a central place in that network. However, because al-Hakim had moved to Iran during much of the Iran-Iraq war and stayed there throughout the 1990s,

81. Graham E. Fuller, *Islamist Politics in Iraq after Saddam Hussein*, Special Report 108 (United States Institute for Peace, August 2003).

his Shiite networks in Iraq were much less strong than those of Sistani or Sadr. As one Karbala resident said upon al-Hakim's return in 2003: "He is acting as if he is the most important leader in the Iraqi religious opposition...All those who claim to be opposition figures were traitors who left Iraq and left us suffering here."⁸²

In terms of other structural factors, Badr and the Special Groups had access to significant resources and external support. Moreover, as described in greater detail below, they had sanctuary in Iran as much of their cadre training occurred in Iran. Finally, given Badr's age and institutional legacy, it does not appear to have had any overt pre-existing factional differences. On the other hand, there were many competing power centers within AAH and the Special Groups more broadly. Nonetheless, these factional differences, which were often quite personal, did not appear to interfere with Special Groups operations.⁸³

7.4.2 Organization-Building

7.4.2.1 Resource Control

Special Groups. Iran played a major role in supplying the Special Groups. This distribution was quite centralized via the Special Group leadership. As Knights finds from interviews with US and Iraqi intelligence officials, this represented a significant change from support to JAM:

[T]he IRGC Qods Force centralized its resupply operations to KH and AAH cells, adding a system of accounting for Iranian-supplied weapons. This meant moving from the "pull" system—where Iraqis came to ask a cell leader for weapons—to a more secure and selective "push" system, where the cell leader would allocate weapons to well-paid and experienced fighters who were known to be reliable. Each major arms cache now has a 'hide custodian' who signs out weapons such as EFPs [explosively-formed penetrators] and is responsible for their proper use against U.S. forces and the minimization of Iraqi casualties. Money continues to be provided in significant volumes, allowing

82. Craig S. Smith, "In Hotbed of Shiite Emotion, Clerics Jockey for Leadership," *The New York Times*, April 22, 2003,

83. Knights, "The Evolution of Iran's Special Groups in Iraq"; Marissa Cochrane, "The Return of Special Groups," *Institute for the Study of War Blog Post* (September 2008).

cells to be paid between \$4,000 and \$13,000 per rocket or roadside bomb attack, depending on the circumstances.⁸⁴

As a result, these groups were able to operate beyond the reach of JAM's resource control. As Cochrane observes, by the beginning of 2007, for example, "Khazali had his own sources of funding, training, and supplies and thus operated independently of Muqtada."⁸⁵ As the year progressed, Iran began supplying increasing numbers of arms and more complex weaponry as well as funding for many Special Group cells.

Badr Organization. As of the late 1990s, Badr put in place systems to distribute food and social support services via shadow businesses and organizations. In addition, like Sunni tribes, they took advantage of smuggling routes to bring people and supplies into Iraq from Iran.⁸⁶ Not long after the US invasion, they put in place distribution offices. For example, one of their first actions upon returning to Iraq in 2003 was opening "a large office complex in British-occupied Basra...and used it to extend its political influence in nearby town and villages."⁸⁷ To an even greater extent than Sadr, Badr members took on leadership positions in Iraqi government after the 2005 elections—perhaps most notably with a Badrist at the helm of the Interior Ministry.⁸⁸ As the International Crisis Group reports, by that time, Badr was "well ensconced in the political transition."⁸⁹

7.4.2.2 Building a Cadre System

Special Groups. The key foundational difference between JAM and the Special Groups was the focus of the Special Groups' leadership, as well as Iran, in forming trusted and competent cadre.

84. Knights, "The Evolution of Iran's Special Groups in Iraq": 14; See also, Felter and Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and 'Other Means'*: Chapter 4.

85. Cochrane, *The Fragmentation of the Sadrist Movement*: 2009.

86. Felter and Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and 'Other Means'*: 21-22.

87. Mahan Abedin, "The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 5, no. 10 (2003).

88. Felter and Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and 'Other Means'*: 36.

89. International Crisis Group, *The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict*, Middle East Report 52 (International Crisis Group, February 2006): 17.

To begin with, rather than importing pre-existing local leaders, the Special Groups were highly selective about who became leaders and received training. Not only did candidates have to be able to read and write, but, as a detained Special Groups leader said, the attributes he looked for in individuals were: “Open Mindedness; Physical Stamina; Maturity; Organizational Skills; Responsible; [and individuals] who are not a problem.”⁹⁰ Further, those selected to attend “train the trainers course” (described in greater depth below), were chosen based on previous military behavior as well as “leadership potential.”⁹¹

Beyond military instruction, training for cadre included two other elements. First, there was a clear focus on indoctrination. This included religious instruction as well as field trips to key Shiite sites. Further, detainees told interrogators that Iranian trainers explicitly sought to undo any allegiance that trainees might have to Muqtada al-Sadr, instead attempting to re-direct allegiance to Special Groups leaders.⁹² Second, interviews with captured cadre members uncovered a focus on personnel management, project management, and supervision type-skills.⁹³

Once back in Iraq, these leaders were inserted in to cells of 20 to 60 individuals, giving them control of fairly small units.⁹⁴ This set-up drew closely on Hezbollah’s small unit organization with independent cells lead by highly trained cadre.⁹⁵ Indeed, drawing on interrogations of Khazali and another high-level Special Groups leader, Brigadier General Bergner observed that a key part of the Special Groups strategy was “to organize the special groups in ways that mirrored how Hezbollah was organized in Lebanon.”⁹⁶

90. Quoted in, Felter and Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and ‘Other Means’*: 57.

91. *Ibid.*: 63.

92. *Ibid.*: 66.

93. *Ibid.*: 68.

94. Kagan, *Iran’s Proxy War Against the United States and Iraq*: 10.

95. Magnus Ranstorp, “The Strategy and Tactics of Hizballah’s Current ‘Lebanonization Process,’” *Mediterranean Politics* 3, no. 1 (1998): 103–134.

96. “Press Briefing with Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner, Multi-National Force - Iraq,” July 2, 2007.

Badr Organization. Like the Special Groups, Badr had well-established procedures for selecting and placing lower-level officers—in fact, most of the procedures used by the Special Groups were developed by Badr. According to Iraqi intelligence in late 2001, Badr had a “Cadre Preparatory Institute,” in which lower-level officers were groomed and given administrative and military instruction.⁹⁷ Similarly, they organized smaller units based on a Hezbollah-model for operations in Iraq during the Saddam years and for death squads.⁹⁸ As described below, these smaller units were key to Badr Operations during 2006 and 2007.

7.4.2.3 Training, Logistics, Communications, and Order of Battle

Special Groups. The Special Groups put a significant emphasis on building strong leaders through explicit military training. As Cochrane observes, the training program was “‘formal and sophisticated,’ with courses on ‘leadership, training, commando operations, weapons and explosives.’ The training varied in complexity, ranging from a “basic weapons course” to “advanced operations and tactics.” This latter program consisted of training on logistics, weapons employment, engineering and explosives, tactics, and information operations.⁹⁹ These programs ranged from three weeks to multiple months.

Perhaps the central part of the training was the “master-trainer” course, which prepared cadre to participate in a “train the trainers” approach. These cadre were trained by Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Hezbollah representatives.¹⁰⁰ As intelligence analysts relate from interviews with captured Special Groups members, “Master-trainers are taught instructional techniques, required to give mock classes, and receive feedback from both their instructors and peers.” As a result, “These classes develop a self sustaining capacity inside Iraq to produce effective fighters for

97. Harmony Document: ISGQ-2005-00038283

98. Felter and Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and ‘Other Means’*.

99. *Ibid.*: 63.

100. Cochrane, *Asaib Ahl al-Haq and the Khazali Special Groups Network*: 7.

Iranian-backed SGCs.” These trainees were split across specialty areas ranging from explosives to conventional weapons and guerrilla warfare.¹⁰¹

They matched this training with the clear ability to transport goods and fighters from Iran and others areas in Iraq. As Cochrane observes:

While Special Groups activity largely centered on Baghdad, complex supply networks moved men and materiel across the Iranian border. Special Groups cells in Baghdad were supplied by two primary lines of communication—a northern supply network ran from the Iranian border through Diyala Province, northeast of Baghdad; a larger southern supply network moved weapons and fighters across the Iranian border to the cities of Kut, Amarah, and Basra and up along the Tigris River Valley and Highway 8 corridor into Baghdad. Diyala Province, located northeast of Baghdad province, shares a long eastern border with Iran. It contained a number of important Special Groups hubs, including the towns of Khalis, Jadidah, and Rashidiyah, which lie north of Baghdad, and the areas of Khan Bani Saad and Nahrwan to the east of the capital. These towns were key nodes along the enemy transit routes from Iran to east Baghdad and functioned as weapons depots and safe havens for facilitators, financiers, and trainers.¹⁰²

Importantly, they shifted these logistics lines in late-2007, relying on southern routes, after US pressure limited the reliability of the northern networks.

In addition, they had Iranian communications technology, allowing them to communicate in real-time between units. These units were functionally differentiated, with explosives units—including differentiated cells dealing with improvised explosive devices (IED) and explosively-formed penetrators (EFPs)—intelligence units, support units, and fighting units.¹⁰³ These smaller units were rarely combined and often operated independently.

Badr Organization. Based in Iran, the Badr Organization’s fighters received more extensive and diverse training in the lead-up to the US invasion. This training included conventional-type activities for functionally differentiated units including artillery, anti-aircraft, and intelligence. Units were expected to carry out training operations on conventional operations including “advance, attack,

101. Felter and Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and 'Other Means'*: 64-66.

102. Cochrane, *Asaib Ahl al-Haq and the Khazali Special Groups Network*: 5.

103. Cochrane, *Special Groups Regenerate*.

defense and withdrawal” as well as more specialized operations on “ambushes, patrols, raids...and war on the cities.” These exercises culminated in Division-level mobilization exercises.¹⁰⁴

Further, after gaining control of the Interior Ministry, many Badrists also joined the Iraqi Army. As a result, they received further training and familiarization with US forces and large-unit formations. Indeed, there is evidence that some Badr units were simply imported into the Iraqi army, allowing them to train as complete units during the US support of the Iraqi Army.¹⁰⁵

Nonetheless, because these units were part of the Iraqi Police and Army, Badr could not directly employ them or the weaponry and movement assets they had. Before the US withdrawal in December 2011, most Badr units outside of the ISF were organized into smaller cells lead by dedicated cadre and often acted as “Death Squads” or security details in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. It was only after the US withdrawal that Badr was able to re-construct larger units and being utilizing ISF weapons and vehicles to support their operations.¹⁰⁶

7.4.3 How Did They Fight?

Given the organizational development of both the Special Groups and Badr, the theory predicts that they would fight with Guerrilla Capacity. They had paired a cadre system with clear military training and functionally differentiated units. Moreover, for the Badr Organization, the theory predicts that when they were able to re-organize into larger units and use ISF equipment after 2012, they should be been prepared for Quasi-conventional operations. They had a significant legacy of large-unit training and had continued to receive some additional instruction during the US occupation as

104. Harmony Document: ISGQ-2005-00038283: 34-39

105. *Interview with Brig. Gen Karl Horst*, in collab. with Frontline, February 9, 2007; Ken Silverstein, “The Minister of Civil War,” *Harper’s Magazine* 313, no. 1875 (2006): 67–73.

106. Zana K. Gulmohamad, “A Short Profile of Iraq’s Shi’a Militias,” *Terrorism Monitor* 13, no. 8 (2015); Holly Williams, “Armed with U.S. Weapons, Infamous Militia Beating ISIS,” *CBS News*, February 2, 2015, cbsnews.com; Kareem Fahim, “Shiite Militia Drives Back Islamic State, but Divides Much of Iraq,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 2015, nytimes.com.

many Badr fighters were in ISF units. Both of these sets of predictions are borne out.

Special Groups. The exact time period of the Special Groups emergence from JAM is unclear. Nonetheless, there is clear evidence that Special Groups had begun independent operations by mid-2006, so this account focuses on that period. During that time, they were fighting in similar areas to JAM, however, they continued to operate after Sadr had called the ceasefire for JAM in late 2007 and much of 2008. As the theory predicts, they are capable of Guerrilla activity. They developed a well-trained set of cadre, however, they did not develop larger units capable of Quasi-conventional Capacity.

Throughout this period, the Special Groups carried out targeted operations, discriminating between different sets of individuals and elites. For example, there were many kidnapping operations targeting particular Iraqi officials, for the most part, Sunnis. These operations were often coordinated and required precision as many of the government ministries had dedicated security forces. Further, many operations looked well-rehearsed as the Special Groups fighters wore fake Iraqi army and Police uniforms.¹⁰⁷ In one of the best-known such attacks, Special Groups fighters, dressed in US military uniforms, were able to enter Provincial Joint Coordination Center in Karbala in January 2007, and then, after attempting to kidnap them, kill five US soldiers. After capturing planning documents for the attack in the aftermath, US officials observed that the documents showed that the group “had conducted extensive preparation and drills prior to the attack... They had American-looking uniforms, vehicles and identification cards that enabled the attackers to more easily penetrate the Provincial Joint Coordination Center and achieve surprise.”¹⁰⁸

Starting in later 2007 and 2008, Special Groups launched sets of assassination campaigns against

107. Kagan, *Iran's Proxy War Against the United States and Iraq*: 14-15.

108. “Press Briefing with Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner, Multi-National Force - Iraq.”

Iraqi officials as well as Sons of Iraq members. These attacks were carried out in hit and run operations as well as with under-vehicle magnetic “sticky bombs.”¹⁰⁹ Further, Special Groups fighters were heavily suspected of also carrying out precise assassinations of Sadrist and Badr leaders.¹¹⁰

Beyond these targeted campaigns, Special Groups also carried out ambushes with coordinated initial attacks IEDs or EFPs. EFPs, when used correctly can launch machined shells through armored vehicles. Due to their level of complexity and the Iranian role in training Special Groups to use them, analysts referred to them as a hallmark of Special Group operations.¹¹¹ Throughout 2007-2010, EFP attacks showed increasing complexity and coordination. Cells carefully recorded the movements of US forces, finding ideal attack locations, and changing the angle and delivery styles of these EFPs in response to US countermeasures.¹¹² Further, these attacks were often paired with small-arms fire.¹¹³ Such operations constituted a relatively large proportion of attacks on US forces in Shiite areas.¹¹⁴

Special groups also carried out ambushes that coordinated between multiple units to surround and attack US or Iraqi forces, often after the detonation of an IED or EFP. One detained Special Groups members described how such attacks played out:

A specific target ambush is normally conducted against a convoy of vehicles. A specific ambush will begin with engineers detonating roadside bombs focused on one vehicle of the convoy. The support weapons teams will then attack the other vehicles with mortars and rockets to force them back, while the conventional weapons teams assault the objective with small arms and RPGs. The conventional weapons teams will assault the target vehicle and take whatever equipment is available. If there is a person still alive in the target vehicle, then that person should be kidnapped if the situation permits. The indirect fire teams are responsible for keeping enough pressure on the other vehicles to prevent them from helping the target vehicle. The conventional weapons teams will

109. “US: Iraq Hit Squads Being Trained in Iran,” *Associated Press*, August 15, 2008, Cochrane, *Special Groups Regenerate*.

110. Patrick Gaughen, *The Fight for Diwaniyah: The Sadrist Trend and ISCI Struggle for Supremacy*, Backgrounder, Iraq Project 17 (Institute for the Study of War, December 2007).

111. Cochrane, *Asaib Ahl al-Haq and the Khazali Special Groups Network*.

112. Knights, “The Evolution of Iran’s Special Groups in Iraq”: 15.

113. Cochrane, *Special Groups Regenerate*.

114. Kagan, *Enforcing the Law*: 3.

withdraw with the seized equipment and persons while the indirect fire teams keep the other personnel from responding.¹¹⁵

Another common tactic used by the Special Groups was indirect fire from multiple locations. The use of mortars and rocket attacks was common, particularly in Baghdad. These coordinated attacks required greater weapons familiarity. Cochrane describes one such attack: on February 19, 2008, the Special Groups launched two indirect fire attacks:

The barrages were only minutes apart and targeted a Combat Outpost in the Oubaidi neighborhood and Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah, both in southeast Baghdad. As the Iraqi Security Forces responded to the first two attacks, they discovered a third barrage of unexploded rockets on a truck used as a launcher. As Iraqi forces went to defuse the rockets, they were remotely detonated in a 'well-planned ambush,' killing fifteen Iraqi police officers and injuring dozens more.¹¹⁶

These attacks gained greater complexity throughout 2008 and 2009, as units began launching at narrow angles to reduce warning or by launching upwards of 20 rockets simultaneously to overwhelm US defenses.¹¹⁷

Importantly, the Special Groups continued carrying out all three types of operations despite significant pressure from US and Iraqi forces. Though there were lulls in activity, they still regained capacity despite losing significant material, many mid and lower-level leaders, as well as many fighters. In particular during later 2007, US forces took advantage of JAM's stand down—as well as the success of the Surge in limiting AQI's operations—to more easily identify and either kill or arrest Special Groups members. As a result, by the fall of 2007, Special Groups activities had declined notably.¹¹⁸

Nonetheless, after a lull, operations continued and then ramped up in 2008 despite continued US pressure. For example, though key leaders such as Khazali were captured, they were simply replaced

115. Harmony Document: Redacted Intelligence Document 001. The Harmony Project documents can be accessed at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program>.

116. Cochrane, "The Return of Special Groups": 8.

117. Knights, "The Evolution of Iran's Special Groups in Iraq": 15.

118. Cochrane, *Special Groups Regenerate*.

via promotions. As a result, EFP attacks reached a peak in January 2008 and indirect fire attacks similarly picked up in February. In March of 2008, they launched coordinated operations on the Green Zone that were described as “one of the fiercest and most sustained attacks on the area in the last year.”¹¹⁹ This offensive was only stopped when the US devoted significant resources in terms of manpower and aerial support, as well as building large dividing walls in Sadr City. Again, after going underground, Special Groups forces re-grouped and re-started their assassination campaigns and indirect fire attacks by late in 2008.¹²⁰

Badr Organization. Following the US invasion, intact Badr units entered Iraq from Iran despite warnings from US forces. They took control of key areas in Basra, Najaf, and Karbala, and were able to pester British and US forces. As the International Crisis Group reported, “after the collapse of the Baathist regime in April 2003, SCIRI followers and Badr fighters hurried back to the newly liberated land. What they lacked in popularity they made up in resources, military organisation and patronage.”¹²¹ For the most part, these units only used force to protect the Shrines in Najaf and Karbala, mostly against JAM forces. Badr continued to hold these territories—and benefit from the lucrative pilgrimage of Shiites to both locations—despite many challenges from JAM (see more below.) This task became even more straightforward with Badr’s units integrated into ISF.

One of the key parts of Badr’s heavy integration into the Iraqi government was its ability to keep its fighters from using force in late 2003 and 2004. While Badr forces fought US and British briefly just after the invasion, Badr’s leadership ordered their fighters to stand down and not brandish weapons in public.¹²² Compliance was substantial as Badr forces stood down and watched as JAM

119. Quoted in, Cochrane, “The Return of Special Groups.”

120. “US: Iraq Hit Squads Being Trained in Iran.”

121. International Crisis Group, *Iraq Policy Briefing: Is There An Alternative To War?*, Middle East Report 9 (International Crisis Group, February 2003): 17.

122. Abedin, “The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI).”

fighters moved into shrines and Najaf and Karbala for periods of the summer in 2004. Felter and Fishman observe that “The decision by SCIRI and Dawah to avoid violent confrontation with the United States paid off after the January 30, 2005 General Assembly elections.”¹²³

When Badr did start using force again after 2005, it used it in a calibrated way. Even though it participated in ethnic cleansing like JAM, it faced many fewer complaints about indiscriminate targeting or racketeering. Much of its activities were through targeted assassinations of Sunni officials as well as some Sadrists. Though obviously biased, one Badrist told the International Crisis Group the difference between JAM and Badr: “Both Badr and Jaysh al-Mahdi are executing Baathists and takfiryin, but there is a difference between the two. Badr is a military organisation, with professional methods and structures, and with people specialising in such killings. Badr is more professional than Jaysh al-Mahdi.”¹²⁴ In other words, Badr members took pride in their capability and approach.

Many of these operations were carried out by units nominally within the Iraqi Police Force such as the Wolf Brigades. While denied by Badr leaders publicly, it appears that targets were passed from Badr leadership to these operational units.¹²⁵ There is also evidence that Badr was targeting particular individuals with intelligence or instructions from Iranian intelligence.¹²⁶ Further, Badr ran secret prisons and interrogation facilities to collect intelligence and to hold individuals beyond the reach of the Iraqi government.¹²⁷

The only period where Badr fought openly was during 2007 when it targeted and clearly defeated JAM units. These incidents were often small-scale gun fights directly pitting Badrists against

123. Felter and Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and 'Other Means'*: 36.

124. International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?*: 23.

125. “Death Squads,” *CNN*, March 25, 2007, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0703/25/siu.01.html>.

126. Joel Wing, “Badr Organization A View Into Iraq's Violent Past And Present,” January 20, 2015, <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/2015/01/badr-organization-view-into-iraqs.html>.

127. Ned Parker, “Torture by Iraqi Militias: The Report Washington Did Not Want You to See,” *Reuters*, December 14, 2015, reuters.com.

JAM. As Dreyfuss relates, “the Badr forces, often in the form of Iraqi army and police units, mercilessly suppressed the JAM. American and Badr forces fought side by side against Sadr’s less well-armed ragtag militias. Dozens of JAM cells were broken up and hundreds of people were killed or arrested.”¹²⁸

As the theory predicts, once Badr was in control of more advanced weaponry and unit formations, it could begin fighting in a Quasi-conventional manner. After the US forces withdrew, Badr took explicit control of some ISF units. These units have often taken the lead in the fight against the Islamic State (IS) as the Iraqi government delegates to Shiite militias. Badr forces have carried out mobile operations with armor, including the use of M1 Abrams tanks as well as technicals.¹²⁹

One of Badr’s major victories was re-taking Diyala from IS forces. During these operations, Badr was placed in control of all Iraqi government and Shiite militia forces.¹³⁰ As Adnan and McFate describe: “The Badr Organization played a major role in all operations launched against ISIS in Diyala during this period. After achieving success in Diyala, the Badr organization capitalized on momentum and deployed as a mobile force along with DOC to launch major operations around Dhulueya and Tikrit in nearby Salah ad Din province November 2014 and March 2015.”¹³¹ As a result, “Badr is also the only militia-political party that dominates a specific province (Diyala), a fact that cements its role in the country.”¹³² They played a central role in other major operations in

128. Bob Dreyfuss, “Is Iran Winning the Iraq War?,” *The Nation*, February 21, 2008, thenation.com.

129. Bill Roggio and Caleb Weiss, “Badr Organization Fighters Pose with US M1 Abrams Tank,” *The Long War Journal Blog Post* (July 2015): <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/07/badr-organization-fighters-pose-with-us-m1-abrams-tank.php>; Mustafa Salim, “70 Islamic State Militants Killed in Fallujah As Conditions Worsen in Besieged City,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 28, 2016, smh.com.au.

130. Susannah George, “Breaking Badr,” November 16, 2014, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/06/breaking-badr/>.

131. Sinan Adnan and Jessica Lewis McFate, “The Resurgence of ISIS in Diyala and its Implications for Iranian Proxies,” July 25, 2015, <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-resurgence-of-isis-in-diyala-and.html>; See also, Fahim, “Shiite Militia Drives Back Islamic State, but Divides Much of Iraq.”

132. Kirk H. Sowell, “Badr at the Forefront of Iraq’s Shia Militias,” August 13, 2015, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=61016>.

Tikrit, around Fallujah, and Baiji.¹³³

7.5 Alternative Explanations

In comparing JAM, the Special Groups, and Badr, this chapter is able to hold constant the structure of social foundations. Each of these groups could draw on fairly similar underlying social relationships that were shaped by the hierarchical nature of the Shiite faith. Each of them had leaders who had been entrenched in those social structures for an extended period of time. Along these lines, they employed similar ideologies focused on the imposition of Islamist governance, or *Velayat-e Faqih*. Similarly, all of them had significant support from Iran.

Nonetheless, there are notable differences between the groups. Badr and the Special Groups had more robust support from Iran, including guidance, training, and sanctuary. Moreover, Badr had a longer institutional legacy, giving it significantly more time to develop than either the Special Groups or JAM. Further, Badr was more directly integrated into the government than either of the other forces. On the other hand, Badr was less embedded in Iraqi social networks given its “outsider” status. As a result, the direct comparisons between these groups are less sharp than in other chapters. Nonetheless, the chapter is still able to provide tests of the theory’s mechanisms. The following discussion walks through the effect of these differences on drawing inferences and isolates how *within* organization variation can address some of these potential confounding factors.

7.5.1 US and ISF Policies

There is a clear difference in the way that the US and Iraqi Government treated JAM, Badr, and the Special Groups. In particular, Badr was heavily integrated into the government, and thus faced

133. Ahmed Rasheed and Dominic Evans, “Iraqi Forces Try to Seal Off Islamic State Around Tikrit,” *Reuters*, March 3, 2015, reuters.com; George, “Breaking Badr”; Michael R. Gordon, “Iraqi Forces and Shiite Militias Retake Oil Refinery From ISIS,” *The New York Times*, October 16, 2015, nytimes.com.

less pressure from US forces. As a result, there is no doubt that they had an easier path toward organizational-development—beyond the fact that they were already well-established—as they faced a much less kinetic fight. That said, part of this positioning was due to Badr’s ability to control their soldiers’ behavior. In 2004, while JAM struggled to control their fighters, Badr successfully ordered their soldiers to reverse course and stand down. This allowed them to enter the political process and serve as “reliable brokers” to the US and Iraqi government.

However, with JAM and the Special Groups, state policies do not explain the variation in behavior and organization. Both groups were sharply targeted by the US, though, the Special Groups faced even more sustained and directed attacks. The US opposed JAM throughout its existence—while it grudgingly allowed JAM to join the political process, JAM was under significant pressure by late 2006. Even during the ceasefire, Sadr was openly worried that the US would assassinate him.¹³⁴ Further, during 2007, the US empowered other actors against JAM, including tribal militias, as well as civil society actors that tried to wrestle support from JAM.¹³⁵

The Special Groups were even more heavily targeted by the US, which, after the JAM stand down, devoted significant resources to tracking down and targeting Special Groups cells. As noted above, while this did slow the Special Groups operational tempo, they were able to re-group by both replacing individuals and by changing their tactics and supply networks. In other words, despite being targeted even more aggressively, they were able to generate and maintain a higher level of military effectiveness than JAM.

134. Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*: Chapter 16.

135. Krohley, *The Death of the Mehdi Army*: Chapters 5, 7-8.

7.5.2 External Support

All three groups received significant support from Iran. In particular, all three were given significant weaponry, ammunition, and even cash. However, both the Special Groups and Badr received more direct support including hands-on training and assistance in designing organizational features. Given Iran's success in creating successful proxies such as Hezbollah, it is not surprising that this support was quite beneficial to both Badr and the Special Groups. What is more, it is instructive that despite the differences between Badr and the Special Groups, their organizational configurations and capacity were alike. As described in the conclusion, this indicates that the particular type of support given by an external patron is important to understanding its influence.

That said, external support does not explain all of the variation observed. JAM was capable of maintaining Limited Structural Integrity with much less support than Badr or the Special Groups. Moreover, it retained Limited Structural Integrity when Iran not only withdrew its support, but sought to directly weaken JAM.

7.5.3 Sanctuary, Relative Power, and Popular Support

Along with Iranian support, both the Special Groups and Badr were able to rely on some sanctuary in Iran, though the vast majority of their operational presence was in Iraq. There is no doubt that this sanctuary allowed Badr and the Special Groups to develop under less pressure and for Badr to carry out large-unit training. That said, the Special Groups did much of their training in-country, relying on the "master-trainer" approach.

JAM was able to move from Combat Ineffective to Limited Structural Integrity by implementing resource control without access to territorial sanctuary. Moreover, when JAM did gain significant territory and was able to operate freely in it in 2006, they did not become more militarily effective.

Sadr was still unable to control *how* his soldiers used violence as many of his soldiers targeted civilians and ignored orders about how to treat fellow Shiites.

Just as sanctuary does not explain much of the variation between the organizations, neither can the differences in relative power between the three groups. While JAM's gains in power in 2006 did not help it to gain greater capacity, neither did its losses in 2007 lead it to fragment. When JAM's power was on the decline in 2007—it was being targeted by the Badr as well as tribal groups empowered by the Sons of Iraq program—it was still able to maintain the ceasefires. It did not fragment even though Badr and Iran sought to fractionalize JAM and the Special Groups sought to pry members from JAM. What is more, Sadr was able to take advantage of his ability to turn violence on and off to shield the organization from greater losses at the hands of Badr by standing down in August 2007. Moreover, by showing he could indeed control his fighters, Sadr saw a boost in popular support after that ceasefire, helping to cement his position amongst his followers.¹³⁶

Indeed, perhaps the major asset JAM had compared to the other groups was greater popular support. Sadr had deep popular support, partially driven by his father, but also driven by the range and depth of resources JAM provided. Conversely, Badr was seen as an impostor due to its affiliation with Iran and that many Badr members had remained in Iran for much of the 1990s. The Special Groups were similarly tainted by their close association with Iran and their excessive use of violence. As Felter and Fishman recount, "Unlike al-Sadr, SCIRI did not have a vast popular movement that could generate power simply by demonstrating in the streets."¹³⁷ Yet, despite this popular support, both Badr and the Special Groups were able to gain greater military effectiveness than JAM. While recruitment was perhaps more challenging, they were able to integrate new fighters efficiently.

136. Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, "Culture Resurfaces In Sadr City As Violence Falls," *NPR*, August 27, 2008, www.npr.org.

137. Felter and Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and 'Other Means'*: 34.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has tested the theory by assessing variation between three Shiite organizations in Iraq: JAM, the Badr Organization, and the Special Groups. Even though there are important confounding factors in this chapter, it still provides an important test of the theory and demonstrates support for many of the theories mechanisms. To begin with, this chapter has demonstrated that pre-existing social structures are insufficient to explain how militarily effective an organization becomes. JAM, Badr, and the Special Groups were embedded in similar Shiite community structures and yet both Badr and the Special Groups reached high levels of effectiveness.

Drawing on temporal variation, the assessment of JAM demonstrates that pre-existing social structures must be leveraged for organizations to benefit from them. Despite starting with widespread social support networks, JAM was unable to control its fighters in 2004 as they disobeyed ceasefire orders, and thus drastically weakened the movement. It was only able to gain Limited Structural Integrity after putting in place resource control by joining the government and setting up centralized distribution offices for services and supplies. As a result, JAM's followers became dependent on JAM for the key things they needed to fight and live. As a result, since it maintained resource control, JAM was able to sustain Limited Structural Integrity as it was weakened in 2007 by the rise of Badr and the Special Groups as well as Iran's withdrawal of support.

Yet, JAM only began the process of increasing its effectiveness. Badr and the Special Groups were able to fight with higher levels of capacity. It is impossible to ignore the role of Iran in helping these organizations to reach high levels of capacity. Beyond that, the Badr case provides further confounding factors given its long institutional legacy and decision to mostly participate in the Iraqi government, reducing its exposure to US attacks. Yet, despite these clear differences, it is instruc-

tive that the military apparatuses of Badr and the Special Groups were so alike. What they had in common was that Iran's support of these groups was focused on providing specific instruction and organizational guidance—as Iran's Revolutionary Guard has done throughout the region. This process focused on developing and lower-level cadre and then placing them into a military force with well-developed command and control that delegated tasks to functionally differentiated units and the logistical back-end to move people and supplies across Iraq (and from Iran).

Beyond these findings, the chapter brings up two important observations. First, JAM's ability to maintain Limited Structural Integrity despite the challenges it faced and to use that level of control to keep the August 2007 ceasefire demonstrates a key contribution of the dissertation. While “weak” organizations are often discounted, the theory and empirics demonstrate that insurgents with lower levels of military effectiveness are not unimportant in determining conflict outcomes. Organizations that are not militarily strong but have resource control and strong primary groups are able to carry out collective activities such as keeping ceasefires. In this context, attempting to remove the social support or resource control of insurgent leaders may drastically reduce their ability to make deals that limit violence. Though it might appeal to policymakers to use overwhelming force against weaker actors, this approach can actually precipitate far more—and less controllable—violence.

Second, the reality that JAM, Badr, and the Special Groups *all* received Iranian support uncovers an important corrective. In the theory, I hypothesize that organizations should only be able to reach Quasi-conventional Capacity with external support as it is quite difficult to gain more advanced weaponry and training on that equipment. However, Badr and the Special Groups indicate that external support can play a role earlier in the process depending on its content. When external patrons directly help with organization-building by providing advisors or even directly training members in-country and providing hands-on guidance, they can clearly push an organization down

the “right” path.¹³⁸ In these cases, external patrons are not providing tangible material resources, but instead are contributing knowledge that is often driven by that patron’s own military history. In this case, Iran has a clear history of successfully building up its own Revolutionary Guard, as well as other groups such as Hezbollah. As with all resources, this observation demonstrates the importance of explicitly tracing *how* inputs to an organization contribute to how that organization develops.

138. I thank Noel Anderson for this observation.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This dissertation has sought to advance our understanding of conflict dynamics by proposing a practical conception of insurgent military effectiveness and developing a comprehensive theory of effectiveness that accounts for the importance of both informal structures of social support *and* formal military structures. Rather than focusing on broad outcomes such as whether insurgents are “cohesive,” “fragmented,” or “popular,” the dissertation studies key distinctions such as whether insurgents can turn violence on or off, or use force to carry out complex ambushes or raids. To explain these levels of effectiveness, I argue that, as in conventional militaries, insurgent formal military structures—such as developed command and control, bureaucratic management, and training procedures—play a central role in not only building military skills but also in developing an organizational ethos which unites disparate fighting units around a set of shared experiences, goals, ideology, and institutional knowledge.

The findings of the dissertation suggest that research into civil war processes and outcomes must look beyond the role of structural and environmental factors. There is no doubt that material and

social endowments, access to external support and sanctuary, as well as state tactics contribute to shaping the conflict environment in which insurgent organizations operate. However, it is what organizations *do* with what they have that determines how well they can fight.

Many of the organizations studied herein created strong social ties organically while others sought out material endowments and shaped the way in which those resources were distributed to their members. On the other hand, though nearly all of the 25 organizations studied were able to relatively easily access small arms and basic supplies, many of the organizations studied developed relatively high degrees of fighting capacity *without* access to territorial sanctuary or external support. And while some were strengthened by territorial gains or weapons provided by external patrons, others remained strong despite battlefield losses or internal disagreements. Instead of pre-determining outcomes, these various factors provided opportunities and challenges for insurgent leaders as they sought to build and maintain their fighting forces.

In short, insurgent groups have agency; they are adaptive and diverse military actors. As a result, researchers will gain greater traction by carefully evaluating how insurgents are shaped by *and* shape their environment. The following sections re-capitulate the core argument and findings of the dissertation before presenting how the focus on carefully unpacking insurgent organizational processes generates important new insights and questions for both academics and policymakers.

8.2 Summary of the Argument and Findings

The dissertation begins by creating a five-level concept of insurgent military effectiveness. This measure includes organizations that disintegrate under fire (Combat Ineffective), those able to carry out simple activities such as ceasefires or preventing large-scale defections (Limited Structural Integrity), those able to ensure that their units carry out specific orders under fire such as only at-

tacking particular populations or areas (Complete Structural Integrity), and, those able to carry out more coordinated military tasks such as handling weaponry, ambushes, retreats, and hit and run operations (Guerrilla Capacity). Finally, organizations with higher levels of military effectiveness can fight in a manner similar to conventional forces by employing combined arms, conducting static defenses, carrying out attacks that coordinate across disparate fighting units, and adapting tactics in a timely manner (Quasi-conventional Capacity).

This disaggregation of insurgent behaviors demonstrates that by studying insurgent behavior in terms of broad distinctions such as “fragmented” or “cohesive,” researchers miss much important variation. For example, while organizations with Limited Structural Integrity will never defeat a state outright, they are capable of maintaining ceasefires that allow them to negotiate peace deals that can facilitate political transitions. Similarly, while the difference between Limited and Complete Structural Integrity does not determine whether an organization can fight like a conventional force, it may very well influence conflict outcomes. While organizations with Limited Structural Integrity cannot prevent their soldiers from targeting civilians, those with Complete Structural Integrity can feel confident that their units will treat civilians as the central leadership desires. This level of military effectiveness thus can be central to an insurgent group’s success as it can use violence without risking the loss of civilian support.¹

To explain variation in that conception of military effectiveness, the theory argues that is not insurgent’s structural conditions that determine how well they can fight. Thus, a fundamental expectation of the theory is that structural conditions, such as access to pre-existing social structures or material resources, should not predict insurgent composition or behavior. In the following paragraphs I summarize the central predictions about which organizational features are necessary to

1. Wood, “Rebel Capability and Strategic Violence Against Civilians”; Humphreys and Weinstein, “Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War.”

achieve each level of effectiveness.

While I argue that strong primary groups are necessary for an organization to fight well, these social ties will only be of use to the organization if they leverage them. What is more, organizations are not doomed if they cannot inherit strong pre-existing social ties. Like conventional militaries, insurgents can build them organically through bootcamp or indoctrination. Whether organizations import strong primary groups or build them organically, to move beyond Combat Ineffective to be able to turn violence on and off (Limited Structural Integrity), the theory argues that organizations must leverage strong primary groups by providing these units with the key things needed to fight and live. When organizations have established such resource control, units are incentivized to deploy their normative infrastructure to ensure compliance with orders so as to maintain access to these key goods. However, resource control only provides the leadership with a base level of control because units will only enforce good behavior for actions they know the central leadership can directly observe, and thus credibly sanction. These types of highly observable activities are ceasefires or defections *en masse*.

To control what soldiers do when they *cannot* be directly observed (Complete Structural Integrity), the theory argues that organizations must create a set of lower-level officers who are trusted by the organization and their soldiers. For the organization to be able to rely on these cadre, the cadre must be well-indoctrinated and selected for advancement based on their commitment and performance. To gain their soldiers' trust, these cadre need to be placed in command of manageable, small, units and be put in the position to gain the respect of their soldiers by fighting with them, sharing responsibilities, and representing them to higher echelons. When they are able to gain their soldiers trust and respect, these cadre serve as focal points, linking deployed fighting units with the organization.

The theory then argues that only organizations that have combined the above organizational features with clear military training procedures and appropriate command structures should be able to consistently conduct military operations such as retreats, hit and runs, or ambushes (Guerrilla Capacity). In particular, cadre must have strong military training to be able to instruct and command their fighters. And, for these fighting units to be able to carry out guerrilla-type activities, they need to be organized into small, functionally differentiated elements that can act in unison, whether serving in fire support, main attack, or flanking roles.

Finally, organizations will only be able to fight with Quasi-conventional Capacity when they have the ability to manage large unit operations. This includes training for units at the company-level and above as well as the logistical back-end to move supplies and heavy weaponry to units in real-time. Given the magnitude of these tasks, it is likely that organizations will need to have access to sanctuary to create dedicated training camps. Similarly, access to heavy weaponry means that organizations will often have external support as it is difficult to access such weaponry consistently without an external patron.

Beyond the predictions at each stage, the theory's mechanics point to some overall predictions. The theory is iterative, so military training without requisite foundations will not result in Guerrilla or Quasi-Conventional Capacity. Similarly, external support or sanctuary without strong primary groups and an officer cadre will not benefit organizations. In short, organizations cannot "skip" steps. In addition, organizations can reach high levels of capacity *without* external support, sanctuary, or strong pre-existing primary groups if they carry out the necessary organization-building the theory describes at each stage of development.

Empirical Findings. The empirical tests conducted by the dissertation provide significant support for each category of mechanisms as well as the overall predictions. Chapter 2 discusses the limits of

Table 8.1 Summary of Empirical Findings

	Organization	Supports the Theory?		
		Yes	Partially	No
Vietnam	Việt Minh	✓		
	QDD Front	✓		
	Hòa Hảo	✓		
	Nguyễn Giác Ngộ (Hòa Hảo)	✓		
	Ba Cụt (Hòa Hảo)			✓
	Cao Đài	✓		
	Liên Minh (Cao Đài)	✓		
	PAVN	✓		
	PLAF Main Force	✓		
	PLAF Guerrilla Force	✓		
Iraq	al-Qaeda in Iraq	✓		
	Islamic State	✓		
	Islamic Army of Iraq	✓		
	1920 Revolution Brigade		✓	
	JRTN		✓	
	Jaysh Muhammad	✓		
	Jaysh al-Mahdi	✓		
	Badr Organization	✓		
	Special Groups	✓		
	Tribal Militias	✓		
	—Fallujah Uprising (2004)			
	—Anbar People's Council			
	—Hamza Brigade			
	—Desert Protectors			
	—Anbar Awakening (2006)			
—Sons of Iraq				

structural explanations and uses large-N data drawing on multiple civil war datasets to show that these structural factors are poor predictors of both insurgent composition and how conflicts end. Next, studying a range of organizations in Iraq and Vietnam, the empirical chapters test the theory with organizations that have different underlying social and material foundations. Beyond showing that these factors do not predict organizational structure and behavior, these organizations provide significant support for the theory's logic and mechanisms—Table 8.1 summarizes the extent of this

support. Of the 25 organizations studied by the dissertation, the theory's mechanics are strongly supported by 22 of the cases—I discuss the cases where the theory does not perform as well in Section 8.5.

During the First Indochina War, I investigate a set of organizations that vary based on pre-existing structural conditions. I show that these structural conditions cannot explain variation in organizational composition or behavior. The Việt Minh developed to be a strong military actor despite its inability to draw on strong pre-existing community structures or external support (before 1950). By contrast, the QDD Front, which also did not have access to pre-existing primary groups, could not take advantage of its significant significant material support and military training provided to it by China. Instead, it disintegrated once engaged in combat. On the other hand, the Hòa Hảo, a religious group with a dense community base and access to extensive French resources and military training, did not become a unified or effective fighting force. A similar religious group, the Cao Đài, also had access to similar resources and French support, but *did* reach higher levels of capacity.

While the Hòa Hảo and QDD Front could not control *when* their soldiers used violence, the Việt Minh, Cao Đài, and one element of the Hòa Hảo, lead by Nguyễn Giác Ngộ, could. Rather than being constrained by their social endowments, the Việt Minh built strong primary groups through indoctrination and literacy programs and leveraged it with land re-distribution. As a result, they were able to turn violence on and off by threatening to take back this land and other key staples. Nonetheless, because they had not developed a cadre system in the south, the Việt Minh could not control *how* violence was used before the late 1940s. This lack of control led to a number of massacres that damaged the Việt Minh's position in the south before a 1947 ceasefire.

By the mid-1940s in the north, and the later 1940s in the south, like the Cao Đài and Nguyễn Giác

Ngộ, the Việt Minh put great effort into carefully selecting their cadre and providing them with dedicated military training. As a result, all three organizations were able to fight with Guerrilla Capacity. After the Việt Minh started receiving Chinese support, they transitioned to Quasi-conventional Capacity as they employed heavy weaponry and conducted large-unit training in areas of sanctuary, mostly in northern Vietnam. This culminated in their conventional victory at Điện Biên Phủ in 1954, during which time they relied on an enormous network of human porters to provide supplies and other key support to their fighters.

During the Second Indochina War, the People's Army of North Vietnam (PAVN) and the Main and Guerrilla Forces of the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) built upon the Việt Minh's success. Each shared a similar approach to creating strong primary groups and dedicated, respected lower-level cadre—many fighters referred to their cadre as their “mothers and fathers.” However, there was variation between the three elements in terms of military training and logistics. The Guerrilla Force did not receive significant training and thus they were only able to control how violence was used (Complete Structural Integrity). This level of control allowed them to fill an important role in local policing and tax collection. However, they could not use violence in more complex ways. While both the PLAF Main Force and PAVN had more advanced training, after 1965, PAVN's training was more consistent and continued to include instruction at the company-level and above. As a result, despite having similar weapons and supplies to Main Force units, PAVN elements were able to fight with Quasi-Conventional Capacity while PLAF units did not. This situation was illustrated by the relatively better performance of PAVN units at Khe San and Huế during the Tet Offensive as compared to the general collapse of Main Force units.

Importantly, across both the First and Second Indochina Wars, the iterative nature of the theory is borne out. While the Hòa Hảo and Cao Đài both had significant military training and support

from the French, because the Hòa Hảo had not created resource control or a cadre system, this training and resource provision did not help the Hòa Hảo to fight effectively. The same was true of the QDD Front even though French intelligence was concerned about the significant military training that many QDD members had. Finally, while the North Vietnamese gave the PLAF Main Force heavy weaponry, unlike PAVN units, their lack of large-unit training after 1965 meant that they were unable to consistently use these weapons as a part of conventional-type operations.

The cases in Iraq (2003-2016) provide similar support for the mechanisms of the theory. In comparing Sunni-based insurgent groups, I am able to hold constant the role of material resources and pre-existing primary groups. While Sunni organizations had access to much weaponry and funding, they could not draw on strong social ties as Saddam Hussein had actively dismantled many Sunni social networks. Despite these shared conditions there was much variation in insurgent development and behavior.

Perhaps the only Sunni organizations that could draw on some strong pre-existing primary group ties were the tribal-based organizations such as the Hamza Brigade or Anbar People's Council. Yet, the fall of Saddam Hussein and the US policies post-invasion stripped these groups of resource control. As a result, these organizations could not convince their followers to fight and many of them simply deserted in 2003 and 2004. Only with the Sons of Iraq program in 2007 were tribal leaders able to re-establish resource control and thus control whether their fighters turned violence on and off. Still, they could not operate with greater military capacity and refused to fight beyond their home areas.

The 1920 Revolution Brigade and Jaysh Muhammad, nationalist groups with many former Iraqi Army members, could not translate their significant material resources into military capacity. Both organizations did not put in place systems to centralize resource provision and they made no attempt

to build strong primary groups as their original members were attrited. By contrast, the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) and Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN), also nationalist groups with many former Baathists, put significant focus on developing distribution systems and a trusted set of lower-level officers. As a result, they were positioned to use their fighters' military training in a coordinated fashion to carry out guerrilla-type operations.

The two most deadly and effective organizations in Iraq, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the Islamic State (IS), developed from even more challenging circumstances than the nationalist and tribal groups. Both were foreign to Iraq, meaning they could not tap into the Baathist networks and were seen as outsiders. What is more, they were forced to recruit from international religious networks with individuals that had disparate social backgrounds and quite varied conceptions of the Salafi approach. However, AQI went to great lengths to indoctrinate its new members and tie them to the organization with a substantial logistics bureaucracy and a set of trusted and committed lower-level officers. This foundation allowed them to withstand a prolonged US decapitation campaign and to re-group after the Surge in 2007.

IS built on AQI's organization by using access to territory and resources to build and train larger-scale fighting units, including dedicated artillery units using Toyota pick-up trucks. These units fought in tandem with infantry elements to carry out combined arms attacks. To support these larger operations, it is no accident that IS recruited former Iraqi Army officers to help design and train their fighting units. Yet, to ensure that those officers could be trusted by the central leadership, only those who fully demonstrated their allegiance to IS were accepted.

In contrast to Sunni organizations, all Shiite groups in Iraq were able to draw on strong pre-existing primary groups. Nonetheless, there was notable variation in the military structure and behavior of these organizations. Despite drawing on the dense support networks of his father, Muqtada

al-Sadr organization, Jaysh al-Mahdi was unable to control how violence was used in 2004 as it had not established resource control. As a result, despite trying desperately, Sadr was unable to get his followers to obey two separate ceasefire orders. By contrast, by 2006 and 2007, JAM had joined the government and taken control of a number of social services ministries positioning it to provide rents to Shiites distributed directly from neighborhood offices, or *Maktab al-Sayyid al-Shahid*. As a result, even though most analysts in academia and the government believed JAM members would not listen to Sadr's directions, JAM members followed costly ceasefire orders in 2007. This stand down was a major contributor to the significant reduction of violence in Baghdad during the Surge.

Nonetheless, because JAM did not establish a cadre system—rather than vetting officers, it simply absorbed existing community leaders and their sub-networks—it was unable to fight with greater capacity. By contrast, both the Special Groups and Badr Organization had highly developed military bureaucracies and consistent military training, often carried out in Iran. As a result, they conducted far more complex attacks. The Special Groups provided some of the strongest resistance to US forces in 2007 and 2008 while Badr led much of the fight against IS.

The Iraq cases again emphasize the iterative requirements of the theory. While nearly all of the ex-Baathist groups had significant military knowledge and access to heavy weaponry, only the IAI and JRTN took advantage of these endowments to operate with higher levels of capacity. Similarly, while JAM received training and supplies from Iran, without the organizational infrastructure to take advantage of them, they fought with far less capacity than Badr or the Special Groups.

8.3 Policy Contributions

Beyond adding to academic discussions about civil war, the theory has important takeaways for policymakers as they seek to respond to insurgent forces and build up partners in civil conflicts. Most

basically, the dissertation highlights the importance of explicitly assessing organizational capacity rather than treating all insurgent or terrorist groups as “like” entities. For example, many have focused on the role of IS’s brutal ideology in accounting for its rise. Instead, while there are many groups that advocate a similar ideological outlook, what sets IS apart is its organizational strength. IS became militarily effective by indoctrinating and training its fighting units. Similarly, despite being seen as simply a “terrorist” menace, IS’ predecessor, AQI developed the capacity to carry out complex activities and hold territory, and thus had clear desires to actually govern. In this context, evaluating military effectiveness contributes to identifying the underlying goals and motivations of an organization.

To the extent that organizations only choose to invest in as much military capacity as they think they need, then the magnitude of that investment signals their intentions much more clearly than rhetoric. Similarly, when insurgents lessen their military capacity they make strong signals about their intentions. For example, if as part of a peace agreement an insurgent organization allows some of their forces to be integrated into the state military, they are making a clear signal of good will as they are losing the capacity to use those troops. Thus, the level of military effectiveness that an insurgent organization attains provides not only information about how large of a threat they pose, but also provides a much less noisy signal of what the insurgent group actually wants to achieve.

Drawing on this perspective, the dissertation provides three clear pathways that may contribute to reducing the intensity of violent conflict.

First, it provides guidance about the types of organizations that policymakers should seek to partner with and prescribes the types of programs that should be implemented to make them stronger and more dependable partners. As the conflict in Syria has illustrated, it is critical to find reliable partners within conflict situations. Yet, one of the most challenging aspects of policy to date has

been how to identify and then effectively support partners. The dissertation helps policymakers with both of these tasks. It helps to inform the selection of partners by pointing to observable institutional characteristics that provide a foundation that outside support can build upon. In particular, organizations that have imported or built strong social ties between unit members have significant room to become more military effective. Yet, the dissertation emphasizes that handing out arms or basic training will not be sufficient to bolster these partners. Instead, actors must help these organizations to create resource distribution systems and disciplinary procedures. Further, to ensure that these organizations are able to use violence in a controlled manner, there must be a concerted effort to select and train lower-level officers committed to the mission while giving them the tools necessary to gain their soldiers' trust. One related benefit of such close involvement in this partner-building process is that policymakers can help to indoctrinate lower-level cadre in a manner that is less ideologically extreme and better-aligned with the long-term prospects for peace.

In most conflict environments, partnerships must also be made with state actors such as militaries or their auxiliary forces. These militaries play a central role in maintaining peace by not only deterring potential groups from turning to violence, but also by behaving in a fair and peaceful manner. As evidenced in Afghanistan recently, peace is often dependent on the provision of security in a manner that does not alienate citizens and instead encourages participation and fosters confidence in the state. In this context, while the dissertation focuses on non-state actors, it provides guidance about policies that will encourage local military actors to behave more responsibly.

In supporting these state actors, not only must there be a focus on training soldiers to behave appropriately, but perhaps more importantly, these organizations must foster structures that institutionalize such behavior. As with non-state actors, achieving control of how and when soldiers use force requires linking the command structure to the relationships horizontally-binding soldiers at

the unit level. The need to build such relationships was illustrated by the recent untimely defection of Malian army units trained by the United States (US).² The dissertation suggests that US training could have been more effective had it focused on organizational unity and military ethos as much as it did on tactical factors. Specifically, training should have been focused on those Malian officers most likely, ethnically and politically, to maintain allegiance to the government.

The second way in which the dissertation supports conflict mitigation is by helping to identify actors capable of making peace while giving mediators tools to help persuade states to make such peace deals rather than attempting to entirely destroy rebel actors. Ceasefires represent an important step in getting parties to the table and limiting violence. However, governments often do not seek such agreements as they either do not expect insurgents to abide by the agreements, or because they seek to militarily destroy rebels. The dissertation can help to change this approach. By disaggregating insurgent capacity at lower levels of military effectiveness, I am able to demonstrate which types of organizations should be able to maintain ceasefires. This utility of such disaggregation is illustrated by my explanation of how JAM could keep the peace despite many believing it would be unable to do so.

The success of the ceasefire underscores a somewhat counterintuitive policy recommendation supported by the dissertation. Though it might appeal to policymakers to use overwhelming force against weak actors, this approach can actually precipitate far more—and less controllable—violence. Attempting to forcibly remove the social support of insurgent leaders can reduce their ability to make deals and hold ceasefires that limit violence. In contrast, by bringing actors to the negotiating table, conflict mediators can take advantage of the social support that some rebel leaders have and leverage that to maintain peace. While JAM's ideology may not be in direct alignment with some

2. Eric Schmitt, "Militant Threats Test Pentagon's Role in Africa," *The New York Times*, February 11, 2013,

state building goals, the agreement with JAM held for a long period of time and allowed for attempts to peacefully reconcile differences and integrate JAM's forces into the state structure.

Finally, in addition to providing guidance on when good governance and rule of law reforms may help to win "hearts and minds." While it is hard to wrestle resource control away from embedded organizations that have put in place robust distribution systems—indeed, Krohley finds that attempts to do this with JAM in 2007 were unsuccessful³—attempts to address problems earlier in the process are likely to be more successful. The theory highlights that organizations will not gain any degree of effectiveness without leveraging strong primary groups by centralizing the provision of resources. Oftentimes, insurgent groups are able to centralize resources by taking advantage of deficiencies in government provision of services or security. For example, in Vietnam, the Viet Minh was able to take advantage of poor land management policies and gain support by distributing land to peasants. Similarly, in Afghanistan, the Taliban has taken advantage of poor judicial systems to provide its own justice. Moreover, when institutions are weak and corruption is possible, insurgents that join the government can use existing infrastructures to bolster their cause at the expense of the state. Perhaps the central reason that JAM was able to build a viable militia in 2006 was its ability to use control of social services ministries to build networks of distribution within the Shiite community of Baghdad. As a result, this theory emphasizes that reforms that improve the transparency, accountability, and reach of government services should be implemented in tandem with efforts to counter nascent insurgencies to prevent such groups from developing resource control in the first place.

3. Krohley, *The Death of the Mehdi Army*: 98-99.

8.4 Broader Implications

The dissertation's focus on unpacking insurgent organizations clearly connects what organizational features are necessary to fight in a certain manner. Beyond understanding how well a given organization can fight, however, the mechanisms and internal dynamics identified point to new avenues of potential research and new ways to think about pressing questions in the study of conflict and beyond. In short, insurgent groups are complex organizations that face many of the same challenges encountered by nascent and developing states as they attempt to achieve both political and military goals.

8.4.1 Three Stages of Insurgent Development

To begin with, insurgents' developmental arc is often quite long. Many of the organizations studied in the dissertation took years, if not decades, to reach higher levels of capacity. Throughout this process, they integrated lessons learned from other conflicts and from their own experiences. Thus, as conventional militaries have developed in stages—from fighting in groups of roaming bandits, to organized mercenaries, to large nationalized armies, and then to more complex combined operations—so to do insurgents.⁴ What is more, while many state militaries have had the luxury of iteratively developing over a long period of time, insurgent groups often start from scratch, and must go through multiple phases in a relatively short period of time.

In particular, the dissertation identifies three meaningful stages. In the first, insurgents are simply fighting to survive and develop some organizational integrity in the face of much stronger state (or non-state foes). Faced with this challenge, some insurgents implement resource control and

4. For this larger context, see Posen, "Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power"; Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*; Charles Tilly, "State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back in*, ed. Dietrich and T. Skocpol (1985): 169–187.

create lower-level cadre to leverage strong primary groups, while others falter. Though the organizations with resource control or trusted cadre are still fledgling, their ability to begin controlling when or how violence is used is crucial to their staying power and potential to develop further.

Indeed, amongst organizations struggling for survival, even basic levels of control are fundamental as such organizations can begin to use violence in a strategic manner. Indeed, strategy, even when it is as simple as turning violence on and off, is constrained by capabilities. Organizations with these capabilities are positioned to become reliable negotiating partner or credibly threaten a government with the unleashing of force. Similarly, by being able to turn violence off, organizations can protect themselves and re-group. When insurgent fighters cannot be easily identified, it is far harder for counterinsurgents to target rebel fighters in a discriminating manner.⁵ In short, even while these groups struggle to survive, there is notable variation in “weak insurgents” that helps to explain when violence can be used to advance political goals and when it cannot.

In the second stage, insurgents, instead of desperately fighting for survival, can begin using force in more complex ways. While resource control and trusted cadre allow organizations to leverage strong primary groups, reaching this stage of development requires specific technical military skills and institutions. That many insurgents operate at this stage of development provides an important corrective for how we evaluate insurgent groups. While organizations in the previous stage have to fight deeply for survival and must remain covert, organizations at this more developed stage are able to pose a tangible military threat to the state and can use violence to significantly undermine state power and advance insurgent political and military objectives. As a result, their capacity should be carefully considered and evaluated.

Finally, organizations in the third stage are transitioning from fighting to governing in the post-

5. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*: 145-53.

conflict environment. A key takeaway from the dissertation is that the skills and institutions developed to *fight* well are not the same as those needed to *govern* well. As new research shows, fighting capacity does not appear to be directly linked with governing capacity.⁶ Nonetheless, in carefully examining the formal tools that organizations use to build and leverage informal ties in creating military capacity, the dissertation points to how some militant organizations might be better prepared to govern than others. For example, the Việt Minh and PLAF followed very different strategies in building strong primary groups than did AQI and IS. In particular, AQI and IS did not try to create a broad population that shared their worldview, instead they only indoctrinate their members in an inward-facing manner. By contrast, the Việt Minh and PLAF tried to create broad social ties re-shaping the entire Vietnamese population through a vast political and governance infrastructure meant to respond to citizens' needs. Thus, though both sets of groups created strong primary groups and thus had the foundation to fight with high levels of effectiveness, the Việt Minh and PLAF were far better prepared to govern.

8.4.2 Civil-Military Relations and Internal Politics

The complex developmental patterns and challenges faced by insurgent groups highlight the importance of more carefully considering the relationships between political and military leaders. With respect to conventional militaries, Talmadge finds that the Huntingtonian notion of wholly “insulating” the military from political leaders is rare. Instead, civil-military relations are driven by the type of influence political leaders choose to exert.⁷ This reality is even more apt in the study of insurgent groups as politics and force are intimately connected in civil war.

While some organizations such as Jaysh al-Mahdi clearly merged political and military decision-

6. See, for example, Sarah Zukerman Daly, *Explaining the Success of Rebel and Militia Successor Parties*, Working Paper (Notre Dame, 2016).

7. Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*.

making, others such as the PLAF and AQI had identifiably separated hierarchies for making political and military decisions. Why was this the case? Did leaders such as Sadr fear losing control of the movement? In either case, the balance between political and military leaders matters. For example, as noted in the discussion of the Tet Offensive during the Second Indochina War, there were perhaps political reasons that led North Vietnamese leaders to launch the assault even though the PLAF Main Force was clearly not up to the fight.

Simple distinctions such as the number of factions an organization has or the stated cause of the organization do not capture the complex relationships between political and military leaders. As the dissertation shows, nearly all organizations have many factions. The impact of such factional differences is mitigated by how the organization's institutions regulate those disagreements. Similarly, organizations advocating similar causes can be organized in vastly different ways. While the Việt Minh and QDD Front both put forward nationalist messages, the Việt Minh had a well-developed political leadership that guided military decision-making, while the QDD Front had no such breakdown of responsibilities. Thus, more detailed research into the civil-military relations of insurgent groups will shed significant light on the decision-making and internal dynamics of these groups, particularly as they transition from simply "surviving" to thriving as strong military actors.

8.4.3 Insurgent Strategy Development

Perhaps one of the key questions that a deeper assessment of insurgent civil-military relations can answer is: What determines why insurgents select and change their strategies? While the dissertation makes clear that existing structural factors are poor predictors of the pathways that insurgents choose, future research should focus on internal dynamics to explain strategy selection. Capabilities serve as a necessary part of strategy selection—insurgents without a coherent military structure

cannot employ complex guerrilla or conventional tactics—but choices about the type of strategy used and the sequencing of that strategy must still be carefully studied.

For example, an important contribution of the dissertation is being able to differentiate whether certain behaviors are driven by a lack of capacity or by a strategic choice. The dissertation's focus on capabilities allows us to better understand if insurgent groups are targeting civilians because fighters are out of control, or whether they are using such violence in response to orders from the leadership. Within the latter, what is the decision-making process that convinces leaders to use violence in a brutal fashion despite the risk of losing public support?

There are clear differences in preferences about the types of tactics both between organizations *and* within them. While IS and the PLAF both had significant military capacity and could control how their fighters used violence, IS has engaged in a particularly horrific campaign in Iraq and Syria. Why do some organizations choose to be so violent? Why do “hawks” sometimes win out in internal disputes? Like in the study of state decision-making in war, there is much to be gained by explicitly evaluating how civil-military relations within insurgent organizations contribute to the formulation of strategy.

8.4.4 Institution-building beyond Civil War

Beyond the study of civil war, the theory and approach also contribute to broader discussions about institution-building in comparative politics.⁸ While a growing literature has focused on the role of informal structures in organizations and state bureaucracies, there are few carefully studied mechanisms explaining the effect of these informal structures. The dissertation helps to delimit the po-

8. For example, see, Steven R. Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “Beyond Patronage: Violent Struggle, Ruling Party Cohesion, and Authoritarian Durability,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 4 (2012): 869–889; Lily L. Tsai, *Accountability Without Democracy: Solidary Groups and Public Goods Provision in Rural China* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, “Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda,” *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 04 (2004): 725–740.

tential role of informal structures while also contributing specific mechanisms and general pathways about how informal structures interact with formal organizations. To begin with, as the theory makes clear, informal structures will not benefit organizations if they do not explicitly leverage them. What is more, they can be counterproductive. As a result, state institutions cannot simply subsume ethnic or religious groups and expect the ties between these individuals to support the task of an organization, whether it be policing or collecting taxes.

The dissertation shows that these social ties can be leveraged to different degrees. While providing resources or key staples may get organizations some degree of support, this manner of linking a formal organization with informal groups will be insufficient in getting members to fully devote their normative infrastructure to support an institution. Instead, organizations or bureaucracies are more likely to get the strong support of informal structures when they position key mid-level leaders to serve as focal points, linked both to the organization and the informal group.

In either case, the dissertation makes clear that informal groups, no matter how strong, cannot substitute for technical know-how. For organizations to be effective, they must complement informal ties with skills and formal tools that help people to do their jobs better. Thus, the training and tools must be task-specific. Just as the technical skills needed to fight well do not position organizations to govern well, effectively collecting taxes or administering an internal police force also require specialized sets of capacities.

8.5 Challenges and Unanswered Questions

While the dissertation makes theoretical and empirical progress, it leaves some questions unanswered and also points to additional avenues of research. In the following section, I walk through the elements of the cases the theory does not succeed in fully explaining while discussing the ques-

tions it does not address in an entirely satisfying manner.

By focusing on how leaders can tie individuals to the organization via a cadre system, resource control, and embeddedness, the dissertation downplays the role that coercion can play in creating successful outcomes. Instead, the theory highlights that heavy-handed punishments are very difficult for insurgents to carry out as these organizations tend to have fewer resources to monitor behavior than do bureaucracies in state militaries or authoritarian regimes that rely extensive punishment schemes. The dissertation also points out that coercion can also have negative effects on morale.

But, at times heavy-handed discipline simply works. This was the case with Hòa Hảo faction led by Ba Cụt during the First Indochina War. He was able to control his fighters with intense pressure, avoiding the trends that weakened other Hòa Hảo factions. Similarly, there is no doubt that both the Việt Minh and PLAF used threats to coerce some behavior. More importantly, as IS has lost ground in 2016, it has turned to increasingly harsh repression of its members. While none of these organizations used harsh disciplinary procedures to achieve high levels of capacity, this potential pathway points to a place where the theory falls short.

Thus, future work needs to investigate the conditions under which nascent forces are able to devote resources to this type of coercive control without significantly limiting their development. What organizational tools do they deploy to retain strong monitoring of their soldiers? For Ba Cụt, he was able to use this approach as he had a quite small force, so perhaps this demonstrates advantages to limited or slow growth. On the other hand, perhaps this coercive approach better prepares organizations to maintain order and govern post-conflict because it is unlikely that people who fought against the organization during conflict will be strong supporters of a government led by that same organization. There is some evidence that this was the case for the Chinese and Soviet

regimes.⁹

Another challenge for the theory is that some organizations do not perform up to the level of capacity that is expected. JRTN did not operate at the level of capacity the theory expected. On a smaller scale, for periods AQI and Nguyễn Giác Ngộ's Hòa Hảo forces did not as well. Thus, while the theory speaks to what organizations *should* be capable of, it does not speak to whether organizations actually act that way. This is a concern for the theory in that it is difficult to assess if these organizations did not behave as expected because they could not, or if they chose not to for other, strategy-based reasons.

That said, it is surprising how many organizations seemed “optimized,” in that they had the capacity they choose to use. In this context, while the dissertation demonstrates that there are no consistent causal stories linking external characteristics of organizations or insurgent leaders to the way in which those organizations develop, the question remains: why do some leaders “get it” while others do not? Though there are many contingencies that lead some leaders that “get it” to fail and others to succeed, future research should better map out the decision-making process of leaders, particularly as they interact with organizational dynamics. As discussed above, a major piece of resolving this puzzle may come from unpacking the civil-military relations of insurgent groups.

The question of why some insurgent organizations develop the way they do leads to another important challenge for the dissertation. While the research design allows the dissertation to rule out alternative explanations based on structural factors alone, there are interactions between these factors and conflict dynamics that no doubt influence organizational development. For example, the cases do not address why the Việt Minh sought to destroy the QDD Front so aggressively and why it was more threatened by competition from this group than the QDD Front was of it. Similarly,

9. Levitsky and Way, “Beyond Patronage.”

the ideology of the Iraqi Sunni tribes clearly limited the reach of the Sons of Iraq program and the Anbar Awakening: these individuals and tribal leaders did not want to serve far from home. Why was the threat from AQI and the Shiite resistance sufficient to motivate these tribal leaders and their followers to take back their communities, but not to take back broader portions of Iraq? Further research needs to more closely focus on the interaction between conflict dynamics and organizational properties to address why modify their particular strategies during the course of a conflict.

Finally, the concepts in the dissertation can be further solidified and tested across a wider-range of ideologies and geographic conditions. It can be difficult to clearly measure resource control as the resources that are critical can vary in different conflict zones. While the key resources in Iraq and Vietnam seemed straightforward, perhaps this is less clear in other areas. Similarly, the cases in Iraq and Vietnam, though providing significant variation, still involved wars that were at least in part supported by foreign occupiers and were influenced by significant global and regional dynamics. Future work should test the theory more precisely in other conflict zones *and* build on the organizational-focus herein to generate large-N datasets with more fine-grained organizational data.

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