

*A government's clear political aim makes countering propaganda easier, thereby reducing VEO activity.*

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119

### General Description of the Literature:

Insurgencies are inherently political by nature as insurgents want to impose their political goals on a society or culture (Mumford 2008). Counterinsurgencies are also political in response because they are trying to reassert their authority against the insurgents (Mumford 2008). Therefore, COIN is highly politicized (Mumford 2008, 6). Insurgencies use propaganda to win the hearts and minds of the population into meeting their objective goal. Cali and Romanych (2005) claim that in order to successfully counter propaganda, the counterinsurgents must thoroughly understand the environment, and be able to recognize the propaganda being used by the VEOs since propaganda tend to be rather subtle and nuanced. They also argue that in order for the counterpropaganda efforts against the VEOs to be successful, the government must determine the appropriate counter measures as well as the possible effects of those measures and predict the opponent's response. Cali and Romanych (2005) agree that counterpropaganda efforts are a long-term measure, and should take the form of an objective or a goal. Thompson (1974) agrees with this claim as well and introduces the five basic principles of counterinsurgency, in which the first principle states that when dealing with an insurgency, the government must have a clear political aim. The government's political aim must be tailored to the unique circumstances of the insurgency and the aim must be direct, future oriented and linked to the long term objective of a lasting and enduring peace (Rigden 2008). The political aim must also be shared with "those that form the backbone of the country," also known as the civilian population, whom the government must eventually win over with their political aim and plan (Bailey 2010, 13). Beckett (2005) claims that the essentials of counterinsurgency have remained the same since 1945, and although Beckett does not use the actual phrase political aim in relation to the success of a counterinsurgency, he does list some basic requirements for counterinsurgency success that brings support to the political aim argument. These requirements include "need for coordination of intelligence... need to implement long-term reform to address the grievances that led to support for the insurgency... need for appropriate use of military force" (Beckett 2005, 15). From the list of the requirements, one can conclude that clear coordination, and long-term planning can lead to successful counterinsurgency efforts, and that these requirements are more easily met when the government has a clear political aim. Mumford (2008) criticizes Thompson's political aim argument by stating that even if the political aim of the government is clear, it may not be conducive to what the population truly desires, and the latter is what essentially leads to success in counterinsurgency efforts. If the civilian population believes that the government's political aim has a negative influence on the people's interests, they would be less likely to cooperate and counterinsurgency efforts may not be as successful (Lebovic 2010). Mumford (2008) argues that a further caveat to Thompson's political aim argument is that even if there is a clear political aim, the political ends must possess realistic political means. There must be an even distribution between the government's political strategic goals and strategic capabilities (Mumford 2008). The case in Iraq that is mentioned in the empirical section below is an example of a failure due to the disjunction between the political means and ends.

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### Detailed Analyses

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**Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence:** Beckett (2005) argues that his list of requirements contributed to the success of several insurgencies, and that the absence of these requirements led to the failure of certain insurgencies. Beckett (2005) shows that in places where these requirements were not adhered to, (Palestine, Aden and Algeria) the counterinsurgency efforts failed. In Palestine, Aden, and Algeria, the political response to the insurgency was weak and labor governments were not prepared to make long-term commitments towards establishing a clear goal of defeating the insurgency (Beckett 2005). The government lacked a political aim and did not set any long-term goals. Beckett (2005, 16) shows, however, that in Oman, Malaya, and Kenya, where "political response was a measured one with clear political objectives articulated for the population, with real incentives," counterinsurgency efforts were successful. Rigden (2008) writes about another successful counterinsurgency case in Dhofar (Oman) where a plan was formulated to bring economic security to the region. The plan was clear, concise, and reflected an excellent understanding of what the people in Dhofar desired. It was "unambiguous to all audiences-local, international, and domestic (Rigden 2008, 22)." Mumford (2008) writes that when assessing the post-Saddam political structure, the Bush administration failed to maintain a permanent focus on the long-term vision of the ends and means. Thompson (2008) highlights this failure by mentioning that the post-Saddam Iraq failed to achieve a long-term aim, which left the Iraqi government in a vulnerable position forced to adopt short-term "ad-hoc measures" as a method of combating insurgent activity. The previous cases mentioned have all been supportive of Thompson's claim that having a clear political aim will enhance the possibility of a successful counterinsurgency.

Mumford (2008) argues, however, that having a clear political aim is not enough to guarantee a counterinsurgency. The political ends of the government must be equal to the political means in order to ensure success. Mumford (2008, 9) mentions the Iraqi case, in which he claims there was "severe disjuncture between political strategic goals and strategic capabilities." The Bush administration was debating between the decision to hand over power to the Iraqi government immediately or retain some control over the country. Eventually this indecisiveness led to the simultaneous pursuit of both agendas, which created an imbalance between the political means and ends. This imbalance eventually resulted in the Iraqi government caving under the pressure wrought by rebuilding the nation's infrastructure while still trying to control the insurgency within their borders (Mumford 2008). Garfield (2007) argues that counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq failed because the coalition mishandled its operations, and did not have the most effective methods to counter the VEO's propaganda. Garfield (2007) argues that the coalition forces did not have a clear plan about how to monitor the VEO's activity and intent and as a result the VEOs took advantage of the coalition's shortcoming. The VEOs shifted the blame away from themselves and convinced the population that violence is the most effective way of achieving change (Garfield 2007). Cali and Romanych (p. 12) argue that an "effective counterpropaganda effort selects the appropriate assets...and determines how these assets can be employed to match or overmatch the effects of opponent propaganda". There is enough empirical case evidence and support for the hypothesis within the literature. In a few cases discussed above, the government's ability to formulate a clear political aim has been shown to increase the likelihood of a successful counterinsurgency. The literature also extends the political aim argument to include the hypothetical statement "political ends and means" as argued by Mumford (2008), where he states that just a clear political aim is not enough and that there are other influencing factors such as government capabilities, that can change the outcome. Overall, there seems to be adequate support for the claim that a clear political aim can deflect VEO propaganda thereby reducing VEO successes.

**Empirical Support Score: 1 = Anecdotal support only for the hypothesis**



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**Applicability to Influencing VEOs:** These studies were performed on VEOs and the findings are, therefore, directly applicable to government efforts to influence VEOs.

**Applicability Score:** Direct: At least some of the empirical results directly concern the context of influencing VEOs.

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