**INSURGENCY AND COUNTER-INSURGENCY (IRD 214)**

COURSE ASSIGNMENT

**Research Question:** Discuss the stages of an Insurgency.

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**INTRODUCTION**

An insurgency is basically, a violent, rebellious movement against constituted authority. In its more widely applicable sense, it is a politicized, armed, unconventional and protracted tussle with a government due to a plethora of partisan, social, economic or even cultural issues e.g. the control of resources, political power, inequality or even religion.

Existing from a long antiquity of political grievances and ideals challenging an established order, they primarily aim to destroy, reform or sustain the legitimacy of the government in a society through propaganda, organizational proficiency, terror or even crippling international support for the government in their bull’s eye. It is noteworthy to point out that, they do all this while working to be in sync with popular support, which is a lifeline of theirs.

In view of the order of business, I begin with saying, before Boko Haram became the phenomenon it is in Nigeria today, its creation was based on harnessing the discontent of a particular group of people towards Westernization, till it gradually morphed into a more complex, organized and vehement insurgency over the years. Like Boko Haram did, every insurgency goes through certain phases/stages as they carry out their objectives. This paper aims to delineate that as well as feasible.

**STAGES OF AN INSURGENCY**

According to the works of experts such as Mao Zedong, the U.S Military and the Federation of American Scientists, despite the underlying exclusivities or whether they are efficacious or not, insurgencies have common mountains to climb in the pursuit of their interest(s). However, due to a culmination of many factors, these stages are not universally undergone in the same manner, as there is no conclusive path all insurgencies pave for themselves. Meaning that some avert, stay stagnant, die out, or even revisit these stages.

Firstly, in the preparatory stage which is often goes unnoticed, an insurgency lays the foundation for all its endeavors. Insurgencies start by seeking out support from people, which they could do by employing the use of a foregoing social, economic, as well as political condition(s) that could bolster that cause. Then, a grievance or complaint of this group of people is pointed out and a form of propaganda begins to be spread to the public. After that, in order to establish a clear opposition to the given authority, the insurgents create a sort of group identity, which might take a religious, political, tribal or ethnic form. They then continue their recruitment, possibly with training set-ups now established for their members. At this stage that they are potentially weak, so the presiding authority most likely ignores this rising movement, giving them more time to organize and strike harder. However, if the government addresses them at this stage, their survivability chances become very slim (*U.S Government*,2012).

The second stage is the initial struggle stage, where all the ‘action’ stems from. In this stage, insurgents initiate a series of ‘hit-and run’ bouts to stir up the government’s overreaction, publicize its cause and display its potency. By this stage, a solid leadership as well as insurgency logistics would have been taken care of. Also, insurgents may/may not have experienced frictions within themselves or external allies that could threaten the whole organization. For example, how Osama Bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, according to historical accounts on ISIS, were diverged on some ideas, which led to the split between ISIS and Al-Qaeda (*The Atlantic*,2019).

Again, the leadership of the government is also tested because the steps the taken in this stage are really instrumental to determining if this movement turns into a full-blown insurgency. So, there’s two sides of the coin, counter-insurgency or not. Many insurgencies have been stopped at this stage, like the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) in Djoubiti, which was crushed in a couple of months.

The third probable stage is full-blown insurgency, which is when the insurgency has started achieving its aim of seizing, nullifying or challenging the political power of a state. More so, the insurgents have transcended into a more multifaceted, powerful form with more vicious attacks orchestrated. At this point, the insurgencies might have even set up international support for themselves, which could help to boost their ‘legitimacy’, improve their political and military operations and overall, their tenacity. Full-scale terrorism, ambushes, guerilla combat and warfare tactics also set in. A clear example of this is the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, all this remains asymmetrical, as the insurgents are not capable of wearing out state power in the event of head-to-head war.

Also, the insurgents might move from political subversion to political substitution. Here, a ‘Deep State’ within a set territory is created that imitates the administrative structures and functions of a government. This ‘government’ might take care of people in need, provide some amenities for them and saddle other social and administrative responsibilities in all in a bit to gain sympathizers and popular support. To cite an example, the activities of the Polisario Front in Western Saharan region are in this likeness, a legitimized ‘shadow government’ that even has United Nations’ recognition (*Britannica,*2020).

The last stage is where a conclusion is reached, either through government or insurgent victory or a comprise agreement. To reiterate, not every insurgency makes it up to this stage. Some get stomped at earlier phases, some are stuck in particular stages for ages and some regress as the case may be. Averagely, most of these conflicts actually lead to a government victory, with the loss of the insurgencies’ popular support, military capabilities and other factors that keep them going. Though the evidences do not come abruptly, crime rate and violence in such setting will drop, many of these criminals might have been killed or captured, commercial activities will begin running smoothly, and many other signs as the case may be.

If it is an insurgent victory, the signs are evident with either a complete overthrow of the government, the expelling of foreign occupiers, a social, economic or political revolution or a total of a secession of a particular region e.g. the ETA’s secession of the Basque region in Spain.

Finally, if a compromise is reached by the government and the insurgents, this settlement could be a ruse, a re-deployment tactic or a disuniting factor for sub-groups of insurgencies or government officials. However, if there appears to be a restraint of insurgent goals, pressures from external allies, a military stalemate or a respectable and solid government leadership willing to negotiate, then such agreement has a good basis to stand. A case in point would be the establishment of a successful cease-fire agreement in 2001 between the government of Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) insurgency they had fought for years (*Steinberg*,2009).

**CONCLUSION**

This paper addresses the stages of insurgency in a wide spectrum, in order to better understand the idea of this element of statehood. It is then safe to say that although history is replete with various forms of this fight against government, many of them follow the above-mentioned phases either in totality, partly or a combination of both. However, it is worthy of note that these postulations are mainly frameworks in theory and there is enormously more to uncover when dealing with insurgents practically.

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