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Tactics Employed in Counter-Insurgency Operations

An insurgency is a rebellion against an authority. It can be described as a power struggle between the insurgents/rebels against the ruling authority, such as the government. This is the process of the insurgents attempting to overthrow the government through the means of political gain. An example of an insurgency is the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

An insurgency is more than often fought with unconventional warfare. In the perspective of the insurgent’s, it is best avoiding the strength of higher power, such as government forces. This is simply due to the fact that insurgent groups in most cases are not well equipped and organized as the government forces. An effective method for insurgents is to attack or exploit a perceived opposition when vulnerable. This includes terrorist attacks, assassinations, kidnappings, abductions, and more displays of intimidation.

Insurgency is mostly classified as an intra-state conflict, as it is the rebels/insurgents that are seeking to overthrow the ruling government. However, in some cases insurgency can extend out of a country’s borders. This is mostly due to insurgent groups having some sort of external support from other insurgent groups, countries, and organizations. Therefore, insurgency is also an inter-state conflict, since insurgent groups carry out their operations in other countries. As a result, insurgency can cross multiple borders.

Counter-Insurgency is basically the opposite of insurgency. It is defined by the United States Department of State as “comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to simultaneously defeat or contain insurgency and address its root cause”. As insurgency is mostly fought with unconventional warfare, counter-insurgency is mostly fought using conventional warfare, since it is often government forces that carry out counter-insurgency operations. In the fight against insurgency, there are numerous tactics that can be deployed to defeat insurgents. These include; targeting leaders of insurgent groups, addressing the political problem, infiltrating insurgents, and building up and reinforcing counter-insurgency. Other more specific ways of tackling insurgency include diplomacy, surveillance, observation, and ultimately declaring war.

Diplomacy: Using diplomacy with insurgent groups/leaders is a way for government officials to discuss and negotiate terms with the rebel groups. This is a peaceful way for the government to understand the cause of the insurgency and identify ways of solving the problem.

Surveillance: This is a way of watching and observing the underground activities of insurgent groups. This is a critical method of acquiring intelligence from the insurgent groups.

Observation: Just like surveillance, it is more of tracking down the insurgent operations. This include things such as locating their bank accounts being us for business transactions (buying weapons, buying vehicles, external funding etc.) or observing routes and ways in which they smuggle in weapons, money, or vehicles.

Declaring War: This method is the most effective counter-insurgency tactic. Depending on the strength of government forces, if the government’s military force is superior to that of the insurgent groups, then they can crush the resistance. However, if the government forces are equally matched or inferior to the rebel group, then external intervention would be needed, either from other countries or organizations.

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