

# [What factors contribute to insurgency group success against a state actor?](https://assignbuster.com/what-factors-contribute-to-insurgency-group-success-against-a-state-actor/)

Research Question

My research question comes from week 6: The Culture of Insurgencies. If approved, the question that I would like to answer to satisfy the course requirement is “ What factors most contribute to an insurgency groups success against a state actor? “  My introduction to the topic will be to define the difference between an insurgency and a terrorist group.  Many generalists confuse the definition of the two and what their objectives, motives and desired end states are.  An insurgency is “ an active revolt or uprising against a government that is less than an organized revolution and is not recognized as belligerency .”[1]Terrorism is the “ the systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion. [2]Terrorism is better described defined as the illegal use of violence and coercion against civilians, security, and the government or authoritative governing power to achieve a political goal.

After ensuring the reader has an understanding of a true insurgency, I would like to explore various historical case studies, going back to the American Revolution, Israeli Conflict with Great Britain in the Gaza Strip and the Taliban shows examples of successful insurgencies, explain why and how the succeeded and if they received any support from other state actors which aided in their success.  As a counterargument, or alternative analysis, I will pick one or two case studies of unsuccessful insurgencies and explain why they failed and what they could have possibly done different to be successful.

My hypothesis is that assistance from other state actors who back a suppressive insurgent group, or who have a common enemy with the insurgent so they may provide them with a safehaven, military weapons, training and funding to aid the group in their armed struggle.  This is likely to help the insurgent remove the current authoritative government and establish a democracy, that would be favorable or amendable to the state that provided assistance to the insurgents.  In addition, the ability to win over the population through either humanitarian assistance or promise of certain rights in which the majority of the population believes are missing, is another major component as to why some insurgency groups are often successful.

Thesis

Many members of insurgency groups have experienced one or more of the following: harsh mistreatment, lack social necessities, repression, discrimination and violence from the ruling party. These experiences contribute to their desire to retaliate against the legitimate government or authoritative governing power.  In the event that violence from the perceived oppressor results in civilian casualties, others often feel be a sense of responsibility to join the insurgency for retribution or for protection of the community.[3]

Throughout history there are several examples of how insurgent groups were able to topple a government and be successful in their rebellion.  This paper will discuss the factors of how these insurgent groups were able to succeed in their desire to overthrow and reach their objectives and will also examine the factors of why some insurgent groups failed.  Insurgency and terrorism are not synonymous, they are actually very different in their tactics, target selection and desired end state.  An insurgency is “ an active revolt or uprising against a government that is less than an organized revolution and is not recognized as belligerency” , according to the Merriam Webster online dictionary.[4]Terrorism is the “ the systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion” , according to the same source.[5]Terrorism can be more clearly defined as “ the unlawful use of violence and intimidation against civilians, security and government targets in the pursuit of political aims against a legitimate government or authoritative governing power.

Literature Review

During a general search the following are six sources of many that I likely will use for my paper.  Following are the six sources that I will heavily rely on for my research and a literature review of each product.  (1) Why Terrorism Fails While Insurgencies Can Sometimes Succeed, Sunil Dasgupta, Friday, January 4, 2002, https://www. brookings. edu/opinions/why-terrorism-fails-while-insurgencies-can-sometimes-succeed/.  (2) Network structure of insurgent groups and the success of DDR processes in Colombia; ErnestoCardenas, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch & Luis Carlos Guevara; 10 Aug 2018; https://doi. org/10. 1080/09592318. 2018. 1488416.  (3) “ The Importance of Winning: Victorious Insurgent Groups and Authoritarian Politics.” Terrence Lyons, Comparative Politics , vol. 48, no. 2, 2016, pp. 167–184, www. jstor. org/stable/24886171.  (4) The social structure of armed groups. Reproduction and change during and after conflict, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 29: 4, 607-628, Daniel Bultmann (2018).  (5) Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies . Paul, Christopher, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, and Molly Dunigan, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013. https://www. rand. org/pubs/research\_reports/RR291z2. html.  (6) David Cesarani, “ The War on Terror That Failed: British Counter-Insurgency in Palestine 1945–1947 and the ‘ Farran Affair,’” Small Wars and Insurgencies, Vol. 23, Nos. 4–5, October–December 2012

Sunsil Dasgupta is a professor for the University of Maryland and has written numerous articles on insurgency and terrorism for the Brookings Institute focused on security, military organization and insurgency. Why Terrorism Fails While Insurgencies Can Sometimes Succeed by Sunil Dasgupta define the difference between an insurgent group and a terrorist group and distinguishes the method on how they conduct attacks, target selection and why targeting the population is against achieving their goals, while terrorist groups decide that targeting a civilian population is aligned with achieving their desired end state. Network structure of insurgent groups and the success of DDR processes in Colombia by Ernesto Cardenas, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch & Luis Carlos Guevara discusses the theory of insurgency networks and its structure.  Although my paper will not focus on insurgent groups in Latin America, the information provided gives a detailed overview of the organizational structure that almost all successful insurgent groups are modeled after. The Importance of Winning: Victorious Insurgent Groups and Authoritarian Politics by Terrence Lyons provides an overview of authoritarian regimes and the roles they have in a political and electoral process and the demands of rebellions and insight into the failed insurgency attempts in Africa.

The social structure of armed groups. Reproduction and change during and after conflict, Small Wars & Insurgencies by Daniel Bultmann explains the social structure of insurgencies from its inception, to how it operates during different stages of the conflict and the structure of a successful insurgent group post-conflict. Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies by Paul, Christopher, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, and Molly Dunigan gives an historical overview of over 40 insurgencies post the Cold War and the COIN (counterinsurgency) model. The War on Terror That Failed: British Counter-Insurgency in Palestine 1945–1947 and the ‘ Farran Affair,’” Small Wars and Insurgencies by David Cesarani examines the unique case study of a group of Jewish insurgents that eventually formed into one coalition modeled insurgency group in the Gaza Strip to target British security and military forces in the area because they perceived that Britain did not protect the interests of Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Argument and Counterargument

Insurgencies differs significantly from terrorism because of its selective nature to use of violence targeting civilians or political or supportive groups that do not adapt politically with the desires of the insurgents, rebels or the government that is in power.  Normally, insurgent groups conduct their first attacks against the ruling government, government supporters and agents within the contested region.  The government in power is selective in targeting insurgent groups and supporters of the rebellion and is likely projected to appear more “ terroristic” focused and directed.  The government uses intelligence collection and political and military mobilization, the government when responding to insurgent group activities and to counter the threat.[6]

Insurgencies can be successful for many reasons.  In this paper I will touch on a few factors that supports my assessment on why certain groups are effective in their rebellion.  Successful insurgencies almost certainly receive assistance from other state actors and some non-state actors that either support of a suppressive insurgent group’s objectives or share a common adversary with the group.  State actors that support insurgent groups often provide the insurgent groups with safehaven, smuggling routes, operational and tactical training, military grade weapons and funding.  Although generous and charitable, the aid provided does not come without a price or underlying goal of gaining influence with the new post-conflict government formed by the insurgency group.  State actors and non-state actors might provide aid to the insurgent group to assist the insurgent group in removing the current authoritative government and establish a democracy or remove a democratic and Western-friendly government.  Their ends state is to place a favorable or amendable government to support its national goals.

The hierarchal structure of insurgent groups influences the prospects for success.  A more unified and close-knit network with a higher level of command and control on its armed forces increases the probability of victory.  An armed insurgent force that is grouped in smaller and more isolated components will have a higher probability of success, according to Cardenas, Gleditsch and Guevara.[7]Their assessment is founded on the significance that the network plays an important role for the risk of conflict repetition, success in conducting operations, and dealing with public perception to achieve its goals.[8]

An insurgency is designed to create public support for the rebellious movement and permit the creation of a trained armed force to eventually defeat the legitimate government, according to Mao Tse-tung.  Mao’s model on insurgency is made up of a three stage model: political preparation, limited attacks, and conventional war.[9]In an armed conflict, insurgents have shown extreme acts of hostility, violence and often a zero-sum political end state.  Insurgencies after the Cold War routinely proved to have the capability to manage a post-conflict state, according to researcher Terrance Lyons’ article on JSTOR.[10]

Mao’s model was driven by the conditions of China.  It was important to shift from guerrilla or unconventional/asymmetric warfare to regular or conventional warfare because Mao acknowledged that lesser methods of violence could not be decisive.[11]Insurgent groups used terror and guerilla warfare against government officials and security forces and supporters who rallied or protested with the population against the insurgency.  A main goal for a successful insurgency is to counterbalance the ruling party’s military and security forces to cause a strategic deadlock or stalemate in hopes of overthrowing the government or an intervention by a third party, usually another state actor, to force negotiations for peace and adherence to some legitimate and humane demands of the insurgent group.

The following two examples show successful insurgent groups in the United States and Palestine (The Gaza Strip and West Bank) and an account of how vastly different each insurgency was in their rebellion against the authoritative governing power.

Example 1: Insurgency During the American Revolution

In 1774 angered American from the thirteen colonies led an organized insurgency against Great Britain for independence.  Their first action was to boycott British products, which was voted on and passed by a committee of decisionmakers from the colonies, who would later spearhead the revolution.  These leaders employed own philosophies and ideology which led to the creation of the insurgency groups to challenge and resist Great Britain’s monarchy (government), treatment and taxing policies.[12]

The insurgency was a result of seeking independence from Great Britain after the Stamp Act.  The Stamp Act was a political move by Britain’s Parliament to tax the thirteen colonies.  The colonies accepted the tax, but were refused a proper governing body and representation.  The Americans began rioting, protesting and uprising because of the tax and the perception that they were not receiving fair treatment from Great Britain.  For seven years the American insurgents fought a aggressive unlimited war.  In the end, the insurgent groups who were smaller in number, weapons and capabilities defeated the super power and gained their independence with the assistance of state actor allies France and Spain.[13][14]

Great Britain had a rudimentary and straight forward strategy on how to suppress the American insurgents and rebellion when they invaded the thirteen colonies.  Great Britain made the fatal assumption that as a superior state actor with a greater ground and naval force and some faithful colonist, that the suppression would be quick with little casualties of British forces.[15]

This example supports some of the factors I provided earlier.  American insurgents won the war with the aid of state actor allies who shared a common enemy and also hoped their assistance would give them leverage in the newly formed post-conflict government.  The insurgents used the support of the population, in which they had the majority in their favor, to gain freedom of movement, and were able to limit the volume credible and accurate HUMINT.

Example 2: Israeli Counterinsurgency Against the United Kingdom in Palestine

I selected this case study to support my thesis because of my work background and little has been discussed or taught on this specific insurgency.  This case study supports the war of liberation and specific targets attacking the adversary and avoiding harming or targeting the population.  The Israeli counterinsurgency against British forces in Palestine unique because unlike the American Revolution insurgency case study discussed earlier, this case has two combatants, British forces and Israeli insurgents from three independent insurgent groups, that eventually merged into one large insurgent group to eliminate British forces in the area while maintaining its own exclusive organizational independence to fight for territory that neither owned or fully occupied.  Over eight decades later, the conflict for the rights of ownership of Palestine, now referred to as the Gaza Strip, is still an ongoing fight between the current inhabitants of the Gaza Strip and West Bank (the Palestinians) and Israeli settlers.

In 1923, Britain passed a mandate to establish Palestine as the national home of the Israeli community.  Since then, several failed attempts by the Israeli’s to establish Palestine as its national home has led to civilian casualties, damage to multiple infrastructures, terrorism, assassinations, claims of inhumane treatment and a divide in the Middle East.

In 1944, three Palestine-based Israeli insurgent groups executed a revolt against the British mandate because they perceived it did not protect Israeli interests.  The three groups was comprised of the Haganah, Irgun and Lehi.  Haganah (“ Defense”), the largest and most prominent insurgent group views were closely aligned with the Socialist-Zionist views of the Jewish leadership in Palestine.  Haganah was splinter group from Haganah that formed right-wing pragmatic group called the Irgun (“ National Military Organization).  Lehi (“ Fighters for the Freedom of Israel”) was radical revisionist pragmatic that split from Haganah.[16]

Irgun and Lehi conducted a joint terror operation to remove the British mandatory government in Palestine which was motivated by the limitation on Jewish immigration into Palestine in early February of 1944.  In mid-October 1945, the three groups agreed to unite their organizations to create the Tenuat Hameri Ha’ivri (“ United Resistance Movement”).  The structure of the United Resistance Movement was comparable to how a coalition force operates.  Under this structure, all threes insurgent groups would maintain its organization structure and leadership.  The unified group would answer to a three-man high command representing each insurgent group to approve any proposed operations.[17]The creation of the unified insurgent group improved their tactics to carry out more violent attacks against British security forces and improved its propaganda and the morale of the Jewish-based population in Palestine.

In June 1946, the United Resistance Movement conducted a series of spectacular and increasingly violent attacks against British security forces in Palestine.  On June 29 th , Palestine-based British-based forces mobilized approximately 10, 000 troops and 7, 000 police officers for Operation Agatha in response to the increased violence and attacks by the United Resistance Movement.  Britain’s response unsuccessful response did not suppress the insurgent groups and failed to identify or neutralize any of the Jewish insurgent leaders or impact their weapon stockpile.[18][19]

Between the fall of 1946 to January 1947, there were about 600 British casualties in Palestine during the conflict.[20]On March 3, 1947, Pakistan-based British forces issued martial law in Tel Aviv and surrounding areas.  The martial law included curfews and passes that resulted in multiple arrests, restricted freedom of movements, regulation of publications.  Despite their best efforts, new intelligence was uncovered.  In Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the arrests temporarily disrupted the United Resistance Movement insurgency group operations, and a led to a decline in attacks.  By September 1947, the British had not suppressed the unified insurgent groups or captured insurgent commanders and leaders.  Great Britain decided to give up and announce their withdraw from Palestine.[21]

Example 3: The Taliban

The Taliban, which also refers to themselves as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, are a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist political movement and military organization in Afghanistan that is currently waging war within that country.  Between 1996 to 2001, the Talibancontrolled about three quarters of Afghanistan, and enforced a strict interpretation of (Islamic law known as Sharia. In 1994, the insurgency group emerged from the Afghan Civil War as one of the most prominent factions consisting of students from eastern and southern Afghanistan and also fought in the Soviet-Afghan War.[22][23]

In the infancy stages of the Taliban they were accepted by the Afghan population as an organization who would free them from corruption, constant in-fighting and brutality.  The Taliban was motivated by the suffering of the people and convinced the population under their leadership things would approve.  Taliban was gaining popularity and the trust of the people.[24][25]

In early November 1994, Kandahar City was conquered by the Taliban in a surprise attack.  By early January 1995 the Taliban controlled twelve provinces in Afghanistan, many without resistance from the population.[26]Finally seizing power in 1996, the Taliban was facing an Afghanistan with severely damaged infrastructures, poor economy, high infant mortality rate and lack of basic resources such as food, water and energy.[27]The international community and non-government organizations began to provide aid to Afghanistan.  They assisted in supplying food, reconstruction after a fierce twenty-year war and other social services.  However, the Taliban leadership began to become suspicious of the aid and by 1998 closed all non-government organization offices.  Following the removal, United Nation offices began to shut down.[28]

Following the September 11 attacks, former U. S. president George W. Bush announced before Congress that the Taliban were responsible for provide support to al-Qaeda and were under its influence.  This lead to a military campaign to overthrow the Taliban and for all states to “[increase] cooperation and full implementation of the relevant international conventions relating to terrorism” and specified consensus recommendations for all countries.” [29] The US. with the United Kingdom, Canada and NATO forces began targeting Taliban and al-Qaeda sites in October with goal of removing the Taliban from power.  By November 2001 the Taliban were severely defeated and degraded in their capabilities.  However, by June 2003, the group announced they had regrouped and were prepared to force U. S. and allied forces out of Afghanistan.[30]

In a US Time magazine article, in July 2016 the Taliban was estimated to control approximately 20% of Afghanistan with Helmand Province as their safehaven and stronghold.[31]Although beginning to defend the population from violence and corruption, the Taliban eventually evolved into that in which is claimed to defend and protect the population from.  Under the heavy handed rule of the Taliban, there were 15 massacres between 1996 and 2001, accusations by UN officials that the Taliban was denying the nearly 160, 000 Afghans of emergency food provided by the UN’s World Food Program for political reasons, killing civilians, detaining and arresting with just or probable cause and raping women.[32]The Taliban defended their actions based upon their harsh interpretation of Islamic law, which led to more than 5000 civilian’s dead, according to the UN.

Unlike the previous two examples of insurgency, the Taliban did seek the support and assistance from the population and received aid from state actor (Pakistan’s intelligence services).  However, as they began to grow in strength and popularity, the true intentions of the organization post-conflict were to establish a very harsh Sharia law upon the population and target the civilians and use brutality, violence and denial of resources and safety to force the population to succumb to their will and their rule.

Alternative Analysis

An alternative view of my analysis is that insurgencies are not successful against a legitimate government or authoritative governing power because they lack public support, appropriate funding and less capable than a fully trained state military with superior advanced weapons.  The perspective of the population, where compliance is demanded by the standing government, there is no guarantee against indiscriminate, random or targeted acts of violence from the insurgent group.  Out of fear, the repressed population chooses or is forced to obey the legitimate government or authoritative governing power in hopes that the government will be able to protect them from random attacks from insurgent groups.  With implied protection from the government, the civilian population would have a sense of security against the insurgents and legitimize actions of violence taken by their government.

A population that is supportive of the government places the insurgent group at a disadvantage because the population would not provide a safehaven, financial support, information or intelligence to the insurgent groups.  Instead the civilian population would be amendable to providing detailed intelligence on the group’s movements, numbers and actions to the government or authoritative governing power.  Support from the population greatly reduces the insurgent groups resources, ability to mobilize and conduct operations against the legitimate government or authoritative governing power.[33]

Conclusion

The three case studies show that when a state actor is threatened by an insurgency, it is not always certain that the state actor with the larger more organized, militarily superior force will have the victory in an armed conflict or crisis.  Factors that support an insurgency’s ability to win in an armed conflict or crisis over a state actor include support from a third party (state actor or prominent non-state actors), population support, and the organizational structure and command and control of the insurgent group.

If all of those factors are in place and in favor of the insurgent group, it becomes nearly impossible for a state actor to compete and persevere in an armed conflict or crisis.  Even if the insurgent group does not have all the major factors in its favor, the very existence of an insurgent group implies that the legitimate government or the authoritative ruling power does not have reliable intelligence and collection to restrict movement, supplies, funding and recruitment of the insurgent group.  As an end result the legitimate government or authoritative ruling power being challenged by the insurgent group likely will become disorganized, which increases the support and momentum of the insurgent group to continue or maintain operations until they achieve their desired end state.

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