

The Logic of Military Force

Policing and politics may be preferable against most terrorist groups. But military force may sometimes be more useful against large terrorist groups engaged in insurgencies. In Iraq, military force was helpful, at least temporarily, against AQI. But the U.S. military largely played a background role. AQI subverted many of the governing institutions, acquired lucrative taps into the local economy (notably oil distribution), and had started to impose its own version of shari'a law where it could. Nationwide, AQI made determined efforts to create a national front, with itself as the vanguard of the Sunni movement. This was done first in January 2006 with the formation of MSC and later in October 2006 with the formation of ISI. In that role, it assimilated several terrorist-insurgent groups, peeled off brigades from other insurgent groups, and pressured the rest to join ISI. Those who refused became targets of intimidation.

In essence, AQI pushed others to get on the bandwagon, with some success. The formation of Anbar Salvation Council was largely a backlash to the tactics and techniques used by AQI against those tribes and insurgent terrorist groups that refused to join its ranks. For several months, Anbar Salvation Council, under pressure from AQI, worked without apparent success. It took concerted effort over months to move tribe members into the local police forces, and many of the new Iraqi police were former insurgents themselves. By joining the local government, they deserted the insurgency.

To examine more systematically what works against terrorist groups that have graduated into becoming insurgencies, we constructed a list of 84 insurgent groups that were also terrorist groups and analyzed the results.⁵⁰ Terrorist groups that are involved in insurgencies differ sharply from other terrorist groups. Of these 84, only two were

⁵⁰ If an insurgent group used terror, we coded it as a terrorist group. Most terrorist groups, however, are not insurgent groups, because they are not powerful enough to take on a government's military forces and mount effective resistance. We used data from Fearon and Laitin's (2003) work on insurgencies and civil wars. The additional insurgencies were those that met the Fearon-Laitin criteria after 1999, the data cutoff point for their work.