

# GLOBAL INSURGENCY MYTH OR REALITY?

**T**he current global security situation appears to validate and vindicate the doctrinal assumptions of U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, that insurgencies will be the “new normal” mode of conflict in which the United States finds itself engaged around the world. In 2010, insurgencies abound and comprise the vast majority of the world’s conflicts. This is nothing new. In fact, the most recent data available on global conflict taken from the 2007 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Yearbook suggest that in 2006, there were 17 major armed conflicts taking place in 16 regions of the world. Not one of them was an interstate conflict.<sup>1</sup>

Despite nearly a year since the change in Presidential administration, a world rife with insurgencies is little different than it was at the height of what the Bush administration called the “global war on terror.” Iraq may be now stabilizing, but there remain regular incidents of insurgent violence directed at U.S. combat forces, the Iraqi government, and innocent civilians. Afghanistan continues to disintegrate and is the main effort for U.S. military operations. The administration of Barack Obama was on course to raise the number of troops from 38,000 to 68,000 by the end of 2009, and military commanders are on record asking for an additional 10,000 troops above that. As with Iraq, the situation in Afghanistan has all the hallmarks of a *national insurgency*, typically defined as “an organized movement aimed at overthrowing a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, General David Petraeus, commander of U.S. Central Command, has

noted as much in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee.<sup>3</sup>

Besides Iraq and Afghanistan, there are numerous incidences of local, regional, or national insurgencies. The Tamil Tigers and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, though weakened substantially in 2008, are still considered viable regional threats to the Sri Lankan and Philippine states, respectively. The government of Colombia and its various rebel groups have been fighting what amounts to a civil war for decades now, and Mexico appears headed down the same path with respect to what is being called a “narco-insurgency.”<sup>4</sup> Israel and the Palestinians have been engaged in one of the longest running conflicts, though whether the intifada represents a classic insurgency is a matter open to debate. Obviously, on the international stage, insurgent violence is more common than it is rare.

But do these local, regional, or national insurgencies, as captivating as they are, comprise a viable and unified *global* insurgency? At its heart, that is the question debated by the authors of the two following articles. On its face, the issue is deceptively simple. Unpacking it, however, reveals additional wrinkles that fundamentally challenge our understanding of insurgency and perhaps even the roots and characteristics of global conflict itself.

In addressing this question, each author examines the issue of the global insurgency from an epistemological point of view; in other words, how do we *know* that (or if) we are facing a global insurgency? What are our measurement and assessment criteria? Are they quantitative, so that we can call an insurgency global once we aggregate enough discrete incidents of local violence? Or is there a qualitative com-

monality among the disparate local, regional, and national insurgencies, some binding philosophy that makes the local examples really just fractal instances of the larger phenomenon?

The authors also examine the issue of the nature of the insurgency itself. If it is a global insurgency, is it founded on radical Islam, and focused on undermining the Western style of governance? Or is it a global insurgency because we *choose* to call it one? If so, is it in the best interests of U.S. national security that we have not seriously examined the philosophical differences and divergences among these insurgencies that are taking place far from each other in both time and space?

These questions, and others, are debated. While each author proposes his own solution to the question of whether a global insurgency exists, we leave it to the reader to draw conclusions. **JFQ**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Yearbook 2007, *Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), appendix 2A.

<sup>2</sup> Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, April 12, 2001, as amended through August 19, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> David H. Petraeus, testimony on United States Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, April 1, 2009, available at <<http://armed-services.senate.gov/Webcasts/2009/April/04-01-09Webcast.htm>>.

<sup>4</sup> Hal Brands, “Mexico’s Narco-Insurgency,” *World Politics Review*, December 22, 2008, available at <[www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article.aspx?id=3072](http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article.aspx?id=3072)>.