



Resistance Dynamics and Social Movement Theory: Conditions, Mechanisms, and Effects

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Introduction

Contemporary conflicts have become more transnational, protracted, irregular, and resistance-centric.¹ They can be best described as protracted internal conflicts with multiple state actors and non-state actors intervening much like the multidimensional hybrid operational environment discussed in Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) 2022.²

This article aims to explain how to harness the emerging strategic utility of non-state actors by utilizing well-established bodies of knowledge on resistance dynamics. This objective is based upon the observation that an increasing number of external state actors overtly or covertly intervene in intrastate conflicts by exploiting the environment's resistance potential in order to increase their respective strategic influence.³ Similarly, both internal and external non-state actors take advantage of interstate conflicts or political instability stemming from failing states. The current conflicts in Iraq and Syria certainly meet this characterization; as do those in Ukraine, Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia, Mali, and Libya. More state actors are supporting or sponsoring political movements in intrastate conflict, making the termination of fighting very difficult. For instance, the resilience of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is largely attributed to the protracted Syrian civil war in which regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey all sponsor local movements. In addition, external non-state actors such as ISIL, al-Nusra, and Hezbollah are also deeply involved in the conflict. In other words, these current conflicts represent a sample of a larger shift in warfare. As of this writing, Uppsala University's world conflict data program compiles 40 conflicts in the world for 2014. All but one of them are intrastate conflicts and 13 of them are internationalized.⁴ In short, state actors are actively leveraging and taking advantage of the resistance potential of groups engaged in civil conflicts.

Understanding Current Conflicts

The United States must adapt to this operational environment in order to help achieve national policy objectives. Key to this goal is a shared problem

¹ Glenn Johnson & Doowan Lee, "Revisiting the Social Movement Approach to Unconventional Warfare," *Small Wars Journal*, December, 2014.

² U.S. Army, *ARSOF 2022*, United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Fort Bragg, NC, 2013, 3.

³ Note that internal conflicts can be a civil war or an internal political confrontation or both.

⁴ <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/> accessed July 28, 2015.

identification that will lead to mitigation and reduction of the fog and friction inherent in a hybrid operational environment. Problem identification begins with understanding how external groups are leveraging and harnessing the resistance potential of organic movements toward their respective strategic interests. By understanding how resistance potential is shaped toward strategic objectives, we can also better determine how to replicate the best practices of supporting and sponsoring robust organic movements.

In order to fight successfully in this complex hybrid environment, a deep understanding of resistance dynamics is critical. Without understanding resistance dynamics, it becomes next to impossible to identify who is working with adversarial state actors and how their non-state surrogates gain political support against our own strategic interests. Our recent unsuccessful attempt at building a surrogate force in Syria is a good reminder of why it matters to harness the utility of organic resistance. Instead of building a sustainable movement with an armed wing, we thought a program designed to train and equip a few dozen commandos would suffice.⁵ This article intends to delineate the strategic dynamics of resistance and discuss the utility of resistance as a strategic tool.

The article begins with a discussion of how resistance is conceptualized in doctrinal and academic terms to distill the essential characteristics of the concept. Then I will highlight three aspects of resistance: antecedent conditions, mechanisms, and effects. I will identify what antecedent conditions facilitate resistance followed by a variety of mechanisms employed by movements to exploit the conditions. The discussion of mechanisms accompanies a description of the effects that can be expected when movements take advantage of these conditions. The article concludes with a discussion of some of the essential traits associated with effective resistance in highly repressive environments.

This article is mostly informed by social movement theory and collective action theory. Other disciplines also address resistance. However, political sociology offers the deepest insights into internationalized civil wars and resistance given its disciplinary focus on revolutionary, resistance, and insurgent dynamics. The article offers a broad overview of the multidisciplinary resistance literature as opposed to an in-depth case study of

⁵ For a good discussion on why the surrogate force was so ineffective, see David Maxwell, "Why the New Syrian Army Failed: Washington and Unconventional Warfare, *War on the Rock*: <http://warontherocks.com/2015/08/why-the-new-syrian-army-failed-washington-and-unconventional-warfare/> accessed on August 20, 2015.

a single resistance movement. The main purpose is to distill commonly established and empirically validated patterns and mechanisms of resistance. The terms “resistance” and “insurgency” interchangeably throughout. Given how extensively organic movements have been utilized by external actors, one’s resistance movement is frequently another’s insurgency.⁶ Pragmatism guides this article; it aims to learn the best practices from all forms of robust movements regardless of their political orientation.

What is a Resistance Movement?

In order to harness the utility of resistance, this article begins with some definitions, both doctrinal and academic. The Department of Defense defines a resistance movement as “an organized effort by some portion of the civil population of a country to resist the legally established government or an occupying power and to disrupt civil order and stability.”⁷ In political science or sociology, resistance is notoriously difficult to define due to its multidisciplinary nature. It can arguably range from armed guerillas to symbolic gestures depending on which academic discipline defines it.⁸ Because of this diversity, I use a broad academic definition of resistance in order to avoid a potential bias: “[collective and] active efforts to oppose, fight, and refuse to cooperate with or submit to ... abusive behavior and...control.”⁹ We can infer three shared characteristics from the definitions: organization, civilian components, and disruption or coercion against some authority. Unfortunately, these definitions offer little on how to recognize resistance potential and leverage it toward a strategic objective. This is where social movement theory can inform us of the *process* of resistance. Based on the political process model developed by Douglas McAdam, we can approach resistance from three different angles: antecedent conditions, mechanisms, and effects.¹⁰ This is a very useful way to think about resistance as the synthesis helps us understand what one should include to develop a

⁶ For a good large-N statistical analysis of external support for armed groups, see Zeec Maoz and Belgiin San-Akca, “Rivalry and State Support of Non-State Armed Groups (NAGs), 1947-2001, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 2012. One of their findings is that supporting only armed groups tends to prolong and complicate intrastate conflicts.

⁷ U.S. Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, November 2010 (as amended through 15 June 2015), p. 206.

⁸ For a detailed discussion how each discipline defines resistance, see Hollandder and Einonhner, “Conceptualizing Resistance” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 19, No. 4.

⁹ Profitt, 1996: 25 from Hollandder and Einonhner, “Conceptualizing Resistance” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 19, No. 4.

¹⁰ Douglas McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, University of Chicago Press, 1982.

resistance movement. That is, the United States should understand what conditions to factor in, what activities to support, and what effects can be expected toward the end-state.

Figure 1: Social Movement Approach to Resistance Dynamics

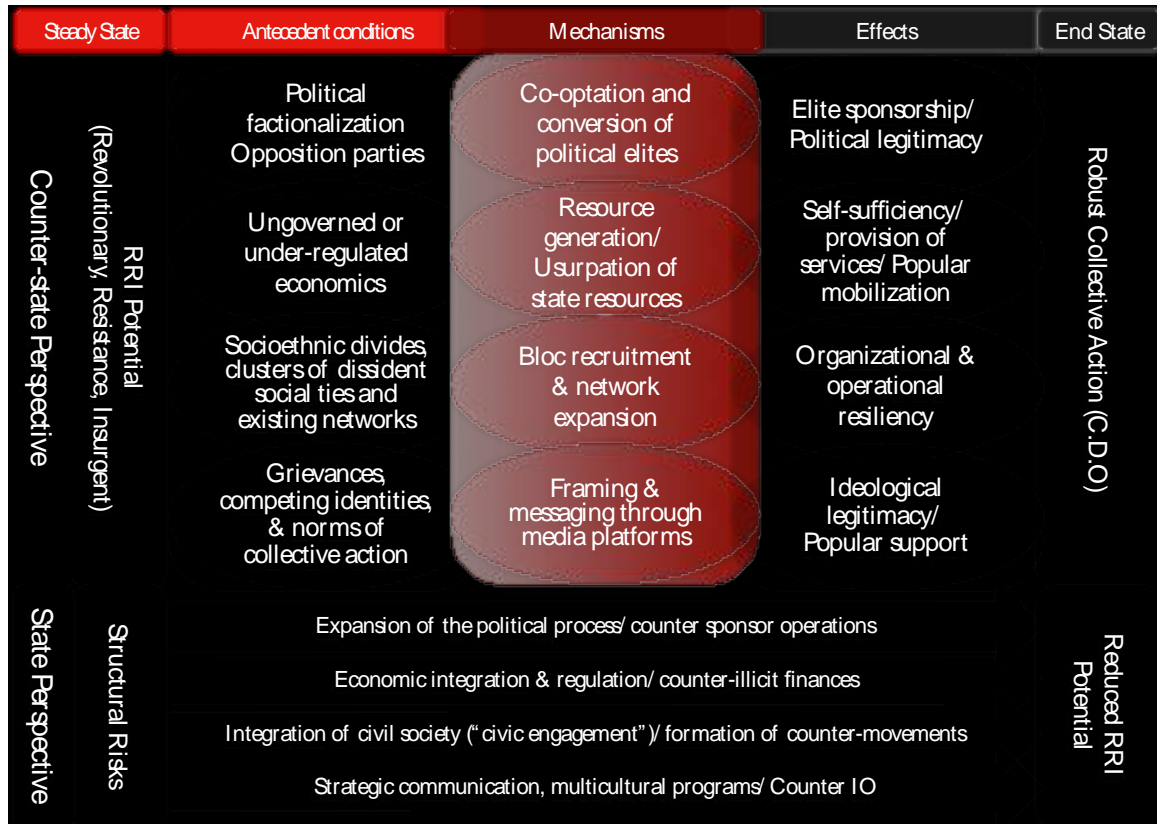


Figure 1 depicts typical processes in the development of resistance movements. They are organized in three categories: conditions, mechanisms, and effects. The utility of these categories is threefold. First, there is much confusion about what factors promote robust resistance, often conflating what is available in the environment with what activities should be emphasized. Second, little discussion exists on what effects external actors can facilitate with and through surrogate movements. Without understanding recurring links between conditions, mechanisms, and effects, it is almost impossible to confidently support resistance elements. Figure 1 clarifies some of the confusion and suggests what to look for, what to do, and what to achieve to support a robust resistance movement. The categories represent broad factors and should not be understood as specific prescriptions.

Conditions

Antecedent conditions are independent of any other explanatory variable.¹¹ An antecedent condition can be defined as “a phenomenon whose presence activates or magnifies the action of a causal law or hypothesis.”¹² In essence, antecedent conditions are locally available ingredients that can be enhanced or amplified through active mechanisms toward robust resistance. In order to support resistance then, it is critical that intelligence preparation of the battlefield begin by analyzing what conditions exist in the operational environment.

Social movement theory suggests four major types of antecedent conditions: political, economic, social, and informational. Political conditions can be factions within the regime or the existence of political opposition groups. Such political groups might be formal or informal. In addition, nonpolitical entities can also expand political opportunities for resistance movements. For instance, Jerzy Popieluszko was instrumental in providing political legitimacy to the Polish opposition movement and Solidarity. Popieluszko was a Catholic priest who routinely delivered anti-communist sermons and gave both religious and nationalist speeches in support of Solidarity. His sermons mobilized such a broad segment of the Polish population that the regime had him assassinated in 1984. Ironically his martyrdom immensely expanded political opportunities for the opposition movement.

Religious leaders creating political opportunities for resistance movements are not uncommon. Cardinal Jaime Sin of the Philippines was able to turn the tide in 1986 when the first “people’s power” movement managed to oust Ferdinand Marcos.¹³ Marcos ordered his military to crush the opposition movement supporting Corazon Aquino, widow of the assassinated senator Benigno Aquino Jr. Cardinal Sin immediately issued a statement urging Catholics to go out and protect the protesters from the troops who had been ordered to shoot.¹⁴ Similarly, Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador gave a great deal of political legitimacy to political opposition groups such as the Democratic Revolutionary Front and the Farabundo Marti National

¹¹ Henry E. Brady & David Collier, *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004, p. 274.

¹² Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Cornell University Press, 1997, pp. 9-10.

¹³ Erica Chenoweth & Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: the Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Columbia University Press, 2011, pp. 160-2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

Liberation Front (FMLN).¹⁵ His support for resistance groups opposing the El Salvadoran regime was so powerful that he too was assassinated. At his funeral, more than 100,000 mourners gathered demanding both land and political reforms.¹⁶ The FMLN's guerilla force was still very weak and unable to mount effective offensives against the government. The army fired on the mourners, killing dozens. This massacre quickly became a mobilizing narrative for opposition groups. In fact, the assassination of Romero drove many sympathizers and nonviolent activists to actively support and join the FMLN guerrillas.¹⁷

Elections provide unique political opportunities for resistance. The overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic took place right after the rigged presidential election of 2000. Marcos was also overthrown following the 1986 snap election in the Philippines where the appearance of election fraud was quickly utilized for mobilization. Cardinal Ricardo Vidal almost immediately made a statement condemning the apparent election irregularities. Where elections are used as a tool of political legitimation, resistance potential follows. The key is to maintain continuously updated information about political events and elections in countries of interest. Even draconian regimes tend to allow elections if only to achieve international legitimacy. This provides a unique opportunity to map the political landscape of the regime.

Certain economic conditions are highly associated with the onset of resistance movements. However, not all robust resistance movements are attributable to economic downturns. Typically, conditions often linked with the onset of resistance include income inequalities, under-employment, unemployment, inflation, or income stagnation. Note that it is often external shocks that trigger the exacerbation of these conditions. Economic measures taken by external actors can create a more conducive environment for organic resistance.¹⁸

Ungoverned or under-regulated economics can also provide opportunities for resistance groups to generate resources to sustain themselves. These unsanctioned economic areas typically have built in informal or autonomous channels of resource extraction and redistribution. The autonomy of the

¹⁵ Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 197.

¹⁶ Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 26-27.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁸ Doowan Lee, "A Social Movement Approach to Unconventional Warfare," *Special Warfare Magazine*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2013, p. 30.

Bazaar in Iran was a major factor during the Iranian revolution of 1979.¹⁹ The Bazaar provided much needed resources to key organizers of the resistance when the regime cut subsidies and stipends to students and academics.²⁰

Economic conditions themselves are rarely sufficient for resistance to emerge or to take hold. While economic conditions throughout the Middle East were generally comparable in the 1980s and 1990s, insurgent movements emerged in only a few select countries.²¹ While all major macroeconomic indicators were comparable in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia between 1980 and 1992, only the first two countries experienced major insurgent movements. This reflects the explanatory poverty of the classical model of resistance which links collective action directly to individual psychological conditions.

Several flawed assumptions explain the limited analytic value of the classical model.²² First, it is almost impossible to observe and measure individual psychological conditions in order to see how they may impact resistance, especially in less than fully developed countries. Second, even if such conditions were observable, the classical model offers no causal mechanisms to link the assumed individual psychological disequilibrium with collective mobilization. It just offers a leap of faith between individual psychology and collective action. Thus, Fearon and Laitin show with their empirical analysis of the Minority at Risk dataset that ethnic divides or grievances alone rarely explain the intensity or duration of civil wars.²³ In fact, they provide statistical evidence that the outbreak of intrastate conflicts cannot be explained by the strength of political grievances. This is not a trivial finding given how popular the notion of grievance is in the common understanding of insurgent dynamics. Third, the antiquated classical theory of insurgency cannot explain how resistance can take place in developed countries.

Individual grievances do play a role in the development of resistance. The question is how. Typically, grievances become instrumental when they are exploited and framed by groups or networks actively seeking to create

¹⁹ Benjamin Smith, "Collective Action with and without Islam: Mobilizing the Bazaar in Iran," in Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: a Social Movement Theory Approach*, Indiana University Press, 2004, pp. 187-9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004, pp. 10-16.

²² For an example of how structural strains are inadequately used to explain revolutionary movements, see Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, Stanford University Press, 1966.

²³ James D. Fearon & David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003.

opportunities for collective mobilization. For the special operations forces (SOF) community to harness resistance potential, then, the focus should be on both the existing conditions and the activities of political actors. This is in essence what Emirbayer and Goodwin call the problem of agency, warning of the false promise of structural determinism.²⁴ In other words, one cannot properly leverage resistance unless potential (antecedent conditions) is understood in the context of agency (purposeful activities).

Socioethnic divides and existing dissident networks provide great potential for resistance. In particular, external actors can leverage such conditions to establish a robust organizational platform. It is no coincidence that most robust resistance movements emerge from pre-existing ties and networks. These pre-existing ties typically have built-in mechanisms to coordinate information and action across civil society. Ethnic divides can be a powerful fault-line to promote resistance initially. However, an isolated group can be an easy target for the regime to marginalize and vilify. The SOF community must pay attention to what network resources socioethnic groups can contribute to the creation of broad coalitions of resistance movements as opposed to just relying on a single subgroup.

Ideological conditions refer to existing grievances stemming from economic disparities or structural strains such as income inequalities, unemployment, underemployment, or discrimination. In essence, these conditions often stem from social, economic, or political strains. They also include existing norms of collective action and violence that can be utilized to justify mobilizing large groups for resistance. For instance, a sense of victimization is often used by Islamists to justify jihad.²⁵ Typically, insurgents will try to align their ideology with socially accepted themes of dissent.²⁶ Instead of treating resistance ideology as a monolithic worldview, it is more useful to approach it as a set of grievances specifically framed to motivate and justify collective action.

Causal Mechanisms and Effects

Mechanisms refer to the causal links between antecedent conditions and outcome variables. In the social sciences, a causal mechanism is defined as “physical, social, or psychological processes through which agents with causal

²⁴ Mustafa Emirbayer & Jeff Goodwin, “Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 99, No. 6, 1994.

²⁵ David A. Snow & Scott C. Bryd, “Ideology, Framing Processes, and Islamic Terrorist Movements, Mobilization: An International Quarterly Review, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2006.

²⁶ David A. Snow & et al, “Frame Alignment Processes. Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4, 1986, pp. 467-76.

capacities operate, but only in specific contexts or conditions, to transfer energy, information, or matter to other entities.”²⁷ Translated to the concept of resistance, causal mechanisms are the activities and techniques used by insurgents or activists to exploit and accelerate the antecedent conditions for resistance purposes. Effects, then, are the outcomes insurgents intend to accomplish by exploiting the conditions through a variety of mechanisms.

United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM) recently released a concept paper that emphasizes cultivating soldiers “with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to understand and influence human actions and activities.”²⁸ The same concept paper stresses the need to link these activities to creating desired effects in the human domain.²⁹ Understanding how mechanisms are related to effects is not only academically useful, but also operationally relevant to the human domain.

Conversion/Co-optation and Effects

When opposition political groups support a resistance movement, the latter typically gains legitimacy quickly. This legitimacy can also be used to gain support from the population. For the movement, this is perhaps the quickest path to leveraging existing groups to elevate its political appeal. As Robert Helvey demonstrates, conversion is a powerful mechanism to transform potential political fractures into resistance.³⁰ He notes that the Serbian opposition movement was able to oust Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, even though the regime possessed much more powerful coercive means, because some of the Serbian police and bureaucrats withdrew their loyalty.³¹ In essence, regime sympathizers were *converted* to support the opposition movement.

Conversion is the process by which the movement signals to the pillars of regime support that they will be disenfranchised by the movement.³² The movement will work with some regime elements to either facilitate or stabilize the eventual transfer of political authority. This is a different way to establish

²⁷ Alexander L. George & Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, 2005, p.137.

²⁸ Operating in the Human Domain, Version 1.0, United States Special Operations Command, Tampa, Florida, August, 2015, p. 38.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Robert L. Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking About the Fundamentals*, Albert Einstein Institution, Harvard University, 2004.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 26-8.

³² Ibid.

auxiliary and underground networks for resistance. Instead of creating purpose-built networks from elements outside of the ruling coalition, the logic of conversion would prescribe identifying moderate or disgruntled factions within the power structures of the regime. Resistance can be considered as a zero-sum political game where one defection or acquiescence means a twofold gain for the movement and a twofold loss to the regime. From this perspective the benefits of conversion become clear compared to those of building external resistance networks to match the regime's coercive capacity.

However, internal conversion and external network building are not mutually exclusive mechanisms. Rather, they should be considered complimentary processes designed to leverage political fractures. Conversion can also be used in the steady state. A political claim made by the resistance movement can gain popular support if an existing political party or influential dissidents also endorse it. The interests of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in Lebanese politics are often advanced in this way by Hezbollah, thus achieving a synthesis between strategic resistance networks and smaller operational networks.

Chenoweth and Stephen also confirm this relationship with their qualitative and statistical analysis of regime-change campaigns.³³ While civil resistance methods are statistically correlated with successful resistance movements, the likelihood of such success is heavily influenced by the magnitude of defectors.³⁴ Several causal mechanisms warrant further explanation. First, regime defectors can greatly enhance the perceived viability of the resistance movement. In 1986, Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Vice Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Fidel Ramos in the Philippine Army used the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) to support the political opposition movement in the Philippines.³⁵ With the Catholic Church's backing and Aquino's street demonstrations gaining momentum, the RAM proved to be a key element of the movement's success.³⁶

Second, regime defectors can deliver critical intelligence to the movement. Such intelligence can be utilized to send surgical signals to other fence-sitters that the movement poses no threat to them or siding with the regime will

³³ Erica Chenoweth & Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: the Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Columbia University Press, 2011.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-51.

³⁵ Felipe B. Miranda ed, *Democratization: Philippine Perspectives*, University of the Philippines Press, 1998, p. 34-35.

³⁶ Gretchen Casper, *Fragile Democracies: The Legacies of Authoritarian Rule*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995, pp. 133-9.

harm their future position. Defection can also be subtle and nonphysical. Endorsements from existing political groups can be powerful catalysts as well.

Third, regime defectors typically can bring subordinates and equipment to the movement, which tend to be resource-poor, especially in the beginning. In the steady state, existing political groups can provide wider access to the movement with their communication platforms and constituency networks. In short, conversion is a critical mechanism to consider given how resource intensive it can be to build an effective resistance movement that can withstand the regime's superior coercive power from scratch.

Growing evidence suggests that conversion was one of the main mechanisms the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) used to expand both in Syria and Iraq. In Iraq, Lina Khatib demonstrates how ISIL co-opted existing Sunni tribes to accelerate its expansion.³⁷ The rapid fall of Mosul can be partially explained by conversion in that Sunni police and soldiers had little reason to fight due to Prime Minister Nouri al-Malaki's systemic persecution of the Sunni population. ISIL continued to make local alliances to accelerate its pace of expansion. In Syria, ISIL essentially rehired civil servants and teachers to maintain control of areas under their control as long as they agreed to use ISIL's ideology.³⁸

To summarize, the effect of conversion can be profound. It can establish broad political legitimacy for the resistance movement. It can help the movement leverage or pool resources with existing organic institutions to accelerate its pace of growth. Most importantly, it can help the resistance movement become very hard for the regime to repress as such oppression is more likely to trigger a political backlash. This is what Gene Sharp calls "political Jiu-jitsu," which he defines as a process through which violent repression is exploited to elevate the legitimacy of resistance and thus garner popular support.³⁹

Resource-Generation and Effects

Resistance is not cheap. It requires a wide variety of activities to gain popular support and maintain access to the population. These activities include information campaigns, publications, public demonstrations, and cultural

³⁷ Lina Khatib, *The Islamic State's Strategy: Lasting and Expanding*, Carnegie Middle East Center, June 2015, pp. 6-11.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

³⁹ Gene Sharp, *How Nonviolent Struggle Works*, Albert Einstein Institution, Harvard University, 2013, pp. 112-5.

and educational events, to name just a few. Self-sufficiency is, therefore, a critical requirement for any resistance movement. State actors can easily use official and financial means to starve dissident groups. Audits are frequently used to suppress dissident groups of financial resources. It is no surprise that robust resistance movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah sustain themselves with a variety of legal and illegal financial and commercial enterprises.

It is convenient to think that external actors can greatly help the movement by providing the required resources to finance various activities. However, there is a big caveat: the success of resistance largely depends on its perceived legitimacy. No matter how secretive external support can be, just a single exposure can completely rob the movement of authenticity and legitimacy—this single point of failure is something the planner should be very careful about.

Successful resistance movements generally develop their own internal mechanisms to generate resources in order to avoid being perceived as a puppet of outside influence. Otpor, a Serbian resistance movement, is famous for using creative ways of generating its own resources, such as street games mocking then Serbian president Milosevic. Other movements also employ fund-raising events. Memorial services are a good example of events used by a wide variety of resistance movements. Setting up charities that accept donations from international actors is another example. Another mechanism is nesting the movement within existing groups that have built-in mechanisms of collecting and distributing membership fees for services. However, these movements use the resources to develop self-sustaining platforms instead of just focusing on acquiring kinetic capabilities. One of the first activities of Hezbollah was collecting trash, and since then, it has established diverse new social institutions, ranging from schools to hospitals.

The tree army in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, is another example of a dissident group with humble beginnings. It started as an agricultural development project led by the Natural Resources Counterinsurgency Cell (NRCC), working under Task Force Mountain Warrior (TFMW), and it quickly became a self-sustaining resistance movement against the Taliban.⁴⁰ Key to its success was the NRCC's emphasis on imparting economic skills and

⁴⁰ Harry R. Bader, Clint Hanna, Clint Douglas, & John D. Fox, "Illegal Timber Exploitation and Counterinsurgency Operations in Kumar Province of Afghanistan: A Case Study Describing the Nexus Among Insurgents, Criminal Cartels, and Communities Within the Forest Sector," *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 2013.

codes of honor to Afghan partners, which in turn propped up the perceived legitimacy and viability of the movement.⁴¹ Trainees were recruited only from respected families. And by working with one of the best agricultural departments in Afghanistan, the partners managed to provide essential skills and services to their home villages. Once the tree army was sufficiently developed, its network was able to drive insurgents out of the area by establishing itself as a legitimate resistance movement against the insurgency and taking over timbering from the Taliban. Illegal timbering and smuggling lumber was one of the most profitable illegal activities financing the Taliban in Kunar Province.⁴² By far, the tree army remains one of the most successful and self-sustaining resistance movements supported by the U.S. against the Taliban.

Bloc Recruitment, Mass Mobilization, and Effects

Mass mobilization mechanisms for resistance differ from individual recruitment. The pace of growth and the scale of growth must be achieved concurrently as weak movements can be easily controlled or even co-opted by the regime. This is why successful movements have empirically employed a specific mobilization mechanism called bloc recruitment. Individual recruitment and bloc recruitment are not mutually exclusive. The argument of this article is to complement existing mechanisms with historically reoccurring patterns of successful resistance movements.

Brokers who organically connect structurally disjointed groups in order to facilitate bloc recruitment play an irreplaceable role. Shin-Kap Han provides a detailed account of how the American revolutionaries overcame internal stratification against the British Empire.⁴³ Paul Revere and Joseph Warren were not in leadership positions, but they provided the critical connective tissue between the thinkers and the doers of the American Revolution.⁴⁴ Similarly, single members of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP) in the 1920s and

⁴¹ Harry R. Bader, Clint Hanna, Clint Douglas, & John D. Fox, "Illegal Timber Exploitation and Counterinsurgency Operations in Kunar Province of Afghanistan: A Case Study Describing the Nexus Among Insurgents, Criminal Cartels, and Communities Within the Forest Sector," *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 2013, pp. 347-8. Specifically, the NRCC ensured the Afghan partners had the following qualities: desire to protect the local community from alien influences, theocratic motivations, and obligation due to some prior association based on family, group, or individual.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 333-4.

⁴³ Shin-Kap Han, "The Other Ride of Paul Revere: The Brokerage Role in the Making of the American Revolution," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2009.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

1930s were instrumental to the rapid expansion of the movement.⁴⁵ The primary function of the single members was to identify key influencers in existing networks and organizations in order to bring them under the NSDAP in a wholesale fashion. In other words, they were mobile brokers focusing on bloc recruitment.

A similar pattern of network development was observed in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. Early members of Polish anti-communist opposition realized that isolated student activism was not sufficient to challenge the communist regime. Their resistance was well organized but quickly suppressed by the regime's divide and conquer tactics as students were framed as over-privileged troublemakers. Realizing this failure, Adam Michnik established civic organizations such as the Workers Defense Committee in Poland (*Komitet Obrony Robotnikow*, KOR) and the Society of Scientific Studies (*Towarzystwo Kursow Naukowych*, TKN) in order to connect Solidarity with other clusters of resistance that did not necessarily align with each other.⁴⁶ KOR was not an overtly political organization. Its mission was to provide legal assistance and support for jailed demonstrators and their families.⁴⁷ TKN was a mobile educational program. In practice, it was called the Flying University where academics and cultural figures organized dispersed events to discuss sensitive topics such as Polish national literature.⁴⁸

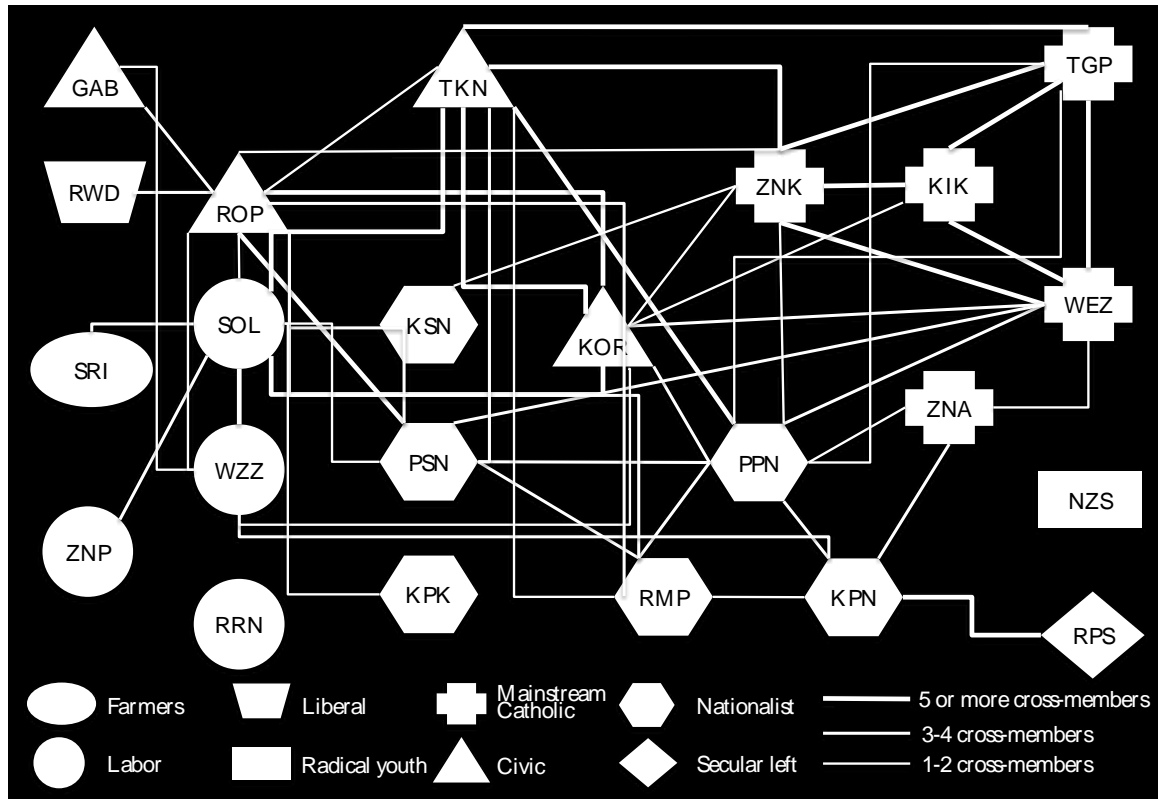
⁴⁵ Marryjane Osa, "Networks in Opposition: Linking Organizations Through Activists in the Polish People's Republic," in *Social Movements and Networks*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 92.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Figure 2: Polish Opposition Network, 1980/1981⁴⁹



The perceived neutrality of civil brokers was perhaps the single most important organizational innovation that key leaders engineered through trial and error. Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik learned in the 1970s that focused yet unconnected resistance could be easily neutralized by the regime’s divide and conquer strategy. The success of Solidarity in the 1980s in replacing the Polish communist regime cannot be explained without taking into account the role of civic networks specifically founded to coordinate and manage a broad coalition of dissident and existing subgroups. In other words, the notion of solidarity was built into the overall resistance landscape.

Similar dynamics were also observed in Italy during the formation of clandestine political militancy in the 1970s. Donatella della Porta meticulously shows that most dedicated members of the Red Brigades, the Proletarian Armed Groups, the Front Line, the Communist Fighting Formations, and a few other minor clandestine groups came from existing political groups and associations through interpersonal ties.⁵⁰ What della Porta empirically shows is that overt networks and affiliations play the role of

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 99.

⁵⁰ Donatella della Porta, “Recruitment Processes in Clandestine Political Organizations: Italian Left-Wing Terrorism,” *International Social Movement Research*, Vol. 1, JAI Press, 1988.

a large pool composed of potential recruits who can be mobilized through existing and multiple personal ties into a more selective and cohesive subgroup. The magnitude of trust-based ties built and sustained in routine overt political organizations predicts the level of commitment expressed by those who joined the underground militant groups.⁵¹

In sum, the United States must learn how to identify and assess the potential of organic brokers in order to facilitate bloc recruitment. Learning about relational dynamics among and across existing networks is critical and is not a trivial matter. Relational information is qualitatively different from individual attributes in that the latter are used to recruit individuals, while the former informs the planner about how heterogeneous groups and networks converge or diverge along different political issues. Understanding those fault lines can be a critical factor in expanding the scope of mobilization.

Framing, Messaging, and Effects

Perhaps the most effective mechanism to achieve a rapid rate of bloc recruitment is strategic framing. Strategic framing is the process by which the movement combines grievances with political arguments regarding three frames: diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational. Instead of merely reproducing existing individual grievances, strategic framing provides interpretive schemes designed to induce a shared consciousness for collective action. In fact, SOCOM stresses the need to understand and adopt culturally relevant messaging themes in order to localize information operations.⁵² If political or economic dissatisfaction is the ingredient of collective action, then strategic framing is the catalyst. Snow and Benford provide four specific mechanisms of this alignment process: bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation.⁵³

Frame bridging is how individual conditions are bridged to a structural issue.⁵⁴ For instance, while personal poverty may be a common economic condition, it can bridge to regime incompetence, corruption, or nepotism. The youth bulge that was exacerbated by the global recession was blamed on the corrupt and nepotistic regimes in the Middle East during the Arab Spring. In

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 159-63

⁵² Operating in the Human Domain, Version 1.0, United States Special Operations Command, Tampa, Florida, August, 2015, p. 53.

⁵³ David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford Jr., Steven K. Worden, & Robert Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation, American Sociological Review, Vol. 51, No. 4, 1986.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

many ways, the self-immolation of Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Buazizi captured and collectivized a widespread individual grievance of economic inequality. It was not an isolated incident, but was framed as a symptom of deep-seeded structural issues affecting many like Buazizi.

Frame amplification is the technique designed to imbue the bridging frame with an active sense of agency by invoking resonating social or religious norms.⁵⁵ For instance, it can be framed that college graduates are under-employed or unemployed not because of a structural economic strain, but because the regime is actively skimming the benefits of national resources. It is well documented that ISIL and its predecessor al-Qaeda in Iraq consistently used targeted violence to amplify the latent sectarian tension between Sunni and Shia populations.⁵⁶ By accentuating and exacerbating the divide, ISIL has sought to mobilize and recruit disenfranchised Iraqi Sunnis.⁵⁷ Returning to the Arab Spring, the death of Buazizi in Tunisia and the murder of Khaled Said in Egypt were quickly amplified as state-sponsored campaigns of unbridled violence against the population.⁵⁸ Incidents of violence were quickly utilized by existing movement networks in what Wendy Pearlman calls “microfoundations of uprising.”⁵⁹ These incidents were reframed as moral judgments invoking the violation of shared norms, dignity, and life. Vilification is a common technique used for frame amplification.⁶⁰ Vilification has two processes. First, it begins with a polarization process where competitors are lumped into a generic “other” category. Second, the “other” category is repeatedly associated with socially and culturally negative traits.⁶¹

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ “February 2004 Coalition Provisional Authority English Translation of Terrorist Musab Al Zarqawi Letter Obtained by United States Government in Iraq.,” February 2004, U.S. Department of State Archive, available at: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm>.

⁵⁷ Karen Bach, “Iraq Sectarian Violence: Sunnis Protest Amid Al Qaeda Calls To Arms,” Archive of Huffington Post, (February 1, 2013), available at: <http://karenbachxy.blogspot.com/2013/02/iraq-sectarian-violence-sunnis-protest.html>.

⁵⁸ Wendy Pearlyman, “Emotions and the Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings,” *Perspectives on Politics*, American Political Science Association, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2012, p. 396. Also see Lisa Anderson, “Demystifying the Arab Spring: Parsing the Differences between Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 3, 2011.

⁵⁹ Pearlyman, “Emotions and the Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings,” p. 396.

⁶⁰ Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Framing Jihad: Intramovement Framing Contests and al-Qaeda’s Struggle for Sacred Authority,” *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 49, No. S12, 2004, pp. 164-66.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

In frame extension the normative judgment established with the amplification process is extended to various groups within the population.⁶² That is, because the regime is actively defrauding the national economy for personal greed and to satisfy its “oligarchy,” it is not only college graduates but also the entire middle class that are suffering from poor economic conditions. In Tunisia, labor movements quickly seized the moment and organized nation-wide demonstrations showing solidarity. In Egypt, what started as an urban-based anti-Mubarak voice quickly became a national narrative about Egyptian national pride. By this process the claim of one group is extended to represent a broader set of social groups.

Frame transformation is the process of revitalizing a perhaps stagnating ideology. An anti-regime narrative may need to be revamped in order to earn international support or recognition. Typically, the movement may invoke a “far enemy” to justify the need to work with external actors. It is no coincidence that Solidarity’s narrative aligned the Polish communist regime with the Soviet Union, just like Zawahiri went from the near enemy of the Egyptian state to the Far Enemy of the West. Perhaps this is where the Arab Spring failed to take advantage of the opening political opportunity of elections. The secular camps within the overall opposition coalition were not as well organized as the Muslim Brotherhood, thus failing to transform their “opposition narrative” to a “political narrative.”

These are just a set of a few mechanisms typically employed by movements to transform individual grievances into a powerful ideology of political mobilization.⁶³ Once a narrative is developed by codifying and disseminating it through print or online media, these mechanisms can sustain the movement very effectively. Even the current narrative of ISIL can be described in a similar fashion. While the genesis of ISIL is uniquely Iraqi Sunni, its information operations have adopted the narrative of the far enemy and vilification of the West to justify why foreigners should do whatever it takes to join the Caliphate and mobilize themselves to commit lone-wolf attacks on civilian targets.

External support can play a critical role in enhancing the movement’s strategic framing. Recent research on the Arab Spring clearly indicates that

⁶² David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford Jr., Steven K. Worden, & Robert Benford, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4, 1986.

⁶³ For additional mechanisms and techniques, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Framing Jihad: Intramovement Framing Contests and al-Qaeda’s Struggle for Sacred Authority,” *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 49, No. S12, 2004.

external media outlets can create an echo effect to elevate the salience of certain political themes and frames.⁶⁴ Even if the regime shuts down social media or even the Internet, external communication and dissemination outside the country corresponds to elevated popular interest and support for resistance. In fact, this was not unique to the Arab Spring. Keck's and Sikkink's extensive case studies of transnational movements demonstrate how a political claim travels outside, amplified by external media outlets or epistemic communities, and then reenters the country of origin to empower the movement.⁶⁵ They call this pattern of resistance growth the "boomerang" effect.⁶⁶ Applied to resistance, an external supporter can surgically guide this well-established pattern to enhance the perceived viability of an organic opposition movement.

Conclusion

This article identifies critical conditions, mechanisms, and effects that can be utilized for supporting resistance movements. However, one environmental factor deserves additional attention. Given the definitions discussed earlier, it should be clear that modern resistance often takes place in politically austere environments. This means sponsoring resistance should factor in substantial measures of regime repression. Thus, it is necessary to examine some of the typical obstacles to sustained collective action in order to identify what traits to look for when looking for resistance movements to sponsor.

A resistance movement challenging the government or occupying force is most likely to face a multitude of repressive efforts. Figure 3 represents a simple typology of state repression. While state repression can be categorized in multiple ways, typically it can be conceptualized by two factors: scope of repression and method of repression. Vertically it ranges from kinetic to non-kinetic and, laterally, it ranges from collective to individual. Four types of repression are commonly used against opposition movements: leadership targeting, leadership cooptation, resource control, and delegitimation.⁶⁷ This typology should work as a check list for planners to factor in what types of

⁶⁴ Sean Aday & et al, "New Media and Conflict after the Arab Spring," United States Institute of Peace, 2012.

⁶⁵ Margaret E. Keck & Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, Cornell University Press, 1998.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶⁷ See Jennifer Earl for a detailed discussion on repression. Jennifer Earl, "Tanks, Tear Gas, and Taxes: Toward a Theory of Movement Repression," *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2003.

support organic resistance movements would need in order to withstand regime repression and survive.

When a resistance movement or insurgency challenges a regime, the latter will first try to remove the leaders by arresting or killing them. However, decapitation rarely leads to organizational collapse of insurgent or terrorist movements.⁶⁸ When leadership targeting is not sufficient or successful, the regime will often employ resource control measures to starve the challengers.⁶⁹ These include shutting down social institutions, audits, and financial sanctions. In addition, regimes will often try to divide and disrupt movements through nonlethal means. Such efforts include cooptation, infiltration, reintegration promises, and selective incentives.

If a resistance movement is to succeed in coercing or disrupting its targeted regime, it becomes critical for the former to have organic capabilities that can be utilized to withstand and overcome state repression. Historically, movements typically acquire these capabilities by employing various non-kinetic and nonviolent activities such as providing essential services and organizing public events to garner popular support.⁷⁰ This is why this article highlights the processes used by insurgents to develop organic political support, resource independence, organizational resiliency, and ideological legitimacy. These processes can be found across different environments ranging from East and Central Asia to the Middle East.⁷¹ This resiliency often stems from a coalition of multiple networks. This multiplicity may carry an operational liability. However, it is the same factors that give resistance a diffused and broad “attribution” characteristic: repression on one is an attack on everyone. Social movement theory calls this mechanism the “repression backfire.”⁷²

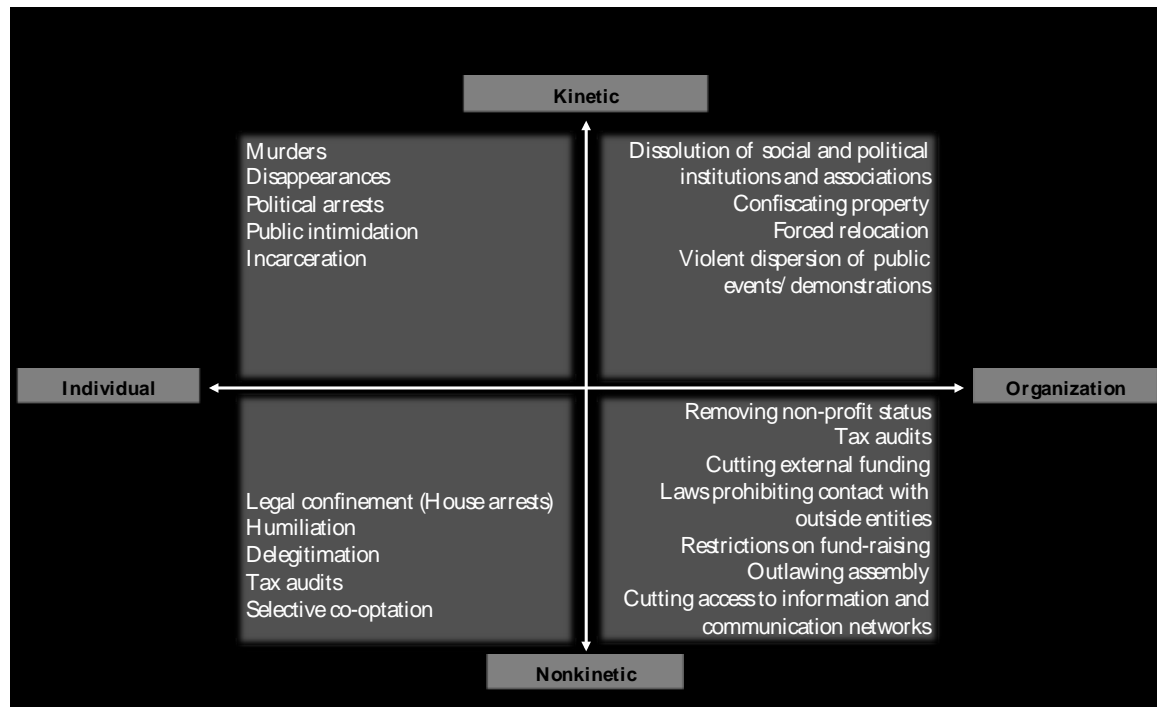
⁶⁸ Jenna Jordan, “When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 2009.

⁶⁹ Jennifer Earl, “Tanks, Tear Gas, and Taxes: Toward a Theory of Movement Repression,” *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2003, pp. 48-49.

⁷⁰ Paul K. Davis & et al, *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism*, RAND Corporation, 2012.

⁷¹ Paul K. Davis & et al, *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism*, RAND Corporation, 2012. The RAND publication uses an inductively compiled set of social movement factors to describe the extent of popular support generated by multiple insurgencies. These include the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in Turkey, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, and al-Qa’ida.

⁷² Backfire is defined as a public reaction of outrage to an event that is publicized and perceived as unjust. For a detailed discussion on backfire dynamics, see David Hess & Brian Martin, “Repression, Backfire, and the Theory of Transformative Events,” *Mobilization: an International Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2012.

Figure 3: Simplified Typology of Repression

The regime will typically have more coercive capacity than the resistance movement. It is common to think that lethal aid is what resistance needs to compete with the regime's military and security forces. Lethal aid may prove effective against weakened or fragile regimes, but not against mature autocratic regimes such as North Korea, China, Iran, or Russia. Lethal assistance also carries a hefty political price.

Social movement literature suggests that what enables the movement to compete effectively against the regime is not how well it fights with brute force, which is typically expressed as guerilla warfare. Rather, it is the political, economic, social, and ideological foundations built during the steady state that enable the movement to deflect regime repression and turn it into a rallying point.⁷³ Resistance movements succeed when they can strategically employ both lethal and nonlethal methods instead of relying on a single strategy. When resistance movements are not balanced, they often lead to undesirable strategic consequences, such as was the case of the Nicaraguan Contras, where neither the surrogates nor the sponsor achieved their respective objective.⁷⁴ If resistance is to be employed as a strategic tool for

⁷³ Paul K. Davis & et al, *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism*, RAND Corporation, 2012.

⁷⁴ For a detailed account about the Contras and its both local and regional consequences, see Stephen Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, 1991.

advancing national security goals, the United States must carefully factor in the intricate dynamics between conditions, mechanisms, and effects. Tactics of guerilla warfare are no longer sufficient to inform us how to harness the strategic nature of resistance.