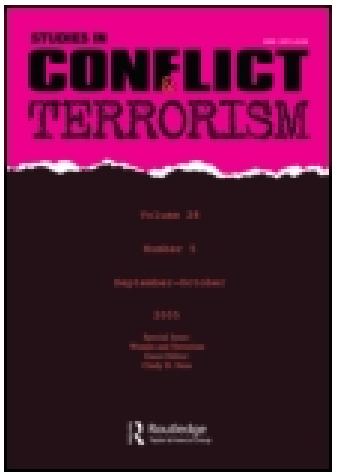


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# Building the Base: Al Qaeda's Focoist Strategy

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# Building the Base: Al Qaeda's Focoist Strategy

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*Al Qaeda has developed a coherent strategy for insurgent violence that has much in common with the focoism advocated by Che Guevara in the 1960s. In their strategic writing, explored here, key Islamist strategists stress the role of violence in creating revolution, and describe the export of committed fighters to focoist enclaves at the margins of enemy control. In contrast to some prominent themes in recent scholarship, the article argues that physical space is demonstrably important to the revolutionaries, that their development of leaderless* jihad *is designed to supplement not replace territorial control, and that their violence is avowedly strategic.*



Al Qaeda and its affiliated global Islamists have developed a focoist strategy akin to that espoused in the 1960s by Ernesto "Che" Guevara. This strategy is evident both in the movement's operational practice and its strategic literature. In particular, key *jihadi* strategists see violence by small groups of focoist guerrillas as the key to controlling territory and to radicalizing the wider population in the cause of revolution. They suggest that the focoists need not be local, but can integrate into foreign communities and shape local discontent in the interests of revolution. Finally, like Guevara's focoist successors, especially the Brazilian Carlos Marighella, they have come to favor small, autonomous groups engaged in urban terrorism as a diversionary effort in support of their territories.

Partly this approach to revolution is the consequence of confronting a similar strategic problem. Like Guevara, the global *jihadis* are involved in a worldwide insurgency; they seek territory, have a political program and a distinctive ideology, all of which are familiar insurgent traits, and all of which demand strategy. Like him they aspire to spread revolution among populations with some broad sympathies, but little experience of militant activities. Like him they face a powerful, conventionally armed enemy with global reach and a compelling alternative ideology. As a result, global *jihadis* have developed an understanding of the utility of violence that is in part intuitive, but also a deliberate reflection on the theory and history of guerrilla warfare. Much of this writing has a distinctly Maoist flavor, but other influences are present too in the *jihadi* strategic literature.

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Studying this strategic discourse provides several important insights. First, it challenges scholars who see in Al Qaeda some sort of astrategic, postmodern, deterritorialized and networked threat, thriving primarily in the virtual sanctuary of the Internet and in the angst of displaced and discontented Muslim youth.[1] Rather, the picture that emerges from the pages of key Islamist strategic texts is of a movement with a distinct strategy that emphasizes violence as a means of obtaining territory, and which in some measure is able to articulate strategy and direct its energies toward that end. In this sense, the movement has a practical theory of revolutionary violence, despite the degradations inflicted on its high command. Thomas Hegghammer and Brynjar Lia argue that "the development of a distinctive jihadi strategic studies genre seems to refute the common belief that Al Qaida's terrorism serves ritual purposes or the desire of revenge only."[2] Al Qaeda's violence is instrumental, as was Che's, not nihilistic or primordial. Rather than the despairing cry of the marginalized and disposed, the violence is pragmatic and strategic—even if, in common with earlier focoism, it has delivered poor results.

Secondly, the close reading of earlier guerrilla theory by leading *jihadi* strategists provides rich insights about the cross-cultural fertilization of strategic ideas between adversaries. War is not waged in cultural silos between hermetically sealed, static cultures.[3] Adaptation and emulation are features of warfare, as of all cultural relationships. *Jihadi* strategists have pored over key secular texts on guerrilla warfare, absorbing the lessons of Mao, Giap, Che, and Marighella. Now in turn Western strategists scrutinize the seminal *jihadi* writing on war. Finally, exploring the focoism in Al Qaeda's strategy offers ideas for how such a strategy might best be countered. If urban terrorism is seen in its proper context as a provocative diversionary attack, should Western strategists concentrate on the diversion, or the main effort to seize and hold territory? A reading of the movement's strategy suggests that the latter remains the key battlefield.

## Focoism

Guevara's focoist approach was an attempt to generalize the particular experience of Castro's small guerrilla band in overthrowing the Batista government in 1958. The following year, Che published his famous treatise on *Guerrilla Warfare*, closely based on his experience in the Cuban revolution. He opened with a thought that encapsulates the essence of focoism: "It is not necessary to wait until all conditions for making revolution exist; the insurrection can create them."[4]

Che's was to be a strategy of provocation and indoctrination: guerrilla warfare as "armed propaganda," as his leading literary acolyte Regis Debray later put it.[5] Violence would provoke a backlash from the regime, sharpening the distinction between repressive, exploitative power, and liberating idealistic guerrillas. The foco, the small guerrilla center or base, would catalyze the revolution.

And yet, immediately afterward, while still on the first page, Che rows back, so that his vision, on first reading, looks remarkably similar to established communist thought on revolutionary war: "The guerrilla fighter," he wrote, "needs full help from the people of the area. This is an indispensible condition."[6] This was, he noted, the "necessary minimum without which the establishment and consolidation of the first centre is not practicable."[7] This did not seem a particularly radical proposition. Mao had written that in its first stages, guerrilla war was about building the infrastructure for revolt, before moving on to military action against the oppressors. For Mao, political agitation was primary, military action secondary.[8]

But on closer examination, Che's foco theory was indeed radical departure from the mainstream revolutionary approach, one that he died trying to demonstrate. Culture, race,

nation—none of these societal bonds would suffice to prevent the determined revolutionary from nudging History on its way. Guevara, as Walter Laqueur put it, "regarded armed insurrection not as the final, crowning phase of the political struggle but expected on the contrary, that the armed conflict would trigger off, or at least give decisive impetus to the political campaign."[9] Revolutionary potential was everywhere—all that was needed was a small group of mobile, trained, and determined men, committed to action, prepared for great hardship, and with the patience and endurance to see things through.

In a later article, Che set out the position more emphatically, or rather, it had evolved, becoming more distinctive and diminishing his earlier emphasis on the need for popular support. "The beginning of the struggle in one area of a country is bound to cause its development throughout the region," he asserted breezily. Revolutionary war would polarize, forcing people to choose a side. As for the foco, Che advocated that

> Nuclei with relatively few people choose places favorable for guerrilla warfare with the intention of either unleashing a counterattack or weathering the storm, and from there they start taking action. [. . . Focos] are essential to the success of the guerrilla army. These bases are points the enemy can enter only at the cost of heavy losses; they are the revolution's bastions, they are both refuge and starting point for the guerrilla army's more daring and distant raids.[10]

Regis Debray makes a similar argument. The guerrillas themselves are, he asserts, the "political vanguard," the "only interpreter and guide" for the masses.[11] It is through war itself that the people's revolutionary spirit is formed, through the activities of the foco: "The guerrilla force is the political vanguard *in nuce*," he explained, "and from its development a real party can arise. [. . .] That is why *insurrectional activity is today the number one political activi*ty."[12] Violence, inflicted by minorities, would create the conditions for revolution, without prior political mobilization. All that was needed was a hard-core, a vanguard, and the support of a small, localized population around the guerrillas' redoubt. Key to the focoist idea—the people need not be onside at the beginning: they could be radicalized. "The guerrilla band is an armed nucleus, the fighting vanguard of the people," Che concluded.[13]

This was different from Mao, whose three stage approach, strongly emphasizing the popular foundation of guerrilla activity has become the standard guerrilla model, including for *jihadi* theorists and their Western interpreters. It was also different from the theories another communist strategist, the Vietnamese General Vo Ngugen Giap, with whom Al Qaeda's strategy is also sometimes compared. Giap's innovation, building on Mao, stemmed from his understanding of the colonial nature of Vietnam's struggle. As Giap described it, the Vietnamese wars, against the French and later the Americans, were wars of national liberation, in which the people were determined to throw off the imperialist yoke. "The people as a whole took part in the armed struggle," Giap wrote, adding with some justification that "peasants, workers and intellectuals crowded into the ranks of the armed forces of the Revolution."[14] To be sure, "it was necessary to bring everything into play to enlighten the masses of the people, educate and encourage them, organise them in fighting for national salvation."[15] But Giap presumed that there was already a good degree of support, both for the nationalist and socialist themes in the revolution.

Both Giap's and Mao's theories have become staples of guerrilla warfare literature, and are frequently cited by insurgents and counterinsurgents alike. *Jihadi* strategists are no exception, and indeed there are key points of commonality between their approach and that of their communist forbears. For his part, Guevara too was influenced by the master guerrilla. By the time he penned *Guerrilla War*, although not, apparently, when he was actually fighting in Cuba, Che had encountered Mao's writing.[16] It showed. Che, like Mao,

saw the war as a popular struggle, he anticipated three stages to the struggle, even if he thought that he could short circuit them. There were echoes of Mao's three stage approach in his conclusion that "Triumph will always be the product of a regular army, even though its origins are in a guerrilla army."[17] Even the need for sanctuary, a territorial stronghold from which guerrilla groups might issue forth to create new rebel holdouts, was common to both men. But Che's focos were innovatory. Winning over the population remained important to the Argentinian, as to all aspiring insurgents. But Guevara was prepared to build from the periphery; content to site his rebel inkspots in seemingly unprofitable territory, to do so using foreign fighters, and to convert the masses by drawing in the enemy through violence, until the oppressed locals bought into his worldview. The focos would be rural, in marginal territory more readily contestable by the insurgents, and spread from there toward central, more densely peopled areas. These innovations echo today in Al Qaeda's guerrilla strategy.



## Al Qaeda's Focoist Revolt

There are, naturally, a great many differences between the characteristics of Guevaran insurgency and that of global Islamism. The similarities, however, are striking. For example, there is the common idea that military and political leadership should be fused in one body, and the idea that revolution thrives best in undergoverned rural spaces, but in practice draws its fighters primarily from the educated urban core. There are other echoes too, not least of Che's almost mystical romanticism and his keen appreciation of the power of image and other propaganda. Here, however, are explored two principal themes: the idea that violence creates the conditions for revolution; and the integral relationship between the revolution and space. Both Guevara and Al Qaeda have willingly drawn on preexisting local disputes, magnifying their global significance and incorporating them within their favored ideological framework. In the focoist conception, localized conflicts have widespread revolutionary potential, achieved through the systematic exploitation of violence by outsiders. In both cases, the focoist revolution builds from small, isolated territories. Physical terrain, held by the foco, is central to the strategic design of the movements, and failure to attain it the heart of the Guevaran tragedy.

An obvious starting point in understanding Al Qaeda's strategy are Sayyid Qutb's foundational remarks on the vanguard of righteous *jihadis*.[18] Like Che, Qutb stressed the separateness of the hard-core, militant believers: the vanguard of the people, who could radicalize the masses. The idea of the vanguard permeates militant Islamist writing, notably that of Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al Qaeda's most prominent theoretician, but also that of its leading strategists. In essence, the *jihadi* vanguard is seen as apart from the masses, and will rouse them from their slumber, violently if needs be. Qutb's vanguard turned out in practice to be factionalized, often around local or national disputes. Such Islamist groups were hierarchical, and, despite occasional outrages, proved unable to destabilize the well organized organs of repressive Arab states. Determination and violence in support of radical Islamist ideology were not lacking, but strategy too often was.

Qutb's appeal to the vanguard was published as *Milestones* in 1964. Elsewhere in the world, Guevara was preparing his own vanguard for a disastrous intervention in the Congo. Leading a small group of Cuban guerrillas, Che found a safe base for focoist activity in the far east of the Congo, in mountainous terrain near Lake Tanganyika. But his small group of Cuban outsiders proved unable to inspire widespread revolt, or rouse the disorganized and demoralized local rebels. In his diaries, Che blamed the locals—leaders and soldiers alike. His own Cubans, he conceded had "a poor cultural basis, as well as a relatively low level of political development"[19] ; they had difficult relations with the rebel leadership, itself a shifting mosaic of factions, and they regularly found themselves outmatched by

mercenaries in the pay of the Congolese government. "What could we offer the peasants?" Guevara mused in his journal, puzzled by their apparent lack of radical fervor. "In the conditions of the war, [. . .] we could not give any real thought to this."[20] All Che had to offer was violence and struggle—which, in the event, proved insufficiently motivating.

He tried again the following year in Bolivia. This time, Guevara insisted on being in direct command of the rebel movement, rather than working through local party commanders. But the result was even worse, the campaign effectively ending after eleven months with Che's death at the hands of government forces. Six months into the campaign, Che was noting ominously in his diary that the foco had not a single recruit from the local peasantry, whose mobilization was "non-existent."[21] It remained that way: the outsiders could not win over the people through violence. Focoism in Bolivia, as in the Congo was a total failure. Guevara felt that the potential for revolution was widespread throughout Latin America and elsewhere in the oppressed third world, and throughout had emphasized the universality of his model, giving limited attention to local conditions. On the foundations of his successes against a corrupt Batista regime, Che built grand theory of guerrilla war that could not account for the lukewarm reception from Congolese peasants, still less explain why Rwandan and Congolese guerrillas would not abandon their mutual suspicion in favor of solidarity against the Yankee enemy. Focoism thereafter lost much of its appeal as a concept for organizing guerrilla war.

The national Islamists had fared little better, but by the late 1980s a global Islamist movement was gestating, ideologically, structurally, and, eventually, strategically. Its rise to prominence is, by now, very well documented.[22] The evolution of the *mujahideen* opposition to the Soviets in Afghanistan during the 1980s greatly facilitated and fostered the emergence of a global *jihadi* identity, transcending the national, parochial views of many *jihadi* groups. Even at its most structured, Al Qaeda, that most prominent expression of global Islamism, was never as rigidly defined as a Party apparatus within a communist state. It was and remains somewhat fragmented between different groups and factions, often nationalist in origin and local in outlook. Nonetheless, Al Qaeda possessed some of the attributes of a government in being: it organized armed force, developed strategy and ideology, and aspired to territory. A group of men *were* Al Qaeda; they could plot, plan, and, occasionally, implement strategy. Space was integral to this ideology—a means of both exercising and controlling political violence.

Then, after 9/11, this organization came under severe and sustained counterattack from American and allied forces, losing territory and key personnel. It retained a diminished operational capability, as the underlying ideology spread to an increasingly broad audience. The balance between organization and ideology remains a subject of considerable contention within terrorism studies, and one with profound implications for the sort of strategy that Al Qaeda might be able to adopt. The twofold contention explored here is that the movement remains strategic in its ability to relate violence to goals, and secondly that there is a relationship between the intellectual activities of its key strategists and the violent activity in which Al Qaeda engages.

## The New Theorists

A handful of writers feature prominently in the *jihadi* strategic literature of the last decade. Here the article focuses on three: Abu 'Ubeid Al-Qurashi, Abu Mu'sab al-Suri, and Abu Bakr Naji. There are other strategists within the movement, but the works of these three men captures the principal themes in global Islamist insurgency.[23] Together they demonstrate a serious engagement with the history and theory of guerrilla war, and the first two have been

prolific writers, with al-Suri's thinking, evolving over several decades of thinking about the Islamist struggle. Al-Suri drew heavily on his reading in strategy, although he seldom references the authors by name. An obvious example is his Clausewitzean pronouncement that "Contemporary sociologists and political scientists have come to know that war is politics using violent methods."[24] Another, equally obvious, is his Maoist description of three stages in guerrilla war.[25] Brynjar Lia's indispensible biography of al-Suri includes a bibliography of his known works, and a key section of his landmark book, *The Call for Global Islamic Resistance*.[26]

Little is known of the other two men besides their writing. Al-Qurashi was a regular author for the *jihadi Al-Ansar* magazine, penning its strategy column, and footnoting his articles to modern Western theorists like Thomas Hammes and William Lind, alongside the classic texts by Clausewitz, Mao, and Giap. He read and cited approvingly articles from *Parameters* and the *Military Review,* and his column addressed themes like Fourth Generation Warfare, propaganda, and terrorism. Of Naji, little is known besides his extended treatise on the *Management of Savagery*, a disquisition on the use of violence to produce political change.[27] As with the other two, his writing is distinguished by a deliberate focus on strategy over theology, and by an engagement with secular strategic thought. As he put it, "following the time-tested principles of military combat will shorten for us the long years in which we might suffer the corrupting influences of rigidity and random behavior."[28] He recommends to fellow *jihadis* the reading of secular books on the art of warfare, especially guerrilla warfare.

The writings of these three strategists are distinct from the pronouncements of Osama bin Laden, whose speeches are not, on the whole, notable for considered thinking on how Al Qaeda might achieve its political goals, other than by exhausting American finances and patience.[29] Ayman al-Zawahiri, perhaps Al Qaeda's most prominent communicator, does develop strategic ideas amid his theological references and political invective—that is, he expresses ideas about how force can practically serve political objectives—but his strategic thinking is much less developed and systematic than the three strategists considered here.

In common with earlier guerrilla theorists, the overwhelming concern of the three men is of their movement's relationship with the population. Thus Qurashi, echoing Mao and generations of guerrilla theorists, writes that the *mujahidin* cannot be defeated "because they are part of the people and they hid among the masses. This strategy is enough to end the superiority of advanced weapons, which are primarily designed for use in open areas with well-defined features."[30] The result, he concluded, was that "nation states have been defeated by stateless nations."[31] The question, of course, was how to do so. Two distinct themes emerge in the Al Qaeda strategic literature, as with earlier writing on guerrilla warfare. The first is the Guevaran notion that the struggle itself can win supporters to the cause and, ultimately, territory. The second is that such war is a long strategy of attrition, which can be accelerated by drawing the enemy in and exhausting him—an authentically Giap-like approach. The second theme is more commonly noted, but is in fact a subset of the first—engaging the far enemy certainly exhausts him, but it also accentuates the difference between the local population and the enemies of the revolution. At the core of Al Qaeda's guerrilla strategy, as at the core of focoism, is the idea that violence radicalizes, including violence by relative outsiders. Small bands of men can use violence to undercut existing authorities, to co-opt local discontents, and thereby to control space.

### *The Far Enemy*

The decision to widen the struggle, drawing in the far enemy of the United States by directly attacking it is perhaps the most common theme raised by those considering Al Qaeda's

strategy, including the *jihadis* themselves. This Giap-like approach found much favor with Al Qaeda's leadership, and with its emerging strategic thinkers, not least since it offered a way of overcoming the nationalist focus of the myriad Islamist groups, which had produced little return after decades of revolutionary struggle.

Abu Bakr Naji wrote in essentially Giap-like form that the goal was "to disperse the efforts and forces of the enemy and to exhaust and drain its monetary and military capabilities."[32] Drawing in the enemy would also lead to greater "human assistance" from the Muslim masses that might replace the losses in battle.[33] In support of this theory, he cites Paul Kennedy's argument about the decline of great powers being brought about through over-extension.[34] This was a line advanced by Osama bin Laden after 9/11, in his assessment that the greatest effect of that attack had been to inflict economic damage on the United States.[35] For Qurashi, the Vietnam War provided key lessons. He wrote that the Vietnamese Communists had fully grasped that America's center of gravity was its own public, and that making them suffer would eventually halt the war.[36] Al-Suri also concluded that the appropriate strategy for the *jihadis* should include the attrition and exhaustion of the main enemy, the United States.

So far, the global *jihadi* strategy is authentically Giap-like. Engaging the far enemy will hasten its exhaustion, and mobilize the masses. But as Thomas Hegghammer convincingly argues, the distinction between near and far enemy in Al Qaeda's thinking can be over-done. Elements of both are often present in *jihadi* thinking. For him, such "categories of analysis only capture fleeting tactical variations within jihadism, which exist along a relatively fluid ideological and operational continuum."[37] When it comes to engaging the near or the far enemy, modern *jihadism*, Hegghammer writes, is increasingly "hybridized." Islamists had not attacked the West before the 1990s, and even when they did they retained, and continue to retain, their focus on local enemies. Like Che, Al Qaeda's strategic thinkers see enemies near and far as elements of the same adversary: imperialism, repression, ideological impurity. To attack either was the way to undermine the hold of tyrannical apostate regimes on territory that Al Qaeda sought to control.

### *Violence Radicalizes*

More profound than the distinction between near and far enemies is the view such thinking encapsulates the relationship between violence and revolution. Violence is less a product of dissent, following from the repression of the masses, and more a catalyst for the nascent revolution, sparking ideological fervor in otherwise quiescent populations. The strategic goal is to use violence to advertize the cause and radicalize the masses. So much the better if battling outsiders exaggerates the distinction between the worthy and the apostate. In this sense, violence is exemplary. It is armed propaganda, certainly, but propagandistic in the sense meant by Jacques Ellul, that it prompts further *action*.[38] In that vein, Qurashi writes that "military power is fundamentally aimed at attracting popular support, the attainment of which would multiply such power."[39] "Every military battle," he concluded, "is a speech that aims at increasing revolutionary awareness."[40] The fight against the far enemy was a particular example of how that might come about. Thus for al-Suri, "American aggression is ... expanding public support for the resistance. This will facilitate mobilisation for the call to jihad."[41]

In an article exploring theories of revolutionary war, Qurashi identified this theme of exemplary action as a key distinction between Maoist and Guevaran thinking, writing that while

> most revolutionary ideologues agree on the need for an injustice for the revolution to succeed, they disagree about whether it is a necessary precondition for revolutionary activity, which was the opinion of Mao, or whether it can be reached *through* the revolution, as Che Guevara held. But even the latter acknowledges that there is a minimum number of certain conditions for a revolution to allow it to form the first stronghold and therefore its continuity and success.[42]

Qurashi footnotes this paragraph to Che's *Guerilla Warfare*, demonstrating thereby a studied consideration of the distinction between the two communists, although not necessarily that Qurashi is an avowed Guevaran. Elsewhere in his writing, however, it becomes apparent that Qurashi leans toward Che. In guerrilla warfare, he writes, "terrorism was used in order to establish the organization's prestige."[43] Pessimists were wrong to predict failure because Al Qaeda was militarily outclassed, he argued, pointing to the "major psychological gains achieved by the mujahidin through military action as well as the positive impact created by these acts of heroism in generating sympathy and support within the Muslim world."[44] Similarly, in another article he argued that critics who thought *jihadi* violence had failed to achieve tangible results were missing the point: violence itself could embolden the Islamic nation.[45] In the fourth generation warfare that Qurashi clearly admired, battlefield losses could enhance prestige, bringing reinforcements and greater support.

For al-Suri, too, military activity was the point of guerrilla war—the only way of awakening the masses:

> Military activity and armed revolutionary jihadi action are what will compel the enemy to retreat, and lead the *Umma* to victory, God willing. Without military resistance, the effects of all peaceful activities—no matter how important publicising, preaching, writing, composing, demonstrating or media and political activities, and such like, are—will be scattered to the winds, and nothing will change without military resistance.[46]

Al-Suri acknowledged that "armed jihadi resistance does not happen in a vacuum and will not transform into a phenomenon of the desired magnitude unless it is borne of a revolutionary jihadi climate."[47] But like Che, he persistently stresses the radicalizing nature of violence, arguing that, "without a strong armed confrontation on the ground, and without a resistance which takes on the capacity of a general phenomenon, and without groups that take part in insurrections, there will not be any value to any of the resistance's political and media theories."[48]

And for Naji, violence was the point of *jihad*, which "is naught but violence, crudeness, terrorism, [. . .] and massacring."[49] Such violence not only deters and dispirits the enemy, it also forces the masses to choose a side. Thus,

> Dragging the masses into the battle requires more action, which will inflame opposition and which will make the people enter into the battle, willing or unwilling, such that each individual will go to the side which he supports. We must make this battle very violent, such that death is a heartbeat away.[50]

Violence radicalizes, in other words: fighting creates politics, not the other way round. Its dynamic alters existing political goals and creates new ones, as well as sharpening the distinctions between groups involved in fighting. Naji writes of the Umma "moving from

error to more error through unbelief and moral corruption, [. . .] the solution and cure for [which] is for the missionaries to fight in every sense of the word."[51] Elsewhere he writes vividly of the "heat of battle burning like a furnace, which prompts [leaders and followers alike] to clearly see the reality of the conflict."[52] In similar vein, he also considers violence as being the best school of revolutionary education, and, in another Guevaran theme, identifies the need for a close association between military leaders and revolutionary ideology.

Still, one could, perhaps, have too much violence, as Ayman al-Zawahiri argued in his famous letter to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, perhaps the movement's most enthusiastic implementer of the thesis that violence creates its own politics.[53] In the letter, al-Zawahiri provides a concise strategic treatise, emphasizing the imperative for popular support, without which "the Islamic mujahed movement would be crushed in the shadows, far from the masses who are distracted or fearful." Such support seemed to be prompted only by the struggle against occupying forces, American or Israeli, and not in sectarian conflict between Muslims, which al-Zarqawi was trying to promote, brutally and with considerable success. Al-Zawahiri thought that the Islamic emirate that would follow the departure of the Americans would require political outreach to all sections of Iraqi society, and this political action was a job for the mujahidin vanguard, every bit as much as fighting. Accordingly, he criticizes Zarqawi's attacks on Shi'ites and their mosques, as a divisive diversion from the main effort against America and its lackeys, and the killing of hostages, which alienates potential sympathizers. Without care to its political dimension, in short, violence lacks utility.

### *The Foco—Violence and Space*

The political role of the combatants was a core Guevaran theme, but al-Zawahiri's letter raised additional focoist concerns, notably the relationship between the revolutionary and place. The vanguard of outsiders who control space at the expense of the enemy has been a central theme in *jihadi* strategy. Giap's guerrillas sucked the imperial enemy inward to fight as part of an ongoing colonial/nationalist struggle. Che, by contrast, exported the struggle to wherever he perceived the preconditions for revolution, and then used violence to spark the revolt. In alighting on the undergoverned spaces of Pakistan, Afghanistan and elsewhere, Al Qaeda has adopted a focoist strategy. The concept is well developed in the theoretical writing of al-Suri, Naji, and al-Qurashi.

Al-Suri starts with the Guevaran notion of a fighting vanguard. "It is necessary," he writes, "that the vanguard sacrifices its possessions and lifestyle for the sake of battle (and not jihad of the pen and the tongue). It is necessary that an elite bears the costs of reviving the jihad in people's reality after it has been completely forgotten."[54] Because the ideal areas for central fronts exist only in a few places (including Afghanistan and Yemen, for example), Al-Suri urges *mujahidin* who want to fight to "head for wherever the fronts open up, whenever they open."[55] As for what they are fighting, al-Suri is emphatic: territory. Favorable terrain and political conditions must obtain, but where they do, the strategy of "open fronts," as pursued by the Islamists in Bosnia and Afghanistan and Chechnya, and in which they confronted the enemy "from permanent bases, and [through] semi-regular guerrilla warfare" has produced military success, and success in rallying the masses. Certainly, this approach was, he argues, an improvement on the hierarchical, nationally oriented Islamist movements of the previous decades, which had been an abject failure in Syria, Egypt, and Algeria. Unlike the nationalist groups, the open fronts attracted wider support—or as Suri puts it, they "succeeded in mobilizing the Islamic nation, with its hundreds of millions, behind them."[56]

And yet these fronts, he concludes, have been a political failure, except in Afghanistan during the years of the Taliban government. After 9/11, the American onslaught had badly weakened the Islamists, even though the enemy had suffered too. The lesson was that "defence from permanent positions" at the wrong time is one of the guerrillas "most vulnerable spots," a point confirmed in "the books of the greatest theoreticians in military art, for example, Mao Tse-Tung Guevara, Giap and Castro."[57] Nonetheless, difficult although it might be, the goal of establishing open fronts, of liberating land and settling on it remained "a goal that one must pursue whenever the opportunities arise."[58]

Che's focos were, the revolution in Cuba aside, comprised of outsiders operating on foreign soil. The essence of focoism is that the differences between the two groups can be overcome in the interests of revolution. Of course, in practice, that proved difficult. Che was puzzled by the manifest antipathy between Rwandan and Congolese rebels, ostensibly united in a global revolution against capitalist oppression, and he was finally thwarted by the blank indifference of Bolivian peasants. Al Qaeda faces the same problem, and its leading strategists all reflect on it. For the foco to stand a chance, al-Suri notes that there should be a "cause in which the local inhabitants can believe, in a way that is sufficient for making them fight a jihad for its sake." Foreign aggression, he writes, is the most suitable cause in fostering a "revolutionary climate" that might be sparked by focoist violence. Thus al-Suri notes that, while most Muslims will describe themselves first as hailing from Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and so on, rather than conceiving of themselves as being of one nation, "the enemy has globalized our cause by his attack on us."[59]

At the central fronts, Suri notes, there will be, "certain inherited social traditions there, and it is of no use violating them or pretending to forget the traces of the past, until the Muslim society emerges which is built on the universalness of Islam and the nationality of Islam."[60] Al-Zawahiri makes the same plea for tolerance of local practices in his letter to the puritanical al-Zarqawi. The foco, in short, will be made up of violent outsiders, but if the *mujahidin* show some understanding of local conditions, the locals will not complain because they sympathize with the broad tenets of the revolution, especially throwing off the yoke of foreign tyranny.

In developing his thinking on "fourth generation warfare (4GW)," Qurashi also considers the problem of foreign *jihadis*, and whether the 4GW model "does not fit in the case of the Al Qaeda Organization, which is fighting outside its territory, mostly on hostile grounds. We answer this by saying, first, that Al Qaeda is fighting alongside the Taliban, who represent the local population. Second, Al Qaeda's mujahidin have proved from the start that they have gone beyond traditional chauvinistic sensitivities."[61] The strategy was clear: Al Qaeda outsiders, many from the Arabian Gulf states and the Levant, would move into remote, inaccessible areas where they would have the space to develop their ideological and political frameworks, to organize militarily and to implement their vision of an authentic Islamic society. By exploiting shared grievances and religious affinity, these outsiders might establish a guerrilla base, a foco, from which to issue forth and spread the revolution. Thus for al-Zawahiri, the fronts to which Arab fighters had flocked were a necessary precursor for the main battle, which would take place in the heartland of the Arab world, around the Levant and Egypt. As he optimistically wrote to al-Zarqawi, "the battles that are going on in the far-flung regions of the Islamic world, such as Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Bosnia, they are just the groundwork and the vanguard for the major battles which have begun in the heart of the Islamic world."[62] The Arab fighters, most especially the exiled Egyptians, were the Cubans of the *jihad*, migrating to the periphery in search of territory and better odds on the battlefield.

This focoist pattern is at the heart of Naji's writing. His regions of savagery are situated in the world's failed states and undergoverned spaces, and he describes them as being like Afghanistan prior to the Taliban taking control.[63] This putative foco may, initially at least be quite small, "usually a city, or a village, or two cities, or a district, or part of a large city."[64] Naji cites as modern examples Chechnya, the area under Janjaweed control in Sudan, the efforts of the 1990s *jihad* movement in Algeria, and the Moro Liberation front in the Philippines.[65] The spaces that these groups carve out are the most profitable theater for Al Qaeda's activities. Within them, the Islamists can work to provide services to the local population, including food, medical treatment, education, and *Sharia* law, while at their borders, they can work to expand the region of savagery under Al Qaeda control, "administrations for savagery," as he colorfully terms them.[66] He also considers the "leftist movements in central and south America" to be exemplars of the phenomenon of administrating regions of savagery. They had, he noted, "achieved amazing results some operational aspects in the managing of the regions of savagery there and some of them established states."[67] And yet they failed because "they manage these regions according to their filthy principles which the surrounding regions do not usually accept. This makes their regions unacceptable for expansion on account of the refusal of the citizens (of those regions) to turn away from the central government."[68] Here, although he does not name them, are the doomed focos of Che and the more resilient Marxist redoubts of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—FARC) in Colombia and Peruvian Maoists of the Shining Path, filled with "moral corruption that results from the anarchist principles they adopt."[69] Still, they had, he concedes, driven America mad through its inability to destroy them. With a more popular message, Al Qaeda might succeed where the leftists had failed.

Certain conditions must obtain before the foco might be established in a region of savagery—ideally it should be at the periphery of government authority, on favorable terrain, with a sympathetic population. Then the *jihadis*, as he describes it, send a vanguard into the region to manage it, which can be further reinforced as they consolidate their presence.[70] As for deviancy from the perceived Sunni orthodoxy of the *jihadis*, Naji, like al-Suri and al-Zawahiri, favors tolerance and understanding of local variations.[71] The *mujahid*, however, are in charge: "political decision issues from the military leader, but the entire political administration or most of it should be made up of warriors from among the assistants of the military leaders," that is, the business of administering is closely associated with the fighters, not a separate political party which controls the military.[72] The focoist Islamists should leverage existing power structures such as tribes in the region of savagery by providing local leaders with money, until "after a period of time in which their followers have mixed with our followers and their hearts have been suffused with the picture of faith, we will find that their followers do not accept anything which contradicts the sharia."[73] "We give them something of the world in order to draw their allegiance to us," he notes in fine Machiavellian style in an appendix dedicated to the subject.[74]

The reality of the foco was more complicated than portrayed in these strategic analyses, with their easy assumption that a shared concept of *Ummah* would facilitate cooperation and forge a shared revolutionary outlook. In practice such relations would be subject to myriad local variations in culture: rural and urban, Arab and non-Arab, and many theological shades. For Thomas Rid, the movement's prospects are poor precisely because it has been unable to co-opt local groups, who have their own grievances and worldviews. He writes that while "the Al Qaeda brand has been attractive to groups born out of local concerns" the relationship is marked by "a divide over appropriate targets and tactics."[75] Nonetheless,

in multiple locations at the margins of the state system, the global Islamists found freedom to shelter from enemy assault, to strategize, and to begin implementing their revolutionary vision for reordering society. Their relations with these groups are typically opaque, but demonstrated through the continued ability of group members to find concealment, train new recruits, and co-ordinate hostile activities, sometimes in conjunction with local allies. Guevara, the Argentinian exile fighting in Congo alongside his band of Cuban guerrillas, would have envied the remarkable penetration of local society and the tangible hold on the Muslim imagination of the *Ummah*.

### *The New Urban Guerrillas*

The main problem for aspirant focoists is controlling space, given the enemy's great strength. The various fronts, including Al Qaeda's nascent emirates in Iraq, have come under intense pressure from the imperialist enemy. This was the problem for Che whose own efforts to spread revolution had, his experiences in Cuba aside, yielded a brutal, overwhelming response from authorities near and far. Al-Suri was struck by the same dilemma. The central fronts Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Bosnia, where the faithful had attempted conventional guerrilla combat, had achieved limited results because they had roused a hornets nest, and the enemy's "stunning technological superiority" had set the movement back.[76] The onslaught had been almost total. "Nothing remains in the field except a few pure hearts, fighting forearms, and resolute wills. They resist the coloniser over here and over there. Vulnerable cells falling as martyrs, without gain."[77]

There was, however, a possible solution. Che wrote that, "If there is a real intention to begin the struggle from some foreign country or from distant and remote regions within the same country, it is obvious that it must begin in small conspiratorial movements of secret members acting without mass support or knowledge."[78] In essence, that is exactly how Al Qaeda has responded to the same dilemma: small secret cells, operating semi-independently, without central organization. Al-Suri offers the fullest theoretical account of this phenomenon. Indeed, developing the idea of "individual terrorism *jihad*" is the core of his *Call For Global Islamic Resistance*, and the reason for which he can lay claim to an enduring strategic legacy.

For the leftists, the great theorist was not Che, but an acolyte, the Brazilian terrorist Carlos Marighella, killed by security forces two years after the Bolivians accounted for Che. Marighella started from the core Guevaran position that violence could radicalize. His twofold twist was to emphasize urban spaces over rural, and the employment of small groups of decentralized fighters. Che's *Guerrilla Warfare* was the first item on Marighella's suggested reading list, and he, like Che, advocated a strategy of provocation that would spur the revolution: "it is enough to win the support of a part of the people," he stressed.[79] While the guerrilla must "[identify] with popular causes to win public support," this is best done through violent action: "The role of the urban guerrilla, in order to win the support of the people, is to continue fighting."[80] Like Guevara and Debray, Marighella stressed action as "the principal way of making armed propaganda."[81] Provocative violence in the cities would draw in repressive counterforces, alienating the masses and winning them to the rebellion. What's more, in Marighella's conception, this urban violence would create sufficient disorder that would allow the foco to operate more effectively in the countryside.[82] Terrorism was not the goal in itself, but rather a diversionary activity to buy time for the focoists elsewhere. To achieve this, Marighella urged the creation of small four- or five-man "firing groups," each of which

> plans and executes urban guerrilla actions, obtains and guards arms, studies and corrects its own tactics. . . . This method of action eliminates the need for knowing who is carrying out which actions, since there is free initiative, and the only important point is to increase substantially the volume of urban guerrilla activity in order to wear out the government and force it onto the defensive.[83]

Al-Suri's vision, and Al Qaeda's strategy in the West is essentially Marighellan. "I do not see any alternatives other than secret warfare," he wrote, ". . . as long as modern American technology controls the space and the skies."[84] For him, the best strategy is to fight "a long, attritional war in overall confrontation with America and its allies, using the methods of clandestine guerilla warfare. In particular, the means of terrorism and deterrence with urban guerilla warfare."[85] To do that, Al Qaeda must take "advantage of the military base that supports our cause inside western societies"[86] as well as fighting in the Islamic world.

As for structure, Al-Suri, like his urban terrorist forebear, favors a system of individuals, cells, and small groups, with a common goal and political program, but otherwise independent of the center. He then develops this idea by distinguishing between various types of resistance unit, according to the expertise and experience of the members. These could operate with less chance of detection and destruction by the West, given their limited hierarchy and organization. Trained cadres, al-Suri envisaged, should "depart from the front," that is, from the focos, and "spread throughout the world, each one according to his circumstances and life situation and operate completely freely and separately from the Centralised Unit."[87] That centralized unit would restrict its activities to providing overall guidance and coordinating military activity at the central fronts.

Fighting this way avoids presenting readily fixable critical targets for the enemy, an idea that also appealed to al-Qurashi, who observed that the decentralized structures of the Islamists offered no obvious center of gravity or unified command that America could attack.[88] It is known from his paper on revolutionary war that al-Qurashi was familiar with Marighella, and like him and al-Suri he has drawn the conclusion that distributed cells can endure against organized opponents.

The point of all this terrorist activity is to buy space and time for the open fronts to establish and consolidate themselves—the violence is calculated, with a clear strategic purpose in mind: to bring publicity and support, certainly, but also critically to take pressure off the foco. The largely rural revolution, at the periphery of the great power system is the focus for global *jihad*. And so al-Suri notes in Marighellan fashion that "individual terrorism Jihad and guerrilla warfare conducted by small cells paves the way for the other kind (Open Front Jihad), aids and supports it. Without confrontation in the field and seizure of land, however, a state will not emerge for us. And this is the strategic goal of the resistance project."[89] This is critical: like Marighella, al-Suri cannot abandon the idea of the foco, the open confrontation for territory, through which the political goals of revolution will be obtained.

Naji also wrote about militant activities away from the main front. For the Islamist foco to succeed, Naji identifies, as did al-Suri, favorable geography, and weak central government control. Where these conditions do not obtain, Al Qaeda must content itself with "vexation operations," as for example in Turkey, Tunisia, and elsewhere, designed to wear down the authorities. These should be conducted by separate cells and groups of fighters. In addition to exhausting the enemy, their activities would serve to attract new recruits to the fight, and might be conducted at a scale that did not engage the operational planning capabilities of high command.[90] Naji is perhaps naively optimistic about the transition from areas of vexation to areas of savagery, and does not develop a particularly

sophisticated understanding of terrorism as essentially diversionary, although he does see it as a deterrent.

In both eras, the key strategists of guerrilla warfare have followed a remarkably similar path. Starting from the point that violence radicalizes, they have developed the idea of outsiders moving into favorable areas to open a guerrilla front against the imperialist enemy. Because this enemy is overwhelmingly powerful, the strategists then develop the concept of globalized, terroristic violence, particularly in urban environments. The big problem remained unresolved—how could Al Qaeda proceed from al-Suri's ultra low-intensity terrorism toward its objective of a Qutbian caliphate? Or, for that matter, how could it expand Naji's zones of savagery into territory more completely under the control of apostates and oppressors? Che never really squared that circle in practice—his rural focos proved failures. Marighella might have seen the urban activities of the movement as a way to create space for the foco, but neither he nor his successor rebels proved able to do that in practice—repressive regimes across Latin America moved to crush the leftist revolutionaries, and urban warfare did not develop as a complement to provincial focos.

## Appreciating the Foco in Al Qaeda

Latterly, the assessment of Al Qaeda's focoist strategy has returned full circle—back into Western discourse, as analysts engage with the works of Al Qaeda's strategic thinkers and reflect on its strategic practice. David Kilcullen, in particular, has made the imaginative leap to describe Al Qaeda's strategy in these terms (intuitively, perhaps, since he cites neither Guevara or Marighella in his *Accidental Guerrillas*):

> AQ moves into remote areas, creates alliances with local traditional communities, exports violence that prompts a western intervention, and then exploits the backlash against that intervention in order to generate support for its *takfiri* agenda. Al Qa'ida's ideology tends to lack intrinsic appeal for traditional socieites, and so it draws the majority of its strength from this backlash, rather than from genuine popular support.[91]

That Kilcullen's analysis has garnered such critical acclaim is a reflection of the extent to which Al Qaeda's essentially focoist logic had been overlooked. Al Qaeda was telling the world about its strategy; of its Guevaran belief in the ability to violence to shape mass attitudes; its focoist desire to establish pockets of territory in which to implement its vision; and its Marighellan belief in the use of urban terrorism to draw heat from the foco. Kilcullen's account reflects this approach, locating Al Qaeda's violent struggle within the discourse on guerrilla war, part of a global insurgency. Elsewhere, however, Kilcullen has de-emphasized the territorial aspect of Al Qaeda's insurgency. He writes that while insurgency is a "struggle to control a contested political space," this need not involved direct territorial control: "the intent to replace existing governments or create independent states is only partly evident today."[92] A reading of al-Suri, among others, suggests otherwise.

Like Kilcullen, other analysts see both new characteristics in Al Qaeda's model of global insurgency, and rediscover some old Maoist ones. Thus Mark Stout and colleagues, in an excellent study of Al Qaeda's strategy for U.S. Joint Forces Command, find traces of Mao in Al Qaeda's strategic writing, alongside Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, and even Carlos Marighella—but not of Che or focoism.[93] In a later article, Stout notes the "occasional references to Guevara and Debray" in the literature of *jihadis*, including the three considered here—Naji, al-Suri, and al-Qurashi.[94] He draws broad parallels between the communists

and *jihadis*, including the role of the vanguard, the three stages of guerrilla war, and the desire to win over the people. Stout also notes the *jihadi* desire to liberate and expand a piece of territory, and describes the evolution of decentralized structures. This fine analysis nonetheless underplays some core elements of Al Qaeda's strategy—its focoist exporting of fighters to undergoverned spaces, its Guevaran belief that the insurrection itself will prompt revolution, and its use of urban terrorism as a supporting element for the foco, rather than the primary front.

Elsewhere, Sarah Zabel also makes the connection between Al Qaeda and Guevara. Like Che, she argues, Al Qaeda does not rely on the political groundwork for revolution having been laid already. The 9/11 attacks and other military attacks, she suggests, were a means of "creating momentum for political change"; of rousing the *umma* to revolt; done in "classic foco manner."[95] This is one cut at focoism—that violence radicalizes, particularly when targeted against contrasting others: the far enemy. The other elements of focoism, the relationship between the expeditionary focoist the locals, and the evolution of a flanking, urban terror front, do not feature in her analysis.

These appraisals are in stark contrast to an emerging body of literature that stresses the novelty of Al Qaeda as a rootless, globalized insurgency. John Mackinlay in particular is struck by the diffuse, unstructured nature of global *jihadism*, which he argues has profound implications for its relationship to space.[96] Critically, the *jihadi* insurgency is, in his view, "deterritorialized." While "a Maoist campaign set out to alter people's beliefs, it also had to succeed in taking and holding territory." In contrast, "the global Salafi message was a specific call for Islam to become deterritorialised."[97] As a result, the desired "'post-Maoist end state is much less easy to define."[98] Similarly, Marc Sageman writes that "unlike traditional terrorist organisations that have physical sites and more territorial ambitions, there is no incentive for a leaderless virtual social movement to moderate or evolve beyond terrorism."[99] These are fundamental misunderstandings of the territorial dimension in Al Qaeda's strategy. Even a deliberately diffuse movement can retain the ability to maintain some degree of ideological and political coherence, and to build more traditional insurgency structures at the margins of the state system as circumstances allow. Al Qaeda has been denied its foco in Afghanistan, but there were other regions on al-Suri and Naji's list, and even if Al Qaeda's core leadership remains harassed and in decline, the global *jihadi* ethos is now well established in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan, as well as the West.

## Implementing Strategy

Strategy implies a relationship between ideas about political violence and the practice of it. Global *jihadi* practice looks much like the theory laid out by al-Suri, Naji, and al-Qurashi, which in turn bears a close relationship to focoism. But at issue is the extent to which this is deliberate: how far the approach to violence adopted by the *jihadis* has been a conscious strategy, or the intuitive response of decentralized revolutionaries to the pressures of organizing terroristic violence. In part, this is a question about how influential the *jihadi* strategists have been.

For the strategists themselves, learning about guerrilla warfare has been a conscious endeavor. They have read widely in both Islamic and secular theories of war, and use this reading to support writing that is considered and analytical. The theorists voraciously recycle established themes from the canon, from which they draw insights and offer guidance about the best direction for the movement. They are authentic and, in al-Suri's case, original theorists of guerrilla warfare. They also reflect on the practice of their revolutions; like Che before them, they note that fighting itself is educational. Strategy is an intensely practical

activity, and it would be surprising if the experience of decades long struggle had not furnished lessons for the strategists. The relationship between strategic theory and practice is, or should be, reciprocal.

To what extent, though, is it possible to write about strategy in a diffuse movement in which command and control are of necessity limited? In his *Leaderless Jihad,* Marc Sageman advances the idea of Al Qaeda as a loose social movement, made up largely of young idealists chasing utopian dreams—very much along the lines imagined by al-Suri. From this perspective, there is limited scope for strategic behavior. Indeed, Sageman writes that there is no longer "meaningful command and control between the Al Qaeda leadership and its followers," and also that the term "strategy" applies "only to formal organizations with a coherent command and control structure, not to the informal groups of wannabes, copycats, or homegrown initiates who comprise the majority of the social movement."[100] Bruce Hoffman's critique of Sageman's perspective prompted a vigorous debate between the two analysts about the enduring importance of Al Qaeda's central leadership organization, which Hoffman argues remain important in explaining its ongoing ability to target the West.[101] The disagreement is between two scholars of terrorist studies, rather than guerrilla war—the origins of al-Suri's strategic thought in the works of leftist guerrillas of the mid-twentieth century does not feature in Sageman's account, or Hoffman's critique. But their debate seems key: how far can a harassed, badly mauled organization design and implement strategy if doing so implies structure and organization?

For Kilcullen, like Sageman, the whole question of strategy is problematic. Classic counterinsurgency writing, as he notes, assumed that the

> insurgent has real-world objectives, and a practicable strategy that can be defeated by denying these objectives. The religious ideology of some modern insurgents creates a different dynamic. Particularly in AQ-linked insurgencies, the insurgent may not seek to do or achieve any practical objective, but rather to be a *mujahid*, earning God's favor (and hope of ultimate victory through his intervention) through the act itself.[102]

That may be the case for some of the foot soldiers drawn by the call of the Global Islamic Resistance, but this existential expression of violence is emphatically not the underlying rationale for revolution. Al-Suri and fellow Islamists have a concrete vision for the social ordering of this world, not the next, and go to considerable lengths to propound it.

As for strategy, the Sageman–Hoffman debate continues, although evidence suggests that Al Qaeda retains some degree of coordination and planning, certainly within its focos, and even in preparing urban terrorists of the sort who ought to be the most autonomous self-starters. Strategy, however, does not always require direct operational control, or centralized planning, although it certainly requires a shared framework for understanding violent activity. In the parlance of Western military theory, that comes through shared doctrine and mission command— independence of action and decision making at the lowest level are prized attributes in maneuverist warfare. Strategy is enacted at the operational level, and it is here that Dima Adamsky astutely sees in the concept of operational art "precisely what decentralised jihad might be looking for now," a way in which doctrine can substitute for tight command and control in providing a common appreciation of the strategic problem and the appropriate course of action. In fact, in the writings of its strategists, and of al-Suri in particular, *jihadis* have already found a focus around which their discourse about the strategy and tactics can coalesce. He has, as Adamsky notes, produced an "operational theory of victory."[103] Thus through the promulgation of ideas about guerrilla warfare,

blending ideas about tactics and strategy in the same manner as in Guevara and Mao's books can provide direction and coherence to the revolutionary struggle. The strategists do not issue orders but act as a repository for strategic knowledge and debate.

Al-Suri's book was not an injunctive for the abandonment of strategy, but rather a recognition of diminished capacity to organize and to hold ground in the face of conventional counterattack. In the sense that it produces, promulgates, digests, and enacts ideas about violence and revolution, the global *jihadis* remain strategic actors. And the strategy they have settled on is classic focoism—the audacious exporting of violence to marginal territories in the hope of sparking widespread revolution.



## Notes

1. Examples of that genre include Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) and John Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago: From Mao to bin Laden (*London: Hurst & Co, 2009).

2. Brinjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27 (2004), p. 356.

3. On which, see especially Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (London: Hurst & Co, 2009) and Peter Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War: Prussia 1806* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

4. Che Guevara, *Guerrilla War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 13.

5. Regis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980), p. 24.

6. Guevara, *Guerrilla War*, p. 15.

7. Ibid., p. 14.

8. "The political goal must be clearly and precisely indicated to inhabitants of a guerrilla zones and their national consciousness awakened." Mao Tse Tung, *Guerrilla Warfare* in Mao Tse Tung and Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (London: Cassell, 1968), p. 64.

9. Walter Laquer, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1998), pp. 330–331.

10. Ernesto "Che" Guevara, "Guerrilla Warfare: A Method," originally published in *Cuba Socialista*, reprinted in David Deutschmann, ed., *The Che Guevara Reader* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997).

11. Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?*, pp. 108–109.

12. Debray, p. 116, emphasis in original.

13. Guevara, *Guerrilla War*, p. 15.

14. Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army* (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 52.

15. Ibid., p. 44.

16. Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?*, fn, p. 20.

17. Guevara, *Guerrilla War*, p. 19.

18. Qutb asked, "How is it possible to start the task of reviving Islam? It is necessary that there should be a vanguard which sets out with this determination and then keeps walking on the path, marching through the vast ocean of Jahiliyyah [unbelief] which has encompassed the entire world. During its course, it should keep itself somewhat aloof from this all-encompassing Jahiliyyah and should also keep some ties with it." Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2008), p. 12. Qutb's vanguard was avowedly spiritual and moral—less directly martial than those that feature in the writing of later Islamist theorists.

19. Ernesto "Che" Guevara, *The African Dream: The Diaries of Revolutionary War in the Congo* (London: Harvill Press, 2001), p. 230.

20. Ibid., p. 223.

21. Ernesto "Che" Guevara, *Bolivian Diary* (London: Lorrimer Publishing, 1971), p. 88.

22. Two landmark works are Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London: IB Tauris, 2002) and Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (London: IB Tauris, 1994).

23. See, for example, 'Abd Al-'Aziz Al-Muqrin's *Practical Course for Guerrilla War*, which includes similar themes, and displays common reflection on secular strategic thought, including some notably Guevaran themes. Translated and analyzed by Norman Cigar, in Norman Cigar, *Al Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2009).

24. al-Suri, *The Call for Global Islamic Resistance* (2004), p. 1080. Page numbers refer to the original text.

25. Ibid., p. 1422.

26. Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007).

27. Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Phase Through Which the Ummah Will Pass* (n.d.) Translated by William McCants, John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Harvard University, May 2006.

28. Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, p. 64 (page numbers refer to the page in McCants' pdf translation, rather than the original text).

29. A growing number of books collect the pronouncements of Al Qaeda figures, notably bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. Particularly useful are Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005), and Raymond Ibrahim, *The Al Qaeda Reader* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007).

30. Abu-Ubaydah al-Qurashi, "Fourth Generation Wars," *Al Ansar*, 28 January 2002.

31. Ibid.

32. Naji, *Management of Savagery*, p. 50.

33. Ibid., p. 25.

34. See Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Fontana, 1989). Naji cites him on p. 7 of *Management of Savagery.*

35. See Osama bin Laden, "19 Students," speech recorded c. December 2001, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World,* pp. 145–157.

36. al-Qurashi, "A Lesson in War," *Al Ansar* online magazine, 19 December 2002.

37. Thomas Hegghammer, "The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* no. 9 (November 2009).

38. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

39. Abu 'Ubeid al-Qurashi, "Revolutionary War" (n.d.).

40. Ibid.

41. al-Suri, *The Call*, p. 902.

42. al-Qurashi, "Revolutionary War," emphasis added

43. al-Qurashi, "Revolutionary War."

44. al-Qurashi, "Fourth Generation Wars."

45. al-Qurashi, "The Foxes of Islam," *Al Ansar*, 15 March 2002.

46. al-Suri, *The Call,* p. 34.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., p. 1114.

49. Naji, *Management of Savagery*, p. 72.

50. Ibid., p. 108.

51. Ibid., p. 249.

52. Ibid., p. 261.

53. Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, 9 July 2005, obtained and released by the United States Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 11 October 2005. Available at http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20051011_release.htm

54. al-Suri, *The Call*, p. 1352.

55. al Suri, *The Call*, as translated by Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, p. 381.

56. Ibid., pp. 347–484, at p. 350 and p. 361.
57. Ibid., p. 373.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., p. 369.
60. Ibid., p. 381.
61. al-Qurashi, "Fourth Generation Warfare."
62. al-Zawahiri, letter to al-Zarqawi.
63. Naji, *Management of Savagery*, p. 27.
64. Ibid., p. 38.
65. Ibid., pp. 33–34.
66. Ibid., p. 31.
67. Ibid., p. 34.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., p. 35.
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