

## Strategic Paralysis in Irregular Warfare

**By Lieutenant Colonel (Ret'd) Richard Newton**

In 1995, Col John Warden's article, 'The Enemy as a System', introduced the 5-Ring model for strategic thinking. The model, sometimes referred to as 'Warden's Rings', provides a worthy framework for practitioners and students of strategy and campaign planning. The effect Warden advocated was 'strategic paralysis', i.e., rendering an adversary impotent by eliminating or neutralising the control and decision-making apparatus. Strategic paralysis in Warden's concept is achieved by focusing on the singular element controlling all necessary functions of the opponent's war-making capacity—the leadership and requisite command and control systems. Although, the 5-Ring model was originally developed for conventional-regular opponents and industrial, interstate warfare, this article contends that Warden's Rings also offer an effective model to be applied in the context of modern *irregular warfare*?

The conventional-regular warfare military planners focused on in 1995 has since given way to planning for and fighting multiple wars of irregular character, or *war amongst the people*. The strategic effect intended by the 5-Rings perspective, eliminating or neutralising the control and decision-making apparatus, however, remains as valid in irregular warfare as it is in a conventional-regular context. When unable to directly target the adversary's leadership (commander, sovereign, chief executive, etc), strategic paralysis can still be achieved by operations, both non-kinetic and kinetic, in the four outer rings of the model. The indirect approach to strategic paralysis becomes more difficult and takes more time the further one moves away from the centre of the model. Therefore, strategic paralysis in irregular warfare requires a composite approach; direct actions focused on neutralising the leadership/decision-makers—the adversary centre of gravity, and indirect actions in the outer rings to isolate, marginalise, and discredit the adversary leadership.

## Introduction

In 1988, Col John Warden, III, published the book he is best known for, *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat*.<sup>1</sup> This book established Warden's reputation as an air power theorist, some suggesting him to be on par with the classic airpower theorists; Giulio Douhet, Hugh Trenchard, and Billy Mitchell.<sup>2</sup> In 1995, Warden followed up his book with in an article for the U.S. Air Force's professional magazine, the *Airpower Journal*. In that article, 'The Enemy as a System', he introduced the 5-Ring model for strategic thinking. It is this model, sometimes referred to as 'Warden's Rings', for which he is most known among military students and planners. The concept of Warden's Rings, so simple on the surface, provides a worthy framework for practitioners and students of strategy and campaign planning—inherently complex processes.

Warden's study of modern state-versus-state warfare, especially those since the inclusion of the aeroplane as an instrument of war, led him to place the leadership element, that entity which holds the decision-making authority to continue or to cease the fighting, at the centre of the rings. The basis for placing the leadership at the centre was Warden's interpretation of the Clausewitzian concept of centre of gravity and how one might attack (or affect) the enemy 'system' in order to achieve the desired strategic results. The bottom line is that Warden's 5-Ring model works, although it has been criticised (unfairly) as being a tool for only planning conventional-regular warfare, or what Sir Rupert Smith

called *interstate industrial war*.<sup>3</sup>

The world has changed since Warden wrote his book and subsequent article. The NATO allies are no longer facing the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Planning and preparing for conventional-regular warfare has given way to planning for and fighting wars of irregular character, or *war amongst the people*. Even with the prospective threats of a resurgent Russia and an aggressive China looming on the near horizon, Western nations have become embroiled in ideologically-driven irregular conflicts on nearly every continent. They have little choice, politically, socially, or militarily, but to fight and win these wars they are in. The question this article asks is if planning tools such as the 5-Ring model have become irrelevant in an era characterised by serial irregular wars? One would hope not and that thinking, adaptive planners would apply useful tools, old or new, to help solve the situation at hand.

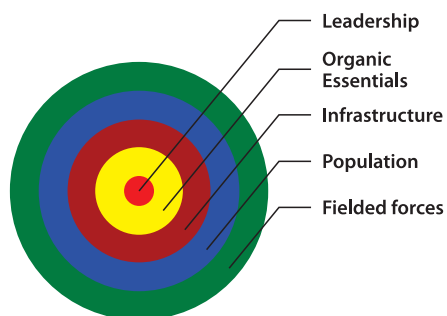
It does not matter if the 5-Ring model was designed with conventional-regular warfare in mind. The campaign planner must still discern the best way to achieve the desired strategic and operational-level objectives. Most importantly, however, what is common to warfare, whether conventional-regular or irregular, is that it is the leadership who decides whether to continue fighting or to negotiate an end to the conflict. There are many factors which influence the leaders' decisions, but in the end it is the leaders who decide. Military strategy and planning are about resolving the conflict and securing a peace. The 5-Ring model is a useful framework

for thinking about and planning the best way to influence the opposing leaders' decisions.

### Warden's 5-Rings

Before beginning, it is helpful to review exactly what John Warden proposed. First of all, he suggested that successful campaign planners, operational artists, and strategic thinkers should approach strategic military problems using a deductive approach. That is, they ought to take a top-down, or a strategy-to-task, perspective. The planner's ability to see an entire problem and then break that problem down into constituent parts, continuing through multiple iterations of analysis and results until one arrives at the tactical-level tasks to be assigned to the various components of a joint force, is the essence of successful campaign planning. The 5-Ring model helps planners visualise the enemy as a comprehensive problem set and then provides a vector towards a reasonable solution.

Warden's experiences and training as a modern airman caused him to look at strategy and planning from the perspective of one who finally possessed effective and reliable weapons able to directly strike at the enemy decision-makers or to affect the leadership through



actions, both kinetic and non-kinetic, against targets in the outer rings.<sup>4</sup> The 5-Ring model was grudgingly accepted by land-centric planners who witnessed the efficacy of airpower during the Gulf Wars in 1991 and 2003. But the model was correct—slogging through enemy forces (the outer ring) that were defending critical capabilities and critical requirements takes time and was a costly way of affecting the enemy decision makers. Likewise, actions focused at the civilian populace (fourth ring) were time-consuming and thus an inefficient way to influence the decision-makers. Warden also recognised that kinetic actions against civilians usually yielded negative long-term political results, the opposite of the end-state desired. Sadly, much of Warden's theory was lost in the emotional bickering of single-Service solutions to national security.

The second thing Warden did was renew the systems approach to strategic thinking. It is suggested that Warden's contribution was a renewal because the critical thinking skills necessary for planning conventional-regular campaigns had been largely lost during the 'vacuum era' of strategic thinking brought about by the near-singular focus on nuclear planning during much of the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> Systems-oriented thinking about warfare was not new. In fact, it was exactly the methodology used 50 years earlier by the faculty at the U.S. Army's Air Corps Tactical School when they began thinking about and planning for the future utility of the aeroplane in the aftermath of the First World War.<sup>6</sup> They, like Warden, looked at the enemy as a system of

interdependent, functioning entities, each with its own internal processes and subordinate groupings. Their theory was that clever planners could discover, through detailed analysis of the individual entities and the system as a whole, alternative paths to achieve the same strategic-level effect—defeating the opponent.

The effect Warden advocated was ‘strategic paralysis’, i.e., rendering an adversary impotent by eliminating or neutralising the control and decision-making apparatus.<sup>7</sup> In ‘The Enemy as a System’, he used a biological example to illustrate his point; the brain, the organ which controls all other processes, tasks, and sub-systems that make up a functioning human, should be the focus for attacking the body. If an adversary takes out or isolates the ‘brain’, then the rest of the ‘body’ may be functioning, but it is not acting as a human. Strategic paralysis in Warden’s concept is achieved by focusing on the singular element controlling all necessary functions of the opponent’s war-making capacity—the leadership and requisite command and control systems.

Warden recognised that it was not always possible, nor desirable, to directly attack the leadership element (sovereign, commander, chief executive). When that is the case, he recommended planners shift their efforts to the second ring, those organic essentials (energy (electricity, fuel, water, factories) and money) necessary for a nation to continue fighting. As Warden assessed how one might create a strategic effect against an opponent, he developed categories that offered classes of

targets against which effects might be applied. These categories became the rings emanating outward from the centre. Warden’s theory proposed that the farther one moved away from the bulls-eye/centre, the leadership or decision-making element, the more difficult it would be and the longer it would take to achieve the desired strategic effect—convince the enemy decision-maker to cease fighting.

As was said earlier, the 5-Ring model was developed for planners looking at a conventional-regular opponent and industrial, interstate warfare. In that context the model makes great strategic and operational-level sense; the adversary is primarily military and kinetic solutions predominate. But irregular warfare is political first and is requires a great deal of attention be paid to effects on the enemy population. The concept of strategic paralysis is still a valid concept for irregular warfare, and therefore the 5-Ring model has value. The question is, then, how might Warden’s work be applied to the context of modern *irregular* warfare?

### The Character of Irregular Warfare

Clausewitz was not a fan of irregular warfare; he dubbed it ‘legalised anarchy’.<sup>8</sup> As an observer and chronicler of Frederick the Great and Napoleon, Clausewitz wrote about the nature of warfare between nations. If one agrees with Rupert Smith that war between nations, ‘interstate industrial war’, no longer exists then further reading of Clausewitz might well be irrelevant. Colin Gray, however, contends that the nature of war has not changed and ‘since all war has the same nature, it matters not whether it is

regular or irregular'.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, this author contends that *On War* is still relevant and concepts such as centre of gravity are still valuable.

Clausewitz' treatment of irregular warfare, 'The People in Arms', is only 5 of the 600+ pages in the Howard and Paret translation of *On War*.<sup>10</sup> In this short chapter he admits the treatment of irregular warfare is 'less an objective analysis than a groping for the truth'. But, it is not Clausewitz' inadequate discussion of irregular warfare that is of value to modern campaign planners and strategists. Rather, it is because our doctrine, policies, strategies, and jargon tend towards the Clausewitzian, and the fact that the early books in the tome (and the ones considered by many to be the most important), were about the nature of war rather than the character of warfare, that thoughtful students and practitioners of the military art should study and understand this eternal, albeit imposing, text.

Before continuing, it is also helpful to remember the leading question Colin Gray asked, '...are we talking about irregular warfare, insurgency, low-intensity conflict, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and so forth? The answer is yes, and more than those'.<sup>11</sup> Irregular warfare and its relatives are warfare and the objective is controlling the population and relevant territory. How that 'territory' is defined will be discussed later.

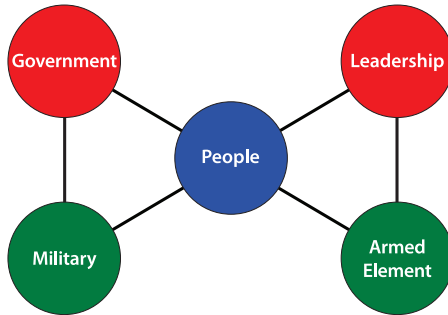
Irregular warfare is characterised first by the environment in which it occurs. To paraphrase Rupert Smith, 'there is no secluded battlefield upon which armies engage, nor are there necessarily armies, definitely

not on all sides.... the people in the streets and houses and fields – all the people anywhere – are the battlefield. Military engagements can take place anywhere in the presence of civilians, against civilians, in defence of civilians. Civilians are the targets to be won, as much as an opposing force'.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, irregular warfare is defined by the adversary, specifically how they choose to fight and the forces they use to conduct their operations. Our goal is to be prepared, agile, and flexible enough to adapt to whatever methods the enemy employs, in whatever environment they decide to fight in.

It has been conventional wisdom that the primary objective, the focus of all political, social, informational, and military efforts in irregular warfare is the people. Mao Zedong noted in his primer on revolution, *Guerrilla Warfare*, that weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things that are decisive.<sup>13</sup> Counter-insurgency expert David Galula noted, 'If the insurgent manages to dissociate the population from the counterinsurgent, to control it physically, to get its active support, he will win the war because, in the final analysis, the exercise of political power depends on the tacit or explicit agreement of the population, or at worst, on the submissiveness'.<sup>14</sup> Current and emerging doctrine in the U.S., Great Britain, and NATO emphasises that campaigns and operations will orient on the populace rather than enemy forces and that the goal of military operations is to restore the legitimacy of the government, secure the support of the population, and neutralise the insurgents' power,

influence, and legitimacy.

It has not been uncommon for those trying to explain or to understand the political and social phenomenon that is irregular warfare to fall back upon Clausewitz's remarkable trinity model. Using two trinities to represent the two antagonists, the government and the insurgents, they



can be turned sideways and joined on the populace, thereby creating a 'sideways hourglass' shape. Dr. Heather Gregg, a professor in the Defense Analysis Department at the Naval Postgraduate School in California, characterised the relationship between the antagonists in irregular warfare as a 'tug-of-war for the loyalty and support of the population'.<sup>15</sup> The sideways hourglass model shows, in graphic simplicity, the tug-of-war between the government and its military competing with the insurgent leadership and its armed element for the loyalty, allegiance, and support of population.

This has served as a reasonably accurate model of the struggle in classical counter-insurgency.<sup>16</sup> Implied by the hourglass model and fully understood by those planning for and engaged in irregular warfare, is that insurgency is first a political conflict, but it is also a social struggle.

Mao Zedong famously observed that irregular warfare was 'politics from the end of a gun'. David Galula, one of the foremost counter-insurgency experts, in his book *Counterinsurgency Operations*, makes the case that the insurgent knows is foolish to fight the government conventionally and thus must 'carry the fight to a different ground where he has a better chance to balance the physical odds against him'.<sup>17</sup> Galula, like so many other theorists and practitioners who have studied Mao and fought against those employing a Maoist strategy, says that 'different ground' is the population. The contest in irregular warfare is a tug-of-war for control, allegiance, and support of the population. In simpler terms, irregular warfare is *fighting about, for and with influence*; influence from both a positive (incentives) and a negative (threats) perspective.

Although there are significant physical elements that must be addressed, the essence of irregular warfare is conflict in the moral domain.<sup>18</sup> This is where irregular conflict is won or lost. The mantra, 'win the hearts and minds' acknowledges that lasting settlement of these conflicts are best achieved via the ballot box rather than the battlefield. In Nicaragua, the FSLN, or more commonly known as the Sandinistas, insurgent organisation became a legitimate political party after the cessation of hostilities and its leader, Daniel Ortega, was eventually and peacefully elected president of the country. The same happened in El Salvador with the FMLN insurgent movement. Similarly, once the Irish Republican Army ceased fighting and agreed to political negotiation, its political

wing, Sinn Fein, sent duly elected representatives to Parliament and continues to exercise significant political clout in the local, peaceful politics of Northern Ireland. As a final example, in 2005, John Garang, leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, negotiated a settlement with the leadership of Sudan under Omar al-Bashir in order to end the fighting, rejoin the political process, and restore southern Sudan via democratic processes.

Examples such as these abound on every continent, from the historical to the current, but they illustrate the key point that irregular warfare is rarely concluded via a *military solution*, but rather through *political resolution*. This is not to say that military force is not required. Quite the opposite is true. In order for political, social, and economic programmes to take root and effect the changes needed to address the root causes of the insurgency, there must first be an environment where the people feel safe enough to participate in the political process. The military and police must provide this safe and security environment. The tug-of-war for the allegiance and support of the populace though, is real, but in order to work towards resolving the grievances which forced the conflict, both the government and the insurgent leadership must compromise and commit to some sort of political process.

What these examples illustrate, too, is that the people are the means to the insurgents' ultimate objective, power. The population is the 'key terrain' in irregular warfare, analogous to the bridges, ports, mountain passes, and dominating heights that are

key terrain in conventional-regular warfare. According to Rupert Smith, the people are the battlefield. But the population is not the capability which is the source of physical and moral strength, or as in British doctrine, 'the most significant hurdle, or obstruction, to attaining the end-state', in irregular warfare.<sup>19</sup> They are not the centre of gravity as some would assert. While acquiescence by the population to the government's side is the desired end-state and according to Galula the prize to be won, the people cannot be the centre gravity.

This does not mean the sideways hourglass model is wrong; quite the opposite. As an illustration of the tug-of-war between the government and the insurgents, it is accurate and useful. Both the government and the insurgents need the physical and moral support of the populace in order to achieve their respective desired political outcomes. The sideways hourglass model does a great job of illustrating the importance of the objective, allegiance and support from the people, in irregular conflict. But it is not a model which offers planners significant help discerning what to do about the irregular adversary they are facing. Re-enter the 5-Ring model.

### The True Believers

General Sir Frank Kitson noted that 'insurgents start with nothing but a cause and grow to strength, while the counter-insurgents start with everything but a cause and gradually decline in strength to the point of weakness'.<sup>20</sup> What he meant though was that the *government* started with everything, meaning the

diplomatic, economic, military, and informational powers and legitimacy of a recognised nation-state, and successful insurgents gradually eroded the government's strength to shift the powers and legitimacy to their side. Likewise, the successful counter-insurgents were able to avoid the decline and use their power to overcome the insurgents' efforts.

Kitson, like Mao, Galula, Sir Robert Thompson, Bernard Fall, and countless other theorists, practitioners, and analysts of irregular warfare, especially those with a tendency towards the protracted popular war theory proposed by Mao, noted that no insurgency can succeed without widespread popular appeal. Psychologists have spent lifetimes trying to understand what motivates groups and why individuals will think and behave differently in a large group setting than they might otherwise if alone or in a very small group. In 1951, Eric Hoffer published *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*.<sup>21</sup> The book should be required reading for all students of irregular warfare (as Colin Gray described irregular conflict, earlier in this paper). *The True Believer* offers insights into the commonalities among ideologically-based mass movements, whether religious, political, or nationalistic. As Hoffer explained in the preface, 'All mass movements generate ... a readiness to die and a proclivity for united action; all of them, irrespective of the doctrine they preach...breed fanaticism, enthusiasm, fervent hope, hatred, and intolerance...all of them demand blind faith and single-hearted (sic) allegiance'.

Insurgencies hinge upon the leadership and the decisions of key individuals. The central figures in every mass movement are the True Believers, men of fanatical faith who embody and articulate the core tenets, inspire and mobilise the masses, and lead the group to action. Depending on the phase of the mass movement, those leaders will either be *men of words*, *fanatics*, or *men of action* (Hoffer's titles). It helps our understanding to spend some time reviewing Eric Hoffer's research.

*Men of words* are the visionaries and charismatic orators who pioneer the movement by discrediting the prevailing order and institutions, articulating a hope for the future, and offering a means to achieve that better future. Interestingly, without the man of words to unify the masses, humans tend to accept their current situations, no matter how dismal, as the normal state of affairs. It then takes the *fanatic* to ignite the flames of rebellion and mobilise the large, uncommitted portion of the population. Fanatics are those who can see the future articulated by the men of words and are prone to the physical actions needed to achieve that promised future. The fanatic, according to Hoffer, thrives on chaos and will push the man of words aside while still spouting the man of words' doctrine and slogans in order to inflame and unite the masses.<sup>22</sup>

Where it takes the man of words to pioneer a movement and the fanatic to give substance to and mobilise mass movements, it is *men of action* who consolidate the effort and institute the enduring elements that ensure the survival and longevity of the movement. Hoffer notes the



man of action 'saves the movement from the suicidal dissensions and the recklessness of the fanatics'.<sup>23</sup> Men of action concern themselves with administering, preserving, and expanding any gains won during earlier phases of the movement.

To illustrate with a modern example, Osama bin Laden can be considered the fanatic for the al Qaeda movement. Through his force of personality, he has mobilised Muslims from around the world to support al Qaeda and its related organisations. But, it was Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian, and Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, a Palestinian, members of the Muslim Brotherhood and teachers of Ayman Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden, who were the men of words and provided the ideological inspiration for the global jihadi movement. Sayyid Qutb's book, *Milestones*, continues today as a manifesto of radical Islam. And it has been Ayman Zawahiri, controlling, administering, and sustaining the network, who can be considered al Qaeda's man of action.

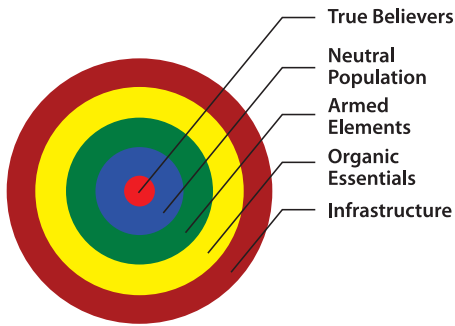
### Strategic Paralysis in Irregular Warfare

It is the True Believers who are the 'source of power from which the (insurgent) system derives its moral or physical strength...and will to act'. More specifically, it is the fanatics and the men of action, those political and paramilitary leaders who inspire, mobilise, guide, and sustain the moral and physical strength of an insurgency, who function as the brains of the movement and are therefore the centre of the model. Experience has shown that without great leadership mass movements;

no matter if good or evil, fall apart. Furthermore, so long as the insurgent leadership has no desire or impetus to negotiate a settlement and rejoin the political process, then the government is obliged to take whatever measures it legally and ethically may to render the insurgent leadership impotent—seeking strategic paralysis.

To continue the earlier example, let us assume that al Qaeda's leadership, Osama bin Laden and Ayman Zawahiri are in Pakistan being sheltered by sympathetic tribes. U.S. and NATO forces are unable to capture or kill these True Believers because of political, geographic, and social restraints. Al Qaeda's ability to guide and sustain their global network survives so long as they remain safely in their sanctuary and they retain access to global communications. It is also true that so long as they have reliable sanctuary, the al Qaeda leadership has little or no reason to negotiate and compromise on their radical, ideologically-driven, perspective of how the world should be.

Thus, if friendly forces are unable to directly strike at the centre of gravity, how then to render it powerless or at least so marginalised that bin Laden and Zawahiri are unable to guide and sustain their movement? The answer is to take an indirect approach as was recommended in the original 5-Ring model. If unable to strike the centre directly, then paralyse the centre of gravity by isolating, starving, immobilising, discrediting, marginalising, or otherwise neutralising it through effects generated via the other rings emanating outward from the centre.



If the 5-Ring model is redrawn to illustrate irregular warfare, then the first ring out from the centre, the population, offers the best and most opportunities to affect the True Believers indirectly. It is among the people where the insurgents' critical capabilities, critical requirements, and critical vulnerabilities lie.

To be successful, the insurgent movement must have the active support of the uncommitted majority of the population. Whereas in conventional-regular conflict the adversaries require only the passive acquiescence of the population, in irregular warfare the insurgents use the people as their source of funding ('taxes'), supplies, recruits, intelligence (information), refuge, and eventually political power. This says nothing of the people's enthusiasm for the insurgent cause; it simply acknowledges the importance of the populace to satisfy the insurgents' basic survival needs.

If considered against Maslow's hierarchy of needs model, in order to exist the insurgent movement, like humans, must first satisfy its physiological and then its security requirements. In irregular warfare, the insurgents fulfil their basic levels of needs by taking what they need from the population through persuasion and coercion. Bard

O'Neill, in *Insurgency and Terrorism*, shows how among the different strategies for insurgency and revolution, only the Maoist approach addresses the population with any degree of respect. The others are all top-down approaches that use the population as the source for manpower, logistics, communications, and financing, with little regard for the 'hearts and minds' of the people.<sup>24</sup> Understanding Maslow's hierarchy helps us see that while ideological fervour and revolutionary zeal might instil an initial feeling of belonging and possibly foster a sense of self-esteem, it is hard for the insurgency to sustain that passion among the soldiers and supporters when they are cold, wet, hungry, scared, and exhausted, i.e., when their basic needs are not being met. Therefore, friendly campaigns and operations designed to paralyse unassailable insurgent leaders must take the next most effective approach, a whole-of-government effort aimed at the denying the movement its physiological and security needs. This is usually best accomplished by ensuring the government provides the people their basic needs and protects them from intimidation and threats by insurgent armed elements.

The next ring out from the centre is Armed Elements, or the irregular version of fielded forces. This ring has what might be considered a reassuring familiarity to military planners. As in the conventional-regular fight, soldiers fighting other 'soldiers' is what military forces are trained, equipped, and organised to do.<sup>25</sup> The challenge for planners in irregular warfare is the lack of identifiable and targetable

military formations among their predominantly guerrilla-style opponents. This is not to say that insurgents never stand and fight—quite the opposite is true, as recent operations in Marjah, Afghanistan have shown. Moreover, at some point the insurgents can and will conduct conventional-regular battles to gain strategic advantage...but they tend to do so at the time and place of their choosing and when the expected results are heavily weighted in their favour. The third of Mao's three-phases is when the insurgents go on the Strategic Offensive and take on government forces in conventional-regular combat. Transition to the third stage though, only happens when the insurgents believe they have sufficient power to defeat the government. The insurgents retain the initiative.

The more immediate threat in the tug-of-war for gaining and sustaining the support of the uncommitted population comes from the insurgent movement's armed elements—politically motivated, usually calloused to violence, and often criminal-like in their attitude toward the populace. Unlike the government which is attempting to 'win' the allegiance and active support of the population, the insurgents rarely concern themselves with persuading the population to willingly join their cause. The insurgents are able to attain their ultimate goal, replacing the government through political violence by coercing compliance and enforcing obedience by the people. Therein lies the government's multi-faceted challenge—how to defeat or deter guerrilla fighters/soldiers while providing a safe and secure

environment for the populace and still representing its actions in a positive and favourable light on the local and world stages? This complex challenge (or opportunity, depending on one's perspective) offers insight as to how planners might impact the insurgent leadership from this third ring.

Just as the True Believers require a safe and secure area from which to control, administer, and sustain their movement, so too does the population need an environment that allows them to live, work, and raise their families free from real or perceived threats to their lives. No matter how grand or how comprehensive the government's programmes to restore services, authority, and legitimacy, counter-insurgency only works when the public feels reasonably safe and secure. Policemen matter! Therefore, the government must have a sufficiently large, adequately trained, and ethically sound security force able to deny the insurgents access to the people, defeat the enemy whenever the guerrillas do give battle, and are seen as apolitical, honest, and just.

The third ring out, Organic Essentials, offers planners a range of possible critical capabilities and critical requirements against which to build an indirect approach campaign plan. Warden defined the organic essentials as those necessities that sustained a modern way of life and kept the industrial machinery operating to produce the weapons of war, i.e., electricity, communications architecture, fuel, money, etc. In irregular warfare, with its decidedly guerrilla character, the adversary has little need for those organic

essentials necessary for conventional-regular warfare. But an insurgency, even a globally-networked, ideologically-driven one, does have organic essentials. The challenge is discovering what they are and how best to effect them when faced with significant sovereignty, legal, cultural, ethical, and political challenges.

Key to al Qaeda's survival has been its ability to spread its message among the Muslim diasporas around the world, sustaining its influx of funds, recruiting fighters from around the world, and attacking Western sensitivities with words and images designed to influence popular opinion among liberal-democratic societies where the leadership gives the population the freedom to express dissenting opinions. The fact that the U.S., U.K., NATO, and their allies are 'playing chess while the insurgents play checkers' is frustrating, but it is a sad fact of life. The challenge, and one of the major reasons why defeating an insurgency takes so long is that 'fighting' on a global scale in the financial markets, world-wide media, supra-governmental political organisations, and international business arenas is orders of magnitude more complicated, difficult, and time consuming than physical combat among soldiers and guerrillas. Operations in irregular warfare are predominantly non-military and require an exceedingly difficult comprehensive, whole-of-government, and multi-national approach. So, while great effects may be generated in the organic essentials ring, the immediacy of the effects and the difficulty of co-ordinating operations are often discouraging.

Infrastructure is placed in the outermost ring because it is the most difficult and therefore the least productive area when developing campaigns and operations against an insurgency. This final ring in the irregular warfare model has a complexity to it that frustrates planners, especially those unable to discard the traditions, methods, and doctrines of conventional-regular warfare. Bridges, roads, communications structures, ports, and the like are easily identifiable and targetable by conventional planners. Striking them has a direct, quantifiable impact upon the conventional-regular fight, i.e., X number of bridges are required for an armoured force to manoeuvre and fight in such-and-such an area. Dropping some or all of them restricts the movement of enemy armoured forces. While irregulars may not have the same requirements for infrastructure as conventional-regular forces, they still must be sustained. What infrastructure guerrillas do require is different than that which military planners have traditionally considered, though. Guerrillas tend to fight primarily with small arms and light weapons, use ubiquitous transportation methods, will normally forage for food, fuel, and medical supplies from among the population, and they have shown innovative uses for commercial communications systems. Although the government requires roads, ports, bridges, and the like in order to implement and sustain its military and civic action programmes, irregulars fighting primarily as guerrillas need little conventional infrastructure to support their forces and operations.

Irregular forces, even in the guerrillas phase, need weapons, ammunition, money, radios/mobile telephones, vehicles, and explosives. Likewise, they need a fitted-for-purpose supply and distribution system able to operate in hostile or denied environment. Insurgents' supply and distribution networks are modelled on, or sometimes even administered by, the international crime and drug networks. These criminal groups have robust and capable networks in place for moving large and small quantities of people, money, weapons, and cargo outside the scrutiny and control of the authorities. The linkage between international crime and insurgency is well documented. It is the perfect marriage. In Colombia, Afghanistan, and Burma, for example, drugs fuel the internal and neighbouring insurgencies. The marketing, production, processing, transportation, distribution, and financing related to illegal drugs have expanded into the related industries of weapons trafficking and illegal immigration. If one looks at insurgent infrastructure from the perspective of border security, immigration, or drug policy enforcement, then there is definitely insurgent infrastructure

worth considering. The problem for military planners is that doing something about this underground network requires an international law enforcement point of view, with all the attendant jurisdictional challenges that arise when policing elements from multiple nations, agencies, and disciplines need to collaborate and cooperate. Decades of international policing efforts have done little to stem the flow of illegal drugs from the producing regions into America and Europe. The same is true for undocumented migrants. These networks illustrate the infrastructures insurgents often use to supply, fund, man, and otherwise sustain their operations. And it is because that underground infrastructure has proven so resilient and difficult to effect that it is placed in the outermost ring of the irregular warfare model.

Comparing the 5-Ring models, then, the leadership is the centre of gravity, the capability and influence from which the insurgents gain their direction, cohesion and will to fight in both cases. In nearly all instances of irregular conflict, the ability to directly target the leadership has been denied, either through political,

Conventional-Regular		Irregular	
<b>Leadership</b>	Political Leader, Commander	<b>Leadership</b>	Fanatics, Men of Action
<b>Organic Essentials</b>	Electricity, Fuel, Water	<b>Population</b>	Active Support (Supplies, Refuge, Info)
<b>Infrastructure</b>	Bridges, Roads, Comms	<b>Armed Elements</b>	Guerrillas, Enforcers
<b>Population</b>	Passive Acquiescence	<b>Organic Essentials</b>	World Opinion, Finances, Sanctuary
<b>Fielded Forces</b>	Military, Police, Paramilitary	<b>Infrastructure</b>	Smugglers, Drug Production

geographical, and/or social restraints. Therefore, counter-insurgents must seek other, indirect, means to neutralise the insurgent leadership. As the population offers most of the effective and relatively easier means of achieving decisive effects, they then become the primary battle-space for both the government and the insurgents. Adjusting the 5-Ring model from a conventional-regular perspective to one more suited for irregular warfare would reorder the rings to be Leadership, Population, Armed Elements, Organic Essentials, and Infrastructure. What is not stated, but becomes obvious in the re-ordered approach to the 5-Ring model, is the affect induced upon the time required to achieve strategic paralysis. Campaigns and operations among the people take time—on average about 10 years. The rapid application of overwhelming force that is the hallmark of U.S. and NATO conventional-regular military operations does not apply to irregular warfare. An indirect approach focused on winning and sustaining the active support of the population, thereby denying the same to the opponents, is a long-term effort. Commanders and political leaders must accept this fact and be prepared for the commitment.

### Conclusion

The strategic effect intended by the 5-Rings perspective is 'strategic paralysis', i.e., rendering an adversary impotent by eliminating or neutralising the control and decision-making apparatus. That objective is as valid in irregular warfare as it was in the conventional-regular context Warden originally developed it to portray. When unable to directly

target the adversary's leadership (sovereign, commander, chief executive), strategic paralysis can be achieved by operations, both non-kinetic and kinetic, in the four outer rings of the model. To be an effective model for irregular warfare the rings must be reordered from Warden's original offering to portray the changed character of modern conflict. Still, as with the original 5-Rings, the further one moves away from the leadership or decision-making element, i.e., the centre of gravity, the more difficult it becomes and the longer will take to achieve the desired strategic end-state—strategic paralysis. It is this strategic paralysis, rendering the enemy system impotent by neutralising the decision-making and controlling authority that is the key take-away from Warden's work. It is also why the 5-Ring model remains a valuable aid to campaign planning in the form of conflict its designer preferred to avoid.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> John A. Warden, III, *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat*, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> See for example, David Jordan, et al, *Understanding Modern Warfare*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Phillip S. Meilinger, ed., *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory*, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1997); and Colin Gray, 'Understanding Airpower: Bonfire of the Fallacies', *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, Winter 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, (London: Penguin Books, Ltd, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> The idea of striking directly at enemy vital centres and overstepping the forces on the ground is as old as airpower itself. The advent of reliable and abundant precision-guided, small yield weapons has enabled achievement of what the early airpower theorist prophesied.

<sup>5</sup> 'Strategic' during the Cold War became synonymous with nuclear weapons rather than the level of war at which national security objectives were defined and policy was established to determine appropriate uses of national or alliance power.

<sup>6</sup> The Air Corps Tactical School called this concept the "industrial web" theory. Its key tenets included the interdependence of a nation's military, political, economic, and social elements and that it was possible to precisely target "vital centres" in order to upset the equilibrium of modern society. Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 49 – 58.

<sup>7</sup> John A. Warden, III, 'The Enemy as a System', *Airpower Journal*, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, Spring

1995), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Clausewitz, pg 479.

<sup>9</sup> Colin Gray, 'Irregular Warfare: One Nature, Many Characters', (*Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, Winter 2007), 40.

<sup>10</sup> Clausewitz, pp 479 – 83. Book 6, Chapter 26.

<sup>11</sup> Gray, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, pp 3 – 4.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel B. Griffith, ed. and trans., *Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare*, (New York: Praeger, Inc., 1961)

<sup>14</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1964), 7 – 8.

<sup>15</sup> Heather S. Gregg, 'Beyond Population Engagement: Understanding Counterinsurgency', *Parameters*, (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, Autumn 2009), 19.

<sup>16</sup> See for example, David Galula; Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, (St Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2005, originally published in 1966); Robert Tabor, *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare*, (Washington, DC: Brassey's, Inc, 2002, originally published in 1965), and Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, and Peacekeeping*, (St Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2007, originally published in 1971).

<sup>17</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1964, pg 7.

<sup>18</sup> NATO recognises three domains of warfare; physical, moral, and cybernetic (*ACO Guidelines for Operational Planning*, July 2005, pg 3-4). The British, too, recognise three domains; physical, virtual, and cognitive (JDP 01, *Campaigning*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, pg 3A-2).

<sup>19</sup> JDP 01, pg 3-22.

<sup>20</sup> Kitson, pg 29.

<sup>21</sup> Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, (New York: Perennial Classics, 2002, originally published in 1951).

<sup>22</sup> Hoffer, pg 144.

<sup>23</sup> Hoffer, pg 149.

<sup>24</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, Dulles: VA: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005, pp 45-60. This chapter on insurgent strategies is essentially the same as in the 1990 version, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, published by Brassey's, Inc.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, pg 6. 'Military force when employed has only two immediate effects: it kills people and destroys things. Whether or not this death and destruction serve to achieve the overarching or political purpose the force was intended to achieve depends on the choice of targets or objectives, all within the broader context of the operation'. v



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