CIA Best Practices in Counterinsurgency

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Description

This is a secret CIA document assessing high-value targeting (HVT) programs world-wide for their impact on insurgencies. The document is classified SECRET//NOFORN (no foreign nationals) and is for internal use to review the positive and negative implications of targeted assassinations on these groups for the strength of the group post the attack. The document assesses attacks on insurgent groups by the United States and other countries within Afghanistan, Algeria, Colombia, Iraq, Israel, Peru, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, Libya, Pakistan and Thailand. The document, which is "pro-assassination", was completed in July 2009 and coincides with the first year of the Obama administration and Leon Panetta's directorship of the CIA during which the United States very significantly increased its CIA assassination program at the expense of capture operations. It produces a chart for US officials to use in strategically assessing future operations and methods in HVT assassinations.

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY   DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

BEST PRACTICES IN COUNTERINSURGENCY

7 July 2009

Making High-Value Targeting Operations an Effective Counterinsurgency Tool (C//NF)

**Making High-Value Targeting Operations an
Effective Counterinsurgency Tool (C//NF)**

Key Findings (U)

A CIA review of high-value targeting (HVT) programs worldwide[a] suggests that HVT operations can play a useful role when they are part of a broader counterinsurgency strategy. HVT operations are most likely to contribute to successful counterinsurgency outcomes when governments decide on a desired strategic outcome before beginning HVT operations, analyze potential effects and shaping factors, and simultaneously employ other military and nonmilitary counterinsurgency instruments.

- Potential positive strategic effects of HVT operations include eroding insurgent effectiveness, weakening insurgent will, reducing the level of insurgent support, fragmenting or splitting the insurgent group, altering insurgent strategy or organization in ways that favor the government, and strengthening government morale and support.

- Potential negative effects of HVT operations include increasing the level of insurgent support, causing a government to neglect other aspects of its counterinsurgency strategy, altering insurgent strategy or organization in ways that favor the insurgents, strengthening an armed group's bond with the population, radicalizing an insurgent group's remaining leaders, creating a vacuum into which more radical groups can enter, and escalating or deescalating a conflict in ways that favor the insurgents.

- The insurgent group factors that shape the impact of HVT operations include the degree of leadership centralization, succession planning and bench strength, level of visibility, life cycle stage, strength of cause and popular support, and existence of sanctuary.

- Several government factors, including the duration and intensity of HVT operations and the choice of HVT method, also affect the outcome of HVT operations. (C//NF)

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[a] We studied as cases Afghanistan (2001-present), Algeria (1954-62), Colombia (2002-present), Iraq (2004-present), Israel (1972 to mid-1990s, mid-1990s to present), Peru (1980-99), Northern Ireland (1969-98), and Sri Lanka (1983-May 2009). We drew additional examples from Chechnya, Libya, Pakistan, and Thailand. (C//NF)

Our study of successful and unsuccessful uses of HVT programs in counterinsurgencies identified several best practices that can be applied when planning or evaluating HVT operations:

- *Identifying Desired Outcome.* Because HVT operations can have unforeseen effects, governments tend to be most successful when they are clear about the desired impact on the insurgent group's trajectory.

- *Basing Decisions on Knowledge of an Insurgent Group's Internal Workings.* Governments' successful use of HVT operations generally draw on a deep understanding of the targeted group's internal workings and specific vulnerabilities, which is usually gained by penetrating the group or debriefing defectors.

- *Integrating HVT Operations With Other Elements of Counterinsurgency Strategy.* Governments with effective HVT programs have integrated them into comprehensive counterinsurgency strategies, the other elements of which could be adjusted to capitalize on or compensate for the effects produced by HVT operations.

- *Protecting Potential Moderates.* Directing HVT operations against the most violent and extremist leaders may increase the likelihood of an eventual political settlement. Many insurgencies have internal divisions between the more militant leaders and those more politically oriented.

- *Capitalizing on Leadership Divisions.* Exacerbating or exploiting leadership fissures, for example by co-opting disaffected insurgent leaders, can be as effective as targeting a group's leadership through military action. (C//NF)

Scope Note (U)

The paper aims to convey lessons learned, provide a framework for evaluating the strategic utility of high-value targeting (HVT) operations, and assist policymakers and military officers involved in authorizing or planning HVT operations. Most of our source information relies on clandestine and defense attache reporting, discussions with HVT practitioners, a CIA-sponsored study on HVT operations in counterinsurgencies, and our review of current and historical case studies. (C//NF)

The two previous papers in the "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency" series were OTI IA 2007-087 (Secret//NF), M*aking Insurgent Defector Programs an Effective Counterinsurgency Tool (C//NF)*, 3 December 2007, and OTI IA 2007-016 (Secret//NF), *Improving Security Force Conduct (C//NF)*, 1 February 2007. (C//NF)

Making High-Value Targeting Operations an Effective Counterinsurgency Tool (C//NF)

Civilian and military leaders of governments fighting insurgencies have often turned to high-value targeting (HVT) operations to achieve objectives such as damaging an insurgent group by depriving it of effective direction and experience, deterring future guerrilla actions by demonstrating the consequences, demoralizing rank-and-file members, promoting perceptions of regime viability in providing security, and imposing punishments for past acts, according to a CIA review of HVT programs worldwide. In evaluating governments' experiences with HVT programs, we studied the cases of Afghanistan (2001-present), Algeria (1954-62), Colombia (2002-present), Iraq (2004-present), Israel (1972 to mid-1990s, mid-1990s to present), Peru (1980-99), Northern Ireland (1969-98), and Sri Lanka (1983-May 2009). We drew additional examples from Chechnya, Libya, Pakistan, and Thailand. (C//NF)

Potential Strategic Effects of HVT Operations (C//NF)

A review of HVT operations in counterinsurgencies worldwide suggests a range of positive and negative potential effects on conflict dynamics. Diverse variables, such as insurgent group characteristics and government capabilities, make predicting the consequences of HVT operations difficult.

- Potential positive effects of HVT operations include eroding insurgent effectiveness, weakening insurgent will, reducing the level of

> **High-Value Targeting Defined (C//NF)**
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> We define high-value targeting as focused operations against specific individuals or networks whose removal or marginalization should disproportionately degrade an insurgent group's effectiveness. The criteria for designating high-value targets will vary according to factors such as the insurgent group's capabilities, structure, and leadership dynamics and the government's desired outcome. (C//NF)

insurgent support, fragmenting or splitting the insurgent group, altering insurgent strategy or organization in ways that favor the government, and strengthening government morale and support.

- Potential negative effects of HVT operations include increasing insurgent support, causing a government to neglect other aspects of its counterinsurgency strategy, provoking insurgents to alter strategy or organization in ways that favor the insurgents, strengthening an armed group's popular support with the population, radicalizing an insurgent group's remaining leaders, and creating a vacuum into which more radical groups can enter.

- HVT operations may, by eroding the "rules of the game" between the government and insurgents, escalate the level of violence in a conflict, which may or may not be in a government's interest. (C//NF)

Impact on Insurgents

Eroding Insurgent Effectiveness. HVT operations can cause greater disruption than a group can absorb when strikes outpace a group's ability to replace its leaders or when the strikes result in the loss of individuals with critical skills such as finance and logistics—who comprise a finite quantity in any insurgency, according to our review. HVT operations typically force remaining leaders to increase their security discipline, which may compromise a leader's effectiveness.

- In Colombia, successful HVT strikes against top insurgent leaders in early 2008, in conjunction with earlier strikes against second- and third-tier leaders and finance and logistics specialists, substantially eroded the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia's (FARC) capabilities, according to clandestine, Colombian National Police, and US Embassy in Bogota reporting.[1 2 3 4]

- In Iraq, Jaysh Muhammad (JM) suffered a significant setback in late 2004 after British forces captured the head of JM and his replacements in short succession, according to the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate.[5]

- Usama bin Ladin's measures to avoid detection, including his reliance on low-technology communications, his reluctance to meet with subordinates, and his contentment with leading from a sequestered distance via infrequent contact, have affected his ability to command his organization, according to detainee reporting.[6 7 8 9 10 11] (S//NF)

Weakening Insurgent Will. Leadership losses can erode morale at all levels of the insurgency and reinforce the costs and risks of involvement, especially when no clear succession plan is in place. The March 2008 death of FARC Secretariat member Raul Reyes is likely to have seriously damaged FARC discipline and morale, even among its leadership, according to a CIA field commentary.[12] Within a week of Reyes' death,

Secretariat member Ivan Rios was killed by a bodyguard, and in May 2008 a veteran FARC commander and ideologue surrendered.[13]

- Rank-and-file morale also suffered when HAMAS failed in 2004 to announce the name of its new leader following the deaths of Sheikh Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, according to an academic terrorism expert.[14] (S//NF)

Changing the Level of Insurgent Support. The death or capture of key insurgents may lead to reduced domestic or foreign support for the group, as supporters recalculate the insurgent group's chances of winning the conflict and consider the potential costs of backing the losing side. Such a phenomenon is enhanced when leadership strikes coincide with other counterinsurgency successes.

- Malaysia's arrest in 1998 of four top leaders of the southern Thai separatist insurgent group Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO), in concert with civil-military programs and an expanded amnesty, led to substantial increases in separatist defections and a decline in domestic support for the group, according to reporting from the US Embassy in Bangkok.[15 16 17] (C//NF)

HVT strikes, however, may increase support for the insurgents, particularly if these strikes enhance insurgent leaders' lore, if noncombatants are killed in the attacks, if legitimate or semilegitimate politicians aligned with the insurgents are targeted, or if the government is already seen as overly repressive or violent. Because of the psychological nature of insurgency, either side's actions are less important than how events are perceived by key audiences inside and outside the country, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency.[18]

- Israeli HVT efforts from 2000 to 2002 strengthened solidarity between terrorist groups and bolstered popular support for hardline militant leaders, according to US Embassy officials in Jerusalem and clandestine reporting.[19 20 21 22 23] (S//NF)

Fragmenting or Splitting the Insurgent Group.
The removal or marginalization of unifying leaders can exacerbate divisions in a group and cause it to fragment. This potential for fragmenting is especially pronounced when insurgent organizations are made up of coalitions of groups or factions.

- The deaths of two senior Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) leaders in a US missile strike in January 2008 are probably hindering the group's merger with al-Qa'ida and exacerbating divisions between the LIFG's North Africa– and Europe-based members.[24][25] (S//NF)

Altering Insurgent Strategy or Organization. By altering internal divisions, an HVT program may cause an insurgent group to change its goals and strategy. For example, degradation of an insurgent group's leadership may lead the group to shift from pursuing political goals to engaging in criminal activity, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency.[26]

- The Iraqi Government has been using HVT efforts to eliminate irreconcilable Sadrist militant leaders and moderate the Sadrist movement.[27]

- In Chechnya, Russia's HVT efforts between 2002 and 2006 precluded political resolution of the conflict and centralized control of the insurgent movement under jihadist faction leader Shamil Basayev, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency.[28] (C//NF)

Some insurgencies adapt to leadership losses by adopting a decentralized organizational structure and taking other measures to improve operational security. HVT efforts can force an insurgency with an aboveground political or propaganda wing to go purely underground to protect its leaders.

- The arrest of four senior PULO leaders in 1998 prompted another southern Thai insurgent group, the Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinate (BRN-C), to decentralize command and control to improve operational security, according to reporting from the US Embassy in Bangkok.[29] (C//NF)

Impact on Governments

Conducting HVT operations can positively or negatively affect a government's counterinsurgency effort, for example by strengthening the morale of and support for the government or by misdirecting government focus. Because both insurgents and counterinsurgents communicate with the wider audience as they fight, a government may find that HVT successes send a message to the government's supporters that the state is taking serious steps to attack the insurgency.

- Public support for the Colombian Government solidified in the wake of the killing of FARC Secretariat member Raul Reyes in March 2008, with President Alvaro Uribe's approval rating increasing from the mid-70-percent range to as high as 84 percent, according to a US press report and a CIA field commentary.[30][31] (S//NF)

HVT operations can capture the attention of policymakers and military planners to the extent that a government loses its strategic perspective on the conflict or neglects other key aspects of counterinsurgency. Since 2004, the Thai Government's fixation on targeting southern insurgent leaders—which in the late 1990s proved effective against an earlier generation of insurgents—has caused Bangkok to misperceive the decentralized nature of the movement and miss opportunities to counter it, according to reporting from the US Embassy in Bangkok.[32] (C//NF)

Diverse Factors Shape the Contributions of HVT Operations to Counterinsurgency Outcomes (C//NF)

Insurgent group characteristics, such as organizational structure, and government factors, such as the effectiveness of military and nonmilitary counterinsurgency instruments, shape an insurgent group's vulnerability to leadership losses, according to a review of HVT operations worldwide. (C//NF)

Insurgent Group Factors

Structure. Groups are most susceptible to leadership losses when they are centralized and personality driven, according to our study, and organizations with more decentralized structures, such as HAMAS and al-Qa'ida, usually have more capacity to adapt and regenerate after suffering losses from HVT operations. Effective insurgent leaders possess a rare combination of initiative, charisma, strategic vision, and communications skills, according to former insurgents.[33]

- The Taliban's military structure blends a top-down command system with an egalitarian Afghan tribal structure that rules by consensus, making the group more able to withstand HVT operations, according to clandestine and US military reporting.[34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45]

- Like al-Qa'ida networks outside Iraq, al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) as of late 2008 delegated considerable operational control to local leaders, a practice that, until early 2007, allowed AQI to weather leadership losses such as the death of Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi, according to clandestine and US diplomatic reporting.[46 47 48]

- Peru's Shining Path, which was highly centralized and based on a cult of personality, could not recover from the 1992 capture of founder Abimael Guzman and most of the group's senior leaders. (S//NF)

Succession Planning and Bench Strength. Insurgent groups' succession planning, breadth and depth of military and political competence, and ability to elevate promising commanders through their ranks contribute to their resilience to HVT operations. The Taliban and al-Qa'ida can most likely replace lost leaders, especially at the middle level. Numerous al-Qa'ida leaders oversee external operations, minimizing the disruptive impact of individual losses, according to clandestine reports.[49 50] (C//NF)

Level of Visibility. Leadership losses may have different effects on insurgent groups using strategies requiring a public face than on highly clandestine groups. The loss of visible public figures has wider psychological repercussions than the loss of underground leaders, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency.[51]

- Since Hizballah and HAMAS carry out state-like functions, such as providing health-care services, these groups' leaders have prominent public profiles. The public may have little awareness of the leaders of clandestine groups such as AQI, which exercise limited parallel governance roles. (C//NF)

Life Cycle Stage. Insurgencies, like other organizations, are more fragile and more dependent on a few individuals during their formative stage—or late in their life cycle when they are in decline—than during their mature middle stage, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency.[52] (C//NF)

Cause and Popular Support. An insurgent group's unifying cause, deep ties to its constituency, or a broad support base can lessen the impact of leadership losses by ensuring a steady flow of replacement recruits, according to academic experts on counterinsurgency.[53 54] HAMAS's highly disciplined nature, social service network, and reserve of respected leaders allowed it to reorganize after the killing of leaders Sheikh Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi in 2004, according to the International Crisis Group.[55 56] (C//NF)

Existence of Sanctuary. Internal and external sanctuaries often provide major advantages to insurgent groups, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency,[57] sometimes allowing a group's leader to evade government forces for decades. Strikes in previously impenetrable sanctuaries can produce disproportionate effects such as demoralization of remaining leaders.

- Sanctuary provided by Iran allows Iraq's Sadrist militants to train, rearm, recuperate, and evade capture, according to US military and clandestine reporting.[58 59 60]

- In southern Thailand, the temporary loss of longstanding Malaysian sanctuary in 1998 was a major factor in the collapse of PULO's armed wing during this period, according to the US Embassy in Bangkok.[61 62] (S//NF)

Government Factors
Duration and Intensity of HVT Operations. Extensive and protracted HVT operations can substantially degrade an insurgency, as military pressure on the group outpaces its ability to replace leaders. Short or inconsistently conducted HVT campaigns may weed out insurgents who are less security conscious or not as important, while sparing the most-talented ones.

- In Iraq, the June 2006 death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi produced no initial drop in AQI attacks, but the strike's impact on Sunni perceptions may have helped the Awakening Movement become a viable force in mid-2006, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency.[63] AQI had suppressed this movement's earlier attempts to organize in 2005, according to the same academic expert.[64] (C//NF)

Choice of HVT Method. Governments can use variables such as culture and the likelihood of collateral damage to assess whether desired effects produced by HVT methods are best achieved by capturing insurgent leaders, using psychological operations to marginalize them, or conducting kinetic strikes. Captures help to demythologize insurgent leaders in cultures with a strong warrior ethos, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency, and may be preferable because of insurgent leaders' interrogation value.[65]

- Capture or refraining from lethal operations may be warranted if the government's goal is to integrate an insurgent group into the political process. For example, the Iraqi Government has chosen not to target Muqtada al-Sadr and many of his top aides because of political sensitivities, according to clandestine reports.[66 67]

- Capturing leaders may have a limited psychological impact on a group if members believe that captured leaders will eventually return to the group, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency, or if those leaders are able to maintain their influence while in government custody, as Nelson Mandela did while incarcerated in South Africa. (S//NF)

The tendency of some insurgent groups to adapt to HVT efforts by becoming more decentralized suggests that a *functional approach* to targeting, aimed at sources of insurgent strength such as logistics and finances, can in some circumstances be more effective than targeting the group's leadership structure. Similarly, targeting top leaders may be politically impossible if a government has decided that a group should be managed rather than targeted for total defeat, as in the case of Baghdad's approach to Sadrist militants. In these cases, a government may adopt a *pruning approach* intended to stunt an organization's growth, interrupt sources of supply, or isolate portions of an insurgent network.

- AQI's top leaders exercise strategic control of the organization but delegate attack planning to local leaders, allowing operations to continue even when leadership positions are vacant, according to clandestine and US military reporting.[68 69 70 71 72] Removing individuals who are important to the organization's core functions—such as those running its car-bombing networks—has had a more demonstrable effect on AQI than disruptions of its senior command.

- A pruning approach can be used to remove effective midlevel leaders, protect incompetent leaders or restore them to positions of authority, separate insurgent personalities from potential sources of government sponsorship, or protect human sources that are collecting intelligence on the networks. (S//NF)

Best Practices Offer Guidelines in Planning HVT Operations (C//NF)

Governments successful in their use of HVT operations have placed a measured degree of emphasis on them while not neglecting other aspects of counterinsurgency strategy, according to our review. We identified several best practices that can be applied when planning or evaluating HVT operations. (C//NF)

Identifying Desired Outcome. Because HVT operations can have unforeseen effects, such as empowering radical leaders, operations tend to be most successful when governments are clear about the desired impact on the insurgent group's trajectory. If a government's goal is a negotiated resolution of the conflict, officials may want to avoid HVT or adopt a pruning strategy, instead placing emphasis on drawing the insurgents into the political process.

- An aggressive HVT strategy risks fragmenting an insurgency or causing it to devolve into terrorist or criminal activity, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency.[73] (C//NF)

Basing Decisions on Knowledge of an Insurgent Group's Internal Workings. Governments' successful use of HVT operations—such as the British strategy in Northern Ireland that led to a peace settlement—generally draws on a deep understanding of the targeted group's internal workings and specific vulnerabilities, which is usually gained by penetrating the group or debriefing defectors. Social, ethnic, or ideological differences among leaders and members and within leadership groups offer vulnerabilities to exploit, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency.[74]

- Information from high-level Irish Republican Army (IRA) assets, including the head of the group's internal security unit, allowed British military intelligence to undermine the IRA, according to a Western press report.[75] (C//NF)

Integrating HVT Operations With Other Elements of Counterinsurgency Strategy. Governments successful in their use of HVT operations have integrated them into broader counterinsurgency strategies. How well a government conducts the other military and nonmilitary elements of its counterinsurgency campaign is a major factor that shapes the HVT programs' contributions to overall counterinsurgency success, according to our review. Governments can adjust these elements to capitalize on or compensate for the effects produced by HVT operations.

- HVT strikes can complement conventional military operations by establishing an overall operational tempo, for example by setting the stage for follow-on activities such as clearing operations in insurgent-held territory.

- In Iraq, counterinsurgency operations emboldened a Sunni backlash against AQI, which magnified the impact of HVT operations by spurring defections and limiting AQI's ability to recruit new members and reconstitute after losses, according to clandestine and US diplomatic reporting.[76 77 78 79]

- Colombia has used HVT operations since 2002 in concert with information operations and conventional military operations, including efforts to extend the reach of governance, amnesty, reward, and defector programs, according to a CIA field commentary.[80 81] (S//NF)

Protecting Potential Moderates. Directing HVT operations against the most violent and extremist leaders may increase the likelihood of an eventual political settlement. Most insurgencies have internal divisions between the more militant and more politically oriented leaders, according to academic experts on counterinsurgency.[82 83]

- The British may have used an HVT strategy over a substantial period of time to moderate the IRA leadership by protecting Gerry Adams and

Martin McGuinness while allowing some of their radical rivals to be eliminated, according to a book by an Irish journalist.[84][85]

- The French in Algeria may have diminished chances for a negotiated solution when they inadvertently strengthened the hand of radical Algeria-based National Liberation Front (FLN) leaders by capturing the moderate, externally based, and nominal FLN chief Ahmad Ben Bella in 1956, according to academic experts on counterinsurgency.[86][87] (C//NF)

Capitalizing on Leadership Divisions.
Exacerbating or exploiting leadership fissures, for example by co-opting disaffected insurgent leaders, can be as effective as targeting a group's leadership militarily. The Sri Lankan Government achieved substantial gains when it exploited a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam leadership split by cooperating with Colonel Karuna, leader of a breakaway faction in the country's Eastern Province.[88] (C//NF)

Appendix A

Selected High-Value Targeting Cases (U)

Afghanistan—Taliban, 2001-Present
The Coalition has led a sustained effort since 2001 to target Taliban leaders, but the government's limited influence outside of Kabul has impeded integration of high-value targeting (HVT) efforts with other military and nonmilitary counterinsurgency elements, such as reconciliation programs. Afghan Government corruption and lack of unity, insufficient strength of Afghan and NATO security forces, and the country's endemic lawlessness have constrained the effectiveness of these counterinsurgency elements. Senior Taliban leaders' use of sanctuary in Pakistan has also complicated the HVT effort. Moreover, the Taliban has a high overall ability to replace lost leaders, a centralized but flexible command and control overlaid with egalitarian Pashtun structures, and good succession planning and bench strength, especially at the middle levels, according to clandestine and US military reporting.[89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100] (S//NF)

Algeria—FLN, 1954-62
The National Liberation Front (FLN) began a revolt in 1954 against French rule in Algeria with the goal of establishing an independent state. The group's campaign of urban terrorism, intended to provoke a French overreaction that targeted the general Algerian population, succeeded, and the resulting loss of civilians increased the FLN's popularity, according to an academic study.[101] French efforts to target FLN leaders included intelligence-driven commando raids on insurgent hideouts, according to a former insurgent,[102] and culminated in the 1956 capture of FLN chief Ahmad Ben Bella and four other top leaders during a flight from Rabat to Tunis.[103 104] Ben Bella was a relative moderate among the FLN leadership, and his capture enhanced the influence of radical Algeria-based leaders, according to academic studies.[105 106] French military gains from 1956 to 1958 shifted the conflict sharply against the insurgents, according to a RAND study.[107] However, the draconian measures taken to quell the insurgency eroded French domestic and international support for the effort, resulting in Algeria achieving independence in 1962, according to the RAND study.[108] (C//NF)

Colombia—FARC, 2002-Present[b]
For most of Colombia's history, political transitions have resulted from successful insurrections by the party out of power, according to a research institute study.[109] The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a Marxist-Leninist insurgent organization, began waging a guerrilla war in 1964 and uses the drug trade to support its military and political activities. President Alvaro Uribe, following his 2001 inauguration, made targeting senior and midlevel FARC leaders a major element of Bogota's counterinsurgency campaign. After several years of failures and near misses, Bogota began a series of successful HVT strikes in 2007, following improvements in intelligence, strike accuracy, mission planning and deployment, operational security, and interservice coordination, according to US Embassy in Bogota reporting.[110] Colombia has effectively integrated the HVT effort into its broader counterinsurgency strategy and has capitalized on the psychological impact produced by the strikes to boost the government's legitimacy and to erode insurgent morale, according to a body of clandestine, Colombian National Police, and US Embassy in Bogota reporting.[111 112 113 114 115] (C//NF)

Iraq—AQI, 2004-Present
Al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI)—earlier known as the Zarqawi network—became a primary focus of Coalition HVT operations in early 2004 as the group began to release public statements and jockey for primacy in the Iraqi insurgency. AQI initially lost several iterations of its senior leadership and

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[b] Colombia's counterinsurgency campaign has been waged since 1964, but our survey looked only at Colombia's recent HVT efforts. (U)

numerous local emirs, but these losses initially did little to slow AQI's momentum, according to clandestine and US diplomatic reporting.[116 117 118] HVT operations in 2007, however, complemented broader Coalition and Iraqi Sunni actions against AQI, such as efforts to cut AQI off from its support base, and have contributed to its decline since that time, according to clandestine and US diplomatic reporting.[119 120 121 122] (S//NF)

Israel—Hizballah and HAMAS, Mid-1990s-Present

In the mid-1990s, Israel's targeting efforts shifted from secular rejectionist groups to Islamist militant enemies, culminating in a targeted-killings campaign during the Second Intifada. In contrast to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and secular rejectionist groups, HAMAS and Hizballah presented Israel with decentralized command structures, compartmented leadership, strong succession planning, and deep ties to their communities, making the groups highly resilient to leadership losses, according to the International Crisis Group.[123 124] The absence of other counterinsurgency measures such as amnesty programs limited the HVT programs' contributions to Israel's overall security efforts, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency.[125] (C//NF)

Israel—PLO and Secular Rejectionist Groups, 1972–Mid-1990s

Following the killing of 11 Israeli athletes during the Munich Olympics in September 1972 by the Black September faction of the PLO Fatah organization, Israeli leaders initiated a multidecade effort to eliminate PLO leaders. The subsequent killings of suspected PLO militants across Europe and the Middle East included low-ranking officials with questionable connections to the Munich events, as well as a Moroccan waiter in Lillehammer, Norway, who had no connection to terrorism, according to a book by a British journalist.[126] The program's secrecy prevented its integration with other diplomatic and military initiatives. International pressure following the July 1973 death of the Moroccan waiter forced Israel to curtail the effort.[127] The PLO had a highly centralized and personality-driven command structure

that made it vulnerable to leadership strikes, but the limited number of successful Israeli strikes suggests that group's strong operational security protected it against the loss of top figures. (C//NF)

Northern Ireland—IRA, 1969-98

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) emerged from the Anglo-Irish War of 1919-21 and has pursued the political objective of a united Ireland on behalf of nationalists among the Catholic minority, according to an academic study.[128] "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland began in 1969 and ended with the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Extensive high-level penetrations of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (commonly referred to as IRA) gave the British visibility into the group's leadership dynamics, internal ideological conflicts, and operational plans, according to a US press report and a book by an Irish journalist.[129 130] IRA leader Gerry Adams initiated a secret peace dialog with the British in 1986 in which he identified himself as far outside the mainstream IRA leadership in his willingness to accept an eventual nonviolent settlement of the conflict, according to the same book by an Irish journalist.[131] This dialog suggests that the British saw an interest in protecting him and members of his faction, which included Martin McGuinness. Acting on intelligence gained through penetrations, the British eliminated some radical IRA members who could have obstructed the peace process or challenged the Adams faction for leadership of the group, according to the same book by an Irish journalist.[132] (C//NF)

Peru—Shining Path, 1980-99

Abimael Guzman, a philosophy professor and administrator at a provincial university, founded the Maoist insurgent group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path or SL) in 1970.[133] SL launched an armed struggle in 1980, seeking to topple Peru's social order and to impose a new utopian society. From 1980 to 1992, the group was a dogmatic, centralized, and disciplined movement that revolved around its charismatic leader, who skillfully maintained control of SL's leadership cadre through manipulation, according to an academic expert on counterinsurgency.[134 135] In what may be a government's most decisive use of HVT, according to

an academic expert on counterinsurgency, Lima's security forces managed to capture Guzman and almost all of the group's senior leadership in a brief period beginning in September 1992.[136] SL remnants have tried to regain traction since the early 1990s but have been unable to overcome the setbacks of a movement built around a cult of personality. (C//NF)

Sri Lanka—LTTE, 1983-May 2009
The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) sought autonomy for the Tamils of northern and eastern Sri Lanka since the group's inception in 1972. Velupillai Prabhakaran, a radical student, founded the group in response to the adoption of a new constitution institutionalizing Sinhalese domination, according to an academic study.[137] The LTTE became one of the world's most ruthless and resourceful ethnonationalist insurgent movements, fighting the Sri Lankan Government to a stalemate that led to a cease-fire in 2002. The LTTE used the lapse in fighting to rearm and train, resuming hostilities in mid-2004, according to a research institute study.[138] In response, Colombo has stepped up efforts to target top LTTE leadership. The Sri Lankan Air Force, in November 2007 and January 2008, used antibunker bombs to target Prabhakaran and other top LTTE leaders, according to a clandestine source claiming firsthand access.[139] Geocoordinate information provided by a former bodyguard of Prabhakaran's contributed to an accurate Sri Lankan military bombing raid that killed LTTE political spokesman S.P. Tamilchelvan and other LTTE leaders on 2 November 2007, according to a clandestine source with whom a relationship was just beginning.[140] The Sri Lankan Government claimed to have killed Prabhakaran and most of the LTTE's senior leadership in conventional military operations in April and May 2009, according to a US military report and a Western press report.[141] [142](S//NF)

A Framework for Use in Planning or Evaluating High-Value Targeting Operations (C//NF)

This framework, which can be used when considering the introduction of a high-value targeting (HVT) program or evaluating one already under way, outlines potential strategic effects of HVT operations, factors that shape HVT programs' effectiveness, and best practices identified in a review of current and historical HVT programs. (C//NF)

Potential Strategic Effects of HVT Operations (C//NF)

Eroding Insurgent Effectiveness. HVT operations can cause greater disruption than a group can absorb when military pressure outpaces a group's ability to replace its leaders or results in the loss of individuals with critical skills. (C//NF)

Weakening Insurgent Will. Leadership losses can erode morale at all levels and reinforce the costs and risks of involvement, especially when the group has no clear succession plan in place. (C//NF)

Changing the Level of Insurgent Support. The death or capture of key insurgents may lead to reduced domestic or foreign support for the group, as supporters recalculate the insurgent group's chances of winning the conflict, or may increase support for the insurgents, particularly if these strikes enhance insurgent leaders' lore. (C//NF)

Fragmenting or Splitting the Insurgent Group. The removal or marginalization of unifying leaders can exacerbate divisions in a group and cause it to fragment, particularly when the group is made up of coalitions or factions. (C//NF)

Altering Insurgent Strategy or Organization. An HVT program may lead an insurgent group to change its goals and strategy. By altering internal divisions, an HVT program may push an insurgency toward a more moderate or militant approach. Some insurgencies adapt to leadership losses by adopting a flat organizational structure and taking other measures to improve operational security, such as dismantling an aboveground political wing. (C//NF)

Strengthening Government Morale and Support. Because both insurgents and counterinsurgents communicate with the wider audience as they fight, a government may find that HVT successes send a message to the government's supporters that the state is taking serious steps to attack the insurgency. (C//NF)

Misdirecting Government Focus. HVT operations can capture the attention of policymakers and military planners to the extent that a government loses its strategic perspective on the conflict or neglects other key aspects of counterinsurgency. (C//NF)

Best Practices in HVT Operations (C//NF)

Identifying Desired Outcome. Because HVT operations can have unforeseen effects, governments tend to be most successful when they are clear about the desired impact on the insurgent group's trajectory. (C//NF)

Basing Decisions on Knowledge of an Insurgent Group's Internal Workings. Governments' successful use of HVT operations generally draw on a deep understanding of the targeted group's internal workings and specific vulnerabilities, which is usually gained by penetrating the group or debriefing defectors. (C//NF)

Integrating HVT Operations With Other Elements of Counterinsurgency Strategy. Governments with effective HVT programs have integrated them into comprehensive counterinsurgency strategies, the other elements of which could be adjusted to capitalize on and compensate for the effects produced by HVT operations. (C//NF)

Protecting Potential Moderates. Directing HVT operations against the most violent and extremist leaders may increase the likelihood of an eventual political settlement. Most insurgencies have internal divisions between the more militant leaders and those more politically oriented. (C//NF)

Capitalizing on Leadership Divisions. Exacerbating or exploiting leadership fissures, for example by co-opting disaffected insurgent leaders, can be as effective as targeting a group's leadership militarily. (C//NF)

Factors Shaping the Contributions of HVT Operations to Counterinsurgency Outcomes (C//NF)

Insurgent Group Factors

Structure. Groups are most susceptible to leadership losses when they are centralized and personality driven, while organizations with more decentralized structures usually have more capacity to adapt and regenerate after suffering leadership losses. (C//NF)

Succession Planning and Bench Strength. Insurgent groups' succession planning, breadth and depth of military and political competence, and ability to elevate promising commanders through their ranks contribute to their resilience. (C//NF)

Level of Visibility. Leadership losses may have different effects against insurgent groups using strategies requiring a public face than on highly clandestine groups. (C//NF)

Life Cycle Stage. Insurgencies, like other organizations, are more fragile and more dependent on a few individuals during their formative stage or late in their life cycle when they are in decline. (C//NF)

Cause and Popular Support. A unifying cause, deep ties to its constituency, or a broad support base can lessen the impact of leadership losses by ensuring a steady flow of replacement recruits. (C//NF)

Existence of Sanctuary. HVT efforts are likely to be less effective when insurgents have an external sanctuary or when political factors prevent them from being killed or captured. (C//NF)

Government Factors

Duration and Intensity of HVT Operations. Because the effects of HVT operations may not be visible for some time, governments may need to sustain the operations as long as there is a strategic rationale. Extensive and protracted HVT operations can substantially degrade an insurgency, but short or erratically conducted HVT campaigns may weed out only the less security-conscious insurgents. (C//NF)

Choice of HVT Method. Governments can use variables such as culture and the likelihood of collateral damage to determine whether capturing or using psychological operations to marginalize insurgent leaders is more likely to produce desired effects than kinetic strikes. Targeting sources of insurgent strength, for example logistics and finances, may be more effective than targeting the leadership of a decentralized group. (C//NF)

Visibility Into Group. A government's visibility into an insurgent group's inner workings, such as leadership dynamics and the distribution of critical skills, can improve HVT outcomes. (C//NF)

Effectiveness of Other Military and Nonmilitary Counterinsurgency Instruments. How well a government conducts the non-HVT elements of its counterinsurgency campaign and how integrated the HVT program is with other elements will shape the impact of the HVT effort. (C//NF)

APPENDIX B — High-Value Targeting in Counterinsurgency Operations: Selected Case Studies (C//NF)

Legend: ○ Limited · ◉ · ○ Moderate · ◉ · ● High

INSURGENT GROUP VARIABLES (C//NF)

CONFLICT / HIGH-VALUE TARGETING (HVT) PROGRAM	PROGRAM IMPACT — HVT Program's Contribution to Counterinsurgency Success to Date	KEY FACTORS — Degree of Centralization	Level of Succession Planning and Bench Strength	Level of Visibility	Life Cycle Stage	Level of Popular Support	Access to Sanctuary
Peru - Shining Path (1980 to 1999) Sustained HVT effort leading to 1992 capture of top leadership.	●	**Centralized** insurgent group, revolving around Guzman's cult of personality.	**None**	Clandestine organization with governance function limited to coercion.	**Mature** at time when HVT operations bore fruit.	Limited popular support and narrow base.	Internal sanctuary in Peru's remote coca-growing regions.
Colombia - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (2002 to Present) Well-resourced, systematic effort to target FARC leadership.	●	Cohesive at top leadership level. Probably more decentralized and personality driven at lower levels.	Established succession plans and procedures but stressed by the pace of military operations and HVT strikes.	Less overt governance role as compared with other communist insurgencies controlling territory.	**Declining** but not on irreversible downward course.	Limited support among local population. Poor FARC conduct combined with improvements in state governance have eroded the group's cause.	Access to sanctuary in Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela.
Northern Ireland - Irish Republican Army (IRA) (1969 to 1998) Sustained British effort to target hardline leaders.	◉	Centralized, top-down control of a cellular organization, making the group vulnerable to high-level penetrations.	Succession planning compromised by competition for top leadership spots. Good bench strength of experienced midlevel and low-level commanders.	Clandestine organization with governance function limited to communal protection and enforcement of order.	**Mature** Organization was well established in 1980s when HVT operations are likely to have begun.	High within nationalist Catholic community; unifying cause.	De facto sanctuary in the Republic of Ireland.
Iraq - al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) (2004 to Present) Extensive Coalition-led effort to target AQI leadership	◉	AQI leaders exercise strategic control but delegate operations to local leaders.	○	Clandestine organization with governance function limited to coercion.	**Early** stage from 2004 to 2005. **Mature** from 2005 to 2006. **Declining** from 2006 to present.	Limited popular support; narrow cause excludes non-Salafists.	Internal sanctuary in the Hamrin mountains.
Algeria - National Liberation Front (FLN) (1954 to 1962) Sustained French effort to target insurgent leadership.	○	A flat, cellular organization.	Established succession plans and procedures, but stressed by the pace of military operations.	Extensive parallel governance role to boost legitimacy and control.	**Early** stage from 1954 to 1956. **Mature** from 1956 to 1958. **Declining** from 1958 to 1962.	Strong popular support because of unifying cause of national liberation.	FLN sanctuary early in the conflict but was eliminated when the French secured borders and coastline.
Afghanistan - Taliban (2001 to Present) Sustained Coalition-led effort to target Taliban leadership.	○	Mostly centralized, overlaid with egalitarian Pashtun structures.	Good succession planning and a bench strength of experienced midlevel and low-level commanders.	Limited overt governance role.	**Growing** On the upswing following rout in 2001.	Strong support among some elements of the Pashtun community.	Extensive sanctuary in Pakistan.
Sri Lanka - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (1983 to May 2009) Government effort to kill LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran and top leaders.	○ Top leaders killed in conventional military operations	**Centralized** insurgent group, revolving around Prabhakaran's cult of personality.	**None**	Extensive parallel governance role for most of conflict's duration.	**Severely degraded** Future uncertain after conventional military defeat.	Medium-to-high support among diaspora Tamils; indeterminate support among domestic Tamils.	Limited sanctuary in LTTE's rear areas and in India's Tamil Nadu state for most of conflict's duration.
Israel - Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Secular Rejectionist Groups (1972 to Mid-1990s) Multidecade effort to target PLO militants, beginning after the Munich Olympics attack.	○	**Centralized** and personality-driven leadership, for example Arafat and Abu Jihad.	○	Extensive parallel governance role to boost legitimacy and control.	**Mature**	High popular support and broad support base among Palestinian community and Arab supporters.	Sanctuary in Lebanon and later Tunisia.
Israel - Hizballah and HAMAS (Mid-1990s to Present) Shift in focus to Islamist Jihadist foes in mid-1990s.	○	**Decentralized** and compartmented leadership, strong succession planning and procedures in place.	●	Extensive parallel governance role to boost legitimacy and control.	**Mature**	High popular support; moderately broad base.	Sanctuary in Lebanon and Jordan (HAMAS).

APPENDIX B — High-Value Targeting in Counterinsurgency Operations: Selected Case Studies (C//NF)

Legend: ○ Limited   ◉   ● Moderate   ◉   ● High

GOVERNMENT VARIABLES (C//NF)

CONFLICT / HIGH-VALUE TARGETING (HVT) PROGRAM	PROGRAM IMPACT — HVT Program's Contribution to Counterinsurgency Success to Date	KEY FACTORS — Level of Duration and Intensity of HVT Operations	Choice of HVT Method	Government Visibility Into Insurgent Group's Inner Workings	HVT Program's Degree of Integration With Other Aspects of Counterinsurgency Strategy	Effectiveness of Nonmilitary Counterinsurgency Instruments (political, economic, information)	Effectiveness of Military Counterinsurgency (non-HVT) Operations
Peru - Shining Path (1980 to 1999) Sustained HVT effort leading to 1992 capture of top leadership.	● (High)	**High-intensity**, successful effort following years of near misses.	Aimed at top leadership. Strong emphasis on captures to demythologize insurgent leaders.	● (High)	● (High)	● (High)	● (Moderate)
Colombia - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (2002 to Present) Well-resourced, systematic effort to target FARC leadership.	● (High)	**High-intensity**, successful effort following years of near misses.	Aimed at FARC command and control. Emphasis on captures and defections in addition to lethal strikes.	● (High)	● (High)	● (High)	● (High)
Northern Ireland - Irish Republican Army (IRA) (1969 to 1998) Sustained British effort to target hardline leaders.	◉	Not Available.	Emphasis on lethal strikes.	● (High)	● (High)	● (High)	● (High)
Iraq - al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) (2004 to Present) Extensive Coalition-led effort to target AQI leadership	● (Moderate)	Sustained.	Emphasis on lethal strikes.	● (Moderate)	● (Moderate)	○ (Limited)	
Algeria - National Liberation Front (FLN) (1954 to 1962) Sustained French effort to target insurgent leadership.	○ (Limited)	Sustained.	Emphasis on lethal strikes.	● (High)	● (Moderate)	◉	● (High)
Afghanistan - Taliban (2001 to Present) Sustained Coalition-led effort to target Taliban leadership.	○ (Limited)	Intermittent.	Emphasis on lethal strikes.	● (Moderate)	○ (Limited)	○ (Limited)	● (Moderate)
Sri Lanka - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (1983 to May 2009) Government effort to kill LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran and top leaders.	○ (Limited) — Top leaders killed in conventional military operations.	Intermittent.	Aimed at LTTE command and control. Emphasis on defections in addition to lethal strikes.	● (Moderate)	● (Moderate)	● (Moderate)	● (High)
Israel - Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Secular Rejectionist Groups (1972 to Mid-1990s) Multidecade effort to target PLO militants, beginning after the Munich Olympics attack.	○ (Limited)	Sustained.	Targets were midlevel operatives rather than command and control. Emphasis on lethal strikes.	● (Moderate)	○ (Limited)	○ (Limited)	● (Moderate)
Israel - Hizballah and HAMAS (Mid-1990s to Present) Shift in focus to Islamist Jihadist foes in mid-1990s.	○ (Limited)	Sustained.	Aimed at command and control as well as logistics. Emphasis on lethal strikes.	● (Moderate)	○ (Limited)	○ (Limited)	● (High)

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