ROADMAPS TO NOWHERE?

The Uncertain Influence of Jihadi Strategic Thinkers

Upon Insurgencies in Iraq

Submitted by Phillip William Etches, for the degree of Bachelor of International Security Studies (Honours) at The Australian National University in October, 2018.
Unless otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents the original research of the author, Phillip William Etches.
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Abstract

This paper seeks to determine the extent to which the al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI) and Islamic State (IS) insurgencies were influenced by—respectively—Abu Mus’ab al-Suri and Abu Bakr Naji’s strategic thought, and why the extent of that influence may have ultimately been limited. This is relevant for scholars of strategic studies because these strategic thinkers’ influence upon those insurgencies is an assumption within some academic and journalistic works which has thus far gone untested. To address this, the paper takes a comparative historical approach, measuring al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought—as expressed in their principal written works—and the AQI and IS insurgencies according to a single analytical framework of organisational, operational, and lifecycle stage phenomena, and then using the results to compare strategic thought with insurgent practice. It then establishes whether externally-ascertainable issues can account for variance identified between strategic thought and insurgent practice. This approach yields two findings. First, AQI and IS’s insurgencies were ultimately conducted in a manner mostly at variance with al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought, and second, such variance appeared resultant from insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale, the tendency of jihadi insurgent organisations towards inflexibility and insularity, and the impact which the operational environment can have upon insurgencies. These findings support a conclusion that the influence of al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought upon AQI and IS’s insurgencies was significantly limited, due apparently to externally-recognisable issues affecting jihadi insurgent organisations’ behaviour.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Contextual Background and Introduction of Research Question

This paper is concerned with the extent to which certain jihadi “strategic thinkers” have influenced two jihadi insurgencies in Iraq, and why the extent of that influence may have been limited. Defined originally by Hegghammer, jihadi strategic thinkers and “strategic thought” are features of the jihadi movement—a class of persons and organisations which use violence because, within an eccentric interpretation of Sunni Islam, doing so is an obligatory “jihad,” or “struggle,” in defence of Islamic faith, lands, and communities.¹ Within that movement, jihadi strategic thinkers, Hegghammer argues, write “about the best way—from a functional point of view—to fight the enemy,” focusing less upon “the theological aspects of the struggle.”² That broad description is constructive: it establishes that jihadi strategic thinkers’ works concern not only strategy—the identification and pursuit of strategic objectives related to actors’ key priorities—but also the operational level, wherein actions are coordinated and undertaken in service of strategic objectives; and the tactical level, wherein tasks are identified and performed in the course of operational actions.³ Rather than focusing upon jihadis’ ideological or religious debates, jihadi strategic thinkers articulate jihadi strategic thought—ideas about not only the strategies, but also the operational and tactical approaches which jihadi insurgencies should employ. For scholars of strategic studies and professionals seeking insights into jihadi insurgents’ strategies, operations, and tactics, the extent of jihadi strategic thinkers’ influence, and that of their strategic thought, is therefore significant.

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Two individuals exist among jihadi strategic thinkers, given their contributions to jihadi strategic thought. One is Abu Mus’ab al-Suri—a pseudonym of Mustafa Setmariam Nasar—who penned *The Call of Global Islamic Resistance.* In his book, al-Suri advocates an insurgency which adopts a loose organisational structure centred around small groups or individuals, using terrorism to substitute—and later complement—conventional military operations. That approach enables a guerrilla strategy of gradual expansion and escalation, to the point of holding territory and winning direct confrontations with the government.

Also noteworthy is Abu Bakr Naji. Naji authored *The Management of Savagery,* wherein he advocates an insurgency which uses violence to exhaust the state’s capacity to provide security and governance, establishes an interim administration, and achieves victory by defeating the government and developing the interim administration into a viable state. Superficially, Naji’s thinking resembles al-Suri’s—both propose gradual escalation, culminating in overt confrontations with the government. But where al-Suri prioritises developing a resilient organisation to erode the existing order, Naji prioritises usurping government functions. Both approaches are explained thoroughly in subsequent chapters, but preliminarily, al-Suri and Naji’s contributions to jihadi strategic thought mark them as jihadi strategic thinkers.

Other jihadi strategic thinkers exist, but al-Suri and Naji—and their principal works—stand out for two reasons. First, within the relevant literature, al-Suri and Naji—and *The Call of Global Islamic Resistance* and *The Management of Savagery*—enjoy elevated esteem from interested parties. The clearest articulation of al-Suri’s importance is Stout’s, who describes al-Suri as “perhaps the leading Salafi jihadist

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strategic thinker,” asserting that “no other member of the jihadist intellectual elite has made an argument as comprehensive” as that in al-Suri’s work. Ryan treats Naji and The Management of Savagery similarly, lauding Naji’s work as a “distillation” of jihadist strategic thought, claiming that “The breadth of Naji’s knowledge and his references to other jihadists’ published works and notebooks support his claim of personal access” to other jihadi notables. Lacey suggests that “It [Naji’s The Management of Savagery] reflects the prevailing views” of al-Qa’ida, while al-Suri’s work “is critical to understanding today’s jihadist movement,” and has attained stature rivalling that of Hitler and Lenin’s writings. In one work, Lia describes al-Suri as “one of the most outspoken voices in the jihadi current,” whose writings “provoked strong responses and debates.” Adamsky argues that al-Suri “introduced a methodology and established a precedent of systematic theory-making in jihadi military affairs...[and] introduced the notion of operational art into jihadi military theory and demonstrated its practical applications.” Shultz writes that “Naji’s book and contributions...catapulted Naji into the ranks of important jihadi strategic thinkers,” and that “perhaps the leading jihadi strategic thinker to emerge was Abu Musab al-Suri.” Zackie provides a more general description of al-Suri’s importance, characterising him as “al-Qaida’s

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7 Stout, 886.
9 Ryan, 149.
11 Lacey, 162.
12 Lacey, 163.
14 Adamsky, 8.
16 Shultz, 32.
leading theoretician and strategic thinker...its post 9/11 principal architect.”17 and his writings as a “masterwork.”18 While not being responsible for all jihadi strategic thought, there is a view in the literature that the persons and strategic thought of al-Suri and Naji are significant.

A second reason for al-Suri and Naji’s significance—and the one giving rise to this paper—is the assumption that their strategic thought has influenced certain jihadi insurgencies in Iraq. One was the insurgency best-known as al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI), which operated following the Ba’athist regime’s fall in 2003,19 and until instability began in Syria and United States (US) forces largely withdrew from Iraq in 2011.20 The other, often called Islamic State (IS), was a later evolution of AQI which formed amidst those same events in 2011,21 operating overtly until being forced underground after losing Mosul in 2017.22 In academic, journalistic, and professional literature, it is held that al-Suri and Naji’s persons or thinking influenced those insurgencies—something expressed by Weiss & Hassan,23

18 Zackie, 1.
23 Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror (New York: Regan Arts., 2015), 40-41.
Gerges, Smith & Jones, Cruickshank & Ali, Ignatius, Hashim, and others, and explored further in the literature review. Those claims have some basis—as stated in the literature review, indications exist that AQI and IS were acquainted with al-Suri and Naji’s work, at least. But those indications do not conclusively establish al-Suri or Naji’s influence upon those insurgencies, and it can only be stated confidently that there exists an assumption that al-Suri and Naji influenced AQI and IS’s insurgencies.

That assumption begs two research questions. First, from publicly-available information, to what extent is it determinable that AQI and IS’s insurgencies ultimately played out in accordance with al-Suri or Naji’s strategic thought? Second, if those insurgencies did not do so entirely, are any issues identifiable which caused variance between strategic thought and insurgent practice?

1.2: Review of Literature and Establishment of Research Gap

Demonstrating the importance and feasibility of addressing those questions, and situating the paper within the literature, necessitates establishing the literature’s current state, and the viability of addressing the gap within it.

The literature concerning jihadi strategic thought and insurgency is divisible into four categories. A research gap exists across those categories, but is addressable, given that the underlying concept has been proven viable, and the necessary resources are available.

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28 Hashim, 75.
30 The viability of establishing the research gap is demonstrated in further depth in Appendix #3.
The first category of works includes books and articles focused upon jihadi strategic thinkers’ backgrounds and the development of their thinking. Lia provides some of the best work on Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri, notably a biography and outline of how his ideas developed.\textsuperscript{31} Cruickshank & Ali also write about al-Suri, albeit with greater brevity and a focus upon al-Suri’s possible impact.\textsuperscript{32} Within a larger work, Fishman describes the development of al-Suri, his ideas, and limited acceptance by the al-Qa‘ida movement.\textsuperscript{33} Cigar provides a biography of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Muqrin alongside a translation, detailing al-Muqrin’s background and the influences upon his thinking.\textsuperscript{34} There is also Stout, who focuses upon the overall development of jihadi strategic literature.\textsuperscript{35} The commonality between these works is that they discuss strategic thinkers’ background, or the development of those thinkers’ ideas, rather than analysing jihadi strategic thought or showing its application.

The second area of the literature contextualises or analyses jihadi strategic thinkers’ writings. Lia & Hegghammer provide one example, analysing an al-Qa‘ida-linked study titled \textit{Jihadi Iraq}, and describing the intellectual context from which it came.\textsuperscript{36} Shlapentokh introduces al-Suri’s strategy and ideas, describing them as “a good example of the jihadist worldview.”\textsuperscript{37} Analysing strategic culture’s role in the jihadi movement, Shultz provides background information and a thematically-focused analysis for the works of al-Suri, Naji, and others.\textsuperscript{38} Finally, Ryan describes multiple jihadi ideologues and strategic thinkers’ ideas, including al-Zawahiri, Faraj, Qurashi, al-Muqrin, al-Suri, Naji, and others. While Ryan avoids linking those thinkers’ works

\textsuperscript{32} Cruickshank and Ali.
\textsuperscript{34} Norman Cigar, Abd Al-Aziz Al-Muqrin, and Julian Lewis, \textit{Al-Qa‘ida’s Doctrine For Insurgency} [A Practical Course For Guerrilla War], First ed. (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books Inc, 2009).
\textsuperscript{35} Stout.
\textsuperscript{38} Shultz.
and specific insurgencies, he notes al-Suri and Naji’s pre-eminence and the quality of their works. In doing so, Ryan demonstrates how this second category of works—rather than linking al-Suri, Naji, and others’ writings to specific insurgencies—focuses on analysing or contextualising the writings themselves.

The third category of works includes case studies of jihadi insurgencies which do not draw links to jihadi strategic thought and focus upon specific periods or themes. Long, for example, focuses on both a period and theme, finding Anbari tribes’ political reorientation in 2006 to be resultant from both a “shift in the strategic calculus of the tribes,” and security force efforts. Philips focuses on a period, describing AQI’s decline after 2006, and its ideological inflexibility, violence, and inability to consider popular political sensitivities as that decline’s cause. Ingram describes the role of propaganda in IS strategy, in the context of IS as both a local and transnational actor. Cancian analyses IS’s tactics, techniques, and procedures, attempting to trace their development. But there are also works which analyse insurgencies in their entirety. Riedel & Saab’s work on al-Qa’ida (AQ) in Saudi Arabia is one example, tracking the development of AQ’s campaign while characterising its membership as followers of Osama bin Laden rather than a fully-independent organisation. Pirnie & O’Connell examine AQI within a specific period, between 2003 and 2006, while making superficial mention of AQI’s place within the broader

39 Ryan.
41 Long, 78.
jihadi movement. Like the others, they fit amidst works which study the insurgencies themselves without drawing connections to specific strategies.

Finally, there are academic and journalistic works which assume a connection between al-Suri or Naji’s ideas, and jihadi insurgencies, when discussing those insurgencies or jihadi strategic thought. Several assume a connection between Naji and IS. Hashim writes one, arguing that IS’s strategy was partly informed by Naji’s thinking. Hassan provides another, describing Naji—alongside another ideologically-focused author—as “indispensable” to IS, but also as having affected former AQI leader Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi’s thinking. Friedman suggests that “[IS’s] methods bear the imprint of... The Management of Savagery.” Weiss & Hassan write that “Al-Zarqawi’s sinister strategy hewed closely to a text [of Naji’s] titled... The Management of Savagery.” Maher writes that The Management of Savagery “provides a rationale for how the movement [IS] behaves today, and also explains...the group’s desire to hold territory and its highly considered use of extreme violence as an asymmetrical tactic.” Gerges describes Naji’s principal work as IS’s “strategic road map.” Gude testifies that Naji’s The Management of Savagery "outlined many elements of the strategy that ISIS now pursues.” Atran implies a link between The Management of Savagery and IS. Finally, Ignatius writes that IS—its leaders being influenced by The Management of Savagery—was a

47 Hashim, 75.
50 Weiss and Hassan, 40.
52 Gerges.
“test case” for Naji’s thinking.\textsuperscript{55} In academic and journalistic sources alike, the influence of Naji’s ideas upon jihadi insurgencies—particularly IS—is a key assumption.

A smaller set of works assume a connection between the AQI and IS insurgencies, and al-Suri. Whiteside provides one example, stating that AQI’s former leader, Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, received an education “mostly from Abu Musab al-Suri’s work on the failed Syrian rebellion and Suri’s advocacy of revolutionary warfare.”\textsuperscript{56} Smith & Jones write that al-Suri’s thinking “influences the transnational online strategy of the Islamic State.”\textsuperscript{57} Writing broadly about al-Qa’ida, Cruickshank & Ali suggest that “His [al-Suri’s] teachings are likely making an impact on the tactics of the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.”\textsuperscript{58} While a link is less often drawn to al-Suri’s thinking, particularly as expressed in \textit{The Call of Global Islamic Resistance}, several works assume al-Suri’s influence, just as a larger portion assume a connection between Naji and IS.

The lack of a clear strategy-insurgency comparison creates a research gap across the above four areas, although that gap’s significance should not be overstated. The first area explains how both strategist and strategic thought developed, but not the extent of their influence and their relation to jihadi insurgencies. The second illustrates the strategies’ substance but not their application. The third analyses the insurgencies themselves either wholly or partly, without establishing the extent to which jihadi strategic thought influenced them. Finally, the fourth area assumes jihadi strategic thought’s influence without proving it. Across the literature, a gap is present, though its nature varies.

This is not to say that the literature is based upon universally-held misunderstandings. For one, al-Suri and Naji’s influence is not consistently assumed.

\textsuperscript{55} Ignatius.
\textsuperscript{56} Whiteside, 748.
\textsuperscript{57} Smith and Jones.
\textsuperscript{58} Cruickshank and Ali, 9-10.
Berger downplays the influence of al-Suri’s proposed strategy,\(^5\) Watts argues that al-Qa’ida’s affiliated networks diverge from their own plans,\(^6\) and Fishman observes that “most al-Qaeda strategic plans go nowhere,”\(^6\) while Naji’s work did less to influence former AQI leader Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi’s than it did to “codify and contextualize the lessons of Zarqawi’s early jihad.”\(^6\) Further, assumption of al-Suri or Naji’s influence are not baseless—jihadis, including within AQI and IS, knew of both thinkers’ works. Hassan states that some IS members read *The Management of Savagery,*\(^6\) while IS-affiliated authors claimed that al-Zarqawi was acquainted with al-Suri and Naji’s thinking but did not embrace it,\(^6\) McCants observes that jihadis beyond Iraq know of al-Suri and Naji’s writings,\(^6\) and al-Qa’ida notable Ayman al-Zawahiri commends al-Suri and his works, including *The Call of Global Islamic Resistance.*\(^6\) Such caveats do not diminish the research gap’s significance—indeed, they add ambiguity by showing that al-Suri and Naji’s works were known to AQI and IS without confirming or refuting their influence, while demonstrating that no scholarly consensus exists about their impact. As such, they further demonstrate that a significant research gap exists because there has been no analysis of the extent to which jihadi strategic thought—particularly as articulated by al-Suri or Naji—ultimately affected jihadi insurgencies’ behaviour.

1.3: Viability of Addressing Research Gap

Addressing that research gap is feasible because the underlying concept has been proven viable, and necessary resources are publicly available. The underlying concept—identifying and explaining the limited extent of strategic thinkers’ influence upon insurgencies to which they are supposedly connected—is feasible. In

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61 Fishman, 37.
62 Fishman, 39.
63 Hassan, 17.
the similar literature concerning communist insurgent strategy and strategists—discussed further in Appendix #3—a debate exists concerning the influence of strategic thinkers like Mao, Giap, and Guevara. Applying that concept in the context of jihadi strategic thinkers and jihadi insurgency, by establishing and explaining the extent to which AQI and IS’s insurgencies accorded with al-Suri or Naji’s thinking, is possible with publicly-available resources. A large volume of media reporting concerns AQI and IS, due to strong public interest. Academic journal articles also address al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought, and AQI and IS. Such journals include *Small Wars & Insurgencies, Terrorism and Political Violence, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, CTC Sentinel, and Perspectives on Terrorism*. Similarly-focused publications have also been produced by subject matter experts and institutional sources including RAND, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Brookings, the Institute for the Study of War, the International Crisis Group, the Combating Terrorism Center, and the Congressional Research Service. Finally, data concerning attacks in Iraq are available from the University of Chicago’s Suicide Attack Database and the University of Maryland’s Global Terrorism Database (GTD). Because the underlying concept of the paper has been proven feasible in a similar body of literature, and the necessary resources are publicly available, it follows that addressing the paper’s research gap is feasible.

1.4: Hypothesis

To establish the extent and potential limitations of the influence of al-Suri and Naji’s thinking upon AQI and IS, and that scholars should avoid overstating that influence, this paper makes two arguments. The first is that publicly-available information indicates that AQI and IS’s insurgencies did not ultimately occur in accordance with—respectively—al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought. This was because mostly, the organisation, operations, and lifecycle stages of these insurgencies ultimately appeared to vary from al-Suri and Naji’s dicta. The second argument is that such variance appeared at least partly due to externally-recognisable issues known to affect insurgencies’ organisation, operations, and development. Among those issues
were insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale, jihadi insurgent organisations’ tendency towards inflexibility and insularity, and the influence which the operational environment can have upon insurgencies. By making these two claims, the paper will address both research questions.

1.5: Methodology & Analytical Framework

To support those arguments, a comparative historical approach is used which compares al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought with the events of the AQI and IS insurgencies, via a suitable methodology. The methodology has two components which support the arguments with the best analysis which is possible within current limitations, and dictate the paper’s structure.

The methodology’s first component supports the argument that AQI and IS’s insurgencies did not ultimately play out in a manner reflecting the influence of—respectively—al-Suri or Naji’s strategic thought. It does so by focusing upon the dependent variable, the presence or absence of certain observable phenomena—explained in greater depth in Appendix #4—which insurgencies would exhibit if they accorded with al-Suri or Naji’s guidance. It involves analysing al-Suri and Naji’s thinking according to an analytical framework, and comparing that thinking to publicly-available data concerning AQI and IS’s insurgencies which is gathered according to the same framework. This establishes if how AQI and IS operated, organised, and developed was accordant or at variance with al-Suri or Naji’s dicta.

Explaining the framework is necessary, given its role in facilitating the best possible analyses of al-Suri and Naji’s thinking, and of AQI and IS’s insurgencies. The framework focuses upon categories of observable organisational, operational, and lifecycle stage phenomena developed from the academic and practitioners’ literature on insurgency,67 and observable via publicly available data.

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67 The basis for the components of the analytical framework is also provided in greater depth in Appendix #2.
Five categories of organisational phenomena facilitate the assessment of the intended and actual structure, development, and internal relations of the insurgency, via publicly-available data. These are developed from the scholarly and practitioners’ literature on insurgency and counterinsurgency like some works considered during the literature review. The first is the influence of pre-conflict social networks upon the insurgency's structure and behaviour. These networks are relevant because they influence the insurgency by shaping its organisational structure and preferences. The second is the strength of the horizontal ties which ensure coordination between decisionmakers, which is relevant because of the importance of such ties for coordination and cohesion across organisational and geospatial gaps. The third is whether the organisation grows purposefully. This category is included because such growth determines whether the insurgency can escape the early-stage insecurity common to nascent insurgencies, and gain freedom of action. The fourth is related to the presence of auxiliaries, and the nature of their role. Auxiliaries are considered because they enable insurgencies to safely conduct activities other than war, and increase organisational survivability. The fifth is how the organisation relates to non-adversary third parties. This category concerns the extent to which the insurgency competes with other actors for dominance of the environment, as the counterinsurgency orthodoxy expects. Together, those categories do not facilitate an exhaustive

69 Staniland, 21-22.
70 Australian Department of Defence Defence, *LWD 3-0-1: Counterinsurgency* (Canberra, Australia: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 2.09-2.10.
73 Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 19, 23.
analysis—other relevant organisational phenomena exist but cannot be readily observed in publicly-available data, including the arrangements by which insurgencies appear to obtain weapons and supplies, and whether relationships of dependency appear between the insurgency and a third party outside the immediate area of operations. But the above categories do facilitate the best analysis possible—with sufficient brevity and via publicly-available data—of the extent to which AQI and IS’s structure, development, and internal relations accorded to al-Suri and Naji’s guidance.

Alongside the categories of observable organisational phenomena, six categories of operational phenomena relate to insurgencies’ activities. Like the organisational categories, these are based upon the relevant literature, and facilitate an analysis via publicly-available data. The first relates to whether the insurgency’s relationship with the population is coercive or co-optive. While it is accepted in the literature that an insurgency seeks popular support for material and political purposes, whether support is achieved through a relationship which is coercive rather than cooperative is a way in which an insurgency can distinguish itself. The second category relates to whether the insurgency seeks to provoke a government or popular backlash—a behaviour of some past insurgencies to which the literature calls attention. The third concerns whether the insurgency seeks to disrupt or usurp normal governmental functions, as some past insurgencies have done. The fourth category relates to whether an insurgency seeks to penetrate or co-opt the government or security forces—a threat against which the practitioners’ literature warns. The fifth addresses whether an insurgency exhibits a willingness to seize

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75 Central Intelligence Agency CIA, Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency, (Online: CIA, 2012). 11; Defence, LWD 3-0-1, 2.3, 2.8.
76 CIA. 15; Defence, LWD 3-0-1, 2.6; Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 30-31.
77 Defence, LWD 3-0-1, 1.3.
78 CIA. 23.
79 Defence, LWD 3-0-1, 4D.1; CIA. 2.
80 Byman, 15.
81 CIA. 14; Defence, LWD 3-0-1, 5.17; Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 2.
territory as past insurgencies have, and hold that seized territory at significant cost. Finally, the sixth category relates to the modalities of attack which the insurgency employs, though it is included because it is an identifiable area of distinction rather than being a question rooted in the literature. Like the categories of organisational phenomena, there are relevant operational phenomena which are excluded from the framework—these include the role of nonviolent activism, which can complement the insurgency’s military operations; and whether the insurgency clearly favours urban terrorism or rural guerrilla warfare. But also like the categories of organisational phenomena, the included categories of operational phenomena facilitate the best possible analysis of whether the operations of AQI and IS accorded to the strategic thought of al-Suri and Naji, which has sufficient brevity and is achievable via publicly-available data.

Alongside the organisational and operational phenomena, a separate indicator relates to the insurgency’s lifecycle stages. This indicator focuses upon the specific identifiable stages of the insurgencies’ lifecycles, whether those stages resembled those envisioned by al-Suri or Naji, and whether those lifecycles reflected the broader strategic trajectory envisioned by al-Suri or Naji. It is included because insurgencies develop over time, and behavioural changes can chart that development. While other indicators concern organisational and operational issues, the lifecycle stage indicator relates to whether insurgencies developed in line with al-Suri or Naji’s envisioned lifecycles.

82 Defence, LWD 3-0-1, 2.10; United Kingdom Ministry of Defence MoD, British Army Field Manual: Countering Insurgency, vol. 1 (London, UK2009), 1, 1.5; Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 2.
85 DoD, 2.14-2.15.
86 Nasar, 1421-22.
87 CIA. 5; DoD, xi.
88 Defence, LWD 3-0-1, 2.8.
The analytical framework described above facilitates the best-possible analysis—of the organisation, operations, and lifecycle advocated by al-Suri and Naji, and seen within the insurgencies of AQI and IS—which is possible via publicly-available data. While it does not ascertain the juncture and purpose of variance between strategic thought and insurgent practice, the framework makes it possible to address the first argument—that mostly, al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought was ultimately not reflected in AQI or IS’s behaviour.

The methodology’s second component addresses the second argument—that externally-recognisable issues appeared to contribute to variance identified between strategic thought and insurgent practice. It does so by focusing upon the independent variable—issues appearing to play a role in causing those insurgencies to organise, operate, and develop in a manner ultimately varying with al-Suri or Naji’s strategic thought. Those issues included insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale, jihadi insurgent organisations’ tendency towards inflexibility and insularity, and the operational environment’s influence. To demonstrate their involvement, the methodology’s second component first identifies the processes by which those issues can affect insurgencies and the impacts they can have, then demonstrates that AQI and IS underwent the same processes and consequently suffered the same impacts—the organisational, operational, and lifecycle phenomena which were divergent from al-Suri or Naji’s strategic thought.

By establishing links between the issues described above and the insurgencies, the second component serves two purposes. First, the component demonstrates that specific identifiable issues appeared to contribute to AQI and IS’s failure to ultimately organise, operate, and develop in complete accordance with al-Suri or Naji’s strategic thought. Second, the component reinforces the paper’s validity by showing that its findings are not necessarily shortcomings in the analysis of empirical data, or unexplained diversions from the norm. This second component of
the methodology, together with the first, is crucial to supporting the argument that complete accordance between strategic thought and insurgent practice appeared to be prevented, partly, by issues affecting insurgencies’ organisation, operations and development.

Aside from the fact that it supports the paper’s arguments, the methodology described above is suitable because it enables the most extensive analysis feasible with available data. Theoretically, a more detailed analysis is possible. As stated in the literature review, AQI and IS personnel were familiar with *The Call of Global Islamic Resistance* and *The Management of Savagery*, but as the analyses of the third and fourth chapters show, both insurgencies’ organisations, operations, and development were mostly divergent from al-Suri and Naji’s thinking. In that context, a more comprehensive analysis establishes not just that variance was ultimately evident and that certain externally-visible factors contributed to it, but also when and how decisions were made to pursue courses of action at variance with al-Suri or Naji’s strategic thought, the internal preferences and processes precipitating those decisions, and external factors’ role in the insurgencies’ decision-making processes.

Such an analysis is more comprehensive and resembles those recommended by defence and intelligence sources, but is not achievable within academic settings because it relies upon both classified and publicly-available data.\(^\text{89}\) The central impediment is that insurgencies’ internal affairs and preferences are not easily measured—insurgents avoid scrutiny,\(^\text{90}\) limiting the amount of publicly-available data concerning their internal affairs. With jihadis more specifically, hyperbole renders a significant amount of disseminated materials unreliable,\(^\text{91}\) as do reputation-management efforts like those undertaken by IS.\(^\text{92}\) At the same time, data collected by state agencies which overcomes the paucity of reliable publicly-

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\(^{89}\) CIA; Defence, *LWD 3-0-1*, 5.1-5.18.

\(^{90}\) Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 2.

\(^{91}\) David Aaron, *In Their Own Words: Voices of Jihad* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008), 45.

\(^{92}\) Ingram, 730-31.
available information are available with insufficient regularity. In sum, a more comprehensive analysis is impossible because of limitations upon the availability of data.

The paper’s methodology facilitates the best possible analysis within those limitations. The first component focuses upon how AQI and IS’s observable behaviours ultimately varied from al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought, rather than when and how their preferences became distinct from al-Suri or Naji’s dicta. Because that analysis is concerned with externally-visible phenomena, it can be undertaken using only publicly-available data from media, academic, and institutional sources, and GTD and the University of Chicago’s Suicide Attack Database, which directly describe the insurgencies’ organisation and operations, or events and activities consistent with certain organisational or operational characteristics. In the second component, the analysis demonstrates that variance between strategic thought and insurgent practice appeared partly resultant from certain issues known to affect jihadi and insurgent organisations, the processes and impacts of which are described in the relevant academic and professional literature. Because it applies pre-existing general explanations of insurgencies’ preferences and decision-making, the external indications of which are described within existing literature, the methodology’s second component can be supported with data concerning AQI and IS’s externally-visible behaviour which are found in the sources which support the methodology’s first component, and in academic and professional sources. The methodology does not completely address the research gap—it does not identify the points and purposes of departure from al-Suri or Naji’s guidance, the internal pressures upon AQI and IS to accord with al-Suri or Naji’s strategic thought, or whether accordance was AQI or IS’s original intent. Rather, it works within certain limitations to show that al-Suri and Naji’s dicta were not indicative of how the AQI and IS insurgencies would ultimately play out, while

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certain issues facing jihadi insurgent organisations appeared to play a role in limiting the influence of al-Suri and Najjí’s strategic thought.

1.6: Structure
The structure of the paper’s remainder reflects the methodology. The second, third, and fourth chapters focus upon the methodology’s first component, using the analytical framework of organisational, operational, and lifecycle stage phenomena to compare strategic thought to insurgent practice, and show that ultimately, variance was mostly evident between AQI and al-Suri, and IS and Najjí. Chapter Two analyses al-Suri and Najjí’s strategic thought according to the framework, establishing what observable phenomena would indicate an insurgency which accorded to that strategic thought. Chapters Three and Four compare—respectively the results of the analyses of al-Suri and Najjí’s thinking to empirical data concerning AQI and IS, showing that how those insurgencies ultimately played was at variance with al-Suri and Najjí’s strategic thought. The fifth chapter focuses upon the methodology’s second component, showing that the variance identified between the insurgencies’ observable organisation, operations, and lifecycle stages, and al-Suri and Najjí’s strategic thought, appeared at least partly resultant from insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale, jihadi insurgent organisations’ inflexible and insular tendencies, and the operational environment’s potential influence upon insurgencies. Being structured this manner, the paper supports its arguments according to the logic of its methodology.
Chapter 2: Analysing al-Suri and Naji’s Strategic Thought

2.1: Chapter Introduction

To determine the extent to which insurgent practice reflected strategic thought, unfocused understandings of al-Suri and Naji’s thinking are inadequate. It is instead necessary to identify phenomena which insurgencies, according to al-Suri or Naji’s thinking, would exhibit. This necessitates analyses of al-Suri’s *The Call of Islamic Global Resistance* and Naji’s *The Management of Savagery* according to the analytical framework. Doing so establishes which organisational phenomena, operational phenomena, and lifecycle stages insurgencies would exhibit if they accorded with al-Suri or Naji’s thinking.

2.2: Analysing al-Suri’s Work

As stated previously, al-Suri advocated an organisation of small groups and individuals which employs terrorism as a substitute, and later as a complement, for conventional operations, while expanding and escalating gradually to the point of confronting the state and seizing territory. While that description conveys the gist of al-Suri’s thinking, it is inadequate for a comparison with AQI, necessitating an analysis which uses the analytical framework to identify the organisation, operations, and lifecycle stages which al-Suri advocated.

That analysis first determines how, in al-Suri’s view, insurgencies should organise. For one, it shows that pre-conflict social networks’ influence is to be limited, with ideological and political preferences being determined by insurgencies’ elites, not exogeneous actors. Second, leaders’ horizontal ties should be limited.⁹⁴ Al-Suri argues that unity should come from ideological commonalities rather than operational coordination, and intergroup communications should be weak or absent among personnel in operational roles.⁹⁵ Third, while al-Suri advocates operational security and discourages reckless expansion, he endorses safe,

⁹⁴ Nasar, 54, 1403-07.
purposeful growth. He also recommends forming groups which then form other groups. Fourth, al-Suri recommends forming auxiliaries for information operations, which work separately from military personnel. Finally, al-Suri suggests that close relationships with non-adversary third parties should be avoided in the insurgency’s early stages for operational reasons, and that they should be developed later only to support insurgents’ objectives. Together, such observations reflect the organisational phenomena which insurgencies, according to al-Suri’s dicta, should exhibit.

The analysis also establishes how insurgencies should operate, according to al-Suri. First, al-Suri recommends co-opting populations by leveraging pre-existing grievances “sufficient to carry them [the people] to jihad.” Second, provocations are discouraged in early campaign stages, to avoid overwhelming responses, but are acceptable for inspiring popular support, or—later—provoking winnable confrontations with security forces. Thirdly, al-Suri recommends disrupting government functions, by striking foreign or domestic security forces, political actors, or government supporters, and persons or entities who support Western government presence. Fourth, al-Suri recommends co-opting personnel from security services when possible, including by avoiding engagements with security forces in order to encourage defections. Fifth, al-Suri recommends avoiding consolidating and defending territorial control prior to the insurgency’s final lifecycle stage. Sixth, al-Suri endorses specific attack modalities. For most groups, attacks involving small arms, light weapons, and explosive devices are

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96 Nasar, 1399-403.  
97 Nasar, 1409, 12.  
99 Nasar, 1370.  
100 Nasar, 54.  
101 Nasar, 1380.  
102 Nasar, 1422.  
103 Nasar, 1385-86.  
104 Nasar, 54.  
105 Nasar, 1422.
recommended in the insurgency’s early stages;\textsuperscript{106} while larger or more-complex attacks are advised in the later stages, and the campaign’s apex should see attacks involving “the remainder of the weapons of the army.”\textsuperscript{107} Such observations reflect the phenomena which could be expected from insurgencies operating according to al-Suri’s dicta.

The analysis also identifies a three-stage lifecycle which al-Suri advocated for insurgencies. The first sees a balance between progress and organisational survival. Operating in small groups, the insurgency operates at limited scale and risk, undertaking assassinations, small guerrilla operations, ambushes, bombings, and raids to induce security force exhaustion, and political and economic failure. The second stage sees the insurgency become more ambitious, aggressive, and tolerant of risk. Insurgents undertake larger operations, compelling security forces into confrontations of insurgents’ choosing and seizing territory opportunistically. The third stage is an offensive, resolving the conflict. Insurgents shift to semi-regular attacks and regular military operations, consolidate territorial control, and use terrorism to complement conventional engagements.\textsuperscript{108} Together, those three stages constitute a lifecycle whereby the insurgency gradually escalates, becoming increasingly aggressive and ambitious in its efforts to hold territory and operate with increasing freedom. Like the organisational and operational phenomena described above, it is reasonable to expect that insurgencies which accorded with al-Suri’s strategic thought would develop similarly.

2.3: Analysing Naji’s Work

Like the analysis of al-Suri’s thinking, analysing Naji’s strategic thought is necessary to establish the extent to which IS’s insurgency played out according to Naji’s thinking. Previously, it was explained that Naji advocated an insurgency using violence to exhaust government capacity to provide governance and security within

\textsuperscript{106} Nasar, 1399-400.
\textsuperscript{107} Nasar, 1422-23.
\textsuperscript{108} Nasar, 1422-23.
a given area, established an interim administration in that area, and resolved the conflict by defeating the government and turning that interim administration into a viable state. Like with al-Suri’s thinking, that broad description is inadequate, necessitating an analysis which identifies the organisation, operations, and lifecycle stages which Naji advocated.

As with al-Suri, observations begin with the insurgency’s organisation. First, Naji discourages influential pre-war social networks. He recommends building groups which operate according to the ideological and operational preferences of the network in the insurgency’s early stages, while later he recommends building a state-like entity based upon a specific politico-religious program. He also discourages integrating the populace or pre-existing networks into the insurgency because of their undependability, and against planning according to the preferences of those not principally loyal to the insurgency.\(^{109}\) Second, Naji encourages strong horizontal ties. Managers should be close and trained in multiple roles, and reassigned in response to operational priorities during the early stages of the insurgency, though Naji does advise allowing some independent decision-making on their part.\(^{110}\) Third, Naji advocates purposeful growth, to develop certain capabilities in the insurgent organisation.\(^{111}\) Fourth, he advocates forming an auxiliary which constitutes the insurgency’s new administrative apparatus, and the assignment of auxiliary personnel to information operations.\(^{112}\) Finally, Naji recommends cooperation with politically- and religiously-hygenic non-adversary third parties.\(^{113}\) Cooperation can be achieved by ignoring past disputes and accepting the instrumental character of partnerships, and by concessions or bribes.

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\(^{109}\) Naji, 17-21, 35.

\(^{110}\) Naji, 23, 50-51.

\(^{111}\) Naji, 62-71.

\(^{112}\) Naji, 11-12, 21.

\(^{113}\) Naji, 18.
to third parties.\textsuperscript{114} Together, such phenomena could be reasonably expected from an insurgency which organised according to Naji’s dicta.

Observations can also be made about the expected operational behaviour which Naji advocated. One is that Naji recommends relations with the population based on the insurgency’s position as a governing actor.\textsuperscript{115} This necessitates forming a state-like administration which provides political and social order, and basic services, in the absence of the government’s failure to do so.\textsuperscript{116} Secondly, Naji advocates operations which provoke responses or polarise the population. In the campaign’s early stages, these may be intended to provoke a response, but in later stages they are intended to force neutral Muslim audiences to align with or against the insurgency.\textsuperscript{117} Thirdly, Naji advocates disrupting and usurping the functions of government. He recommends attacking the “enemy and the regimes collaborating with them” in the insurgency’s early stages, while in later stages he recommends assuming the responsibilities of government.\textsuperscript{118} Fourth, Naji calls for the infiltration of the government and security forces, and information operations which appeal to lower- and middle-level personnel from the security forces to defect.\textsuperscript{119} Fifth, Naji recommends defending territorial control. This can be by using the quasi-state apparatus to develop the population for fighting and repelling attacks,\textsuperscript{120} and by responding to security operations with attacks which impose costs upon the adversary. Lastly, Naji provides little guidance concerning specific attack modalities, directing readers to “general books on the art of war, especially guerrilla wars” from jihadi and non-jihadi sources instead. What guidance he does provide concerning attacks is broad, and relates to maximising the frequency, geospatial spread, and

\textsuperscript{114} Naji, 35, 47-49.
\textsuperscript{115} Naji, 20-21.
\textsuperscript{116} Naji, 17.
\textsuperscript{117} Naji, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{118} Naji, 11-12, 16.
\textsuperscript{119} Naji, 21, 51.
\textsuperscript{120} Naji, 17-18.
range of targets of attacks. Together, such phenomena could be expected from insurgencies operating according to Naji’s guidance.

Finally, identifying Naji’s proposed lifecycle stages is possible. Three stages are defined. The first is of “the power of vexation and exhaustion,” wherein the insurgency creates a disordered space wherein it can establish a new order. In this stage, insurgents weaken the adversary with attacks of high frequency and geospatial spread, conduct spectacular attention-drawing attacks, and seize territory. The second is “the stage of the administration of savagery,” wherein insurgents establish a new order within the destabilised space. Here, the insurgency positions itself as a quasi-state within its new territory, eliminates dissenters, builds the capacity to repel and respond to attacks, and engages with ideologically-acceptable partners. The third stage is of “the power of establishment,” wherein the insurgency achieves victory by creating a viable state-like entity. As with al-Suri’s writings, the direction of Naji’s envisioned lifecycle is escalatory, though it emphasises more the usurpation of the state’s role and improving the quality of its efforts, than widening those efforts’ scope. Like with the organisational and operational phenomena described above, it could be reasonably expected that the above would reflect the lifecycle of an insurgency which developed according to Naji’s guidance. As with al-Suri’s strategic thought, that understanding is essential because it facilitates an analysis which address the paper’s first research question—the extent to which AQI and IS’s insurgencies accorded with al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought.

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121 Naji, 28-32.
122 Naji, 15-18.
Chapter 3: Comparing al-Suri and AQI

3.1: Chapter Introduction

Analysing al-Suri and Naji’s thinking enables comparisons between strategic thought and insurgent practice, the first of which is between al-Suri’s thinking and AQI’s insurgency. That comparison works by comparing the results of the analysis of al-Suri’s thinking to empirical data concerning AQI’s insurgency. Doing so establishes the extent to which AQI’s exhibited organisational phenomena, operational phenomena, and lifecycle stages accorded or varied with al-Suri’s thinking. This determines that despite indications of AQI members’ familiarity with al-Suri’s writings,\(^{123}\) AQI’s insurgency mostly varied with al-Suri’s thinking—while AQI’s exhibited organisational phenomena mostly accorded to al-Suri’s thinking, its observable operational phenomena and lifecycle stages mostly varied.

That comparison’s results serve two purposes. First, they partially address the paper’s first research question by showing that ultimately—based upon publicly-available information—AQI mostly varied from al-Suri’s dicta. Second, they specific the categories of phenomena wherein that variance occurred, facilitating the fifth chapter’s analysis which addresses the paper’s second question.

3.2: Comparing AQI and al-Suri’s Thinking

Comparing empirical data concerning AQI’s insurgency to al-Suri’s thinking shows that variance appeared between AQI and al-Suri’s guidance. That comparison is structured according to the analytical framework, and—while not identifying precisely when and how AQI diverged from al-Suri’s guidance—shows that although AQI’s organisation ultimately reflected al-Suri’s strategic thought, its operations and lifecycle mostly varied.

AQI’s organisation mostly accorded with al-Suri’s dicta, with accordance occurring across three of five categories of organisational phenomena. The first concerned

\(^{123}\) al-Banghali, 39.
pre-conflict social networks’ influence, which al-Suri believed should be limited. Accordingly, pre-conflict social networks did not strongly influence AQI. AQI leaders desired cohesion,\textsuperscript{124} integrating Iraqis into senior positions and relying upon pre-existing social links to recruit them.\textsuperscript{125} The resulting cohesion insured AQI to other networks’ conflicting and moderating preferences, including those within the broader transnational al-Qa’ida movement.\textsuperscript{126} External indications reflected this. For one, AQI’s platform and practices were resilient and persisted amidst leadership changes—despite reductions in attacks following the death of former leader, al-Zarqawi,\textsuperscript{127} repeated re-brandings, further leadership changes,\textsuperscript{128} and pressure from third parties, the frequency and character of AQI’s attacks did not significantly change,\textsuperscript{129} nor did its unwillingness to engage with the political process. AQI’s alienation of more-moderate networks was also consistent with an unwillingness to accommodate pre-conflict networks’ preferences: in 2005, tribal fighters from Albu Mahal attacked AQI;\textsuperscript{130} while in 2007, Ansar al-Sunnah, the 1920 Brigades, and Iraqi Hamas formed a separate partnership.\textsuperscript{131} These external indications, alongside reports of AQI’s internal workings, show that in keeping with al-Suri’s thinking, pre-conflict social networks’ influence upon AQI was weak.

Second, AQI accorded with al-Suri’s endorsement of purposeful growth, although that growth eventually slowed. AQI’s growth began before the conflict, with former

\textsuperscript{128} Hashim, 72-73.
\textsuperscript{129} UMD-START, "Data from GTD, Al-Qa’ida in Iraq, Tawhid & Jihad, and Islamic State of Iraq Attacks, 2001 and 2011;" ; M. J. Kirdar, Al Qaeda in Iraq, (Online: CSIS, 2011). 5.
\textsuperscript{130} Gary Montgomery and Timothy McWilliams, eds., \textit{Iraqi Perspectives: From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009} (Quantico: MCUP, 2009), 12-13.
leader al-Zarqawi bringing core personnel to Iraq and establishing a network there before US entry in 2003. In worsening circumstances following 2003, AQI continued integrating new members locally, and via foreign fighter flows. AQI’s early behaviour reflected the resultant growth. For one, the organisation operated in various locales, with data showing concentrated attacks in Baghdad’s surroundings and elsewhere in Iraq. Further, the frequency and character of AQI attacks initially reflected a network operating at growing scale: the rate of attacks increased in AQI’s early years, while human capital-intensive suicide bombings increased in greater proportion to other attack modalities. Admittedly, such growth eventually lessened, particularly as security forces became increasingly capable, and AQI never outgrew other insurgent actors in Iraq. External pressures notwithstanding, though, AQI matched al-Suri’s thinking by growing purposefully when able.

Thirdly, AQI formed auxiliaries for non-military functions, as al-Suri recommended. AQI contained persons who supported operations by facilitating transfers of equipment and non-Iraqi personnel. Also present were personnel with responsibilities including information operations, operational security,

139 Serena, 35-36, 41.
assassinations, managing hostages,\textsuperscript{140} or criminality to fund AQI’s operations.\textsuperscript{141} As with pre-conflict social networks’ limited influence and purposeful growth, those auxiliaries’ presence indicated that AQI mostly accorded with al-Suri’s strategic thought.

The observable organisational phenomena exhibited by AQI were not wholly accordant with al-Suri’s thinking, though. Variance occurred in two of five categories, one of which related to the strength of horizontal ties. While al-Suri recommended limiting them and relying upon ideological commonalities for unity, AQI desired strong horizontal ties. Internally, the organisation was clearly structured. Commanders knew their role and how to engage with colleagues, with established roles for information, intelligence, financial, and other officers. Operational and tactical decision-making was delegated to local commanders, facilitating decisions informed by local situational awareness, and pre-existing relationships were leveraged when recruiting to ensure mutual trust.\textsuperscript{142} AQI’s behaviour reflected this. In late 2005, AQI commanders gathered to consult for a “three-month campaign” of coordinated attacks;\textsuperscript{143} while in 2006, as external pressure increased, AQI measuredly reduced its operational footprint in certain areas.\textsuperscript{144} Moreover, GTD data were at least consistent with an AQI capacity for coordinated operations. March of 2004 saw near-simultaneous incidents in Baghdad and Karbala, 22\textsuperscript{nd} September of 2004 saw multiple bombings in Baghdad against military targets, and 16\textsuperscript{th} March 2007 saw simultaneous attacks across multiple locales, for example.\textsuperscript{145} While AQI’s operations grew increasingly parochial

\textsuperscript{140} International Crisis Group ICG, In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency, (Online: ICG, 2006). 8.
\textsuperscript{141} Rollins and Wyler. 31; Phil Williams, Criminals, Militias, and Insurgents: Organized Crime in Iraq, (Online: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009).
\textsuperscript{142} Serena, 44; Patrick Johnston et al., Foundations of the Islamic State: Management, Money, and Terror in Iraq, 2005–2010 (Santa Monica: RAND, 2016), 71-82.
\textsuperscript{143} Ware.
\textsuperscript{144} Benjamin Bahney et al., An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa’ida in Iraq (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 44.
\textsuperscript{145} UMD-START.
in later years, amidst leadership incompetence and security force attacks, AQI displayed an intent to maintain horizontal ties, despite al-Suri’s guidance.

Second, while al-Suri discouraged close engagement with non-adversary third parties—especially earlier-on—AQI’s relationships with non-adversary third parties were mostly cooperative, though the insurgency only later worked to maintain them. Initially, AQI coexisted—albeit poorly—with other Sunni groups with whom it had differences. These included the Mujahideen Army in Iraq, the Islamic Army in Iraq, Ansar al-Sunnah or Ansar al-Islam, the 1920 Revolution Brigades, the Islamic Front of Iraqi Resistance, and criminal actors. While common objectives enabled coexistence between those groups and AQI, AQI’s unwillingness to moderate its ideological platform, and attempts to assert a central role in Iraq’s broader insurgency, eventually alienated third parties, which pivoted from AQI by 2006, sometimes towards Iraq’s government. Resultantly, AQI attempted to improve its image, rebranding as the Mujahideen Shura Council in 2006, presenting itself as a more-conventional part of the al-Qa’ida-led jihadi movement, and later in that same year forming the Islamic State of Iraq. These changes indicated AQI’s desire—contrary to al-Suri’s dicta—to seem a leader among various insurgent actors, and to maintain cooperative relationships with non-adversary third parties. This aberrant collegiality, however, did not negate the three areas of

146 Bernard, 7.
147 Roggio; Fishman, Dysfunction and Decline. 19.
148 Cordesman, Iraq’s Sunni Insurgents: Looking Beyond Al Qa’ida. 4-5.
149 Serena, 33-34, 45.
151 Seth Jones and Martin Libicki, How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa’ida (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008), 91-92.
organisational accordance, and ultimately, most observable organisational phenomena exhibited by AQI accorded with al-Suri’s guidance.

But while accordance appeared between the organisational phenomena exhibited by AQI and al-Suri’s thinking, variance occurred between al-Suri’s guidance and AQI’s exhibited operational phenomena—among six categories, variance appeared in four. The first related to the character of AQI’s relationship with the population. Although Al-Suri recommended co-opting the population by exploiting pre-existing grievances, AQI maintained coercive relationships with local populations, particularly tribes in Iraq’s west.156 The insurgency encroached upon all major areas of life. AQI sought political control by undermining local leaders’ autonomy, denouncing the traditional tribal order as un-Islamic, encouraging younger members to attack AQI’s opponents,157 and assassinating dissenting tribal leaders.158 AQI also attempted to dominate social affairs, restricting alcohol, mixed-gender interactions, and other matters, while violently enforcing those restrictions.159 Further, AQI sought to replace the customary law normally governing tribal life with a religiously-derived judicial system, enforcing judgments severely. Finally, AQI forcefully entered economic life, expropriating business revenues,160 while preventing tribal leaders from accessing US-backed investment.161 Local actors’ backlashes against AQI further attested to that coercive relationship. In 2005, tribes from the Dulaimi confederation struck AQI, provoking AQI recriminations; in 2006, the Mahal and Albu Nimr, as well as several tribal networks

156 Bahney et al., 30.
159 Katzman. 10-11.
161 Cigar, 13-16.
within Anbar Salvation Council, rose against AQI; and in 2007, anti-AQI mobilisation coalesced as “Sahwa” (Awakening) militias, eliciting reactions from AQI leaders. Similarly, persons living under AQI rule cooperated with security forces—the Anbar People’s Council began supporting police in 2005, while the rate of civilian tips for insurgent weapons caches increased significantly in 2006-7. Like the direct indications, this popular backlash illustrated that AQI’s relations with local populations, contrary to al-Suri’s guidance, were coercive.

The second area of operational variance related to the use of provocations. While al-Suri discouraged provoking reactions prematurely, AQI intended and acted to provoke reactions from the government and public from its campaign’s early stages. This is based partly upon AQI’s known intent—in 2004, former leader al-Zarqawi expressed a desire for sectarian conflict in Iraq. AQI’s actions reflected that intent. For much of its insurgency, AQI perpetrated strikes likely to provoke government and public responses. These included the 2003 Jordanian embassy bombing, the 2003 bombing of a hotel used by the United Nations, the 2003 killing of a prominent Shi’i figure, the 2006 bombing of a notable mosque in Samarra, and a tendency in the late 2000s to target religious minorities and institutions. More broadly, GTD data indicated a pattern of attacks against security force, government, and diplomatic targets between 2003 and 2005, which

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162 Long, 79-80.
164 Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro, 20.
165 Cordesman, Iraq’s Insurgency and Civil Violence. 30.
166 US Department of State, “Text of a Letter From Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, Obtained by United States Government in Iraq.”
170 Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro, 15.
continued—aside from a decline in attacks against diplomatic targets—into the late 2000s.\(^{172}\) For much of its insurgency, AQI intended and acted to provoke a response, contrary to al-Suri’s advice.

The third area of operational variance concerned the co-optation or penetration of security forces. While al-Suri encouraged this, AQI did not appear to infiltrate or co-opt Iraq’s security forces. Media reporting is not wholly consistent with collaboration between security forces and AQI, and establishing collaboration resultant from infiltration or co-optation is difficult. Some reports indicate security personnel collaboration with Sunni insurgents, among whom may have been AQI. In 2004, one report indicated an Iraqi National Guard officer providing support to insurgents near Kirkuk.\(^ {173}\) In 2007, Iraqi authorities dismissed a mayor and 1,500 police officers for alleged collaboration with Sunni insurgents.\(^ {174}\) In 2011, an Iraqi soldier was convicted of killing two US personnel, and was allegedly an AQI member, however the conviction was overturned in 2012.\(^ {175}\) Further, GTD data show that while the rate of attacks against security forces varied, AQI never ceased attacking security forces in a manner which might encourage defections as al-Suri suggested.\(^ {176}\) As such, dispositive proof of AQI’s infiltration or co-optation of the government or security forces—which would reflect al-Suri’s influence—was absent.

The fourth area of variance related to AQI’s willingness to maintain territorial control. Where al-Suri discouraged premature territorial seizures, AQI sought to establish and maintain territorial control, although its resolve to do so gradually declined. Initially, AQI resisted efforts to end its overt presence in certain areas. In

\(^{172}\) UMD-START.
\(^{176}\) UMD-START.
2004, several insurgent organisations—including AQI—turned Fallujah into an environment wherein they could operate relatively freely, while AQI attempted to assert leadership in that city. Forcing AQI from Fallujah required two offensives by security forces, which—given AQI and other insurgent organisations’ resistance—caused substantial damage to the city. AQI’s willingness to fight for territorial control declined after Fallujah, however. The insurgency took a more measured approach in Ramadi in 2006, entrenching itself there after losing Fallujah, but focusing its efforts in specific areas of the city before eventually being expelled by US, Iraqi government, and local tribal forces. In 2007 and 2008, in Anbar, AQI faced growing pressure from US and local forces, and responded by consolidating its presence in Ninewa rather than attempting to defend its presence in Anbar. By 2009, as US forces began withdrawing and Iraqi forces’ role grew, AQI had consolidated itself in Diyala and Ninewa, with networks operating around Baghdad and in eastern Anbar, allowing itself to be forced underground. This change ultimately illustrated the broader point: while its resolve to do so declined, AQI wished to maintain some measure of territorial control. It was in this regard, and in the coercive relations with the population, provocative behaviour, and failure to infiltrate or co-opt the security forces, that AQI’s operations varied from al-Suri’s thinking.

178 Bahney et al., 19.
180 Pirnie and O’Connell, 11-12.
181 Johnston et al., 15-16.
183 Phillips, 65.
185 Hashim, 73.
187 Johnston et al., 2-3.
The operational phenomena exhibited by AQI were not entirely divergent from al-Suri’s guidance, however—accordance appeared across two categories. For one, reflecting al-Suri’s dicta, AQI endeavoured to disrupt government functions with limited success, but did not meaningfully attempt to usurp them. AQI’s disruption and usurpation of government were readily observable. After the 2003 fall of the Ba’ath government, AQI targeted infrastructure, security forces,188 and essential professionals like doctors, while threatening those who facilitated or encouraged political engagement,189 or were central to tribal politics.190 This continued into AQI’s later years, as the insurgency continued targeting government and local security forces, services, and infrastructure.191 Simultaneously, AQI made token attempts to usurp government functions through its aforementioned efforts to impose a social, political, and economic order upon areas it controlled; and seized control over facilities essential for healthcare, education, and petroleum production.192 AQI was not successful in its attempts to disrupt the functions of government, however, and made no meaningful efforts to usurp them. While AQI’s efforts—and those of other actors—rapidly degraded Iraq’s security environment in 2003 and 2004,193 Iraqi and foreign forces were able to make limited progress in improving Iraq’s security situation later in the decade.194 While AQI disrupted essential services by targeting infrastructure and professionals, it did not itself provide those services.195 Further, AQI’s political obstruction failed, with at least seventy percent of AQI’s preferred constituency—Sunni Arabs—registering to

188 UMD-START.
189 ICG, In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency. 17-18.
190 ICG, Iraq After the Surge I: The New Sunni Landscape. 6-7.
191 State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2009. 120.
192 Montgomery and McWilliams, 21, 46.
195 Johnston et al., 101-02.
vote, and the 2005 and 2010 elections proceeding with majority participation. Alongside other evidence, this reinforced AQI’s intent—but ultimate failure—to disrupt government functions as al-Suri encouraged, and its unwillingness to meaningfully usurp them.

Secondly, AQI favoured an attack modality which al-Suri endorsed—bombings. GTD data indicate 297 bombings between 2003 and 2011, exceeding armed assaults, kidnappings, and assassinations. Periodic increases and decreases in bombings were also telling. Between 2004 and 2005, bombings increased while other modalities—notably, armed assault and kidnapping—decreased. More broadly, the rate of bombings increased until 2010, except in 2006 which saw a general reduction in attacks. This preference for bombings, alongside AQI’s intent to disrupt the functions of government was accordant with al-Suri’s operational guidance. Amidst the areas of operational variance, however, it did not change the fact that AQI’s exhibited operational phenomena mostly varied from al-Suri’s thinking.

Like the operational phenomena it exhibited, AQI’s lifecycle also varied from al-Suri’s thinking. Variance appeared in that lifecycle’s individual stages, and its aggregate. In the individual stages, resemblance to al-Suri’s proposed lifecycle was inconsistent, with similarities initially appearing: between 2003 and 2004, AQI operated clandestinely, establishing itself within the post-Ba’athist landscape, and attacked diplomatic, security, and politically-symbolic targets, and private citizens. While developing relationships with other militant actors in this period, AQI operated discreetly—its involvement in the 2003 Jordanian embassy bombing, for example, was not initially apparent. This reflected al-Suri’s

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cautious first stage. AQI’s insurgency also resembled al-Suri’s second stage between 2004 and 2006, as the insurgency became more aggressive. It declared its association with al-Qa’ida,\textsuperscript{203} perpetrating more attacks against more targets,\textsuperscript{204} and attempted to establish an overt role for itself by entrenching itself in significant locales, including Fallujah and Ramadi.\textsuperscript{205} Initially, AQI’s lifecycle resembled that proposed by al-Suri.

But later stages of AQI’s lifecycle differed from al-Suri’s vision, as did the overall lifecycle. Between 2006 and 2009, the insurgency’s defensive behaviour did not resemble any stage al-Suri described. To prevent attacks by other actors in a time of relative vulnerability, AQI rebranded as the Islamic State of Iraq,\textsuperscript{206} increasingly targeting private citizens instead of security forces.\textsuperscript{207} Responding to pressure from US, Iraqi, and local tribal forces,\textsuperscript{208} it reduced its overt presence in Anbar and dispersed elsewhere, including Diyala and Ninewa.\textsuperscript{209} Similarly, the counteroffensive from 2009 to 2011, as US troops—once AQI’s principal adversary—gradually ceded responsibilities to Iraqi forces,\textsuperscript{210} only vaguely resembled al-Suri the first stage proposed by al-Suri. Rather than bringing increasing pressure to bear against the government, AQI had become an underground organisation again,\textsuperscript{211} maintaining a strong presence in Diyala and Ninewa, and discreet networks around Baghdad and eastern Anbar.\textsuperscript{212} It also avoided major confrontations with security forces,\textsuperscript{213} which

\textsuperscript{203} Al Jazeera, "الزرقاوي يعلن ولاءه لابن لادن ويعينه بالوضع في العراق/Zarqawi Announces His Loyalty to Bin Laden and His Involvement in the Situation in Iraq," \textit{Al Jazeera}, 19/10/2004 (2004).
\textsuperscript{204} UMD-START.
\textsuperscript{207} UMD-START.
\textsuperscript{208} Fishman, \textit{Dysfunction and Decline}. 6, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{211} Johnston et al., 2.
\textsuperscript{212} State, \textit{Country Reports on Terrorism} 2009. 119-20.
\textsuperscript{213} Fishman, \textit{Dysfunction and Decline}. 19.
had become more hazardous as more essential AQI personnel were killed in confrontations.\textsuperscript{214} Instead AQI increasingly perpetrating firearm and bombing attacks against police, government, and military targets; and shifted its attention from the civilians it had targeted in the preceding stage of its campaign—something at odds with al-Suri’s objective to induce “exhaustion.”\textsuperscript{215}

AQI’s lifecycle still varied from al-Suri’s vision when considered in the aggregate. This was evident in the campaign’s overall direction: while al-Suri advocated ongoing escalation and increasingly ambitious efforts to expand the organisation and its territory, AQI became less ambitious and increasingly focused upon survival as its campaign progressed. AQI’s insurgency also did not “mature,” with AQI never operating in a manner resembling al-Suri’s final lifecycle stage—with terror and guerrilla tactics complementing conventional operations amidst territorial seizures. In both its individual stages and entirety, AQI’s lifecycle varied from al-Suri’s thinking, just as the exhibited operational phenomena did. Cumulatively, such findings support a broader conclusion: while AQI exhibited organisational phenomena mostly accordant with al-Suri’s guidance, the operational phenomena and lifecycle AQI exhibited were mostly at variance.

3.3: Summary and Key Findings

Comparing AQI to al-Suri’s guidance serves two purposes. Firstly, it partly addresses the paper’s first research question by showing that ultimately, AQI’s insurgency mostly varied from al-Suri’s thinking. More narrowly, the comparison identifies categories of phenomenon apparently at variance with al-Suri’s guidance. Two categories were organisational: AQI had strong horizontal ties and engaged with non-adversary third parties, contradicting al-Suri’s recommendation. Four other categories were operational: AQI maintained coercive relations with the population, employed provocations earlier than al-Suri advised, failed to co-opt security forces,

\textsuperscript{214} Hashim, 73.
\textsuperscript{215} UMD-START, 1422; Nasar.
and sought territorial control sooner than al-Suri advised. Finally, AQI’s lifecycle—as separate stages or a whole—ultimately differed from al-Suri’s proposed lifecycle. In identifying those areas of variance, the results serve a second purpose—facilitating the fifth chapters’ analysis, which addresses the paper’s second question by accounting for variance between strategic thought and insurgent practice.

Limitations upon those results exist, however. They do not establish whether AQI originally intended to follow al-Suri’s guidance and was forced to diverge, or that no other areas of potential accordance or variance exist. Indeed, questions remain because of indications of AQI leaders’ familiarity with al-Suri’s thinking, the limited accordance which was identified, and the methodology’s noted limitations. However, the results do show that AQI’s insurgency ultimately occurred in a manner mostly varying with al-Suri’s thinking, with variance occurring in specific areas.
Chapter 4: Comparing Naji and IS

4.1: Chapter Introduction

While analysing al-Suri’s work enables a comparison between al-Suri’s thinking and AQI, analysing Naji’s enables a comparison of Naji’s strategic thought and IS. Also structured according to the analytical framework, that comparison contributes similarly to answering the paper’s research questions. The comparison works by comparing the results of the analysis of Naji’s thinking to empirical data concerning IS’s insurgency, and establishing whether IS’s exhibited organisational phenomena, operational phenomena, and lifecycle stages accorded or varied with Naji’s guidance. This shows that despite indications of IS members’ familiarity with Naji’s writings, IS ultimately organised and developed in a manner varying substantially from Naji’s dicta, and operated only in limited accordance.

Like those from the preceding chapter, that comparison’s results serve two purposes: demonstrating variance between Naji’s strategic thought and IS, and enabling the fifth chapter’s analysis which addresses the paper’s second research question.

4.2: Comparing IS and Naji’s Thinking

Comparing the results of the analysis of Naji’s thinking to data concerning IS shows that IS’s insurgency occurred at considerable variance with Naji’s dicta, despite IS members’ familiarity with Naji’s writings. While not establishing the juncture and cause of divergence from Naji’s thinking, that comparison—structured in line with the analytical framework—demonstrates that IS’s organisation and development mostly varied from Naji’s dicta, while its operations were in only limited accordance.

The comparison first establishes that IS organised in a manner mostly diverging from Naji’s thinking. Variance occurred in three categories of observable

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216 Hassan, 17.
organisational phenomena. First, despite Naji’s warning to limit their influence, pre-conflict social networks held significant sway over IS’s behaviour. Former officials from the pre-war Ba’athist government comprised one network; while not affecting IS’s ideological programme, they influenced IS’s operational behaviour, increasing its combat effectiveness. IS-aligned tribes were another, albeit looser, network. While IS needed them to assert territorial control, ideological and social differences prevented tribes’ complete integration into IS. Consequently, tribal fighters sometimes operated with separate priorities, enmeshing IS into local conflicts.

While neither pre-conflict network altered IS’s ideological platform, they affected its operational behaviour, thus indicating their influence upon IS, contradicting Naji’s recommendation.

Second, while Naji advocated strong horizontal ties, IS’s lack of operational cohesion indicated weak ones. IS commanders maintained strategic cohesion: in 2013 and 2014, groups of IS personnel converged upon locales like Mosul, Ramadi, and Fallujah, operated with broad geospatial spread across central and Northern Iraq, and undertook “campaigns” like the waves of bombings in 2012 and 2013. Commanders were not operationally cohesive, however. The aforementioned bombing campaigns were more consistent with prior centralised planning than middle-level collaboration, and coordinated attacks were abnormal

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223 Lewis. 14.
in GTD data. IS’s operational commanders also operated independently while IS-aligned tribal fighters worked according to separate priorities, causing “disjointed and localized” operational behaviour, while IS’s defensive operations relied more upon preparation than coordination. Despite its strategic cohesion, IS’s operational behaviour belied strong horizontal ties of the sort Naji advocated.

Third, although Naji endorsed constructive engagement with non-adversary third parties, IS’s relations with non-adversary third parties in Iraq were belligerent and uncompromising. IS’s conduct between 2011 and 2013 reflected this. The insurgency violently pressured tribal actors in that period, integrating some by exploiting the Iraqi government’s failure to provide security, and attacking those which had resisted AQI. Even when not hostile, IS was unaccommodating—with the Islamic Army of Iraq, Ansar al-Sunnah, the 1920s Revolution Brigades, and others, it cultivated relationships via shared interests rather than compromise. The alienation of third parties, particularly as incentives to tolerate IS’s behaviour lessened in and after 2014, also indicated this inflexible attitude towards third parties. Lacking close bonds to incentivise ongoing relationships, other groups distanced themselves entirely from IS or maintained only discreet relations, to avoid being targeted by increasingly-capable security forces.

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224 UMD-START, "Data from GTD, al-Qa’ida in Iraq, Islamic State of Iraq, and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant Attacks, Between 2011 and 2017."
228 Gartenstein-Ross and Jensen, 102-03, 05-06.
230 Sinan Adnan and Aaron Reese, Beyond The Islamic State: Iraq’s Second Sunni Insurgency, (Online: ISW, 2014). 15-16, 18; Al-Tamimi.
against IS,231 or signalled their intent to do so when able.232 That backlash further evinced the character of IS’s relations with other actors—rather than co-opting them and accommodating their interests like Naji recommended, IS’s relations with non-adversary third parties were hostile and uncompromising. This, alongside pre-conflict social networks’ influence and the weakness of horizontal ties, indicated variance between IS’s organisation and Naji’s thinking.

Organisational variance was not complete, however. Accordance appeared in two of five areas. First, IS reflected Naji’s endorsement of purposeful growth—circumstances permitting—by expanding purposefully in response to operational requirements. From 2011 to 2013, IS grew cautiously in response to specific challenges. Prison breaks enabled the recruitment of experienced jihadis, expanding IS’s initially-small workforce;233 while engagement with tribes allowed IS to assert and maintain territorial control.234 This growth hastened in 2014, as IS’s “state” created greater manpower requirements.235 To satisfy those requirements, IS courted Iraqi Sunnis by leveraging political anxieties and attacking objectors,236 and invited foreign personnel to fill military and non-military roles.237 After late 2014, however, growth slowed. Military failures hampered recruitment within IS’s territory and caused unsustainable personnel turnover, while the closure of smuggling routes reduced the flow of foreign personnel, and IS’s worsening

231 Anthony Cordesman and Sam Khazai, Shaping Iraq’s Security Forces, (Online: CSIS, 2014). 54-56.
235 Fishman, The Master Plan, 203-05.
circumstances precipitated desertions. While IS’s behaviour between 2011 and late 2014 indicated an initial desire for purposeful growth of the sort advocated by Naji, changing circumstances ultimately curbed that ambition.

Second, IS accorded with Naji’s endorsement of the formation of auxiliaries. Those auxiliaries existed within two classes. The first supported military operations and was continuously present. It conducted information operations, supported IS’s administration and logistics, facilitated attacks in the territories of third-party adversaries like Belgium and France, or generated funds through criminality or collaboration with criminal networks. The second class managed IS’s “state” by performing law and order, regime security, civil service, and public works functions, although it shrunk over time amidst military losses, financial pressures, and mismanagement, however. Shrinkage notwithstanding, they—alongside personnel supporting military operations—constituted an auxiliary within IS. But despite IS’s development of auxiliaries and purposeful growth, most organisational phenomena exhibited by IS varied from Naji’s guidance.

At the same time, IS exhibited operational phenomena which were in only limited accordance with Naji’s thinking. Across six categories, accordance occurred in three. First, as Naji advocated coercive relations with the population, IS asserted control

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238 Colin Clarke et al., Financial Futures of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Santa Monica: RAND, 2017), 19-20; Knights and Mello, 4-5.
244 Eric Robinson et al., When the Islamic State Comes to Town: The Economic Impact of Islamic State Governance in Iraq and Syria (Santa Monica: RAND, 2017), 78-79; Seth Jones et al., Rolling Back the Islamic State (Santa Monica: RAND, 2017), 17.
over political, social, and economic life within its territory. This was evident after IS seized territory in late 2013 and 2014 and asserted control over significant dimensions of life. To control political affairs, IS security personnel identified and punished politically unhygienic materials, statements, or perceived sympathies.246 To regulate social life, the insurgency established guidelines concerning public and private morality,247 banned “un-Islamic” practices and products,248 and attacked undesirable groups.249 IS also regulated economic affairs by imposing taxes,250 and encroaching upon the cement, gas, oil, and other industries.251 That behaviour did not necessarily indicate coercion—alone, it also resembled an intent to win support by providing illiberal governance. Rather, the coercive nature of IS rule was established by the use of kidnappings,252 executions,253 and corporal punishment to secure it.254 It was the maintenance of such control via those methods which indicated a coercive relationship with the population, reflecting Naji’s ideas.

Second, IS’s provocations and their polarising outcomes mirrored Naji’s guidance. Between 2011 and June 2014, attacks aggravating pre-existing sectarian tensions indicated IS’s provocative intent. Following US withdrawal in December 2011, IS frequently attacked the predominantly-Shi’a security forces, anti-AQI Sahwa militia which Iraqi Sunnis had come to view as the Iraqi state’s partner,255 and Shi’a and

246 Speckhard and Yayla, 8-9.
248 Robinson et al., 149.
249 Hassan, 3.
250 Jones et al., 65; Robinson et al., 10-11.
251 Robinson et al., 12-13; Phillips.
255 Lewis. 10; International Crisis Group ICG, Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State, (Online: ICG, 2013). 11-12.
Shi’a-affiliated targets.\textsuperscript{256} Similarly telling was IS’s targeting of Sahwa-linked tribes, to signal that cooperation with IS was essential to other tribes’ survival.\textsuperscript{257} That provocative intent was further evinced by the responses to such attacks. Iraq’s government reinforced IS’s narratives of Sunni disenfranchisement by demonising Sunnis and allowing Shi’a militias’ remobilisation,\textsuperscript{258} while tribes lost confidence in the government’s willingness to protect them and increasingly tolerated IS’s intrusions into their affairs.\textsuperscript{259} More broadly, sectarian violence intensified as Shi’a militias and security forces attacked Sunni citizens, gatherings, and properties,\textsuperscript{260} while locals’ governing concern was the government’s response when IS announced its presence in Fallujah in December 2013.\textsuperscript{261} Alongside IS’s provocative attacks themselves, such reactions further indicated IS’s intent and action to provoke and polarise, as Naji recommended.

Third, in keeping with Naji’s thinking, IS sought to disrupt and usurp government functions, although the balance between disruption and usurpation shifted. IS prioritised disruption between 2011 and 2013, targeting security force personnel and recruits,\textsuperscript{262} intimidating former or suspected security personnel,\textsuperscript{263} and targeting the government and essential services.\textsuperscript{264} While such attacks continued until at least 2016,\textsuperscript{265} IS began usurping government functions in 2014 by assigning

\textsuperscript{256} Agencies, "Al-Qaeda Claims Wave of Deadly Iraq Attacks," \textit{Al Jazeera}, 22/03/2012 (2012); UMD-START, "Data from GTD, al-Qa’ida in Iraq, Islamic State of Iraq, and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant Attacks, Between 2011 and 2017".
\textsuperscript{258} ICG, \textit{Make or Break: Iraq’s Sunnis and the State}. i-ii, 1.
\textsuperscript{259} Barrett. 41.
\textsuperscript{261} ICG, \textit{Iraq: Falluja’s Faustian Bargain}. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{263} Beccaro, 213; Mustafa Habib, "Why Aren't Anbar’s Locals Fighting Extremists?," \textit{Niqash}, 14/04/2016 (2016).
\textsuperscript{265} UMD-START, "Data from GTD, al-Qa’ida in Iraq, Islamic State of Iraq, and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant Attacks, Between 2011 and 2017".
personnel to security,\textsuperscript{266} civil administration, healthcare, education, and other
duties in its territory,\textsuperscript{267} and inviting foreigners with relevant expertise to that
territory.\textsuperscript{268} Such efforts were not necessarily effective—IS’s governance was
inept,\textsuperscript{269} and only of a competitive standard because expectations were low.\textsuperscript{270} But
success or failure notwithstanding, IS nevertheless exhibited an intent to disrupt
and later usurp government functions in Iraq. As with IS’s coercive treatment of the
population and its use of provocations, that intent was accordant with Naji’s
thinking on how insurgencies should organise.

But despite appearing across three categories of observable operational
phenomena, accordance was absent within three others. Outright variance
occurred twice. First, despite Naji’s endorsement of infiltrating and co-opting the
government and security forces, IS attempted neither infiltration nor co-optation,
remaining hostile towards Iraq’s government and favouring disruption over co-
optation. Partly, this was evident in the number of attacks against the
government—between 2011 and 2016, IS conducted more than 1,700 attacks
against security forces and government targets.\textsuperscript{271} IS also killed some former or
suspected security or government personnel within its new territories, while
compelling others to resign and renounce government ties.\textsuperscript{272} Further, security
forces’ service of IS’s interests at specific junctures was not due to IS’s behaviour.

Security personnel deserted Mosul in 2014,\textsuperscript{273} but because of demoralisation,

\textsuperscript{266} Speckhard and Yayla, 6.
\textsuperscript{267} Phillips, 734-35.
\textsuperscript{269} Al-Tamimi, “A Caliphate Under Strain: The Documentary Evidence,” 2-4; Robinson et al., 184-85.
\textsuperscript{270} Phillips, 735.
\textsuperscript{271} UMD-START, “Data from GTD, al-Qa’ida in Iraq, Islamic State of Iraq, and Islamic State of Iraq and
the Levant Attacks, Between 2011 and 2017”.
State Fragility in Iraq Contributed to the Emergence of Islamic State,” \textit{Terrorism and Political Violence}
\textsuperscript{273} Tallha Abdulrazaq and Gareth Stansfield, "The Enemy Within: ISIS and the Conquest of Mosul," \textit{The
Middle East Journal} 70, no. 4 (2016): 539-40.
equipment shortages, and incompetence. Similarly, security forces’ failure to thwart IS’s seizure of Fallujah in December 2013 resulted from demoralisation and locals’ obstructive efforts. While occasional, apparent cooperation was consistent with the co-optation Naji recommended, a broader body of evidence indicated IS’s ongoing hostility towards Iraq’s government and security forces, rather than an intent to infiltrate or co-opt them.

Second, although Naji recommended preserving territorial control, IS’s conduct after August 2014 signalled an unwillingness to risk its organisational or reputational survival to do so. In permissive circumstances, IS seized territory between December 2013 and June 2014, and signalled an intent to maintain control. But after the size of its territories peaked and Western intervention began in late 2014, IS prioritised organisational and reputational survival over territorial control—something reflected in its behaviour. IS attempted to defend major cities after late 2014 amidst security force encirclement, but ultimately resumed focusing upon guerrilla and terror operations—in the battle for Mosul’s final weeks, for example, most IS attacks were comparatively small and outside that city. IS’s rhetoric reflected this—it began counselling sympathisers outside Iraq to operate in their own countries in late 2014, its propaganda increasingly

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275 ICG, Iraq: Falluja’s Faustian Bargain. 6-7.
279 Knights and Mello, 1.
281 Hassan Hassan, "Insurgents Again: The Islamic State’s Calculated Reversion to Attrition in the Syria-Iraq Border Region and Beyond," CTC Sentinel 10, no. 11 (2018): 4-5; UMD-START, "Data from GTD, al-Qa’ida in Iraq, Islamic State of Iraq, and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant Attacks, Between 2011 and 2017”; CPOST.
282 Barrett. 38-40.
emphasised military operations rather than the “state” in 2015, and a senior IS member asserted that territorial control was unnecessary in 2016. While the hindrance of security forces was superficially consistent with Naji’s call to defend territory, IS’s behaviour and rhetoric, after maintaining territorial control became costly, indicated a prioritisation of survival.

Alongside that clear organisational variance, IS’s preference for bombings for most of its campaign neither accorded nor varied with Naji’s dicta. GTD data note 3,388 IS bombings, as opposed to 481 armed assaults, 103 assassinations, and 436 kidnappings. That preference remained consistent, except in June 2014 when the number of armed assaults and bombings neared parity and a period of low activity in 2011 and 2012. Unfortunately, Naji neither strongly endorsed or condemned specific attack modalities, and IS’s preference for bombings thus neither accorded nor varied with Naji’s thinking. Being numerically equal to areas of accordance, this and the other areas of non-accordance meant that at best, only limited accordance appeared between IS’s operations and Naji’s thinking.

Like the exhibited organisational phenomena, and unlike the exhibited operational phenomena, variance appeared in IS’s development, as the individual stages and whole of IS’s lifecycle ultimately differed from Naji’s vision. Accordance was initially evident in IS’s individual lifecycle stages. In the first, lasting until US withdrawal in December 2011, IS operated defensively and prioritised survival. Aside from some attacks against mostly-government targets, IS prioritised establishing itself in

286 UMD-START, "Data from GTD, al-Qa’ida in Iraq, Islamic State of Iraq, and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant Attacks, Between 2011 and 2017".
287 Bohan.
the Syrian conflict more than doing so in Iraq. This did not necessarily accord or vary with Naji’s thinking, but rather was a pre-conflict period for the insurgency. The second stage, lasting from December 2011 to December 2013, saw preparations for an offensive. Operating relatively freely amidst government incapacity, IS prepared for an offensive, working to worsen Iraq’s social polarisation, and undermining potential threats by attacking persons and groups associated with anti-AQI Sahwa militias. This resembled Naji’s first proposed stage. The third stage, from December 2013 to around August 2014, was an offensive. Enabled by prior efforts and government failure, IS seized Fallujah, Ramadi, Mosul, Tikrit, and other major centres, and signalled an intent to maintain control. IS also announced its “state” and attacked undesirable groups such as Yazidi and Shi’i Iraqis in this period. This resembled Naji’s second proposed stage, wherein the insurgency was to erect an interim administration and establish itself as a quasi-government. In these first three stages, IS’s lifecycle mostly resembled that envisioned by Naji.

Variance became evident after late 2014, however. For one, the lifecycle stage between August 2014 and the loss of Mosul in July 2017, wherein IS’s situation deteriorated, was a departure from Naji’s thinking. While slowing the loss of major centres like Fallujah, Ramadi, and Mosul, IS increasingly focused upon

292 Cordesman, Hitting Bottom: The Maliki Scorecard in Iraq. 2.
293 Joffé, 10-11.
294 IS, “From Hijrah to Khilafah.”; IS, “Remaining and Expanding.”
guerrilla and terror operations, perpetrating attacks abroad and dispersing within and beyond Iraq.\textsuperscript{297} Rather than defending its “state” and territory, IS prioritised organisational and reputational survival. The overall direction of IS’s campaign also came to vary with Naji’s proposed lifecycle. Rather than consistently escalating and consolidating as Naji recommended, IS ultimately escalated and then withdrew. While escalation occurred between the Decembers of 2011 and 2013, and between December 2013 and late 2014, IS stagnated and withdrew after late 2014, returning to its pre-conflict reality. Resultantly, the insurgency’s overall course varied from Naji’s proposed lifecycle. Considered alongside variance between IS’s individual lifecycle stages and those Naji envisioned, that variance further indicates the divergence between IS’s lifecycle and Naji’s thinking. This in turn supports the conclusion that IS’s insurgency ultimately varied from Naji’s guidance of Naji, as its organisation and development varied considerably with Naji’s thinking, while its operations were only in limited accordance.

4.3: Summary and Key Findings

Comparing IS and Naji’s strategic thought serves two purposes. For one, it addresses the paper’s first research question by showing that despite IS members’ evident familiarity with Naji’s writings, IS’s insurgency ultimately varied, mostly, from Naji’s guidance. More specifically, the comparison identifies categories of observable phenomena wherein IS varied from Naji’s strategic thought. Three categories were organisational: while Naji advised limiting pre-conflict social networks’ influence, ex-Ba’athists and tribes exercised significant influence upon IS’s operational behaviour; rather than engaging constructively with non-adversary third parties as Naji proposed, IS was belligerent and uncompromising with such parties; and while Naji advocated strong horizontal ties, IS’s conduct was consistent with weak ones. Another two aberrant categories were operational: while Naji

endorsed infiltration and co-optation, IS exhibited overwhelming hostility towards the government and security forces, and although Naji endorsed maintaining territorial control, IS was unwilling to assume the risk needed to do so. Lastly, IS’s lifecycle—in its individual stages and aggregate—varied with Naji’s guidance. By noting those areas of variance, the chapter’s results also serve a second purpose—facilitating the fifth chapter’s analysis which addresses the paper’s second question by accounting for variance between strategic thought and insurgent practice.

Like the comparison between AQI and al-Suri’s thinking, such results are not comprehensive—they do not establish whether IS intended to follow Naji’s guidance and was forced to diverge from it at some point, or whether there remain other areas of accordance or variance between IS and Naji’s thinking. Rather, questions persist because of IS members’ known familiarity with Naji’s writings, limited accordance between IS and Naji’s dicta, and limitations upon the paper’s methodology. But what the results do establish is that according to an analysis maximising rigour within certain limitations, IS’s campaign ultimately varied substantially from Naji’s strategic thought, with variance appearing in specific areas.
Chapter 5: Accounting for Variance Between the Strategic Thought and Insurgent Practice

5.1: Chapter Introduction

The preceding chapters’ analyses identified specific categories of observable phenomena wherein variance occurred between strategic thought and insurgent practice. Ignorance of al-Suri or Naji’s thinking did not cause variance—as noted previously, personnel from AQI knew of al-Suri’s writings, as IS personnel did of Naji’s, and both insurgencies exhibited some accordance with those thinkers’ guidance. Consequently, the paper’s second question is relevant: what issues appeared to cause variance between strategic thought and insurgent practice?

The fifth chapter addresses that question by establishing that variance appeared at least partly resultant from issues known to affect jihadi insurgent organisations. For that, it has two parts. The first identifies issues known to affect jihadi insurgent organisations and outlines their associated processes and impacts. Those include insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale, jihadists’ tendency towards inflexibility and insularity, and the operational environment’s potential influence upon insurgencies. The second stage demonstrates that links can be drawn between those issues and the exhibited phenomena which varied from al-Suri or Naji’s guidance. For this, it shows that these issues’ associated processes were visible in AQI and IS, and thus appeared to precipitate the identified variance. The analysis is imperfect, as it focuses only upon externally-recognisable issues, and not preferences and processes which are not wholly visible in publicly-available data. But within the limitations upon the paper’s methodology, the analysis addresses the paper’s second question as rigorously as possible by demonstrating that externally-recognisable issues—with known processes and impacts—appeared to at least contribute to AQI and IS’s identified variance from al-Suri and Naji’s guidance.
5.2: Issues Contributing to Variance

As stated previously, three issues apparently contributed to variance between strategic thought and insurgent practice. All are based upon general explanations of insurgent or jihadi behaviour in the relevant scholarly and professional literature, and work via processes recognisable in publicly-available data.

The first issue is that insurgencies’ capacity to operate at increased scale is limited by challenges affecting their organisation and operations. Two such challenges exist. First, insurgencies balance imperatives of operational capacity and security. They must operate at greater scale to accomplish more-ambitious objectives, while expanding cautiously to avoid sacrificing cohesion or becoming vulnerable to external threats. Second, reckless growth can be detrimental. Assimilating personnel from other social networks without homogenising them weakens horizontal ties, yields influence to those networks, and undermines operational coordination. The above challenges pose dilemmas for growing insurgencies. First, rapid expansion empowers pre-conflict social networks and weakens horizontal ties, while remaining small limits operational capacity. Second, manpower-intensive tasks like high-cost military operations or close population management are difficult, because insurgencies will be too small to perform them, or—by expanding rapidly—will risk losing horizontal cohesion needed to achieve more-ambitious outcomes. By posing such dilemmas, challenges

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300 Staniland, 41-42.
302 Defence, *LWD 1*, 45.
affecting insurgencies’ organisation and operations limit insurgencies’ capacity to operate at increased scale.

Second, jihadi insurgent organisations are inclined towards inflexibility and insularity which leads to unpragmatic behaviour. Jihadis are extremists in a broader movement, with disproportionate, nonnegotiable views of the importance of their identity and objectives, and an intolerance of external ideas and actors. This can lead jihadis to ignore political and operational realities. At times, jihadis alienate potential partners or lose popular support by refusing to moderate their ideology or objectives. They can also securitise immorality, attacking perceived deviants, including those with whom cooperation would be advisable. Excess confidence in their objectives’ importance and feasibility can also lead to overly-provocative behaviour and alienate potential sympathisers. By causing such behaviours, jihadi insurgent organisations’ tendency towards inflexibility and insularity can lead to unpragmatic decisions.

Third, the operational environment can influence insurgencies’ decision-making. Insurgencies lack the resources necessary to achieve victory independently and must instead exploit opportunities. Consequently, environmental factors influence insurgencies’ organisation and operations. The most important factor is government strength. Weak governments cannot thwart insurgencies, incentivising opportunistic insurgent behaviour, while strong governments constrain insurgencies’ behaviour by creating risks and imposing costs. A second factor is...

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303 Henzel, 71.
307 DoD, X.
military support by a state actor, which offsets government weakness and has an impact resembling that of government strength. A third factor is the insurgency’s popular appeal, relative to the government. Insurgencies seek popular support, and with it, can accomplish objectives without confronting governments directly. However, some measures which separate populations and governments—terrorism, intimidation, or deprivation—can diminish insurgents’ relative appeal, constraining their behaviour. By precipitating opportunism or constraining insurgent behaviour, environmental factors influence insurgencies’ decision-making. Alongside insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale, and jihadis’ inflexible and insular tendencies, that influence was among the three issues which apparently contributed to variance between strategic thought and insurgent practice.

5.3: Apparent Role of Issues in Causing Identified Variance

The aforementioned issues appeared to contribute to the variance evident between strategic thought and insurgent practice. The analysis establishing this has three parts, which demonstrate that the processes and outcomes associated with those issues were recognisable in AQI and IS.

The analysis’s first part concerns the three categories of observable organisational phenomena wherein variance occurred. These include pre-conflict social networks’ influence, the strength of horizontal ties, and the character of relations with non-adversary third parties.

Insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale appeared to contribute to pre-conflict social networks’ influence upon IS. Such networks became influential because of IS’s efforts to quickly build operational capacity. Before its offensive between December 2013 and June 2014, IS’s admission of ex-Ba’athists quickly

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309 Daniel Byman et al., *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 91; Jones, 162-63.
310 Fall.
311 Defence, *LWD 3-0-1*, 1.3, 1.11-1.12; Jones, 169-70.
addressed leadership and expertise shortcomings, while partnerships with tribes allowed territorial seizures. However, ex-Ba’athists and tribes were not cautiously integrated into IS, did not share its preferences and ideology, and consequently influenced IS at the operational level. With ex-Ba’athists, this was beneficial—it increased operational efficacy. Tribes’ influence, however, enmeshed IS in local conflicts which were irrelevant to its operational and strategic priorities. In sum, IS’s efforts to rapidly build capacity without properly integrating and homogenising new personnel appeared to empower the networks from which those personnel came, indicating that those networks’ outsized influence upon IS was likely due to limitations upon the scale at which insurgencies can operate.

That limited capacity to operate at greater scale also appeared to cause IS’s weak horizontal ties and AQI’s strong ones. Both insurgencies exemplified the compromises between operational security and cohesion, and operational capacity, which can limit insurgent organisations’ growth. In IS’s case, prioritising operational capacity contributed to weak horizontal ties. Seeking the capacity necessary to seize territory and establish a state, IS expanded quickly between 2011 and December 2013. For this, IS conducted jailbreaks, cultivated partnerships with tribes, and integrated ex-Ba’athists rather than expanding cautiously. Resultantly, IS’s horizontal ties were weak and reflected in its operational behaviour, in contradiction of Naji’s thinking. In contrast, AQI prioritised operational security and contradicted al-Suri by avoiding rapid growth. Focusing upon terror and guerrilla operations, AQI’s manpower requirements were modest, and cautious growth—by leveraging pre-existing relationships—occurred. Relative to other Iraqi militant

313 Barrett. 21.
314 Gartenstein-Ross and Jensen, 108-09; Knights and Mello, 2.
316 Barrett. 21.
317 UMD-START, “Data from GTD, Al-Qa’ida in Iraq, Tawhid & Jihad, and Islamic State of Iraq Attacks, 2001 and 2011”.
318 Serena, 44; Johnston et al., 71-82.
organisations, AQI therefore remained small, but operated in a manner reflecting strong horizontal ties. Both insurgencies faced the same challenges which limit insurgencies’ capacity to operate at scale, and it appeared that due to those challenges’ associated processes, IS maintained weak horizontal ties while AQI maintained strong ones.

While insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale seemed to account for pre-conflict social networks’ influence and the strength or weakness of horizontal ties, the operational environment’s influence appeared to cause AQI and IS’s relationships with non-adversary third parties to differ from al-Suri and Naji’s recommendations. Inflexibility was not the sole reason—both insurgencies were initially uncompromising with third parties, to the point of those parties’ alienation, but AQI eventually attempted to maintain relations with those parties, while IS did not. Rather, factors in AQI’s operational environment affected AQI’s preferences, which were absent in IS’s. For one, AQI emerged when Iraq’s government was weak, but supported by a state actor—the US. In such circumstances, the Iraqi and US governments could impose costs upon an isolated insurgency, forcing AQI to compromise on its extreme preferences by engaging pragmatically with some other actors, contrary to al-Suri’s recommendation. In contrast, IS emerged when security forces were weak, the US withheld support for Iraq’s government, and third parties were relatively inferior to IS. Amidst that, IS would not suffer costs for alienating other actors, and lacked incentive to diverge

320 Jones and Libicki, 91-92; Adnan and Reese, 15-16, 18; Al-Tamimi, "Islamic Army of Iraq Interview".
324 Pirnie and O’Connell, xiii-xiv.
327 Bohan.
from its inflexible preferences, which varied from Naji’s thinking.328 While jihadi organisations’ inflexibility and insularity may account for AQI and IS’s preferences when dealing with non-adversary third parties, available evidence suggests that the presence or absence of pressure from the operational environment apparently caused AQI to defy al-Suri’s preference for non-engagement with third parties, while allowing IS to remain divergent from Naji’s preference for engagement.

The analysis’s second part concerns variance identified across three categories of operational phenomena. Those included the character of relations with the population, the use of provocations, and the penetration or co-optation of the government or security forces.

A connection was apparent between AQI’s inflexibility and insularity, and its hostile relationship with the population. Eventually, those relations worsened in the mostly-tribal areas where AQI desired a presence. To establish ties with the population in such areas, AQI could have worked within the existing political, social, and customary order, as US forces eventually did.329 As former leader al-Zarqawi signalled, however, AQI’s ideological platform was extreme,330 and the insurgency instead violently asserted control over political, social, legal, and economic life. Such behaviour was consistent with an attempt to win popular support by establishing a competing system of authoritarian control, separating the population from the government. The continuation of such behaviour after the subsequent backlash, however, indicated that AQI’s coercive relations with the population, in contradiction of al-Suri’s thinking, appeared resultant more from inflexibility than a pragmatic attempt to “out-govern” the state.331

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328 Wright et al. 7.
329 Cigar, 2, 33-34.
330 State, "Text of a Letter From Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, Obtained by United States Government in Iraq".
331 Phillips, 77-78.
Inflexibility also appeared to precipitate AQI’s use of provocations, contradicting al-Suri’s recommendation. In AQI’s radical perception, Shi’a Iraqis were a serious threat, while Sunni Iraqis not aligned with AQI were ignorant of the importance of AQI’s ideology and objectives. That perception aligned with a view that instead of cultivating support in a fight against foreign occupation, provoking a sectarian civil war and forcing Sunnis to side with AQI and against Shi’a Iraqis was preferable. AQI’s actions reflected that view—the insurgency attacked politically-sensitive targets, and Shi’a and Shi’a-linked targets, early in its campaign. By validating a preference for sectarian conflict, inflexibility and insularity thus appeared to contribute to AQI’s disregard for al-Suri’s discouragement of provocations.

AQI and IS’s failure to infiltrate the government or security forces, as both al-Suri and Naji advised, also appeared resultant from inflexibility and insularity. Both insurgencies harboured radical anti-Shi’a views which had relevance within post-Ba’athist Iraq. After 2003, Shi’a Arabs dominated the government and security forces, partly by screening Sunnis and Kurds, the Iraqi civil service expelled or marginalised Sunni Arabs, and eighty-five percent of the Iraqi National Police were Shi’a by 2010. The problem was not the security forces’ or government’s incorruptibility, or AQI and IS’s incapacity for pragmatic engagement with third parties—Shi’a groups penetrated and co-opted security forces, while AQI and IS maintained limited relations with other Sunni groups. Rather, AQI and IS’s inflexibility made pragmatic engagement with mostly-Shi’a government personnel unacceptable, and both insurgencies instead attacked government and security

332 Jones, 168-69.
333 Katzman, Al Qaeda in Iraq: Assessment and Outside Links. 8-9; State, “Text of a Letter From Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, Obtained by United States Government in Iraq”.
334 Kirdar. 4.
337 Cordesman, Iraq’s Insurgency and Civil Violence. ii, 6-7.
force targets continuously. While al-Suri and Naji advocated infiltrating or co-opting the government and security forces, inflexibility appeared to prevent AQI and IS from doing so.

The analysis’s third part relates to the two remaining identified areas of variance. Those were AQI and IS’s willingness to maintain territorial control, and the variance between their lifecycles and those envisioned by al-Suri and Naji.

The operational environment appeared to influence both insurgencies’ lifecycles and willingness to maintain territorial control more than al-Suri and Naji’s thinking. Initially, permissive circumstances incentivised opportunistic behaviour, though a causal relationship was not apparent. In their early stages, permissive circumstances allowed opportunistic territorial seizures and escalation by the insurgencies.

Between 2004 and 2006, AQI—expecting limited US involvement—exploited government unpopularity among Sunnis to position itself as the ruling actor in Fallujah and Ramadi, while IS seized territory between December 2013 and late 2014 amidst unrest and government weakness. As earlier chapters’ analyses showed, both insurgencies fomented unrest and seized territory opportunistically. Such behaviour did not contraindicate al-Suri or Naji’s influence, and was consistent with adherence to al-Suri and Naji’s guidance—only AQI’s premature seizure of territory contradicted al-Suri’s thinking, after all. What was evident, though, was that both insurgencies behaved opportunistically in permissive circumstances.

Clearer indications of the operational environment’s influence emerged as worsening circumstances disrupted both insurgencies’ lifecycles and willingness to maintain territorial control. After 2006, Iraqi security forces became increasingly effective while the number of US military personnel increased, and AQI lost popular

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339 Bahney et al., 19; Knickmeyer; State, “Text of a Letter From Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, Obtained by United States Government in Iraq”.

340 Joffé, 10-11.
appeal as the Iraqi and US governments courted Sunni tribes.\textsuperscript{341} In 2014, US support for Iraq’s government resumed, while that government offset its own weakness by integrating some militias into the security forces and addressing some grievances which lent IS relative appeal among Sunnis.\textsuperscript{342} In environments posing greater risk and offering fewer opportunities, both insurgencies prioritised survival over territorial control and escalation. As shown in the analyses of the third and fourth chapters, AQI’s willingness to defend territory declined after 2006, while IS prioritised organisational and reputational survival after late 2014. Similarly, the insurgencies’ divergence from al-Suri and Naji’s envisioned lifecycles occurred at comparable junctures. Despite opportunistically seizing territory and escalating in permissive circumstances, neither insurgency fought meaningfully for territorial control or continued escalating in adverse circumstances. As other issues appeared to cause variance across other categories of observable phenomena, it was the operational environment which seemingly dictated AQI and IS’s lifecycles and willingness to maintain territorial control, precipitating variance between both insurgencies and the strategic thought with which their members were known to be at least passingly familiar.

5.4: Summary and Key Findings

Results from the above analysis address the paper’s second research question. Broadly, they do so by showing that based upon publicly-available data, variance identified in preceding chapters appeared resultant from insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale, jihadi organisations’ tendency towards inflexibility and insularity, and the operational environment’s potential influence upon insurgencies. More specifically, the results demonstrate that insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale appeared to increase pre-conflict social networks’ influence within IS, while weakening IS’s horizontal ties and


strengthening AQI’s. They also suggest that jihadi insurgent organisations’ inflexibility and insularity precipitated AQI’s coercive relations with the population and provocations, and could be linked to AQI and IS’s failures to infiltrate or co-opt the government and security forces. Finally, the results show that the operational environment’s influence appeared to account for AQI and IS’s relationships with non-adversary third parties which differed from those encouraged by al-Suri and Naji, and their willingness to maintain territorial control and their development across lifecycles differing from those al-Suri and Naji envisioned.

As acknowledged previously, such findings are not comprehensive. They result from an analysis focused upon external pressures which prevented accordance between strategic thought and insurgent practice, and not internal pressures upon AQI and IS, or the extent to which accordance was AQI or IS’s original intent. But despite not entirely filling the research gap with which it is concerned, the analysis still takes a substantial step towards doing so by showing that although personnel from AQI and IS appeared familiar with al-Suri or Naji’s thinking, certain externally-recognisable issues apparently prevented that thinking from ultimately being reflected in the totality of AQI and IS’s organisations, operations, or lifecycles.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1: Summary

The paper has developed across five chapters, with substantive argumentation beginning at the second. The second analysed al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought according to a framework of categories of observable phenomena. Doing so identified organisational, operational, and lifecycle stage phenomena which insurgencies would exhibit if they accorded with al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought, facilitating subsequent chapters’ analyses.

The third chapter established the extent of accordance between AQI’s insurgency and al-Suri’s thinking. For that, it first compared al-Suri’s strategic thought to data relating to AQI’s insurgency, determining that AQI’s insurgency occurred in a manner mostly varying from al-Suri’s guidance, while identifying categories of observable phenomena wherein variance was evident between al-Suri’s thinking and AQI’s insurgency.

The fourth chapter established the extent of accordance between IS’s insurgency and Naji’s thinking. For that, it compared Naji’s strategic thought to data concerning IS’s insurgency, establishing that IS’s insurgency occurred in a manner mostly varying from Naji’s thinking, while specifying categories of observable phenomena wherein variance appeared between Naji’s thinking and IS’s insurgency.

Lastly, the fifth chapter established that variance identified in preceding chapters appeared resultant from issues known to affect jihadi insurgent organisations. It first identified those issues: insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale, jihadi insurgent organisation’ tendency towards inflexibility and insularity, and the operational environment’s potential influence upon insurgencies—and the processes by which those issues cause impact. It then demonstrated that those issues appeared to contribute to variance identified between strategic thought and insurgent practice. Following the second, third, and fourth chapters, the fifth chapter was the paper’s last.
Those four chapters produced two findings, the scope of which should not be overstated. The first was that ultimately, AQI’s and IS’s insurgencies played out in ways mostly varying with—respectively—al-Suri and Naji’s guidance. This was because across most categories of observable organisational, operational, and lifecycle stage phenomena, variance appeared between AQI and al-Suri’s thinking, and between IS and Naji’s, despite evidence of AQI and IS members’ familiarity with al-Suri and Naji’s works. The second finding was that identified variance between strategic thought and insurgent practice appeared resultant from insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale, jihadi insurgent organisations’ tendency towards inflexibility and insularity, and the operational environment’s potential influence upon insurgencies. Those issues appeared to cause AQI and IS to ultimately exhibit organisational, operational, and lifecycle phenomena varying from al-Suri and Naji’s guidance, because the processes and outcomes associated with those issues were also identifiable in AQI and IS. Both findings are subject to certain caveats—the first relates only to AQI and IS ultimate behaviour, not the junctures of divergence from al-Suri and Naji’s thinking, while the second accounts only for externally-recognisable issues’ apparent role in causing variance. Limitations notwithstanding, however, both findings are significant and result from the ideal analysis within certain restrictions.

Those findings support the paper’s two arguments. Firstly, they indicate that based upon publicly-available information, AQI and IS behaved in a manner varying from—respectively—al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought, despite being acquainted with both thinkers’ works. This was because in most categories of observable organisational, operational, and lifecycle stage phenomena, variance ultimately appeared between the insurgencies and al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought. Second, the paper’s findings indicate that variance identified between strategic thought and insurgent practice appeared at least partly resultant from certain externally-recognisable issues known to affect insurgencies. Those included insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale, jihadi insurgent organisations’
tendency towards inflexibility and insularity, and the operational environment’s potential influence upon insurgencies. The findings of the four preceding chapters support both arguments.

Supporting those arguments addresses the research questions to the greatest possible extent. The first question was simple: to what extent can it be determined that the insurgencies of AQI and IS played out in accordance with the strategic thought of al-Suri and Naji? The first argument addresses that question by showing that AQI and IS’s organisations, operations, and development mostly varied from al-Suri and Naji’s thinking, despite AQI and IS members’ familiarity with those thinkers’ principal works. The second question was also simple: if AQI and IS did not behave completely accordantly with—respectively—al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought, did any identifiable issues contribute to variance between strategic thought and insurgent practice? The second argument addresses that question by showing that several established issues—insurgencies’ limited capacity to operate at increased scale, jihadi insurgent organisations’ tendency towards inflexibility and insularity, and the influence which the operational environment can have upon insurgencies—appeared to contribute to AQI and IS’ exhibition of organisational, operational, and lifecycle stage phenomena which mostly varied from al-Suri and Naji’s strategic thought.

As anticipated in the introduction, those answers are of limited comprehensiveness, but still relevant. The first concerns only whether the insurgencies’ behaviours ultimately varied from al-Suri or Naji’s thinking, and not precisely when and how variance occurred or if accordance was the original intent. Similarly, the second answer only establishes externally-recognisable issues’ apparent roles in causing variance, and not internal preferences and processes causing variance, or how externally-recognisable issues affected AQI or IS’s decision-making. Such shortcomings do not diminish the answers’ value—both result from a methodology which facilitates the best analysis possible using publicly-available data, and
substantially narrow the research gap. One does so by demonstrating that despite assumptions about al-Suri and Naji’s influence and evidence indicating AQI and IS members’ familiarity with those thinkers’ works, scholars should not necessarily expect AQI or IS to act according to al-Suri or Naji’s strategic thought, while the other does so by establishing that externally-recognisable issues appeared to inhibit accordance. Thus, despite their limitations, both answers substantially narrow the research gap in which the paper exists.

6.2: General Implications & Future Research

Addressing the research questions has two implications. First, the paper’s findings call into question the link between jihadi strategic thought and jihadi insurgencies. Partly, they do so by showing that ultimately, a connection between jihadi strategic thought and jihadi insurgent practice was mostly not reflected in AQI or IS’s organisation, operations, or lifecycles. This was despite some authors’ assumptions that AQI and IS were influenced by al-Suri and Naji’s thinking, and evidence of AQI and IS members’ familiarity with al-Suri and Naji’s writings. The findings also cast doubt upon the assumed link by showing that externally-recognisable issues described by the literature—insurgencies limited capacity to operate at increased scale, jihadis’ tendency towards inflexibility and insularity, and the influence of the operational environment upon insurgent organisations—appeared to impede accordance between AQI and IS, and al-Suri or Naji’s thinking.

The second implication is that the paper’s limitations invite further work. For one, including jihadi insurgent groups outside Iraq may precipitate general observations, if not theories, about jihadi insurgencies’ behaviour. Preliminarily, those include Ansar al-Sharia in Yemen, al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Shabaab in Somalia, Islamic State in Syria as well as Iraq, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines, Barisan Revolusi Nasional in Thailand, and Boko Haram in Africa.
Conceptual expansion is also possible. Establishing the extent to which jihadi insurgencies resemble communist models of asymmetric warfare—like those described by Mao, Giap, and Guevara—may yield generic and generalisable insights about asymmetric warfare.

Finally, the paper’s analysis can be refined. As noted previously, a better analysis can identify the juncture and purpose of variance between strategic thought and insurgent practice, identify processes leading to divergence from al-Suri or Naji’s thinking, and ascertain the role of internal and external pressures in those processes. Despite needing more data, this is conceptually sound, given the evidence supporting the assumption upon which it is based—that AQI and IS were acquainted with al-Suri and Naji’s thinking. Moreover, determining the extent to which accordance resulted from adherence to al-Suri or Naji’s work can clarify refutations of the assumed link between strategic thought and insurgent practice. Expanding the framework to consider the role of nonviolent activism in insurgent operations, the insurgency’s relationship with a state actor partner, and other additions can also lend further rigor. Finally, adding a control case would be constructive—an insurgency detached from the jihadi movement or predating al-Suri and Naji’s principal written works, which accords with those thinkers’ guidance, would suggest that al-Suri and Naji were more observers than influential strategists.
### Appendices

#### Appendix 1: Acronyms & Key Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANU</td>
<td>Australian National University</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>United States Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPOST</td>
<td>Chicago Project on Security &amp; Threats</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRS</td>
<td>United States Congressional Research Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRRS</td>
<td>Conflict Records Research Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSIS</td>
<td>Center for Strategic and International Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>CTC</td>
<td>Combating Terrorism Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence</td>
<td>Australian Department of Defence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoD</td>
<td>United States Department of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTD</td>
<td>Global Terrorism Database, provided by UMD-START.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICG</td>
<td>International Crisis Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>Islamic State. An evolutionary successor of AQI. Other names included “The Islamic State of Iraq and Sham” (ISIS), “The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL), and “Da’esh.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISW</td>
<td>Institute for the Study of War</td>
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<td>JP</td>
<td>Joint Publication</td>
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<tr>
<td>LWD</td>
<td>Australian Army Land Warfare Doctrine</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCUP</td>
<td>Marine Corps University Press</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTIS</td>
<td>National Technical Information Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sahwa</td>
<td>Arabic word which translates to “Awakening.” In the context of Iraq between 2003 and at least 2017, Sahwa refers to Iraqi tribal militias, comprised mostly of Sunni Arabs, which fought against al-Qa’ida in Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shi’a</td>
<td>Sectarian denomination within Islam. Constitutes a minority among the world’s adherents to Islam, but a majority within Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Sectarian denomination within Islam. Constitutes a majority among the world’s adherents to Islam, but a minority within Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMD-START</td>
<td>University of Maryland National Consortium for The Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USIP</td>
<td>United States Institute of Peace</td>
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</table>
Appendix 2: Note on Arabic Transliteration and Translation

The paper contains words transliterated from Arabic and not in common English use. No standardised transliteration method exists for Arabic, and for that, several conventions are employed:

- The definite article, *al*, is uncapitalized except when starting a sentence;
- The ‘*ayn* is presented as an apostrophe, and its sound is conveyed by successive letters, which are capitalised according to English writing conventions;
- The *qaf* is presented as a *Q*;
- No distinction is made between hard and soft *s*, *d*, and *h* letters; and
- If person or organisations’ names are used, then common English spellings of that name are used, regardless of the above rules.

In addition, two vital sources are in Arabic. One, *The Management of Savagery*, is available in English. The manuscript refers to that version, although the page numbers cited in footnotes for correspond to the original Arabic version. The other, *The Call of Global Islamic Resistance*, is unavailable in English in its entirety. A translation of that text is not provided because although a translation would be helpful, the original work is 1,600 pages, with partial translations available online.
Appendix 3: Similarities Between Literature Concerning Jihadi Strategic Thinkers, and Research Concerning Communist Strategic Thinkers

One of the reasons why it is viable to address the research gap in which the paper sits is that a similar gap has been filled before, in the literature concerning the strategy and strategists of communist insurgency.

The literature concerning jihadi strategic thinkers and insurgencies in the Middle East has parallels to that which surrounded communist strategic thinkers and insurgencies in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere. In part, this is because Mao Tse-Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Che Guevara are presented in the same exceptional light as al-Suri and Naji. This is demonstrated best by Bunker, who lauds Mao’s contribution to communist insurgent doctrine, describing Mao’s Guerrilla Warfare as a foundational work. He also calls attention to the work of Giap, which advanced Mao’s thinking further by counselling the insurgent to consider the international setting in which they acted; and Guevara, whose advice—to aggravate popular grievances—is still considered meaningful even if his “Foco” strategy was ultimately unsuccessful. Levanger assigns similar importance to Giap, describing Giap as “one of the foremost practitioners of insurgency and revolutionary war,” although it should be noted that since Levanger put forward that argument, Giap’s assumed importance has been challenged.

It is also because the general shape of the literature pertaining to the persons, works, associated campaigns, and supposed impact of Mao, Giap, and Guevara resemble that concerning jihadi strategic thinkers. In the literature review in chapter one, the literature has been presented as being divided thematically into four general areas:

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1. Studies of the strategic thinkers themselves and the development of their works;
2. Works which endeavour to contextualise, dissect, and analyse the writings of those thinkers;
3. Case studies which focus either upon themes or periods of certain jihadi insurgencies, or those insurgencies in their entirety; and
4. Works which assert the influence of al-Suri and Naji over jihadi insurgencies.

This runs parallel to the position in which the insurgency literature had been, when communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia and Latin America were ostensibly shaped by the strategic thinking of the most-notable theorists of communist guerrilla warfare, Mao Tse-Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Che Guevara.

For all four areas of the jihadi-centred literature which were identified in the literature review, a similar set of works can be found concerning communist strategic thinkers and insurgencies. For one, there exist biographical works concerning the strategists of communist guerrilla warfare, as well as the development of their works. O’Neill is one example of this, providing some biographical information on Giap, while dismissing his contribution to guerrilla strategic thought.\(^{345}\) McCormick affords similar treatment to Guevara, providing an outline of Guevara’s life and works, but also arguing that Guevara’s strategy had been too reliant upon the conditions of his first revolution—in Cuba—to be viable elsewhere.\(^{346}\) Griffith, writing an introduction to a translation of Mao’s *Guerrilla Warfare*, describes how Mao’s personal development made him amenable to revolutionary war,\(^{347}\) while contemplation of his experiences leading up to the

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conclusion of the “Long March” served as the inspiration for the development of his theory of war.”

There is also a healthy body of works which offer context or analysis of the strategic thought of Mao, Giap, and Guevara. Condit—writing when the war against communism was at a similar point to that at which the War on Terrorism appears to be in 2018—provides an example which situates certain communist insurgencies in the context of a broader set of communist revolutionary wars, by tracing the evolution of communist revolutionary warfare across the persons and actions of Lenin, Mao, Debray, and others. Adie offers another, describing the development of Mao’s guerrilla warfare doctrine during the 1920s, and the maturation of that doctrine during the war against Japan and Chinese nationalists. Majumdar makes a similar contribution, describing the origins of Maoist guerrilla thought while also providing more substantial analysis of Mao’s strategy. Moreno also provides a detailed description of Guevara’s Foco strategy.

Case studies which address communist insurgencies—either in part or as a whole—are also readily available. Pike, for example, explores the role played by terrorism within the Viet Cong insurgency, while Schultz examines the role of Viet Cong terrorism in gaining and maintaining control over local populations in the Vietnamese countryside. Writing in 1967, Giap himself describes his government’s war against the US and South Vietnam, describing the North Vietnamese government’s people’s war strategy as “superior to all strategies of the

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348 Tse-Tung and Griffith, 18-19.

The fourth area differs from its counterpart in the jihadi-focused space. Rather than presenting the connection as an assumption, this area of the literature provides some explanation of the connection between the communist strategic thinkers and communist insurgencies. Gates argues that guerrilla warfare was in fact used by the North Vietnamese, albeit as part of a broader strategy which combined political agitation and military activities. Levanger argues that Giap’s influence upon the North Vietnamese insurgency was limited, as his mastery was more of bureaucratic politics than insurgency. Moreno compares Guevara’s Foco theory to the diaries he kept during his involvement with the Cuban and Bolivian insurgencies, showing accordance between Guevara’s theory and action in the process. Finally, Adie’s work—in addition to showing the development of Mao’s thinking—shows how the conduct of Mao’s wars against the Japanese and nationalist Chinese reflected his strategic thinking. The above works contrast with those which are concerned with jihadi strategic thought—rather than assuming the thought-action connection, the works above go to some length to demonstrate a link, or the absence thereof.

By showing differing views about the impact of communist strategic thinkers upon insurgencies, the literature concerning communist strategic thought and insurgency supports the underlying concept of the paper. While there are identifiable similarities between the literature concerning communist strategic thought and

356 Giap. 28-37.
359 Levanger, 44-45.
360 Moreno.
361 Adie.
insurgencies, and jihadi strategic thought and insurgencies, the former body of literature shows that the research gap in the latter—the failure to demonstrate or contest the influence of jihadi strategic thinkers upon jihadi insurgencies—has previously been addressed in a similar setting.
## Appendix 4: Framework of Indicators

### Indicator-Evidence Tables

### 1: Organisational Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Observable Phenomenon</th>
<th>Preferred Sources</th>
<th>Acceptable/Consistent Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1.1: Influence of Pre-Conflict Social Networks | • Academic sources  
• Credible media reporting | • Purges, desertions, or defections by members of pre-conflict networks  
• Public statements of dissatisfaction by figures from pre-conflict  
• Consistency of insurgent political platform over time  
• Operations in support of pre-conflict networks’ known goals |
| 1.2: Strength of Horizontal Ties | • Academic sources | • *Global Terrorism Database* (GTD) data showing large geospatial spread of similar attack methods  
• Reports concerning leadership relationships |
| 1.3: Growth Patterns—Open or Closed | • Academic sources  
• Credible media reporting  
• Quantitative data showing frequency, scale, or geographic spread of insurgent operations | • Stagnation or increase in the frequency, scale, or geographic spread of attacks  
• Cessation of attacks following counterinsurgency operations |
| 1.4: Presence and Purpose of Support or Service Auxiliary Groups | • Academic sources  
• Credible media reporting | • Insurgent pre-emption of security force operations  
• Post-conflict arrests of collaborators  
• Insurgent activities requiring medical, technical, professional, or tradecraft expertise |
| 1.5: Character of Relationships with Non-Adversary Third Parties—Integration, Elimination, or Coexistence | • Academic sources | • Attacks against neutral non-adversary parties  
• Integration or realignment of third parties with the insurgents  
• Continued insurgent avoidance of attacks against non-adversary third parties |
## 2: Operational Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Observable Phenomenon</th>
<th>Preferred Sources</th>
<th>Acceptable/Consistent Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2.1: Character of Relationship with Population—Cooperative or Coercive | • Academic sources  
• Credible media reporting | • Popular refusal to cooperate with security forces  
• Expansion of insurgent support beyond areas of direct insurgent control  
• Insurgent efforts to force compliance within areas of insurgent control |
| 2.2: Use of Provocations to Polarise Population or Provoke Security Response | • Academic sources  
• Credible media reporting | • Attacks against security force or government targets, after insurgent emergence, but before seizure of territory  
• Attacks against targets of significance for certain elements of population, after insurgent emergence, but before seizure of territory |
| 2.3: Disruption or Usurpation of Government | • Academic sources  
• Credible media reporting | • Attacks against government targets  
• Attempts to dissuade public engagement with government  
• Insurgent efforts to persuade public of capacity to provide government services  
• Actual insurgent provision of government services |
| 2.4: Penetration or Co-optation of Government or Security Forces | • Academic sources  
• Credible media reporting | • Government statements of concern about penetration  
• Diversion of government resources to insurgents  
• Insurgents receiving advance warning of security operations |
| 2.5: Willingness to Maintain Territorial Control | • Academic sources  
• Credible media reporting | • Media products conveying insurgent intent to maintain territorial control  
• Insurgent efforts at entrenchment in captured territory  
• Quantitative data showing increased attacks during security force efforts to reclaim territory |
| 2.6: Employment of Specific Attack Modalities | • Quantitative data drawn from GTD | N/A. |
3: Lifecycle Stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Observable Phenomenon</th>
<th>Preferred Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1: Adherence to Lifecycle Stages, as Described by Strategic Thinkers</td>
<td>Built upon the analysis provided by other indicators, and the historical record of the insurgencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explanation of Indicators

The above tables explain the desired and acceptable evidence which can be used to assess the indicators upon which the analytical framework is based. What follows is a brief explanation of the substance and relevance of each of those indicators.

1: Organisational

1.1: Influence of Pre-Conflict Social Networks

The influence of pre-conflict social networks is relevant because it determines whether the organisation is willing to tolerate the influence of pre-conflict social networks which can influence the insurgency to organise and operate according to ideas and objectives which are not its own. Staniland notes that when insurgent organisations are built upon politicised pre-conflict social networks, the character of those pre-conflict networks is reflected in the structure and behaviour of the insurgent organisation for which they are the basis, because “leaders embedded in [pre-existing] social bases cannot fluidly reshape their social relations or political meanings.” Byman reinforces this, arguing that “Civil society (social clubs, religious organizations, unions, sporting groups, and other associations that are independent of the state) defines an important resource of a group.” This begs a question of whether an insurgent organisation will attempt to marginalise pre-conflict networks, in order to minimise their influence upon the organisation, or

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362 Staniland, 9.
363 Staniland, 24.
364 Byman, 23.
tolerate them, allowing them and their preferences to affect the organisational, operational, and ideological character of the organisation.

Media and academic sources which explore the influence of pre-conflict social networks upon the AQI and IS insurgencies are readily available, such as the point-counterpoint which began with a Perspectives on Terrorism article by Whiteside, and was continued by Zeidel; and Philips’s work which describes the relationship between al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI) and tribes.

There are also observable occurrences which are consistent with the integration or suppression of pre-conflict networks. Public statements of discontent by major figures from once-integrated groups, as well as defection and/or desertion, are consistent with a failure to suppress those groups whose interests were always at odds with those of the insurgency. Conversely, a pattern of operational decisions (particularly targeting) which was in line with the interests of pre-conflict groups and at odds with the stated objectives of the organisation is consistent with an allowance of pre-conflict groups’ interests to take precedence over those of the core insurgent organisation.

1.2: Strength of Horizontal Ties

The strength of horizontal ties among leadership figures is relevant because it relates to whether the organisation has the leadership cohesion and coordination required for central control across large geospatial and organisational distance, or if it is likely to become a collection of disparate groups with parochial interests.

Two sets of sources can inform a judgment of the strength or weakness of horizontal ties. The first is based upon academic and media reporting which discusses the background of the organisation’s leadership, and the relationships

365 Whiteside, "A Pedigree of Terror: The Myth of the Ba’athist Influence in the Islamic State Movement."
366 Zeidel.
367 Phillips, 71-72.
368 Staniland, 21-22.
between figures within the leadership. The second is based upon quantitative data from the University of Maryland’s *Global Terrorism Database* (GTD), which can indicate whether the organisation is operating in an apparently-coordinated fashion across a large geospatial distance.

### 1.3: Growth Patterns

The presence or absence of purposeful growth has implications for the operational choices and decisionmaking latitude of insurgent decisionmakers. Organisational growth is a response to organisational preferences and operational requirements, determining the organisation’s ability to use certain operational approaches. As the Australian *Army’s Land Warfare Doctrine (LWD)* 3-0-1 notes, insurgent organisations are initially in a position of inferiority because of their small size, creating an early-stage tension between the need to grow a political base and the need to maintain security.³⁶⁹ This can lead the organisation to be “open” or “closed” in a given lifecycle stage. An open insurgent organisation will engage in what is dubbed “purposeful growth” both by Jones,³⁷⁰ and US Joint Publication (JP) 3-25.³⁷¹ Open organisations expand deliberately to meet operational or strategic requirements, outsourcing tactical-level decisionmaking to individual cell leaders while still maintaining operational control, strategic control, and a desired level of security.³⁷² Closed networks will refrain from expanding, either because decisionmakers have judged that expansion would be unnecessary or bring a disproportionate measure of risk.³⁷³ The presence or absence of growth affects the operational choices of the organisation because certain operational and strategic courses can only be pursued by organisations which have expanded to a certain size.³⁷⁴ It is because of this that

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³⁶⁹ Defence, *LWD* 3-0-1, 2.09-2.10.
³⁷⁰ Jones, 41.
³⁷¹ JCS, F2.
³⁷² Jones, 29-30, 40-41.
³⁷³ Jones, 41-42.
³⁷⁴ Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 18-19.
growth patterns—and whether they are open or closed—are a useful diagnostic indicator.

Identifying growth patterns is possible through the use of academic and media reporting which addresses the internal history of the organisations. CIA’s guidance also suggests that changes identified in quantitative data, particularly an increase in the frequency, scale, geospatial distribution, and targets of attacks, are consistent with growth. Stagnation in those same factors can also be indicative of a lack of growth, as can a reduction in attacks after security operations against the insurgents.

1.4: Presence or Purpose of Service or Support Auxiliary Groups

The presence and purpose of either support or service auxiliary groups is relevant because of the importance attached to the role of the auxiliary in the literature. Auxiliary cells allow the insurgents to conduct activities which are normally impossible, either because such activities are too complex, or because of operational circumstances. According to Jones, auxiliary cells provide “logistics, operational support, and intelligence collection”. Similarly, the US Army’s Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies states that auxiliaries are part-time personnel who can operate overtly, help accommodate and screen new members into the network, and perform “particular tasks or special assignments.” Contemporary US counternetwork literature goes further, characterising the auxiliary as a key network element that is not only able to operate covertly amid the normal population, but also to provide professional, specialised operational, or trade skills, which the organisation’s core membership

375 CIA. 14.
376 Jones, 19.
377 Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 23.
378 Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 2.
379 Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 19.
380 JCS, F5.
lack. For the purposes of this paper, auxiliary groups are therefore understood as either collaborators in spaces beyond insurgent control (support auxiliary) or operational specialists who are not part of the organisation’s core groups (service auxiliary).

For the support auxiliary, the most-reliable information comes from academic sources and media reporting which describes persons or entities who are connected to the insurgency and operating in areas not under the insurgents’ direct control. Reports of post-conflict purges of insurgent collaborators in both urban and rural areas are also consistent with the development of an auxiliary, as are successful non-suicide attacks in areas outside insurgent control.

For the service auxiliary, academic sources remain ideal, while media reporting—including material produced by the insurgents themselves—can also be used, so long as it indicates the provision of medical, technical, professional, tradecraft, or other specialised services being provided or utilised by the insurgency.

1.5: Character of Relationships with Non-Adversary Third Parties—Integration, Coexistence, or Elimination

Determining the character of relationships between the insurgents and non-adversary third parties addresses the question of if and how the organisation aims to become the dominant political and security actor in the area of conflict. In some modern works on counterinsurgency, it is stated that insurgents are in competition with other actors for control over a given population. Fall provides one of the earliest explanations of this idea, writing that insurgencies aim to “establish a competitive system of control” and will bring violence to bear both against the state and against other non-state persons and entities to do so. The question this begs is how an insurgent organisation will relate to non-adversary third parties—will it integrate them, attempt to coexist, or eliminate them?

381 JCS, III.3.
382 Fall.
In determining the character of relationships between the insurgents and non-adversary third parties, academic sources discussing those relationships are ideal. Also useful are reports of attacks against non-adversary third parties, and reports of possible or actual accord between those parties and the insurgency.

2: Operational

2.1: Character of Relationship with Population—Cooperative or Coercive

Whether the insurgents maintain a cooperative or coercive relationship with the population is relevant because of the noted centrality of popular support in insurgent campaigns, and the differing ways in which support can be achieved. Within the counterinsurgency orthodoxy which is reflected in LWD 3-0-1, such popular support is needed for both material and psychological/moral support.383

One means of obtaining it is by expending time and effort to out-govern the state or persuade the population to accede insurgent control for political/ideological reasons. But the CIA also notes that insurgencies can attempt to coerce the population,384 albeit at the risk of weakening the insurgents’ political position.385

This begs a question of which approach the insurgency will take in attempting to win popular loyalty or compliance.

Signs that the organisation may have sought popular support include the refusal of the population to cooperate with security forces, the provision of early warning of counterinsurgency operations to the insurgents, and the expansion of the insurgent organisation’s support base beyond the constituencies with which they were initially linked. Signs that the organisation is seeking to coerce the population include individual or collective punishment, efforts to restrict movement, the aggressive imposition of a political or social program, and any other sort of

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383 Defence, LWD 3-0-1, 1.3.
384 CIA. 23.
385 Connable and Libicki, 103-04.
deliberate deprivation, as well as popular backlash against the aforementioned methods.

2.2: Use of Provocations to Polarise Population or Provoke Security Response

The matter of if and how the insurgency carries out attacks, with a view to polarise the population or provoke a security response, is included in the framework because of the noted tendency among insurgent organisations to use such measures as a means of drawing attention and expanding. The CIA notes that insurgent decisionmakers may wish to “provoke the government into committing abuses that drive neutral civilians towards the insurgents.”

LWD 3-0-1 states that insurgents may strike “military targets to induce exhaustion or provoke overreaction,” and JP 3-24 claims that insurgents have long “sought to provoke political regimes into overreactions.” Similarly, Byman recommends considering whether early-stage insurgent organisations are intent upon provoking outrage from tribal, religious, or ethnic communities.

Signs that the organisation seeks to provoke a government response include attacks against government targets, critical infrastructure, or security forces. Signs that the organisation seeks to polarise the population include mass-casualty attacks or attacks against politically, culturally, or religiously-significant civilian targets.

2.3: Disruption or Usurpation of Government

Whether the insurgent organisation seeks to disrupt or usurp government is included because of the importance attached to such activities by the literature. The disruption or usurpation of the functions of government is pursued by some insurgent organisations, who seek to establish themselves as competitors for the civil obedience of the population. Conversely, the need to provide security in the

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386 CIA. 2.
387 Defence, LWD 3-0-1, 4D.1.
388 DoD, II.4.
389 Byman, 52.
390 Byman, 15.
391 Fall, 1.
face of such disruption or usurpation has been recognised as an essential element in US counterterrorism policy.\textsuperscript{392}

Academic sources and media reporting—including that produced by the insurgents—which shows or advertises the insurgent organisation’s provision of security and government services is indicative of a desire to usurp governance. Attacks against government buildings and/or personnel,\textsuperscript{393} as well as calls for the population to refrain from interacting with the state, are indicative of a desire to disrupt the government.

2.4: Penetration or Co-optation of Government or Security Forces

Whether insurgents seek to penetrate or co-opt security forces and government is relevant because—as with the disruption or usurpation of government function—it is an activity to which the literature calls attention. The CIA advises analysts to look for the “penetration of the military, police, and intelligence services.”\textsuperscript{394}

Furthermore, LWD 3-0-1 calls attention to the possibility of host nation security forces being infiltrated by “insurgents or foreign intelligence services,”\textsuperscript{395} while DA 550-104 describes the penetration of government institutions as part of an insurgent organisation’s efforts to shape its operational environment.\textsuperscript{396} The concerns had also been raised by the Iraqi government during the effort to integrate Sunni Arabs into the Iraqi state security forces,\textsuperscript{397} while Hashim indicates (without citation) that security force penetration had indeed occurred in Iraq prior to 2014.\textsuperscript{398}

Academic, media, and professional sources discuss intent to infiltrate or co-opt the government and security forces. Reporting of equipment diversion, insurgents

\textsuperscript{393} Byman, 8.
\textsuperscript{394} CIA. 14.
\textsuperscript{395} Defence, \textit{LWD 3-0-1}, 5.17.
\textsuperscript{396} Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 2.
\textsuperscript{397} Cigar, 76.
\textsuperscript{398} Hashim, 79.
receiving advanced warning of security operations, or mass security force defections are also consistent with the penetration or co-optation of the security forces.

2.5: Willingness to Maintain Territorial Control

The willingness of the insurgents to maintain territorial control is relevant because of the noted importance—for insurgencies—of seizing and defending territory. LWD 3-0-1 states that “to achieve their political objectives insurgents must ultimately control the territory in which the target population resides.” This is echoed by British counterinsurgency literature which cites territorial control as one of the principal objectives of insurgencies, and DA 550-104 which argues that insurgencies will attempt to seize territory in the later stages of their campaign. This begs the question of whether the organisation will attempt to maintain territorial control, or cede it in the face of pressure.

Relevant sources include academic sources and media reporting, which discuss insurgents’ intent to maintain control over territory, efforts by insurgents to entrench themselves in territory they have seized, or insurgent resistance to efforts by security forces to regain territorial control. Quantitative data showing an increase in attacks around the time of major security force operations are also consistent with a desire—on the part of the insurgents—to maintain control over territory.

2.6: Employment of Specific Attack Modalities

Whether the insurgents employ specific modes of attack is included in the framework because it has intrinsic value, and because it can be easily tested. Identifying specific methods of attack is possible through the use of quantitative data from GTD.

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399 Defence, LWD 3-0-1, 2.10.
400 MoD, 1, 1.5.
401 Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 2.
3: Adherence to Lifecycle Stages Described by Strategic Thinkers

Lifecycle stages are used to indicate both the intended and actual development of the insurgency. The CIA observes that “insurgencies often progress through certain common stages of development,”402 while DA 550-104 states that “Guerrilla strategy usually follows a three-stage evolution,”403 JP 3-24 proclaims the existence of several stages of insurgency,404 and the Australian Army’s LWD 3-0-1 identifies specific insurgent behaviours in certain stages.405

Lifecycle stages are described clearly in the works of al-Suri and Naji. Determining whether the insurgencies themselves developed in line with those stages requires first the identification of campaign inflection points. Second, an analysis of other indicators, within the time periods between those inflection points, can be done by examining other indicators. The essential caveat when considering lifecycle stages is that neither the al-Qa’ida in Iraq or Islamic State insurgencies ever developed fully.

402 CIA. 5.
403 Molnar, Tinker, and LeNoir, 2.
404 DoD, JP 3-24, xi.
405 Defence, LWD 3-0-1, 2.8.
Adnan, David. *In Their Own Words: Voices of Jihad*. Santa Monica: RAND, 2008.


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https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/64792/%D8%A8%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B3%D8%AC%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%A9%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%81-%D8%A8%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%AE%D9%85/ar. Accessed 22/04/2018.


