

The 2nd Annual Joint Threat Anticipation Center Workshop Conference Report

April 3-5, 2006 - What Are National Security Threats?

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Day 2- April 4, 2006

Microfoundations of Insurgent Violence - Mark Smith, Ph.D candidate, Department of Political Science, University of Chicago; Janine Davidson, Director, Counterinsurgency Studies with the Center for Adaptive Strategies and Threats, Hicks and Associates, Inc.

Smith and Davidson focused on the micro-dynamics of insurgency and counterinsurgency. The fight between insurgencies and counter-insurgencies is seen as fought through the civilian population, where most violence is against civilians. While most of this insurgency is dismissed as criminal activity by the media and counterinsurgents (i.e., the U.S. in Iraq), a lot of the seemingly indiscriminate violence (e.g., suicide car bombs) is strategic. Activities such as the caching of weapons, recruiting fighters, punishing government collaborators, collecting taxes, etc. tend to be public at the local level, with the effect that civilians supporting the government will not collaborate because they do not feel safe from insurgent retaliation. Civilian micro-decision models can show why insurgency overwhelmingly favors the insurgents over the counterinsurgents.

For a successful counterinsurgency, one needs to "multiply" the effect of counterinsurgency. This can be done by directing efforts at changing civilian perceptions and expectations. It is also important to be very selective in targeting insurgents (i.e., avoiding false positives), in order to convey the image of a well informed governing entity. Another way to create stability and earn the confidence of the civilian population is by building political, security, economic and social institutions simultaneously. Smith and Davidson suggested that good counterinsurgency looks like good police work.