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Insurgency Frameworks (archived)

Bradley, Gordon

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Insurgency Frameworks (under construction)

This web site is set up to highlight research on developing a unified general framework for insurgency (definition, vocabulary, and description). Initially it will include the thesis by ENS Shanece Kendall, USN, that uses a Living Systems Theory approach and the related research that she references (e.g. social network analysis, sociobiology, population modeling, complex adaptive systems, and systems dynamics). The web site is organized to support ongoing research; it will include major categories to provide links to other papers of interest. It will also host comments and critiques of ENS Kendall's thesis and more generally the research program and other papers on this topic.

I welcome comments, critiques, and additional references to place on the web site:

<mailto:gbradley@nps.edu>. The web site will support an evolving working bibliography for unified general frameworks for insurgency; it could evolve into a focus for an online research community. I will initially maintain the web site; however, as others choose to participate the design and management should pass to a larger online research community.

Below is a link to the recent M.S. thesis by ENS Shanece Kendall, USN. ENS Kendall graduated in June 2007 from the U.S. Naval Academy with a degree in chemistry. As part of the requirements for a M.S. in Applied Science (Operations Research) she developed a unified general framework for insurgency based on James Grier Miller's Living Systems Theory. Her work involved research on insurgency, systems theory, and other living systems approaches as well as wrestling with Miller's 1102 page book that describes his unifying theory of all living systems. See the thesis abstract below, a link to her thesis, her references with links and the start of a working bibliography on related research.

Research Program

The thesis addresses a larger research agenda that has three major premises:

1. A clear understanding of insurgency (definition, vocabulary, description of structure and process) is necessary to understand and then evaluate proposals for counterinsurgency actions. Absent a framework for insurgency, counterinsurgency proposals are answers without a clear question. It is easy to propose superficially plausible counterinsurgency actions and to construct analogies to previous insurgencies (e.g. Malaya and Vietnam); but without a clear insurgency framework it is not possible to evaluate their positive (or negative) impact. The starting point for an historical analysis of counterinsurgencies and the development of government policy and military doctrine is a framework for insurgency.
2. An insurgency is best understood as a system; this allows the application of systems theory and General Systems Theory. Since insurgencies are organizations of people, the concepts and definitions of living systems, in particular James Grier Miller's Living Systems Theory, apply. Living Systems Theory is an inclusive framework that includes all life from the cell to supranational organizations. It is

a “general” framework in that it describes the shared structure and processes of all living systems rather than the details of any specific system. Miller’s work contains a particularly elegant discussion of the necessity for and the value of a general approach to understanding living systems.

A general framework for insurgency is valuable because it attempts to identify the structure and processes that all insurgencies must have and thus provides a framework to understand the details of any specific insurgency. A general framework provides an organization for “lessons learned” and for the case studies of specific insurgencies. Analysts and policymakers are prone to extract details from particular insurgencies (esp. Malaya and Vietnam) and to quickly elevate them to general principles and even immutable laws. A general framework abstracts from particular details to general structure and common processes and thus supports better analogies between specific insurgencies. A general approach also helps avoid overemphasis on the most visible aspects of insurgencies (e.g. attacks, weapons flows) by providing a description of the hidden processes that every insurgency must have (e.g. recruiting, vetting, communications, control, intelligence).

3. A unified framework for insurgency is better than any of the many existing frameworks such as those based on historical analysis, warfare, political science, anthropology, sociology, and other disciplines. Each of the existing frameworks brings its own definitions, vocabulary, frame of reference, and assumptions. It is difficult for analysts and policymakers to integrate insights from disparate sources when there is no commonly accepted definition and no unambiguous vocabulary. In addition, existing frameworks tend to lock policymakers into views of insurgency that may be limiting. For example, the warfare framework used by DoD uses definitions and vocabularies that exclude a “whole-of-government” approach used by some other frameworks. A necessary first step is to adopt an inclusive definition and replace the multiple vocabularies with discipline neutral terms that support a unified framework. Miller’s work contains a discussion of the need for a unified framework and his Living Systems Theory demonstrates how this can be achieved for living systems.

ENS Shanece Kendall masters thesis [**A UNIFIED GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF INSURGENCY USING A LIVING SYSTEMS APPROACH**](#)

References from Kendall thesis with [links](#)

Living systems approaches:

[Living Systems Theory](#)

[Ecology, Evolution, and Animal Behavior](#) (EEB)

[Sociobiology](#)

[Complex Adaptive Systems](#) (CAS)

[Systems Dynamics](#)

A UNIFIED GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF INSURGENCY USING A LIVING SYSTEMS APPROACH

**Shanece L. Kendall, Ensign, United States Navy
B.S., United States Naval Academy, 2007**

Master of Science in Applied Science (Operations Research)-June 2008
Advisor: Gordon H. Bradley, Department of Operations Research
Second Reader: David L. Alderson, Department of Operations Research

This thesis develops a unified general framework of insurgency. The framework is “unifying” in that it includes all the physical and social science formulations of insurgencies and both contemporary and historical insurgencies. It is “general” in that it describes all insurgencies rather than a specific one. This thesis first redefines the definition of insurgency in the context of the twenty-first century and addresses the military, political, social, and economic elements. Next, it adopts the view that an insurgency is a living system. This idea is based on the characteristic that every insurgency consists of a group of people embedded in a larger society. Using this concept, this thesis argues that James Grier Miller’s Living Systems Theory, from his book *Living Systems*, is the most fitting theory to study insurgency. To demonstrate the framework’s effectiveness, it is applied to the Iraq Sunni Insurgency. The framework is used to describe the structure of the insurgency system using three levels—insurgency, Improvised Explosive Device (IED) Unit, and IED Cell—and the twenty critical subsystems that process information and matter-energy in the insurgency’s IED Cell. This framework should help clarify, focus, and support the current debates about policy, operations, and tactics for insurgencies.

KEYWORDS: Insurgency, Iraq, Sunni, Living Systems Theory, James Grier Miller, Systems, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)

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