Introduction

Between 2003 and 2008, there were no fewer than ninety named insurgent organizations in Iraq engaged in a struggle against the U.S.-led Coalition and a nascent Iraqi government.[1] Some of these groups were indigenous to Iraq while others were composed almost solely of foreign fighters. Some of these groups existed prior to the invasion, and others formed only in the post-2003 period. In this five-year timeframe, these organizations—and doubtless equally as many unnamed other groups—executed no fewer than thirteen thousand attacks across the major cities and provinces of Iraq.[2] Many of these attacks were conducted against Coalition forces but many were also conducted against the Iraqi National Police (INP), the Iraqi Army, and Iraqi businessmen, educators, store owners, politicians, and civilians.

The actual size of the Iraqi insurgency is difficult to estimate.[3] But it is safe to say that its population easily numbered in the tens of thousands and may have even approached 100,000 active members at its zenith.[4] Estimating the size of the insurgency's support network is equally challenging. A 1963 Special Operations Research Office study of insurgent and guerrilla undergrounds (consisting of supporters providing supplies, shelter, finance, logistics, and so forth) in France, Yugoslavia, Algeria, Malaya, Greece, the Philippines, and Palestine revealed that in all cases undergrounds were much larger than the supported insurgency or guerrilla movement. The undergrounds in these conflicts ranged in size from being 2–1 (Palestine) larger to 27–1 (Greece) larger than the supported group.[5] Using this range as an estimative tool, if the Iraqi insurgency had 10,000 members, it may have had, potentially, 20,000 (minimum) to 270,000 (maximum) underground supporters. If the upper range of the insurgency's mem-

bership is used, then it may have had, potentially, 200,000 (minimum) to 2.7 million (maximum) underground supporters. These are quite large numbers in a country that currently has a population of roughly 30 million.

The Iraqi insurgency was unquestionably large and complex in terms of membership and composition. Adding to its complexity was its networked structure, disposition, and operations. Insurgent organizations operated on local, provincial, or regional levels. They were linked by shared membership, associations, familial ties, tribal affiliations, religion, ideology, needs, transaction structures, and the overarching goal of ridding Iraq of the U.S.-led Coalition and the government that the Coalition helped establish. These shared interests and the compelling goal of ousting what many viewed as a hostile occupying force were the unifying factors that both compelled the insurgency and gave it a measure of coherence. Few if any insurgent organizations had the capacity to conduct operations across the whole of Iraq, and none had the ability to coordinate operations countrywide on anything other than a very temporary basis. Nonetheless, the insurgency engulfed the Iraqi state: not as a structured whole but instead as a loose and shifting mosaic of small- and medium-size organizations sharing a mutual and broader interest. This phenomenon, although not sui generis or entirely new, had not been seen on this scale in previous insurgencies.

By late 2006 and early 2007, the insurgency had reached the peak of its activity. It had participating organizations in every Iraqi province. Foreign fighters traveled from the Greater Middle East, Asia, Europe, and Africa to fill its ranks. The Iraqi government had just been stood up, and the INP and Iraqi Army were fledgling organizations. Casualties crested for Iraqi civilians and for Coalition forces during this period. Opinions of the Iraq War were at their nadir internationally, and debate regarding the withdrawal of U.S. and Coalition forces had climaxed. Chaos and uncertainty reigned.

But within sixteen months the situation in Iraq nearly reversed itself. Granted, Iraq did not transform into a utopia, and as of this writing it still experiences persistent yet low levels of violence punctuated by the occasional mass casualty attack. Many of the indigenous organizations that composed the insurgency still survive but in alternative and less violent forms. Or, as is likely the case for a number of foreign individuals and groups, they have migrated to other conflict areas such as Afghanistan, Africa, or, more recently, Syria. Regardless, the Iraqi insurgency, as it had existed between 2003 through 2007, is no longer functional.

Partly, the insurgency's failure was the result of the successful, albeit slow developing and persistent, adaptations of Coalition forces in general and of the U.S. Army in particular. Credit for the ultimate dissolution of the Iraqi insurgency cannot be taken away from those who fought valiantly for the success of the new Iraqi state. I cannot and will not make that argument. But the actions and adaptations of Coalition forces tell only one side of the story of the insurgency's demise. Neither Coalition forces nor the insurgency operated in isolation. The insurgency too adapted. Initially its adaptations were successful and left Coalition forces reeling. But as the conflict wore on the insurgency's adaptations, indeed its capacity to adapt withered. Correspondingly, its ability to achieve its goals faded, and the insurgency dissolved. This book offers an explanation of why this happened.

THESIS AND RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

An enormous, complex, networked insurgency, like the one in Iraq,[6] should have been highly adaptive. Indeed, for about three years, the Iraqi insurgency was quite adaptive. It routinely and successfully made organizational changes to further or achieve organizational goals. This was to be expected given the insurgency's complex composition and networked disposition: each of these characteristics individually and compounded endowed the insurgency with vast strengths. Its composition provided a range of differently skilled and experienced planners and operators. Its size provided mass, breadth, and durability. Perhaps most important, its structure helped fulfill its need for covertness,[7] yet enabled its symbiotic sharing of resources, knowledge, and personnel even or especially in chaotic milieus. Networks are oftentimes credited with a structural ability to learn and modify their behavior quickly, even in rapidly changing environments. They use this ability to adapt and to inculcate lessons and innovations into organizational processes and procedures to effect goal-directed or goal-oriented organizational change. In contradistinction to more formal or hierarchical organizational forms, networks usually maintain few durable structures that contribute to inertial organizational forces. They can and do change frequently upon receiving various and variable environmental stimuli. Insurgent networks are recognized as having advantages of organizational flexibility, adaptability, and creativity,[8] when compared with other possible organizational forms.

However, networks, particularly covert networks, also suffer from disadvantages. The same organizational structure that facilitates adaptation and flex-

ibility is also less robust for other organizational practices and needs. Covert networks lack the organizational and analytical girth that accompanies more formal and open or hierarchical organizations. Data collection and analytical elements are not explicitly designated in this type of organization because of a need to maintain secrecy, a dearth of appropriate personnel, skills, or resources, or because of the structure of a network. Thus networks have difficulty comprehensively estimating environmental changes and assessing the effects of these changes on the network and on organizational effectiveness. Although covert networks are sensitive to changes in their environments because of inherent survival instincts and a correspondingly heightened sense of awareness, they do not maintain the structural capacity for significant analysis, the rigorous testing of competing hypotheses, or for comprehensively controlling their adaptive processes in concert with organizational goals. This is even more problematic for large, multinodal networked organizations separated by geographical distances and in competition with a large, trained, and heavily resourced opponent. A capacity for adapting rapidly does not imply a capacity for adapting correctly: an adaptation made might not have been the best available out of a range of possible options in support of organizational goals. Only if the changes made enhanced the organization's effectiveness in accomplishing its mission or achieving its goals were they of any value. Adaptation for the sake of adaptation, even or especially if only for organizational survival, is not necessarily impressive or significant in and of itself.

Unquestionably, the insurgency's success and its commensurate ability to adapt were abetted by its complex composition, networked disposition, and covert nature. But I argue that the insurgency was a failure in the long term because of these same organizational characteristics. *The thesis of this book is that the Iraqi insurgency failed to achieve longer-term organizational goals because many of its organizational strengths were also its organizational weaknesses: these characteristics abetted and then corrupted the insurgency's ability to adapt.* Its composition, disposition, and covert nature possessed it of many needed attributes but also limited its effectiveness and made the organization unwieldy and incapable of centralizing and decentralizing planning and operations effectively in support of its objectives. As the title of this book indicates, the Iraqi insurgency needed to be more than a network to adapt effectively for the achievement of its organizational goals.

I set out in this book to detail and explain how and why this was the case. I first examine the Iraqi insurgency's organizational adaptation between 2003

and late 2008. I then compare the findings of this examination with a similar exploration of the Afghan insurgency's organizational adaptation between 2001 and 2012. I compare the findings of the former against those of the latter to reveal important similarities and differences between two cases of diverse and complex covert networked insurgencies.[9]

This book provides a detailed examination of how the Iraqi insurgency adapted over time and sheds clues regarding the adaptive strengths and limitations of the diverse and complex covert network form in a competitive conflict environment. A comprehension of how the Iraqi insurgency—and comparatively, the Afghan insurgency—adapted provides a foundation for understanding the behavior of similar organizations operating in competitive conflict environments. Because insurgencies of this type are not going away and indeed may become more likely in the future, understanding how they adapt and the effects of their organizational composition and structure on the process of adaptation will not only aid in the appropriate application of resources in their defeat but may possibly help to limit their growth in the first place.[10]

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

I provide an exploratory and revelatory yet detailed case study examination of the Iraqi insurgency's organizational adaptation between the early-2003 and late-2008 period.[11] I treat the Iraqi insurgency as an instrumental case, one that reveals the adaptive strengths and weaknesses of a complex, covert, and networked organization operating in a conflict environment.[12] Although all organizations differ in terms of composition, disposition, goals, capabilities, and so forth, the Iraqi insurgency case is not so distinct from other insurgencies or indeed, the organization was not so different from other comparable groups as not to offer valuable insight into the characteristics and patterns of behavior of complex, covert, networked organizations in general.[13] Describing and explaining the interrelationship between these characteristics and patterns helps to explain and possibly even predict how similar organizations in similar operational environments will adapt.[14]

I conduct this analysis within a framework designed to describe the interrelated elements of organizational adaptation.[15] Using this framework allows for the examination of a range of factors within a single case and within the context of an overall process. Specifically, I examine how the insurgency adapted its organizational inputs, outputs, and learning cyclically and over time to achieve organizational goals.[16] Organizational adaptation refers to a complex

and cyclical goal-oriented process of learning and change. To be adaptive, "an organization must take an action to support a particular organizational goal or mission, assess the performance of this action, and then adjust organizational inputs and outputs to better match the goals or mission of the organization based on this prior assessment."[17] Organizational inputs consist of but are not limited to: organizational context; group design and culture; materiel and technical resources; and external assistance. Organizational context consists of goals, rewards, information, training, and constraints. Group design and culture consists of composition, norms, and tasks. Materiel and technical resources consist of equipment, funds, and intelligence. External assistance consists of consulting, direct action, and cooperation. Organizational outputs consist of critical group processes: the application of skills and knowledge; task performance competency; and command, control, and communications. Organizational learning consists of knowledge collection, transfer, and integration. The process of adaptation is the cyclical modification of each of these preceding elements.

In the conduct of this analysis, I drew upon a range of sources produced during or immediately following the 2003–8 period of the insurgency that includes but is not limited to: theoretical and practical studies of networks and network behavior and the process of organizational adaptation; translated insurgent texts, doctrine, and interviews; periodical and newspaper reports on insurgent organizations and their evolution; scholarly studies of insurgent behavior and in particular their behavior in the Iraq conflict; and datasets describing instances and patterns of insurgent attacks across the major cities of the seven most violent provinces in Iraq.[18] I contextualize and help characterize this information with interviews of veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom, many of whom deployed on multiple occasions to different provinces and cities in Iraq (and in Afghanistan). These semistructured interviews, conducted in 2008, provide a competitor's perspective on how the insurgency adapted over time.[19]

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 provides the foundation for the analysis conducted in Chapters 2 and 3. First, it discusses the diverse and complex nature of the Iraqi insurgency. Second, it defines and describes the behavior of networks in general and of covert networks in particular. Third, it examines the structural strengths and weaknesses of covert networked organizations and discusses how these strengths and weaknesses affect and are affected by organizational adaptation.

Last, it provides a detailed rationale and framework for the analysis of the Iraqi insurgency's organizational adaptation conducted in Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapters 2 and 3 present and describe the Iraqi insurgency's adaptation from an organizational perspective. Chapter 2 focuses on organizational inputs, and Chapter 3 focuses on organizational outputs and learning. Each of these chapters details the insurgency's adaptive changes and the intertwined effects of these changes on the organization's ability to achieve its goals in the 2003 to 2008 period. These adaptations are summarized and assessed based on the network characteristics presented in Chapter 1 and are then used for comparative purposes in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 evaluates the Afghan insurgency using the same framework and similar resources employed in Chapters 2 and 3. The findings from this chapter are used to conduct a comparative analysis of insurgent organizational adaptation in Iraq and Afghanistan. Chapter 5 concludes the book. It provides a more detailed summary of my main argument and presents a number of implications for policy-makers and scholars. Chapter 5 concludes with recommendations for future study.