

*Giving priority to countering political subversion rather than physical destruction of VEOs will be more effective in limiting VEO activity (in the long term).*

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### General Description of the Literature:

The literature shows that countering political subversion through political warfare is an important part of an overall counterterrorism strategy and that it is effective when balanced with military force. Pelli's article (1990) details British COIN efforts in Malaya after WWII, noting that the military "play[ed] only a portion of the role in counterinsurgency operations" – but a significant one. Davis (2010) notes that groups like al Qaeda exist as networks rather than single entities and are less vulnerable to direct military attack. Mumford (2008) discusses how VEOs can use political subversion to circumvent the state's ability to carry out its political role. As such, COIN efforts must address political subversion by weakening the link between the VEO and the population. Mumford (2008) also notes that if military force is used without circumspection, it can turn the population towards the VEO. This is supported by Alimi (2011) who suggests that the *lack* of violent repression by U.S. forces on the Weathermen influenced the group's demise. Campbell and Connolly (2006) also point out in the case of Northern Ireland that state repression can lead to sustained mobilization for the VEO. Ultimately, these findings suggest that physical destruction through military force can often be counterproductive; implying that countering political subversion instead of focusing mainly on the military response is an important part of any counterterrorism strategy. Some of the literature also addresses the issue through the lens of contentious politics and social movement theory. Cronin (2009) observes that social movement theory (a theory that explains social group mobilization) can inform the emergence of VEOs but does not tell us much about how they end. Social movement theory sometimes relies upon the framing of a message to advance mobilization. Wiktorowicz (2004, cited in Cronin 2009) discusses al Qaeda's use of framing to sustain its authority and this framing could be considered political subversion.

### Detailed Analyses

**32:** *Giving priority to countering political subversion rather than physical destruction of VEOs will be more effective in limiting VEO activity (long-term).*

**Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence:** Davis notes that political warfare is often missing in the current counterterrorism context and calls it a "standard component of warfare," thus indicating its role as part of the overall strategy in the counterterrorism fight (Davis 2002: 46). Specific examples, both historical and contemporary, within the literature show the importance of countering political subversion. Using Sir Robert Thompson's experiences in Malaya in WWII, Pelli shows that, along with military action, political and governmental actions and cooperation are extremely important, stating that the "closely coordinated effort by police, military and government at the local level ... brought about successful COIN in Malaya" (Pelli 1990). He cites Thompson's statement that a country's "focus of effort [should] be on political subversion" in order to isolate the VEO not only from the local population and take away its support base, but also to isolate the individual from the VEO itself (Pelli 1990). In sum, there is evidence from the Malay insurgency that stopping political subversion works in the long run. Applicable to the present day, Mumford (2008) reassesses Thompson in light of the war in Iraq. He notes the direct relevance, in a post-Cold War context, of

Thompson's political subversion approach and updates Thompson's fourth principle to read: "The coalition should place an emphasis on non-kinetic operations in order to defeat political subversion within the host nation" (Thompson 1966: 5-6). Mumford (2008), like Thompson before him, also argues that the VEO must not be allowed to influence the population. Mumford notes that this principle was not applied in Iraq in 2003 where the U.S. proceeded with de-Ba'athification at the expense of keeping potential insurgents within the population and also observes that Orders 1 and 2 by the coalition authority meant that thousands of civil servants and soldiers lost their jobs, which created fertile recruiting conditions for VEOs. Wiktorowicz (2004) provides further evidence from post-2003 Iraq that not stopping political subversion can make things worse in terms of defeating the insurgency. In a case study of al Qaeda, he discusses how social movements are about persuasion, and looks at the verbal fight between al Qaeda and nonviolent Islamic fundamentalists. He shows that in competing with non-violent Islamic groups for support, al Qaeda uses a tactic of building up its religious leaders as logical and with a good reputation, while castigating nonviolent Islamic fundamentalist religious leaders as "emotional, corrupt, naïve and ill-informed" (Wiktorowicz 2004: 177). He notes that it is effective in part because it taps into widespread distrust of the Saudi mainstream clerics. This is a form of political subversion and warrants serious COIN attention. Finally, Campbell and Connolly look at political aspects in the case of Northern Ireland, noting that political warfare, in the form of laws, can have a repressive potential and can have a "damping" effect on violent conflict (Campbell and Connolly 2006: 935). The literature shows that countering political subversion is a very important part of an overall counterterrorism strategy working to limit VEO activity.

**Empirical Support Score: 4 = Single systematic case study supporting the hypothesis.**

**Applicability to Influencing VEOs:** The finding above is applicable to influencing VEOs, although much of it suggests that countering political subversion is an important part of an overall counterterrorism strategy, but is not necessarily more effective than military aspects, such as attempting physical destruction of the group.

**Applicability Score:** Direct: At least some of the empirical results directly concern the context of influencing VEOs

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