



THREAT FORMS

Last Updated: 1 February 2020

Subversion, insurgency, lawlessness, and terrorism manifest themselves in a variety of forms capable of challenging the authority and survival of host nations. Below are examples of internal threats that may require Air Force [foreign internal defense](#) (FID) assistance. Strategic and operational level planning should address the degree to which each one of these forms manifests itself in the overall threat to HN internal security.

SUBVERSION

Subversion is an action designed to undermine the military, economic, psychological, or political strength or morale of a governing authority. At one end of the scale, subversion may weaken government authority through extortion, bribery, and physical threats. In other cases, it can provoke widespread civil disorder eventually leading to political and economic crises, ethnic and religious confrontations, and armed disputes among rival political factions external to the government. Dissident groups may use propaganda and terrorism to dramatize political causes or to extort concessions from host governments. Civil disorder and anarchy can produce widespread violence and social upheaval precipitating a host government's collapse. These situations can result in possible military support to civil law enforcement agencies in certain circumstances permitted by law.

INSURGENCY

Insurgency is the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region. Insurgencies often develop as a result of internal perceptions that a host government is unable or unwilling to solve important domestic, economic, or political problems. An insurgent's aim is attaining legitimacy derived from popular support. Popular support fuels the political mobilization required to generate workers, fighters, money, and weapons while denying the same to the government. Preemptively addressing critical economic and political issues by host governments is central to countering insurgencies and should generally take precedence over military force. Insurgency often assumes an ideological foundation with social, economic, political, or religious components. The relationship of force application to the central issues underlying an insurgency warrants special consideration in planning. Insurgency

dominates the direction of violent political change occurring in the world today. [Appendix A](#) discusses the principles of classic insurgency and counterinsurgency.

Insurgencies have individual characteristics that commanders should take into account when initiating FID operations. It is imperative that commanders understand the nature of the conflict. The essential elements of information typically shift from empirical estimates (enemy strength, position, tactical posture, and direction of movement) to cultural and political identity and motivation. Standard insurgency-counterinsurgency paradigms may not work. A failure to critically analyze an insurgent conflict and determine its nature at the beginning of a confrontation can waste resources and potentially fuel further insurgency.

LAWLESSNESS

The term lawlessness, as it applies to FID, carries the connotation of anarchy and revolt, indiscriminate killing by insurgents, narco-terrorists, gangs, and warlords, as well as theft and destruction of property.

Lawlessness often occurs when a government has marginal or ineffective oversight and control over its population or territories. Lawlessness may also exist when the government lacks the mechanisms required to monitor and control the formation and activities of subversive organizations. Local dissident groups may use terrorism against government agencies, or against other ethnic or religious groups, to demonstrate and reinforce their claims to autonomy. The inability of a government to extend its administration and influence into outlying regions typically results in the emergence of “ungoverned territories.” This is often the result of not having the technological means to provide physical presence and persistence in forward areas. Airpower can help alleviate this deficiency.

Subversion, insurgency, illegal drug production, and narco-terrorism all go hand-in-hand with lawlessness. Illicit drug production and trafficking can function subversively when international drug cartels seek permissive environments and resort to intimidation and violence to suppress government interference. “Partnerships” involving exchanges of drugs, weapons, and money between insurgents and drug cartels may also support subversive activities, terrorist organizations, and revolutionary movements. Terrorist organizations, insurgents, and drug cartels often share common infrastructures. Lawlessness is destabilizing to a legitimate regime and may also serve to promote insurgent goals.

TERRORISM

Terrorism is a tactic employed in insurgency and guerrilla warfare. Terrorism uses intimidation and violence to achieve its aims, which are usually linked to a goal or cause. Terrorism may pursue religious, political, and ideological goals. It may aim to replace governments and regimes that yield to, or encourage, forces of change and modernization that threaten religious orders and ways of life. In other cases, terrorism

may be used to gain political or economic concessions from a host government.

When political mobilization and legitimacy form the critical [centers of gravity](#), a goal of terrorism is often to demonstrate the inability of regimes to defend themselves and their populations. Terrorism is generally considered a major component or tactical instrument, not necessarily a separate, stand-alone phenomenon without ideological or political context and motivation.

US security interests can be adversely affected when HN governments are threatened by terrorist violence. The internal security of partners and allies may require US assistance through FID. In addition to helping manage internal conflicts through training and advisory assistance, the Air Force can help with [intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance](#), command and control, and certain forms of direct assistance.
