

DECONSTRUCTING GLOBAL INSURGENCY: A CRITIQUE OF KILCULLEN'S FRAMEWORK ON TERRORIST LINKAGES

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Abstract

This paper provides a critical analysis of David Kilcullen's (2004) framework on the links between global terrorist organizations, which identifies eight major dimensions of connectivity: ideology, language and culture, personal history, family relationships, financial networks, operational and planning cooperation, propaganda, and shared doctrines, techniques and procedures. While Kilcullen's framework is an important contribution to understanding the transnational nature of contemporary terrorism, its application across different contexts reveals both strengths and limitations. Methodologically, the study adopted critical analysis through qualitative documentary research design using secondary sources. The critique highlights that ideological linkages are not uniform, as evidenced by movements, such as Izala in Nigeria, which share Salafi-Wahhabi orientations but remain aligned with state structures rather than insurgent agendas. Similarly, the linguistic and cultural ties emphasized by Kilcullen are less significant in African contexts where groups such as Boko Haram operate primarily in local languages. Moreover, personal history and kinship bonds, while sometimes influential, cannot fully account for the divergent pathways taken by individuals and groups educated within the same traditions. Financial connections, propaganda, and shared tactical doctrines remain strong aspects of Kilcullen's model, but evolving realities (such as Boko Haram's reliance on criminal economies and the increasing role of digital platforms in propaganda and recruitment) demand an updated understanding. The critique concludes that Kilcullen's framework remains a valuable starting point for analysing global jihadist networks, but must be refined to account for local dynamics, digital transformations, and the blurred lines between ideology and organized crime. By situating global linkages within their specific socio-political contexts, a more comprehensive understanding of terrorism and insurgency can be achieved.

Keywords: Deconstruction; global insurgency, global links; insurgency theatres; Kilcullen; terrorist linkages.

Introduction

In *Countering Global Insurgency*, Kilcullen (2004) advances the argument that contemporary insurgent groups, particularly those with Islamist orientations, are not isolated or confined to local struggles but are instead interconnected across different regions of the world. He describes this transnational presence in terms of “theatres of operation,” which, according to his classification, include the Americas, Western Europe, the Caucasus and European Russia, South and Central Asia, Southeast Asia, Australasia, and the Maghreb. These theatres, he contends, are not arbitrary geographical categories but operational zones where insurgent actors collaborate, share resources, or conduct activities that transcend national boundaries. In Kilcullen’s formulation (2004, p. 4), this global insurgency “appears to function through regional theatres of operation rather than as a monolithic bloc.” What this means is that instead of perceiving Islamist militancy as a single, centrally directed organization, it should be understood as a network of localized insurgencies that nonetheless display common features across different regional contexts.

Kilcullen further operationalizes the concept of theatres by explaining that they are spaces where militants from one country cooperate with actors from adjacent states or export their operations into neighbouring territories. This interpretation provides the foundation for his broader thesis. By deconstructing these theatres of operation, Kilcullen seeks to furnish policymakers, security experts, and military strategists with a conceptual framework for crafting more effective responses to what he characterizes as a truly global insurgency. In his view, understanding the way Islamist militants’ structure themselves across theatres offers a pathway to designing counterinsurgency measures that are not narrowly localized but instead take into account the interconnected and transnational character of the threat.

Part of Kilcullen’s claim is that Islamist groups within the various theatres follow broad ideological and strategic trajectories that resonate with the pronouncements and worldview of Al-Qaeda. They tend to share similar tactical repertoires, adopt common operational vocabularies, and engage in comparable forms of propaganda. However, Kilcullen also acknowledges that there is little empirical evidence to suggest that Al-Qaeda as an organization directly commands or coordinates jihad in each theatre. This introduces an important tension in his thesis: on the one hand, he points to strong ideological and operational convergence among militant groups; on the other, he concedes that these groups may not be under the direct hierarchical authority of Al-Qaeda. The result is that global jihad,

far from being a monolithic bloc, emerges as a diffuse, heterogeneous, and multilayered phenomenon that resists easy categorization.

The impetus for this article lies in subjecting Kilcullen's analysis to critical scrutiny. While there is no doubt that his conceptualization of theatres of operation has been influential and remains persuasive in many respects, there are also grounds for questioning some of his assumptions and conclusions. This is particularly relevant because the factors that generate and sustain insurgencies vary significantly across national and regional contexts. The drivers of radicalization in one theatre may not be the same as those in another, and the objectives of insurgent organizations often differ considerably. For instance, the historical, socio-political, and religious dynamics that gave rise to Boko Haram in Nigeria are not identical to the circumstances that produced the Taliban in Afghanistan (Fisseha, 2016). While both groups may share some ideological affinities and employ overlapping tactics, their grievances, recruitment bases, and strategic goals are rooted in very different contexts. Kilcullen's attempt to draw broad generalizations across theatres, therefore, risks obscuring these important distinctions.

One particularly problematic aspect of his argument is the claim that Islamist groups tend to follow general ideological or strategic approaches aligned with Al-Qaeda (Kilcullen, 2004), despite the absence of convincing evidence that Al-Qaeda directly directs or controls insurgent activities across all theatres. This dual assertion, which simultaneously emphasizes ideological unity and organizational autonomy, creates an internal contradiction within his framework. If Al-Qaeda does not exercise direct control, then the assumption of a coherent ideological and operational unity across theatres becomes difficult to sustain without further qualification.

In light of these concerns, this article seeks to provide a systematic critique of Kilcullen's analysis of the global links between terrorist organizations. The study adopted critical analysis with qualitative documentary research design using secondary sources. The critique is not intended to dismiss his framework entirely; rather, it aims to evaluate the extent to which his identification of linkages withstands closer scrutiny. In doing so, the article acknowledges areas where his analysis remains valuable but also highlights aspects that are problematic or insufficiently supported. The discussion is structured around the eight forms of linkage that Kilcullen (2004) identifies as the foundations of global insurgent connectivity: ideological affinities, linguistic and cultural ties, personal histories, family relationships,

financial networks, operational and planning cooperation, propaganda dissemination, and the diffusion of doctrines, techniques, and procedures.

His emphasis on global linkages risks overshadowing the local dynamics that often serve as the primary drivers of insurgency in places like Nigeria, such as poverty (Isyaku, Ishaq, Abdullahi & Mukhtar, 2017), political exclusion (British Council, 2020), ethnic grievances (Isah, Dando & Mukhtar, 2022), and governance failures (Isyaku, Ishaq & Mukhtar, 2018). A more comprehensive approach to understanding terrorism must integrate both the transnational and the local, recognizing that global networks amplify but do not solely determine insurgent trajectories. By refining Kilcullen's model in this direction, scholars and policymakers can better grasp the complex interplay of global connections and local realities that sustain contemporary terrorism. Thus, each of these factors will be examined to determine whether they convincingly demonstrate the existence of a truly global insurgency or whether they reflect more localized, context-specific phenomena that resist broad generalization.

To provide a clear roadmap, the article is organized into four sections. Following this introduction, Section Two reviews Kilcullen's analysis of the links between global terrorist organizations, outlining the eight dimensions of connectivity that he emphasizes. Section Three offers a critical evaluation of these linkages, interrogating their strengths and weaknesses and contrasting Kilcullen's framework with evidence from selected case studies. Section Four concludes the article by summarizing the key findings of the critique and reflecting on their implications for the broader study of insurgency and counterinsurgency in the contemporary international system.

Links between Global Terrorist Organizations

This section examines the various connections that Kilcullen (2004) identifies as binding terrorist organizations across different regions of the world. According to him, there are eight fundamental bases of linkage that illuminate how insurgent movements and terrorist networks sustain a degree of cohesion despite their geographical dispersion. These are: ideological linkages, linguistic and cultural affinities, shared personal histories, family relationships, financial connections, operational and planning coordination, propaganda flows, and the diffusion of doctrines, techniques, and procedures. Together, these elements provide what Kilcullen regards as the connective tissue of the global jihad movement.

Ideological Link

Kilcullen places significant emphasis on ideology as the most fundamental bond among terrorist and insurgent groups. He argues that the majority of these movements are rooted in a broadly Salafi orientation, often influenced by or aligned with the rigid doctrines of Saudi Wahhabism. Even groups such as the Taliban, which originated within the Deobandi tradition of South Asia, exhibit a purist and authoritarian outlook that converges with Salafi principles. The writings of key ideologues, including Sayyid Qutb, Abul A'la Mawdudi, Abdullah Azzam, and the medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyya, continue to provide intellectual foundations for jihadist movements. These figures offer not only theological justification but also a political and social vision that situates global jihad as both a religious duty and a political struggle. Thus, while insurgent groups operate in different national contexts, they share an overarching ideological universe that legitimizes their actions and fosters solidarity.

Linguistic and Cultural Link

A second important dimension identified by Kilcullen (2004) concerns linguistic and cultural ties. The Arabic language, widely used across Muslim societies, serves as a lingua franca that facilitates communication between jihadist organizations operating in distant theatres. It enables the exchange of training materials, intelligence, propaganda, and operational plans. Moreover, the shared religious and civilizational identity of Islam contributes to a common worldview that transcends national boundaries. Kilcullen argues that this "Islamic civilizational overlay" provides not only a shared language but also a collective political and cultural outlook, reinforcing solidarity between otherwise diverse national groups. Through this cultural affinity, militants are able to frame their struggles as part of a broader, unified cause, despite being embedded in very different societies.

Personal History Links

Personal histories also play a significant role in knitting together insurgent groups across the globe. Kilcullen points to the formative experience of the Afghan jihad in the 1980s, where many older mujahidin fought side by side against Soviet forces. This struggle provided both a training ground and a crucible of shared identity that continues to shape the global jihadist movement. Leaders and ideologues who studied under Wahhabi clerics in Saudi Arabia, such as Abu Bakar Bashir of Jemaah Islamiyya, still maintain ties with their mentors and draw upon these relationships in decision-making processes. The senior leadership of Al-Qaeda

itself is bound together by shared experiences dating back to the 1970s, when they collectively opposed the Egyptian and Saudi regimes. Later generations of fighters were bonded through conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Chechnya, which became secondary arenas of jihad.

Even within a single country, these personal histories create intricate networks of connection. In Indonesia, for example, many Jemaah Islamiyya members came from families with deep roots in the Darul Islam movement, attended the same schools, and later trained together in camps in the Philippines. In such cases, friendships, webs of acquaintance, and networks of mutual obligation stretch across national and regional borders, giving global jihad an enduring human infrastructure (Kilcullen, 2004).

Family Relationships

Another powerful source of linkage is kinship. Kilcullen highlights the extent to which family ties, whether through blood or marriage, reinforce the cohesion of jihadist networks. Alliances are often sealed through intermarriage. A well-known example is the marriage of Osama bin Laden to the daughter of Taliban leader Mullah Omar, symbolizing a bond that went beyond tactical cooperation. Similarly, many Indonesian jihadist leaders married women from the Arabian Peninsula, particularly from the Hadhramaut region spanning Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman. Such intermarriages foster bonds of obligation that transcend individual groups and link different theatres of insurgency.

Furthermore, family continuity plays a role in sustaining jihadist movements. Sons of prominent leaders frequently follow in their fathers' footsteps, while widows often take up arms or become suicide bombers to avenge their husbands. In Chechnya and European Russia, this phenomenon has given rise to the so-called "Black Widows"; female militants who have carried out numerous attacks and who have acquired independent symbolic status within the jihadist narrative.

Financial Links

Kilcullen also stresses the financial networks that connect disparate groups. He notes that insurgent organizations often provide mutual financial assistance, with Al-Qaeda suspected of funding Jemaah Islamiyah for the 2002 Bali bombings and other groups in the Philippines. Beyond direct funding, Islamic charities, hawala banking systems, and traditional religious networks serve as conduits for money transfers. While some of these organizations operate

with genuine humanitarian intent, others have been co-opted, knowingly or unknowingly, into financing terrorism. Wealth derived from Middle Eastern oil revenues has historically been a major source of funding, with Arabia functioning as a central hub in this financial web.

Kilcullen's observations are further supported by historical examples of state and external actors funding insurgencies. For instance, Hungary and Italy supported dissidents in Yugoslavia after World War I to destabilize the new state for territorial gain (Lutz & Lutz, 2013). Iran has long been accused of sponsoring militant groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Kurdish insurgents in Iraq as part of its strategy to extend Shia influence. Similarly, the U.S. government, through the CIA, provided financial and logistical support to the Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s (Lutz & Lutz, 2013). These cases illustrate how financial support remains a vital link in sustaining insurgencies globally, be it from states, organizations, or informal networks.

Operational and Planning Link

Another key dimension is operational and planning cooperation. Kilcullen (2004) argues that while Al-Qaeda does not function as a centralized headquarters issuing direct orders to subordinate groups, it provides resources and expertise that facilitate operations. Instead of top-down command, operational links occur through sponsorship, funding, and advice. For example, Al-Qaeda has supplied regional affiliates with targeting data and specialist training, while local groups have reciprocated by sharing intelligence. The foiled Jemaah Islamiyya attacks in Singapore in 2001 highlight this dynamic: targeting data discovered in an Al-Qaeda safe house in Afghanistan directly connected the plot to broader networks of planning. Such instances demonstrate that, even without central command, the global jihad movement is sustained by webs of operational coordination.

Propaganda Links

Kilcullen also underscores the role of propaganda in unifying global jihad. Al-Qaeda has consistently exploited local conflicts for global messaging, framing them as part of a universal struggle. Propaganda materials, often produced collaboratively, circulate between groups and amplify shared grievances. Websites such as Jihad Unspun, run by a Canadian convert, exemplify how global networks disseminate commentary and analysis across multiple theatres. By 2006, Kilcullen strengthened his argument, emphasizing that

counterinsurgency strategies must adapt to the expanding opportunities for propaganda. He observed that the rise of the Internet created “virtual sanctuaries” beyond the reach of conventional counterinsurgency measures. Groups in Iraq, for example, mastered the use of global media to amplify their cause. Organizations such as the “Global Islamic Media Front” and Al-Qaeda’s as-Sahab production unit professionalized jihadist media operations. Today, Internet-based platforms enable not only propaganda but also financial transfers, clandestine communication, recruitment, and training, extending the reach of jihadist networks far beyond physical theatres of conflict.

Doctrines, Techniques, and Procedures

The final form of linkage concerns the diffusion of doctrines, techniques, and procedures. Kilcullen notes that insurgent and terrorist groups worldwide have access to a growing body of instructional material. These include political guidance documents such as PUPJI, military manuals like *Military Studies in the Jihad Against the Tyrants* (seized in Manchester in 2002), and multimedia resources disseminated through CDs, DVDs, and online platforms (Kilcullen, 2004; Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017). Al-Qaeda has also produced its own online training manuals, such as the Al-Battar series, which provide detailed instructions on weapons, tactics, and bomb-making. This shared doctrinal pool standardizes methods and ensures that new generations of fighters can quickly adopt techniques developed in other theatres. In effect, the circulation of doctrines and procedures creates a transnational archive of insurgent knowledge, accessible to groups from Southeast Asia to the Middle East and beyond.

Critique of Kilcullen

This section presents a critique of Kilcullen’s framework on the global links between terrorist organizations. The discussion is organized around the eight linkages that Kilcullen (2004) identified, namely: ideological, linguistic and cultural, personal history, family relationships, financial networks, operational and planning cooperation, propaganda, and doctrines, techniques, and procedures. The analysis acknowledges areas where Kilcullen’s arguments remain persuasive, but it also highlights limitations and contradictions, particularly when his framework is applied to diverse regional contexts such as sub-Saharan Africa.

Ideological Link

Kilcullen's assertion that Salafist and Wahhabi ideologies serve as unifying threads across jihadist groups is partly valid but also problematic. For instance, the Izala movement in Nigeria is explicitly Salafi in orientation, draws heavily from Wahhabi theology, and acknowledges the influence of Ibn Taymiyya. Yet, it has never declared allegiance to Al-Qaeda or any global jihadist coalition. On the contrary, Izala's activities often align with state interests; Perouse de Montclos (2014) notes that the movement maintains its own security apparatus (Yan Agaji) but largely works in consensus with the Nigerian government. This example reveals that while ideological commonalities exist, they do not automatically translate into operational or organizational alignment with transnational jihadist groups. Kilcullen's broad generalization therefore overlooks instances where ideological overlap coexists with political loyalty to the state.

Linguistic and Cultural Links

Kilcullen's emphasis on Arabic as a unifying linguistic and cultural medium is persuasive, yet it oversimplifies linguistic realities in some contexts. Boko Haram, for example, has historically used Hausa and Kanuri far more than Arabic in its discourse, despite professing allegiance to global jihadist ideologies. From Muhammad Yusuf to Abubakar Shekau, its leaders have never presented Arabic as their operational language or elevated an "Arabic-speaking" leader within Nigeria or the broader Lake Chad sub-region (Kassim, 2018). Arabic in this case functions more as a liturgical or scholarly resource than a lived linguistic practice. Boko Haram's use of Arabic mirrors the way educated Nigerians use English, a learned language rather than a native one. Thus, while Arabic may facilitate communication across some theatres, its role should not be overstated in regions where other languages dominate insurgent discourse.

Personal History Links

Kilcullen's discussion of shared personal histories is insightful but selective. The Afghan jihad of the 1980s is particularly crucible for transnational militancy. He overlooks the millions of scholars and clerics who studied under Wahhabi teachers without becoming militants. Figures such as Khalid Yasin (U.S.), Mohammad Magid (U.S.), Hamza Yusuf (Canada), and Nigerian clerics like the late Ja'afar Mahmud Adam and Sani Umar Rijiyar Lemu, all emerged from Wahhabi traditions but became prominent advocates of peace

(Agbaje, 2014). Many of them have publicly condemned terrorist violence as un-Islamic and inhumane. Agbaje (2014) records that Sheikh Ja'afar Adam denounced Boko Haram as extremist before his assassination, which Salaam (2013) and Agbaje (2014) suggest may have been carried out by the group itself. This indicates that exposure to Wahhabi thought does not predetermine militancy; rather, violent jihadist trajectories may arise from political grievances, personal motivations, or distorted interpretations of Islam. Kilcullen's analysis thus risks conflating correlation with causation.

Family Relationships

The role of kinship ties in jihadist networks is another area where Kilcullen provides useful insights but overstates their universality. Evidence from Iraq between 2005 and 2006 shows that Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) deliberately promoted intermarriages between its leaders and prominent tribal families in Al-Anbar province to gain legitimacy and secure tribal alliances (US FM 3-25, 2009). However, this strategy backfired when the combination of forced marriages, targeted threats, and assassinations alienated tribal leaders. This illustrates that while family relationships can strengthen networks, they can also provoke resistance. In other theatres, intermarriage and kinship bonds certainly exist, but they are not always decisive in explaining organizational cohesion. Kilcullen's framework underplays the extent to which family ties can generate both cooperation and conflict within insurgent networks.

Financial Links

Kilcullen's emphasis on financial interdependence among terrorist groups is largely accurate but requires greater nuance. Boko Haram's financial lifelines illustrate the complexity of insurgent funding in practice. Onuoha (2014) identifies at least four major revenue streams for Boko Haram: membership dues, donations from sympathetic politicians, external support from foreign terrorist groups, and criminal enterprises such as bank robberies and kidnappings for ransom. In addition, Boko Haram has extorted money from local populations and wealthy elites, demanding "protection fees" to prevent attacks. Beyond these localized sources, broader global networks of patronage and mutual obligation sustain terrorist operations. White (2002), Barno (2006), Wagner (2006), Babalola (2013), Persson (2014), Rich (2014), Smith (2015), Mukhtar (2026) all highlight the interplay between terrorism and illicit economies, ranging from drug trafficking to piracy and money laundering. The U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide (2009) further warns that such financial activities weaken state institutions, foster corruption, and push insurgencies into opportunistic alliances

with organized crime. Kilcullen identifies financial links correctly but underplays how insurgency financing often shifts from ideological to criminal motivations over time.

Operational and Planning Links

Kilcullen's claim that global jihad lacks centralized command but thrives on operational collaboration finds strong support in real-world cases. A notable example is the discovery of targeting data for American schools and public buildings on a captured terrorist's computer in Pakistan, which triggered alerts in the United States and the arrest of eight suspects in the United Kingdom. This suggests that while local groups plan and execute their own operations, they often cooperate across regions and benefit from encouragement, tactical advice, and resources provided by transnational actors like Al-Qaeda. Kilcullen's analysis here is compelling, though it should also recognize the growing role of digital platforms, which now allow dispersed groups to coordinate operations without physical proximity.

Propaganda Links

Kilcullen is correct to emphasize propaganda as a powerful glue connecting jihadist groups. In Nigeria, Boko Haram has consistently deployed radio broadcasts, videos, and online platforms to spread its ideology and instil fear. The sophistication of some of these media productions strongly suggests technical assistance from international jihadist networks. Al-Qaeda's Sawt al-Jihad bulletin and al-Khansa women's magazine exemplify how propaganda is tailored for different audiences, while the circulation of videos, such as the Russian Hell series showing the torture of Russian soldiers, illustrates how localized conflicts are packaged for global consumption. By 2006, Kilcullen had already noted the transformative role of the Internet in creating virtual sanctuaries for propaganda, recruitment, and coordination. His argument remains highly relevant today, as digital media continues to amplify insurgent influence beyond physical theatres of war.

Doctrines, Techniques, and Procedures

Finally, Kilcullen's observation that doctrines and tactics circulate across jihadist theatres is strongly supported by evidence. Islamist groups worldwide demonstrate a remarkable capacity to adapt and adopt tactics pioneered elsewhere, whether suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), or online recruitment strategies. Doctrinal materials such as Military Studies in the Jihad Against the Tyrants and Al-Qaeda's Al-Battar online manual provide practical training to militants across different regions. The Zarqawi network

in Iraq, which maintained a media unit producing graphic videos of hostage beheadings, exemplifies how tactical innovations can rapidly disseminate across the global jihadist movement. Moreover, imagery of Muslim suffering in Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq, and the Balkans continues to fuel narratives of victimization and solidarity, motivating recruits far beyond the immediate theatres of conflict. Kilcullen is therefore correct in highlighting this linkage, though he could have further explored how globalization and digital connectivity have accelerated the circulation of militant doctrines.

In fact, scholars identified five types of terrorist organizations, including: rebel or military groups (e.g. M23 in the Congo DC and the Lord's); Resistance Army (LRA); Islamic insurgents (e.g. Boko Haram, Al Shabaab, and Al Qaeda); political movements (e.g. Hamas and The Taliban); government agencies (e.g. Janjaweed of Sudan; and clandestine organizations (such as underworld organizations and violent cults (Okoli and Iortyer 2014; Fisseha, 2016, p. 19).

In summary, Kilcullen's eight linkages offer a valuable framework for understanding the interconnectedness of global terrorist organizations. Yet, as this critique has demonstrated, many of his arguments require qualification. While ideology, language, personal histories, kinship, finance, operational ties, propaganda, and shared tactics do indeed connect insurgent movements, their influence is neither uniform nor universally decisive. In some contexts (such as Nigeria) the links are weaker or more complex than Kilcullen allows. By overstating certain connections while underestimating local dynamics, his framework risks oversimplifying the diverse realities of insurgency. A more balanced approach would recognize both the global linkages and the deeply localized factors that drive militant movements.

Conclusion

The article made a critique of the Kilcullen's analysis of the links between global terrorist organizations. The critique of Kilcullen's eight linkages underscores both the utility and the limitations of his framework. On the one hand, Kilcullen successfully identifies the diverse forms of connectivity that allow terrorist organizations to function beyond local boundaries, ranging from ideological and familial ties to financial and operational cooperation. His insistence that insurgent groups are not isolated entities but components of a transnational web remains a valuable analytical contribution. However, the application of his framework

across different contexts reveals important caveats that weaken the explanatory power of a one-size-fits-all approach.

First, ideological linkages are not straightforward. While movements like Izala in Nigeria share a Salafi-Wahhabi theological orientation, they do not necessarily align with global jihadist agendas, and in some cases even collaborate with the state. This reveals that ideology alone cannot predict insurgent behavior, as political and contextual factors often reshape its impact. Second, linguistic and cultural bonds, particularly the Arabic connection, are more nuanced than Kilcullen suggests. Groups such as Boko Haram operate primarily in Hausa and Kanuri, with Arabic serving more as a symbolic or religious language than a medium of operational unity. Kilcullen's emphasis risks privileging Middle Eastern experiences at the expense of African realities.

Third, personal history and kinship ties, while occasionally significant, are not deterministic. Many clerics educated in Wahhabi traditions have chosen peaceful paths, and kinship-based strategies such as AQI's forced marriages in Iraq have sometimes backfired. These cases demonstrate that human agency and local politics complicate the neat linkages Kilcullen outlines. Fourth, the financial dimension is indeed central, but it evolves in ways Kilcullen underplays. Boko Haram, for instance, moved from reliance on donations to a diversified criminal economy involving kidnappings, extortion, and smuggling. Over time, such activities blur the distinction between ideological insurgency and organized crime.

Fifth, operational, planning, and propaganda links provide some of Kilcullen's strongest insights. Global jihadists frequently share intelligence, encourage local affiliates, and deploy sophisticated propaganda to shape perceptions and recruit fighters. Yet even here, the rise of digital platforms and decentralized online networks has transformed the speed and reach of such linkages beyond what Kilcullen initially envisioned. Lastly, the shared doctrines and tactical repertoires across jihadist movements illustrate both the adaptability and resilience of global insurgency. However, these commonalities also highlight the importance of global digital infrastructures, which Kilcullen only partially accounts for in his early work.

Taken together, the critique suggests that while Kilcullen's framework provides a useful starting point, it must be applied with caution and contextual sensitivity. His emphasis on global linkages risks overshadowing the local dynamics that often serve as the primary drivers of insurgency in places like Nigeria, such as poverty (Isyaku, Ishaq, Abdullahi & Mukhtar, 2017), political exclusion (), ethnic grievances (Isah, Dando & Mukhtar, 2022), and

governance failures (Isyaku, Ishaq & Mukhtar, 2018),. A more comprehensive approach to understanding terrorism must integrate both the transnational and the local, recognizing that global networks amplify but do not solely determine insurgent trajectories. By refining Kilcullen's model in this direction, scholars and policymakers can better grasp the complex interplay of global connections and local realities that sustain contemporary terrorism.

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