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Beyond FM 3-24:

Readings for the Counterinsurgency Commander

by Joshua Thiel, Bryan Martin, William Marm, Christopher O’Gwin, , Christopher Young, Gabriel Szody, and Douglas Borer

Prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks, United States (U.S.) Army Green Berets were active in the international sphere. Organized in small, twelve-man teams known as Special Forces Operational Detachment Alphas (ODA), these specially trained soldiers were primarily engaged as teachers of Counterinsurgency (COIN) to Host Nation’s (HN) military forces during Foreign Internal Defense (FID) missions. They were expected to not only add value to the capacity, professionalization, and operational capabilities of the HN forces, but were also expected to be the COIN subject matter experts within the U.S. military. However, ODAs rapidly evolved from teachers of COIN to practitioners of the art during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If one were to follow a randomly chosen ODA chronologically, the COIN techniques and methods used by that unit have changed in three general ways over the last ten years. The initial pedagogical role as teachers of COIN to foreign partners before 9-11, gave way for the first seven or so years in Iraq and Afghanistan to extreme instances of unilateral combat in the new role as the “Primary Counterinsurgent.” In the third phase, many ODA’s have returned to a more nuanced approach today that reflects the Special Force’s original call to arms, “By, With, and Through.” Additionally, even as Special Forces has recently sought to reclaim its roots, the U.S. military as a whole, including conventional or general purpose forces, have also become much more COIN savvy over time.

Indeed, ODAs in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines, the Trans-Sahel, and in Central and South America have traveled the full arc between primary teacher to primary practitioner and back again depending on the local rules of engagement. Likewise, many Army and Marine units have been assigned duties in Afghanistan and Iraq as practitioners of COIN, and Navy Seal Teams have often been assigned roles as COIN teachers in FID missions – assignments for which they have minimal formal preparation.¹ In preparation for these difficult assignments, most junior officers today refer to the Army’s *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, a document which is weighted heavily towards preparing the U.S. military in the role of “Primary Counterinsurgent.” Beyond FM 3-24 what additional readings might be useful to help prepare junior officers for the full array of COIN challenges facing America’s expeditionary units?

¹ In recognition of this shortcoming, Naval Special Warfare in San Diego has begun a junior officer training program to provide social, and cultural education that stresses critical thinking skills.

In the winter of 2010, six Special Forces Majors with extensive field experience teaching and practicing COIN, mentored by Professor Douglas Borer at the Naval Postgraduate School,² sought to determine which bodies of scholarly work, properly sequenced, might impart a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of multiple-COIN techniques for new counterinsurgent commanders.

During the course of this study, a wide variety of COIN theorists and practitioners were read and discussed. This essay includes the authors such as David Galula, whose book *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* is the intellectual bedrock for FM 3-24. Joining Galula are David Kilcullen and Seth Jones, familiar names whose current influence with senior officers helped shape the understanding of COIN within the U.S. military today. Somewhat less familiar names and works, such as Robert Taber's *War of the Flea* and readings by Edward Luttwak, added depth to our study. Finally, often-overlooked works such as Timothy Lomperis's *From People's War to People's Rule* and John P. Cann's *The Portuguese Way of War* provided "off the beaten path" perspectives of COIN operations.

It is useful for all counterinsurgency commanders to clearly understand their operational environment in terms of two roles: either the "Primary Counterinsurgent" or the "By, With, and Through" advisor. The "Primary Counterinsurgent" is often found in early COIN efforts during which an external military force fills the void of an inept or nonexistent HN security apparatus. In this role, there is minimal effective sovereignty. In the other role, the external military works "By, With, and Through" existing HN forces to indirectly counter the insurgency. In this role, the HN has a greater degree of effective sovereignty. By reading select chapters suggested below from Galula, Jones, Lomperis, Taber, Cann, and Kilcullen, new commanders will gain significant insight into the sliding scale of "By, With, and Through" to "Primary Counterinsurgent," beyond the scope provided by FM 3-24.

The other noticeable paradigm that becomes apparent during a comprehensive study of counterinsurgency is the clear division between strategic level "COIN Theory," and those techniques and procedures that seek to operationalize COIN. Most COIN literature examines challenges of insurgent warfare somewhere along the spectrum between theory and practice. We assert a well-rounded COIN commander should understand the entire spectrum; he will know where his level of command fits into the spectrum, and he will grasp how the theory and practice relate to each other.

The following figure is a visual representation of the two sliding scales and where we believe each recommended COIN author falls along them. No single piece of literature is all inclusive; whereas, reading a composite of the works will provide the COIN commander the depth of understanding necessary to operate in a complex COIN environment.

² The Defense Analysis Department at the Naval Postgraduate School provides the most advanced graduate education opportunities presently available to the SOF community in areas of Special Operations, Counter-Insurgency, Counter-Terrorism, and Information Operations.

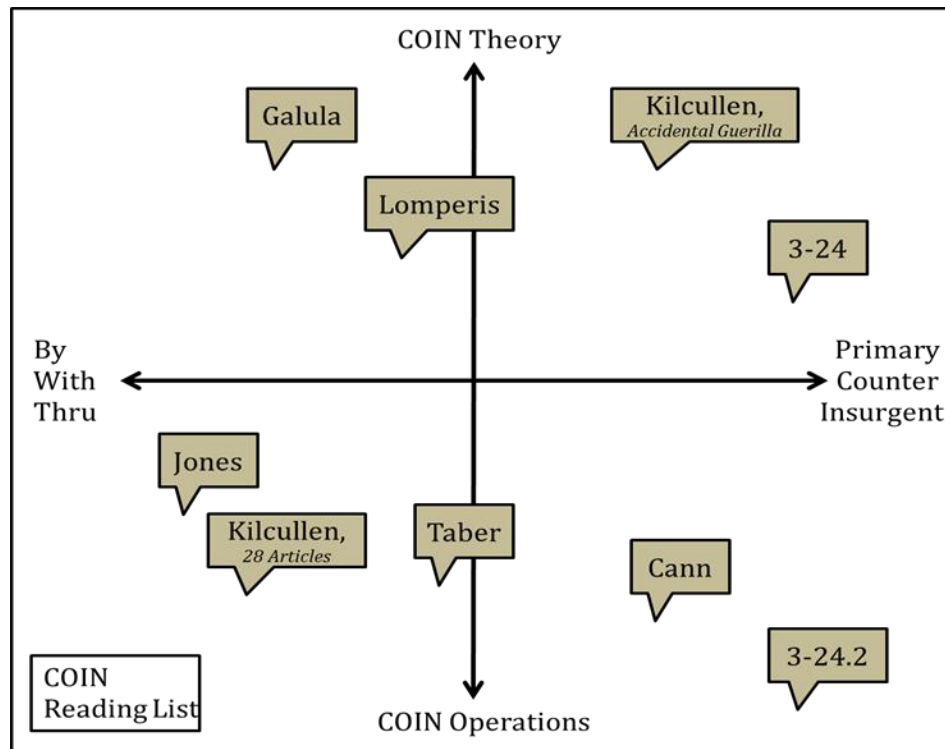


Figure 1. Key COIN readings as they express COIN Theory, COIN Operations, and Method of Implementation

As is evident in the figure above, the selected readings represent varying degrees of direct and indirect involvement in counterinsurgencies combined with COIN theory or operational techniques. The readings that lie closer to the “By, With, and Through” role on the horizontal axis will emphasize indirect concepts that require use of the indigenous force. On the opposite side, the primary counterinsurgent unilaterally conducts direct engagement with insurgents. On the vertical axis, the selected readings are plotted based on the degree to which they emphasize COIN theory or operational techniques. Figure 1 offers a framework for comparing content: Galula tends to emphasize more “By, With, and Through” and COIN theory than Lomperis. *FM 3.24* is designed to inform the primary counterinsurgent compared to Seth Jones, who stresses the indirect use of indigenous forces. All counterinsurgents and especially all COIN commanders must comprehend where on the spectrum the various readings are located and how each reading relates to their specific COIN deployment. For example, the mix of readings that apply to Iraq and Afghanistan are different than those required for Columbia and the Philippines. However, one must recognize that within Iraq and Afghanistan the environment has shifted due to political and military dynamics over time. Indeed, as Iraqi forces replaced Coalition forces as primary combatants in the Summer 2010, the setting for an COIN commander has shifted significantly from the right of the diagram to the left.

A relatively small number of readings, selected from the growing expanse of COIN literature were covered in this study. Thus, while these nine suggested readings are not exhaustive, they do represent a fair cross-section of the themes available in the literature.

Galula

Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice by David Galula is the flagship book of counterinsurgency scholarship owing to its succinct yet comprehensive handling of all relevant principles involved in counterinsurgency warfare. Galula's thesis attests that the ultimate goal of a counterinsurgency force is to foster the support of the affected population and not to simply control territory. Thus, Galula's work, which first appeared in 1964, is considered by many to be the canonical text of the "hearts and minds" counterinsurgency camp.

The main contribution of the book is a comprehensive list of imperatives and principles for practitioners in the COIN environment. Galula provides well-conceived and supported advice for the full spectrum of counterinsurgency covering a variety of topics including: sequencing of operations, patterns of insurgency, mobilizing causes, geography, leadership, and organizational structure to name a few. Among these, his discussion on causes and sequencing represent highly pivotal issues. Galula outlines a prescriptive (if debatable) seven step process for counterinsurgents, which includes: expel insurgents, emplace static forces, control population, destroy political infrastructure, conduct elections, test local leaders, and win over remaining insurgent supporters.

Galula's impact should not be underestimated; numerous tactical operations in Iraq executed Galula's model lock step, including Colonel H.R. McMaster's command in Tal Afar.³ While our working group acknowledges the utility of Galula's sequencing, some members have observed a variety of other sequencing methods based on the antecedent conditions.

If the working group could only prescribe one book beyond *FM 3-24* for readers interested in COIN theory, Galula's book is it. We believe every military professional should read *Counterinsurgency Warfare* before they deploy.

Lomperis

From People's War to People's Rule by Timothy Lomperis analyzes the critical factors influencing the development and outcome of insurgencies. This book should not be the first book for the counterinsurgent scholar, but should be considered for those seeking to move beyond Galula to a more advanced and analytical text. The models and graphs are informative and supported by a variety of case studies. The author provides a useful lens by which any counterinsurgent practitioner can better understand the environment.

Lomperis goes beyond Galula's "causes" of insurgency by introducing categories of legitimacy. These categories of legitimacy are a major contribution to the field, specifically in regard to both understanding and influencing the population through information operations and the coordination of multiple lines of operation. When preparing for a deployment, this book will stimulate the reader and facilitate the generation of ideas on how to influence critical factors. Lomperis' fields of analysis provide excellent starting points for creating counterinsurgent metrics. If you are deploying to conduct counterinsurgency then this book should be in your library.

³ George Packer, "The Lesson of Tal Afar," *The New Yorker*, April 10, 2006.

Taber

Robert Taber's book, *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare*, provides an insightful glance into counterinsurgency operations from the insurgent's vantage point. Like Lomperis, it is an excellent selection to read after Galula. As a journalist covering the revolutionary upheaval of Castro's Cuban insurgency in the mid-1950s, Taber makes several critical observations that are pertinent in today's operational environment. Using evidence that relies heavily upon Maoist theory, Taber demonstrates why it is critical to study the Chinese leader's principles, claiming that they are as timeless as they are universal.

Taber's definition of an insurgency is important to consider, as it provides a basis from which to understand an insurgency holistically. He observes that an insurgency is a conflict between a government and an "out-group," in which the latter uses both political resources and violence to change, to reformulate, or to undermine the legitimacy of at least one of four key foundations of government power: integrity of borders, political systems, authorities in power, and policies.

In his discussion of insurgent characteristics, Taber draws critical conclusions that help to explain why individuals and cultural "out-groups" join and support insurgencies, providing insight into the social and economic impacts of poor governance. Moreover, Taber outlines five key considerations that every insurgent organization should adhere to in order to achieve victory: an awareness of the deprivations suffered by the population and the belief that violence will work to encourage revolt; avoid strength and attack weakness where possible; consistent use of Maoist principles; the criticality of political organization in base areas; and an understanding of the government's response mechanisms. From the counterinsurgent's perspective, a reverse engineering of these principles provide opportunities to develop a strategic thought process and insights for defeating the insurgent.

Although somewhat biased in favor of the insurgent, Taber's book is an excellent primer on the dilemmas of COIN. The metaphor of how an infestation of fleas can eventually kill the dog is well supported. In our assessment, chapters 1, 2, 4 and 10 are the most useful.

Kilcullen

The much-acclaimed Australian soldier-scholar David Kilcullen provides a more focused and specialized perspective on counterinsurgency that is helpful in understanding the influence of globalization and its impacts on the contemporary Islamist insurgent. In his book, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, Kilcullen describes today's insurgent as a local who has chosen to fight against outsiders that he perceives as intruding on the physical and cultural space of his traditional society. Kilcullen asserts that local wars are primarily guerrilla conflicts within societies that are often sponsored or inspired by transnational extremists seeking to disrupt the status quo. Interaction between accidental guerrillas and ideological terrorists makes both the traditional counterterrorism and classical counterinsurgency models inadequate for developing a strategy to counter these enemies. Thus, the purpose of his book is to develop a more pertinent model.

Kilcullen model defines the nature of the accidental guerrilla phenomenon in terms of four basic characteristics inherent to any insurgent movement: provocation – making government forces react to you, and to hopefully overreact thereby generating ill-will amongst the

population; intimidation – preventing local populations from cooperating with government or coalition forces by publicly killing those who collaborate; protraction – prolonging the conflict to exhaust the opponent's resources, eroding political will, sapping public support, and avoiding losses; and finally exhaustion – imposing costs on the government, overstressing its support system and tiring its troops. Consequently, Kilcullen argues that these principles can be countered through aggressive government programs that stress population security, good governance, positive development of economic conditions, and information dominance.

In the end, Kilcullen arrives at several conclusions, considered “best practices” in counterinsurgency operations. He recommends that a political strategy be developed that builds government effectiveness. Second, he calls for a comprehensive approach that integrates civil and military efforts. Third, continuity of key personnel and policies must be maintained to provide stability and normalization. Fourth, a strategy of population-centric security needs to be enacted. Fifth, there must be a cueing and synchronization of development, governance, and security efforts. Sixth, a multilateral environment of cooperation needs to be developed, relying on a close and genuine partnership that puts the Host Nation forces in the lead. Seventh, a strong emphasis needs to be placed on building effective and legitimate local security forces. Lastly, a region wide approach that disrupts safe-havens, controls borders and frontier regions, and undermines terrorist infrastructure in neighboring countries is critical to success.

Kilcullen's book should be studied by both the military and civilian professional confronting the COIN dilemma. Despite its Islamist focus, this book is abstract enough that its application is relevant in other COIN situations. The best chapters to read, in order of importance, are 1, 5, 2, 3, and 4.

Cann

Counterinsurgency in Africa: The Portuguese Way of War by John P. Cann describes Portugal's efforts at waging three simultaneous counterinsurgencies in its African colonies of Angola, Mozambique, and Portuguese Guinea. Because the wars were fought over a considerable period (1961-1974), Portuguese policies and practices were designed to preserve its meager resources by spreading the burden of the war as widely as possible while at the same time maintaining the tempo of the war at a sustainable pace.

Cann explains how the Portuguese devoted time and effort to develop a workable strategy, a new military doctrine, and the appropriate force structure. The Portuguese developed a strategy that paralleled the guerrilla strategy of protracted war. They focused all diplomatic efforts to nullify the influence of communist adversaries and to delegitimize the anti-state terrorist organizations. In short, the Portuguese applied the lessons learned from the French in Algeria and Indochina, and the British in Malaya. They created new institutions and rapidly educated their military in the new doctrine. To synchronize their new strategy and doctrine, the Portuguese radically reorganized their military force structure to conduct counterinsurgency, and all but abandoned conventional warfare approaches. Cann explains that the Portuguese conducted continuous local patrols using small units, which produced better results than the less frequent, large scale, battalion, or brigade-sized operations.

Cann's book is a good case study on successful counterinsurgency that skillfully used surrogate forces. Cann describes the integration of the civil administration, the police, and the military based on local conditions. This shows that they were highly flexible and recognized the

importance of the civilian efforts in counterinsurgency. Ultimately, Cann shows that focused and committed executive leadership with deft management allowed Portugal to wage a three front war 8,000 km from home for 13 years. The book should be read in its entirety in order to glean the experiences of each of the three COIN environments and the doctrinal programs established in Portugal.

Jones

In *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, Seth Jones defines the nature of the insurgency in Afghanistan and identifies the factors that contributed to its rise. Jones identifies the capabilities that the U.S. military should consider to improve its ability to wage effective counterinsurgency operations.

Jones begins with an analysis of COIN theory then operationalizes his population-centric approach with respect to Afghanistan. Demonstrated in his COIN model, Jones highlights the capacities of the indigenous security forces, local governance, and external support for insurgents are the hallmarks of success or failure of counterinsurgency efforts. Jones asserts that the U.S. should focus its resources on helping to improve the capacity of the indigenous government and its security forces, thereby improving their competency and legitimacy.

Throughout the book, Jones highlights many preferred operational and tactical techniques specifically for Afghanistan. Among them, he asserts that the Afghan National Police should be the primary focus of Coalition training. He also identifies three factors that have undermined good governance in Afghanistan, including: warlordism, drug trade, and an ineffective justice system. To address these factors, Jones recommends that command and control be decentralized down to the smallest unit possible. Finally, he claims that the best way to win over the population and isolate the insurgents is to live among the population.

The main contribution of Jones' book is how to apply COIN theory in Afghanistan. Each chapter in *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* has relevance and should be required reading for all leaders due to its concise yet full description of insurgency.

FM 3-24

The U.S. Army published *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency* to capture the lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan in a common language using classic counterinsurgency terms. Although the military was extremely rushed to publish the manual in response to conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, overall it is quite successful in providing an all-encompassing document. It should be read and understood by all leaders serving in or preparing for service in the country's counterinsurgency fight. The manual's purpose is to adjust the thinking and practices of America's maneuver centric and attrition oriented ground forces. It clearly describes COIN as a political, cultural, and sociological struggle focused on the population, rather than only the enemy combatants.

A recurrent theory throughout the manual is the "side that learns faster and adapts more rapidly- the better learning organization- usually wins,"⁴ a theme clearly borrowed from John Nagl's text, *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and*

⁴ *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, December 2006, p. ix.

Vietnam.⁵ The introduction clearly identifies this imperative for U.S. forces in order to be successful in this low-intensity and dynamic fight. Leaders and soldiers must study counterinsurgency prior to a deployment, and must continue learning downrange while they attempt to defeat irregular enemies. *FM 3-24* clearly articulates that a learning organization that can accurately identify the weaknesses of the external environment of war and reconfigure its own capability to exploit those weaknesses will defeat an insurgency; a bureaucratic hierarchy that is inward focused on administration and operations will not.⁶

Like David Galula and Seth Jones, *FM 3-24* concludes that the center of gravity in counterinsurgency is the people. COIN forces must provide for the people, protect the people, and convince the people that their incumbent government is legitimate. Therefore, *FM 3-24* argues that an equal amount of time must be spent gaining knowledge of the population as spent understanding insurgency. The faster COIN forces can provide legitimacy, the sooner they can end the lifeline of the insurgent, which is the population's active and passive support. Because this struggle is not just a military one, *FM 3-24* argues that effective COIN operations requires a balanced application between military and civic operations, and a unity of effort between the different units and organizations which carry them out.⁷

FM 3-24 states that the primary audience for the manual is leaders and planners at the battalion level and above. Because they identify the need to "keep U.S. forces more agile and adaptive than irregular enemies," the military recently published a new manual, *FM 3-24.2 Tactics in Counterinsurgency* to fill the doctrinal gap for the tactical leader and unit.

FM 3-24.2

FM 3-24.2, Tactics in Counterinsurgency, is the offspring of the conventional military's successful large scale counterinsurgency waged in Iraq from 2006-2009. This manual evolves U.S. military doctrine from theoretical and strategic to the establishment of proven techniques at the operational and tactical level. Fundamentally, *FM 3-24.2* is a "best practices guide" from Iraq; however, it avoids the pitfall of doctrinalizing the solutions tailored only to Iraq and it maintains principle-based solutions to those tactics and operations in counterinsurgency.

The most significant contribution of *FM 3-24.2* is full spectrum counterinsurgency at the tactical level. Counterinsurgency practitioners can glean significant insights to the design, integration, balance and implementation of Lines of Effort relevant in the counterinsurgent environment, including: governance, services, economic development, information, offensive operations, and security to name a few.

FM 3-24.2 also prescribes techniques under the assumption that population centric counterinsurgency (winning the population) is the most effective way to defeat an insurgency and solidify the legitimacy of an incumbent government. To protect the population and remove the insurgents with minimal collateral damage, Population Resource Control (PRC) measures becomes a pivotal concept; PRC techniques are a significant contribution of this work.

⁵ A text which we did not formally review due to conceptual overlap with other works on this list, but it is recommended.

⁶ Edward N. Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," *Parameters* XIII, no. 4 (1983) and *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, December 2006.

⁷ *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, December 2006, p. 1-21.

The forbearer, *FM 3-24*, synchronized OIF forces by providing a common conceptual understanding and strategic vision. Similarly, *FM 3-24.2* provides a common planning framework and tools to synchronize General Purpose Forces, Special Forces, interagency elements, and non-government organizations. We expect this document to pass the test of time and serve as the primary driver of training, planning, combined operations, and scenarios at the national training centers. We assert *FM 3-24.2* is the single most important document for smaller-unit counterinsurgency commanders preparing for deployment.

Conclusion

The intended scope of this study was to capture a broader range of lessons learned in COIN that would further enhance the doctrine found in *FM 3-24* for counterinsurgency commanders. Since the majority of American COIN doctrine is founded on Galula's work in *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, it seemed prudent to examine lessons learned from various authors writing on different styles of COIN models. The types of COIN models varied across two intersecting sliding scales, the first ranging from COIN theory to COIN operations. The second scale ranged from forces working "By, With, and Through" HN units to expeditionary forces acting as the "primary counterinsurgent." After reviewing various authors, Galula's place in COIN theory and practice remains firmly rooted at the theory level in a "By, With, and Through" environment. Conversely, *FM 3-24*, which is highly influenced by Galula, also belongs in the theory realm, but frames the U.S. as the "primary COIN practitioner" vice HN units. Bodies of work that operationalized COIN, ranging from working "By, With, and Through" to "primary counterinsurgent," all seemed to expound in some way on Galula's basic premises. Jones' *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* highlighted the importance of making sure the Afghans do the majority of work themselves while Cann illustrated the complexities maintaining control in a colonial territory. While all of these readings were different in their own right, they all connected at a certain level, and as a whole helped to frame the full spectrum of COIN.

What then do all of these readings mean for new counterinsurgency commanders? The answer depends on the environment in which the commander may find himself. Possessing a solid theoretical foundation of COIN is imperative, and for that, Galula is always a great place to start. But commanders must understand that the type of environment in which they will work will determine the practical application of the readings covered in this study. A commander ready to deploy to Columbia, Philippines, or Afghanistan for the first time would benefit by reading the bodies of work that expound on those types of operating environments – those in which external forces *must* work through the host nation to be successful. In contrast, scenarios may exist in which host nation forces are inept, broken, or non-existent, which requires U.S. forces to serve as the primary COIN practitioners.

Although the authors of this essay sampled a relatively small number of readings during the course of this study, an extensive collection of material exists on the topic. Some of the more notable books and articles include Andrew Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam*, Nathan Leites and Charles Wolfe's "Rebellion and Authority: An Analytical Essay on Insurgent Conflicts," Bard O'Neill's *Insurgency and Terrorism*, Edward Luttwak's "Modern Warfare: COIN as Malpractice" and "Notes on Low Intensity Conflict," Alistair Horne's *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*, and Jeffrey Record's *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win*. Additionally, the JFK Special Warfare Center and School has published a recommended reading list for officers attending the Special Forces Qualification Course containing a number of excellent

related books for future study. Areas of future professional study should include bodies of work that look through the lens of the insurgent or guerrilla unit. Understanding counterinsurgency does not translate into understanding insurgency; the two have a dichotomous relationship and each are separate fields of study that true professionals should be able to dissect.

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