

The Basics of Counterinsurgency

By R. Scott Moore¹

Abstract

The study examines the basic characteristics of insurgencies and counterinsurgency campaigns conducted over the past century, strip away many of the prevailing assumptions. Based on detailed analysis of nearly sixty counterinsurgency campaigns, successful and unsuccessful, as well as the lessons learned by American and Coalition forces in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001, the conclusions offer a historically grounded framework for thinking about counterinsurgency. While every conflict exhibited its own unique causes and conditions requiring tailored solutions, as a whole the many counterinsurgency campaigns exhibited fundamental characteristics that remained constant. If there were no immutable laws or empirical formulas for counterinsurgency, there existed certain basic principles and traits that marked and will continue to mark successful, and unsuccessful, outcomes.

Introduction

Recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have forcibly highlighted the need to reexamine how we fight irregular conflicts, and especially insurgencies to find a strategy to address these emerging threats. Religious extremism, ethnic intolerance, and socio-economic imbalances have given birth to fanatical movements demanding radical change. Insurgencies, and the terrorism that accompanies them, pose complex challenges threatening political and social stability and defying military attempts to suppress or defeat them. Unfortunately, if the conceptual confusion emanating from the many debates over these conflicts is any indication, we seem to have forgotten the past while attempting to reinvent the future. The lack of an integrated and multi-dimensional approach to these new threats too often leads to confusion and disjointed responses and acrimonious debates not only over what needs to be done, but who- military or civilian- should do it. In the absence of an overarching strategic and operational understanding of the problem, military and civilian planners default to their own experiences and ideas, and, in many cases, grasp prevailing assumptions and accord them the status of historical truths.

To many, the new threats we face pose unprecedented challenges. Transnational conflict and weapons proliferation, religious and ethnic extremism, and mushrooming urbanization have changed the landscape on which insurgencies are being fought. The media and modern telecommunications greatly expand conflict zones; what might have been viewed as local problems just few years ago now assume regional and even international significance. Seemingly unrelated insurgent and terrorist groups coalesce,

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even if only in the virtual world, to provide support, exchange ideas and methods, and spread their violence. If insurgents once fought under charismatic leaders from remote bases using captured, externally supplied, or manufactured weapons to free their countries, they now fight as loosely organized networks with the latest technologies gained from the open market, operate from urban hideouts, and strike at regional and international perceptions. Suicide terrorism crosses borders and oceans with relative ease while the threat of weapons of mass destruction provides small groups with powers once preserved for nations. Genocide has become a weapon of war. No longer can an insurgency in a distant country be ignored as inconsequential and be left to fester.

Yet, despite these emerging realities, the fundamental nature of insurgency and counterinsurgency remain remarkably consistent, and can be discerned through careful study of the past. The following paragraphs examine the basic characteristics of insurgencies and counterinsurgency campaigns conducted over the past century, strip away many of the prevailing assumptions. Based on detailed analysis of nearly sixty counterinsurgency campaigns, successful and unsuccessful, as well as the lessons learned by American and Coalition forces in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001, the conclusions offer a historically grounded framework for thinking about counterinsurgency. While every conflict exhibited its own unique causes and conditions requiring tailored solutions, as a whole the many counterinsurgency campaigns exhibited fundamental characteristics that remained constant. If there were no immutable laws or empirical formulas for counterinsurgency, there existed certain basic principles and traits that marked and will continue to mark successful, and unsuccessful, outcomes. As with all types of warfare, history provides insights and guidance that cannot be ignored merely because present-day and future insurgencies may differ in their details from those of the past.

Insurgency Defined

The term *insurgency* conjures often widely disparate interpretations, suffering at the hands of both experts and pundits. Commonly accepted meanings remain elusive, with predictable conceptual confusion. *Insurgency* continues to be used interchangeably, and imprecisely, with *irregular warfare*, *unconventional warfare*, *revolutionary warfare*, *guerrilla warfare* and even *terrorism*. *Insurgents*, similarly, have been called *guerrillas*, *terrorists*, *revolutionaries*, *extremists*, and *irregulars*. The interchangeability of terms is understandable, given the diverse nature and adaptability of those who wage insurgency and the overlapping traits of these types of conflicts. Insurgents employ guerrilla and terrorist tactics, espouse revolutionary and radical causes, pose asymmetric threats to modern conventional forces, operate on the legal and moral margins of societies, and blur distinctions between civilians and combatants. The very use of the term *insurgency* creates legal confusion, as it infers a level of legitimacy that can pose political problems to ruling governments and counterinsurgent forces. All this adds up to level of conceptual uncertainty clouding our understanding of the strategic problem.

The Department of Defense inadequately defines insurgency as “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and

armed conflict.”² While succinct, this characterization has changed little over the past several decades, orients on military and security actions, and fails to reflect the wider scope and complexity of insurgencies today, especially their protracted and transnational nature and their political, economic, and social dimensions. With its emphasis on subversion and armed conflict, the definition identifies, by implication, insurgency as predominantly military problem.

Yet, insurgency seeks radical change to the existing political or social order through the use of sustained violence and political disruption. It is a long-term form of warfare in which military actions are carried out by guerrilla cells and terrorists, often targeting civilians and infrastructure. But guerrilla attacks and terrorism comprise only one element, and sometimes not the primary one, of an insurgency. More important than the violence of insurgency are its political, economic, and social components. These are at the heart of the conflict, both its causes and its effects. Instead of defeating armies, insurgents slowly chip away at the authority and legitimacy of the ruling government and, in many cases, the intervening power. Thus subversion, social disruption, and political action become more important than violence, however spectacular or horrendous. For these reasons, the following expanded definition is offered, one that more accurately portrays the nature and scope of insurgency in the 21st Century:

An insurgency is a protracted violent conflict in which one or more groups seek to overthrow or fundamentally change the political or social order in a state or region through the use of sustained violence, subversion, social disruption, and political action.

This expanded definition of insurgency reflects the multi-faceted character of insurgency and firmly places insurgency within the political and social realm in which it resides. While, as Clausewitz asserts, war is a continuation of politics by other means, insurgency takes that idea to a new level; it does not distinguish between the two: for insurgents, war and politics are inseparable and concurrent.

The Nature of Insurgency

Because the goal is to overturn real or perceived maladies endemic to particular conditions and situations by employing a wide range of violent, political, social, and economic means to achieve that goal, insurgencies defy simple characterization. Each insurgency reflects unique conditions, characteristics, and dynamics setting it apart and making simple solutions based on doctrinal formulas difficult if not impossible. Nonetheless, most share certain common traits. Insurgencies are largely internal conflicts waged by indigenous movements for political, economic, or social control of a particular state or region. While other states may support insurgents, the impetus for change lies not with invasion from without, but uprising from within. In fact, able to draw from loosely connected networks, often located outside the conflict zones, for expertise, clandestine funding, and ideological support they have thus grown far less reliant on

² *Joint Publication 1-02, DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* dated 12 Apr 2001 (amended to 25 August 2005)

external states for material assistance than in the past. Additionally, insurgent movements motivated by radical ethno-nationalist and religious beliefs, and sure of the righteousness of their causes, increasingly turn to subversion, violence, and terrorism to intimidate highly vulnerable populations and gain a level of “support” more akin to that normally associated with local criminal gangs than populist movements. As the 21st Century progresses, tightly controlled insurgencies based on rural unrest are giving way to loosely organized networks of extremists hiding in ethnic and religious enclaves.

Like those of the past, today’s insurgencies must employ asymmetric methods to achieve their goals. The existing regime or intervening power possesses the military, political, economic, and social resources normally held by a state, even a weak one. The insurgency must form and grow, systematically weakening the state’s grip on power. In contrast to interstate warfare, with its clear conceptual and legal separations (even if not always observed in practice) between military forces and civilian populations, insurgency makes few such distinctions. Insurgents survive by not being seen and by fighting in subversive and shadowy groups that only show themselves momentarily, and then blend back into the surrounding physical or human terrain. Notably, however, if once insurgents took refuge in remote areas and relied on external support, they now hide virtually in plain sight in populated and urban areas. Remaining in the urban shadows, operating in dispersed and compartmented cells, drawing sustenance and protection through the support, acquiescence, or intimidation of the populace, and carefully, but visibly, directing violence at civil and military targets, they gain strength and wear down their enemies. Insurgencies need not gain decisive battlefield advantage for more than few seconds; they need only keep from being tactically overwhelmed. The longer they remain a threat, the greater their chance for success.

At their most basic level, and whatever their particular circumstances, insurgencies reflect a complex, three-dimensional web of **actions, structures and beliefs**.³ Within these dimensions, and, more importantly, their interactions, can be found the causes and the cures for insurgency. Each dimension shapes, and is shaped by the other. They cannot be separated and addressed individually; to do so could, and has in the past, led to disastrous results. Each must be understood both as part of a larger whole and in its relation to the unique conditions and circumstances of the conflict. In short, these dimensions offer a framework for analyzing and comprehending insurgencies and crafting effective counter-strategies.

Actions. Actions consist of those events, behaviors, and acts that characterize and form the visual tapestry of insurgencies. They encompass the individual and group behaviors, large and small, of all those caught in an insurgency, be they insurgents, military and security forces, aid workers, local or national leaders, or the populace. The most obvious actions center on is the violence of insurgency, which can run from individual acts of intimidation to terrorist bombings to full-scale attacks. But that is only one type of many. Actions may consist of the retaliatory or repressive acts taken by a government, perhaps

³ This discussion is drawn from recent concepts of conflict and conflict resolution, notably those found in C.R. Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict*, New York: St. Martin’s Press (1998) and Hugh Miall, et. al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers (2005).

incited by the insurgents, that stokes further violence or the behaviors of police or political leaders that, over time, convince populations to support the insurgency. They may include the precipitous event that sparks a sudden outbreak of violence, such as government police forces firing into crowds during a rally. For insurgents, they include subversion, political infiltration, and economic sabotage on the part of insurgents. Because they can be planned and executed, and, more importantly, seen and often measured, actions tend to overshadow the other dimensions of insurgencies. In the end, however, actions, by themselves, represent the daily, largely tactical, aspects of insurgencies. Their strategic impact lies in their effect on the structures and beliefs comprising the much deeper roots of the conflict.

Structures. Structures are the conditions that frame an insurgency. Such terms as *stability*, *instability*, *infrastructure*, *economic development*, *humanitarian aid*, and *security* describe structural elements of insurgencies. Insurgents attempt to tear down existing structures, exploit those that are repressive, discriminatory, or corrupt, and build new ones in their stead. In Iraq, the key structural issues have centered on developing an indigenous and effective security capability and the framing and adopting a viable constitution; they have become critical centerpieces of the conflict, and ones which the insurgents seem determined to disrupt and eventually destroy. Much of the Western approach to insurgency focuses on the Wilsonian principles of economic development and democratic institutions, two structural imperatives deemed necessary to preventing or ending insurgencies. Insurgents counter with attempts to build alternative (usually radical) structures and to create an environment of instability that prevents structural reform from taking hold. Islamic Extremists, for example, offer their own solution: a caliphate that restores past glories, establishes Koranic rule, and ends repressive political regimes in the Islamic world, all of which are structural options. Today, urbanization and its associated poverty, unemployment, and social inequities provide the structural backdrop to insurgencies in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. All these, be they political, economic, social, or security, form the essential physical and conditional battlefields over which insurgencies are fought.

Beliefs. Beliefs comprise those attitudes, perceptions, prejudices, ideologies, worldviews, cultures, and social and individual identities that fuel insurgencies. These are the psychological and sociological imperatives that drive and are driven by actions and structures. Beliefs encompass more than just the conscious decision or willingness to side with one faction or the other, to support an insurgency or the government. Sometimes coined “hearts and minds”, this expression does not adequately portray this dimension of insurgency; it largely misses the complex nature of beliefs and tends to reduce them to a sort of inanimate, and controllable, constant. Instead, beliefs represent the preconceptions and mental filters that determine how individuals and groups perceive the actions and structures that surround them. The concept of beliefs must be understood within a deeper context that goes beyond conscious, and momentary, reactions to particular events or information and gets to the unconscious, often visceral, responses drawn not just from momentary reactions, but centuries of cultural interpretation. The success of such news agencies as *Al Jazeera* in shaping opinions of US actions has far less to do with how the

messages are crafted than with the receivers of the messages. Beliefs reside the very heart of an insurgency.

Insurgencies thus reflect the complex interaction between actions, structures, and beliefs. Each conflict combines them in different ways; which may be paramount depends on the situation and conditions of the particular conflict, and may even change over time. But none can be divorced from the others. Each must be assessed and understood both individually and, more important, as part of larger whole in terms of both how they interact with the others. In each insurgency, the complex and unique interface between actions, structures, and beliefs determines the path of the insurgency and, in the end, dictates the outcome. To understand the nature of insurgency demands a three-dimensional outlook.

Causes of Insurgency

Debates over the causes of insurgencies often focus on a few identifiable (and, by implication, repairable) issues, usually related to modernization, globalization, poverty, or political ineptitude. In the United States, in particular, lack of democracy and poor economic development are seen as key risk factors for insurgency. Thomas Barnett talks of the destabilizing effects of states and regions unable to tap into globalization and its economic and political benefits.⁴ Others, such as Samuel Huntington⁵, cite the violent disruptiveness of competing cultures, embodied in religious and ethno-nationalism and exemplified by Islamist radicalism and al Qaeda. Still others focus on repression, terrorism, crime and corruption, and discrimination, actions that incite popular unrest and feed insurgency. Although all these explanations provide useful insights into the causes, they fall short of explaining the underlying dynamics that cause insurgencies to erupt and then sustain them.

Insurgencies originate within often cloudy sets of conditions in which actions, structures and beliefs swirl and eventually explode into sustained violence. It is the interaction of many causes that produces insurgency, not the presence of just one or a few, however compelling they may appear. Structurally, insurgencies most often occur in poorly developed or inequitable political, social, or economic conditions. They may be exacerbated by oppressive or corrupt regimes, ethnic factionalism, lack of natural resources or disparities in their distribution, social stratification, or military occupation. The disruptions caused by modernization or globalization often highlight indigenous political and economic weaknesses. Urbanization, with its associated political and social inequities, has grown to be a critical factor in fostering unrest. Structural disparities become magnified and distorted by competing world-views, historical myths, long-held social prejudices, and radicalism, especially those espousing ethnic or religious intolerance and cultural exclusivity as solutions to problems they blame, sometimes justifiably, on others. These, in turn, are fueled and ignited by the actions that become

⁴ Thomas P. M. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the 21st Century*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons (2004)

⁵ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Touchstone Books (1996)

catalysts for insurgency, the most prevalent in recent years being state violence and repression against a particular segment of the population, economic exclusion either by existing governments or by one political or ethnic group against another, acts of corruption and crime that no longer can be tolerated, or even single acts, such as arrests, political assassinations or overreactions to protests. Sometimes, insurgencies erupt spontaneously following a particular event or series of events. Others may be choreographed by charismatic leaders who offer insurgency as an alternative to the current intolerable situation, as was the case of Mao and Castro, and is now with Osama Bin Laden. By themselves, however, even charismatic individuals are not sufficient causes of insurgency, and attempts by counterinsurgent forces to focus on these individuals can be both misguided and counterproductive. As previously stated, insurgency reflects a complex interaction of actions, structures, and beliefs that, combined, form a witch's brew of violence. This is not to say that one or a few factors, conditions, or individuals may not be more important than others. Each insurgency reflects particular deep-seated and often intractable maladies that fester and eventually can no longer be tolerated. Which dominates depends on the unique characteristics and conditions and the interactions between actions, structures, and beliefs. But these conditions and causes must be stirred, and that requires a far more complex interaction. In the end, it is the mixing of a host of factors- long term and immediate- that ultimately fuels insurgency.

Underlying, deep-seated issues, impelled to violence by the complex interaction of actions, structures, beliefs, feed on instability. Unstable states or regions, unwilling or unable to address their endemic problems, form an essential precondition for insurgency. Failed or failing states, often struggling to recover from bloody civil or interstate wars, cultivate the political, economic, and social volatility in which deep-seated maladies fester and then erupt into violence. Within cities and populated areas, instability feeds on poverty, crime, ethnically exclusive enclaves, and corruption. Unfortunately, instability too often is viewed solely as a structural problem related to economic development, democratic institutions, or social equality, perhaps because such conceptualizations lend themselves to concrete solutions. And while structural problems may indeed be critical pathways to insurgency they reside within a larger, three-dimensional maelstrom of dynamic factors that collectively define an unstable state or region. In the end, unstable structures may well be necessary causes of insurgencies, but they are not sufficient in themselves. How that instability manifests itself in actions and beliefs determines whether or not an insurgency will erupt and the nature of the conflict once underway.

Historically, the most intractable and bloody insurgencies have been rooted in extremist and exclusionary beliefs about identity, especially ethno-nationalism, cultural exclusiveness, religion, or a combination of the three. Individual and group identity, and oft-associated radically held worldviews, attitudes, and historical myths (particularly if they involve past tragedies), rarely leave room for compromise. In those states or regions where instability reigns amid state corruption or failure and includes maltreatment or inequities directed at particular ethnic or other identity groups (or, equally important, are perceived to do so), insurgencies, once begun, become bloody, no-holds barred, inflexible conflicts characterized by apparently indiscriminate violence directed at not just security

forces, but entire segments of the population. The excesses of the Algerian terrorists in the 1950s, the Tamil suicide attackers in the 1990s, and the Sunni extremists in Iraq today serve as testimony to the character of such insurgencies. Equally tragic, they often lead to counterinsurgency tactics that can be just as ruthless and intolerant, as evidenced by the French in the city of Algiers in 1956.

Urbanization has exacerbated these extremist trends. As traditional societies confront the inevitable changes of modernization, they become ever more radicalized as they search for solutions to the squalid conditions, corruption, crime, and social and political change represented by life in many of the cities of the developing world. Poverty combines with inadequate services, lack of education, exclusion, crime, and often corrupt government to create situations in which single acts or individuals can incite violence. Additionally, heavily populated areas provide many of the resources for insurgencies once thought only to exist in remote areas or from external resources. Large numbers of disaffected youth, many jobless and lacking opportunities, provide ready recruiting grounds for insurgent movements. Small arms proliferation, especially in post-conflict regions, offers steady supplies of weapons. Segregated and often insulated religious and ethnic groups who inhabit cities offer protection, support, and hidden mobility. The ability of insurgents to move and operate with relative impunity in Iraq's cities provide two examples. Baghdad, Ramadi, Fallujah and Basra are centers of insurgency and unrest, built on the already existing political and social instability and spurred by radical religious leaders and endemic xenophobia. When looking at causes of future unrest and violence, increasingly the focus must be on the conditions that exist in the world's growing urban areas. While in the past, insurgencies grew among rural peasants, they now mature among the world's displaced and vulnerable urban populations.

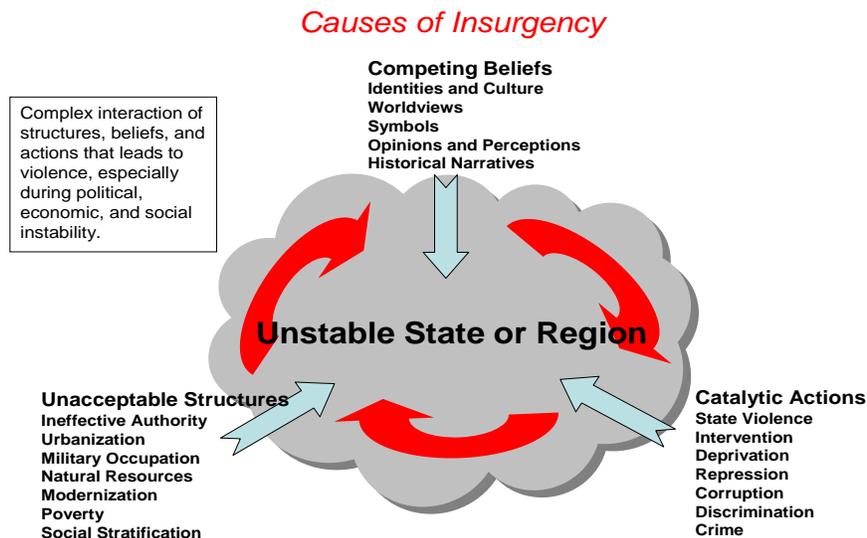


Figure (1)

Figure (1) offers a visual model of the nature and causes of insurgency. It should not be viewed as a static representation, in which a menu of actions, structures, and beliefs offers a template for analyzing a particular insurgency. Instead, it should be seen as a

dynamic illustration of the complex combinations of the many factors and conditions that can lead to and sustain insurgency. The elements listed under each dimension serve only as examples; they may be modified and added to depending on the particular situations and conditions encountered. Key to understanding this framework is the interaction of actions, structures, and beliefs. IT is the three-dimensional dynamics of these interactions that shape the causes and nature of insurgencies, and, as will be seen, the strategies for countering them.

Insurgency Strategy

Nearly 25% of insurgencies in the past century overthrew the existing political or social order; another 16%, while not gaining all their objectives, forced settlements that addressed at least some of the underlying issues.⁶ Early in the century, Russian Bolsheviks under Lenin postulated a strategy based on careful cultivation of an elite cadre of revolutionaries and subversion of the existing political and social power structure as precursors to successful insurgency. Built around urban workers, the strategy sought a sort of *coup de main* in which the ruling elite would be quickly overthrown, but only after exhaustive political preparations undermined it. Notably, Lenin did not envision a lengthy war of attrition. Mao Tse-tung, while also laying the essential political and social groundwork, advocated a strategy of protracted rural guerrilla warfare, using a three-phased approach, that moved from organization of political cadres and small guerilla bands to what he called “mobile warfare”, which called for widespread guerrilla warfare to confound and wear away the enemy to, once the enemy had been sufficiently weakened by political, social, and military attrition, decisive conventional warfare. A highly flexible strategy that emphasized prolonged political and social action to undermine the current regime, with military operations largely in a supporting and often interchangeable role, Mao’s concepts have too often been misconstrued, with his phases templated by counterinsurgency analysts in search of formulas for victory. Ho Chi Minh modified Mao’s approach to meet the unique circumstances in Vietnam, combining insurgent and conventional operations into a political-military strategy anchored on the support of the rural population and integrated military units able to move between guerrilla and conventional warfare. Like Mao, he anchored his strategy on careful cultivation of a popular base of support, but was more willing to employ local terrorism to induce it.

Castro and his lieutenant, Che Guevara, eschewed the need for political and social mobilization before conducting military operations. Instead, their *foci* strategy emphasized violence as a precursor to popular support, inciting an uprising once the weaknesses of the government became apparent. The *foci* strategy, like that of Mao and Ho, emphasized establishment of remote bases in regions inaccessible to conventional military forces. Carlos Marighella, the Brazilian revolutionary, adapted Castro’s ideas to the cities, believing that urban terrorism would prompt harsh retaliations from security forces, thus alienating the populations and leading to a general uprising. In the Middle East, a similar strategic approach emerged, first in Algeria in the 1950s and later in Palestine, but one that sought to influence world opinion in hopes of gaining international

⁶ Based on statistical and case study analysis of 58 insurgencies in the 20th Century.

support and thus force the occupying forces to withdraw. The loosely networked terrorist insurgencies that have emerged in recent years molded new technologies to this approach, especially in terms of communications and terrorist capabilities, to gain international attention (and often support), influence and mobilize populations, and strike at enemies both inside and outside the conflict zones. Today's insurgencies are more akin to the *foci* approach in their use of violence, while adopting (sometimes consciously) the urban terrorism advocated by Carlos to gain world attention and mobilize populations.

Each of these strategic approaches reflected the particular demands and requirements of the conditions in which the insurgents found themselves. Insurgent strategies varied with the specific conditions and situations in which they occurred. Additionally, insurgents continually adapted to changing circumstances and the enemies they confronted. Nevertheless, over the course of the 20th Century, certain common traits and strategic pathways emerged that continue to be at the heart of insurgency strategies today and likely will continue to in the future.

Most fundamental, insurgencies prey on and exploit deep-seated issues and the complex interplay between them. Insurgencies are symptoms of much deeper illnesses. Neither the violence of the insurgency, however horrific, nor the rhetoric of the insurgents, often incomprehensible, should mask the reality of the causes that underpin them, even if many insurgent groups appear to be less interested in redressing grievances than making the most of them. Insurgents fight for reasons that resonate in the conflict zones, and sometimes well beyond them. Whatever the tactics employed, insurgencies reflect legitimate issues, even if those issues only exist in the minds of the insurgents and their supporters. Admitting this fundamental truth provides no more legitimacy to an insurgent movement than poverty does to violent criminals. However the insurgents may be viewed, and whatever their methods, the underlying causes they reflect must eventually be addressed. Insurgencies exploit these causes to gain recognition and popular support, to discredit their opponents, and to lend credence to their activities; and many are genuine reflections of existing problems demanding resolution. Ignoring them, or worse, failing to understand them, only reinforces the insurgency's appeal.

Exploiting these causes, insurgencies strive to undermine the existing political, economic, or social order. Their objective is to loosen the grip of the ruling authorities and their security and military forces, as well as those of any intervening or occupying power, by creating uncertainty and demonstrating how ineffective the current order is, while subverting any efforts the counterinsurgent forces may make to address the underlying causes. Guerrilla attacks, sabotage, civil disorder, and intimidation of the civil population create instability and uncertainty, while local cadres, and terrorist and guerrilla cells, create a parallel, shadow political and economic structure to fill the void. All the while, rumors, propaganda, and competing ideologies prey on pre-existing attitudes, prejudices, cultural biases, and fear to create a climate of distrust and uncertainty that sustains the insurgency. Some theories of insurgency equate this use of beliefs to gaining and maintaining popular support. Such an explanation is far too simplistic, however, and largely based on Western misunderstanding of the Maoist concept of insurgency. Much

more than popular support, insurgency seeks to establish a moral ascendancy that, either through persuasion or coercion, ensures that, at a minimum, the population does not turn against the insurgents and if not willingly, at least through intimidation, remains passive or provides grudging support. In most conflicts, the majority of the population attempts to remain clear of the conflict; such detachment works in the favor of the insurgency.

For that reason, insurgencies increasingly resort to unconstrained violence, at least when measured in terms of international norms of armed conflict. This should not be confused with random or indiscriminate violence, for insurgent attacks are both purposeful and select in their intent, even if often horrific and apparently unconcerned with civilian deaths. But insurgent violence rarely conforms to the constraints levied on conventional military forces and police, who, by law, both international and domestic, must abide by basic humanitarian standards. Insurgent violence often targets the population in an attempt to intimidate, undermine morale, or discredit the ruling government. It may also specifically strike at particular individuals and groups, a strategy seen increasingly in ethno-nationalist and religious conflicts. In addition, it may be directed at economic or political structures to prevent them from being rebuilt or developed. As insurgencies increasingly are conducted in urban areas, the potential for spectacular violence also increases. In the past three decades, insurgency violence increasingly targeted populated areas rather than security forces, terrorizing and cowing the citizenry and largely neutralizing the highly destructive, but too often indiscriminate, weaponry of modern armies. Global terrorism added a new, transnational dimension, the shock effects reverberating not only in the immediate vicinity of the attack, but across a much wider audience. Terrorism's reliance on ever more stunning and bloody attacks in order to gain media attention attests to its primary aim. Insurgent violence, whatever its tactical purpose and however apparently random, nearly always seeks to influence attitudes, perceptions, and will, locally, regionally, and globally. It is unconstrained in a legal, and often accepted moral sense, but hardly imprecise or random.

Insurgent strategies are protracted ones. Few if any, insurgent groups possess the capabilities necessary for quick, decisive victory. Instead, their only hope rests in continuing the fight for as long as possible, wearing away at their enemies. To this strategic imperative must be added the sobering reality that insurgencies often reflect such deep-seated issues, especially, as earlier discussed, those associated with ethno-nationalism and identities, that they prove to be highly resistant to defeat. Insurgents may be suppressed, but unless they are eradicated or their causes addressed, they rarely voluntarily give up the fight. If insurgencies based on ethno-nationalist or religious causes tend to be the most intense and intractable, they also tend to be the most successful, perhaps because they involve issues that cannot be compromised. In particular, these have also often been insurgencies seeking to overthrow the rule of a colonial or occupying power or attempting to secede from the rule of a different ethnic or religious group.

Ambushes, improvised explosive devices, kidnappings, apparently random bombings, and selective shootings, for example, prove extremely difficult to combat and can be morally and physically debilitating to the victims. When directed at military or security

forces, such tactics incite security forces to overreact, wear away morale, provide weapons and equipment that may be left behind or captured, and keep the counterinsurgency effort off-balance. Rarely will insurgents attempt decisive tactical victory in open battle; to do so invites disaster. Quite often casualties inflicted on counterinsurgent forces may actually be relatively low. Despite the constant attrition, military casualties rarely compare to those sustained in conventional battles, let alone campaigns or wars. In fact, insurgencies today, having moved into populated areas, are changing the equations of dead and wounded. Military forces suffer far less than civilian populations. The rates of American casualties in Iraq, for example, remains at less than one half that suffered during the conventional combat leading to the fall of Baghdad.⁷ In contrast, civilian casualties have grown exponentially as terrorist attacks in urban areas take a horrific toll. The point is not to minimize the danger to or the sacrifices of American troops, but to emphasize that the effects of insurgent attacks are cumulative, and intended to wear away popular will and polarize the Iraqis rather than decisively defeat security forces in battle. Where once Mao cautioned against such tactics, insurgents now embrace them. The intentional targeting of civilians in populated areas intimidates populations and leaders, creates instability, and strikes at government control. While the carnage they inflict may be unconstrained in its tactical effects and in terms of international norms, it nonetheless reflects a carefully crafted campaign of purposeful violence aimed at the actions, structures, and beliefs of the enemy forces and regime and the wider population, as well as the regional and international audience that modern telecommunications have made participants in the insurgency.

Finally, control of urban areas has become a key element of insurgent strategies. Unlike the insurgencies of the post-World War II era, in which remote sanctuaries provided safety to insurgents (with the notable, and perhaps prescriptive, examples of such conflicts as in Brazil and Algiers), urban areas have become insurgent centers of gravity. Not only do they provide sustenance and enable terrorists and guerrillas to plan operations in relative safety, they are the breeding grounds for many of the underlying causes of unrest and thus form the essential political, social, and economic battlespace that must be controlled. This does not mean insurgents must physically or continually occupy a city or town; they merely have to make doing so untenable for government and security forces. Through apparently random attacks on heavily populated areas (such as markets or religious sites), police stations, and infrastructure, insurgents create and sustain instability. Additionally, they need only intimidate urban neighborhoods through threats and occasional assassinations to ensure needed support and anonymity. In Iraq, insurgents play a sort of cat and mouse game with security forces, moving in and out of urban areas at will, creating instability and intimidating populations and police while striking at key government facilities. Cities like Ramadi, Baghdad, and Karbala have become urban cancers that continue to fester and seem to defy efforts to cure them.

In successful insurgencies, these components are superimposed on the underlying causes of insurgency, forming a complex strategy that addresses the particular circumstances and conditions of the conflict. Strategic approaches may thus differ, and have in the past, as

⁷ Based on statistics compiled by Anthony Cordesman, "US and Coalition Casualties and Costs of War in Iraq," Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 21, 2005.

witnessed by the differences between Mao’s and Castro’s methods, yet retain a common framework. Figure (2), below, expands on the earlier graphic to illustrate the essential elements of an insurgency strategy. In the end, it is the ability of insurgents to seamlessly combine the actions, structures, and beliefs by exploiting deep-seated issues, undermining their enemies, employing unconstrained but purposeful violence, protracting the conflict until their enemies are no longer psychologically, if not physically, capable of continuing, and, control, or at least keep in turmoil, heavily populated areas that most often brings insurgent victory.



Figure (2)

Counterinsurgency Defined

As with insurgency, the term *counterinsurgency* suffers from imprecision and confusion. It has, in the past several years, been used interchangeably with *stability operations*, *foreign internal defense*, *counterguerrilla operations*, and, most recently, *countering irregular threats*. In addition, it has been included as a subcomponent of *small wars*, *unconventional warfare*, *irregular warfare*, *asymmetric warfare*, *low-intensity conflict*, and *military operations other than warfare*. While intuitively, most who conduct any or all of these types of operations know counterinsurgency when they experience it, each of these terms denotes a distinctly, if interrelated, type of conflict or military strategy that, does not define counterinsurgency as a whole. For example, *small wars* encompass a wide range of military operations that may include counterinsurgency, but also interventions, peacekeeping operations, crisis actions, and irregular warfare. On the other hand, counterinsurgency may encompass or, conversely, be a component of, depending on the strategic situation, efforts to combat terrorism, suppress guerrillas, restore security and stability, assist with foreign internal defense, and reconstruct post-conflict societies. It is easy to see where confusion may begin. Because of these interrelationships, a clear definition of the term *counterinsurgency* becomes necessary.

The current Department of Defense definition of counterinsurgency reads as follows: “Those military, paramilitary, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.”⁸ While more expansive than the doctrinal definition of *insurgency* in its acknowledgement of political and economic components (see page 3), its emphasis on defeating an enemy betrays a military bias. Additionally, it does little to aid in understanding the nature of counterinsurgency or its expected end state. Given the nature, characteristics, and strategy of insurgency, any definition of counterinsurgency must acknowledge the complexity of the conflict. For these reasons, the following definition of *counterinsurgency* is offered.

Counterinsurgency is an integrated set of political, economic, social, and security measures intended to end and prevent the recurrence of armed violence, create and maintain stable political, economic, and social structures, and resolve the underlying causes of an insurgency in order to establish and sustain the conditions necessary for lasting stability.

This definition both acknowledges the causes and dynamics of insurgency and the three-dimensional complexity of dealing with them and places military and security operations firmly within the wider context of the conflict. Perhaps most important, it also establishes the end-state of successful counterinsurgencies. In that sense, it is a prescriptive definition; understanding counterinsurgency must begin with comprehending not only its components, but its ultimate objective.

Counterinsurgency Strategy

Of the counterinsurgencies conducted during the past century, nearly 40% succeeded in either suppressing the insurgents to a point that proved manageable for local security forces or ending the insurgency altogether. In general, these results reflected two basic strategic approaches. The first, a predominantly military one, focused on the physical defeat of the insurgents. While occasionally successful in ending violence, this approach required both overwhelming force and a willingness to apply extreme measures against not only the insurgents, but the population as a whole. Unfortunately, this approach also resulted in repressive and authoritarian regimes; many installed by military coup. While the insurgents were crushed or, more likely, reduced to criminal levels, the causes that spawned them remained largely unaddressed. Counterinsurgency became an exercise in continuous suppression. Examples of this type of approach include Argentina in the late 1970s and Guatemala during the same period. While in both cases the insurgents were all but eliminated, the political and social repercussions proved politically catastrophic. More often, as was the case in Ireland in 1916 and, more recently, in Palestine today, attempted military solutions, even if effective in the short term, inflame the insurgency over time.

⁸ *Joint Publication 1-02, DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* dated 12 Apr 2001 (amended to 25 August 2005)

The second strategic approach, and one that proved most successful at achieving long-term stability, sought to resolve the conflict in all its dimensions. In this approach, counterinsurgency was not primarily about defeat of an armed enemy; rather, its main objective centered on establishing lasting stability in a state or region. Not only were the actions of the insurgents suppressed, long-term solutions to both the symptoms, and, more important, the causes of the insurgency comprised essential elements. The strategy achieved three objectives: 1) violence and subversion were brought to a level manageable by local security forces; 2) political, economic, and social institutions were built to address the many of the structural problems fomenting instability, and; 3) the hatreds, mistrust, and prejudices that fueled the conflict were transformed. In short, the root causes of the insurgency had been addressed and solved. Victory resided not simply in the defeat of insurgent forces; it involved a much broader outcome that reinstated and then maintained stability, precluding the insurgency from reemerging not because its fighters had been killed or suppressed, but because the conditions that sparked the conflict insurgency no longer existed. If an insurgency is caused by actions, structures, and beliefs that feed on instability, then counterinsurgency must combat those causes in all their dimensions.

Achieving success in counterinsurgency may be, therefore, one of the ultimate paradoxes of military history; successful counterinsurgency means meeting the demands of the enemy, or, more accurately, the causes they espouse, without giving in to their methods. This should not be taken to mean that insurgents must be appeased or tolerated, nor should their means be legitimized. But the actions of insurgents should never overshadow the underlying structures and beliefs that nurture them. While violence needs to be ended, the conflict must be resolved if counterinsurgency is to succeed. Addressing causes cannot be seen as capitulation; rather, it should be viewed as a realistic and effective strategic approach to ending the insurgency successfully. Examples of this approach include the British in Malaya in the 1950s and the US-supported counterinsurgency in El Salvador in the 1980s. In both cases, the insurgents were marginalized, and ultimately co-opted, by a strategy that addressed the political, social, and economic causes of the insurgency.

Successful counterinsurgencies tend to last, on average, nearly ten years. During that period significant military and security efforts are required to keep the insurgent threat at bay while the underlying causes can be addressed. Even when an insurgency has been largely resolved, continuous and sustained effort may be needed to ensure it does not reemerge and that political, economic, and social conditions, as well as popular attitudes, sustain stability. Like a chronic disease, insurgencies and the conditions that caused them may never be fully eradicated, and thus the need for continuous vigilance.

Notably, successful counterinsurgencies rarely involved negotiated settlements. However, this should not be taken to mean that insurgents must be forcefully eliminated or that attempts to negotiate with insurgent groups are fruitless. On the contrary, while formal agreements between the state and an insurgent movement may be rare, quite often, political accommodations result in insurgent groups either being co-opted or, more likely, ending armed conflict and becoming part of the legitimate political process. Thus,

amnesty programs, formation of new political parties that include the insurgents, or at least the groups they represent, and inclusion of former insurgent leaders in local and national political processes are as much a part of counterinsurgency strategies as are military operations.

To achieve the transformation of popular attitudes, control of populated and urban areas is imperative. Unlike for insurgents, for counterinsurgency forces- both civil and military- control must be continuous and all-encompassing. It also must be visible, requiring continuous presence to ensure safety and prevent intimidation. Control, however, involves more than physical security. It also demands provision of essential services as well as freedom of movement, the latter a dual-edged requirements that can also allow insurgents mobility. Finally, control also must be psychological; the populations must not only see it, they must accept it. They must perceive that their needs and requirements are being met; that the causes of the insurgency no longer apply to them. This can be extremely difficult in divided societies or when the security situation demands temporarily repressive measures, but without that acceptance (which, as will be discussed in a later paragraph, does not necessarily mean popular support), success will be difficult if not impossible.

The ultimate objective of counterinsurgency strategy is lasting stability, but not one that is imposed and maintained by force or repression. Stability must provide the structures necessary to peacefully address issues that may continue to arise; those structures must be understood, institutionalized, and fully accepted by the population, who now feel they benefit from them. The following paragraphs outline the tasks and critical enablers of a successful counterinsurgency strategy that, over time, can achieve that stability.



Figure (3)

Figure (3) illustrates the goals of a successful counterinsurgency strategy. Note that, like insurgency, they are three-dimensional and interactive. Actions must be sustained and not

only seek out and destroy insurgent militants, but also address, on a daily basis, the basic needs of the population and the underlying causes of the insurgency. Social, political, and economic structures must be rebuilt while the beliefs that gave rise to the insurgency must be transformed so that distrust and hatred no longer dominate.

The Tasks of Counterinsurgency Strategy

An effective counterinsurgency strategy consists of several critical tasks, which, when integrated, provide a pathway for resolving the insurgency.⁹ Combined, they determine objectives, integrate them with actions, and enable decision-makers to assess progress and change direction if necessary. While the tasks fall into functional categories, rather than being conducted sequentially, they are mutually supporting; they can not be neatly phased or performed exclusively by particular types of units or organizations. None exist in isolation; the effects of the actions taken in each should be mutually supporting. The currently prevailing idea that responsibilities for certain tasks can be neatly assigned to military forces and civilian agencies does not reflect past or present realities. Counterinsurgency, like insurgency, is too complex an undertaking for such demarcations.

Nonetheless, a successful counterinsurgency strategy, conceptually, be broken down into six functional categories that address the actions, structures, and beliefs that underpin the conflict it seeks to end. The tasks move the conflict from ending the violence to, to building stable political, economic, and social, institutions to addressing the psychological and social attitudes of the populations and factions involved. Care must be taken, however, not to divide a counterinsurgency strategy into “phases” based on metrics that move operations from one to the next. In practice, all are intermingled and inseparable; more important, how they are performed directly effects the outcomes and conduct of others.

Establish and Maintain Security. This task consists of three interrelated subcomponents: restoring security; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; and maintaining security. In most counterinsurgency strategies, restoring security initially assumed primary importance, particularly in those cases where insurgent attacks or the effects of violence posed human security risks or threatened the existence of the government. Restoring security, however, encompassed more than just defeating or eliminating guerrillas and terrorists or the forcible imposition of order. It encompassed all actions taken to defeat insurgents, end factional violence, suppress civil unrest, and eliminate criminal activity. In addition, it included measures taken to provide for the immediate physical welfare of the population and its essential institutions and infrastructure, to include providing humanitarian relief and restoration, protection, and provision of essential political, legal, economic, and social services. Restoring security often proved extremely difficult, and tended to be manpower intensive placing as great an emphasis on basic individual and small-unit skills. It demanded well-trained troops, situational and cultural awareness, precision engagement, and restraint in the use of force.

⁹ This discussion and the lists of tasks to follow are derived from analysis of nearly sixty past counterinsurgency campaigns conducted during the 20th Century.

Insurgents had to be separated from and rooted out of populated areas, a difficult and dangerous process. Lavish use of firepower, while perhaps tactically effective if insurgents could be positively identified and located, often led to operational or even strategic failure, as the French discovered in Algeria and the Americans in Vietnam. Once cleared of insurgents, areas required continuous patrolling in order to keep insurgents out; these operations required the most of small unit leaders operating in dispersed elements and consistently able to make decisions of operational and strategic impact. Small units, isolated by buildings and narrow streets and surrounded by apathetic or even hostile populations, could be highly vulnerable, especially in restricted terrain. The bloody actions of Marines in Ramadi in April 2004 attest to the difficulties of maintaining security in urban areas. In addition to tactical prowess, however, restoring security also demanded the capability to simultaneously re-establish and maintain basic humanitarian services and to shield the population, as much as possible, from the effects of the insurgency. Civil-military operations, to include temporary governance if necessary, as well as supporting relief efforts were critical components of security operations. Indeed, restoring security sometimes was as much a humanitarian task as it was a combat one.

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration consisted of a range of actions intended to collect and dispose of the weapons and ammunition that inevitably littered conflict zones while disarming (the process of collecting and disposing of weapons), demobilizing, and reintegrating former insurgents and combatants, and preventing the reintroduction and proliferation of small arms. Disarmament and demobilization of armed factions and former insurgents and soldiers, and controlling the ownership and use of weapons by general population ensured that the ruling government maintained a monopoly of the use and means of force. Disarmament, however, did not necessarily equate to collection and disposal of all weapons in an area or country; rather, it established control over the possession and movement of small arms and light weapons, as well as ammunition and explosives. It required clear sets of regulations and laws for owning weapons, as well as means of enforcing those laws. Equally important, captured and former insurgents or armed forces had to be demobilized and reintegrated into society. The presence of former insurgents who had not been reintegrated into their societies can, and did, destabilize conditions. Finally, a key component of disarmament included rearmament of police, security forces, or local militias in a manner that provided for local security and, perhaps more important, not assist in training or rearming insurgents or factions.

Maintaining stability sustained an environment in which governance, political and economic development, and rebuilding occurred without threat of political turmoil, violence, crime, or social conflict. Stability not only required that insurgents be neutralized, it also established local governance and security capacities, prevented of crime, resettled populations, protected freedom of movement for commerce and travel, enforced human rights, and backed civil authorities. To effectively maintain stability, counterinsurgent forces controlled populated areas, providing continuous security, sustaining political and legal capacities, restoring social and sustain civil service, and

addressing social problems in the urban areas. The population came to see and believe that security forces and civil authorities were both legitimate and permanent.

Provide Humanitarian Relief and Essential Services. This task provided immediate relief and rebuilt damaged and destroyed critical infrastructure while fostering and supporting local and national capacities to maintain necessary commercial, transportation, utility, communications, and social service networks and capabilities. This task often enhanced the effectiveness of security forces by minimizing vulnerability of the civil population and reducing the often destructive effects of military operations. Reconstruction- the rebuilding of essential infrastructure- was often the first step in establishing long term political and economic development and transitioning to indigenous governance. Critical to effective reconstruction was the need to carefully coordinate programs with the needs of local and regional authorities.

Promote Effective Governance. Beginning locally and extending to the national level, effective counterinsurgency operations nurtured the development and sustainment of political and legal institutions capable of providing governance within the rule of law, meeting the basic social needs of the populace, and providing both internal and external security to the country. Rather than installing so-called “democracies”, however, counterinsurgency strategies most often sought governance that created a binding “social contract” (in which the political leadership and bureaucracy saw as its primary task enhancing the welfare of the populace while the citizenry perceived the government as legitimately representing their interests and thus worthy of their support and allegiance). Establishing effective governance began in the key towns and cities, and spread from there; populated areas, to use a military term, constituted “key nodes” for both insurgency and counterinsurgency strategies.

Sustain Economic Development. The task of building and sustaining economic development, often the key to ultimately resolving the underlying causes of the insurgency, built on other efforts, especially those associated with maintaining stability, conducting reconstruction, and establishing effective governance. It created and supported economic structures, practices, and attitudes facilitating economic growth and long-term prosperity. Military forces played a key role in protecting economic growth, beginning its development at local levels, and ensuring conditions remained ripe for its expansion. Operations could range from protecting and supporting harvests to collecting taxes. Yet, much of the task also fell to indigenous leadership, quite often supported by external donors and corporations. For this reason, economic development, unless carefully monitored, could quickly fall prey to corruption, fraud, or incompetence. Sustaining economic development, in a counterinsurgency campaign could be too fragile to leave to the free market.

Support Reconciliation. In order for the conditions that underpinned the insurgency to be resolved, the psychological and social wounds that inevitably accompany internecine warfare had to be addressed. The goal of reconciliation centered on reuniting populations and countries suffering from years of internal violence and the psychological wound inflicted by it. Hatreds, distrust, and lingering animosities between the populace and

security forces and insurgent groups, between ethno-nationalist or religious factions, or directed at individuals or groups had to be defused and ultimately overcome. Revenge exacted in zones recently secured by security forces almost invariably incited new violence. Reconciliation proved to be a long-term and continuous process that included conducting investigations, truth commission, war crimes trials, and military tribunals; mediating local disputes; resettling and supporting displaced persons and populations; enforcing reparations and restitution and building local capacities for conflict and dispute resolution.

Foster Social Change. In the end, successful counterinsurgencies brought about political and social change. As earlier discussed, rarely did insurgencies erupt in stable and effectively governed societies or countries; the causes from which they emerged usually possessed at least some kernel of validity. For that reason, counterinsurgencies that attempted to maintain the *status quo* rarely succeeded; pre-existing social conditions and structures, as well as attitudes, demanded change to achieve lasting stability. This did not necessarily mean imposition of democratic, Western concepts of political liberalism, which many times proved to be counterproductive, at least if not translated into the cultural context of the conflict. Unfortunately, social change often created disruptive, especially to traditional societies, when carried out too quickly, haphazardly or arrogantly. Change could only occur within the cultural norms of the society and thus could not be imposed. Nonetheless, implementing social change remained a key part of counterinsurgency. Marines ordered to depart Haiti in 1934 bitterly complained that they had not been allowed to restructure Haitian society and thus had been unable to accomplish their mission of resolving the fundamental causes of Haiti’s unrest, despite 19 years of occupation.

Counterinsurgency Strategy

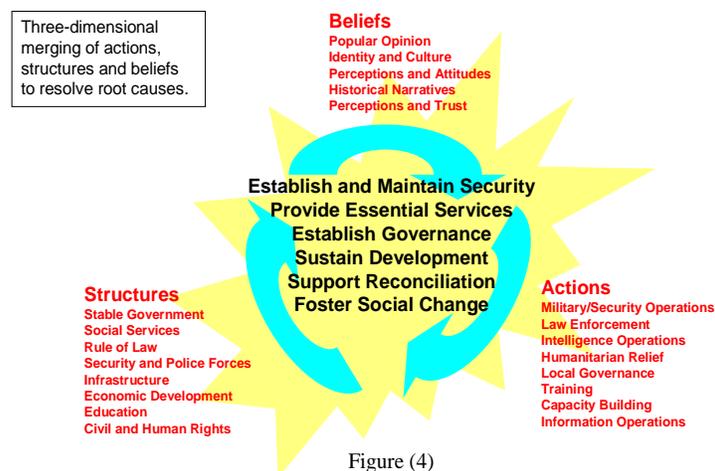


Figure (4)

Figure (4) illustrates an effective counterinsurgency strategy; in it, tasks interact within the three-dimensional dynamics of actions, structures and beliefs. The diagram represents

a dynamic process, not a static checklist that builds the necessary synergy and initiative to not only overcome the insurgents and their strategy (see figure (2)), but to resolve the underlying causes of the conflict and ensure they do not reignite violence. The tasks offer no checklists that guarantee success; they represent a framework for a long-term (on average, in excess of nine years) strategy that must be conducted three-dimensionally, with each being mutually supporting and carried out so that actions support and are supported by rebuilt structures and changing beliefs. Applied within the conditions and particular situations of each conflict, they offer a tested guide to resolving insurgencies. Finally, it should be noted that certain aspects of counterinsurgency that have become mantras of recently developed US military concepts and documents are not included.¹⁰ These include *combat operations*, *information operations*, *training security forces*, *civil security*, and *civil action*. While these are important, they are, in reality, subordinate tasks or, in some cases, enablers. They do not exist as separate tasks in their own right.

Enablers

While the tasks form the essential framework of a counterinsurgency strategy is to succeed, they are not sufficient of themselves. Certain factors must be present to enable counterinsurgency forces (civil and military) to effectively execute the strategy. These enablers cut across all tasks. Historically, they proved to be the critical factors to success; their absence largely meant failure. As such, they must be integrated into each task.

Clear Goals. Counterinsurgency demands clearly defined, unambiguous political and military goals. The pathway to resolution should be identified at both strategic and operational levels. The strategic goal must remain constant and not be swayed by the inevitable tactical and operational changes that will occur. Historically, of those counterinsurgency strategies that failed, all but one lacked clear goals or suffered from strategic and operational confusion; of these that succeeded, nearly all benefited from unambiguous goals fully understood by those planning and executing the strategy. It is not enough that the goals be stated by political leaders, however; they must be communicated to all levels and all units, organizations, and agencies involved in the counterinsurgency. Well-written statements that fail to filter to the operational and tactical levels are of little value.

Civil-Military Unity of Purpose. Civil authorities, military commanders, and, equally important, the many civil and non-governmental agencies and organizations, whether indigenous, US, or others, must coordinate to achieve the objectives of the counterinsurgency effort. While ideally, one civil or military commander may be optimal, the civil-military complexities of counterinsurgency make that largely impractical. Nonetheless, unity of purpose can be achieved through the use of coordination centers and processes, integration of civil and military organizations, such as the recently developed Provisional Reconstruction Teams deployed in Afghanistan, and common planning processes and procedures. Particularly problematic are the many civilian and

¹⁰ In particular see, see the recently published draft concepts contained in *Marine Corps Operating Concepts for Changed Security Environment* (especially Chapter 6, “Countering Irregular Threats: A New Approach to Counterinsurgency”) and the Army’s draft *FM 3-07.22, Counterinsurgency Operations*.

non-governmental workers who inhabit conflict zones; while most are well-intentioned. Somehow they must work towards a common set of goals. Past insurgencies in which many organizations went in many directions rarely succeeded.

Integrated Intelligence. Few challenge the idea accurate and timely intelligence is crucial to successful counterinsurgency. However, intelligence comprises far more than determining locations or movements of insurgents and suspect individuals, or developing targeting data. It extends beyond the realm of military concerns to encompass a wide range of information and intelligence related to political, social, economic, and security issues. Indigenous attitudes, perceptions and mores, social hierarchies, and community needs may be more important than the location of a particular insurgent or group. Insurgents make little distinction between these many elements, neither should those conducting counterinsurgencies. And, like all aspects of counterinsurgency, intelligence must be fully integrated, not only between military and government forces, but also with civilian agencies and, if at all possible, with indigenous leaders and the non-governmental actors throughout the conflict zone.

Legitimacy. To be successful, counterinsurgencies must be perceived as legitimate. Legitimacy often is equated to popular support, however, that term is much too simplistic and often focus efforts in the wrong directions. Popular legitimacy involves a more complex dynamic than the sort of popularity contest implied by phrases like “winning the hearts and minds”. Indeed, most populations caught in the crossfire of an insurgency merely want to be rid of all sides in the conflict. Instead, legitimacy within the conflict zone occurs when populations, and their leaders, understand that the counterinsurgency results benefit them more than any alternatives. It is thus as much a result of actions and structures than information operations, and cuts across all tasks. So-called “hearts and minds” campaigns rarely can justify actions that otherwise may not be legitimate, as the French learned in Algeria and US actions at Abu Graib demonstrated recently. No matter how well-crafted, information operations and strategic communications cannot overcome illegitimate actions.

Externally, legitimacy centers on domestic (in the case of supporting or intervening states) and international acceptance that the counterinsurgency effort is justifiable, worth the costs, and conducted in accordance with accepted norms and laws. Internationally and in the United States, these norms largely derive from traditional concepts of *Just War*. Failure to do so can pose significant strategic risks. Modern communications, the political necessity for counterinsurgencies to be conducted by coalition forces, and the constant, but sometimes forgotten, reality that US forces will operate in foreign lands, has raised international legitimacy to levels that often demand close scrutiny of even small unit actions. While frustrating to those engaged in daily operations, this reality constitutes an essential component of any effective counterinsurgency strategy.

In the end, internal and external legitimacy is far less a function of public information or psychological operations, as helpful as they may be in fostering it, than a reflection of the cumulative effects of a well-conceived and integrated strategy that the majority of the populations, both inside and outside the conflict zone, see as effective and conducted

within the bounds of international, domestic, and local norms, and directed at resolving the problems that led to the insurgency.

Use of Force

Many current concepts and doctrines of counterinsurgency proclaim that an essential element must be the minimal use of force. While generally true in a strategic sense, the level and type of force used is a more complex issue and largely situation dependent. Random and indiscriminate use of force, or the use of improper and unnecessarily destructive means, can be counterproductive, especially when the damage inflicted excessively affects the civil population. This is particularly critical when conducting military operations in urban areas, where even the slightest mistakes can be catastrophic in terms of lives lost and, in the long run, strategic harm. At times, however, overwhelming force at the tactical and operational levels may be entirely appropriate, even necessary. Restraint can be, and has been in the past, as strategically damaging as heavy-handedness. Indeed, timid use of force, as was the case in Fallujah in April 2004 when lack of action by US forces led to perceptions of their defeat among insurgents and the local populace, can be counterproductive if not well-thought out. The willingness and ability to use force and confront insurgents sometimes sends a psychological message that can be decisive. While the use of force should be discriminate and strike at only those insurgent targets or elements at which it is aimed, at the point of application it may be overwhelming (indeed, in some cases it should be). As with all other aspects of counterinsurgency, the type, level, and timing of any use of force must be viewed three dimensionally. Their impact on political, economic, and social structures and, more important, how they shapes the beliefs of insurgents, the population, and those scrutinizing the insurgency from afar must be carefully considered. An effective counterinsurgency strategy does not avoid combat or the use of force, nor should combat cannot become the primary tool; the use of force must be weighed in each situation, anticipating the long-term effects on all aspects of the counterinsurgency effort.

An Integrated Strategy

Insurgencies are highly complex, violent, protracted conflicts that seek fundamental political and social change. Because their goal is to overturn real or perceived maladies endemic to particular conditions and situations by employing a wide range of violent, political, social, and economic means, insurgencies seem to defy simple categorization. Nonetheless, insurgencies possesses unique conditions, characteristics, and dynamics that sets it apart and makes simple solutions based on doctrinal formulas difficult if not impossible, they also share certain common traits. Insurgency strategies generally pursue interlocking tasks, exploiting underlying causes, undermining their enemy's will, employing unconstrained (but purposeful) violence, and waging protracted multi-dimensional warfare, and increasingly, controlling urban areas.

Successful counterinsurgency requires a mirror-imaged strategy in which the tasks- from restoring security to effecting reconciliation- are carefully choreographed with each other and enabled by clear objectives, unity of purpose, sound intelligence, and internal and

external legitimacy. The strategy must be planned and executed as a fully integrated combination of continuing actions, rebuilt structures, and transformed beliefs that eventually lead to lasting stability. Those strategies that approached counterinsurgency as a solely military problem and focused on finding and eliminating insurgents while imposing security succeeded in suppressing violence only so long as military force could be brought to bear- they rarely addressed the underlying causes nor were they able to achieve lasting results. As evidenced by such counterinsurgency strategies as those conducted in Argentina and Guatemala in the 1970s, the resulting enforced stability could prove as dangerous as the insurgency itself. Those counterinsurgency strategies that conducted integrated strategies addressing root causes, such as those in El Salvador in the 1980s and Malaya in the 1950s, succeeded in achieving lasting stability. The strategies meshed civil and military objectives, executed them with a singular purpose, developed a wide-ranging intelligence capability and, perhaps most important, sustained their legitimacy while executing a three-dimensional plan that understood the effects of actions on structures and beliefs.

This paper has attempted to reiterate the basic elements of successful counterinsurgency. In much of today's rhetoric, myth and supposition has replaced critical analysis and understanding. We yearn for simple solutions and quick results; neither is possible. Counterinsurgency is not for the faint of heart or the impatient; it is a long, hard, sometimes bloody, and usually painful process that may last years and often appears to make little headway, especially if tactical outcomes are used to measure strategic progress. Nor is it for those who would neatly compartment roles and responsibilities between military and civil. Historically, military forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations carried out a wide range of civil and military tasks, many of them not traditionally associated with the use of force. More recently, civil agencies and other workers found themselves performing tasks that changed the definitions of combatants and placed them directly in the paths of battle and violence. While bureaucratic and programmatic concerns may seek to neatly compartment military and civil responsibilities, such considerations have rarely been effective. Successful counterinsurgency results from a long-term, continuous, and integrated civil-military strategy carried out by soldiers and civilians operating side-by-side, that builds lasting social, political, and economic stability in a state or region while resolving the underlying causes that that led to insurgency. Nothing less achieves success.

The Author

R. Scott Moore is currently the Director for Strategic Initiatives in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Partnership Strategy. A retired Marine Corps infantry officer, he commanded infantry and reconnaissance units from platoon to battalion landing team and participated in combat, expeditionary, and peace operations in Panama, the Balkans, the Mediterranean, Southwest Asia, the Far East, and Africa. Dr. Moore graduated from the US Naval Academy in 1976, earned an M.A. in military history from Duke University, an M.A. in international relations from Salve Regina University, and a Ph.D. in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University. His is also a graduate of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. His military decorations include the Bronze Star Medal and the Combat Action Ribbon (2).