

Military History and the Drafting of Doctrine: FM 3-24, Relevant Case Studies or Seductive Analogies?

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Military professionals value history as a tool for accomplishing objectives ranging from predicting future events and outcomes to developing new strategy and doctrine. Examining individual case studies helps reveal patterns and trends useful in forecasting, while drawing historical analogies between current and prior situations with similar characteristics can reveal "lessons learned," which are often applied to future contingencies. The U.S. Army and Marine Corps counterinsurgency manual (FM 3-24) published in December 2006 is an example of the degree to which history can influence the making of present-day military doctrine. The manual is based on the lessons learned from counterinsurgency experiences as far removed as the 1950's. While the consideration of history is undeniably important, so is the need for in depth analysis of the selected case studies and historical analogies from which lessons are drawn. Such analysis ensures similarities are more than superficial and that the lessons we are learning are the correct ones. This paper calls into question the validity of the historical analogies used in FM 3-24 and cautions against the continued reliance on historical case studies that are diminishing in relevance.

As pointed out by Frank Hoffman in his summer 2007 article in *Parameters*, a careful read of FM 3-24 reveals that the manual is firmly grounded in the classical theories of insurgency and counterinsurgency.¹ Key concepts, historical case studies, and even the list of suggested readings emphasize the experiences and lessons learned during the 1950's and 60's when politically organized Maoist inspired wars of national liberation dominated the security landscape. Sir Robert Thompson's defeat of the insurgent movement in Malaya and David Galula's efforts against insurgency in Algeria are touted as textbook examples for conducting a successful counterinsurgency. Even facets of our own experience in Vietnam are reintroduced and reexamined, in most cases to emphasize what not to do when combating an insurgency.²

From a historical perspective, the new manual's focus is understandable. Relatively recent examples of politically organized Maoist-inspired insurgencies achieving victory, most notably in Vietnam, leads us to believe our current enemies could and will adopt a similar approach in order to defeat us today. The existence of a "template" for a counterinsurgent victory, that being the writings of Thompson and Galula, further reinforces the perceived utility in emphasizing identical concepts in current doctrine. Finally, Mao's strategy and tactics for conducting an insurgency with centralized and top

down leadership structure, emphasis on maintaining the support of the rural population, and three-phased strategy for achieving victory are familiar and well understood concepts deeply engrained in the U.S. Military's collective experience. Also understood are the tools and methods for combating such strategies and tactics, such as strengthening host nation capabilities through Foreign Internal Defense and winning the "hearts and minds" of the affected population through civic actions and economic development.

Insurgency

The manual's focus on the prominent role politically organized Maoist-inspired insurgencies have played over the last 40 years has led to a general disregard for other, though historically less significant, theories of insurgency. This is despite the fact that many of these overlooked theories appear to have greater relevance in today's security environment when compared with the theories FM 3-24 is based upon. For example, FM 3-24 barely acknowledges the foco theory of insurgency, even though focoism calls for a decentralized leadership structure, lack of political parties or cadre, and an emphasis on the use of force to achieve victory, all hallmarks of the global insurgency we face today.³ Similarly, FM 3-24 makes no mention of the theory or practice of insurgency championed by leaders such as Carlos Marighela. Marighela's theory was an adaptation of Che Guavera's foco theory, which, instead of focusing on the rural population, identified the city as the key battleground in which efforts to destroy the current political, economic, and social system would succeed or fail. Terrorism, kidnapping, sabotage of infrastructure, and a propaganda campaign using mass communications and the media formed the foundation of Marighela's insurgent movement.⁴ The idea of leaderless resistance, with its independently operating cells, lack of central control, and reliance upon the media to communicate successes and recruit new members, also is not discussed or explored in FM 3-24.⁵ This is despite the fact that such an organizational concept has already been adopted by Al-Qaida and its associated movements.

The tendency to devote substantial resources to only studying those insurgent movements that have achieved victory in the traditional sense of the word helps explain the lack of analysis devoted to these theories of insurgency, even though focoism and Marighela's movement, to name a few, share important similarities with today's global insurgency.⁶ The historical propensity for focoist insurgencies to fail, aside from the Cuban experience, which experts agree succeeded due to a set of highly unique circumstances, and Marighela's failed experiment that resulted in his death at the hands of Brazilian security forces, supports the perception that there is little of value that can be learned from studying theories that have no record of "winning."⁷ Similarly, leaderless resistance has historically been associated with radical animal rights groups, environmental activists, and white supremacist operating in the United States, all with no clear record of success.

The emphasis on studying insurgencies that have achieved a decisive military or political success assumes that today's insurgents have similar objectives. Based on the writings of Steven Metz, David Kilcullen, and other experts, this is far from certain.⁸

In addition to the lack of attention given to the theories of insurgency mentioned above, FM 3-24 has two glaring oversights or miscalculations that have a profound impact on how we view and conceptualize insurgency. First, the manual assumes yesterday's Maoist-inspired insurgents and those of today's religiously-inspired groups have a similar overarching ideology that can be countered with similar strategies. However, as pointed out by John W Jandora, Communist insurgencies, whether traditional Maoist-inspired, foco, or Marighela's urban-based organizations, are grounded in the same western philosophy and ideology emphasizing material well being. Jandora argues that the ideology of today's insurgents is the opposite of Communism. It is based on spiritual salvation, social justice as determined by the Qur'an, and, perhaps most important, is anti-materialistic. Thus, Jandora cautions that tried and true counterinsurgency approaches focusing on winning "hearts and minds" through economic incentives will not work and can even lead to greater conflict.⁹ Frank Hoffman reinforces this idea in his summer 2007 article in *Parameters*, stating that "economic inducements and material gains will not overcome someone's faith or religious identity."¹⁰

Supporting the misperception on ideological similarities between the politically-organized insurgencies of the past and those of today is the manual's assertion that in "all cases insurgents aim to force political change. Military action is only a means to an end." The manual acknowledges that "each insurgency is unique," and correctly points out the need for the counterinsurgent to identify the philosophy behind the approach insurgent leaders have adopted to serve as the foundation of their movement. However, it fails to take into account the changed motives driving today's global insurgency.¹¹ Warfighters and academics alike continue to analyze today's insurgent narratives, the historical grievances and references insurgent leaders use to justify their actions and promote their cause, through the lens of relatively recent historical events, most of which are steeped in Marxist, Maoist, or Guevarist theory, both in terms of overarching ideology and battlefield strategy and tactics.

John Jandora addresses this topic in a May 2007 article in *Small Wars Journal*. In his article, he states that "we can find explanations for the thought and behavior of the jihadists from inside their own culture, not from Maoist or Guevarist theories of insurgency." Jandora then cites historical examples from the Ottoman Empire and from other Islamic case studies dating as far back as the eighth century to provide an Islamic view of the overarching philosophy, planning, organization, and functioning of al-Qaida and its associated movements.¹²

Counterinsurgency

The way in which the U.S. views and relates to counterinsurgency is similar to the pattern described above. Both FM 3-24 and the numerous articles on counterinsurgency strategy and tactics that have been published since the events of 11 September have focused on an extremely narrow pool of historical examples from which to draw lessons. Events and circumstances surrounding the British and French success in Malaya and Algeria and U.S. failure in Vietnam have been dissected ad nauseam in an attempt to garner fresh insights that can be applied to Iraq and Afghanistan. Analysts have paid only cursory

attention to examples such as the U.S. experience in the Philippines, the British campaign in Iraq during the 1920's and later in Northern Ireland, and the French experience in Vietnam. Even less analytic effort has been expended on examining conflicts such as the British Indian Army's campaigns in what is today the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan, as well as British campaigns in Cyprus and Dhofar or the numerous insurgencies that occurred throughout Latin America and Africa. Most glaring is the complete omission of the counterinsurgency experiences of nonwestern states, even though some have a rich history of successfully defeating, or at least containing, insurgent movements similar to those we are currently combating and are likely to face in the future.

For example, FM 3-24 makes no mention of the Indian Army's rich experience in combating insurgent movements, both Maoist-inspired and religiously-based, that it has dealt with in the 60 years since Britain granted independence. In particular, India's handling of the Sikh uprising in the state of Punjab during the 1980's and 90's and its continued efforts to quell the Pakistani-backed Muslim insurgency in the state of Kashmir are ignored. Russia's experience in Chechnya, where forces confronted a hybrid insurgency composed of Chechen nationalists, jihadi elements, and organized crime syndicates is likewise not mentioned. Finally, the manual overlooks Thailand's successful prosecution of a counterinsurgency campaign during the 1970s and 80s that, even though it involved countering a Maoist-inspired insurgency, could prove instructive in today's circumstances.

Reasons for the manual's failure to analyze and exploit lessons learned from more obscure examples of counterinsurgency practices, particularly from nonwestern nations, are similar to those described in the previous section. Commonly cited and analyzed examples of counterinsurgent strategies and tactics are those that are most familiar and, to a large degree, have proven successful. These examples recount the efforts of western powers attempting to quell an insurgency through the application of varying combinations of political, economic, and military power, a situation seemingly similar to that which we are facing today.

Conclusions

While the general concepts FM 3-24 is based upon hold ideas worth considering, the overall validity of the case studies and analogies used, both in terms of the insurgent and counterinsurgent dynamic, need to be more carefully examined to insure we are drawing lessons from case studies whose similarities to today's circumstances are more than superficial. Focusing on the motivating factors driving the politically-organized insurgents of 40 years ago and the elements contributing to counterinsurgent success in places like Malaya and Algeria is tempting, if for no other reason than because they are familiar. But for the reasons described above, the true value and applicability of these examples needs to be more thoroughly examined. As Richard Neustadt and Ernest May point out in their book entitled *Thinking in Time*, reliance on analogies that are not thoroughly dissected and analyzed is at best misleading and at worst dangerous. The superficial similarities between the case studies forming the foundation of FM 3-24 and

the counterinsurgencies we are currently engaged in have resulted in the perfect set of conditions for falling prey to what Neustadt and May refer to as a “seductive analogy.” This occurs when one supposes that a problem is what it used to be when, in reality, conditions have changed.¹³ Avoidance of this trap can only be accomplished through revising the way in which we think about insurgency and counterinsurgency.

FM 3-24 very rightly underscores the necessity for adaptability, flexibility, and well thought out actions at the tactical and operational level, but fails to apply these characteristics to our overall strategic approach to defeating insurgency. While the current application of the new doctrine appears to be showing signs of success in Iraq, at least in terms of metrics measuring levels of violence and U.S. casualties, our enemy’s well documented strategic, operational, and tactical adaptability all but guarantees that current doctrine will be out of date for the next conflict and result in the well known axiom of trying to “fight the last war again.” Iraq and Afghanistan are but two battles in the overall “Global War on Terrorism,” and if we are to secure victory, our ability to think and adapt must exceed that of our enemy’s. Relying on insurgent and counterinsurgent theories based on purely western experiences, ideals, and philosophies is a serious oversight that constrains our ability to accomplish our objectives. Well schooled students of military history recognize that the practice of a weaker enemy trying to defeat a stronger adversary through asymmetric means—the very heart of what an insurgency is attempting to do—did not begin with Britain’s experience in Malaya or even the French experience in the Spanish Campaign of 1808. With that in mind, why do we continue to limit our collective focus to a small set of historical examples whose relevance in today’s security environment is increasingly questionable?

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¹ Frank G. Hoffman, “Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency?” Parameters Summer 2007, Vol. XXXVII, No. 2, pp. 71-87.

² U.S. Army, Counterinsurgency-FM 3-24, Paladin Press, 2006.

³ Ernesto "Ché" Guevara, Guerrilla Warfare (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961)

⁴ Carlos Marighella, Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla, 1969, accessed on 15 May 2008 at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marighella-carlos/1969/06/minimanual-urban-guerrilla/index.htm>

⁵ Simson L. Garfinkel, Leaderless resistance today, , Accessed on 29 April 2008 at http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue8_3/garfinkel/.

⁶ DR. David Kilcullen, Countering Global Insurgency: A Strategy for the War on Terrorism, access on 22 March 2008 at <http://www.smallwars.quantico.usmc.mil/search/Articles/CounteringGlobalInsurgency.pdf>.

⁷ Ian Beckett, Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and Their Opponents Since 1750, Routledge, 2001.

⁸ Steven Metz, Rethinking Insurgency, accessed on 4 May 2008 at www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/Pubs/display.cfm?pubID=790. See also David J. Kilcullen, New Paradigms for 21st Century Conflict, accessed on 30 April 2008 at <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0507/ijpe/kilcullen.htm>.

⁹ John W. Jandora, “Mao in Mufti? Insurgency Theory and the Islamic World,” Small Wars Magazine, 4 February 2006, accessed on 29 March 2008 at <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/documents/swjmag/v5/jandora.htm>.

¹⁰ Hoffman, Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency.

¹¹ U.S. Army, Counterinsurgency-FM 3-24, Paladin Press, 2006.

¹² John W. Jandora, “Al-Qa’ida as Raid-Based: Technique from the Past?” Small Wars Magazine, May 2007, accessed on 29 March 2008 at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/swjvol8.pdf>.

¹³ Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, Thinking in Time: the Uses of History for Decision-Makers, Free Press 1988.