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A Third COIN Course of Action SWJ Review of *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq*

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A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq by Mark Moyer, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2009, 368 pp., \$30.

Years from now, local economists and civic leaders may well curse the name Dr. Mark Moyer for the irreparable harm he did to the local Washington, DC economy in 2009-2010, and blame him for creating the conditions necessary to finally inhibit the unfettered flow of government money to local defense corporations asserting special skills or knowledge applicable to counterinsurgency. Over the past decade, thousands of retired and former military professionals have created new-identities for themselves as counterinsurgency or counterterrorism experts around the Metro DC area regardless of their lack of experience, training, or education in those fields. This re-branding created financial and professional opportunities that were only possible due to the absence of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism knowledge within the Department of Defense and individual military branches in the period immediately before and after the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001; thus, we in the military have no one to blame but ourselves. Thankfully, after hundreds of books and thousands of articles produced by self-proclaimed counterinsurgency experts, that were truly more akin to travel monologues detailing individual lessons learned during extensive periods in-theater ranging from 10 days in Kabul or Baghdad to a 12 months combat deployment in which the author was fortunate if he ever left the immediate 5 miles around his Forward-Operating-Base, we finally have a book worthy of careful examination and an all-important second-read.

Dr Moyer's *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* is that book, and is a "must-read" for any military professional or serious student of national security policy, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, or operational art. By distancing himself from self-professed experts capable only of regurgitating thoughts and assertions made earlier and better by the counterinsurgency trinity of Sir Robert Thompson, General Sir Frank Kitson, and LtCol David Galula, Moyer has done the impossible and provided a third course of action to all counterinsurgency professionals and practitioners mired in the population-centric versus enemy-centric debate. Yes - there is a third option; and yes, this means that those lecturing us idiots that

it is all about the people, may have to stop and think what that actually means prior to saying it. In *A Question of Command*, Dr Moyar makes a true contribution to the continuing counterinsurgency debate by asserting that a leader-centric approach may have the same if not greater efficacy than a population-centric or enemy-centric approach. What does this assertion mean in practical terms? It means that our intelligence and analytical personnel and systems must be capable of identifying these leaders within the target society or organization, as well as understand the extent of their influence and reach, and what possible futures will result upon their absence or removal. It means that within our own manpower system we need to develop a process to refine normative career paths, routine command-cycles, and personal & unit combat rotations in order to identify and exploit those leaders with the necessary counterinsurgency aptitude. Most importantly, it means that we need to re-educate our military forces and civilian DoD leadership in order to create a shared understanding of a leader-centric approach and its implications.

For those who will immediately dismiss Dr Moyar's hypothesis and defer back to the comfort of more known and accepted approaches such as population-centric or enemy-centric, consider the following: To be successful in a population-centric approach, the counterinsurgent must convince the populace of the inevitability of his success, identify and understand popular grievances, the needs of the people, and other causal factors that will produce the desired result - support for the government and counterinsurgent forces. Within a target society or group, which individuals know these things better than any other, and will most likely be exploiting them? Answer - Civil or Military Leaders within that target group. By developing a shared understanding of these leaders, the counterinsurgent will be able to best utilize a population-centric approach, and select leaders capable of mirror-imaging when appropriate. Who will inspire his own counterinsurgency force and convince them of the inevitability of success? Answer - Moyar's counterinsurgent leader with the skills articulated in the first 15 pages of the book. For those fans of the enemy-centric or counterterrorism approach in which violence applied in the sufficient amount and the appropriate time will break the will and capacity of insurgents, the leader-centric approach is consistent with your pre-existing mental model. While Moyar asserts that the efficacy of the counterinsurgent force and approach is dependent upon the identification of the appropriate leader(s), one can also conclude that the same must hold true for the insurgent; thus, you could potentially kill your way to a workable solution if you were able to identify and eliminate all those individuals within your target-set capable of exercising effective leadership and control of their movements. In other words, self-professed experts should embrace Moyar's arguments in order to reinforce their own, rather than dismiss it as something not worthy of further discussion.

Although the book is less than 300 pages in total length, Dr Moyar is able to dedicate 40 pages to explaining leader-centric warfare to include recommendations for utilization, while also providing 240 pages of context through the use of nine case studies. I am aware that some have criticized his failure to include their favorite case-study, and that others with 7-12 months experience in Afghanistan do not share his conclusions. Those who offer either critique are missing the point - people/leaders matter most! If you desire to criticize his conclusion that counterinsurgency requires a specialized skill set and aptitude not shared by all military leaders then please understand that you are in fact arguing that General Westmoreland was just as capable and effective as General Abrams, that General Sanchez was just as capable and effective

as General Petraeus, and that President Lincoln could have been replaced at anytime without consequence. The facts don't support this conclusion.

As a military professional who has read most recent works that have been heralded as "must-reads" or as works providing unusual or original insights into counterinsurgency, I have been disappointed the vast-majority of the time. Rarely have I read anything on counterinsurgency that provided true "food-for-thought" other than that which was produced by Galula, Kitson, or Thompson. But Dr Moyar has produced a volume that may be as influential as those written by the Big 3 COIN savants. The book is very well organized, and it provides overwhelming evidence for the author's hypothesis in a manner that does not become repetitive and boring. While those currently benefitting from the lack of original thought within counterinsurgency circles may deride this work and Dr Moyar personally, he is an expert, and his assertions deserve further examination and your considered thought. For all true military or national security professionals, take my advice - take a week of leave and digest all three of Dr Moyar's books.

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