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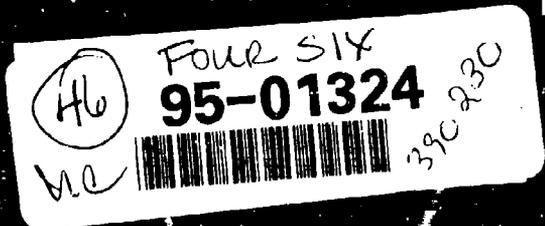
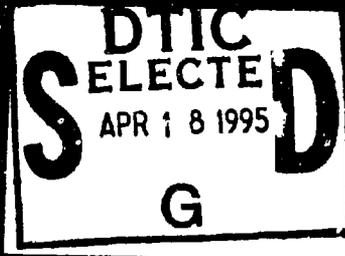


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COUNTERINSURGENCY:

Strategy and the Phoenix
of American Capability

Steven Metz



U.S. Army War College



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Final Report

Counterinsurgency: Strategy and the Phoenix
of American Capability (U)

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The author argues that insurgency is mutating in response to changes in the global security environment, thus making much of U.S. strategy and doctrine obsolete. Even though counterinsurgency is not currently a high priority in U.S. national security policy, the military must keep abreast of such changes and preserve some expertise so that American capability could be reconstituted should policymakers again opt for active counterinsurgency support. He states that if the military ignores global developments in insurgency and counterinsurgency, the reconstitution of capabilities would be more difficult.

insurgency; counterinsurgency; Global South; post-Cold War; Maoist "people's war"; low intensity conflict 42

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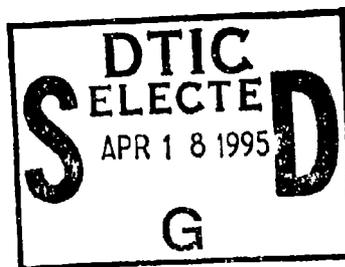
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**COUNTERINSURGENCY:
STRATEGY AND THE PHOENIX
OF AMERICAN CAPABILITY**

Steven Metz



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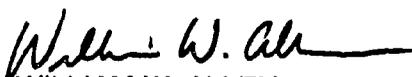
Comments pertaining to this report are invited and should be forwarded to: Director, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050. Comments also may be conveyed directly to the author by calling commercial (717) 245-3822 or DSN 242-3822, FAX (717) 245-3820, DSN 242-3820.

FOREWORD

Counterinsurgency is seemingly not of great concern to the U.S. Army today. This may represent a period of remission rather than the apparent abandonment of the mission. It is possible that the U.S. military may again become engaged in counterinsurgency support in the future.

In this study, Steven Metz argues that the way the Department of Defense and U.S. military spend the time when counterinsurgency support is not an important part of American national security strategy determines how quickly and easily they react when policymakers commit the nation to such activity. If analysis and debate continues, at least at a low level, the military is better prepared for the reconstitution of capabilities. If it ignores global developments in insurgency and counterinsurgency, the reconstitution of capabilities would be more difficult.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer this study as part of its ongoing analysis of the strategic dimensions of military operations other than war.



WILLIAM W. ALLEN
Colonel, U.S. Army
Acting Director
Strategic Studies Institute

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

STEVEN METZ is Associate Research Professor of National Security Affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College. Dr. Metz has taught at the Air War College, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and several universities. He holds a B.A. and M.A. in international studies from the University of South Carolina, and a Ph.D. in political science from the Johns Hopkins University.

SUMMARY

Today, there is no pressing strategic rationale for U.S. engagement in counterinsurgency but history suggests that if the United States remains involved in the Global South, one may emerge. American counterinsurgency strategy has unfolded in a distinct pattern over the past 50 years. At times, policymakers saw a strategic rationale for engagement in counterinsurgency. When they did, the military and Department of Defense formed or reconstituted counter-insurgency doctrine, concepts, and organizations. When the strategic rationale faded, these capabilities atrophied. This pattern may be repeated in the future.

During the last decade of the Cold War, the U.S. military developed an effective approach to insurgency and implemented it in El Salvador, but this focused on one particular type of insurgency: Maoist "people's war." The El Salvador model may not apply to post-Cold War forms of insurgency. Moreover, many of the basic assumptions of American counterinsurgency strategy appear obsolete. Trends such as ungovernability, the routinization of violence, and the mutation of insurgency change the costs/benefits calculus that undergirded Cold War-era strategy and doctrine.

During the current period of remission in insurgency, the Army should use its intellectual resources to analyze ongoing mutations in insurgency and to open a debate on the nature of a cogent post-Cold War counterinsurgency strategy. This strategy should expand its conceptual framework and stress three principles: selectivity, multilateralism, and concentration on secondary support functions including indirect or second-tier engagement. Such efforts will pave the way for the reconstitution of American counterinsurgency should it be required.

COUNTERINSURGENCY: STRATEGY AND THE PHOENIX OF AMERICAN CAPABILITY

Introduction.

The insurgents of the world are sleeping. Few new old-style insurgencies have emerged since the end of the Cold War and many old ones, from the Philippines to Peru, from Mozambique to El Salvador, from Northern Ireland to the West Bank and Gaza are lurching or inching toward settlement. But sleep is not death—it is a time for rejuvenation. Since the means and the motives for protracted political violence persist, it will prove as attractive to the discontented of the world in the post-Cold War global security environment as it did before. Eventually insurgency will awaken. When it does, the United States will be required to respond.

Since the late 1940s, the importance American policymakers attached to supporting friendly states facing guerrilla threats has ebbed and flowed. Often counterinsurgency was not considered strategically significant and the defense community paid it little attention. When the president did decide that insurgency posed a threat, the military and the defense community had to craft or update an appropriate conceptual framework, organization and doctrine. Like a phoenix, American counterinsurgency capability periodically died, only to be reborn from the ashes. And always, how the period of remission was spent shaped the process of rebirth. When the military and defense community maintained a cadre of counterinsurgency experts to ponder past efforts and analyze the changing nature of insurgency, the reconstitution of understanding and capability was relatively easy.

Today there is no pressing strategic rationale for U.S. engagement in counterinsurgency, but history suggests one may emerge if the United States remains involved in the Global

South. This is the time, then, for introspection, assessment, and reflection—for keeping the intellectual flame burning, even if at a very low level. Just as conventional combat units train after an operation in order to prepare for future ones (while hoping they never occur), the U.S. military and other elements of the defense community must mentally train for future counterinsurgency. This entails both looking *backward* at previous attempts to reconstitute counterinsurgency capabilities and looking *forward* to speculate on future forms of insurgency and the strategic environment in which counterinsurgency might occur. To do this now will shorten the period of learning and adaptation should counterinsurgency support again become an important part of American national security strategy.

Threat and Response, Mark I.

From the end of World War II, revolutionary insurgency was epidemic in the developing world, driven by an unfortunate conflux of trends and factors. For instance, most Third World governments exercised only limited or ineffective control over parts of their nations. Because of rugged terrain, poor infrastructure, government inefficiency, and tradition, the common pattern was for the influence of the regime to decline according to distance from the capital. The national government was something of an abstraction. As Jeffrey Race noted in his classic study, *War Comes to Long An*, “for the majority of the Vietnamese population, ‘government’ has always meant simply the village council—the peasant had little experience of any other.”¹ The fragile legitimacy of many Third World regimes also helped set the stage for insurgency. Since many Third World states were artificial creations of colonialism, no national government, however good, would be accepted by all segments of the population. The stress on local or primal identities during the colonial period—part of a deliberate “divide and conquer” approach by the imperial metropolises—exacerbated this problem. In Asian and African states where decolonization was peaceful, regimes often found it difficult to build legitimacy because of the taint of association with the colonial masters. Even in regions long independent or

autonomous such as Latin America and parts of the Islamic world, repression and corruption by autocratic or traditional regimes eroded government legitimacy.

The electronic and transportation revolutions of the 20th century also paved the way for revolutionary insurgency by allowing people in remote regions to develop an accurate sense of their predicament. Before modern communication, the hinterland poor assumed that all the world lived as they did. With the advent of modern communication, they recognized their disadvantages and, more importantly, blamed the government. The result was what social scientists call the "revolution of rising expectations" which simply meant that demands on Third World states tended to grow faster than the government's ability to meet them, thus generating frustration. Empirical studies have closely linked the resulting "perceived relative deprivation" with political violence.² Improvements in communication and transportation also gave revolutionaries methods to organize support and allowed them to study and emulate revolutionary success in other parts of the world.

At the same time, changes in global values helped legitimize revolutionary violence. Although Americans often forgot it during the Cold War, armed resistance to repression has been an intrinsic part of the Western political tradition, enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. Reflecting this, the political left in the United States and Western Europe remained sympathetic to Third World revolutionaries fighting repressive regimes. Ironically, the ascendance to superpower status of the United States, with its strong liberal tradition, helped spark global consciousness concerning human rights which, in turn, further legitimized armed resistance to repression. It is not coincidence that Ho Chi Minh cited the American Declaration of Independence during his announcement of the independent Republic of Vietnam in 1945.³ The French-speaking parts of the Third World also found justification for revolution in their intellectual heritage. The liberating effect of political violence was a recurring theme among French thinkers Rousseau through Georges Sorel.⁴ Frantz Fanon, who argued that only violence could psychologically liberate the victims of colonialism, was very

influential among Third World radicals.⁵ And throughout the 1950s and 1960s the United Nations General Assembly, increasingly dominated by Third World nations recently liberated from colonialism, implicitly and, sometimes, explicitly approved armed struggles which it considered "just."

Finally, the existence of an international support network manipulated by the Soviet Union encouraged the spread and persistence of insurgency. Armed opponents otherwise easy for even weak regimes to defeat became serious threats with training, advice, equipment, and sanctuary from the Soviet Union, China, or one of their surrogates. Mao's triumph in 1949, in addition to providing a blueprint for successful revolution, offered potential insurgents proof that even apparently strong, Western-backed regimes could be defeated.

Insurgency took a number of forms, some specific to certain regions or countries, others global, but all were attempts to alter the social, political, and economic status quo through violence. In contrast to insurrections or coups d'état, insurgencies were characterized by protractedness and broad participation. In essence, insurgent strategists had two tasks: first, *strip* legitimacy from the regime, and, second, *seize* it themselves. The precise strategy of an insurgency varied according to its leaders' backgrounds, personalities, and answers to questions concerning the nature and extent of the insurgent coalition, its ideological framework, geographic focus, and the priority accorded the military and political dimensions of the conflict.

Maoist "people's war" was successful less because it was truly new or innovative than because it was holistic, integrated, and synchronized while the efforts of the counterinsurgents were sometimes astrategic or, at best, torn by contradictory and counterproductive practices.

Of the insurgent strategies that appeared during the Cold War, Maoist "people's war" was undoubtedly the most successful. With the exception of Cuba, nearly all victorious insurgents—Vietnam, Cambodia, Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Guinea Bisseau, Namibia, Algeria—followed

some variant of Maoist "people's war." This had several defining characteristics: the primacy of political organization over military operation, the development of extensive political undergrounds and common fronts of "progressive" organizations and movements, protractedness, and emphasis on rural areas. All of these are simple ideas. Why, exactly, was "people's war" so successful? In part, because it correctly identified and targeted the key vulnerabilities of most Third World regimes: limited legitimacy, weak public support, and shaky control of the hinterlands. Maoist "people's war" was also able to organize the very real, local grievances of Third World peasants into a strategically significant movement. This distinguished "people's war" from the innumerable serf, slave, and peasant rebellions of the past, most of which never transcended their local roots. Maoist "people's war" was successful less because it was truly new or innovative than because it was holistic, integrated, and synchronized while the efforts of the counterinsurgents were sometimes astrategic or, at best, torn by contradictory and counterproductive practices. And, finally, Maoist "people's war" succeeded because it was new.

Still, many of the key counterinsurgent powers had dealt with small wars before. The French and British fought insurgent-style opponents during their colonial expansion in Asia and Africa, and the United States had faced guerrillas during the Indian wars and in the Philippines, Mexico, and Nicaragua.⁶ Yet this did not immediately translate in proficiency at opposing communist "people's war." After some initial problems, though, the United States came to grips with the Huk Rebellion in the Philippines and the British eventually defeated a Chinese-inspired insurgency in Malaya.⁷ The French developed the most elaborate concept of counterinsurgency but had the least success implementing it. Based on their experience in Indochina, the French concluded that counterinsurgency must mirror "people's war." It thus required a careful blend of military, political, and psychological efforts including pro-government propaganda, mobilization of the state's political resources, attacks on the subversive infrastructure, reconquest of liberated zones, isolation and destruction of insurgent military forces, and diplomatic efforts.⁸

Similarly, the British stressed strict unity of effort between the military, economic, political, and police forces during counterinsurgency, effective political and psychological operations, and the limited use of firepower in military operations.⁹ Initially, neither of these concepts found eager converts in the U.S. military. Rather than use the 1950s to hone their understanding of insurgency, policymakers and senior military leaders ignored the hard-earned wisdom of America's allies and forgot what the United States itself had learned and captured in documents like the Marines' astute *Small Wars Manual* of 1940.¹⁰

During President Dwight D. Eisenhower's tenure, American national security strategy had been based on "massive retaliation."¹¹ American superiority in strategic nuclear weapons, he believed, would deter Soviet aggression better and more cheaply than conventional forces. In the 1950s strategic thinkers linked nuclear stalemate and "indirect aggression," but thought this would come as limited conventional war.¹² As a result, Americans trained their Third World allies to confront Korea-style external invasion rather than internal threats. In addition, U.S. conventional forces had declined precipitously after the Korean War, leaving the United States with little to counter guerrilla warfare. Even Army Special Forces, which were created at this time, focused on partisan warfare and unconventional operations in Europe rather than insurgency. To the extent that Third World conflict was a problem, Eisenhower and his national security team felt that the European colonial powers—Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Belgium—would deal with it.

Under Kennedy, this changed. Inspired by Khrushchev's January 1961 speech endorsing "wars of national liberation," the eroding security situation in Laos and South Vietnam, the consolidation of Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba, the French defeat in Algeria, and the outbreak of communist insurgencies in Colombia and Venezuela, Kennedy was convinced that indirect aggression through guerrilla insurgency had become a paramount security threat. The strategic rationale for U.S. engagement in counterinsurgency thus grew from ideas like the "domino theory" and the notion of "death by a thousand

small cuts" advanced by French theorists of *guerre révolutionnaire*. Revolutionary war, this group believed, was the dominant form of conflict in the late 20th century. A defeat for pro-Western forces even in places that appeared strategically insignificant became important when seen as one more small contribution to global Soviet victory. Metaphorically, at least, the Cold War consisted of interminable skirmishes rather than decisive pitched battles. The strategic significance of insurgency, in other words, was symbolic and perceptual rather than tangible and empirical.

Kennedy immediately instigated a wide-ranging program to improve U.S. capabilities.¹³ He first formed a Cabinet-level Special Group—the Interdepartmental Committee on Overseas Internal Defense Policy—to lay the groundwork for a unified counterinsurgency strategy and coordinate the disparate elements of the government.¹⁴ The Pentagon established the Office on Counter-Insurgency and Special Activities headed by Major General Victor H. Krulak (USMC) and gave him direct access to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense.¹⁵ The services integrated counterinsurgency into their professional educational systems, and established training centers. Army Special Forces were expanded and reoriented toward counterinsurgency assistance. Even the State Department and Agency for International Development began to take counterinsurgency seriously (albeit with less enthusiasm than the military).¹⁶

Within a year, the Interdepartmental Committee released a basic statement of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy. It stated:

The employment of indirect aggression through the use of subversion and insurgency against Free World institutions is related directly to the fact the world is dominated by two over-whelmingly strong centers of power. These power centers tend to become involved directly or indirectly in most of the critical situations that occur throughout the world. They tend at the same time to muffle any violent confrontation so as to avoid escalation to the nuclear level. On the part of the communists, this has resulted in an increased effort to seek their objectives by subversive insurgency rather than overt aggression.¹⁷

Reflecting the theoretical work of Kennedy advisor Walt Rostow, the policy assumed economic "take off" was inherently destabilizing and stressful.¹⁸ Communists, under the leadership of the Soviet Union, exploited this for their own geostrategic ends. The solution was to ameliorate the root causes of the insurgency, to "deal with and eliminate the causes of dissidence and violence."¹⁹ "The U.S. must always keep in mind," wrote the Interdepartmental Committee, "that the ultimate and decisive target is the people. Society itself is at war and the resources, motives and targets of the struggle are found almost wholly within the local population."²⁰ But the policy stressed that outsiders cannot solve insurgency, and thus the role of the United States should be strictly limited. The United States sought to augment "indigenous capabilities" and seek "the assistance of third countries and international organizations."²¹ The new policy intentionally glossed over what would later become a raging debate between those who focused on the endogenous political and economic causes of the insurgency and those who stressed outside intervention and the military dimensions of the problem. The debate between "root causes" and "military threat" approaches to counterinsurgency grew from the deliberate decision of insurgent strategists to make their struggle neither war nor peace. Western democracies knew how to deal with war and knew how to deal with peace. They were confused, however, by conflicts overlapping and blending the two, by what American policymakers and strategists would later recognize as deliberate ambiguity.

When the U.S. military became heavily involved in Vietnam, senior leaders largely ignored the American experience with small wars as well as that of the British and French. From first involvement until the mid 1960s, American advisors sought to augment the conventional military capabilities of the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) in anticipation of a Korea-style war.²² Even when the true nature of the conflict became clearer, the U.S. Army, in Andrew Krepinevich's words, "was neither trained nor organized to fight effectively in an insurgency conflict environment."²³ With the exception of the Marines and Army Special Forces, the U.S. military was uninterested in the more mundane aspects of

counterinsurgency such as training the ARVN, village pacification, local self-defense, or rooting out insurgent political cadres, at least at the higher level.²⁴ Perhaps more importantly, the United States never forced the South Vietnamese regime to undergo fundamental reform. Army Chief of Staff General Earle G. Wheeler reflected the thinking of Johnson and top advisors when he said, "The essence of the problem in Vietnam is military."²⁵

Still, inappropriate military techniques in themselves did not lose Vietnam. With a clear, coherent counterinsurgency strategy and a president who understood Marxist "people's war," the U.S. military could have been forced to change. But basic U.S. counterinsurgency strategy contained major flaws. Having never faced major engagement in a serious Maoist "people's war," American policymakers grossly under-estimated the extent and length of commitment that this entailed, and thus became involved in an area with absolutely no U.S. interests beyond the symbolic. The Kennedy policy gave inadequate attention to preparing the American public for engagement in counterinsurgency. In part this was because the Kennedy approach to counterinsurgency eschewed major involvement by the armed forces and stressed advice and assistance. It also grew from Kennedy's confidence in his ability to mobilize public support when necessary. Whatever the cause, the effects were debilitating.

Some writers have suggested that Kennedy recognized the mounting problems of U.S. engagement in Southeast Asia and intended to withdraw after the 1964 elections.²⁶ But Johnson did not and, as popular approval of American involvement lagged, the Vietnamese communists skillfully used a program they called *dich van* ("action among the enemy") to further weaken public support.²⁷ The administration offered no effective response. Lyndon Johnson thus inherited a flawed strategy and made it worse by allowing advocates of a military solution—both those in uniform and key civilians like National Security Advisor Walt W. Rostow and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara—to win bureaucratic battles over the conduct of the conflict while simultaneously refusing the military the resources it considered necessary for victory.²⁸ By

the time the United States formed an organization to synchronize the military, political, and psychological dimensions of the struggle in 1967—the Civilian Operations and Revolutionary Development Support or CORDS program—it was too late.²⁹ The Viet Cong political infrastructure was too entrenched, the South Vietnamese regime too corrupt and illegitimate, and the American public too alienated to win the conflict. And even CORDS could not substitute for coherent counterinsurgency strategy. As Phillip B. Davidson noted, the communists won because they had a superior grand strategy.³⁰

Threat and Response Mark II.

After Vietnam there was no presidential pressure to focus the Pentagon's attention on counterinsurgency. Without a strategic rationale, the Army relegated counterinsurgency to its periphery, the flame barely kept burning by a handful of concerned experts, most with Vietnam experience.³¹ The 1981 version of basic Army doctrine for low-intensity conflict did not even use the word "counterinsurgency."³² Admittedly, there were good reasons for this: conventional warfighting capabilities had declined precipitously, and Europe and Southwest Asia posed more pressing threats than Third World insurgency. The Carter policy in the Third World placed greater emphasis on human rights than containment. The leaders of ongoing insurgencies in places such as Nicaragua and Zimbabwe appeared less solidly pro-Soviet than their predecessors. Together, these considerations led President Jimmy Carter to conclude that the cost and risks of American engagement in counterinsurgency such as the strengthening of corrupt, illegitimate, and repressive regimes outweighed the risks of insurgent victory.

Luckily, when perceptions of the strategic situation began to change, there was residual expertise within the military and Department of Defense. The flame had been kept alive. The motive for the reconstitution of counterinsurgency capability was the growth of pro-Soviet regimes throughout the Third World, especially the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua, gains by communist insurgents in Guatemala, and the near-victory of

the Cuban-backed *Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) in El Salvador. "Death by a thousand small cuts" again found articulate and influential spokesmen such as Secretary of State Alexander Haig and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick. In a critique of the Carter administration's tolerance of leftist political movements in the Third World, Dr. Kirkpatrick wrote, "violent insurgency headed by Marxist revolutionaries is unlikely to lead to anything but totalitarian tyranny."³³ In rhetoric reminiscent of Kennedy and his top advisors, Secretary Haig argued that Americans should be concerned "about illegal Soviet interventionism in El Salvador, in Africa, in the Middle East, in Southeast Asia, and wherever international law is violated and the rule of force is applied against people who are seeking self-determination and social change."³⁴ "We cannot," he stated, "ignore Soviet activity in the developing nations because our passivity alters the calculations of other countries. It makes further Soviet expansion or Soviet-backed destabilization appear to be inevitable. It gives the appearance—and it is no more than an appearance—that Marxism in the Soviet mode is the wave of the future."³⁵ Such statements offered an indication of the administration's intent and a renewed strategic rationale for counterinsurgency.

As during the Kennedy administration, high-level attention and the existence of a strategic rationale energized the military. For instance, by the late 1970s counterinsurgency had become a "non-subject" in the military educational system.³⁶ In the 1980s, it was reintroduced with systematic attempts to integrate the lessons of Vietnam. The Army's Special Warfare Center, the School of the Americas, and the Air Force's Special Operations School expanded their offerings on counterinsurgency. Eventually the Navy added a program on low-intensity conflict at its Postgraduate School sponsored by the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). The services created "proponency offices" to coordinate thinking and education on low-intensity conflict.³⁷ The Army and Air Force established a Center for Low-Intensity Conflict (AAFCLIC) at Langley AFB. Army Special Operations Forces and the foreign area officer program, both major contributors to counterinsurgency support operations, grew. The Senate

Armed Services Committee, a particularly strong advocate of organizational change, forced the Department of Defense to name an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Low-Intensity Conflict and Special Operations (ASDSOLIC) and create USSOCOM. Recognizing the need for coherent strategy and policy, the Senate panel urged the National Security Council to form a low-intensity conflict board.³⁸ The Central Intelligence Agency also augmented its covert action capability which includes support to counterinsurgency.³⁹

The explosion of thinking and debate about low-intensity conflict was even more important than institutional reform. A number of serving and former government officials, retired officers, and analysts at government-related think tanks began to write on low-intensity conflict.⁴⁰ Articles on counterinsurgency returned in force to military publications such as *Military Review*, *Parameters*, and *Marine Corps Gazette* after a decade-long hiatus. The Department of Defense and the military services sponsored major studies and workshops.⁴¹ Congress held hearings.⁴² As a result, a working consensus on appropriate post-Vietnam counterinsurgency strategy and doctrine eventually emerged.⁴³

Conceptually, the Reagan policy echoed Kennedy's by stressing the relationship of Third World conflict to the superpower struggle. Secretary of State George Shultz could have been reading from Kennedy administration policy statements when he noted that low-intensity conflict "proliferated, in part, *because* of our success in deterring nuclear and conventional war...Low-intensity warfare is [our enemies'] answer to our conventional and nuclear strength—a flanking maneuver in military terms."⁴⁴ As in the Kennedy administration, Reagan advisors were divided between hard-liners that stressed the wider geostrategic dimension of low-intensity conflict and the role of outside agitators, especially the Soviet Union and Cuba, and moderates who focused on internal causes of insurgency. The compromise which ensued was exactly the same as during the 1960s. Reagan's 1987 National Security Strategy, for instance, noted that the major causes of low-intensity conflict were "instability and lack of political and economic development in the Third

World" which provided "fertile ground..for groups and nations wishing to exploit unrest for their own purposes."⁴⁵

The Reagan counterinsurgency strategy blended "carrots" and "sticks," simultaneously promoting democracy, development, dialogue, and defense.⁴⁶ However, it was less globally ambitious than the Kennedy policy, with a clear focus on Central America and the Caribbean and, like its pre-Vietnam predecessor, attempted to resist escalation. The 1987 National Security Strategy, for instance, stated that indirect applications of American military power, particularly security assistance, were appropriate for low-intensity conflict.⁴⁷ The limits on American involvement in counterinsurgency were made even more explicit when the 1988 National Security Strategy emphasized that U.S. engagement in low-intensity conflict "must be realistic, often discreet, and *founded on a clear relationship between the conflict's outcome and important U.S. national security interests.*"⁴⁸

For the Army and Air Force, the counterinsurgency experience of the Reagan administration was eventually codified with the 1990 release of FM 100-20/AFM 3-20, *Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict*. Success in low-intensity conflict, according to this doctrine, is based on five "imperatives": political dominance, unity of effort, adaptability, legitimacy, and perseverance.⁴⁹ The pivotal concept is *legitimacy* defined in a quintessential Western, rationalistic style. This assumes the people of a country facing insurgency will decide whether the government or the rebels can give them the "best deal" in terms of goods and services, and then support that side. Following this, U.S. activity in counterinsurgency is based on the internal defense and development (IDAD) strategy under which the host government "identifies the genuine grievances of its people and takes political, economic, and social actions to redress them."⁵⁰ But while FM 100-20, like the National Security Strategy, noted that the U.S. military role in counterinsurgency would "normally center on security assistance program administration," it did not rule out direct tactical involvement of U.S. forces even though admitting this "will be rare." Similarly, tactical-level doctrine stated,

The introduction of US combat forces into an insurgency to conduct counterinsurgency operations is something that is done when all other US and host country responses have been inadequate. US combat forces are never the first units into a country. They are normally the last.⁵¹

The gate to escalation, then, was narrower than in 1965, but not closed entirely.

Just as Southeast Asia offered a laboratory for Kennedy's version of counterinsurgency, Central America, especially El Salvador, provided a testbed for the development of post-Vietnam counterinsurgency strategy and doctrine. If there was ever a nation "ripe for revolution," it was El Salvador in the late 1970s. Like much of Central America, El Salvador had a weak economy dependent on commodity exports, badly maldistributed land and wealth, a history of authoritarian government and military intervention in politics, widespread corruption, and violent suppression of political opposition. The nation had occasionally attempted to develop an open political system, but without success. Democracy, according to Salvadoran political leader Guillermo M. Ungo, was "a cruel and painful deceit to Salvadorans."⁵² Furthermore, El Salvador's extreme population density made things even worse than in neighboring states like Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. All of the pathologies of Central America were thus distilled in one small country.

Aided by substantial shipments of American military equipment left in Vietnam a decade earlier and shipped to El Salvador by way of Nicaragua, the FMLN guerrillas quickly became "one of the most combat-effective insurgent organizations in Central America, if not all Latin America."⁵³ By late 1980 they controlled large areas of three northern provinces, and in January 1981 launched a "final offensive" designed to topple the Salvadoran government in the same fashion that Somoza had been overthrown 3 years earlier. To support the attacks, the rebels had stockpiled 600 tons of weapons, most from Soviet-bloc sources.⁵⁴ With large-scale assistance from the Carter administration—earlier cut off for the rape and murder of four U.S. churchwomen by members of the National Guard—the government thwarted the "final offensive"

but could not defeat the rebels or even gain the tactical initiative. Until early 1984, the FMLN operated in large, conventional-style units and continued to exercise partial control over regions of El Salvador.⁵⁵

Despite the inauspicious combination of a brutally repressive government, incompetent and corrupt military, and an insurgent movement growing in political and military skill, the Reagan administration decided to "draw the line." El Salvador was to be the indicator of the new administration's more active containment of Third World communism.⁵⁶ A State Department special report called the insurgency in El Salvador "a textbook case of indirect armed aggression by Communist powers."⁵⁷ Secretary of State Haig said, "our problem with El Salvador is external intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation in this hemisphere—nothing more, nothing less . . . the rebel activity, its command, control, and direction, now is essentially in the hands of external forces—Cuban, Nicaraguan, and, of course, indirectly, Soviet."⁵⁸

Focusing on Latin America was not a new twist in American strategy. President Kennedy's efforts were directed more at Latin America than Southeast Asia, and included the Alliance for Progress and the inter-American military system.⁵⁹ This policy fell into disrepair when many Latin American insurgencies petered out by the early 1970s. President Carter further cut security assistance and training programs in the belief that Latin armies were tools of repression. For President Reagan, the communist threat to Latin America changed the strategic calculus.⁶⁰ When the administration decided to "draw the line" in El Salvador, some elements in the U.S. military welcomed the chance to try counterinsurgency again, this time tempered by the "lessons" of Vietnam. According to an important report prepared by four Army lieutenant colonels, "For the United States . . . El Salvador represents an experiment, an attempt to reverse the record of American failure in waging small wars, an effort to defeat an insurgency by providing training and material support without committing American troops to combat."⁶¹ A healthy degree of realism and sense of constraint flavored the new approach to counterinsurgency. But U.S. strategy and doctrine still

reflected the basic assumption that paved the way for escalation in Vietnam: Americans knew how to defeat Maoist "people's war," but Third World regimes did not. Henry Kissinger's Bipartisan Commission on Central America, for instance, distinguished American-style "enlightened counter-insurgency" which stressed the building of democracy and the encouragement of economic and social development from the iron-fist approach favored by Third World governments.⁶² The essence of counterinsurgency support was thus bringing "enlightenment" to American allies.

American military advisors were determined that El Salvador would not become "another Vietnam." Armed with "lessons" from Southeast Asia, Americans urged the El Salvador Armed Forces (ESAF) to stress pacification, civil defense, and population security—what was called the "other war" in Vietnam—rather than the destruction of guerrilla units. The military, American experts believed, should operate in small units with strict constraints on the use of firepower. Since the support of the population was the crux of counter-insurgency, military activities should be subordinate to economic, political, and psychological ones designed to augment the legitimacy of the government. Equally important, the post-Vietnam counterinsurgency strategy and doctrine stressed that the United States must not assume control of the conflict.

The U.S.' post-Vietnam approach to counterinsurgency still required making fundamental changes in the host nation's basic social, economic, political, and military structures and beliefs, but doing so with a limited American presence. The absolute crux of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy, then, was finding ways to encourage or force an allied government and elite to do things they vehemently opposed. Improving the capability of the ESAF was not enough. Salvadoran society had to be reformed, a just legal system developed, right-wing political violence stopped, the military submitted to civilian control, and the peasants given a better life. U.S. policy then, sought to simultaneously strengthen the military and promote democracy. The primary tools were advice and assistance. The aid was only a small portion of U.S. foreign assistance, but

staggering considering El Salvador's size. Military aid peaked at \$196.6 million in 1984, economic assistance at \$462.9 million in 1987.⁶³ Michael J. Hennelly has calculated that from 1981 to 1992, American assistance to El Salvador was about \$1 million *per day*—this for a country of 5.2 million people.⁶⁴

American officials, both civilian and military, were constantly frustrated at the difficulty they faced convincing the Salvadorans to take the steps called for in the American approach to counterinsurgency. It took a 1983 National Campaign Plan—written with substantial assistance from American General Fred F. Woerner—to focus the counter-insurgency effort on winning popular support rather than killing guerrillas.⁶⁵ To that point, the Salvadoran military had largely used “iron fist” techniques which indiscriminately eradicated suspected insurgent supporters. The result was gruesome massacres such as the 1981 destruction of the village of El Mozote.⁶⁶ In fact, human rights abuses by the military and “death squads” of off-duty military and police posed the greatest obstacle to the winning of popular approval by the government.⁶⁷ It also threatened American support on a number of occasions and was the primary tool used by the FMLN in building an extensive international patronage network outside the Soviet bloc.⁶⁸ Serious improvement in the human rights situation only came after a direct warning in 1983 from Vice President Bush that continued death squad violence would lead to an aid cutoff.⁶⁹

Despite the persistence of human rights abuses and the political skill of the FMLN, steady progress was made by the counterinsurgents throughout the 1980s. By 1985, the ESAF was competent enough that the FMLN reverted to small unit, protracted warfare. Awash in American aid, the ESAF grew from 10,000 soldiers at the beginning of the insurgency to 56,000 in 1987.⁷⁰ Elite special units were formed and proved particularly effective. But the most important changes were political. With intense American pressure, the 1984 presidential elections won by José Napoleón Duarte were the cleanest in El Salvador's history. By the end of the 1980s, El Salvador was a democracy—albeit a fragile one, the ESAF a reasonably proficient military force, and the FMLN stood little

chance of outright victory. Still, most analysts doubted that anything better than stalemate would ensue.

Today, however, El Salvador is at least a qualified success. January 1992 peace accords reintegrated the FMLN into El Salvador's political life, and a number of former rebel political and military leaders hold elected office or head political parties. Joaquín Villalobos, one of the preeminent FMLN *comandantes*, has rejected socialism and now leads a reformist, left-of-center political movement.⁷¹ El Salvador is rapidly rebuilding war damage and the economy is fragile, but growing. The third set of open presidential elections took place in 1994. "In terms of US regional objectives," writes Victor Rosello, "El Salvador presently appears to be an unqualified success."⁷² But was it? If anything, the American experience in El Salvador suggests that U.S. doctrine works against a particular type of opponents, but only in conjunction with the appropriate strategic framework. For future counterinsurgency strategy, El Salvador had two important implications.

First, El Salvador showed the magnitude of the task when applying the American concept of counterinsurgency. It can work, but the political and economic costs are immense. El Salvador is a small country close to the United States, but the United States spent nearly \$6 billion in assistance plus a tremendous amount of political capital, time, and attention.⁷³ Put simply, the extent of change necessary to prepare a government for effective counterinsurgency is immense. It requires not only changing institutions and procedures, but attitudes and values. The final costs of consolidating counterinsurgency—of making it permanent—are still not clear. The United States has lost interest in El Salvador and is cutting assistance, but that nation's program of reconstruction and reconciliation is not finished.⁷⁴

Second, El Salvador showed the serious constraints on American leverage. The major tool was "conditionality"—the continuation of aid was made contingent on reforms, especially the building of democracy and an end to death squad violence and other human rights abuses. Phrased differently, U.S. policymakers and diplomats had to convince the Salvadoran elite, particularly the ESAF, that American aid was necessary

for success, but the aid would only continue if appropriate reforms were made. The Reagan administration was able to pull this off largely by a strategic version of the "good cop/bad cop" method of influence. The administration expressed sympathy with the predicament and difficulties of the elite and the ESAF leadership, but reminded them that Congress—the "bad cop"—would cut off aid without reform. Ironically, the end of the Cold War increased American leverage because threats to cut off aid were suddenly more credible. But, as Benjamin Schwarz points out, *if U.S. counterinsurgency strategy "proves most effective when vital interests are not at stake, it will work best in situations that matter least."*⁷⁵

The similarities between Vietnam and El Salvador will be much greater than those between El Salvador and what comes after it.

Threat and Response, Mark III?

After Vietnam, specialists considered the essence of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy and doctrine sound, but concluded that it had not been applied properly in Southeast Asia. El Salvador thus did not require a radical revision of either strategy or doctrine, but simply better application. This was an accurate assessment. Despite some stark differences, Vietnam and El Salvador both occurred within the same strategic environment. In terms of the broad nature of the threat and the wider geostrategic concerns which shaped American decisionmaking, Vietnam and El Salvador shared more features than not. Today, U.S. counterinsurgency strategy continues to assume that the wisdom gained in Southeast Asia and Central America holds. El Salvador is thought to have proven the correctness of American strategy and doctrine. "The El Salvador experience," Victor Rosello writes, "generally validated the US Army's Foreign Internal Defense doctrine in countering insurgency."⁷⁶

Future counterinsurgency may not emulate the past—the similarities between Vietnam and El Salvador will be much greater than those between El Salvador and what comes after

it. Since the strategic environment determines the form and salience of insurgency, the United States must now revise its counterinsurgency strategy and doctrine. Some trends in the post-Cold War strategic environment may inhibit insurgency, others will simply force it to mutate. Many of them, though, will alter the strategic calculus for the United States leading policymakers to reconsider where, when, why, and how they engage in counterinsurgency support.

In his seminal book, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Samuel Huntington argued that political development entails the creation and maintenance of institutions capable of dealing with demands on the state.⁷⁷ The contemporary Global South is undergoing mitosis, splitting into those able to craft adaptive and viable institutions and those unable. Success at institution-building often leads toward democracy.⁷⁸ Since functioning democracies are less susceptible to insurgency even if not altogether exempt, this is good news. Failed institution-building results, at best, in the division of states into subnational units with security the purview of warlords and militias. At worst, the outcome is anarchy and a Hobbesian war of all against all. Robert Kaplan, among others, contends that the trend toward anarchy will eventually win out and much of the Global South will see "the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, and the growing pervasiveness of war."⁷⁹ Afghanistan, where "there is no civil law, no government, no economy—only guns and drugs and anger," may portend the Third World's future.⁸⁰ While political results are mixed, macroeconomic trends favor fragmentation over sustainable democracy. Despite the economic take-off of a few states, most of the Global South seems unable to sustain a level of economic growth able to keep pace with population. Democracy can be born in a stagnant economy, but cannot grow to maturity.

A second related trend is the routinization of violence. At best, this results in the omnipresence of crime. While crime is growing in nearly all countries, this trend is most threatening in developing countries where un- and underemployment are epidemic and police forces overwhelmed, ineffective, or

corrupt. In much of the Global South, walls topped by concertina wire and backed by elaborate alarm systems are standard on even middle-class homes. In poorer neighborhoods, dirt-floored, single-room houses have thick bars on the windows. More and more businesses have their own heavily armed guards. In Panama, for instance, one sees frozen yogurt shops protected by men with M-16s. At its worst, the global routinization of violence has spawned entire generations for whom protracted conflict is normal. Whether Lebanon, Gaza, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Colombia, Liberia, or the inner cities of the United States, youth see violence not as an aberration, but part an intrinsic aspect of life. It takes little to spark insurgency in such a context.

On the positive side, the end of the Cold War and the evolution of global norms have diminished external sponsorship of insurgency or its use as an element of national security policy. For the present, at least, only pariah states dabble in the export of insurgency and terrorism. The Cold War notion of the moral legitimacy of support to armed struggle has thus abated. The end of the Cold War also allowed a surge in the ability of the United Nations to cobble together coalitions for peacekeeping and broker negotiated solutions to conflict. For the United States, the end of the Cold War did not end global engagement, but changed national interests. American leaders have long had little tolerance for military casualties in conflicts where they saw few serious national interests or chances of clear success—witness Reagan's withdrawal from Beirut. With the demise of the superpower competition, issues worth spilling American blood have become even rarer even while the U.S. military remains engaged around the world.

As the strategic environment changes, insurgency itself is mutating. Distilled to its essence, a revolutionary strategy includes *goals* and *methods*. The goals of Maoist "people's war" were the seizure of political power and the revolutionary transformation of the political and economic systems. Its methods were political and guerrilla warfare followed, if necessary, by conventional military action. Post-Cold War insurgents may seek political, social, and economic transformation that is revolutionary in its extent, but not

necessarily revolutionary in the Marxist sense of building a "new" system. For instance, *reactionary* insurgency, in which a religious-based group attempts to seize power from a secular, modernizing government as the Iranians did in 1979, will be common. In some ways this will also emulate Cold War revolutionary insurgency in that legitimacy will be the focus, control of the state the goal, and external support important, but tactically future reactionary insurgents will largely be urban with an emphasis on terrorism rather than rural guerrilla war. This type of insurgency will be most dangerous if it again becomes a technique of inter-state conflict with external sponsors using insurgency to weaken an opponent.

Other post-Cold War insurgent movements will not seek to seize the state in order to change the political, social, and economic system. Many regions of the Global South will suffer from what Larry Cable calls "defensive" insurgency where some subgroup within a state, whether ethnic, tribal, racial, or religious, seeks autonomy or outright independence.⁸¹ Given the extent of primal conflict in post-Cold War world, such *secessionist/separatist* insurgencies may be the dominant form during the next decade. These are also the closest to traditional "people's war" since the insurgents will place great stock on the creation of "liberated zones." But where Maoists based mobilization and support on political ideology, secessionist insurgents will use primal ties. This will alter the essence of counterinsurgency. When the opponent was Marxist, the government could build legitimacy by offering the people a "better deal" than the insurgents. When the roots of the conflict are primal with the government controlled by a different group than the insurgents, legitimacy will be extraordinarily difficult, perhaps impossible, for the regime to win. As bitter struggles in Peru and Guatemala have shown, the tendency will be for the government to consider all members of the group supporting the insurgency as enemies. And from a regional perspective, secessionist/separatist insurgencies will be particularly dangerous since they can easily spill over state borders.

What can be called *commercial* insurgency will also pose security threats without seeking the outright seizure of state

power.⁸² Commercial insurgency will be a form of what is becoming known as "gray area phenomena"—powerful criminal organizations with a political veneer and the ability to threaten national security rather than just law and order.⁸³ In fact, many commercial insurgencies will see an alliance of those for whom political objectives are preeminent and the criminal dimension simply a necessary evil, and those for whom the accumulation of wealth through crime is the primary objective and politics simply a rhetorical veneer to garner some support that they might not otherwise gain. This political component distinguishes commercial insurgents from traditional organized crime. Most often, though, commercial insurgencies will not attempt to rule the state but seek a compliant regime that allows them to pursue criminal activity unimpeded. If that is impossible, they will use persistent violence to weaken and distract the state. In many ways, commercial insurgency has the longest historic lineage—quasi-political bandits and pirates, from Robin Hood to Carlos Lehder, have posed pervasive security threats throughout history.

Another emerging form of insurgency will be aimed at multinational political organizations and military forces attempting to stabilize failed states. These insurgencies will emulate anticolonial conflicts in Algeria, Angola, and the first phase of Vietnam as the insurgents play on nationalism and, to an extent, racial divisions. Since public support in the nations providing the multinational force will often be precarious or weak, the insurgents will need only to create instability and cause casualties among the multinational force. Somalia is a prototype for this new type of insurgency.

Within this array of goals, the methods used by insurgents will vary according to the nature of the regime they oppose and the extent of their support network. If the legitimacy of the regime is weak, insurgents may follow something like Maoist techniques. If the regime is a democracy with at least moderately strong legitimacy, insurgents may pursue what U.S. Army doctrine calls "subversive insurgency." This will combine a legitimate, above-ground element participating in the political process and an underground using political or criminal violence to weaken or delegitimize the government

and thus can also be called *camouflaged* insurgency. The insurgents will camouflage the connection between the above-ground and underground elements to avoid alienating potential allies opposed to the regime but not in favor of violence, and to complicate attempts by the government to obtain outside assistance. It is much easier for a regime to acquire international support to fight an avowed revolutionary insurgency than a camouflaged insurgency that gives all the appearance of general disorder or widespread crime. When the underground element does destabilize the state and the above-ground element seizes power, the immediate problem for the new government will be reining in its violent wing. It will first attempt cooptation. Failing that, the government will have all of the intelligence needed to violently crush the underground, thus cementing its legitimacy by bringing order and stability. For the United States, subversive insurgencies may pose intractable strategic problems because they will strike at fragile democracies, and because their covert nature will make early intervention difficult. Like many forms of insurgency, camouflaged insurgency will be difficult to recognize until it is so far developed that cures are painful.

In combination, changes in the strategic environment and mutations in insurgency undercut the basic assumptions of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy and doctrine. For example, during the Cold War American policymakers often assumed the costs of *not* acting when a friendly government faced a Marxist insurgency outweighed the potential risks and costs of engagement. In the post-Cold War strategic environment, this may not hold except when insurgents intend to destabilize their neighbors. Marxism was a proselytizing ideology. From Leon Trotsky to Daniel Ortega, its adherents linked their own political survival to spreading the revolution. Future insurgents may not automatically come to the same conclusion, particularly if they see that destabilizing neighbors and spreading the insurgency are likely to provoke serious international involvement and make them *less* secure rather than more so.

This holds important implications for the United States. Victory by non-proselyting insurgents, even those ideologically hostile to the United States, is unlikely to threaten serious

national interests. Existing policy and strategy suggests two reasons for U.S. concern for insurgency. One is an updated "domino theory." But if most post-Cold War insurgents do not seek to spread violence, this argument weakens. It is also true that it is easier to contain a radical state run by former insurgents than to prevent insurgent victory. The other reason for American concern is access to raw materials and markets. But, as Benjamin S. Schwarz writes, "America's essential interests very rarely depend upon which group controls resources or power within underdeveloped countries...basic American economic interests seem relatively secure whatever happens politically in the Third World."⁸⁴ This does not mean that the United States has no economic interests in the Global South, but simply that who holds power there will have only a minimal impact. Since victorious insurgents must undertake post-conflict national reconstruction, they are unlikely to stop exporting raw materials. They may be more likely to close their markets, but these are often insignificant anyway. And, even if victorious insurgents did deny the United States access to a resource or market, the costs would ultimately be less than the burden of protracted counterinsurgency support.

Rather than making a rational costs-benefits assessment and then committing assistance until the end of the conflict, Americans stumble in and persist as the political costs of disengagement mount.

In the post-Cold War security environment, the costs and risks of counterinsurgency are increasingly altering the basic strategic calculus. Counterinsurgency always risks damaging American credibility, either by association with a repressive or corrupt regime, or by staking U.S. prestige on the outcome of a conflict and forcing policymakers to choose between the economic costs of engagement or the political costs of disengagement. Put simply, a government in serious danger of defeat by an insurgency is often a bad ally. Hypothetically, the United States could only engage in counterinsurgencies where the beleaguered government is not so bad. But this is extraordinarily difficult, mostly because of the way the United

States usually becomes involved in counterinsurgency. Rather than making a rational costs-benefits assessment and then committing assistance until the end of the conflict, Americans stumble in and persist as the political costs of disengagement mount. During the Cold War, the United States often rushed in to bail out governments facing imminent defeat and then found that, rather than a bucolic summer romance, it had entered a fatal attraction. In the post-Cold War period, American involvement in counterinsurgency may grow out of peace operations, but will still be inadvertent more often than not. The Clinton administration's national security strategy does not specifically mention counterinsurgency other than "nation assistance" in Latin America, but its emphasis on global engagement, expanding democracy, and supporting peace operations opens the way for stumbling into long-term commitments.⁸⁵ Decisions such as the willingness to provide arms to the Cambodian government to fight Khmer Rouge guerrillas could be the first step.⁸⁶

American engagement in counterinsurgency also risks damaging the social, political, and economic system of the friendly state. For South Vietnam, the cure may not have been worse than the disease, but it was close. In El Salvador the United States was able to avoid damaging the state and society to the extent of Vietnam, but a regime may eschew badly needed reform and negotiation with insurgents if it thinks American assistance will allow outright victory. It is possible that the Salvadoran military recognized that the collapse of the Soviet Union spelled the end of massive U.S. support, and thus finally allowed a negotiated settlement that could have been reached several years earlier. American involvement in counterinsurgency, then, is often like lending money to a chronic gambler—it postpones real resolution of the problem rather than speeding it.

Counterinsurgency can also damage American institutions and morale. The erosion of national purpose and respect for authority engendered by Vietnam has taken years to ameliorate and will never be fully cured. Future American engagement in counterinsurgency might also provoke domestic terrorism. With easy global transportation, the

existence of a variety of emigre communities in the United States, and a perception of the American public's unwillingness to accept casualties from peripheral conflicts, insurgents may open an "American front" and target public health, financial networks, communications systems, and the ecology.

During the Cold War, American policymakers often assumed that only the United States could provide effective counterinsurgency support. This was always questionable. Often the British and French better understood revolutionary insurgency than Americans did. In the post-Cold War security environment, the most effective counterinsurgency support may come from military institutions with extensive experience either fighting insurgents—the South Africans, Nicaraguans, Turks, Israelis, Peruvians, Filipinos, Colombians, and Salvadorans, for instance—or those such as the Zimbabweans with insurgent backgrounds. Thus there may be others both willing and able to provide counterinsurgency support in the post-Cold War security environment. U.S. effort might be better spent augmenting the planning, intelligence, sustainment, and mobility capabilities of these regional counterinsurgency powers than directly aiding a threatened regime.

Finally, Cold War-era counterinsurgency strategy and doctrine assumed Americans understood insurgency better than the threatened regime. Whether this was true or not, there is little evidence that U.S. policymakers and strategists fully grasp the motives, fears, and hopes driving emerging forms of insurgency. Americans are particularly likely to fail against insurgents driven by intangible motives like justice, dignity and the attainment of personal meaning and identity. If, in Martin van Creveld's words, "future war will be waged for the souls of men," the United States will face profound problems.⁸⁷ As U.S. experience with "holy terrorists" in the Middle East shows, Americans are ill-equipped to deal with the "root causes" of religion-driven violence.⁸⁸

In the post-Cold War strategic environment, then, counterinsurgency is increasingly becoming a high risk/low benefit activity. The U.S. military and defense community must make policymakers aware of this while simultaneously watching for changes in the strategic calculus.

Conclusions and Recommendations.

American counterinsurgency strategy and doctrine must be revised to reflect the post-Cold War strategic environment. Because counterinsurgency is not a central element of current U.S. national security strategy, such revision must deal with broad concepts rather than specifics, thus paving the way for a reconstitution of capability should the strategic calculus change and a new rationale for counterinsurgency emerge.

Conceptual expansion should be the first step. The definition of insurgency itself must be expanded to reflect the complexity of the new security environment. The first post-Cold War revision of FM 100-20—now called *Operations Other Than War*—recognizes the variegation of insurgency that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union. While continuing to emphasize Maoist “people’s war,” it pays greater attention to urban and subversive insurgency than its predecessors. It also stresses that U.S. neutrality in insurgencies “will be the norm.” The new doctrine argues that “Success in counterinsurgency goes to the party that achieves the greater popular support.”⁸⁹ There are two problems with this. First, it does not offer practical advice on the spiritual and psychic dimensions of legitimacy. Americans often assume that legitimacy arises solely from the provision of tangible goods and services and thus overlooks the importance of spiritual and psychic fulfillment. Second, the current American approach to counterinsurgency as evinced in existing doctrine is accurate for forms of insurgency that seek to seize power by mobilizing greater support than the regime, but offers little guidance for confronting gray area phenomena, “irrational” enemies for whom violence is not a means to political ends, or what Ralph Peters calls “the new warrior class”—“erratic primitives of shifting allegiance, habituated to violence, with no stake in civil order.”⁹⁰ In a study that brilliantly captures changes in the global security environment, Hans Magnus Enzensberger writes,

Nothing remains of the guerrilla’s heroic halo. Once ideologically armed to the teeth and exploited by their shadowy backers, today’s guerrillas and anti-guerrillas have become self-employed. What

remains is the armed mob. All the self-proclaiming armies of liberation, people's movements and fronts degenerate into marauding bands, indistinguishable from their opponents...What gives today's civil wars a new and terrifying slant is the fact that they are waged without stakes on either side, that they are wars *about nothing at all.*⁹¹

For American counterinsurgents, this is a sea change. As John Keegan points out, cultures with a Clausewitzian belief in the connection of war and politics often have difficulty comprehending—much less defeating—opponents with other motives.⁹² The job of experts in the military and defense community is to help overcome this. Some movement in this direction has taken place. New joint doctrine, for instance, states that foreign internal defense “has traditionally been focused on defeating an organized movement attempting to overthrow the government,” but in the future “may address other threats” such as civil disorder, narcotrafficking and terrorism which “may, in fact, predominate in the future as traditional power centers shift, suppressed cultural and ethnic rivalries surface, and the economic incentives of illegal drug trafficking continue.”⁹³ To transcend the conceptual limits of the Cold War, insurgency should be considered simply protracted, organized violence which threatens security and requires a government response, whether revolutionary or nonrevolutionary, political or nonpolitical, open or clandestine.

Building consensus on basic principles should be the second step. In the post-Cold War security environment, four seem appropriate. One is *rigid selectivity*. The key factor when the United States considers engaging in counterinsurgency support is whether the threatened state and regime warrants the effort.⁹⁴ During the Cold War, the simple fact that a non-communist regime faced a communist challenge led American policymakers to support counterinsurgency. In the post-Cold War world, the United States can and must be much more discerning. The international system is not domestic society where every citizen, no matter how reprehensible, deserves assistance.

The second principle should be *multilateralism*. When engaging in counterinsurgency, the United States should

engineer an international support coalition both to enlarge the assistance available to the threatened state and to avoid staking U.S. credibility on the outcome of the conflict. Even though American counterinsurgency strategy has long called for multinational efforts, policymakers seldom attempted to be "one among equals" but instead formed hierarchical coalitions where the United States clearly bore the brunt of the effort. Horizontal coalitions should be the way of the future. In the Western Hemisphere, the United States might lead such coalitions but elsewhere rely on others.

The third principle should be *concentration on secondary support*. The United States might lead efforts to deter, isolate, and punish external sponsors of insurgency. In general the United States should be an indirect or second-tier supporter providing assistance to regional states with greater experience in counterinsurgency and a more direct stake in a conflict. They are more likely to truly understand the conflict and, since they have a greater interest in regional stability, to persist if the struggle becomes prolonged. One thing that made the Soviet Union an effective *supporter* of insurgency was reliance on surrogates like Cuba and North Vietnam. The United States should adopt this practice. If the United States does join a multinational counterinsurgency support coalition, it should focus on special skills such as intelligence, mobility, planning support, and psychological operation.

The fourth principle should be *organizational coherence*. The United States may need a new organization to confront new forms of insurgency. With the exception of secessionist/separatist insurgency, all post-Cold War forms will be far removed from the Army's traditional areas of expertise and will be more police functions than military ones. The Army should thus encourage the formation of a permanent civil-military cadre of experts with a strong emphasis on law enforcement and intelligence collection and analysis. Rod Paschall's argument that Western military forces are not proficient at counterinsurgency and should be replaced by "an international corporation composed of former Western officers and soldiers skilled in acceptable counterinsurgency techniques" rings even truer today than when written in 1990.⁹⁵

What can the Army do to preserve residual counterinsurgency capability? Working closely with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, the Army should use its intellectual resources to "keep the flame burning," at least at a low level. Sponsored research, symposia, workshops, conferences, discussion papers, working groups, publications, and debate in the Army educational system can contribute to this. The wargames, planning exercises, and case studies used in the Army's professional educational system should deal with commercial, subversive, or spiritual insurgency rather than Maoist "people's war." The Army should also make sure it retains a cadre of counterinsurgency experts within its ranks during downsizing. With luck, no strategic rationale for extensive U.S. involvement in counterinsurgency will emerge and this cadre will never be activated. But it is the fate of the military to prepare for the worst even as it hopes for the best. With clear thinking now, the U.S. military can be ready to offer effective advice should the strategic calculus change and the United States once again see a rationale for major involvement in counterinsurgency support.

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