

DEFEATING INSURGENCIES WITH MINIMAL FORCE RATIOS

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
General Studies

by
CHRISTOPHER BLAHA, MAJOR, USA
B.B.A., Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York, 2000

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
2013-01

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved</i> OMB No. 0704-0188		
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 14-06-2013		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2012 – JUN 2013	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Defeating Insurgencies with Minimal Force Ratios			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Christopher Blaha, Major			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301			8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
<p>This thesis examines three successful counterinsurgencies fought with a force ratio of less than 20 counterinsurgents per 1000 inhabitants. Discussion begins with a review of force ratios and their quantitative effect on the probability of a counterinsurgency victory, followed by a historical review of counterinsurgency conflicts in Sri Lanka, El Salvador, and Colombia. Analysis of factors contributing to the counterinsurgency victory, despite historically low force ratios, was conducted in order to identify trends and effective strategies. Conclusions and recommendations discuss the implication of this research in future conflicts, with emphasis on the potential role of the United States.</p>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Counterinsurgency, Sri Lanka, El Salvador, Colombia					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	70	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Name of Candidate: Major Christopher Blaha

Thesis Title: Defeating Insurgencies with Minimal Force Ratios

Approved by:

_____, Thesis Committee Chair
Timothy Hentschel, Ph.D.

_____, Member
Michael Jones, M.S.

_____, Member
LtCol. Andrew Dietz, M.S.

Accepted this 14th day of June 2013 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

DEFEATING INSURGENCIES WITH MINIMAL FORCE RATIOS, Major Christopher Blaha, 70 pages.

This thesis examines three successful counterinsurgencies fought with a force ratio of less than 20 counterinsurgents per 1000 inhabitants. Discussion begins with a review of force ratios and their quantitative effect on the probability of a counterinsurgency victory, followed by a historical review of counterinsurgency conflicts in Sri Lanka, El Salvador, and Colombia. Analysis of factors contributing to the counterinsurgency victory, despite historically low force ratios, was conducted in order to identify trends and effective strategies. Conclusions and recommendations discuss the implication of this research in future conflicts, with emphasis on the potential role of the United States.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the guidance, support, and mentorship of numerous individuals. First, I would like to thank my wife, Kimberly, for her support, encouragement, and grammar expertise. Next, I would like to thank my thesis committee, who provided mentorship and feedback while exercising patience and understanding. Last, I would like to acknowledge my small group advisor, Mr. Michael Jones, for the assistance and motivation.

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ACRONYMS

COIN	Counterinsurgency
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FM	Field Manual
FMLN	Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front
HN	Host Nation
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
US	United States
WWII	World War II

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Insurgencies have been battled by powerful militaries overwhelming the enemy with firepower and saturating the population and terrain with presence. Others have been fought with a smaller force relative to the population, constrained by finances, available manpower, or political will. The ratio of counterinsurgents to population changes the historical probability of success for the counterinsurgent. The strategies used in successful post-World War II (WWII) counterinsurgencies fought with less than optimal force ratios can provide future military planners, strategists, and commanders with a force structure template necessary for the small, resource constrained wars of tomorrow.

This research will seek to identify and define common characteristics of successful post-WWII counterinsurgencies fought with a ratio of security forces (or counterinsurgents) to population of less than twenty per one thousand inhabitants. In this analysis, the researcher will identify diplomatic, military, and interagency contributions to the successful completion of a counterinsurgency campaign.

Based on analysis of successful counterinsurgency campaigns with a lower than historical average force ratio, secondary questions will require answers to reach a definitive conclusion. How did third party forces adapt during successful counterinsurgencies? Can the tipping point in successful counterinsurgencies be identified? What is the composition of the optimal force in relation to nature and size of the insurgency? Can deficiencies in structure be overcome with training, technology, or tactics?

This paper is written with assumptions made at the onset. Insurgencies will continue to plague the globe for foreseeable future. The desire for a better life, an oppressed minority seeking a voice through violence, criminal organizations seeking power and wealth, and history littered with insurgency point to a high probability of future conflict. Communism, Islamic extremism, and other assorted motivations have driven a constant stream of insurgencies since WWII. Western nations may be drawn into insurgencies domestically and externally and should prepare themselves accordingly.

Insurgencies can be defeated. As current conflicts show, it requires enormous political will and economic support to win a war that may take decades. Operational setbacks and domestic political pressure from current operations are not likely to force the United States (US) to radically change its global engagement posture.

The vast majority of successful post-WWII counterinsurgencies were fought with force ratios of greater than 20 counterinsurgents per 1000 residents.¹ Three conflicts contradict the historical trend that a greater than 20:1000 security forces ratio is required to be successful in a counterinsurgency; the Sri Lankan Civil War, the Salvadoran Civil War, and operations to counter the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in Colombia. These three conflicts involved third-party influence, achieved a historically significant amount of peak violence, and lasted for over 20 years.

The following chart, produced by the Institute of Defense Analyses, provides a sample of force densities in post-WWII insurgent conflicts and the outcome. The larger line represents *peak force-densities* achieved in the area of operations, as defined by the

¹Joshua Thiel, "Coin Manpower Ratios: Debunking the 10 to 1 Ratio and Surges," *Small Wars Journal* (2010): 6-7; R. Royce Kneece Jr., *Force Sizing for Stability Operations* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2010), 3-4.

authors of study. The smaller line represents force density in relation to the overall population of the nation. The vertical axis represents counterinsurgents per 1000 inhabitants.

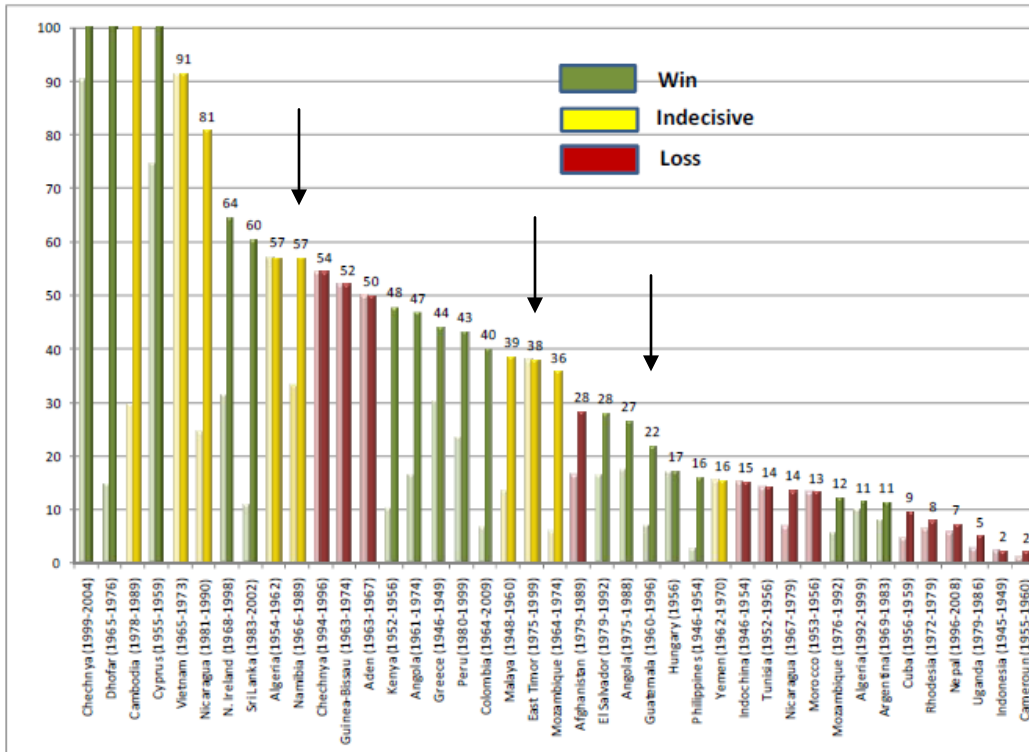


Figure 1. Selected Historical COIN Operations with Peak Force Densities

Source: R. Royce Kneese Jr., *Force Sizing for Stability Operations* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2010), 4.

While other insurgencies were successful according to the Institute for Defense Analysis with less than a 20:1000 counterinsurgent ratio, they do not meet the threshold for this work due to either their short duration, minimum peak violence (see Appendix B), or lack of external actors. This research is being conducted to see how the US

Government can possibly assist a nation conducting counterinsurgency operations utilizing lessons from past victories. In order to make that a viable scenario, an external actor must influence the conflict and time must be available to exercise all elements of national power. In addition, if violence remains low the counterinsurgent action trends towards a policing action, which is outside the desired scope of this research.

Analysis of the forces applied to counterinsurgencies in Sri Lanka, El Salvador and Colombia, will potentially reveal patterns of success common to all three that can be extrapolated for use in future conflicts.

Key Terms

Conventional Military Forces. Non-Special Operations Forces.

Counterinsurgency (COIN). Those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.²

Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). The FMLN was a coalition of five Marxist-Leninist insurgent groups active in El Salvador from 1980-1992. The FMLN included the *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí* (FPL), Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP), the *Resistencia Nacional* (RN), the *Partido Comunista Salvadoreño* (PCS) and the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos* (PRTC). Supported by the Communist regimes of Castro and the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, the group unsuccessfully attempted conventional warfare from 1982 to 1983. The FMLN reached their peak in 1983 with approximately 12,000 members. After failed conventional attacks, the FMLN began a nine year campaign of

²US Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2006), Glossary-4.

asymmetric warfare. The US intervened on the side of the El Salvadorian government in 1983, providing materiel, financial aid, and covert assistance. In 1992, the FMLN signed peace accords and became a legitimate political party. In 2009 a FMLN candidate was elected President.³

Force Ratio. The ratio of security personnel to inhabitants of a particular area. Unless specified, all force ratio citations will be representative of a nation's entire population (i.e. this paper will focus on whole nations, not specific regions unless noted).

Force Structure. The proportionality of conventional and special operations forces.

Host Nation (HN). A nation which permits, either by written agreement or official invitation, government representatives and/or agencies of another nation to operate, under specified conditions, within its borders.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). LTTE, also known as the Tamil Tigers, are an FBI-designated terrorist organization operating in Sri Lanka. Credited with the assassination of two world leaders, they are noted for pioneering the use of suicide belts and sparking a civil war that led to over 70,000 deaths.⁴ The Tamil Tigers were effectively defeated in 2009.

³The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), "Terrorist Organization Profile: Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front," http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data_collections/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=228 (accessed January 14, 2013).

⁴The Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Taming the Tamil Tigers," January 10, 2008, http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/tamil_tigers011008 (accessed October 21, 2012).

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People’s Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo, FARC–EP and FARC). The FARC was formed in 1964 as the militant wing of the Colombian Marxist Party. They are the largest and most capable communist insurgent group in Latin America.⁵

Special Operations Forces. US Army definition. Forces specialized in unconventional warfare (UW), counter-terrorism (CT), direct action (DA), foreign internal defense (FID), and special reconnaissance.⁶ Special operations forces operate with greater independence and in smaller numbers than conventional forces.

Successful. A successful counterinsurgency is defined as one where the conflict ends with the counterinsurgent maintaining political and military power. Military operations cease and remaining insurgent activity is resolved through HN police activities.

In order to refine the scope of this work and operate within time and length constraints, limitations are required. The British alone have fought eight successful counterinsurgencies. Time and length constraints of this work prohibit in depth analysis of every COIN success. This work will focus on successful counterinsurgencies with third-party state military influence on the outcome where the force ratio was less than 20 counterinsurgents per 1000 inhabitants. The insurgent motive analyzed is political, and this work will focus on communist separatists. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the

⁵The National Counterterrorism Center, “Terrorist Groups: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia,” <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/farc.html> (accessed October 17, 2012).

⁶US Army Special Forces, “Primary Mission,” <http://www.goarmy.com/special-forces/primary-missions.html> (accessed October 17, 2012).

author acknowledges that future conflicts will more likely have dissimilar motives. How third-party nations fought these insurgent groups is the focus, and will remain relevant despite the insurgent ideology.

This research is limited to the military campaigns of Sri Lankan and Indian operations against LTTE; operations in El Salvador against the FMLN; Colombian and US operations against the FARC.

History is littered with failed counterinsurgencies. Superior military strength does not equate to successful COIN strategy and outcome. Most scholarly work on COIN focuses on insurgent tactics, ideology, and western TTPs to counter insurgent activities at the tactical level. Research in force type and density combating insurgencies can provide insight into future COIN-driven force requirements. Forecasted resource constraints demand future conflicts are fought as efficiently as possible.

It is likely that the US military will no longer be structured to fight prolonged counterinsurgency operations on multiple fronts. Economy of force and partnership will drive future operations. To remain successful and decisive on the battlefield, leaders will have to weigh the need for resources, troops, and funding between competing demands. It is essential for decision makers to know if the strategic endstate can be achieved in the same length of time with fewer forces, or more expeditiously, and with a higher probability of success with the forces available if structured with an eye towards counterinsurgency operations as well as conventional.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Each of the individual conflicts has been studied in depth. The tactics used by the insurgent groups, counterinsurgent forces, and the external influences on the conflict have volumes of papers, articles, and other scholarly work. The goal with this paper is not to recreate those works, but to analyze the counterinsurgency strategies from a separate approach.⁷ By identifying the tipping point in successful counterinsurgencies with a ratio fewer than twenty counterinsurgents to 1000 inhabitants, we can hope to identify trends in macro-strategy, preserving combat power at the theater and national level while increasing the chances of success thus providing commanders with courses of actions based on proven victory.

There are many excellent works analyzing individual conflicts, actors, and tactics. The researcher will be utilizing these works and their findings to establish, if possible, a cause-and-effect relationship between force size and composition and the eventual outcome of the conflict.

The defeat of the Tamil Tigers during the Sri Lankan Civil War has been analyzed by the Sri Lankan Government, international media, and US counterinsurgency analysts in and outside of the government.

⁷The author recognizes the large numbers of recent works relating to counterinsurgencies, their causes, and quantitative analysis regarding length, forces, and composition. The analysis, if relevant, is utilized in this work.

The Sri Lankan Ministry of Defense conducted a comprehensive review of the later stages of the conflict titled *Humanitarian Operation: Factual Analysis*.⁸ Published in 2011, this work is the Sri Lankan military's analysis of the LTTE and the conflict from 2006 to 2009. Per the work, the government's goal in publishing *Humanitarian Operation* was to demonstrate "why the Government of Sri Lanka engaged in a military strategy against the LTTE, why Security Forces used the level of force they did, and how at each stage in the operation Sri Lanka took extraordinary steps to respect and protect the lives of civilians."⁹ The document provided the researcher valuable insight on Sri Lanka's approach to counterinsurgency operations and their view on the LTTE.

International media provided timely coverage of the Sri Lankan Civil War as events occurred. The British Broadcasting Corporation published "How Sri Lanka's Military Won" on May 22, 2009. Written shortly after hostilities ceased, this article provides a brief summary on the events leading to defeat of LTTE. Jane's Navy International published "Sri Lanka Learns to Counter Sea Tiger's Swarm Tactics" in March 2009.¹⁰ This article provides analysis of the naval operations of the LTTE and Sri

⁸Ministry of Defense, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, *Humanitarian Operation Factual Analysis July 2006-May 2009*, http://www.defence.lk/news/20110801_Conf.pdf (accessed February 10, 2013), 19.

⁹*Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰Tom Fish, "Sri Lanka Learns to Counter Sea Tiger's Swarm Tactics," *Janes Navy International* (March 2009): 21-26, http://www.defence.lk/news/Sri_Lanka_Navy.pdf (accessed February 15, 2013).

Lanka's response. *Al Jazeera* published an article titled "Tamil Tigers Show Off Air Force"¹¹ providing information on the LTTE's air operations and capabilities.

For analysis on the defeat of the FMLN in El Salvador, the researcher utilized journal articles, newspaper articles; US Government produced products, and comprehensive books on the insurgencies with a focus on El Salvador. Unlike Sri Lanka, most of the research on the Salvadorian Civil War is focused on the UN-brokered peace agreements and humanitarian concerns, not the tactics of the key armed actors. Due to the amount of information available in the 1980's and the relatively common nature of the insurgent (peasant, communist, Latin America) the military analysts did not cover the conflict or the actors in a level detail comparable to the LTTE or the FARC.

The *New York Times* provided detailed coverage during and after the conflict. They were particularly useful for documenting events as they happened in both El Salvador and in the US. US politics and actions played a significant role in the conflict and the *New York Times* provided the researcher a reputable source for domestic political actions.

The US role in the conflict was critical to this research given the nature of the conflict and the source of this work. The level of funding for conflict as well as US policy guidance for the issue can be found products created by numerous US Government entities, to include the Department of Defense and the US Congress. The RAND Corporation (funded by the US Government), published *US Policy for Central America*

¹¹"Tamil Tigers Show Off Air Force," *Al Jazeera*, March 26, 2007, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2007/03/2008525184856552419.html> (accessed February 10, 2013).

in 1984, describing US policy in the region along with justifications and political background.

The Stanford Journal of International Relations published an article written by Michael Wilkerson titled “Security and Democracy in El Salvador: An Undeniable Connection.” This work, published in 2008, provides an excellent summary of the conflict and the aftermath of the UN-brokered peace accords.

In a comprehensive book titled *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, Stephen Stedman, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth Cousens dedicate a chapter of the book to the Salvadorian Civil War. This chapter provides a detailed account of the conflict and role of international actors.

For analysis on the degradation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People’s Army (FARC) during the ongoing conflict in Colombia the researcher used US Government produced reports and analysis, newspapers, magazine articles, and think tank reports. Given the timeframe of the conflict, and accounting for the change in progress found in recent years, the majority of the analysis and research is focused on events from 2001 to 2013. Interest in Colombia by western analysts increased dramatically after 9/11 and again the late 2000’s as violence began to decrease after peaking in 2002.¹²

The RAND Corporation published *From Insurgency to Stability: Case Studies* in 2011. Written by a team of analysts, this work was published for the Secretary of Defense and focuses on select insurgent conflicts, to include Colombia and El Salvador. These

¹²See Appendix A.

case studies provide a summary of each conflict and identify key factors contributing to the outcome.

Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk published the *Colombian Labyrinth: the Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability* in 2001. While the conflict was not yet at its peak in terms of violence and transition, the work provides background on the insurgency and earlier influences.

The *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency*, written by Thomas Marks and published by the Strategic Studies Institute in 2002, provides insight on the Colombian military's transition that ultimately proved successful.

Analysis of counterinsurgency trends, methods, and tactics increased dramatically after the US involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Numerous US Government funded studies, student research papers, and policy papers have focused on past conflicts, the lessons learned, and the facts surrounding the warring parties.

The RAND Corporation, a non-profit policy institute and think-tank, published *How Insurgencies End* in 2010. Authored by Ben Connable and Martin Libicki of RAND Corporation's National Defense Research Institute,¹³ this work was prepared for the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity. The key findings by this study address the length of the conflict, state sponsorship of an insurgent group, and politically incorporating an insurgent group through influencing the population and external organizations.

¹³Per RAND National Defense Research Institute (NDRI), <http://www.rand.org/nsrd/ndri.html> (accessed February 12, 2013), "The National a federally funded research and development center (FFRDC), conducts RAND research for the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the defense agencies, the United States Marine Corps, and the United States Navy."

Connable and Libicki conclude, based on analyzing 89 insurgencies, the average insurgency lasts 10 years. After 10 years, the government has a slightly higher probability of defeating the insurgents. This goes against the theory that an insurgent can outlast a counterinsurgent. In this paper, the FARC in Colombia and the LTTE in Sri Lanka were defeated (or in the case of the FARC, severely degraded) past the ten year mark in the conflict. They conclude that state-supported insurgencies, in this paper exemplified by the FARC, are successful approximately 50 percent of the time. The probability of insurgent success declines significantly with loss of state support (i.e. a state sponsor ceases to support the insurgent organization).

General information on a country's demographics, topography, and economy are essential to understanding the conflict. The CIA World Factbook was utilized in this work to provide a geographical description of the nations involved in the conflicts analyzed.

The intent of this work is to apply historical analysis and lessons learned to future US conflicts. After more than a decade fighting insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan the US Army has incorporated many lessons learned into their doctrine. The capstone manual for US Army and Marine Corps counterinsurgency doctrine is Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*.¹⁴ Published in 2006 under the guidance of then Lieutenant General David Petraeus, FM 3-24 discusses force ratio in paragraph 1-67.

Most density recommendations fall within a range of 20 to 25 counterinsurgents for every 1000 residents in an AO [area of operations]. Twenty counterinsurgents per 1000 residents are often considered the minimum troop density required for

¹⁴FM 3-24 was promulgated by both the US Army and the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps nomenclature for the manual is Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5.

effective COIN operations; however as with any fixed ratio, such calculations remain very dependent upon the situation.¹⁵

In 2010, the Institute for Defense Analysis published “Force Sizing for Stability Operations.” The authors challenged the 20:1000 ratio found in FM 3-24. When using recently uncovered and declassified data, the optimal ratio based on post-WWII successful counterinsurgencies is, according to their findings, 40 to 50 counterinsurgents per 1000 inhabitants.¹⁶

The Institute for Defense Analysis work, in addition to similar study conducted at the Harvard Kennedy School, drove the US Army Combined Arms Center to publish FM 3-24 Revision Issue Paper #2. The revision clearly states the numbers quoted in 2006 (20:1000) included numerous caveats such as “very dependent upon the situation.”¹⁷ Revision Paper #2 acknowledges scholarly analyses have refined the optimal ratio and recommends paragraph 1-67 of FM 3-24 is amended to include “a ratio of greater than forty counterinsurgents to 1000 inhabitants is considered the necessary troop density for effective counterinsurgency operations.”¹⁸

Great Britain has extensive experience in COIN operations. For centuries their armed forces served as a colonial police force, fighting small wars and insurgencies with regularity. The lessons learned from these historical battles, in addition to the more recent interventions in Northern Ireland and the Global War on Terror, have been captured in

¹⁵U.S. Army, FM 3-24, 1-13.

¹⁶Kneece, iii.

¹⁷John Paganini, *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency, Revision Issue Paper #2* (Fort Leavenworth: US Army Combined Arms Center, 2012).

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 2.

their culture and doctrine. British Army Field Manual (AFM) *Countering Insurgency* was written in 2009 and is their capstone COIN doctrine.¹⁹

In order to prevent a duplicate work and contrast my findings with expert analysis, I reviewed multiple articles, theses, and books on US counterinsurgency experience.

Works Reviewed

In order to get to the endstate of this thesis we must first summarize the conflicts and attempt to find consensus on what made them successful. In order to identify factors leading to a successful conclusion for the counterinsurgent, key variables in the insurgencies need to be identified and linked to the endstate.

In *How Insurgencies End*, the authors identify key variables such as time, external support, and terrain and quantifiably compare the outcomes of post-WWII insurgencies. Using the key variables identified in that work, this researcher applied them to the conflicts of Sri Lanka, El Salvador, and Colombia.

In order to understand the enemy (from the counterinsurgent's point of view), Bard O'Neill's *Insurgency & Terrorism: from Revolution to Apocalypse* provides methods analysis for insurgent groups. *Terrorist Identity: Explaining the Terrorist Threat* by Michael Arena and *Inside Insurgency: Violence, Civilians, and Revolutionary Group Behavior* by Claire Metelits provide additional insight and methods for analyzing insurgent organizations.

¹⁹British Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, October 2009.

Given the relative recent nature of the conflicts in discussion, there are numerous publications that can expand on the current state of these conflicts and detail individual actions and accounts.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

While one of the conflicts focused upon is recent, all are approached in a historical research fashion. Research conducted was based on reports and documentation from each individual conflict. It is acknowledged that operations are still ongoing in Colombia. For research purposes this thesis will focus on applied combat power prior to January 1, 2012.

For each conflict in this thesis a historical review is conducted. In order to provide context and background, the geography, economy, and demographics of each nation is detailed. The key actors in the conflict are identified, their role explained, and the significance of their contributions analyzed. The key actors are the HN government, the insurgent group or groups, and external influences such as third-party nations backing the insurgent or counterinsurgent with funding, troops, materiel, or ideological guidance. A road to war, or how the conflict began, and the grievances driving the insurgent are summarized. The intent is to identify unique and like factors in the three conflicts researched.

The conflicts are researched to identify changes and adaptations in the counterinsurgent, the insurgent and external factors. The decisive point is established for each conflict. The researcher defined the decisive point as the geographical point or time when the victory was no longer possible for the insurgent without an unexpected external influence on the counterinsurgent.²⁰ Factors such as HN reaction to foreign troops and

²⁰Other works, specifically ones authored by RAND, refer to the decisive point as the “tipping point.”

HN force capability and size will be taken into consideration. The missions conducted by the forces will also be considered.

The transition of the counterinsurgent and insurgent is identified and the relevance explained. What factors drove the transition, the external influences, and their affects on the actors is researched for its impact on the outcome of the conflict. When identifiable, the conflict is described in phases.

The three conflicts are analyzed individually. The order of battle for the insurgent, HN forces, and third party forces will be defined. This thesis attempts to identify trends, tactics, and other security related factors resulting in a successful counterinsurgency with a force ratio of less than 20 counterinsurgents per 1000 inhabitants.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

This research analyzed each conflict separately; first defining the insurgent, the counterinsurgent, and historical basis for the insurgency. Building upon the basic history of the conflict, this chapter identifies primary and secondary military, diplomatic, situational, and external factors leading to a successful outcome for the counterinsurgent.

FM 3-24 identifies the common elements of an insurgent organization as leaders, combatants, political cadre, auxiliaries, and mass base.

Defeating the Tamil Tigers

After over two decades of conflict, the insurgency in Sri Lanka was powerful and entrenched. One third of the island nation was in the hands of the LTTE. In 2005, a new political administration renewed the Sri Lankan government's fight against the insurgents, dedicating increased funding, troops, and emphasis on the counterinsurgency effort. Most importantly, the new president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, provided the military (led by his brother) the support needed to defeat the LTTE. In 2009, the majority of the remaining leadership of LTTE was surrounded by the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) in an area named Puthukkudiyirippu. In one final battle the leadership of LTTE was killed and the movement of the Tamil nationals effectively ended.²¹

²¹Geoff Demarest, *Winning Insurgent War*, 2nd ed. (Fort Leavenworth: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2011), 39.

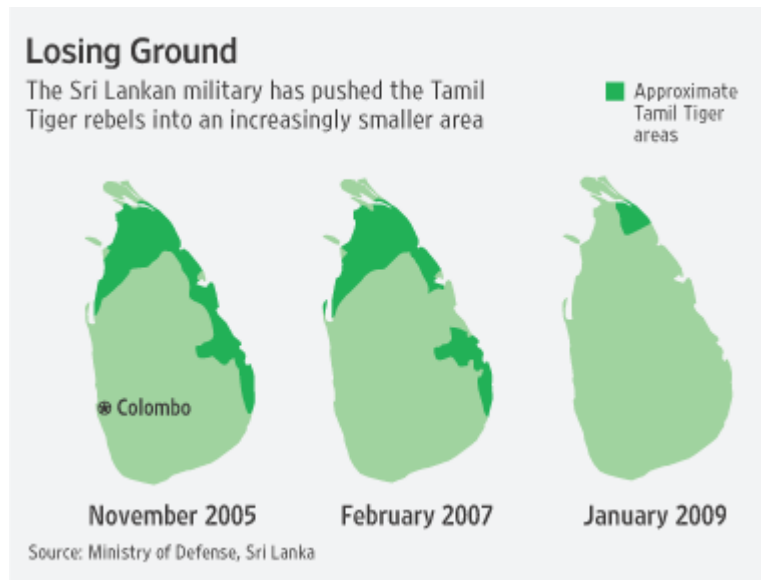


Figure 2. LTTE Controlled Regions

Source: Peter Wonacott, “Sri Lanka Army Corners Rebels,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 16, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123203075892985665.html> (accessed February 18, 2013).

Sri Lanka is an island nation located off the south eastern coast of India. Slightly larger than West Virginia, it had a population of approximately 21 million people in 2012. Relatively rural, the vast majority lives outside urban areas (86 percent compared to 18 percent for the United States). Sri Lanka is predominately Sinhalese. The ethnical composition of the nation is Sinhalese 73.8 percent, Sri Lankan Moors 7.2 percent, Indian Tamil 4.6 percent, Sri Lankan Tamil 3.9 percent, other 0.5 percent, unspecified 10 percent (2001 census provisional data).²²

²²Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook-Sri Lanka,” <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ce.html> (accessed February 17, 2013).

The Tamil people have long history in Sri Lanka. Evidence suggests their presence in Sri Lanka since the 2nd Century BC.²³ In the 18th and 19th Century, the British brought Tamils from India to Sri Lanka to work on coffee and tea plantations, greatly increasing their numbers. The Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils identified themselves as separate communities until the 1980s, when the groups began to lose their distinction.

After WWII, the British relinquished their colonial claim on Sri Lanka, gaining their independence by 1948. The years of colonial rule would have long lasting effects on the Tamil people. In the final decades of British rule, the Tamil leadership fought for greater representation in the colonial government. The British denied the Tamils, favoring the Sinhalese majority. The Soulbury Commission of 1944, which guided the transition from British rule to independence, sparked a Tamil separatist movement that had been previously denied representation by British policymakers. The seeds of the insurgency were planted.

In 1956, the Sinhala-Only Act was passed by the Sinhalese dominated government in Sri Lanka. The legislation established Sinhala as the nation's official language. All government proceedings and business would be conducted solely in Sinhala. The act greatly impacted middle-class Tamils. Public service jobs were redistributed from urban Tamils to Sinhalese. Tamils who refused to learn Sinhala were fired.

²³K. M. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 196.

Anger began to swell in the Tamil communities. Civil disobedience among the Tamils led to violent altercations. The constitution passed in 1972 compounded an already growing rift between the ethnic Tamils and the Sinhalese. Special provisions were established for those of the Buddhist faith, further isolating the predominately Hindu Tamils. New admission standards to universities were higher for the Tamils, incensing the Tamil youth. The Tamils began to bond in opposition of the government.

Both ethnic groups began to protest and rally against one another. In 1972, a pro-Tamil rally outside the Parliament building in the capital of Columbo became violent. Violence rapidly spread to other areas of the nation, resulting in an estimated 150 deaths. In 1983, a fledgling band of LTTE fighters successfully ambushed a Sri Lankan military unit, possibly in response to the rape of Tamil girl by the military. The Sinhalese public responded by attacking Tamil civilians and prisoners. Thousands of Tamils died from riots and a systematic clearance of Tamil families and businesses from urban areas.

Stories of the atrocities spread quickly throughout the Tamil communities. Support for Tamil nationalism and the LTTE grew almost overnight. The guerilla war had begun. In 1976, Vellupillia Prabhakaran founded a militant separatist movement in the proximately-Tamil northern region of the island nation. His group became the LTTE. After 1983, insurgent groups unified under the LTTE and the movement grew exponentially. The goal of the LTTE was to overthrow the Sinhalese-led government and establish an autonomous Tamil state. The goal of the Sri Lankan government was to maintain unity and enforce peace. They were not willing to sacrifice peace for a two state solution.

The LTTE used guerrilla tactics compounded with terrorist actions. Led by the enigmatic and ruthless Prabhakaran, the LTTE adopted much leftist (communist) ideology common with resistant groups throughout the Cold War. Adopting a left-leaning stance provided the LTTE foreign support.²⁴

India, the powerful neighbor to the north, greatly influenced the conflict. There were strong ties between the Tamils on Sri Lanka and in India. The Indian government held great fiscal and military influence over Sri Lanka due its proximity, size, and trade. A key party to multiple ceasefire agreements, India sent a peacekeeping force to Sri Lanka from 1987-1990. With a perceived breach of the terms of the ceasefire by the LTTE and the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF), the IPKF began offensive operations against the LTTE. For two years the forces battled, with IPKF suffering an estimated 1200 casualties and the LTTE suffering an unknown number speculated to much higher than the IPKF. In 1990, a new administration took over in India and the political support for the peacekeeping mission waned. The IPKF pulled out in the same year. The outgoing Indian President, Rajiv Gandhi, was killed in 1991 by a LTTE suicide bomber as he campaigned for re-election.²⁵

²⁴Demarst, 41.

²⁵BBC News, "Sri Lanka Profile," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12004081> (accessed April 1, 2013).

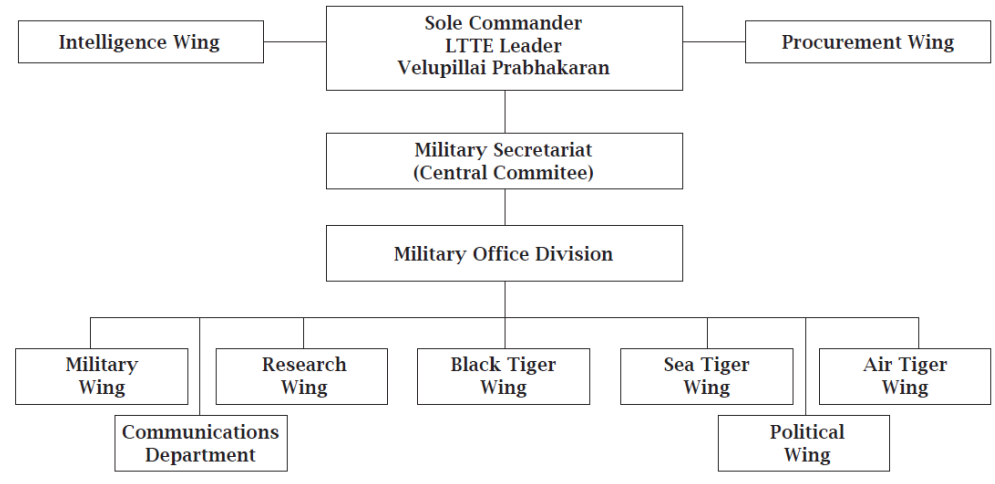


Figure 3. LTTE Task Organization

Source: Ministry of Defense, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, *Humanitarian Operation Factual Analysis July 2006-May 2009*, http://www.defence.lk/news/20110801_Conf.pdf (accessed February 10, 2013), 19.

As the conflict progressed the LTTE transitioned from guerilla tactics to conventional warfare. The LTTE maintained terror cells and elements of asymmetrical warfare, but incorporated large scale conventional attacks and techniques. The Battle of Elephant Pass demonstrated the ability of the LTTE to mass and conduct large-scale attacks. For days the LTTE laid siege to a SLA base located at Elephant Pass. The SLA was forced to conduct a division level rescue operation involving amphibious landings and relief airdrops. In the end of the battle the SLA persevered, at a cost of 202 SLA and over 500 LTTE.²⁶

²⁶K. T. Rajasingham, "Sri Lanka: The Untold Story," *Asia Times Online*, July 27, 2002, http://atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/DG27Df02.html (accessed February 12, 2013).

The LTTE developed an air and naval wing to augment their ground and terror elements. Called the Sea Tigers, the naval forces of the LTTE were effective as a line of communication to India, ferrying personnel and materiel. The Sea Tigers were also effective at disrupting Sri Lankan naval operations. According to the Sri Lanka Ministry of Defense, the Sea Tigers sank 56 government ships, to include eight major vessels and 20 fast attack craft.²⁷ The Sea Tigers used fast, light boats launched from shore to swarm Sri Lankan naval assets and strike fatal blows with a suicide boat. Sri Lanka was forced to transform their navy, both in terms of equipment and manning, to deal with the new threat. This transformation from a naval police force to an effective offensive waterborne force was not complete until 2007.²⁸ While efforts to improve naval capacity began in the 1980's, drastic change did not occur until the 2002.

The Air Tigers, the air force wing of the LTTE, was not as effective as the Sea Tigers in the course of the conflict yet unique among insurgencies. Long thought to be strictly LTTE propaganda, the Air Tigers demonstrated their existence and ability to carry out attacks in March, 2007. The Air Tigers struck the main Sri Lankan airbase, killing three air force personnel and shutting down the nearby Colombo International Airport. Mainly flying in small propeller driven aircrafts, the Air Tigers had a limited number of light reconnaissance aircraft and helicopters. The Air Tigers conducted several attacks, to include a failed suicide mission, until their defeat in 2009.²⁹

²⁷Ministry of Defense, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 19.

²⁸Fish, "Sri Lanka Learns to Counter Sea Tiger's Swarm Tactics," 21-26.

²⁹"Tamil Tigers Show Off Air Force."

The final operational element of the LTTE was the Black Tigers, the suicide wing of the organization. From 1987 through 2008, the Black Tigers carried out over 378 suicide attacks, with over 25 percent of those attacks carried out by females. Suicide attacks were meticulously planned and executed, often with excellent results for the LTTE. They were successful in assassinating the president of Sri Lanka, the former Prime Minister of India, and numerous mayors and political party leaders.³⁰

To summarize the conflict for use in this work, the LTTE fought an insurgency for 26 years (1983 to 2009).³¹ External support was provided to the insurgents from India and financially from across the globe. The insurgents had limited to no sanctuary outside of Sri Lanka. Their motives were political in nature (although it can be argued Prabhakaran had a personal goal of power). The counterinsurgent was the Sri Lanka Government (SLG). India's brief intervention had little effect on the outcome of the conflict.³²

The insurgency was destroyed by a deliberate application of military forces against the insurgent main body. Political support, through funding, vision, and national-level leadership, was an essential element in the victory. After decades of failed peace negotiations, the counterinsurgency strategy became enemy-centric, focusing on the complete destruction of the LTTE and their leadership. The military adapted from hard

³⁰Ministry of Defense, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 17.

³¹While LTTE was an operational resistance group since 1976, the level of violence, coordination, and goals required for an insurgency were not established until 1983.

³²India's entrance and exit from the conflict are an excellent representation of a third party's will to fight a violent insurgency. Their role and lessons from the experience fall outside the scope of this work.

lessons learned, and military leaders were provided the tools and breadth to implement drastic changes to formations, training, equipment, and personnel strength. The counterinsurgent was aided by international community no longer willing to allow insurgencies to operate on a global scale. The international actions taken after 9/11 greatly diminished LTTE's fundraising abroad. In 2005, Canada outlawed funding of LTTE, cutting \$12 million of annual funding to the terrorist-designated organization.³³ Expatriate funding dwindled as LTTE's reputation for terrorism grew, accelerated by the assassination of the former Indian Prime Minister.³⁴

The counterinsurgency model used by SLG after 2005 has been named the Rajapaksa Model. The fundamentals of the government's enemy-centric strategy were to ignore international criticism, no longer negotiate, no ceasefires, complete operational freedom, empower younger leaders, and information sharing with their neighbors.³⁵ Rapid transformation, as evidenced by the Sri Lanka Navy, was a product of the freedom and funding provided by the increased fiscal support.³⁶

The results of these transformations were decisive SLG victories over a waning insurgent network. After the withdrawal of the IPKF, direct and indirect of the LTTE

³³Neil Smith, "Understanding Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers," *Small Wars Journal* (September 2010): 42, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/understanding-sri-lankas-defeat-of-the-tamil-tigers> (accessed March 5, 2013).

³⁴In a 26 year conflict numerous factors built upon another leading to the defeat of the insurgent. The 1991 assassination began a long term trend of weakened expatriate support.

³⁵Smith, 40.

³⁶Fish, 24.

from Indian Tamils diminished. China assisted in equipping and training Sri Lanka forces, going as far as assisting in the planning of operations.³⁷

The US Department of State published the interagency *US Government Counterinsurgency Guide* in January 2009. The guide defines a successful counterinsurgency as one where three conditions are met:

The affected government is seen as legitimate, controlling social, political, economic and security institutions that meet the population's needs, including adequate mechanisms to address the grievances that may have fueled support of the insurgency;

The insurgent movements and their leaders are co-opted, marginalized, or separated from the population;

Armed insurgent forces have dissolved or been demobilized, and/or reintegrated into the political, economic, and social structures of the country.³⁸

Before 2005, the SLG attempted to negotiate with an armed group controlling terrain and running a separate government in those regions. The LTTE were losing members due to conflict but the first high-profile defector was not until 2004. The Rajapaksa Model facilitated the achievement of all three requirements. Through mass and determination, LTTE land fell to SLG forces. The LTTE leadership was forced to operate in a rapidly shrinking area, and was eventually killed by security forces. In 2004, a senior LTTE commander defected to the SLG after a disagreement with Prabhakaran. Not only a symbol of dissent in the ranks, the defector provided valuable intelligence to SLG and brought with him a significant number of seasoned LTTE militants.³⁹

³⁷Smith, 43.

³⁸US Department of State, *US Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, January 2009, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf> (accessed December 2, 2012), 16.

³⁹Smith, 43.

Financially isolated, leadership killed or defected, isolated from their base of support in India, and their stocks destroyed by ground and naval offensives, the LTTE officially capitulated in May 2009. The SLG handling of the conflict and the Rajapaksa Model will be analyzed for decades after hostilities ended. Aid groups were quick to criticize the SLG for the violence of their offensive and the damage it caused, to include thousands of internally displaced persons. The SLG and its leadership are unapologetic.⁴⁰ They were elected on a mandate to destroy the LTTE and they succeeded. After decades of terror, there was little domestic sympathy for the LTTE.

El Salvador

After the Vietnam Conflict, the US was hesitant to enter into another counterinsurgency operation. Yet, even with a nation politically and military exhausted after intensive warfare in Southeast Asia, the administration of President Carter was not going to sit idly by and let El Salvador fall into the hands of communists.⁴¹

El Salvador is a nation of 6 million people. The smallest nation with the highest population density in Latin America, its population resides in predominately urban areas. Christianity plays an important role in El Salvadoran society; 78 percent of the population identifies itself as Christian [Roman Catholic (57 percent) or Protestant (21 percent)]. Slightly smaller than Massachusetts, El Salvador is tropical and mountainous.⁴²

⁴⁰Ibid., 42.

⁴¹Benjamin C. Schwartz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1991), v-vi.

⁴²Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook-Sri Lanka."

The Salvadoran Civil war lasted from 1979 to 1992. The roots of the war can be traced back to the late 19th Century. Coffee had been introduced to El Salvador and quickly became its primary cash crop. Wealth in the country was disproportionately concentrated among the land owners and ruling class, with 2 percent of the population effectively controlling all of the wealth of the nation. In 1932, the Central American Socialist Party was formed by Augustin Farabundo Marti and a peasant uprising began.⁴³ The government responded with violence, allegedly killing anyone thought to be a supporter of Marti. 30,000 people were eventually killed, including Marti after his arrest.⁴⁴ Armed resistance to the government continued in a decentralized manner.

A successful coup in 1979 gave hope for change. The civil-military *Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno* (Revolutionary Government Junta or JRG) was now leading the government of El Salvador. The US backed the new leadership with \$5 million in military aid, hoping to prevent another situation like similar to nearby Nicaragua, where the ruling regime fell to leftist guerrillas.⁴⁵ The government did not stabilize. Due to assassinations and fear of assassinations, the ruling civilians left the administration. Violence escalated on both sides. When policies enacted by the new regime failed to live up to expectations, five leftist groups in El Salvador organized under the new FMLN.⁴⁶

⁴³Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. El Salvador, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/181798/El-Salvador/40914/Military-dictatorships#ref468010> (accessed April 3, 2013).

⁴⁴“1932: The Massacre in El Salvador,” *Destiny’s Children*.

⁴⁵Thomas Conrad, “The Aid for El Salvador Is Called Nonlethal,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1980.

⁴⁶Michael Wilkerson, “Security and Democracy in El Salvador: An Undeniable Connection,” *Stanford Journal of International Relations* 10, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2008):

Archbishop Óscar Romero was a prominent Catholic leader gunned down in early 1980 by forces suspected to be right-wing elements supported by the JRG. Before his killing he penned an open letter to President Carter, asking for the US to stop supporting the JRG and call for peace.⁴⁷ At his funeral, government snipers killed dozens of mourners. These actions, combined with other high profile killings of aid workers and religious leaders, fueled resistance against the US-backed JRG. The US did suspend aid, but reinstated funding a short six weeks later.⁴⁸

The right-wing government and the left-wing FMLN broke into a full-fledged civil war by the fall of 1981. The government continued to attempt to quell dissidents with violence. The results of their actions drew widespread international condemnation. Despite the alleged human rights violations,⁴⁹ the US continued to back the government, increasing support throughout the 1980's.⁵⁰

The hard-line policies of the Salvadorian Government and their security forces drove popular support in rural areas to the FMLN. The government was viewed as repressive and biased against the poor and Catholic population. The FMLN took

35, http://sjir.stanford.edu/pdf/El_Salvador_%20REAL_final_v2.pdf (accessed March 23, 2013).

⁴⁷Tom Gibb, "Us Role in Salvador's Brutal War," *BBC News*, March 24, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1891145.stm> (accessed April 3, 2013).

⁴⁸Masterpiece, *Enemies of War*, *PBS*, <http://www.pbs.org/itvs/enemiesofwar/elsalvador2.html> (accessed February 12, 2013).

⁴⁹Gibb.

⁵⁰Stephen Stedman, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth Cousens, *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publications, 2002), 547.

advantage of the rift between the rural population and the government, providing services to the people in a successful bid to gain their support.

To counter the FMLN, the government attempted to isolate the insurgents from their Nicaraguan logistical support and attacked civilian centers supporting the FMLN.⁵¹ This strategy led to extremely high civilian casualties and drove popular support to the insurgents.

With a relatively small military in 1980, the government was limited in their military capabilities. The military could not hold land in the rural areas and the FMLN was able to capitalize on this weakness for the first half of the decade. As the insurgency dragged on and the US support grew, so did the capacity of the military in terms of competence and size. In 1979, security forces numbered 10,000 with limited helicopter and airplane support. A decade later, there were 56,000 security forces with 63 airplanes and 72 helicopters.⁵²

The war raged for over a decade, with the highest casualties occurring in the first four years. For the rest of the 1980s, the war stagnated with neither side getting the upper hand.⁵³ With safe havens in Honduras preserving the FMLN and a weak central government, there was no internal or external factor driving the conflict to an end. The insurgents had substantial popular support yet the military continued to grow in strength.

⁵¹Seldman, 547.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Wilkerson, 35.

The fall of the Berlin Wall changed the dynamics of the conflict. External support from Cuba and the Soviet Union ended.⁵⁴ The ideology behind the movement was adversely affected by the fall of the communist center of gravity. At approximately the same time, the administrations in the US shifted from President Reagan to President Bush. While President Reagan provided limited support for a settled negotiation, President Bush fully supported a peaceful resolution.⁵⁵ Multi-lateral negotiations, previously ineffective, began to work towards a peaceful resolution.

The final factor contributing to a negotiated settlement was a 1989 FMLN offensive against military and government installations. The FMLN launched simultaneous attacks on military installations and government centers, bringing two thousand guerrillas into the capital. The offensive failed and government forces won an overwhelming victory, yet changed the psychology of the actors on both sides of the conflict. While a tactical failure for the insurgents, it pressured the ruling elites and showed hard line insurgents military victory over the government was not feasible. Fringe elements in the FMLN previously against negotiations gave up on their hopes of defeating the government militarily.⁵⁶

In a rare case of Cold War unity, the US and Soviets pressured the UN to mediate a settlement. In 1990, initial peace accords were signed. One year later, a UN observer mission was established in El Salvador to ensure human rights accords were being followed by all parties. The Chapultepec Accord was signed in 1992, leading to a lasting

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Schwarz, 106-116.

⁵⁶Seldman, 549-550.

peace.⁵⁷ In accordance with the El Salvadorian Constitution established in 1983, fair elections were held in 1994.

The de-militarization agreed upon in 1992 required massive government security reforms and was incredibly detailed on the process. In an orderly fashion, both the FMLN and government security forces consolidated and de-armed. Many divisions of the security apparatus were permanently disbanded. Existing security forces underwent significant personnel changes. Changes ensured the FMLN had representation in the security forces and the existing security personnel, deeply mistrusted by the FMLN and their supporters, were replaced by new personnel.⁵⁸

In the end the FMLN was recognized as a legitimate political party and land reforms placated much of the rural grievances. While the peace process was not flawless, violence greatly decreased after the 1992 accords and never reached a significant level again.

The FMLN demobilized 12,362 fighters in 1992. The armed forces, numbering approximately 63,000 in 1992, were reduced to 30,500 by 1994. US military financial assistance all but ceased by the mid-1990s.⁵⁹

To summarize the conflict for this work, the FMLN fought an insurgency for 13 years (1979 to 1992). External support was provided by Cuba, Nicaragua, and the Soviet

⁵⁷Roush, "The El Salvador Accords."

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Seldman, 547.

Union.⁶⁰ Honduras provided a safe haven. This insurgency can be linked to leftist (communist) ideology, but is best described as a class struggle. The wealth divide in El Salvador was vast, and the rural population suffered extreme poverty. Religion played an important role in the lives of the insurgents, but was not a fundamental driver of the insurgency. It was part of their identity. The right-wing government of El Salvador was the counterinsurgent. They had support of the large landowners and capitalists, as well as international support via the US.

Unlike Sri Lanka, there was no great military defeat of the insurgents that brought this conflict to an end. Despite a five-to-one numerical advantage, the military was never able to significantly disrupt the FMLN's offensive capabilities, as demonstrated by the 1989 FMLN attacks. The government attempted to destroy the insurgent, yet could only achieve containment.

The population of El Salvador in 1992 was 5.4 million.⁶¹ With security forces numbering 63,000, the ratio of security forces to population is 1000:11. That is an extremely low number of counterinsurgents when compared to post-WWII counterinsurgencies. The relatively small number of security forces greatly limited the government's ability to clear and hold land.

What eventually led to end of the Salvadorian Civil War were not the security forces but political negotiations. The military provided time for the government and

⁶⁰Mike Allison, "El Salvador's Brutal Civil War: What We Still Don't Know," *Al Jazeera*, March 1, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/02/2012228123122975116.html> (accessed April 3, 2013).

⁶¹Jan Lahmeyer, "El Salvador," *Populstat*, <http://www.populstat.info/Americas/elsalvac.htm> (accessed March 1, 2013).

protection to urban population centers and industrial regions. Without US intervention in the early 1980s there was speculation that the FMLN would have militarily defeated the government security forces.⁶²

Colombia

Many may consider the counterinsurgent effort the US and Colombian Governments have undertaken in Colombia over the last two decades to be focused on counter-narcotic trafficking. While they would not be necessarily wrong, they would not be right, either.

Colombia is South America's fourth largest country in land mass and second in population. Strategically located, it borders both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Panama (and in close proximity to the Canal), and holds vast oil reserves. Its terrain varies from coastal lowlands, central highlands, and mountainous regions.⁶³

The roots of today's insurgency in Colombia go back to the earliest days of the Cold War. Struggle between liberal and conservative groups throughout the 1940s and 1950s consumed an estimated 200,000 lives and became the period known as the *La Violencia*.⁶⁴ The liberal communist movement in Colombia was fueled by the Cuban Revolution and Soviet efforts in Latin America. In the aftermath of this period, during

⁶²Wilkerson, 35.

⁶³Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook-Colombia," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html> (accessed February 12, 2013).

⁶⁴"Colombia: Stamping Out La Violencia," *Time Magazine*, March 13, 1964, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,828244,00.html> (accessed March 30, 2013).

1963 and 1964, Colombia's two main insurgent groups were formed; the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, or FARC) and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, or ELN). The FARC was aligned with a Soviet based ideology and the ELN was aligned with the Cubans.⁶⁵

The FARC was, and is at the time of this writing, a greater, more capable threat to the Colombia Government than the ELN. Funded by drug trade, extortion, and kidnapping, the FARC expanded through the 1980s and 1990s, maintaining an active presence in two thirds of Columbia's political districts. The ELN operated primarily in oil rich region of northeastern Colombia. Their funding primarily came from extorting oil companies. While the Colombian military has had success in degrading the ELN and the FARC, the ELN has ceased to be an effective fighting force due to military pressure and increased competition among insurgent and criminal organizations.⁶⁶

⁶⁵Angel Rabasa, John Gordon IV, Peter Chalk, Audra K. Grant, K. Scott McMahon, Stephanie Pezard, Caroline Reilly, David Ucko, and S. Rebecca Zimmerman, *From Insurgency to Stability* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1111.2.pdf (accessed February 12, 2013), 42-44.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 44.

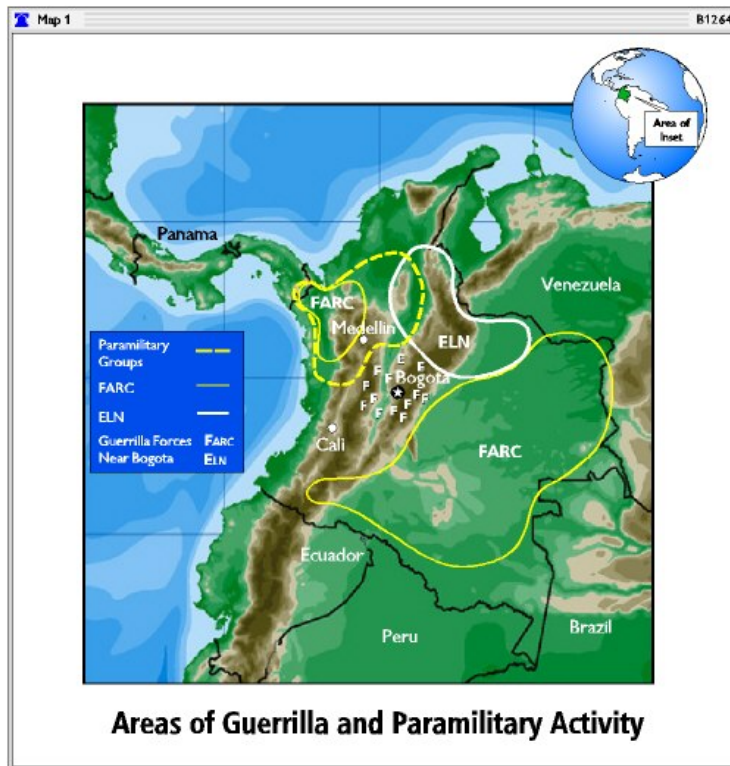


Figure 4. Insurgent Areas of Operations in 1999

Source: John Sweeney, "Tread Cautiously in Colombia's Civil War," *The Heritage Foundation*, March 26, 1999, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/1999/03/tread-cautiously-in-colombias-civil-war> (accessed April 3, 2013).

Due to the degradation in the general security situation throughout the later quarter of the 20th Century, militia groups were organized to provide local defense from the FARC and ELN. These groups, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* or AUC), did little to aid in the overall security of the country. They did successfully expel and deny regions to the FARC.

The insurgency changed during the 1990s. The FARC evolved into a more conventional fighting force, massing enough forces to battle battalion-sized elements. Toward the end of the decade, due in large part to US funding and assistance, the

Colombian military dramatically increased its capacity and capabilities. Concentrations of FARC fighters were no longer a tactical threat to government forces.⁶⁷

After 9/11, the situation changed yet again. President Bush increased financial and military support. Colombian President Andres Pastrana announced a collapse in peace negotiations with the FARC. In 2002, he ordered the military to reclaim large territories granted to the FARC in earlier peace settlements. The AUC organizations were directed to disband, leaving the government as the only legitimate security force.⁶⁸

From 2000 to 2008 the US provided over \$5 billion in military aid to Colombia. Other external actors in the conflict are Panama, Venezuela, and Brazil. Panama was once a safe haven for FARC personnel as well as a key transit point for the drug trade. AUC forces, prior to their disbanding, denied the border region to the FARC. Brazil has cooperated with the Colombians, facilitating cross-border airspace control empower both nation's security forces. Venezuela, until as recently as 2008, continued to provide assistance to the FARC. After the death of a FARC leader with strong ties to Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, the longtime leader of Venezuela, demanded a moment of silence in his nation's congress. A significant portion of the cocaine trafficked from Colombia to the US and Europe travels through Venezuela, with little to no government interference.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Ibid., 45.

⁶⁸Michael Evans, ed., "War in Colombia," National Security Archives Briefing Book No. 69, <http://www.gwu.edu/...nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB69/background.html> (accessed February 19, 2013).

⁶⁹Jens Gusling, "The Colombian Connection: How Hugo Chavez Courted Farc," *Spiegel Online International*, June 4, 2008, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-colombian-connection-how-hugo-chavez-courted-farc-a-557736.html> (accessed February 17, 2013).

Criminal between the governments of Ecuador, Nicaragua, and the FARC are known to exist.⁷⁰

Narcotics trafficking, long providing valuable funding to the FARC's operations, were a short-term asset and long term liability. Unlike the FMLN in El Salvador, who were recognized as a political movement and received a level of international recognition of their legitimate goals, the FARC was (and is) viewed as a criminal organization. Individual commanders were motivated by power and money, not ideology.

Unlike the LTTE, the FARC was unable to sustain large-scale operations of a battalion-sized or larger, despite multiple attempts. Population centers were protected by security forces, and insurgents were forced to operate in the rural areas and neighboring safe havens. Like the insurgencies in Afghanistan, the ability of the insurgent to maintain safe houses and bases outside of the reach of the counterinsurgent cannot be understated.

As of 2013, the FARC is not defeated. They continue to cause security concerns for the Colombian Government and interested parties (most notably the US). While still a threat, they have been degraded and contained. The probability of FARC successfully defeating the legitimate Colombian Government is remote. Security continues to improve and the counterinsurgents have the momentum (see figure 5).

⁷⁰Rabasa et al., *From Insurgency to Stability*, 51.

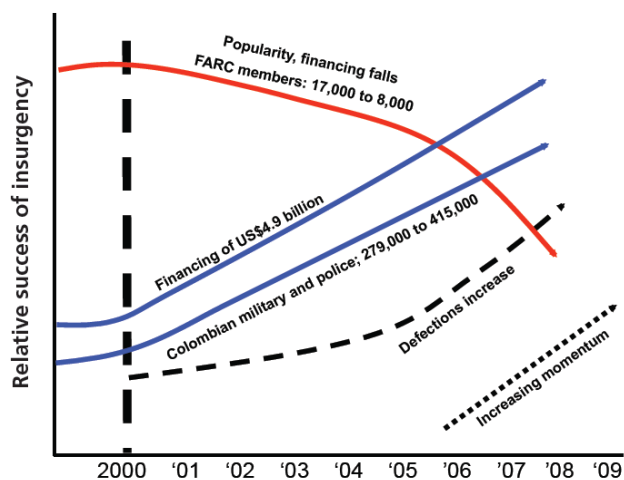


Figure 5. Tipping Point of the Colombian Insurgency

Source: Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010), 60.

In 2011, Alfonso Cano, the leader of FARC, was killed by the Colombian military. Demonstrating advanced tactics and intelligence, the Colombian Army removed the leader of FARC three years after the founder of FARC died from natural causes.⁷¹ While leadership has been replaced, losing original communist leadership is a blow to the legitimacy of their political goals.

Able to fight a competent army for decades, the FARC is a developed fighting force. As they expanded in the 1970s and 1980s, the FARC adopted a military structure. They established companies and platoons, wore uniforms, and had rudimentary staffs

⁷¹Darcy Crowe, “The Colombian Insurgents Vow a Battle,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203733504577022332960404076.html> (accessed February 19, 2013).

providing operational and strategic guidance.⁷² They expanded their insurgent influence along “fronts”, or districts. Their numbers swelled from 350 in 1966 to 15,000 in 2000. Initially against the drug trade (or at a minimum not involved), as cocoa became the cash crop for rural Colombians and the money in trafficking grew, the FARC increased their involvement in the trade.⁷³

As their involvement in the drug trade grew, their ideology waned as an insurgent motive. Money and control of the narcotics trade became the driving force behind the insurgency. Popular support of the insurgency all but disappeared; by one account they only had support of 5 percent of the population by the year 2000.⁷⁴

Operationally, the FARC sought to expand throughout the nation, forcing the government to disperse forces denying the counterinsurgent the ability to mass. The Colombian Army (COLAR) fought throughout the 1980s and 1990s using US counter-guerrilla doctrine.⁷⁵ This doctrine was designed to fight in a decentralized manner against small groups of individuals. As the FARC transitioned to maneuver warfare in the mid 1990s, the COLAR was still operating decentralized. The result was series of significant tactical defeats by the COLAR at the hands of the FARC.⁷⁶

⁷²Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: the Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Publishing, 2001), 25-27.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 29.

⁷⁵Thomas Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002), <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/pub18.pdf> (accessed April 3, 2013), 10.

⁷⁶Marks, 6-8.

In 2000, the Plan Colombia was initiated by the Colombian Government and the US. A ten point plan, it focused on improving the strength of the security forces, economic improvement, counter-drugs, and government and judicial reform. A large part of the reforms were funded by the US under President Clinton. All told, the US obligated \$1.3 billion to security and agriculture improvements from 2000 to 2001.⁷⁷ Unlike the aid the US provided during the Reagan administration to El Salvador, the aid provided to Colombia was never officially designated as funding in support of counter-insurgency efforts. Quite the opposite, all security funding was designated as anti-narcotic.

In 2002, as US aid began to flow into in Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Velez was elected to the presidency. Uribe directed an offensive against the FARC and ELN, utilizing helicopters and munitions provided by the US. This offensive was successful, killing many insurgent leaders and pushing the FARC away from the cities. Urban life became safer.⁷⁸

President Uribe was replaced by his defense minister, Juan Manuel Santos, in 2010. Juan Carlos Pinzon became the defense minister and has continued to transform the military organizationally and tactically. Continuing to pursue a counterinsurgency strategy (vs. the 1990s counter-guerilla strategy which was narco-criminal focused), Minister Pinzon is utilizing US doctrine similar to efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷⁹

⁷⁷Rabasa and Chalk, 63.

⁷⁸Michael O'Hanlon, "Colombia Needs U.S. to Invest More in Counterinsurgency," *Bloomberg*, March 29, 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-03-29/colombia-needs-u-s-to-invest-more-in-counterinsurgency.html> (accessed April 3, 2013).

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

Violence in Colombia peaked in 2002. Since then, security forces have grown in gross numbers, counterinsurgency strategy has been adopted, and a whole-of-government approach has materialized.⁸⁰

To summarize the Colombian insurgency for this work, the FARC and the ELN are the insurgents. They have safe havens in Venezuela and Equator. Prior to 2002, the FARC was given a 42,139 square kilometer zone with no government security forces as part of earlier negotiations.⁸¹ This zone (*zona de despeje*) provided FARC with a base of operations and limited the requirements for a safe haven across an international border. Earlier in the conflict Cuba and the Soviet Union provided material and financial support for the insurgents; this ended with the fall of the Soviet Union.

The FARC is primarily a military and narcotics trafficking organization. There was a movement in the organization to imbed FARC members into local politics; this was a move to control local resources, not effect national politics.⁸² Their website still proclaims the FARC as revolutionaries and politically motivated, yet their actions over the last two decades do not trend towards political overthrow of Colombia.⁸³

The counterinsurgent is the Colombia security forces. The counterinsurgents peaked in 2006 with a total of 306,000 personnel, for a ratio of seven security forces per

⁸⁰Marks, 10. Points out that prior to 2002, only the Army was focused on defeating the insurgency.

⁸¹Rabasa and Chalk, 43.

⁸²Ibid., 51.

⁸³<http://www.farc-ep.co/>. The researcher does not speak Spanish but given the dates of the postings it is obvious the site is updated daily (as of April 3, 2013).

one thousand inhabitants (7:1000).⁸⁴ The US has backed the counterinsurgents with military and financial assistance. The counterinsurgent transitioned from a counter-guerilla strategy to US-doctrinal counterinsurgency.

How did the Counterinsurgent Succeed with Minimal Forces?

The three insurgencies studied in this work were all unique. The enemy the counterinsurgent faced had different motivations. Third-party influence on the conflict, whether in support of the counterinsurgent, the insurgent, or a neutral manner, affected each war in a separate manner. The terrain, demographics, security forces capacity, and time all presented unique and separate challenges.

In Sri Lanka, the government had two distinct advantages over the governments of Colombia and El Salvador; the country was an isolated island and the insurgents were generally contained to a specific piece of the island. Of all of the conflicts presented here, the ability of the government to fight the insurgency with minimal forces seems easiest; they are only fighting on a small portion of the country. The government could conduct an economy of force⁸⁵ operation outside of LTTE held territory and contain the fighting.

In the end the government did just that; time was utilized to build the counterinsurgent force and direct assault was successful. It took many years to build a force capable of directly attacking the LTTE in mass and winning. External support was

⁸⁴Kneece, A-1.

⁸⁵As defined in the US Army, Field Manual (FM) 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Graphics* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1997), “The allocation of minimum-essential combat capability or strength to secondary efforts so that forces may be concentrated in the area where a decision is sought.”

instrumental to the LTTE. It needed to be cut-off in order for the SLG to achieve the superiority of combat power necessary to overwhelm the LTTE.

External support is important to an insurgency. Since WWII, only three insurgencies have been successful without external support, out of eighteen insurgent conflicts with no external support to the insurgent.⁸⁶ The LTTE were supported by a non-state entity, Tamils from around the globe. While this financial support aided in the LTTE's cause, it did not significantly shape the outcome.

Statistically, external support to the counterinsurgent is a weakness, not a strength.⁸⁷ While India provided peacekeepers for a short duration, they were not operating in support of the counterinsurgent. The SLG fought alone, and this provided an advantage. The enemy-centric (Rajapaksa Model) warfare strategy pursued after 2005 was internationally condemned due to its perceived assault on human rights of the Tamils. This research does not speak on the moral, humanitarian and legal concerns with Sri Lanka's counterinsurgency approach. If a state actor sponsored the counterinsurgent, support may have been contingent on the method the government approached the insurgency.

While controversial, the outcome of Sri Lanka's enemy-centric counterinsurgency strategy is apparent. US doctrine directs population-centric method of counterinsurgency. Enemy-centric focuses on isolating and destroying the insurgent while population centric focuses on securing the population from the counterinsurgent.

⁸⁶Connable, 62-63.

⁸⁷Ibid., 49.

Like Sri Lanka, Colombia, under new presidential leadership, altered their strategy against the insurgents. The counter-guerrilla strategy employed until 2002 saw large garrisons built in hostile areas under constant attack. Patrolling was conducted infrequently and in large formations vulnerable to attack (ironically similar to Napoleon's failed counterinsurgency experience in Spain and the Soviet experience in Afghanistan). Adopting a US-styled counterinsurgency assisted in turning the tide on an insurgency dragging on for over four decades.

As shown earlier, the population was already against the insurgents (they only held 5 percent support). Yet the population was not supportive of the government's efforts. In order for a population-centric strategy to be successful, the government and security forces must be viewed as legitimate. The new strategy secured population centers and spurred economic activity.⁸⁸ The enemy was still pursued. Economy of force operations were conducted in less populated and less insurgent infested regions and the military was placed against the greatest threats in a methodical manner.⁸⁹

Both Sri Lanka and Colombia's counterinsurgency efforts were positively affected by US and western sentiment after 9/11. In Sri Lanka, the LTTE was declared a terrorist organization and their external funding streams were disrupted by the international banking regulations on such entities. For years the US government claimed support to Colombia was 'counter-narcotics'; indirectly disrupting the insurgents by attacking their perceived center of gravity (narcotics trade) while staying clear of support

⁸⁸Plan Colombia contributed the funding for these efforts. See page 49 of this document for further information.

⁸⁹Marks, 10-22.

the counterinsurgency efforts. After 9/11 the US dropped the pretense the support for Colombia was counternarcotics and increased military support.

Of the three conflicts studied, El Salvador was most reliant on external support. In 1981 and 1983, the insurgents were very close to a military defeat of the government forces.⁹⁰ The insurgents strove for popular support and capitalized on the grievances of the rural population.⁹¹ A military stalemate existed throughout much of the 1980s; while the FMLN were unable to defeat the Salvadorian government, the counterinsurgents were unable to defeat or significantly degrade the FMLN. Of equal importance was the popular support for the FMLN. The political support for the insurgents did not wane despite an improving counterinsurgent military capacity (funded in large part by the US). The external support kept the government in existence, but could not overcome the insurgent movement, politically or militarily. The counterinsurgent was viewed as abusing the population through “death squads”, countering any military gains with a political loss for the counterinsurgent.⁹² While the counterinsurgent did not make overt attempts to win the hearts and minds of the people, typically in an insurgent conflict the counterinsurgent will gain the trust of the people through military successes.⁹³ In the case of El Salvador, any potential gains amongst the people were overshadowed by the government’s violent acts against civilians. The US, viewed domestically in the US and internationally as counterinsurgent actor in El Salvador, lost political capital from the alleged human rights

⁹⁰Stedman, 547.

⁹¹Ibid., 546.

⁹²Ibid, 545.

⁹³Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: from Revolution to Apocalypse*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Potomac Books Inc., 2005).

violations. As a result, funding was stopped periodically but always returned after promised reforms.⁹⁴

Balancing military strength and popular support, the counterinsurgent and insurgent were effectively even strength. Neither side improved their position for years, making a brokered negotiation easier to accomplish.⁹⁵

Of the three insurgencies studied here, negotiations were only successful in El Salvador. Ceasefires and concessions made by the counterinsurgent in Colombia and Sri Lanka failed to improve the situation for the government.

The FMLN is the only insurgency in this work where the outcome was slightly favorable for the insurgent. The marginal success of the FMLN can be attributed to their ability to maintain strong popular support. It is a victory for the counterinsurgent, as the power structure remained relatively stable and violence ceased. Incorporating the FMLN as a political party, in addition to land reforms, addressed the grievances of the people. In Sri Lanka, the grievances of the LTTE and the Tamil minority population were not addressed; military defeat sealed the fate of the insurgent. In Colombia, the original grievances of the insurgency were ideological and hence must more difficult to address. The government attempted to address the root cause of the insurgency by providing the FARC with a semi-autonomous region, only to have it become an insurgent safe haven with little positive effect. The land grant to the FARC came after the insurgency morphed

⁹⁴Of note, the ties of “death squads” to the GOP did not end in 1992. In the 2012 election for President of the United States, numerous media outlets tried to connect Gov. Romney and the “death squads.”

⁹⁵i.e. both sides recognized victory was not readily attainable.

into a narcotics-based insurgency and can be argued that it was too little to late or the wrong strategy all together.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No force level guarantees victory for either side. During previous conflicts, planners assumed that combatants required a 10 or 15 to 1 advantage over insurgents to win. However, no predetermined, fixed ratio of friendly troops to enemy combatants ensures success in COIN. The conditions of the operational environment and the approaches insurgents use vary too widely.

In the three conflicts studied here, security forces were arrayed in different methods based on troop, enemy, and terrain constraints in order to maximize their effect. In the enemy-centric approach pursued by the SLG forces were massed on insurgent strongholds geographically separated from the population segment supportive of the counterinsurgent. Securing the population, a troop intensive task, was secondary to destroying the insurgent's leadership and combat power.

The enemy-centric approach, not supported by current US doctrine,⁹⁶ allowed the SLG to mass all available combat power against the insurgents. This was effective in Sri Lanka due to the relatively isolated posture of the LTTE and the minimal forces required to secure the majority of the Sinhalese-dominated areas. In addition, the SLG was

⁹⁶Analysts have argued that the US war in Afghanistan is being executed in an enemy-centric fashion. Others, most notably demonstrated by COL (ret.) Tunnell's open letter to the Secretary of the Army, argue the US should pursue a more enemy-centric approach given our force ratio Afghanistan. US doctrine does not directly support enemy-centric or population-centric approaches to counterinsurgency, nor does it discuss the approaches. FM 3-24 and JP 3-24 heavily promotes the tenets of population-centric warfare without advocating or defining the position.

perceived to show little disregard for casualties among the Tamils. All assets can be brought to bear for a much lower cost if collateral damage is not a concern.

In Colombia, forces were originally arrayed in large outposts subject to large-scale attacks by the insurgent. They did not protect the population and did not hold land. The counterinsurgent adapted and developed a strategy of protecting population centers and took advantage of swelling ranks to conduct offensive operations. This strategy aligns much closer to current US doctrine of protecting the population while continuing to disrupt the insurgent's ability to interfere with government efforts.

El Salvador provides little military lessons learned. While the counterinsurgent was able to maintain power, they were not successful in securing the population or defeating the insurgency. The lessons to be drawn from El Salvador center on peaceful resolution of an insurgency with third-party brokerage; an important lesson for sure, but not essential to this work. The US showed great resolve working with a less than optimal HN partner. With assistance, the HN was able to expand their military capacity a rate greater than the insurgent.

When operating with minimal forces, based on the conflicts studied in this work, the counterinsurgent can take an enemy-centric or population-centric approach. If the insurgent is easily identifiable and geographically isolated, a preponderance of a counterinsurgent's forces can be dedicated to defeating the insurgent militarily if it achieves the endstate. In the case of Sri Lanka, degrading the LTTE's combat power and killing their leadership was successful in ensuring victory for the counterinsurgent. In Colombia, the insurgency is widely dispersed and operating in difficult terrain. Isolating

the insurgent and defeating them in a deliberate campaign is an unlikely solution with the forces available. There, a population-centric approach is successful.

Time is on the side of the counterinsurgent in Colombia. In *How Insurgencies End*, the authors demonstrate that the longer an insurgency lasts, the higher the probability of counterinsurgent success. In the conflicts here, all three counterinsurgents gained strength over time. External support dissipated in Sri Lanka and Colombia. While largely based on events outside of the conflict region, the loss of external support dramatically lowers the insurgent's odds of victory.

In order to maximize effectiveness of troops available, the simplest solution is to prioritize forces into either regions of enemy strength (i.e. Sri Lanka) or securing major population centers (similar to the US strategy in Iraq circa 2006).⁹⁷

Implications for Future Conflicts

Politics, world events, and a host of other factors will drive whether the United States will enter into counterinsurgency conflict in the future. While the role of the US in future conflicts is unknown, what is a near certainty is that insurgencies will occur for the near and intermediate future. In most cases, the US will have a direct or indirect influence on the conflict.

As the study of the Colombian conflict shows, even though the US is not the primary counterinsurgent, the effect of US direct and indirect influence altered the dynamics of the counterinsurgency effort. Military to military interaction is an ongoing

⁹⁷Kneece, 26.

effort throughout the world, at embassies, exercises, training, and combat. Intelligence agencies, departments of state, and trade expand our global reach.

As the US commits to advising or assisting a counterinsurgent, it is essential we recognize the impact of our influence, the depth of the commitment, and establish clear goals and objectives. In addition, limitations to the assistance must be acknowledged and mitigated by all parties. Budgets, personnel, political willingness to overtly or covertly assist in military actions, and effectiveness of intervention need to be considered.

APPENDIX A

Counterinsurgent to Insurgent Ratio

COIN Victors	Counter Insurgent	Insurgents	Ratio
Argentina	28,200	20,250	1:1
Dhofar	16,100	6,000	3:1
El Salvador	56,200	2,000	28:1
Greece	225,450	30,000	8:1
Kenya	30,500	12,000	3:1
Madagascar	16,000	16,000	1:1
Malaysia	62,020	7,000	9:1
Papua New Guinea	2,000	2,000	1:1
Philippines 50-54	25,058	20,00	1:1
Sri Lanka	115,000	4,000	29:1
Uruguay	30,500	3,400	9:1
Total	607,078	122,650	
		Raw Ratio	5:1
		Ratio Average	8:1
Standard Deviation	10	Ratio from Range	4:1

Source: Joshua Thiel, “Coin Manpower Ratios: Debunking the 10 to 1 Ratio and Surges,” *Small Wars Journal* (January 15, 2011): 5-7, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/coin-manpower-ratios-debunking-the-10-to-1-ratio-and-surges> (accessed December 3, 2012).

APPENDIX B

Violence Peaks in Counterinsurgencies

Conflict	Violence Peak Year	Security Force KIA per Million Population	Security Forces per 1,000 Population	Fraction of Security Forces Local
Algerian War(1954-1962)	1958†	297.5	46.3	0.11
Angola (1961-1974)	1968	20.2	12.3	0.44
Argentina & The Dirty War (1969-1983)	1976	5.9	6.6	1
Colombian Civil War(1964-present)	2002†	28.1	12.2	1
Contras in Nicaragua (1981-1990)	1987	460.3	22.9	1
Dhofar Rebellion (1965-1976)	1973	2.4	6.7	0.68
El Salvador (1979-1992)	1983†	358.6	7.7	1
Greek Civil War (1946-1949)	1948	507.9	29.9	1
Huk Rebellion (1946-1954)	1952	7.8	2.6	1
Indonesia in Timor (1975-1999)	1978	620.5	33.6	0.33
Kurdish Rebellion vs. Turkey(1984-1999)	1994	17.7	8.4	1
Malaya (1948-1960)	1951	66.6	12.7	0.76
Mau Mau Revolt (1952-1956)	1954	44.8	9.3	0.87
Mozambique (1964-1974)	1973 †	23.1	5.9	0.54
Nepal People's War (1996-2008)	2002†	26.1	5.3	1
Northern Ireland (1968-1998)	1972 †	109.3	18.4	0.23
Portuguese Guinea (1963-1974)	1967	269.5	38.4	0.15
Rhodesia I (1966-1970)	1968	2.5	3.4	0.88
Shining Path in Peru (1980-1999)	1992 †	17.5	7.7	1

Tamil Insurgency (1983-2002)	2000	48.3	8.8	1
Tunisian Independence War (1952-1956)	1954	7.6	14.1	0.12
Tupamaro Insurgency in Uruguay (1963-1973)	1972	7.1	4.3	1

Source: Steve Goode, "A Historical Basis for Force Requirements in Counterinsurgency," *Parameters* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 52, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/09winter/goode.pdf> (accessed December 3, 2012).

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