

Where We Stand: The Challenges of Insurgency

History is rife with examples of insurgencies, and the challenges they pose continue to present themselves to states including the United States. Setting out with a goal of identifying trends in the strategy of insurgency and counter-insurgency, American counter-insurgent (COIN) efforts and their successes and failures were explored. Before this study was undertaken, a definition for the term insurgency was settled upon:

Insurgency (n.): An organized non-state actor who is perceived to accept violence in pursuit of a permanent change to the political status quo.

A quick discussion of causes ensued, with a concurrence formed around three variables: dissatisfaction, leadership, and violence. With the definition settled upon, a critical analysis of American COIN missions, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the attempt to understand American COIN efforts, it was decided to study the successes and failures so far that historical perspective allows.

America has a history of success in COIN missions. The recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan provide some clear examples of successful strategies. For brevity, they will not be explored in depth. General positive trends include an improvement in ground security, the Sunni Awakening movement, ceasefires, a focus on increasing the role and capabilities of the host's military, minimized collateral damage, and a building of infrastructure, both political and physical. Unfortunately these successes are reached in a very costly trial-and-error process. Large-scale mistakes in the Iraq war include the immediate disbanding of the Iraqi Army, non-discriminatory de-Baathification, and failure to plan adequately for stability operations. Afghanistan witnessed the failure to maintain security and borders, a shift of focus and subsequent over-reliance on air power to make up for troop deficit, and the lack of incorporation of the Pashtu. From these successes and failures, lessons for future application become evident.

Pulling from America's experience in past and present COIN operations, ideas were generated meant to help tackle future insurgencies. First and foremost, the need to recognize that by nature counter-insurgencies are long-term strategic commitments and that to succeed states need to maintain the necessary domestic political support for such a mission. The need to incorporate elites, especially at the local level, was evident. Also examined was this concept of 'Out-Governing' an insurgency. Recognizing the goal of an insurgency is to establish a rival political structure, then the existing governmental structure needs to be strengthened to persevere. This is a broad point, encompassing the need to ensure a means for locals to maintain a base of life, placing actions in cultural contexts, and simple but noticeable direct actions, i.e. building a well with locals. It is also necessary to recognize the need for a codified and common 'message' among actors in the counter-insurgency that can be adjusted to ensure the right content is being heard by the target audience. The content is intended to reassure the populace of the commitment of the United States and to humanize the military forces. A strong public relations effort is valuable in this endeavor, which allows at American forces to present their version of events first; the first message is the truth to many. Important in this effort to unify a message is the need to pool abilities of Intergovernmental Organizations (IOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and state actors. Also, in whatever action is undertaken, it is important that locals are integrated into employed positions and that the final product has a 'local face.' Another valuable tool are Combined Action Teams; placing a group of troops for long periods in small locals relying on the populace for support and protection ensures that they have it in their best interest to win the local hearts and minds. In an effort to weaken an insurgency, the funding

and resources should be targeted, both domestically and abroad. Another unique idea developed was that of playing the role of a 'Guest.' At its barest level, this means understanding and playing to the hosts' culture. Also inherent to this technique is cultural exchange; the daily back and forth among counter-insurgent actors and locals should be capitalized on as a means to humanize both sides. Avoiding collateral damage is also a critical point; the collateral damage does nothing to improve our standing among the locals. Another unique idea was the recognition of the role of regional bodies. By utilizing groups of states who share a common geographic area or identity, a vested interest can be capitalized upon to ensure long-term support for COIN missions. Anticipating and utilizing strategic opportunities will maximize visibility and success. It was also identified that there is an evolution in insurgencies, and that there must be appropriate evolutions in commitment. As part of this, the ability to commit only a small budget may not be a deterrent in efforts to combat later-model insurgencies. The recent experience of the United States in the Philippines identifies low budgets as driving innovation in late-model insurgencies. The end-all lesson is the need to remove havens from the insurgencies, denying them access by a utilization of all the above-mentioned tools. Even with recognizing these lessons however, there will always be future challenges.

Analyzing the current global trends of insurgencies, it is recognized that alarming challenges will be presented to COIN actors. The United States in particular has to address the Afghan-Pakistan nexus if it ever hopes to overcome the Afghan insurgency. The Horn of Africa and other African regions require monitoring now to prevent insurgencies in the future. States must increase intelligence capabilities to ensure they counter the right insurgent movements. It is also important that states involved in COIN operations continuously reevaluate the domestic situation, both politically and economically, to ensure support exist for COIN intervention abroad. Identified as essential to an effect global combating of insurgencies, international organizations must change the institutional culture from that of a collective security effort to one of peace and state building. This future challenges and goals can be addressed and overcome, but it requires a commitment by all COIN actors.

It is the conclusion of this effort that even with all discussed so far, two points deserve special emphasis. First is the need of COIN actors to recognize the need for an upfront commitment to this type of mission and the need to maintain this domestic commitment for the duration. Secondly, actors need to maintain their focus on innovation of strategy and tactics while critically analyzing the faults and successes of the currently implement strategy and tactics. In closing, it is the need to change the mental framework and perspective from which studies of insurgency are derived away from fighting insurgency to an acceptance of the need to prevent them.