



PROJECT AIR FORCE

THE ARTS

CHILD POLICY

CIVIL JUSTICE

EDUCATION

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

NATIONAL SECURITY

POPULATION AND AGING

PUBLIC SAFETY

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

TERRORISM AND
HOMELAND SECURITY

TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE

WORKFORCE AND WORKPLACE

This PDF document was made available from www.rand.org as a public service of the RAND Corporation.

[Jump down to document](#) ▼

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world.

Support RAND

[Purchase this document](#)

[Browse Books & Publications](#)

[Make a charitable contribution](#)

For More Information

Visit RAND at www.rand.org

Explore [RAND Project AIR FORCE](#)

View [document details](#)

Limited Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law as indicated in a notice appearing later in this work. This electronic representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for non-commercial use only. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents.

This product is part of the RAND Corporation monograph series. RAND monographs present major research findings that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors. All RAND monographs undergo rigorous peer review to ensure high standards for research quality and objectivity.

Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era

The Strategic Importance of USAF
Advisory and Assistance Missions

Alan J. Vick, Adam Grissom, William Rosenau, Beth Grill,
Karl P. Mueller

Prepared for the United States Air Force

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited



RAND

PROJECT AIR FORCE

The research described in this report was sponsored by the United States Air Force under Contract F49642-01-C-0003. Further information may be obtained from the Strategic Planning Division, Directorate of Plans, Hq USAF.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Air power in the new counterinsurgency era : the strategic importance of USAF advisory and assistance missions / Alan J. Vick ... [et al.].

p. cm.

“MG-509.”

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8330-3963-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Counterinsurgency—United States. 2. Air power—United States. 3. United States. Air Force. 4. Military assistance, American 5. Military missions. 6. World politics—21st century. I. Vick, Alan.

U241.A57 2006

358.4'1425—dc22

2006019803

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

RAND® is a registered trademark.

Cover image of CT team: Combat Aviation Advisors from the 6th SOS and regular army soldiers from Chad in front of a Chad Air Force C-130.

© Copyright 2006 RAND Corporation

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from RAND.

Published 2006 by the RAND Corporation

1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138

1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050

4570 Fifth Avenue, Suite 600, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

RAND URL: <http://www.rand.org/>

To order RAND documents or to obtain additional information, contact

Distribution Services: Telephone: (310) 451-7002;

Fax: (310) 451-6915; Email: order@rand.org

Summary

Often treated by Americans as an exceptional form of warfare, insurgency is anything but. Spanning the globe, centuries, and societies, insurgency is quite common. The United States itself was founded by insurgents—British colonists who rebelled against the abuses and neglect of British rule. At the end of the 19th century, the United States fought Filipino insurgents in its newly won territory. During the 20th century, U.S. forces fought insurgents in Nicaragua; Haiti; the Dominican Republic; the Philippines (again); Vietnam; and most recently, Afghanistan and Iraq. It has provided support to counterinsurgent forces in many more locations and support to insurgents in a few (most notably Nicaragua and Afghanistan).

This monograph seeks to help USAF prepare for future insurgency challenges by describing current trends, presenting an overview of key counterinsurgency principles, exploring counterinsurgency grand strategy options for the United States, proposing a new precautionary approach to counterinsurgency, and assessing current and potential USAF contributions.

Key Findings

- The primary insurgent threat to the United States today stems from regional rebels and global terrorists who share a common ideology.¹ These ties allow global terrorists to use a local insur-

¹ Throughout this report we use *insurgent* and *rebel* interchangeably.

gency as a training ground, to provide sanctuary, and to motivate a global audience (pp. 3–4).

- Today the only terrorist group with both the capability and desire to conduct attacks against U.S. interests at home and abroad is al Qaeda (pp. 24, 55).
- The U.S. counterinsurgency priority, therefore, should be the insurgencies motivated by radical Islam and global jihad. These are the ones most likely to find common cause with al Qaeda (p. 58).
- Previous experience with insurgencies has demonstrated that insurgencies are rarely defeated by outside powers. Rather, the best role for outsiders is an indirect one: training, advising, and equipping the local nation, which must win the war politically and militarily (pp. 4–5).
- A precautionary strategy that seeks to defeat the insurgency in its early stages is the most cost-effective approach, potentially avoiding huge costs in lives and dollars (pp. 82–93).
- Because insurgencies are fundamentally driven by social, political, and economic issues, nonmilitary aid will often be most important, especially in the early phases of a rebellion. Support to the host nation's police, security, and intelligence organizations is especially critical and should precede or occur in parallel with military assistance. When they are necessary, military actions must be carefully designed to support the overall political strategy. In past insurgencies, ill-considered actions by the government's military and security forces often increased insurgent determination and popular support for the rebels. The United States and leaders of partner nations must take care lest the military dynamic overtake the political (pp. 37–41, 45–47).
- Because air power has much to contribute to counterinsurgencies around the globe, advising, training, and equipping partner air forces will be a key component of U.S. counterinsurgency efforts (pp. 109–114).
- USAF needs a full-spectrum counterinsurgency capability. Although training, advising, and equipping efforts will be USAF's most common role in counterinsurgency, some situations may

require U.S. combat air power to team with indigenous or coalition ground forces or to participate in joint and interagency U.S. counterinsurgency operations (pp. 146–147).

Recommendations for USAF

USAF possesses a broad range of capabilities, in both its special and general-purpose forces, that can make significant contributions to fighting insurgents. Bringing these capabilities to bear on the counterinsurgency problem will require that counterinsurgency be treated as a problem as important as conventional warfighting, even though the manpower, dollars, and force structure devoted to it will likely never need to be as large as those devoted to major combat operations. To enhance its contribution to counterinsurgency, USAF should take the following steps:

- **Make counterinsurgency an institutional priority.** Without clear signals from senior USAF leaders, the institutional USAF will continue to treat counterinsurgency either as something that only the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) does or as a lesser included case that requires no special preparation. Major speeches, vision statements, personnel policy changes, and new programs will be necessary to overcome this perception (p. 133).
- **Create organizations and processes to oversee USAF counterinsurgency efforts.** The USAF will need new organizations to develop and oversee counterinsurgency policy and concepts, to integrate efforts across the USAF, to coordinate with DoD and other agencies, and to execute counterinsurgency advisory and assistance missions (pp. 133, 135).
- **Develop and nurture counterinsurgency expertise throughout USAF.** Counterinsurgency expertise does exist in USAF, but, outside of AFSOC, it is scattered and limited. Substantial counterinsurgency education should be a mandatory part of the cur-

riculum in the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps, at the Air Force Academy, and in all phases of Air Force Professional Military Education from Squadron Officer School to the Air War College. Opportunities for more in-depth training and education will need to be developed, as will appropriate career paths for counterinsurgency specialists (pp. 135–136).

- **Create a wing-level organization for aviation advising.** This is likely the single most important initiative USAF can take to enhance its own counterinsurgency capabilities. By creating a wing-level organization, USAF will be able to grow its advisory capacity to meet the demand; expand aviation assistance to include institutional and higher-level advising; develop new counterinsurgency concepts and technologies for partner air forces; supervise an embedded advisor program; and offer sufficiently diverse opportunities to attract and retain the very best officers, noncommissioned officers, and civilian personnel (pp. 136–143).
- **Enhance USAF combat capabilities for counterinsurgency.** Although only as a last resort, USAF does need the ability to conduct air operations in support of partner-nation forces and/or U.S. joint forces fighting insurgencies. USAF already has considerable relevant capabilities, and its modernization programs will enhance them further. Beyond that, specific technologies (e.g., foliage-penetrating sensors) and, most important, a deeper understanding of the insurgent phenomenon will increase the effectiveness of air power in future counterinsurgency operations (pp. 146–147).