CONTROLLING SMALL WARS

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December 1968
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In almost every year since World War II at least one insurgency has been underway in the less-developed areas. In chronological order such insurgencies have appeared in Greece, Burma, Malaya, The Philippines, Vietnam, Kenya, Laos, the Congo, Algeria, Cuba, Yemen, the Dominican Republic, and Thailand. Not surprisingly, nearly half of the "small wars" on this list have occurred in Southeast Asia.

One can think of several reasons for expecting this high frequency to diminish in years to come. For example, "lessons" have been learned from Vietnam by both internal and external participants, and the termination of alien rule in most of the world has removed a major stimulant for many insurgencies.¹ One can also think of reasons for expecting the frequency to remain the same or to increase: again, the "lessons" learned from Vietnam (the lessons are, in other words, ambiguous and opposite inferences can be drawn from them); the persistence of deep frictions, grievances, and inequities in the less-developed countries, and the heightened frustration that is likely to accompany unconstrained promises and limited success in producing

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This paper was prepared for inclusion in a book on Problems of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy, edited by H. G. Gelber, and to be published by Oxford University Press.

¹For a statement of such reasons, see Paul Kecskemeti, Insurgency as a Strategic Problem, The RAND Corporation, RM-5160, February 1967, Santa Monica.
remedies. In sum, the reasons for expecting this frequency to diminish are not obviously stronger than the reasons for expecting it to remain the same or to increase.

Each major insurgency is, in some sense, unique as suggested by the diversity of areas and circumstances in the list. But most of them have shared many common features -- organization and disorganization, tactics, violence, coercion, persuasion, ideology. The common features make insurgency a proper subject for more general analysis. The diversity warrants caution in pushing generalizations too far.

What are the sources and causes of insurgency? How are the sources and causes combined and converted into an effective insurgent organization and operation? What concepts and doctrines can help in understanding insurgency, from either the side of the initiator or the opponent? How can an insurgency be made to wax and win, or to wilt and wane? What programs can be formulated to deter or anticipate it, or to control or suppress it once it has started? These are the sorts of questions with which this essay will be principally concerned.

An essay on insurgency and counterinsurgency might appropriately begin by considering the words themselves. Both terms have been used so loosely that their meaning is unclear. And frequently strong feelings are evoked by them despite, or because of, their ambiguity. In much of the underdeveloped world the term "insurgent" more often denotes the "good guys" than the "bad guys." (In Mexico City, for example, a main boulevard is the Avenida de los Insurgentes.)

For these reasons we shall generally use instead two terms that are probably more accurate, surely fresher, and perhaps less partisan: "rebellion" and "authority." The dictionary defines rebellion as "open, organized, and often armed, resistance," whereas insurgency is defined as a revolt "not reaching the proportions of an organized revolution" [emphasis added]. Since it is precisely the organizational aspects that are central to its strength, as well as to its analysis, "rebellion" is a more useful term.
"Authority" is a legal and legitimized right and capacity to command. Of course, authority can be employed for good or bad purposes, and for purposes that are congenial or hostile or indifferent to American or other interests. These purposes should be of first importance in policy formulation — that is, in the choice of whether and how to support or oppose or remain neutral toward a particular authority structure — but they are not the primary concern of this essay. In principle, the analysis of what makes rebellion succeed or fail can be used by those interested in its success or those interested in its failure. In deterring or fighting rebellions, or in helping them emerge and advance toward victory, what needs to be made central to the discussion is the structure of authority, and how to strengthen and maintain it, on the one hand, or how to undermine, destroy, and supplant it, on the other. (In the following discussion, I shall frequently use the letter "R" to stand for rebellion or insurgency, and "A" to refer to authority.)

Let us now turn to some specifics concerning the concepts and conduct of counterinsurgency. In so doing, I do not mean to imply that insurgencies should invariably be countered wherever and whenever they arise. The question of whether and when to oppose, or to support, or to ignore an insurgency does not permit an easy or a general answer, neither from the Australian nor the U.S. point of view. General Suharto's rebellion against Sukarno, following the attempted coup of September 30, 1965, provides one instructive example of the wisdom of non-involvement by both countries. Nevertheless, when the controlling of an insurgency does emerge as a policy goal, as it has and no doubt will, questions of concept and technique are important to ask and to answer.\(^1\) They are the principal concern of this paper.

\(^1\)The following discussion, as well as some of the preceding comments, draws freely on the more extensive treatment in a forthcoming book by Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, Jr., *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts.*
POLITICS AND FORCE IN COUNTERINSURGENCY

According to a frequent assertion, in successful counterinsurgency politics is primary and force is secondary. In this respect, counterinsurgency is supposed to differ from conventional war, where the order is reversed.

Belief in the primacy of politics over force characterizes the familiar slogans and priorities of a set of views I shall refer to as the "hearts-and-minds" approach to the problem. But advocacy of the primacy of politics is not confined to civilians. Sometimes the views expressed by professional military men also stress the primacy of politics in counterrebellion, although probably the typical military view would have it otherwise.1 While the view that politics is primary is both frequently expressed and widely accepted, is it true?

One difficulty in answering this question arises from the unclear meaning of "politics" and "force." Tautology often lurks behind such strongly drawn but loosely defined dichotomies, and this is a case in point. Frequently, perhaps usually, the political effectiveness of an A is judged by whether or not an R is suppressed (deterred), while the suppression (deterrence) of rebellion is construed to depend on the political effectiveness of A. Thus, if Magsaysay was indeed successful in suppressing the Huks, he was politically "effective"

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1 Despite frequent rhetoric to the contrary, a probably more typical, but not more accurate, military viewpoint was expressed by General Earle G. Wheeler in 1962, before he became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

It is fashionable in some quarters to say that the problems in Southeast Asia are primarily political and economic rather than military. I do not agree. The essence of the problem in Vietnam is military.

Quoted by Alastair Buchan, "Questions about Vietnam," Encounter, January 1968, p. 7. The reason this formulation is no more accurate than the other is that it focuses on the amount and the priority of force (the opposing view focuses on the amount and the priority of politics). Both views neglect what in our view are the more important questions concerning the types of force and types of politics, as discussed below.
(thereby demonstrating the primacy of politics over force), and if Batista was notably unsuccessful in suppressing Castro, it was because of his political ineffectiveness, thereby demonstrating the same point!

However, if an effort is made to define the concepts so that each can be observed independently of the other, it is highly questionable whether the commonplace assumption about what is primary and what is secondary is right. If "politics" is construed as the domain of nonviolence, persuasion, and consensus, and "force" as the domain of violence, coercion, and constraint, then the biggest contrasts between counterinsurgency and other types of war probably lie within these categories, rather than between them. The main differences (and they are significant ones) between counterinsurgency and other wars should probably be put, not in terms of the commonplace view, but in other terms. The types of force, and the types of political actions that are most relevant and most effective in determining outcomes, are likely to differ significantly between counterinsurgency and other wars. Military techniques that work effectively in counterinsurgency are not likely to be effective in other wars, and political techniques and strategies that work in counterinsurgency are likely to differ from those that work in other kinds of wars.

But "politics" is not necessarily more important in counter-rebellion than in conventional wars -- particularly, recent and future conventional wars. In its influence on the outcome of the Battle of Britain, for example, Churchill's political ingenuity played as decisive a role as that played by the Royal Air Force. To mobilize (maneuver) the British populace into such intense resolution that compromise became unthinkable was an act of great political dexterity, comparable in its influence on Britain's stamina and on the outcome of the war with the military effectiveness of the RAF. The contrast with the role of domestic politics in influencing military outcome in the Battle of France is obvious and notable. The importance of Syngman Rhee's political ingenuity in freeing the North
Korean prisoners of war in 1953, and thereby influencing the outcome of the Korean war, is another case in point.

Moreover, politics does not seem to be less important in contingencies closer to the nuclear end of the spectrum. Thus, in the Suez crisis of 1956 and the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 -- in both of which nuclear threats arose, with differing degrees of imminence -- political maneuvering was singularly important in influencing military outcomes. For example, recall the profound political importance of the militarily almost valueless Jupiter missiles in 1962.

Of course, politics is equally significant in insurgent conflicts. But the ingredients of effective political action are different from those suggested by the previous examples. From A's standpoint, effective politics requires that A demonstrate -- by adhering to and enforcing law and order, by maintaining discipline within and between its agencies, and by completing announced programs visibly and expeditiously -- a growing capacity to govern. Demonstrating competence and acquiring a reputation for effective action constitute A's political task. Political actions that strengthen A are synonymous with political actions that expand A's capacity to absorb and offset harrassment from R.\(^1\) Elections, political organizing, government probity, and development programs are contributors to this end.

If, on the one hand, politics is important in other kinds of conflict besides rebellions, so, on the other hand, the application of force and violence is important in rebellions and counterrebellions as well as in other wars. Thus, Magsaysay's reorganization of the Philippine Constabulary into smaller, more decentralized, and mobile units, combined with the altered incentive structure created for the Armed Forces of the Philippines to reward effective application of force against the Huks,\(^2\) was not less important in suppressing the

\(^1\) Leites and Wolf, op. cit., Chapter II.

Huks than were the political moves (for example, the relatively free elections of 1953 and reduced corruption in the civil administration) instituted by Magsaysay at the same time.

The military measures, forces, and capabilities that are best suited for counterinsurgency are apt to be different from those that are best suited for other types of contingencies. Thus, if the forces of Asian countries are designed to meet major conventional invasion by China or North Vietnam or North Korea, or if Latin American forces are designed for hemispheric defense, their capabilities for deterring or meeting insurgent threats may be considerably less (for a given budget) than if they were specifically designed to meet these lower-level threats. A capability to prevent R — that is, a deterrence capability — requires a highly developed intelligence system, enlarged and improved paramilitary and police forces, and expanded engineering and medical units for "civic action" in remote areas, rather than conventionally armed and trained military units with heavy firepower and armor. A capability to wage effective counterinsurgency warfare — that is, a "war-fighting" capability — is likely to require forces (as does nuclear war) with a high degree of surface mobility, airlift, and aerial reconnaissance, as well as a capacity for operating effectively in small units for long periods of time while retaining good communications with higher-echelon headquarters. On the other hand, forces to meet a major conventional aggression are likely to stress not these capabilities, but rather armor, artillery, fighter aircraft, and air defense, as well as highly centralized operations by large, division-level units. And the use of forces trained, commanded, and equipped for major conventional contingencies in unconventional, insurgent conflicts is likely to entail both high costs and low effectiveness. The war in Vietnam is the most obvious and glaring example.

Defense capabilities for deterring Rs, as well as for fighting them in their earliest stages, should emphasize police and militia forces rather than military ones. Such forces are apt to be more closely associated with civil than with military administration,
because their primary mission is preserving law and order and protecting the population. Fulfilling these missions depends critically on an intimate knowledge of local happenings, people, and organizations — in other words, on police intelligence, rather than the order-of-battle, "counterforce" type of intelligence with which the military tends to be preoccupied.¹

Thus, the requirements in an insurgency context for both deterrence and war-fighting capabilities are likely to differ sharply from the requirements for deterring or meeting large-scale conventional aggression. The ingredients of effective force in counterinsurgency are not less important than, but just very different from, the ingredients of effective force in other contingencies. A decision to base force structures on one set of contingencies is thus likely to mean reducing capabilities for other contingencies.

In sum, politics typically plays a powerful and often undervalued role in military confrontations at the higher levels of the spectrum, including nuclear as well as conventional contingencies; and the use of force plays a highly important and also often undervalued role in lower levels of conflict, including counterinsurgency. The differences between counterinsurgency and other conflicts relate to the content and conduct of political and coercive roles, not to their relative importance. In analyzing and specifying these roles, the systems view of counterinsurgency differs as sharply from the conventional military emphasis on counterforce (attrition) as it does from the hearts-and-minds emphasis on sympathy.

CONTRASTS BETWEEN COUNTERINSURGENCY AND OTHER CONFLICTS

While it is, as we have suggested, expedient for A to join closely politics and force — civil and military instruments — in counterinsurgency, this point is hardly a distinguishing one. Still, there are important contrasts between counterinsurgencies and other conflicts as traditionally analyzed and practiced.

¹ Leites and Wolf, op. cit., Chapter VII.
Traditionally, wars between As have been waged and analyzed as counterforce and pro-territory, aiming at the destruction of the enemy's forces and the occupation of his territory. Consequently, the location and movement of the "forward edge of the battle area" (FEBA) were viewed as providing a relatively clear indication of success.

By contrast, counterinsurgency is primarily a counterproduction effort, rather than an effort to annihilate forces or acquire territory. The aim of successful counterinsurgency is to counter R's ability to produce and reproduce forces, as well as to "harden" the structure of government authority so that it can withstand R's attacks while the essential counterproduction effort is gaining momentum.

In conventional war, destroying the enemy's forces (counterforce) is a means of acquiring his territory. Destroying his forces and acquiring his territory, in turn, provide the means of coercing the adversary to accept a desired outcome. In counterinsurgency, by contrast, the adversary may have no territory in the earlier and usually critical stages. (In contrast to A's doctrine, to eschew territory, to retreat, to evaporate, and to accept local setbacks are fundamental attributes to R's operating doctrine.¹) Instead, A's aim should be to attack R's organization; that is, to attack the apparatus by which the forces and outputs of the system are produced. Counterforce is part of the process, but not the most important part. R's military forces are a part of the target system, but not necessarily the major part. In addition, A must target both the population and the exogenous sources of R's support: the former, in order to influence the population's behavior so as to limit the inputs available to R internally; and the latter, in order to restrict external resupply of key inputs.

FORCE RATIOS IN COUNTERINSURGENCY

An important point of contrast between counterinsurgency and conventional wars arises in connection with the much discussed "force

¹For a fuller discussion, see Leites and Wolf, op. cit., Chapter IV.
ratios" between counterinsurgents and insurgents. Sir Robert Thompson has properly characterized much writing on this matter as "nonsense," and "one of the myths of counterinsurgency."

Part of the nonsense arises from the fact that the data are so ambiguous. It is never quite clear what is in the numerator and denominator of the ratios cited. Do they include only active combatants? And what about guerrillas who are only part-time combatants — should they be expressed in terms of some "full time" equivalents? And should the counterinsurgents include the police and air and naval patrol forces, or only active ground combat forces?

Although the familiar ratio of ten counterinsurgents to one insurgent has often been cited as prerequisite to successful counterinsurgency, two important qualifications need to be attached to this ratio, apart from the ambiguity (as noted) of the numerator and denominator. First, widely different ratios have prevailed in different insurgencies: the range extends from one or two to one in the Philippines, to twenty or thirty to one in Kenya, to perhaps forty to one in Malaya, at least toward the end of the campaign. The second qualification is that the ratio itself is sensitive to the stage in the conflict at which it is computed, and to whether a given ratio comes about by a build-up of the counterinsurgents, or by a reduction in the insurgency's ability to produce forces. To the extent that A is successful in its efforts to disrupt R's production mechanism, the ratio will be drastically raised by the decline in R's production capability toward the end of a counterinsurgency effort. A rising ratio brought about by the reduction of R's forces thus has quite a different meaning from, and — from A's point of view — a more auspicious significance than, one brought about by a rise in counterinsurgent forces.

Still, as noted earlier, an important contrast exists between force ratios in counterinsurgency and in conventional wars. The contrast arises from the fact that where there is a front line in the battle area, the defender generally has a strong advantage, one further

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1Thompson, op. cit., p. 48.
strengthened by defensive fortifications. Consequently, although there are major exceptions — Israel's rout of much larger Arab forces in the six-day war of June 1967 is a striking example — the familiar planning factor of two or three to one in favor of the defender reflects this advantage. Where there is no front line, as in counter-insurgency, this model no longer applies, and it is more appropriate to use an air-defense model. The defender does not know where an attack may come. Hence, even if he is able to keep an advantage by maintaining a high-level alert at each of the targets, there are so many targets to defend that the aggregate force ratio becomes much larger than that of the attacking force.

Putting the problem this way underscores an important influence on the force ratios needed by A. The better A's information about where and when an attack may come, and the shorter his response time (as through aerial surveillance and lift), the smaller the force ratio that he needs. Therefore, A's intelligence and information system will play a central role in influencing force ratios.

Moreover, it is probably at least as important to stress the kinds of forces that A needs as the numbers. As noted earlier, A's mobility, weapon training, and communications are likely to be different from, and considerably less expensive on a unit cost basis than, those associated with military forces equipped for fighting large-scale conventional wars.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS IN COUNTERINSURGENCY

One of the distinguishing characteristics of counterinsurgency is the difficulty and complexity of finding reliable indicators of success. After the fact, it is easy to put things in their places: to say that at such and such a time it became clear that the insurgency was going up- or downhill, or that the force ratios were decidedly moving in the right direction, or that a decisive turn was taken toward A's success

\footnote{Below some threshold value. Unless the response time is at least quicker than some minimum value, it may make no difference.}
or failure. But during a counterinsurgency campaign, it is hard to be clear about "winning" and "losing."

The difficulty of identifying reliable indicators of success is related to the previously noted points about the unsuitability of indicators normally used for evaluating success in conventional war: destruction of the enemy's military forces, and acquisition of his territory (that is, casualties, and movement of the FEBA). Counterforce and pro-territory indicators are not appropriate in counterinsurgency.

Neither is measuring the warmth of popular support, and its shift from R to A, a reliable indicator of success, even if we had a good calorimeter for this purpose (which we do not). Genuine popular support in transitional societies is multifaceted and heterogeneous; perhaps more important, it is rare in any durable sense. And when it appears to be most genuine, it is as likely to be a manipulated appearance, as a deep-rooted conviction. (This is not to deny that genuine support is desirable in principle, or that successful manipulation of its appearance is an important quality to cultivate, whether by A or by R.) Nevertheless, as I have suggested elsewhere, Rs or As can wax in the face of popular dislike, and wane in the midst of popular sympathy. ¹

Rather, the difficulty of assessing successes and observing the process of winning and losing in counterinsurgency arises from the complex political-military tasks of counterinsurgency previously alluded to. Observing each task accurately is difficult, and observation is complicated by the possibility that progress in one task may be accompanied by regress in another.

To be confident that the process of winning in counterinsurgency is actively underway, we need to know several things: that R's access to inputs is becoming more difficult (the "prices" at which inputs are available are rising, and the quantity available is diminishing); that R's organization is experiencing increased difficulties in converting

¹See Wolf, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency," op. cit.
its inputs into insurgent activities (there is growing evidence of lassitude, friction, and misunderstanding within the R organization); that R's forces are being destroyed (and faster than the conversion mechanism is producing new ones); and that A's efforts to strengthen local defensive capabilities (by hardening, relocation, fortification, and the build-up of a responsible and effective police force) are making progress.

That such an assessment is difficult, demanding an active and competent intelligence system, is evident. However, if there is a single indicator that is more reliable than any other it probably is the rate at which middle- and higher-level officers and cadres in R's organization are acquired by A — whether by defection or by capture. Given the high regeneration coefficient of the intact infrastructure, this is the crux of R's strength and stamina. Depleting the core of the organization is the aim; acquiring cadres is the key to the core. In both Malaya and the Philippines, this indicator was — retrospectively — a good predictor. And it has never been deceptively high in counterinsurgencies that have been unsuccessful, probably because it is harder to falsify than other indicators.

The selection of appropriate indicators is further complicated by two problems which, though they also operate in conventional conflicts, play a more critical role in insurgent wars. One problem is possible distortions in the actions of members of A as a result of the selection of a particular indicator. If casualties inflicted on R's forces become accepted as an important indicator of success, incentives facing A's personnel are changed. The reporting of R's casualties may be inflated as a result. Or the threshold of reliability for distinguishing R's forces from the general population may be lowered so that a higher proportion of actual casualties may be imposed on the population than before.

A second problem is that accurate observation of success requires the indicators relating to R's own behavior to be known as well. For example, if one is concerned with judging the process of winning or
losing, it would be useful to know how an external sponsor of R might be viewing the same process. If R is concerned with strengthening its control in one part of the country by executing local officials, then combat undertaken by R in other parts of the country may be considered successful even if the relative casualty rate is highly unfavorable, because such combat diverts A's attention and resources from the area in which control by R is being strengthened. The first problem makes concentration on pure counterforce indicators of success unreliable and misleading, and the second makes the use of territorial indicators inapplicable.

Judging the process of counterinsurgency requires, in other words, intimate knowledge of R's organization and of the impact on that organization of various tasks and measures undertaken by A. What A must be after is to suppress R's capacity to undertake disruptive acts to some tolerable (to A) level, so that eventually the continued effort and sponsorship of the residual R will not seem worth the costs. When a given package of measures (or costs) undertaken by A buys a greater current and expected future suppression of R's capacity, then the process of winning is underway.

Finally, it is important not to specify an unrealistically high suppression level in concluding that a win has been obtained. The normal level of dacoity, disorder, and illegal activity in less-developed countries is usually high. Efforts to establish an unrealistically stringent suppression level may have the effect of vitiating relationships between A and its own external support, thereby turning allies into suspicious and disaffected adversaries.

INTELLIGENCE AND INFORMATION: NEEDS AND DILEMMAS

Improved intelligence and information capabilities are central to nearly all aspects of insurgent conflict, both for R and for A, as already noted. Yet achieving this improvement is most difficult in the environment of the less-developed countries. In general, the costs of timely and accurate information vary inversely (and probably nonlinearly) with the level of development. Thus, it is much harder
for A to obtain timely and accurate information in less-developed countries than in more-developed countries. In advanced countries, A's intelligence is usually much better than R's, while in the less-developed countries the situation is reversed.

A corollary can be drawn from this hypothesis concerning differences between more-developed countries and less-developed countries with respect to the types of violence likely to be encountered there. In the former, "hot" violence -- which implies spontaneity, hence a shorter preparatory period, and hence less time for possible pre-emption by A -- is more likely to occur. On the other hand, in less-developed countries, "cool" violence, accompanied by greater preparation and a longer lead time, is more likely; the resulting increase in the risk of being observed may be small, and the chance of being detected remains low.

While an improved capacity to obtain and make use of intelligence information is central to virtually all the tasks of counter-insurgency, its role is nowhere more crucial than in connection with the controlled use of coercion. Indeed, there is probably nothing more likely to enhance the legitimacy and respect of an A in the eyes of the people than a demonstrated capacity to make the punishment (as well as the reward) fit the crime, both in severity and in timeliness. Such discernment requires a capacity to ascertain who is doing what and when, with a speed and reliability seldom found among the As of the less-developed countries. Consequently, improved intelligence capabilities are likely to be of great importance in insurgent conflicts, probably at least as important as the judicious distribution of benefits to the population at large.

The components of such enhanced capabilities involve: (a) collecting, processing, and retrieving information; (b) communicating clearly and regularly with the population; (c) observing behavior and responses accurately and continually; and (d) relating the foregoing components to the allocation and control of subsequent programs and action.