CONTROLLING SMALL WARS

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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

[1]For 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 <u>Avenida de los Insurgentes</u>.)

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, <u>organized</u>, and often <u>armed</u>, resistance," whereas insurgency is defined as a revolt "<u>not reaching the proportions of an organized</u> 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.

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[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 ques-
tionable 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 con-
trasts between counterinsurgency and other types of war probably
lie within these categories, rather than between them. The main dif-
ferences (and they are significant ones) between counterinsurgency
and other wars should probably be put, not in terms of the common-
place 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 resolu-
tion 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 impor-
tance 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 con-
tingencies 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 mili-
tary 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 con-
flicts. But the ingredients of effective political action are dif-
ferent 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. Demon-
strating 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 organi-
zing, 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

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[1] Leites and Wolf, op. cit., Chapter II.

[2] See Wolf, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: New Myths and
Old Realities," The Yale Review, Vol. LVI, No. 2, Winter 1967,
pp. 225-241.

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 capabili-
ties 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 intelli-
gence 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.

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[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

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[1] For 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."[1]

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 insur-
gent 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 reduc-
tion 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 con-
trast 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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[1] Thompson, 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 counterinsurgency, 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[1] (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

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[1]Below some threshold value. Unless the response time is at least quicker than some minimum value, it may make no difference.

or failure. But <u>during</u> 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

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[1]See Wolf, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency," <u>op. cit.</u>

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 -- retrospec-
tively -- 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 con-
flicts, 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, in-
centives facing A's personnel are changed. The reporting of R's
casualties may be inflated as a result. Or the threshold of reli-
ability 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 unrealis-
tically 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 then 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 differ-
ences 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 prepara-
tion 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 intelli-
gence 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 con-
flicts, 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.