

CHAPTER VII

COUNTERINSURGENCY THEORY

Insurgencies have existed since the time of the Roman Empire, contemporary with the time of the Han dynasty in China. Each of these great empires fought numerous insurgencies as part of their consolidation and pacification of the areas within their spans of control. As previously mentioned, the Ayutthayan Empire and its successors were periodically compelled to put down rebellions as part of their internal security concerns as well. Despite the regional and global experiences in dealing with insurgencies, rebellions, resistance movements, uprisings, and any other term associated with popular armed opposition to the state, doctrines and theories to counter them have only emerged since the end of the 19th century.¹

7.1 Insurgency Defined.

The United States Department of State defines insurgency as “a protracted political- military campaign conducted by an organized movement seeking to subvert or displace the government and completely or partially control the resources and/or population of a country through the use of force and alternative political organizations...Insurgency is a contest with the government for support of the people and control over resources and territory”.² Recently revised British military doctrine expands on this and defines insurgency as “a competition involving at least one non-state movement using means that include violence against an established authority to achieve

¹ M.W. Shervington, “Small Wars and Counterinsurgency Warfare: Lessons from Iraq.” diss., Cranfield University, 2005: p.4.

² United States Department of State, United States Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative, Counterinsurgency for U.S. Government Policy Makers: A Work in Progress, Oct 2007: p.7.

political change...the insurgent movements will use all methods and tactics at their disposal to achieve a political aim”³. Significant to both of these definitions is the recognition of the political aspect of insurgency. Author Tom Marks describes insurgency as a political campaign backed by muscle...the conscious effort to supplant one political structure with another.⁴

7.2 Elements of Insurgency

The vast majority of rebellions and insurgencies develop as a result of economic, political, and social disparities within states whose governments are unresponsive to the needs of its people. There are typically socio-political-economic intricacies of the “cause” which insurgents use to mobilize support. Without a cause, the insurgency cannot persuade the population to join or assist the campaign.⁵ For example, an insurgency with a strong component of religious, tribal, ethnic, ideological or cultural identity may resonate with some subset of the target population.⁶ This separate identity forms the basis for political legitimacy and thus provides the cause to generate support.⁷ Separate identity as a cause also determines what Larry Cable, former associate professor of History at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington defines as offensive and defensive insurgencies. Offensive insurgencies are revolutionary in origin, whereas defensive insurgencies are those “in which a particular identifiable ethno linguistic, religious, or cultural group inhabiting a specific geographic region seeks autonomy,

³ M.W. Shervington, “Small Wars and Counterinsurgency Warfare: Lessons from Iraq.” diss., Cranfield University, 2005: p.9.

⁴ Tom Marks, Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994)., p.3.

⁵ Robert R. Tomes, “Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare.” *Parameters US Army War College Quarterly* XXXIV, 1 (Spring 2004), p.5.

⁶ United States Department of State, United States Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative, Counterinsurgency for U.S. Government Policy Makers: A Work in Progress, Oct 2007: p.12.

⁷ Frank G. Hoffman, “Neo-Classical Insurgency.” *Parameters US Army War College Quarterly* XXXVII, 2 (Summer 2007), p.81.

separation, or independence from the status quo power.”⁸ Offensive insurgency aims to overthrow the status quo, while defensive insurgency aims to separate itself from the status quo. Other qualities of causes include: a large part of the population must be able to identify with it; the counterinsurgent cannot be able to use the same cause or espouse it; the essential social mobilization base remains the same while the cause changes over time as the insurgency adapts.⁹

Although there are many varieties of insurgencies organized and structured according to local conditions, all share certain common attributes. Four elements typically encompass an insurgency; cell-networks that maintain secrecy; terror used to foster insecurity among the population and drive them to the movement for protection; multifaceted attempts to cultivate support in the general population, often by undermining the government; and attacks against the government.¹⁰ Although cellular and decentralized in structure, the organization of insurgencies consists of leadership, combatants, auxiliary and the mass base. Leaders provide the planning and control the movement, combatants fight and provide security, auxiliaries are active sympathizers who provide support services, and the mass base consists of followers and the supporting populace. As the leaders and combatants group is often forced to remain in hiding as it tries to grow in strength, it relies on the support of the mass base to provide it with recruits, food, and supplies. In theory, if an insurgency is able to exploit the inability or unwillingness of a government to provide for the needs of the people and address their grievances, it has effectively won the support of those people and grows in strength as well as legitimacy.

⁸ Wray R. Johnson, *Vietnam and American Doctrine for Small Wars*. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2001), p.26.

⁹ Robert R. Tomes, “Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare.” *Parameters US Army War College Quarterly* XXXIV, 1 (Spring 2004), p.5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.3.

7.3 Stages of Insurgency

Insurgencies may evolve through any or all of the stages of subversion and radicalization, popular unrest, civil disobedience, local guerilla activity, and widespread guerilla warfare to open armed conflict – or to dormancy. One or more different stages may be manifest in any given insurgency at the same time. An insurgency may succeed in overthrowing the government, may force it into political accommodation, or may itself be crushed. It is important to understand at what stage or stages the insurgency is in order to develop appropriate and effective responses.¹¹

7.4 Counterinsurgency (COIN) Defined

The US Army's most current doctrine on COIN defines it as "the military, paramilitary, political, psychological and civic actions taken to defeat an insurgency".¹² Thus, as David Kilcullen writes, counterinsurgency is "all measures adopted to suppress an insurgency...its nature are not fixed, but shifting: it evolves in response to changes in insurgency... (applying) all elements of national power against insurrection".¹³

Historically, there have been two different approaches to COIN – annihilation versus turning the loyalty of the people. Taking from the British Army's COIN Manual, author John Nagl explains the costs and benefits of both approaches; "A straight forward attritional approach is one option. Such strategies have been adopted and some have worked. Absolute repression was used by the Germans in response to guerilla attacks during the Second World War. Saddam Hussein's use of chemical weapons against the

¹¹ United States Department of State, United States Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative, *Counterinsurgency for U.S. Government Policy Makers: A Work in Progress*, Oct 2007: p.11.

¹² Field Manual 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5 "Counterinsurgency" Washington: Department of the Army, 2006: p.1-1.

¹³ David. Kilcullen, "Counterinsurgency Redux." *Survival*, 48 (Winter 2006-07), p.112.

Kurds and his campaigns against the Marsh Arabs in Southern Iraq are contemporary examples of the use of attrition...None of the attritional 'solutions' described above is appropriate in a liberal democracy, and it is considered that a 'gloves off' approach to an insurgency problem has a strictly limited role to play in modern COIN operations."¹⁴ A strategic COIN policy of attrition, or what was termed by the Romans as a "Carthaginian Peace" obtained by the utter destruction of an enemy, may in fact subdue and suppress insurrection, but it is not the model used by western liberal democracies.

The objective of any government actively waging a counterinsurgency is to deny mass support to the leadership combatant group. It has been shown that when dealing with rebellions and insurgencies, governments that engage in COIN operations designed to address grievances and win the support of the populace often succeed in defeating insurgency. Western COIN models emphasize that strategies should be designed to simultaneously protect the population and prevent insurgent violence; strengthen the capacity of government institutions and attain legitimacy to govern responsibly, including redress of legitimate grievances; and marginalize insurgents politically, socially and militarily.¹⁵

7.5 Insurgency Templates

Western COIN (American, British and French) doctrines were all refined during the Cold War period following a series of anti imperialist, ideological and nationalistic wars across the globe.¹⁶ During this era of the "wars of national liberation" Western COIN strategies were developed in response to three major insurgency templates; Leninist, Maoist, and Guevarist.

¹⁴ John A. Nagl, Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife. Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002.), p.26.

¹⁵ United States Department of State, United States Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative, Counterinsurgency for U.S. Government Policy Makers: A Work in Progress, Oct 2007: p.12.

¹⁶ M.W. Shervington, "Small Wars and Counterinsurgency Warfare: Lessons from Iraq." diss., Cranfield University, 2005: p.35.

7.5.1 Leninist Model

The Leninist model rests on two pillars; first, that a highly politicized, organized and trained cadre operated as the vanguard of the revolution; and second, that governmental authority had collapsed to the extent that the people could ally themselves with the revolutionaries without fear of reprisal. Peasant unrest, military mutiny, and political paralysis served as catalyst revolutionary ascendancy. Necessary to success is the leadership group's ability to recognize the intersection of these objectives at the critical moment and seize the initiative.¹⁷

7.5.2 Maoist Model

The Maoist model developed in China where the schism between urban and rural dictated the movement. Victory over the ruling classes for the majority rural masses depended on a three phased campaign strategy. The first phase was the "strategic defensive phase," which concentrated building will and training and organizing the peasants into subversive elements to enable the guerillas to live among the population as "little fish in the ocean."¹⁸ In this phase, trained and dedicated cadres develop an administrative structure, a "shadow government," and use terrorism and propaganda to subvert government authority and control.¹⁹ The second phase, the "strategic stalemate phase," concentrated on establishing bases, increasing the tempo of operations and training units for the decisive third phase. In the third "strategic offensive phase," the movement would be organized into regular military units and inflict a defeat on the military in conventional battle.²⁰

¹⁷ Wray R. Johnson, Vietnam and American Doctrine for Small Wars. (Bangkok. White Lotus, 2001), p.29.

¹⁸ M.W. Shervington, "Small Wars and Counterinsurgency Warfare: Lessons from Iraq." diss., Cranfield University, 2005: p.13.

¹⁹ Wray R. Johnson, Vietnam and American Doctrine for Small Wars. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2001) 29.

²⁰ M.W. Shervington, "Small Wars and Counterinsurgency Warfare: Lessons from Iraq." diss., Cranfield University, 2005: p.13.

7.5.3 Guevarist Model

The Guevarist, or foco model, was the predominant movement in Latin America from the 1960s to the 1980s. Where most theories of revolution seem to agree that certain preconditions be met if a revolutionary situation is to arise, foco theory says that only a minimum level of discontent with a government must be sufficient to create favorable conditions for revolution. This model asserts that popular forces can achieve victory over a regular army, the objective conditions as described by Lenin need not exist and can be manufactured, and the countryside is the area for armed fighting.²¹

Between 1950 and 1970 there were at least ten insurrection around the world in which the Maoist model, or the Marxist ideology from which it was inspired, was the chosen vehicle.²² Despite the fact that there were other models of insurgency, such as the urban strategy of Brazilian Carlos Marighella, the Irish Republican Army, and the FLN in Algeria, the United States, Britain, and France had each encountered a Southeast Asian insurgent movement aligned with Maoism. By the 1960s and 1970s, during the “counterinsurgency era,” there were key areas in which each nations experience converged into more or less a common theoretical approach.

²¹ Wray R. Johnson, Vietnam and American Doctrine for Small Wars. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2001), p.30.

²² M.W. Shervington, “Small Wars and Counterinsurgency Warfare: Lessons from Iraq.” diss., Cranfield University, 2005: p.14.