CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Purpose of This Study

Insurgency is a timeless mode of conflict and has taken many forms, including independence movements during decolonization, ethnic and sectarian conflict, regional separatism, and resistance to occupation. The United States has spent more than a decade opposing—and supporting indigenous operations in opposing—insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. In short, insurgency has been the most prevalent form of armed conflict since at least 1949, and it is not going away.[1] *When a country is threatened by an insurgency, which counterinsurgency (COIN) approaches give the government the best chance of prevailing?* This is the principal line of inquiry addressed in this report.

Contemporary discourse is rife with recommended concepts for COIN and advice for would-be counterinsurgents. Scholars, observers, and theorists—amateur and professional alike—draw on history, common sense, or contemporary operations to recommend certain COIN practices and disparage others. Communities of interested military and nonmilitary personnel engage in vigorous debates about the effectiveness of various concepts for COIN, or the applicability of a certain proponent's proposals in specific contexts.[2] Much of the discussion and theorizing is founded on individuals' personal experiences with insurgency, their detailed analysis of one or two historical

[1] Thomas X. Hammes, "Why Study Small Wars?" *Small Wars Journal*, Vol. 1, April 2005.

[2] See, for example, the wide range of articles, opinions, and (most of all) discussions that have taken place on the *Small Wars Journal* blog.

cases, or their general sense of history. While existing concepts and discussions clearly contain good advice for COIN forces, substantial disagreement and dispute remain. How are we to adjudicate among partially conflicting concepts and contradictory advice? We want to absorb the lessons of history, but of which lessons and which histories should we be most mindful?

A 2010 RAND report, *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency*, sought to answer these questions through detailed case studies of the 30 insurgencies begun and completed worldwide between 1978 and 2008. This report largely supersedes that previous study, incorporating its 30 original cases into a broader and more comprehensive database, with expanded research and analysis.[3] The original core question remains, however: Which COIN approaches are most effective? This report also poses several new research questions, including the following:

- Once good COIN practices are in place, how long must a COIN force sustain them before the conflict is resolved?
- What factors can help reduce the duration of an insurgency? What factors tend to extend insurgencies?
- What factors contribute to a more durable postconflict peace?
- Do good COIN practices differ for external COIN forces (that is, COIN forces from another country)? If so, which COIN practices are most effective for these external forces?

Defining COIN and the Implications of the Term

In this report, we define *counterinsurgency* (COIN) as efforts undertaken by a government and its security forces (or the security forces of supporting partners or allies) to oppose an insurgency. However, unlike so many other definitions, the precise wording does not really matter. For us, counterinsurgency is whatever one does when oppos-

[3] The findings of the original study are fairly robust in light of the expanded data set. The core findings of *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers* are explicitly revisited in light of the new data in Appendix D.

ing an insurgency. The term *counterinsurgency* does not and should not presuppose an approach to or theory of counterinsurgency, simply that there is an insurgency and there is someone who wishes to fight it. We offer this brief definitional note only because the literature on this topic often actively conflates the type of operation (countering an insurgency) with a specific concept for or theory of counterinsurgency (usually population-centric counterinsurgency, or the concept outlined in Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*) by using the same term to denote both.[4]

This conflation leads to ambiguity and confusion, especially when the literature condemns COIN in general when it is merely disagreeing with the approach the United States has taken in fighting the Afghan insurgency,[5] and when it is making a statement that the United States should not get involved in operations to oppose insurgencies, whatever concepts are employed.[6]

Here, we use *counterinsurgency* to refer exclusively to operations against insurgents, not a specific theory, approach, concept, strategy, or set of tactics for doing so. Further, we urge others to do the same: When describing a specific concept for counterinsurgency (even the one from the field manual helpfully titled *Counterinsurgency*), use additional specifying language (as we have done in the preceding paragraphs in this section).[7] Regarding the debates over COIN concepts

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[4] See, for example, Christopher A. Preble, "Playing to Our Strengths—and Why COIN Doesn't," *The National Interest*, January 19, 2012; Oleg Svet, "COIN's Failure in Afghanistan," *The National Interest*, August 31, 2012; Ryan Evans, "COIN Is Dead, Long Live the COIN," *Foreign Policy*, December 16, 2011; and David H. Ucko, "Counterinsurgency After Afghanistan: A Concept in Crisis," *Prism*, Vol. 3, No. 1, December 2011.

[5] Svet, 2012.

[6] Jeffrey Record, *The American Way of War: Cultural Barriers to Successful Counterinsurgency*, Washington, D.C.: CATO Institute, Policy Analysis No. 577, September 1, 2006a; Michael Cohen, "Just Another Depressing Day at the Office," *Democracy Arsenal*, December 7, 2011; Alex Marshall, "Imperial Nostalgia, the Liberal Lie, and the Perils of Postmodern Counterinsurgency," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, June 2010; Douglas Porch, "The Dangerous Myths and Dubious Promise of COIN," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, May 2011.

[7] We are not alone in this urging. Colin Gray asserts, "COIN is neither a concept nor can it be a strategy. Instead, it is simply an acronymic descriptor of a basket of diverse activities

that are hidden in discussions purporting to be about the validity of "COIN," we are agnostic, but we want COIN to be used only to denote a type of operation and mission without presupposing the approach a counterinsurgent force will take.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Counterinsurgency

While there are many different possible *concepts* for counterinsurgency espoused in the literature (this report evaluates 24 such concepts), there are traditionally two core philosophies (or theories) of counterinsurgency: population-centric and enemy-centric.[8] The former focuses on the population as "the sea" in which the insurgents "swim" and theorizes that, if the population and its environment are sufficiently controlled, the insurgents will be deprived of the support they need and will wither, be exposed, or some combination thereof, bringing the insurgency to an end.[9] The enemy-centric paradigm sees insurgency as much more akin to conventional warfare and focuses on the defeat of the enemy as the counterinsurgent's primary task. Each core philosophy is interpreted by a variety of corollary theories, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit, that connect to the various concepts advocated for in the literature on COIN, but each concept can be quickly categorized (or pigeonholed) as having antecedents that are either primarily population-centric or primarily enemy-centric.[10]

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intended to counter an insurgency." See Colin S. Gray, "Concept Failure? COIN, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Theory," *Prism*, Vol. 3, No. 3, June 2012, p. 17.

[8] David Kilcullen, "Two Schools of Classical Counterinsurgency," *Small Wars Journal Blog*, January 27, 2007.

[9] "The guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea." Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith II, Chicago, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2000.

[10] Some scholars have argued that proponents of the population-centric theory of COIN have come to dominate any discussion of counterinsurgency by utilizing "select historical interpretations" to bolster their argument. See Jeffrey H. Michaels and Matthew Ford, "Bandwagonistas: Rhetorical Re-Description, Strategic Choice, and the Politics of Counterinsurgency," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, May 2011.

Both philosophies can claim historical successes, and both have a sensible logic with face validity: On the population-centric side, insurgents denied access to and support from the population will be easily defeated as fish out of water; on the insurgent-focused side, clearly, an insurgency ceases to exist when its ranks have been depleted and a sufficient number of its fighters have been killed or captured. Despite these sensible logics, each can easily be portrayed as something ridiculous and extreme. Population-centric COIN gets caricaturized as expensive, long-term nation building that forbids troops from using their weapons.[11] Enemy-centric COIN gets depicted as unconstrained, scorched-earth violence, so alienating the population (and the rest of the world) that for every insurgent killed, ten new recruits step up to take his or her place.[12] Although opponents of one view or the other might wish to believe otherwise, population-centric and enemy-centric logics do not follow an "either/or" dynamic; they can be pursued in tandem, with the COIN force seeking to deny the insurgents the support of the population while simultaneously seeking to reduce the insurgents through decisive action. Still, the two philosophies are meaningfully distinct, as they involve different logics and are buttressed by different concepts and activities, even if the proper balance between those activities remains an open question.

While the population-centric/insurgent-centric duality is the classic division in discussions on counterinsurgency, our research adds nuance and promotes slightly different divisions. Rather than a single dichotomy, we propose two, establishing a spectrum between two forms of COIN actions: those aimed at diminishing motive versus strictly kinetic actions (using force to kill, capture, or constrain). We consider a similar spectrum for two forms of COIN targets: active insurgents and insurgent support.

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[11] Another critique of population-centric COIN is the "untenable premise" that populations are static, when, in fact, people tend to move around, especially in times of conflict. Eric Jardine, "Population-Centric Counterinsurgency and the Movement of Peoples," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 23, No. 2, May 2012a.

[12] Nathan Springer, "Many Paths up the Mountain: Population-Centric COIN in Afghanistan," *Small Wars Journal*, May 2010.

Our previous study, reported in *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency*, discovered that insurgents' continued ability to maintain their tangible support (recruits, weapons and materiel, funding, intelligence, sanctuary) is more important than where that support comes from (the population or an outside actor) in determining the outcome of an insurgency; this study confirmed that finding. This suggests that rather than distinguishing between a focus on the population and a focus on the enemy, it would be better to distinguish between a focus on the enemy and a focus on the enemy's sources of support, which may or may not come from the population.

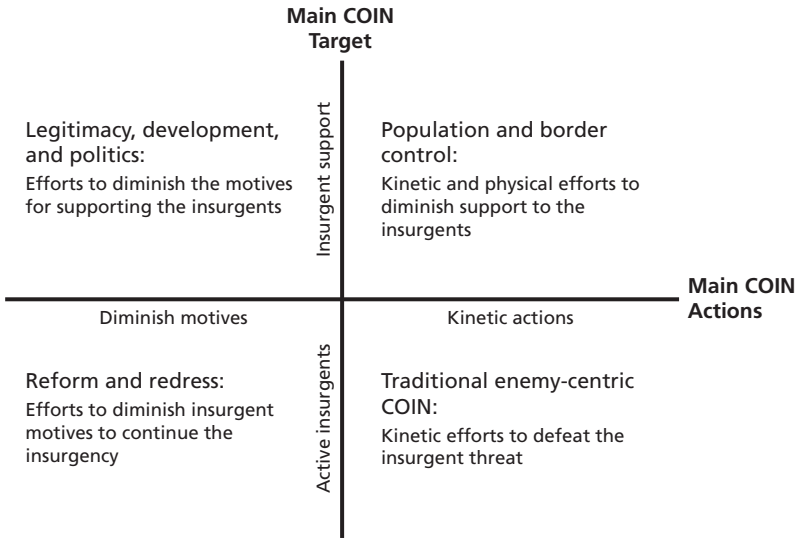
Historically, COIN forces have diminished insurgent tangible support in a variety of ways: reducing the willingness of the population to offer support, reducing the opportunity for the population to offer support (through various measures to control or influence the population),[13] physically interdicting the routes by which support flows, and reaching international political agreements to end cross-border support, among others. This leads to the other key dichotomy, because support was reduced either by assuaging the supporters' motive for providing support or by physically reducing their opportunity or ability to do so. This dichotomy can also be applied to efforts to enervate insurgents: They can be subject to physical action and captured, wounded, or killed, or the COIN force can reduce the insurgents' motives for fighting, leading them to surrender, accept an amnesty offer, or simply disappear back into civilian life.

These two dichotomies divide the theoretical space into four quadrants, as depicted in Figure 1.1. Every COIN concept can be categorized within this typology, according to whether it is more focused on targeting insurgent support or the insurgents themselves and whether it emphasizes kinetic solutions or motive-focused solutions. Historical COIN campaigns can be categorized in the same way.

Each of the 71 historical cases informing this report follows one of two COIN paths and falls broadly into two categories in this typol-

[13] Such efforts can either be enforced by an external actor or maintained *by* and *with* the population. Thomas Rid, "The Nineteenth Century Origins of Counterinsurgency Doctrine," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, October 2010, Vol. 33, No. 5.

Figure 1.1
New COIN Dichotomies: Targeting Insurgent Support Versus Active Insurgents and Efforts to Diminish Insurgent Motives Versus Employing Kinetic Approaches



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ogy. COIN campaigns on the "iron fist" path fall primarily into the lower right quadrant, with a focus on kinetic actions against the active insurgency. The more effective of these primarily enemy-focused campaigns also devoted some effort to reducing insurgents' support, but almost always in an exclusively physical way (upper right quadrant). COIN campaigns on the motive-focused path fall primarily into the upper left quadrant, with a focus on reducing the motives for supporting or participating in the insurgency. Unlike the iron fist counterinsurgencies, the motive-focused efforts, though primarily on the motive-focused side of the equation, were often balanced with kinetic efforts to kill, capture, or constrain active insurgents (waxing over into the lower right and occasionally the upper right quadrants).[14] We return to

[14] Staniland and Greenhill have decried a one-size-fits-all approach to COIN, noting that "privileging ideal-type strategies runs the risk of creating false dichotomies between approaches, whereas successful COIN requires mixtures of these approaches, not an embrace

these two paths, iron fist and motive-focused, when we describe how we divided the cases into subpopulations for further analysis in Chapter Three. These analyses found that primarily motive-focused and balanced COIN campaigns are much more likely to be successful than strictly iron fist efforts (see Chapter Six).

Data and Analyses

The research presented here tests 24 concepts for COIN drawn from the existing literature against the record of history. Moving beyond validation through one or two case studies, this research assembles a significant and systematic foundation of evidence from which to assess COIN concepts: detailed case studies of the 71 insurgencies begun and resolved across the globe between World War II (WWII) and 2010.[15] Each case is supported by a detailed case narrative and by quantitative data for nearly 300 individual factors. These analyses benefited considerably from having both quantitative and qualitative data and from being able to move back and forth between the two. Qualitative narratives suggested factors or hypotheses, which were then tested comparatively across cases using the quantitative data. Points that did not make sense in the quantitative analyses were explored in the detailed narratives, with the nuance from the narratives then being subjected to the quantitative analyses in the form of new hypotheses or factors.

Chapter Two describes the cases and case selection. In addition to considering findings across all 71 cases, we identify several subsamples, or classes, of cases of specific interest in Chapter Three. These include the 59 core cases (excluding poor comparative examples, such as the COIN campaigns fought against the postcolonial wars of inde-

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of any single one." Kelly M. Greenhill and Paul Staniland, "Ten Ways to Lose at Counterinsurgency," *Civil Wars*, Vol. 9, No. 4, December 2007, p. 404.

[15] This broad empirical basis allows us to avoid three logical traps that much of the contemporary debate fails to escape: (1) the trap of ongoing operations (what we are seeing now is what we will always see); (2) the trap of individual cases (what happened in one particular case tells us about what could or should happen in all cases); and (3) the trap of bad analogy (every U.S. COIN effort is like Vietnam).

pendence); the 44 iron fist cases in which the COIN force sought to prevail predominantly through the vigorous application of force; the 15 motive-focused, or balanced, cases in which COIN forces emphasized efforts to diminish the motives for the insurgency and its supporters over (or in balance with) the application of force; and the 28 cases in which an external actor (another country) committed military forces in support, further subdivided into the 13 cases in which the external actor committed only advisers, special operations forces, or air power and the 15 cases in which the external actor committed significant ground troops, up to and including cases in which external forces were—or were for a time—the primary COIN force. Our findings provide strong empirical support for some COIN concepts and strong evidence against others, as discussed in Chapter Four.

By analyzing the patterns of practices and factors that characterize COIN wins and COIN losses in these cases, we move beyond the testing of recommended COIN concepts. We developed a list of "good" and "bad" factors based, first, on strong *a priori* grounding in existing COIN literature and, second, on relationships observed in our data during preliminary analyses. Examining the patterns of presence or absence of these practices and factors in the data, we reached several interesting conclusions regarding the differences between those who defeated insurgencies and those who did not, which COIN practices were critical to success, what factors are correlated with the durations of insurgencies, and what factors are correlated with the length of post-conflict peace intervals. Details of these results and supporting analyses are presented in Chapters Four and Five.

About This Report and Accompanying Case Studies

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. Chapter Two describes the methods used to identify the 71 insurgencies begun and resolved since WWII, details how we collected data for our case studies, and presents brief historical summaries of the 71 cases. Chapter Three identifies various subsets or subpopulations within the 71 cases that are most appropriate for answering certain kinds

of questions. That analysis found that some of the cases, while individually interesting, are simply not good cases for comparison, so we constrained most analyses to the 59 core cases within the larger data set. Chapter Four introduces the 24 COIN concepts identified in the literature, describes the factors that represent them in the analysis, and tests them against the record of history by considering the impact of their implementation on the outcomes of the 59 core cases. Chapter Five describes our analyses of the impact on case outcomes of different *patterns* of practices and factors that are present or absent in the cases. That chapter also discusses the development and validation of a list of "good" and "bad" COIN practices and our attempt to mathematically reduce the host of strongly supported concepts for COIN to a minimally sufficient set. Chapter Five also examines factors that contribute to the duration of insurgencies and to the length of post-conflict peace intervals. Chapter Six presents the results of the analyses repeated for the various subsamples (iron fist versus motive-focused and external actor cases). Chapter Seven draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

Seven appendixes and an accompanying volume of case studies support this report. Appendix A provides extensive methodological details supporting our analyses. Appendix B offers technical background and detailed results of one of the analyses conducted as part of the research, qualitative comparative analysis. Appendix C offers similar details for another technique used, survival analysis. Appendix D reviews the key findings from the original *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers* study in light of the new data and analyses. Appendix E lists all the factors included in the data set for each phase of each of the 71 cases. (The full data are provided in a spreadsheet that accompanies this report.) Appendix F contains the checkbox scorecard that guided the analyses presented in Chapter Five; Appendix G presents scorecard scores for the 59 core cases based on that scorecard. Detailed case narratives for the 41 new cases added to the database for this analysis appear in a companion volume, *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies*. Yet another separate volume, *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Detailed Counterinsurgency Case Studies*, companion to the original *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Sources of Success in*

Counterinsurgency, contains a detailed case narrative for each of the original 30 COIN cases.[16]

[16] Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, and Molly Dunigan, *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-291/2-OSD, 2013; Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, and Beth Grill, *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Detailed Counterinsurgency Studies*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-964/1-OSD, 2010a; and Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, and Beth Grill, *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-964-OSD, 2010b.