

Chapter Title: Results for Motive-Focused, Iron Fist, and External-Actor Cases

Book Title: Paths to Victory

Book Subtitle: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies

Book Author(s): Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill and Molly Dunigan

Published by: RAND Corporation. (2013)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt5hhtb4.14>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a RAND Corporation License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://www.rand.org/pubs/permissions.html>.



*RAND Corporation* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Paths to Victory*

## **Results for Motive-Focused, Iron Fist, and External-Actor Cases**

---

This chapter presents results from some of the analyses in Chapters Four and Five for the iron fist versus motive-focused subpopulations and for the subpopulation of cases in which a major external actor provided COIN forces.

### **Iron Fist and Motive-Focused Subpopulations**

Chapter Three described several subpopulations, including the division of the 59 core cases into 44 iron fist cases, in which COIN forces focused predominantly on kinetic action against active insurgents, and 15 motive-focused cases, in which the COIN forces' primary focus was on reducing motives for participation and support. Where the efforts were substantially balanced between the two, we considered the case to be motive-focused, so the motive-focused category (15 cases) contains both motive-focused and balanced cases.

### **The COIN Concepts and the Iron Fist and Motive-Focused Subpopulations**

Data presented at the end of Chapter Three showed that iron fist COIN forces lose more often than motive-focused forces (27 of 44 iron fist cases were COIN losses, while only four of 15 motive-focused forces lost), though forces adhering to either paradigm can win. This leaves open the possibility that different factors or implemented concepts led to iron fist and motive-focused wins: Are there multiple, genuinely different paths to victory?

The short answer is no. The same factors that are correlated with iron fist wins and motive-focused wins are common to COIN wins in general; these factors just appear less frequently in iron fist wins, probably because COIN forces that follow an iron fist COIN theory are less likely to seek to implement many of the successful concepts.

In support of the subpopulation analyses, we re-ran all the concept-factor stack cross-tabulations for the 44 iron fist cases and the 15 motive-focused cases. While the exact percentages deviated slightly from those derived from the full data and presented in Chapter Four, almost all led to the same levels of support and matched across all three populations: the 59 core cases, the 44-case iron fist subset, and the 15-case motive-focused subset. Refer back to Table 4.33 for a summary of concepts and support.

What varied was the frequency with which these concepts were implemented. Six of the 17 strongly supported concepts were very rare in iron fist cases but were strongly correlated with success when they were: development (appeared in only five iron fist cases, all of which were wins), pacification (in nine iron fist cases, all of which were wins), legitimacy (government legitimacy appeared in 12 iron fist cases, eight of which were wins; legitimate use of force was present in only four iron fist cases, three of which were wins), strategic communication (only four iron fist cases, all of which were wins), beat cop (in only five iron fist cases, all of which were wins), and reform (in only three iron fist cases, all of which were wins).

Note that “crush them,” found to be a poor concept across the 59 core cases, remains a poor concept in iron fist cases. Most iron fist cases employed this concept (34 of 44), but *most iron fist cases were losses*.

For one concept, however, the iron fist findings differed from the motive-focused results: initiative. As shown in Table 6.1, in every motive-focused case in which the COIN force had the initiative (nine cases, 100 percent), it won; among the iron fist cases, however, in 23 cases in which the COIN force had the initiative, it won only 13 times (57 percent).

Recall that in the discussion of the initiative concept in Chapter Four (see Tables 4.16 and 4.17), that in the 59 core cases,

**Table 6.1**

**Initiative Concept Implemented Versus Case Outcome for Motive-Focused and Iron Fist Cases**

		Motive-Focused Cases		Iron Fist Cases	
		COIN Loss	COIN Win	COIN Loss	COIN Win
Fighting in phase initiated primarily by COIN force	Yes	0	9	10	13
	No	4	2	17	4

the correlation between initiative and outcome was fairly modest until intelligence was included; we found that taking the initiative based on good intelligence was very highly correlated with outcome. In Algeria's campaign against the GIA, for example, the COIN force received substantial intelligence from the population (due, in part, to the population's weariness with the GIA's brutal tactics). Combined with the COIN force's targeted campaign against insurgent leaders, this allowed the government to gain the upper hand. Similarly, in Northern Ireland, British intelligence collection allowed the COIN forces to severely curtail PIRA activities throughout Northern Ireland and Western Europe. Table 6.2 presents the relationship between initiative and intelligence against outcomes for the two subpopulations of interest. Virtually all

**Table 6.2**

**Initiative and Intelligence Concepts Implemented Versus Case Outcome for Motive-Focused and Iron Fist Cases**

		Motive-Focused Cases		Iron Fist Cases	
		COIN Loss	COIN Win	COIN Loss	COIN Win
Both initiative and intelligence	Yes	0	7	1	9
	No	4	4	26	8

cases in which both concepts are present—regardless of whether they are iron fist or motive-focused cases—are COIN wins.

Taken together, Tables 6.1 and 6.2 reveal one further interesting (if not that surprising) finding: COIN forces in iron fist cases are much more likely to seize the initiative without the necessary foundation of intelligence than are motive-focused COIN forces, and they are thus much more likely to suffer the consequences of such indiscriminate applications of force.

### **Additional Observations About the Iron Fist and Motive-Focused Subpopulations**

This section presents a few additional observations about these two subpopulations, beginning with the iron fist cases. As noted, only 17 of 44 (38 percent) iron fist cases were COIN wins. Thirty-three of the 44 involved violent practices and atrocities well beyond the pale of contemporary U.S. ethical standards, including 13 of the 17 iron fist COIN wins. Very few (three) of the iron fist COIN forces avoided excessive collateral damage or other illegitimate applications of force; those that did, however, won. Iron fist COIN forces do not require popular support; 11 of the 17 wins under this paradigm achieved that outcome without the support of the majority of the population in the area of conflict. In Chapter Four, under the discussion of tangible support reduction, we showed that all winning COIN forces in the 59 core cases managed to reduce at least three of ten insurgent tangible support factors, and that in only two COIN losses were COIN forces able to reduce tangible support. Both of the cases in which tangible support was reduced but the COIN force still lost were iron fist cases: Afghanistan (anti-Soviet) and the Lebanese Civil War. Just as with the Israelis in Lebanon, no matter how effective Soviet COIN forces were in reducing the insurgents' tangible support, Afghanistan's predominantly Muslim population was never likely to have high levels of popular support for the "godless communists." Further, the Soviets' scorched-earth policy in parts of the country did nothing to endear them to the locals.

Turning to the motive-focused cases, we see that popular support is positively correlated with motive-focused success. All 11 of the

motive-focused COIN winners improved their level of popular support across the span of the conflict (see factors 87 and 88 in Appendix E). All the motive-focused COIN winners did many things right: The lowest COIN scorecard score for a motive-focused winner is 6.

The bottom line is clear: While iron fist COIN forces *can* beat insurgencies, the most effective concepts and the most ethically permissible concepts align with a motive-focused or balanced COIN paradigm. That motive-focused or balanced concepts were more successful than iron fist cases should not be surprising, though. After all, insurgency is, in some sense, armed politics. Iron fist concepts address the *armed* part of the duality but do little to speak to the *politics* side of the equation.

### **Qualitative Comparative Analyses for the Motive-Focused Subpopulations**

Repeating QCA for the 44 iron fist cases revealed nothing new or interesting; the same sets of prime implicants derived from the 59 core cases worked. (Such is the nature of prime implicants. If they fully discriminate outcomes in the full population, they will also do so for any subsample or subpopulation.) QCA for the 15 motive-focused cases did produce some slightly different subpopulation-specific additional prime implicants, however.

QCA for the 15 motive-focused cases required only a single prime implicant: a reduction in tangible support. Removing tangible support from consideration still allowed the easy discrimination of the 11 COIN wins and four COIN losses with any two of the following factors (so, any two together make a sufficient prime implicant): pacification, legitimacy of the use of force, unity of effort, initiative, border control, and intelligence.

Since the overall results of this study suggest that the motive-focused paradigm is the best choice when fighting insurgencies, QCA on this subpopulation merely confirms the priority placed on tangible support reduction by the QCA of all 59 core cases.

## External Actor Subpopulations

As reported in Chapter Three, the 28 cases that involved forces from a major external power intervening on behalf of the government were evenly split between COIN wins and losses. From the perspective of a country that is likely to participate in a COIN campaign only as an external actor, this is good news. COIN campaigns supported by external actors are not that much more likely to be losses, even though cases that require external support are, logically, the most difficult cases.<sup>1</sup>

### The COIN Concepts and External Actors

We revisited all the concepts tested in Chapter Four for the 28 cases involving external forces from a major power intervening on the side of a COIN force. As was the case with the iron fist and motive-focused subpopulations, the concepts all received the same level of support in the external actor cases as they did in the full 59 core cases. Again, from the perspective of a potential external actor, this is good news; the same things that allow a government to defeat an insurgency by itself also allow a government to defeat an insurgency with help.

Several of the concepts have been advocated as specifically applicable to cases involving an external actor and thus merit further discussion. As shown in Table 4.26, the number of “put a local face on it” factors present and the outcomes of the 28 external actor cases are virtually uncorrelated. This does not mean that efforts to promote the competence of host-nation security forces and transition to them the execution of the COIN mission do not contribute positively in individual case narratives and, more broadly, to other important factors, such as legitimacy and the demonstration of commitment and motivation. It merely suggests that putting a local face on it is nei-

---

<sup>1</sup> If a government were robust or an insurgency trivial, offers by neighbors or allies to commit troops to oppose the insurgency would be rebuffed as unnecessary or as a threat to sovereignty. Similarly, a potential external supporter of a government would much rather see the government sort out its internal security issues with as little outside assistance as possible. Only when an insurgency is perceived as a serious threat relative to the capabilities of the government are external powers likely to offer direct military support and is such support likely to be accepted.

ther strictly required for COIN success nor a guarantee of such success when external forces are supporting the government. Table 4.28 shows similar results for cultural awareness. Cultural awareness among external forces may enable other positive factors (and the case narratives suggest that it does), but in the historical cases involving external forces on the side of the government, cultural awareness was not necessary to win, nor was it strongly correlated with success when present.

Commitment and motivation is the final concept meriting specific mention in the context of external actors. Originally designed as a test of the relationship between the external actor and host-nation government (“you can’t want it more than they do”), this concept proved to be applicable across all 59 core cases. It received strong support in Chapter Four and was highlighted as a priority in the QCA in Chapter Five. This importance is even more apparent when governments are supported by external forces. As Table 6.3 shows, *no* externally supported governments that managed to prevail lacked commitment and motivation. Commitment alone is not sufficient to guarantee success, but its absence is sufficient to always accompany failure among this set of 28 cases. The history of modern insurgency suggests that no matter how committed the external power is, if the indigenous government and COIN forces do not demonstrate a commitment to defeating an insurgency, the insurgency will not be defeated. As an external COIN actor, you can’t want it more than the host-nation government.

**Table 6.3**  
**At Least Four Commitment and Motivation Factors Versus**  
**Case Outcome for the External Actor Subpopulation**

		Case Outcome	
		COIN Loss	COIN Win
At least four commitment and motivation factors	Yes	6	14
	No	8	0



We further divided the 28 external actor force contributions on the COIN side into those that were limited to advisers, SOF, or air power (13 cases) and those that involved significant ground force contributions (15 cases). We observed some significant difference in the patterns of concepts supported between the two, or between either and the full population of cases (the 59 core cases).

**Additional Observations Regarding External Actor Cases**

We have a few other interesting observations regarding external actor cases. First, no COIN force prevailed while the insurgents had an external professional military fighting on their behalf unless the COIN force also had an external professional military fighting on its behalf. This suggests that, in some cases, advisers and SOF may not be enough. Second, where significant external forces were engaged, coordination between those forces and other COIN forces is critical. Factor 160 is “Effective coordination between diverse COIN forces (e.g., police, paramilitary, various military forces, different country forces).” This factor was present in all seven cases in which significant external forces were present and the government won, but it was absent in seven of the eight cases in which the government lost. (See Table 6.4.)

Third, the willingness of indigenous COIN forces to take casualties is correlated with success, being present in 13 of 14 winning cases involving an external actors’ forces. (See Table 6.5.)

**Table 6.4**  
**Coordination Versus Outcome for Cases Involving**  
**Significant External Ground Forces on Behalf of the**  
**Government (n = 15)**

		Case Outcome	
		COIN Loss	COIN Win
Coordination between diverse COIN forces (e.g., police, paramilitary personnel, various military forces, different countries’ forces) effective	Yes	1	7
	No	7	0

**Table 6.5**  
**Indigenous COIN Force Willingness to Take Casualties**  
**Versus Outcome for the External Actor Subpopulation**

		Case Outcome	
		COIN Loss	COIN Win
Indigenous COIN forces' willingness to take casualties was high	Yes	9	13
	No	5	1

A final observation about external actors has to do with their departure. Where an external actor has committed significant ground troops, there are basically two scenarios under which they leave: The first is leaving the host nation to wrap up, when either the insurgency is defeated or the indigenous COIN force has become sufficiently strong to face the insurgents on its own; the second is when the external supporter has reached the end of its own domestic political will and is withdrawing from a contest still in doubt, leaving the indigenous COIN force to stand on its own. Sometimes, the sudden or eventual departure of an external COIN force is a condition of any potential peace agreement with the insurgents. In these data, there were 13 cases in which an external actor was the primary COIN force at some point during that case (so, 13 of the 15 cases in which external actors contributed significant ground forces to the COIN effort). In seven of those 13, an external actor was still the primary COIN force in the decisive phase (meaning that the external actor either substantially drew down or left entirely in the other six). Of the seven external actors that stuck it out, four won. Of the six that drew down or departed, the government it left behind won only twice. This is not a large enough sample to draw definitive inferences by any means, but it does indicate that withdrawing external support—whether leaving a strong indigenous capability to mop up or cutting and running—is potentially capricious. The narratives highlight the importance of sustained external support for both the government and the insurgents where it has been present. Many

narratives (see the summaries in Chapter Two) highlight the importance of the withdrawal of external support from either side as being instrumental in determining case outcomes.

### **QCA and External Actors**

As noted earlier in this chapter, all prime implicants for the larger population of the 59 core cases apply to the 28 external actor cases, as that is the nature of prime implicants. The pattern of possible prime implicants for the 28 external actor cases is similar to those for the 59 core cases. Among the 28 external actor cases, every case was characterized by five concepts (instead of four for the larger population):

- flexibility and adaptability
- commitment and motivation
- tangible support reduction
- border control
- at least two of the following: unity of effort, initiative, or intelligence.

The only difference from the core implicants in the full data is the addition of border control. Border control comes in because 26 of the 28 external actor cases had some kind of cross-border support flowing to insurgents at some point during the case, and all 14 winners had substantially reduced that flow by the end of the conflict.

Other than the addition of border control, it is noteworthy that there are no other additional concepts competing as prime implicants for this subpopulation. This confirms the finding noted in the section “The COIN Concepts and External Actors,” which is that defeating an insurgency with the help of external forces relies on the same concepts as doing so without external forces.