

THE PEOPLE IN ARMS

A Practitioner's Guide to Understanding Insurgency
And dealing with it effectively

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DEDICATION

This short work is dedicated to all who are giving their blood, sweat, and tears to achieve a better state of peace in which those who govern do so with humility and grace, thereby ensuring the security and dignity of those entrusted to their care.

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If we should have to fight, we should be prepared to do so from the neck up instead of from the neck down.
Jimmy Doolittle

Since Clausewitz's day, many thinkers, military and civilian, have written about the problem of insurgency or, as Clausewitz put it, "the people in arms." Unfortunately, on the one hand, many of these works were written at the level of the political scientist or sociologist, and were therefore largely theoretical, and thus of little interest to the tactician. On the other hand, many works were purely tactical in nature – useful to the man at squad or platoon level, but lacking any broader theoretical context to explain why what is observed exists. These tactical manuals thus became "formulaic" – "in such and such a circumstance, do this." But explanations of *why* a particular insurgency came to be, or its specific dynamics or vulnerabilities, have generally been given short shrift or ignored entirely. Thus, many tactical books are long on how to conduct "kinetic" activities, but woefully short on what really matters about dealing effectively with insurgencies. The theoretical books are long on what ought to be done, but often lack an operational perspective that would provide some idea as to how to go about doing what is recommended.

Clausewitz himself admits (Chapter 26) that his understanding of "the people in arms" was limited, though he states that the importance of this form of conflict would grow with the passage of years. Clausewitz evidently did not understand that "the people in arms" was to become far more than merely a useful adjunct of conventional operations, such as the partisan or resistance movements in Napoleon's day or in Nazi-occupied Europe. From peasant uprisings and relatively unfocused tribal warfare in remote areas of the globe during the nineteenth century, irregular warfare has evolved into a distinct species of conflict with its own "rules" and dynamic. Unfortunately, many senior Western military officers, trained in the strategy and tactics of conventional warfare, are slowly (sometimes very painfully) learning that the "rules" of conventional warfare as taught at Sandhurst, West Point, or Saint-Cyr do not necessarily apply to insurgency.

The author has been a student and observer, and sometimes a participant, in various insurgencies since his "initiation" in Vietnam in 1969. What is presented in this work is a distillation of those experiences and studies gathered over approximately forty years on four continents, to include some firsthand experience with the contemporary American struggles in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as some experience in working with insurgent movements in the 1980s. This short work is intended to give the reader an understanding of the true nature of insurgency and a glimpse at the reasons why we have not always dealt with it effectively. If the reader gains some insight into insurgency, and can apply his knowledge intelligently, Jimmy Doolittle's wish will come true: *we will start fighting more from the neckline up – and less from the neckline down.*

PART ONE: THE NATURE OF INSURGENCY

If you know that a thing is unrighteous, then use all dispatch in putting an end to it. Why wait until next year?
Mencius

The philosophers hitherto have only interpreted the world in various ways; the thing is, though, to change it.
Karl Marx

The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave.
Patrick Henry

1. Why should there be insurgencies?

We might reasonably start by asking what appears at first blush to be a simple question: “why should there be insurgencies?” Why, indeed, should there be violent efforts by a group or sect to achieve its stated aims by overthrowing a regime in power? The tendency of many professional military men in the West is to think that insurgencies are caused by “crazy” or “wicked” men purely to promote some subversive (usually evil) cause for their personal gain or glory.¹ Moreover, Europeans and Americans tend to view insurgencies as *criminal* disruptions of law and order rather than as instruments to attain certain political ends. Whereas Westerners use the term “*victory*” as the desired end of a conventional war against another state, “*restoration of law and order*” or “*pacification*” are the phrases most often associated with defeating insurgencies. Even the terms used to describe the insurgents themselves, such as the pejorative terms “*bandits*,” “*miscreants*,” “*terrorists*,” or “*delinquents*,” is evidence that the Western mind still does not grasp the fundamental nature of insurgency.

Let us begin with two propositions for consideration and debate: (1) “*Where governmental authority is respected and popularly accepted, and administration is fair and effective, insurgencies are unlikely to appear – or if they do appear, they will quickly expire for lack of general support.*” (2) “*Where governmental authority is neither respected nor popularly accepted, and administration is corrupt and ineffective, insurgencies are more likely to appear – and if they do appear, may prosper if they gain widespread popular support.*” We can (and should) debate these propositions and test them based on our knowledge of history and case studies in the twentieth century.

Most insurgencies, and certainly those that ultimately proved successful, such as China, Algeria, Cuba, and Vietnam, took place in lands where governmental authority was neither popularly accepted nor respected, and where administration, if it existed at all, was spotty, inefficient, or corrupt. We begin to perceive a curious “cause – effect” relationship between ineffective government and the rise of insurgencies.²

¹ Although demonization of one’s enemies is common in warfare – “the bloody Hun” of World War I and the “dirty Japs” of World War II being just two examples – demonization may well be even more common in the world of insurgency as it manifests itself in unfortunate pejoratives of a cultural or racial nature. Sadly, demonization merely obscures the origin and aims of the insurgent movement, thereby making it (ironically) even more difficult to confront.

² With the retreat of colonialism, the world is less likely to see anti-colonial insurgencies in the future. That said, so long as ineffective, exploitative regimes spawn revolutionary movements, the world is likely to see

Perhaps we should first clarify what true insurgency is as contrasted with terrorism or ordinary criminality. A terrorist has no realizable political agenda. For him, the act of killing is the end in itself. His “goal” is simply to create shock and widespread fear. A true terrorist is, arguably, an anarchist – an opponent of any form of governmental authority whatsoever.³ An example of a true terrorist organization is the Aum Shinrikyo which released deadly sarin gas in Tokyo subways in 1995. This act was indiscriminate violence against Tokyo commuters devoid of political purpose.

By contrast, an insurgent may use a terrorist act or tactic, but the act is generally more focused and selective, and has a distinctly political object in view. The insurgent use of terror – for example, the assassination of a key leader, the bombing of a police or military recruiting center, a suicide attack on a convoy – makes a political statement. Such attacks almost always are intended to promote some aspect of the insurgent’s broader political program. Moreover, if the insurgent is intelligent, his act of terrorism is a conscious act of political strategy. For the insurgent terror is a means, not an end.⁴

Both criminals and insurgents engage in criminal acts such as kidnapping and bank robbery. Criminals obviously perform these acts for their own benefit. Insurgents, by contrast, use bank robberies, theft, and even narco-trafficking to raise funds for The Cause. Kidnappings and shootings are conducted for political impact, not necessarily to earn beer money. Not surprisingly, insurgents justify their criminal and terrorist acts on the grounds that they advance The Cause while punishing “enemies of the people.” This is the classic “end justifies the means” approach.

The point must be emphasized, however, that although insurgents may use criminal or terrorist methods, here again they consider these acts merely *as means to an end* rather than ends in themselves. This is small comfort to those who have been victimized by their actions. But the distinction between ends and means is important for the practitioner, for what is vital to understand is the difference in motivation between true criminals and terrorists on one hand, and insurgents on the other.

Insurgents, then, have a broader purpose in mind than do criminals or terrorists, and that purpose is to oust what they believe to be a government-in-being which has forfeited its right to rule. *The motivation for an insurgency is political.*

Insurgencies are, almost by definition, internal wars – wars conducted by a portion of the people against their own existing government. Insurgents may receive outside aid, they may enjoy “sanctuaries” in neighboring countries, but their intent is to unseat an existing

insurgencies of various stripes for many decades. The challenge for U.S. policymakers will be to decide which future insurgencies directly affect American interests and require some level of involvement.

³ Dr. John J. LeBeau of the George C. Marshall Center makes an important point that there are movements that are “quasi-political.” That is to say, they fall into a hazy gray area so far as their purpose is concerned. Examples might include “hate groups” and certain millenarian religious groups.

⁴ This is not to say that insurgents as individuals always act intelligently or humanely. It is quite true that some criminals drafted into insurgent movements get pleasure from killing “as an end in itself.” Others act on the basis of racial or ethnic prejudice or religious intolerance (eg. Sunnis killing Shi’ites and vice versa.)

regime and replace it with one of their choosing. Usually this takes time, so the struggle is protracted. It also takes on a sense of “competition” between those who wield power and those who aspire to wield it.

Although speaking specifically of French Indochina, Bernard Fall observed: “*When a country is being subverted, it is not being outfought; it is being out-administered.*”⁵ Fall noted that French colonial administration in Vietnam (1946-1954) was being challenged by a new political idea – that indigenous people could establish an independent government and administer themselves without European tutelage. Indeed, French administration in the late period of colonial rule in Indochina barely extended outside Hanoi and Saigon and was, in any event, neither accepted by the people nor especially effective. Unfortunately for the United States, the governmental capabilities of Ngo Dinh Diem and his successors were no more effective than had been those of the French governor general. In contrast, the political structure of northern Vietnam established during the anti-French war and extended after July 1954 – though strict to the point of being harsh – gave Ho Chi Minh a distinct advantage over his southern rivals.⁶ The results of this were clear by 1975.

In the contemporary struggle in Afghanistan, it should be noted that in provinces such as Helmand, the Taliban has established Islamic courts to administer *shari’a* law. These courts have largely displaced the corrupt and inefficient courts of the Kabul regime and may be one step toward “out-administering” the government of Hamid Karzai.

After the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, governance remained weak. Governance woes worsened in the first few years after President Hamid Karzai’s government was established. As one World Bank study concluded, the primary beneficiaries of assistance were “the urban elite.” This triggered deep-seated frustration and resentment among the rural population. Indeed, the Afghan government suffered from a number of systemic problems, including fragmented administrative structures, and had difficulty attracting and retaining skilled professionals with management and administrative experience. Weak administration and lack of control in some provinces made tax policy and administration virtually impossible.⁷

Like a violent weather disturbance such as a hurricane or tornado, an insurgency may take shape where local conditions are “right.” There must be certain preconditions for an insurgency just as there are for the formation of tornadoes. Normally these include a “government” which cannot effectively govern, often staffed by a self-serving oligarchy

⁵ Bernard Fall, *Last Reflections on a War*, p. 220, was by extension talking about not merely the provision of governmental services (though that, too) but the construction of a political organization that would nurture and sustain the insurgent movement in times of trial. This “administration” – which performs quasi-governmental functions -- is the “DNA” of the insurgency: its invisible infrastructure.

⁶ Author is not an apologist for the methods used by Ho in suppressing his opponents from 1954 to about 1960. However, the point must be made that the Viet Minh had established full, effective governmental control over the territory it controlled north of the 17th parallel. By contrast, South Vietnam was an administrative patchwork loosely “governed” by members of the Ngo family (including Madame Nhu) and their cronies. After their passing, a succession of generals assumed national power, but they exerted little effective local control. South Vietnam was never renowned for effective administration of its territory.

⁷ Seth G. Jones, Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, 2 April 2009; p. 3

(or foreign occupiers) that, due to arrogance or ineptitude has lost the respect and support of a significant number of its citizens. Conditions are now “ripe” for a whirlwind.

2. All warfare begins with an idea

All warfare, to include insurgency, begins with an idea. That political idea might be a vision of conquest and annexation; liberation from tyranny, foreign occupation, or colonial rule; defense of one’s threatened culture or “ancient liberties;” a desire to spread one’s ideology, religious beliefs, or economic interests; or from dreams of “destiny” and acquiring a “rightful place in the sun.” The idea is the purpose, central goal, or desired result of the war. It is the unifying feature of all actions taking place during the conflict.

The specifics differ, but the central principle abides. Whatever the nature of a national or tribal group, political party, religious sect, or messianic leader {and his followers,} there is some political idea, some vision, some set of core beliefs which motivates that group to action. It is this central idea around which a movement takes its shape. But whatever the specifics may be, the idea boils down to this: “*things must change!*”

In his monumental work, *Vom Kriege*, Karl von Clausewitz goes to considerable length to explain to his military readers that the nature of any war is at bottom political. His famous and oft-quoted observation “...war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means” captures in one sentence the inescapable fact that any form of conflict, from nuclear holocaust at one end of the spectrum to tribal insurrections at the other, is fought to attain some political goal.⁸ He further states that the object of war is to compel an enemy to accept one’s will, that is, to bow to one’s own political agenda.

Since 1648 when the Treaties of Westphalia were signed ending the Thirty Years’ War, the West has been accustomed, in the main, to dealing with the political ideas and ambitions of nation states and their leaders. Until the last 100 years or so, these states and leaders have been almost exclusively European nation-states or quasi-European republics like those of the Americas that speak the political language of Europe.

The so-called Third World was not taken seriously by European powers, and certainly was never considered an “equal.” The European pattern was to send second sons to Africa and Asia as traders, administrators, military officers, or missionaries – to assert European control and interests over European dependencies and take up what Kipling called “the white man’s burden.” First sons stayed at home to become the premiers, foreign ministers, and field marshals who would deal with European adversaries.

The attention of most European military men and diplomats then, as now, focused on “state on state” warfare and diplomacy rather than on what Clausewitz described as “the people in arms.”⁹ Emphasis was then, and still is today, given to the conduct of regular

⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 82

⁹ Within Europe itself, there have been notable instances in which *non-state* actors have fought for political ideas of their own. Certainly the resistance of the Spanish *guerrillas* during the time of Napoleon’s

campaigns, with attention focused on the technology of weaponry and the means by which technology-intensive weapons and conventional forces could be most effectively employed.

By contrast, “popular” wars, such as those in nineteenth century Spain or Poland, received little attention except from a handful of specialists. Generally, wars of resistance fought by irregular or partisan groups – whether in Europe or elsewhere – were regarded as aberrations not worthy of serious study by the military officer or his policymaking superior. Even in the United States, little time is devoted to studying the unconventional exploits of Francis Marion (the “Swamp Fox”) or those of John Singleton Mosby (the “Grey Ghost of the Confederacy.”) A clever operator like Frederick Funston (captor of Emilio Aguinaldo by stratagem) is completely unknown except to historians of the Philippine Insurrection.

When consideration turns to critical evaluation of campaigns in what until recently was called the Third World, the European military mind (to include here, the American military mind as an outgrowth of an essentially “European” point of view) goes blank. These campaigns, fought by a number of European expeditionary forces seeking to establish or maintain colonial power in Africa and Asia, attracted little attention at the time from the defense ministries in London, Paris, Berlin, or Rome, and have had little impact on the curricula taught, then or now, at Sandhurst or Saint-Cyr. Anti-colonial insurrections such as those in the French and German colonies in Africa, or the nearly continual British clashes with Afghans and other tribal groups in British India, or even successful resistance efforts by countries such as Ethiopia (against Italy) have been ignored by military and political thinkers. They were ignored in the nineteenth century, I believe, because indigenous enemies were never taken seriously; the Herero in Southwest Africa or the Mohmands of the Northwest Frontier did not speak the political language of the Europeans. Today these case studies are ignored, I think, because they are considered “ancient history” and thought irrelevant to a contemporary military officer’s professional preparation.

And yet, even in the Third World, political ideas – however different or even bizarre from those of the Europeans – continue to motivate peoples quite unfamiliar with the precepts and practices of the Treaties of Westphalia. Nineteenth century examples of such non-European political ideas are numerous and varied, but include such phenomena as the rise of the Mahdi in present-day Sudan (ca 1880), the Great Mutiny in British India (1857), the rising of the Acehnese in the Netherlands Indies, or even the T’ai-p’ing and Boxer rebellions in China. With only a few exceptions, such as the Italian humiliation in 1896 in Eritrea, and the Spanish defeat at the hands of the Riffians in 1921, it is quite true that European technology – firepower – generally settled the question of which political

occupation (1808-1814) is a case in point. There have been other rebellions, such as those in Austria (against France and its satellite, Bavaria) led by Andreas Hofer (1809), Poland (against imperial Russia in 1830 and again in 1863), and the Balkans (recurring uprisings against the Ottoman Turks, from 1804 to 1913.) Though each particular uprising was unique to its time and its place, all of these European cases could be described as “wars of national resistance” conducted by non-state actors. All were inspired by an idea – that of liberation – in some cases ultimately successful, in other cases not.

idea, the colonial or the anti-colonial, would prevail. Understanding the nuances of a non-Western political idea and its language played very little part in quelling a colonial revolt 150 years ago. Sadly, as events have shown in contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq, these same Western tendencies to attempt a divorce between politics and warfare persist today.

The twentieth century witnessed the rise of “nationalism” in many European colonies in Africa and Asia. The irony is that the leaders of many of these movements were, in fact, educated in Europe. But the political ideas that these leaders brought home with them, though flavored by European philosophers such as Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Nietzsche or Marx were not simply imprinted whole on non-European populations, but rather blended into what were still the indigenous cultures of colonial or semi-colonial lands. Thus, the “political language” of modern anti-colonial movements has been a kind of hybrid: Marxism with Buddhism in French Indochina; socialism with Islam in Algeria; British liberalism with Hinduism in India, Ba’athist fascism with Islam in Syria and Iraq, and so on.

The strategists and thinkers in the defense ministries and chancelleries of early twentieth century Europe evidently thought it unnecessary to understand in precise detail the political idea underlying a non-European resistance movement, the political language in which that idea was delivered, and the political impact that such an idea had on various groups within the disputed area. The normal European response to a colonial uprising was to use force to “maintain order” – that is, to preserve European political and administrative control. In effect, the employment of force often was what we might call “*a technical solution to a basically political problem.*” Such “technical solutions” unfortunately ignored the politics and merely postponed resolution.

In the nineteenth century, Europeans could and did buy off or intimidate Third World potentates. The British in particular were highly skilled at this, developing their indirect rule in British India almost to a “high art.” As mentioned, if there were lingering doubts about “who ruled whom,” such doubts usually were laid to rest by liberal European application of the Enfield rifle and the Maxim gun.¹⁰ This method of dealing with so-called “wogs” might be considered an early version of “shock and awe.” And we are forced to admit the fact that, in the great majority of cases during the heyday of colonialism, raw military power dictated local politics.

But by the mid-twentieth century, for the most part, Europeans were no longer in a position to bribe, cajole or intimidate some local *cacique* in order to gain their political objective. Indigenous groups were better armed than they had been. The credibility and economic power of the principal colonial powers was greatly reduced. *But the decisive factor in nearly all successful anti-colonial movements, and the insurgencies which some of those movements spawned, was the ability of a native leadership to promote an idea, and to organize the ordinary people of hamlets, then villages, then whole districts behind that idea.* In the case of Mohandas Gandhi, a political idea was carried into reality

¹⁰ There is also the unfortunate phrase: “*civilizing with a Krag-Jorgensen*” – another standard rifle in common use by the U.S. Army and other nations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

through his celebrated non-violent agitation. In other lands, such as French Indochina, Ho Chi Minh achieved his political aims by use of protracted insurgent warfare. And in contemporary Afghanistan and Pakistan, we are also witness to the organization of people around a central idea.

3. Forward or backward?

Political scientists will quibble with the following bald assertion as being simplistic (which, admittedly it is,) but insurgent movements can be placed into one of two different categories. There are, first of all, insurgent movements that seek to *transform* society, to rid society of existing norms and structures, and replace the old with something new, to smash the “feudal” and move rapidly to the “modern.”

By contrast, there are other movements that seek to block or undo the “new” and to restore or *preserve* the old, the traditional, the “way things were – and ought yet to be.”

There is a tendency of Western policymakers and military men to confuse the two, not making a clear distinction between movements that strive for change, that is, movements that wish to “transform” society, and those that steadfastly oppose any social and political change.

An example of the former (“transformational”) insurgent movement is the Chinese. The vision of Mao and his colleagues was to weaken or demolish completely the old social order, patterns of landholding and wealth, religious beliefs, and so on. The Chinese Communist Party declared such institutions to be “feudal,” and held them – along with foreign imperialism – to be the root causes of China’s woes. Instead, the Party offered a vision of a “new China” built on socialist principles that would rid society of old evils and make China both independent and “modern.”

By contrast, the contemporary Taliban believes that the social and political reforms that have taken place in the secular regimes of Afghanistan and Pakistan are anathema. The Taliban holds that the old, traditional ways are best and, if restored, will lead to social harmony and peace. According to the Taliban, secular institutions such as voting, women’s emancipation, public (non-religious) education – especially of girls – and many other such programs violate basic precepts of Islam – and are therefore at the root of the ills that beset Pakistan and Afghanistan. This very conservative political idea might be thought of as “preservationist.” (If anything, this political idea is reactionary, and certainly *not* “radical” as some pundits would have us believe.)

While admitting freely that the division of all insurgencies into two categories – the transformational and the preservationist – is simplistic, the paradigm nonetheless does describe virtually all insurgencies known. The majority of insurgencies, especially those organized along nationalist or Marxist lines, tend to be “transformational,” whereas those organized along tribal, religious or ethnic lines tend to be “preservationist.”

Beyond broad categorizations of the general political character of an insurgency, the point must be made that no two insurgencies are completely alike in all respects. While limited comparisons of insurgencies can be usefully made – and certainly some features of two different insurgencies can be compared – each insurgency is truly unique. As we will see, each insurgency should be studied and understood on its own merits.

What is important for the practitioner to bear in mind is that understanding the distinction between “transformational” and “preservationist” insurgencies is not an academic game, or the splitting of sociological hairs – but of direct relevance to designing appropriate means for meeting each type of challenge. What is appropriate for one category of insurgency is often quite inappropriate for the other.

4. Insurgency and public opinion

Military power is usually quite visible in the ranks of uniformed troops, rows of vehicles, and weapons of war that a regime can array. By contrast, political power is often almost invisible. In many parts of the world it cannot be measured by the number of votes cast, the amount of money contributed to political parties or candidates, or the number of people at a rally. But though not always visible, political power is nonetheless very real, for it rests in the sentiments of the people and their willingness to obey some entity, to subscribe to some idea. Napoleon himself, witness of the French Revolution, made this observation: “*Power is based on opinion. What is a government not supported by opinion? Nothing.*”¹¹

Seen in this light, it becomes obvious that an insurgency is a continuation of political relations by other means or, as I define it: “*armed competition between two or more groups for the political allegiance and support of the people.*” It is armed, and therefore distinct from the non-violent path to political change, probably because each competitor has decided that his political endpoint is non-negotiable.

Here the contrast between the British approach to India and the French approach to Vietnam – roughly contemporaneously – is instructive. It must be remembered that, in the case of India, the British Labour Government after World War II was only too anxious to grant independence. The stumbling block was not British unwillingness to accept Indian political demands; it was whether there was to be one India...or two (ie. Pakistan.) In the case of the French Fourth Republic, the idea of granting independence to the fledgling Democratic Republic of Vietnam was unthinkable. Ho Chi Minh and his followers were unwilling to remain under French rule. Here it is worth noting John F. Kennedy’s astute observation that: “*those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable.*”¹²

The superlative example of a successful insurgency in the mid-twentieth century is, without doubt, the replacement of the American-backed Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek by the indigenous Communist regime of Mao Tse-tung. The early struggles of

¹¹ Maxim of Napoleon Bonaparte quoted by Jacques Ellul, op cit., p. 121 and others.

¹² John F. Kennedy, address to Latin American diplomats at the White House, 12 March 1962

the “Chinese Red Army” in Hunan and Kiangsi were none too promising, and it is true that in the early 1930s the insurgent movement was nearly wiped out. But Mao and his surviving colleagues learned hard lessons that were later put to good use in Yen-an. Of highest importance to Mao and the Chinese Communist Party was political mobilization. Put another way, the Party’s goal was the building of popular support; the method was to educate – and then indoctrinate – as many peasants and others as possible.

Throughout the late 1930s, and all during the long Japanese occupation of North China (1937-1945) the Chinese Communists invested much time and effort building their power with the peasantry in areas under their control. The guerrilla forces of the Eighth Route Army constantly attacked small Japanese outposts, sabotaged rail lines, hampered enemy re-supply efforts, and generally harassed and tied down the Japanese army in the major cities and large towns.

But the real war was not there. The “real war” was in the classrooms of the Resistance University and in cadre schools, peasant literacy classes, and mobilization rallies. In a very real sense, it was in these schools that the revolution was won. It was here that the political idea became the goal for thousands, then millions of Chinese who desired a positive change and believed that Mao could bring it about. Over the war years, public opinion shifted dramatically – precinct by precinct.

It is worth quoting in full Mao’s prescription for mobilizing the people. This selection is excerpted from his pivotal “On Protracted War” (1938):

What does political mobilization mean? First, it means telling the army and the people about the political aim of the war. It is necessary for every soldier and civilian to see why the war must be fought and how it concerns him. ... Secondly, it is not enough merely to explain the aim to them; the steps and policies for its attainment must also be given, that is, there must be a political programme. ... Without a clear-cut, concrete political programme it is impossible to mobilize all the armed forces and the whole people to carry the war against Japan through to the end. *Thirdly, how should we mobilize them? By word of mouth, by leaflets and bulletins, by newspapers, books and pamphlets, through plays and films, through schools, through the mass organizations and through our cadres.* ... Fourthly, to mobilize once is not enough; political mobilization for the War of Resistance must be continuous. *Our job is not to recite our political programme to the people, for nobody will listen to such recitations; we must link the political mobilization for the war with developments in the war and with the life of the soldiers and the people, and make it a continuous movement. This is a matter of immense importance on which our victory in the war primarily depends.*¹³

In carrying out his revolution, Mao Tse-tung always understood that every military action had to be designed to support some political aim, however local, however humble. At no time was force to be used unless it served a political purpose.

Before leaving the Chinese example, the point should be made that during the last phases of the Chinese civil war (1946-1949) the Nationalist forces had at least four times the numbers of soldiers as the Communists. The Nationalists also possessed American-provided planes, tanks, artillery pieces, vehicles, and small arms. Not least, Chiang Kai-

¹³ Mao Tse-tung, Selected Military Writings, “On Protracted War,” p. 229. I have italicized portions for emphasis.

shek was the beneficiary of American diplomatic support, financial aid, and military advice (this latter, sadly, way off the mark.)

What the Communists had that the Chinese Nationalists lacked, however, was the support of the people. The people provided porter assistance to the Communists, but denied same to the road- and rail-bound Nationalists. The people provided eyes and ears, so that the Communists always knew where their enemies were, in what strength, and what they planned to do. The Nationalists usually had little knowledge of their enemy's plans and intentions, and often did not even know the Communists' whereabouts. The people provided food and shelter when they could to the Communist forces; the Nationalists were left to starve in the cold rain of November 1948.

In short, the Communists trapped the Nationalists on the roads and in the cities – just as they had the Japanese a few years earlier. The Communists undermined the morale of rank and file Nationalist soldiers and officers (many went over to the new “People’s Liberation Army.”) And between November 1948 and April 1949, the tottering Nationalist regime was driven from power on the mainland. *In a very real sense, the Chinese people had “voted” by aiding one party and withholding aid from another.*

In the contemporary case of Afghanistan (and Pakistan, for that matter) we see what can fairly be labeled “*armed competition between two or more groups for the political allegiance and support of the people.*” On the one hand, we have the established quasi-secular regimes of Kabul and Islamabad. On the other hand, there are the committed fighters of the Taliban loosely allied under the banner of Mullah Omar. But it might be argued that the Taliban, though fewer in number than their enemies, and certainly not as well armed, have one thing that their enemies lack. And that is a clear political idea – the establishment of an “Islamic emirate” under strict Islamic law (*shari’a*.) We may take issue whether that idea “makes sense” or is even “good” for Afghanistan – but in so doing, we necessarily would be making that judgment through Western eyes. What matters ultimately is not *our* opinion, but the opinions of those who live in the conflicted areas and who may hold traditions and values very different from our own.

As noted earlier, the Taliban is definitely not a “transformational” movement as were the Chinese Communists. In fact, they are extremely “preservationist.” The political idea that they put forward is that traditional culture is the only valid culture, a severe and intolerant version of Islam the only valid religion, and that Taliban leadership will restore social order if allowed to do so. This central idea may be abhorrent to us, but is attractive to many. We need to ask what countervailing political idea has been offered to the people of Afghanistan or Pakistan, and whether those alternative ideas find broad support among the people.

It may be that ultimately the ongoing Afghan insurgency will be decided by whichever entity, the government in Kabul or the Taliban, is best able to mobilize public opinion and organize active supporters. The Taliban have made excellent use of madrassas to train and indoctrinate their “cadres.” It is less certain whether the Kabul government has

made much effort to create through public schools or anywhere else a competing vision that holds greater attraction for the people of Afghanistan.

In the case of Pakistan, the Taliban may not pose a threat in areas where the government has firm and effective administrative control. But there are large expanses of Pakistan where Islamabad's writ has little force. It is there, in the "blank spots" on the map, where Pakistani authority is weak or non-existent that the Taliban and its allies will flourish.

In closing this section on the vital role of political leadership and the pursuit of a political idea as the basis for warfare, the observation of Jean Monnet, who might be considered the "father of modern Europe," bears thought. Monnet was speaking at a time when Stalin's armies occupied Eastern Europe, and the Communist idea attracted millions of adherents in Western Europe. But I believe that his observation has universal validity: "*People will only fight for what is inside them and what they believe, and we must give them something to believe.*"¹⁴

5. A war of ideas

A true insurgent movement is a "government-in-waiting." Whether the movement is "transformational" or "preservationist," it intends eventually to capture power and govern. We have spent some time examining the political bases for insurgency – not as much as a political scientist would like, but hopefully not so much as to bore a practitioner. By now it should be abundantly clear that political factors are literally the "warp and weft" of the fabric of insurgent warfare – indeed, as "masters of the art" such as Mao Tse-tung have testified, successful prosecution of a war is impossible without continual and meaningful political mobilization. General Vo Nguyen Giap noted that "*In preparing for armed insurrection, propaganda is the most essential task to be performed. During the insurrection, propaganda is even more important than fighting.*"¹⁵

If political mobilization is the core of a movement, it then follows that those who either support – or oppose – a given insurgency should pay close attention to understanding what the political issues are and how they are conveyed to specific audiences. Assuming that *two* sides are playing the game – not just the insurgents – a war of ideas will be the inevitable result. Usually, however, a targeted regime is blind to the political offensive launched by the "government-in-waiting" and attempts to deal with the deteriorating situation only through its instruments of coercion – the police and the military.

If we accept Napoleon's observation that political power is based on popular opinion, it also follows that whoever or whatever influences that opinion, influences the foundations of power. Napoleon once admitted that he feared "four hostile newspapers" more than "a thousand bayonets."

Force is clearly one factor in the equation. But in insurgency, force plays a backseat role so far as politics is concerned. It is therefore persuasion and organization that come to

¹⁴ Theodore White, *In Search of History*, p. 441.

¹⁵ Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army*, pp. 77-79. See also the Phu Yen case study at Annex B.

center stage and are quietly backed up by force. Political mobilization is not tacked on as a pale afterthought to what the Pentagon (rather grotesquely) likes to call “kinetic operations.” It is instead an integral – indeed, *the central* – element of an insurgency.¹⁶ Once again, Mao succinctly captured the issue in a 1938 lecture: “*Armament is an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor ... Man, not material, forms the decisive factor.*”¹⁷ (Conventional buffs might also note that General Patton said just about the same thing; let’s hope the Pentagon really believes it.)

We have seen in the preceding section how Mao laid bare the arsenal of techniques available to his cadres in Yen-an to mold opinion and thus build political power. What he advocated was a coherent, inter-locking, mutually reinforcing political warfare campaign designed to build solid, reliable political support in the areas in which his guerrillas had to operate. Indeed, the political warfare offensive paved the way for his later penetration of various districts by his armed elements. What must be kept in mind is that effective strategy depends upon a skillful blending of persuasion of key groups alongside selective – and politically relevant – focused force. (See Annex C on Political Warfare.)

A secondary effort of Mao’s political warfare campaign was aimed at weakening the commitment of his opponents to their causes. Where his enemies had no apparent “cause” to defend, or where that commitment was shaky, this effort also proved quite successful. It is well known that tens of thousands of Nationalist troops came over to Mao in the latter phases of the Chinese Revolution. Even some Japanese are reported to have defected to Mao, and others undoubtedly returned to Japan imbued with ideas picked up in China.

The question of political warfare is directly related to the formation and spread of a political idea – the motive force that can build the power either of an insurgency (that is, a “government-in-waiting”) or a government-in-being. That motive force is nurtured by persuasion, indoctrination, and education. What is especially required is a coherent and continuous propaganda effort – relevant to people’s conditions and needs – that clarifies for specific groups (known as target audiences) the perceived causes of societal ills, lays out a clear plan or program for the resolution of those ills, and then motivates that audience to play an active part in carrying out the political program.

What must be understood is that political ideas may vary, but the method of their spread does not. A political idea may be Jeffersonian, Marxist, fascist, Hindu, Islamist, Roman Catholic, or any other flavor. If a doctrine or set of beliefs held by a group or leader is to become accepted by many, and ultimately if it is to shape public policy, it must be spread methodically and consistently.

Here we come to a subject that is uncomfortable for many Americans: propaganda.

¹⁶ Col. Grant Newsham, USMC, observes that the most skillful insurgents use a “delicate balance” of force and persuasion – neither overplaying the role of force in encouraging obedience nor eschewing its value. This might be described as a carefully calculated “iron fist in velvet glove” approach.

¹⁷ Quoted in John Baylis, *Contemporary Strategy*, Vol. 2, p. 135. Baylis translates Mao as: “Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things, that are decisive.”

6. That nasty word “propaganda”

It should be understood that the term “propaganda” comes from the Latin word *propagare*, to propagate, propound or spread. It has acquired its negative flavor in the twentieth century when the word took on a sinister, evil connotation – perhaps because of its association with Nazi or Communist political causes. In the American popular mind, “propaganda” is associated with clever lies, tricks, slander, and deception. The idea of persuasion, especially persuasion based on truth, is seldom considered.

The irony is that the term “propaganda” was first coined by the Roman Catholic Church in 1622 in its Sacred Congregation for Propagating the Faith (*Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*.) The object of this body was to propound, spread, or promote Catholic doctrine to counter or block what the Roman Catholic Church viewed as the heretical (“wrong”) teaching by Lutherans, Calvinists and others in northern and central Europe. Such heretical teachings would not have disturbed the Catholic Church much, but for the fact that the spread of Lutheranism and Calvinism was seriously eroding the Church’s political position in Europe – and costing it a lot of lost revenue.

Something had to be done, and the Church’s response (apart from the Inquisition) was the development of a sophisticated campaign to prevent the spread of Protestant doctrines and, where possible, to win back souls to Rome. It must be confessed that this effort met with remarkable success – quite apart from the use of armed force.

The hypocrisy of the American people and government concerning propaganda is only too obvious. While condemning “propaganda,” American political parties and pressure groups regularly spend hundreds of millions of dollars shaping the views of the American voter and motivating him or her to support certain candidates and programs and to oppose others. By the same token, American advertising is a multi-billion dollar industry and has as its purpose the persuasion of the American consumer that one brand of toothpaste is far superior to all others and therefore only it is worthy of purchase.¹⁸

If propaganda is central to the way that we form the political and economic opinions of our own citizens – and it is – then it stands to reason that such efforts could be put to productive use abroad. Domestic propaganda often is sophisticated and sometimes subtle, but much of it is effective. Elections often are decided by the effective use of persuasive techniques with groups of voters. Corporate sales rise or fall depending upon the public’s opinion of its products, and therefore the number of sales made.

A leading theorist and observer of propaganda in the twentieth century was Jacques Ellul, a former Marxist turned Catholic theologian and scholar.

¹⁸ Ironically, Edward L. Bernays, whose name is today obscure, is credited as the “father of American advertising.” Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, became convinced that psychological factors could be used in commercial advertising. During World War I, Bernays became a propagandist for the Woodrow Wilson Administration and did all in his power to promote support for America’s participation in the war, and to undermine any remaining sympathy for the imperial government in Germany.

Ellul's work, Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes is so profound that it merits reading cover-to-cover. (Selected quotations are carried at Annex C.) But two of Ellul's central observations are useful here to illustrate how the Taliban – or any political group – can form mass opinions and put them to good use:

To the extent that man needs justifications, propaganda provides them. But whereas his ordinary justifications are fragile and may always be open to doubts, those furnished by propaganda are irrefutable and solid. The individual believes them and considers them to be eternal truths. He can throw off all sense of guilt; he loses all feeling for the harm he might do....¹⁹

The great force of propaganda lies in giving modern man all-embracing, simple explanations and massive, doctrinal causes, without which he could not live with the news. Man is doubly reassured by propaganda: first, because it tells him the reasons behind the developments which unfold, and second, because it promises a solution for all the problems that arise, which would otherwise seem insoluble.²⁰

In the hands of a Taliban mullah capable of quoting Scripture (whether authentic excerpts taken from the Holy Qur'an or, in many cases, "sayings" of highly dubious Scriptural authenticity) poorly educated men, especially those who are also seeking their next meal, are easily recruited and organized into a self-sustaining base of support. It is here, at the most basic level of the mosque or madrassa that the Taliban builds its power. The madrassas and mullahs are the political mobilization equivalents of Mao's resistance schools and senior cadres.

Let us consider for a moment what was done by a "transformational" insurgency in an earlier day. Even before Mao Tse-tung had risen to leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and prominence, the Chinese were skilled organizers. A Nationalist report from 1928 had the following to say about an earlier leader's organizational work:

The reason the Communist Party has such a deeply rooted and firm foundation at Anyuan is because in the past the Communists carried out comprehensive 'red education' at Anyuan. Six or seven years ago the Anyuan workers were all country bumpkins...Not one of them could stand up at a meeting and say a word, let alone deliver a speech. Still less had any of them ever heard of organizing anything. It was only after the Communist bandit Li Lisan went to Anyuan...that the knowledge of how to organize became widespread. Now workers were speaking up at public meetings and even giving lectures! The Communists at Anyuan greatly valued education but they did not mechanically evangelize Communism like a missionary cramming a religious belief into a worker's head. At first they focused on literacy and basic knowledge. Every week they convened lectures as well as workers' debate societies and study groups.²¹

Now we must look at our own efforts and those of our allies in the contemporary era. If we seek for the reasons why the Taliban seems resurgent, and is indeed slowly extending its reach into parts of Afghanistan – and Pakistan – from which it was expelled only a few years ago, it is not because of its superior weaponry. The Taliban does not, as yet, have an air force, and "command of the sea" is hardly an issue. Even its ability to use basic infantry weapons is not up to NATO standards. Yet most objective observers agree

¹⁹ Jacques Ellul, Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes, p. 165. (See Ellul quotations at Annex C.)

²⁰ *ibid*, p. 147.

²¹ *Hunan Qingxian Gongbao*; September 1928, quoted in Elizabeth Perry, "Reclaiming the Chinese Revolution;" pp. 1159-1160.

that the Taliban is gaining strength in southern Afghanistan, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas {FATA} of Pakistan, and in other districts of both countries. Why is this so?

The answer can only reside in one aspect of the insurgency – an aspect largely ignored by the regime in Kabul and myopically not even seen in Washington. The answer is that the Taliban, though a fundamentally different kind of insurgency from that of the Chinese a half century ago, have taken a leaf out of Mao’s handbook as relates to political warfare and are playing that card as a trump. And despite its very weak hand, the Taliban is still beating Kabul and its Western allies in the political warfare game. It has been given this great opening by the obvious flaws of the Kabul regime and the mistakes of the allies.

The political warfare response from the Western - Afghan side? Deafening silence. To revisit Jean Monnet: *“People will only fight for what is inside them and what they believe, and we must give them something to believe.”*

7. Political change and reform

We have noted John Kennedy’s observation that *“those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable.”* If we accept this statement as true, we should ask why indeed some regimes do make peaceful change impossible. Reason alone would suggest that the wise course of action would be to avoid violence, with its concomitant loss of life, human pain, and destruction of property and societal values.

Perhaps, as with so much else, the answer lies in human nature. In material terms, some folks who have nothing at all want a little. Those who already have something want more, and they certainly don’t want to lose what they have. With the exception of Buddhist monks, very few human beings are completely and genuinely satisfied only with what they have – and covet nothing more.

But in a non-material sense, some who presently are “out” wish to be “in,” and those who already are “in” wish to stay that way. This relates to social position, political power, and the advantages accruing to personal or family connections and influence.²²

The problem that vexed a string of U.S. administrations of both political persuasions was how to encourage certain Third World regimes battling active insurgencies to undertake serious programs of political, economic, social, and military reform. Despite heavy diplomatic pressure and huge amounts of aid, some regimes – the former government of South Vietnam is a case in point – seemed impervious to real change. As Dwight D. Eisenhower observed in his Inaugural Address: *“A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both.”*²³

Is broad social and political reform even possible?

²² Aristotle observed the following in his *Politics*: “Inferiors revolt in order that they may be equal, and equals that they may be superior. Such is the state of mind which creates revolutions.”

²³ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Inaugural Address, 20 January 1953.

In some cases it is. But in many other cases what the U.S. government sees as “reform” is viewed by the locals as unwarranted “meddling” and interference. Moreover, the very idea of reform suggests that something is wrong and needs fixing. No one likes to be told that what he is doing is “wrong” – least of all by an outsider, no matter how powerful. But the core of the problem is deeper. From the standpoint of those in power, the system works just fine, thank you. Don’t tinker with it.

The problem with reform – political change – is the problem of the incipient revolution itself. As we’ve seen, an insurgent movement is a “government-in-waiting” which came into being with the express purpose of capturing power and implementing its own program. Normally, a government-in-being seeks to retain power; the insurgents, of course, wish to take it away. Compromise – power-sharing – is occasionally possible. But the problem here is that a compromise is fragile and, in any case, neither side is too happy about sharing power with its opponent. The existing regime would consider any “compromise” with the insurgents to be a highly distasteful surrender; the insurgents would consider that their revolution was unfinished, incomplete, perhaps betrayed.

From the regime perspective, reform has more drawbacks than advantages. Even if the elite groups controlling the regime agree philosophically with reforms aimed at political and social change, they are aware that introduction of such measures in the midst of an insurgency is risky and potentially unsettling. Normally, however, elite groups have little interest in reform because such changes imply dilution or loss of the very political power that they hope to retain. In the peculiar logic of insurgency, if the ruling groups were willing to cede significant political, economic, or social prerogatives, there would be no need to decide the issue by force. Since they are not willing, force must decide.

The irony is that, in most cases, the insurgent movement also opposes reforms. While this may appear counter-intuitive, there is good reason for the insurgents to wish that no political or other changes take place – at least, not until after they have taken power. The reason for this is again part of the evil logic of insurgency – if reforms of various kinds prove successful, the very reason for the insurgent movement would be undermined. A peasant would see no point in risking death as a guerrilla if he can legally obtain land or civil rights or any other object of his desire. Very quickly the movement would lose its purpose, and its membership would melt away. Therefore, an insurgent movement normally will attempt to pin the government-in-being to its existing situation – a situation that may be rife with “contradictions” and other dysfunctions that make it vulnerable politically. And, as stated, normally the existing regime is quite content not to change.

What needs to be understood at this point is that an insurgent movement, much like an underdog candidate in a vicious electoral race to unseat an entrenched incumbent, will be looking for all the “dirt” he can find. No chink in the armor is too small to ignore, no vulnerability will be left unexploited, no opportunity to make political capital at the regime’s expense will be missed. The insurgent movement’s political cadre, if clever and well-informed, will know precisely where the government’s weak spots are, who is on

the take, who has injured whom, and in which closets the skeletons may be found. Insurgency is bare-knuckle politics at its best.

How will this political war be conducted? As Mao stated in his article on “Political Mobilization,” a powerful, comprehensive campaign will be conducted using all the media at the insurgents’ disposal – and then some.

As noted earlier, the insurgents’ object is to attract to its banner those who, for one reason or another, are already disaffected; then to cause those who are loosely attached to the targeted regime to withdraw their support from the regime; and finally to compel even members of the government-in-being to flee or make their peace with the movement. By stages the political foundations of the existing state are slowly but steadily leached away until nothing is left. Then the regime will simply dissolve.

The Chinese have a saying that is appropriate to this phenomenon: “*Water is the softest of all things, but with time and persistence it can wear away the hardest stone.*”

8. An inept regime’s response

It is now worth considering the response of the regime that has made itself vulnerable to overthrow. At the start, the regime attempts to maintain order through its monopoly on coercive power (esp. police and military.) Despite a regime’s colonial, oligarchic, or even despotic nature, certain groups will support the regime because they benefit in some way from its rule. (It should be remembered that even in the American Revolution, a very sizable portion of the colonial population opposed independence and backed the British Crown – usually because in some way or ways those Tories perceived benefit or advantage from supporting continued British rule. Many Tories fought strenuously on behalf of King George III to maintain the *status quo*.) A regime may be harsh or relatively benign, but what is certain is that it rewards some and antagonizes others.

So long as a government-in-being has a monopoly not only on force, *but more particularly, a monopoly on political ideas*, discontent with the regime is diffused and lacks direction. To the extent that the existing regime can, in fact, satisfy or at least co-opt the majority of significant socio-ethnic groups within its borders, it probably can preserve itself in power indefinitely.²⁴ So long as opinion supports the regime in being, however inept, harsh or corrupt that regime may be, it will not fall. We note with some interest that it took three centuries for the Latin American revolutionaries to overthrow Spanish colonial rule, and six hundred years to see an end of the Ottoman Empire.

I think all of us, from Greek philosophers down to contemporary visionaries, would agree that the ideal government would “*govern with humility and grace, thereby ensuring the*

²⁴ Consider, for example, British rule in Canada until Confederation under the British North America Act in 1867. From 1763 to 1867, even in French Canada, there were no significant anti-colonial risings against British rule, nor did alternative or “shadow” regimes appear – such as the insurgent movements in the Original Thirteen colonies that eventually became the United States. Of course, Parliament went out of its way to conciliate the French inhabitants through the Quebec Act and other legislation.

security and dignity of those entrusted to their care.”²⁵ Sadly, as James Madison pointed out, men are not angels, and governments do not always comport themselves with compassion, much less with foresight for the consequences of their decisions. In some cases, governments are inept and inefficient, others greedy and rapacious, and still others predatory and vicious. Lord Acton was correct in observing that “*power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*”²⁶

Regimes that become despotic or corrupt, especially if they are also inept, tend to spawn their own problems. Very soon after major dysfunctions begin to appear in the political life of a given country, an opposition movement will begin to take shape. Such a movement may at first be loosely organized and have only vague thoughts about why social, economic, or political problems exist – and perhaps no idea at all about what should be done to correct those ills. But along with the general feeling of discontent, a leader or leaders will emerge. If that leader is charismatic, and especially if he or she can propound a clear message as to why the ills exist and what should be done about them, the movement will begin to take form and grow.

The target regime has an option at this point. If it is truly democratic (which is unlikely) it can allow itself to be voted out of power. Or, if the existing regime is at least willing to consider the political ideas – usually couched as “reforms” – put forward by the movement, violence might yet be avoided. As noted, the problem is that “reforms” usually are stillborn because they negatively affect the interests of an entrenched ruling elite and its bureaucracy. We are mindful of the 9/11 Commission’s observation in its report: “*Imagination is not a gift usually associated with bureaucracies.*”²⁷

In the majority of cases, a colonial or oligarchic regime tends not to take its opposition very seriously at the outset. It may attempt to control the movement’s access to media, arrest its leaders, and disrupt its rallies and meetings. But the regime’s effort to quash the group, rather than negotiate seriously with it or co-opt it, merely causes the opposition to become more militant in its demands, and perhaps unintentionally gives credence to the movement’s statements. If the regime is inept as well as repressive, it may also take actions that polarize wide sections of the population. Always remember that insurgent political warfare specialists will make hay out of any regime gaffe. As mentioned earlier, if well led, the opposition movement will take full advantage of any and all mistakes made by the regime. Napoleon mockingly advised: “*Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake.*”²⁸ Indeed, the insurgents will gleefully cheer on such mistakes.

Due to the inability of an inept and corrupt regime to reform itself, or to admit any but members of the “in-group” to the trough, it will use only coercive means to deal with the growing movement. This in effect gives the movement a free hand to organize ever-wider segments of the local population and mobilize them with the central political idea

²⁵ Quoted from a Lutheran service bulletin.

²⁶ Lord Acton. (John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, 1834-1902) in written correspondence to Bishop Mandell Creighton, April 1887.

²⁷ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, The 9/11 Commission Report, p. 344.

²⁸ Quoted in James Charlton, The Military Quotation Book, p. 93.

held by the insurgent movement's leaders. To the extent that the populace is confronted with an existing regime that it distrusts, ignores, or doubts – and a growing movement which has a clear idea of what should be done, however severe its proposals – many will begin to give the opposition movement a fair hearing. Given time, and a consistent, coherent message, the movement will eventually succeed in building its power one citizen at a time. “*Power is based on opinion,*” said Napoleon.

Since opposition movements rarely have parity with an existing regime in terms of weapons and militarily trained personnel, they have no choice but to use the one weapon which most such regimes ignore – political mobilization. The movement will set about building political power at the grass roots level, often with simple word-of-mouth campaigns and sloganeering. Lenin once directed his cadres paraphrased as follows: “*Agitation for the masses, propaganda for the few.*”²⁹ By this, Lenin meant that intellectuals and the educated classes could be motivated primarily by the printed word – persuasive books and other publications that presented cogent arguments to an educated, inquiring mind. Agitation, on the other hand, was directed at those whose education was spotty or non-existent. The idea with these groups was to reduce Marxist theory and sophisticated arguments into easily understandable sound bytes such as “Land – Peace – Bread.” Both approaches were appropriate to their respective audiences...and the combination succeeded in building Soviet power in 1917-1918.

In the contemporary case, the Taliban has sharpened both its internal and overseas propaganda. This will also be covered in some detail at Annex D. However, what the practitioner must clearly understand is that the Taliban is not some third-string gang of illiterate mopes that somehow got stuck in the 13th century. Regularly, each day, the Taliban publishes newsletters in Pashto, Dari and other languages for its literate supporters, it makes available press releases and film clips for international distribution, it conducts local “teach-ins” at madrassas and mosques, it produces DVDs which are sold in the marketplaces at cost and filled with “action footage” for its younger, more action-oriented target audiences. The Taliban also makes excellent use of the Internet to spread its persuasive messages around the globe. The record clearly shows that the Taliban is conducting an increasingly effective propaganda campaign. {See Annex D.}

The Taliban, like the Algerians or the Cypriots before them, take a long view and believe that constituencies in France, Great Britain, or the United States will grow weary of a never-ending war. Overseas propaganda can help foster this attitude. Meanwhile, like water wearing against hard stone, the Taliban also wears away the regime and the people.

9. Who joins an insurgent Movement and why?

²⁹ See V.I. Lenin, *What is to be done?*, see p. 65. In Section III, titled “Trade Union politics and Social-Democratic politics,” Lenin describes the respective tasks of the propagandist who must understand and explain many complex ideas “*to a comparative few,*” and the agitator whose job is to take a single idea and “*rouse discontent and indignation among the masses against this crying injustice...*” He goes on to observe: “*Consequently, the propagandist operates chiefly by means of the printed word; the agitator operates with the living word.*”

A fair question might be asked about who joins an insurgent movement. Why do they join? Oddly, target regimes and their allies tend not to pay much attention to the “sociology” of their insurgent adversaries, preferring instead to classify all insurgents as “bandits” or “delinquents.” (It’s always easier to call someone a name than to find out who he is and why he acts the way he does.)

Well, in point of fact, there *are* genuine criminals who find their ways into insurgent movements. But there are members drawn from almost every other walk of life, and for more reasons than can be easily counted. In some movements, notably those in Spanish America, Catholic priests and nuns have taken up arms or served in the clandestine arm of the insurgency, its infrastructure. The participation of peasants in insurgent warfare is almost proverbial. But there are niches for practically every type from the intellectual to the illiterate. In this day and age, technically skilled persons are highly sought after.

The question of motivation to join an insurgency is perhaps, as Clausewitz would say, an “imponderable.” There is simply no pat answer that applies universally. A simplistic response (by some) to the contemporary problem of the Taliban – or al-Qaida, for that matter – is that fervent belief in so-called “radical Islam” is the motivant.³⁰ Yes, that is certainly true for some. But is it true of all?³¹

At its most basic level the insurgent membership roster is shaped by the society in which the insurgency takes place. China in the 1930s and 1940s drew heavily upon the peasants who were largely illiterate, but the Communists also had the advantage of university students and intellectuals who were driven from their homes in the big coastal cities by the Japanese army. The Irish Republican Army in 1920 drew upon poor urban dwellers from Dublin slums, but it also attracted support from wealthy Irish nationalists and upper middle class elements – all well educated. African insurgent groups draw heavily upon teenage boys who lack education and employment. They also occasionally recruit some members with higher education, though in Africa such persons are a relative rarity.

Since the backgrounds of insurgent recruits will vary from country to country, and from social group to social group, it follows that individual motivations also will vary. Each insurgency must be analyzed to determine its particular “sociology.”

What a European intellectual seeks by leaving his books and university hall to join the movement is not what a teenage African boy seeks who cannot write his name. It may be supposed that what motivates the intellectual is a deep sense of social injustice and a desire to create “the just society” and to apply the classroom theory he has absorbed to real world society. Many such Europeans joined so-called “liberation” movements in Latin America. By contrast, the teenage African boy may be seeking his next meal and a sense of comradeship with other boys his age. He could care less about “just societies,”

³⁰ The author holds that “radical Islam” is a misnomer; if anything, the brand of Hanafi Islam propounded by al-Qaida and the Taliban is extremely reactionary, not radical. Its political goal is to turn back the clock and restore ancient Islamic practices and traditions, not overthrow and destroy them.

³¹ Motivations range from the basest desire to loot and kill to the loftiest goals of human liberation. Tribes and political parties may have a simple desire for power and “spoils of war” for their members. We would do well, however, to reflect that many insurgent leaders were motivated by the highest idealism.

socio-political theories or religious zeal. His motivation is excitement, camaraderie, a sense of power or importance (to be a Big Man), and probably food.

The tendency of regime and Western counterinsurgent forces to lump intellectuals and teenage boys into the same hopper and then brand them “bandits” merely demonstrates the intellectual sloth of those forces. What is needed in this case is careful, painstaking analysis of the individuals in particular insurgent populations. In this effort perhaps a trained Psyop officer, especially one with some understanding of sociology or anthropology, is required.

If an insurgency is to be countered, it must first be understood. And it must be understood in terms of its many people and their myriad reasons for casting their lot with the insurgent leaders and their central political idea.³²

Some analysts posit a kind of “concentric ring” sociological structure of an insurgency. In the innermost circle are the so-called “hardcore” insurgents – the leaders and founders of a movement. This circle includes those who are presumably the most committed of the insurgency’s membership. They are also the ones who stand to benefit most if the insurgency triumphs and overthrows the government-in-being. They are, in fact, the shadow government – the “government-in-waiting.”

In the next circle around the core are those members of the insurgency who are key aides and lieutenants – members who are the “go-to” men that accomplish certain functions. This group may include senior political warfare cadres, administrators, “police” and security officials, guerrilla unit leaders, and logisticians. They, too, are committed to the insurgency and stand to inherit high position in the new government.

Outside this ring is a much larger group of mid-level functionaries, the “sergeants” of the movement, who are indispensable for carrying out the many vital functions but who do not themselves make the decisions about what is to be done and when.

The outer ring consists of the rank-and-file and new recruits. These are the people called upon to “do and die” like the Noble Six Hundred. They are trained and indoctrinated and always kept under strict watch. Unquestioning obedience is expected of this group and deviation from the prescribed regimen is punished. This group has little, if any, input into insurgent decisions.

Outside the outer ring are the people of the target country. Although they stand outside even the outermost ring, it should be constantly kept in mind that there would be no rings at all were it not for the sustaining role played by “the people.”

³² Author is aware of ongoing intellectual debates between recognized experts such as Bruce Hoffman and Marc Sageman concerning the motivation of individuals who join insurgencies. While not taking sides in the debate, author wishes to note that motivations vary depending on the composition of the societies at war, the issues at stake, and the socio-cultural backgrounds of the individuals themselves. Religious belief may be the key factor for some individuals, achievement of secular goals for others. In sum, both Sageman and Hoffman may each have part of the truth. The author’s assertion remains: it is necessary to understand each insurgent movement in terms of the people who join it.

If we accept the “ring model” of organization of an insurgency, whether African, Asian, or Spanish American, we might think about the relative degrees of commitment of those at the core and those on the periphery. We might also wish to gauge the socio-economic levels of most members in each ring. It might be inferred – barring cultural factors peculiar to a country – that many of the better-educated and more intelligent insurgent members will be found in the two innermost rings. It would seem reasonable that those who remain in the outer rings are perhaps not as talented, educated, or as able as those who gravitate toward the core. While this is not by any means an absolute, it is reasonable to accept as a working hypothesis.

It also follows that those in the innermost rings have the most privileges and are not bound by the same restrictive rules as are those in the outer rings. A good example of this was given by former Salvadoran FMLN *comandantes* Joaquin Villalobos and Nidia Diaz. These two paragons of revolutionary virtue were seen – and filmed – on a shopping spree in Mexico City. The elite members of insurgent movements do not always live by the rules they make for their followers.

Careful analysis of insurgent leadership, especially of members in the innermost rings, will show a continual effort of those in outer rings to move closer to the “inner circle” and those in the inner circle to jockey among themselves for the top leadership jobs. This is not only political behavior; it is human nature. Insurgent movements are not static beings, but are in a state of constant change – with some members moving up to key leadership positions often at the expense of other members who have been disgraced, displaced, or even dispatched.

In many insurgencies there is a “rite of initiation” – often a violent act – that not only proves the *bona fides* of the aspiring novice, but also commits that individual to the movement. The murder of a regime official or policeman is considered a suitable “rite.” Having committed the murder, the new recruit cannot now suddenly reverse himself and decide to go back to the old life he was living before accepting recruitment.

The new recruit has made his choice; he has acceded to the program and discipline of the insurgent movement. As Jacques Ellul observed:

For action makes propaganda’s effect irreversible. He who acts in obedience to propaganda can never go back. He is now obliged to believe in that propaganda because of his past action. He is obliged to receive from it his justification and authority, without which his action will seem to him absurd or unjust, which would be intolerable. He is obliged to continue to advance in the direction indicated by propaganda, for action demands more action.³³

There is also the question of willingness, that is, whether the act of joining the movement, or of undergoing the “rite of initiation,” was voluntary or involuntary. This question of free will invokes a whole new set of psychological and sociological criteria. Another factor that we will discuss later is the greater tendency in insurgent organizations to promote on the basis of demonstrated merit rather than on family connections.

³³ Jacques Ellul, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

In the cruel logic of insurgency, the way in to the movement may not be easy, but the way out is nearly impossible. The recruit finds himself in a sticky web which traps him ever more tightly as he accepts indoctrination, carries out orders, psychologically separates himself from “normal” society, and undergoes certain personality changes.

10. Pity the poor insurgent!

No one who has never lived under cover, used false identity papers, evaded the police and security service of some country, and communicated through dead-drops, coded messages, and brief face-to-face meetings, can possibly understand the clandestine world in which an insurgent must live.

Many older Americans have read stories of underground resistance movements in Nazi-occupied Europe, but only a tiny number of Americans have ever lived clandestinely. Most often, such a life is likely due to criminal activity – a “double life” as it were.

And yet, that is precisely the type of life that a true insurgent must live. Why? Simply because were the insurgent to emerge into the open, he would be swiftly arrested or shot. Hence, he must live in a kind of twilight world where, to his insurgent colleagues, he is known for what he is – though perhaps not by his true name – but to the “uninitiated,” he is merely a cobbler, farmer, teacher, petty trader, or some other “harmless” person.

I recall a story about a man at Camp Radcliff, An Khe, Vietnam, who was a superlative barber. At that time, a first class military haircut cost all of one U.S. dollar – payable in Military Payment Certificates (or MPC.) The barber was friendly and cheerful to all his customers, and even got to know quite a few on a first-name basis. When the final brush and powder was applied and the mirror held up, every soldier was thoroughly pleased with the cut. Not surprisingly, he often received tips and small gifts.

One night there was an especially destructive sapper attack carried out against the helo park at Camp Radcliff. The ensuing firefight between the defending GI’s and the Viet Cong attackers was conducted in pitch-black conditions, with firing guided by observed flashpoints and the sound.

Next morning, as the Americans cleared the wire, they came upon the body of a VC sapper who had been killed that night. He looked familiar – “we’ve seen this man before somewhere.” Well, it was the barber. Being a barber was his day job.

The point of this vignette is to demonstrate a key fact in the strange logic of insurgency. The true insurgent lives among the people, operates among the people, and depends for his survival on maintaining both his identity and true political calling confidential. He is sustained by the people among whom he lives, so it is often his cover, and the friendship of his neighbors and family that make it possible for him to carry out his functions as a guerrilla, logistician, intelligence reporter (spy), or as a recruiter of new insurgents.

None of this is easy. In fact, the clandestine life is exceedingly hard to live. One has to be constantly on one's guard, to know exactly with whom one is dealing, who is probably a police counterspy, which buildings are safe and which are traps, how to spot surveillance without letting on that you've spotted it, and a host of other street activities.

Imagine the daily strains of life if you had to obtain false identity papers (perhaps several sets for use in two or three different areas with different identities in each,) to locate safehouses where secret meetings could be held and other vital functions carried out (eg. weapons storage, propaganda production, etc.) to find means of obtaining illegal food and medicine stocks to support guerrilla comrades "in the bush," and still carry on your cover occupation as teacher or shoe repairman – "business as usual." The authorities must never know!

Take it a step further. Let us suppose that you have suffered a gunshot wound to your right arm. No, you are not going to die...not immediately. But how do you turn up at the Emergency Room and explain a gunshot wound to your arm? And if you cannot go to the hospital, then where do you go? Who has the appropriate medicines? Who can safely remove the bullet and set a fractured bone? And what if gangrene sets in? Who can be trusted? Who might betray you to the regime authorities?

But even this is the tip of the iceberg. For just outside your safehouse a police patrol in its van has just now arrived. The driver stops the van and a squad of policemen pile out and begin a sweep through the area, perhaps conducting a house to house search...

They have flushed out one of your comrades whom they recognized from a photograph. He has a black bag thrown over his head, his hands are cuffed, and he is taken to the van. When he is interrogated, will he compromise your safehouse and you?

It then becomes time to quickly change locations, identities, means of communication, and limit any potential damage to your organization.

And how does one maintain contact with other elements of the resistance movement? Can you simply dial up a fellow insurgent? (Your phone is probably tapped.) Could you use a short wave radio? Perhaps a guerrilla stronghold far from the government's reach could use a radio on a one-way basis – to send out instructions and propaganda messages. But it is nearly impossible for an insurgent living in a populated area to send a reply by "wireless" – we live in the age of near-instantaneous direction finding. A transmission of even a few seconds, and the regime's police and security services will have pinpointed your location. Time to move quickly again.

For these reasons, an insurgent soon learns to use highly trusted couriers for the most pressing information or intelligence. But he also learns to use dead drops to leave money, instructions, documents, etc., for persons that he simply cannot meet. Signal sites are established using (perhaps) flowerpots, chalk marks, even the types of clothes put out on a clothesline in clear view of the entire community – but containing a hidden message only for those who know how to "read" the washline.

Let us turn now to the ordinary fighter, either in the jungle or on the mountainside. Can he depend on hot cooked meals three times a day? Ice cream in the freezer? A cold beer after a hard day's work? Food is the most pressing survival issue for the guerrilla who lives his life "in the rough." In winter, obtaining sufficient food becomes a matter of life and death. Only if the guerrilla can depend upon a farmer sharing a portion of his crop – either voluntarily or through "revolutionary taxes" – can the fighter make it through lean seasons. And what if there is widespread crop failure due to drought or flooding?

Next to food is the issue of medicine. A sick man, even an insurgent living a double life in a populated area, can always go quite legitimately to a doctor for medicine to cure his illness. But what if a guerrilla living in a jungle or mountain stronghold contracts hepatitis, malaria or typhoid? To whom does he turn? And problems become an order of magnitude more difficult if the guerrilla is wounded by shot or shell, and especially if he has head or internal injuries.

To borrow a phrase out of context from the Leviathan, the life of a guerrilla fighter is likely to be as the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes described:

Whatsoever, therefore, is consequent to a time of war where every man is enemy to every man, the same is consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture {*ie. cultivation*} of the earth; no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.³⁴

Always bear in mind that, to be a hardened guerrilla, or even a member of the insurgent cadre living "*la double vie*" in a village or other populated area, requires incredible strength of mind, iron self-discipline, commitment of belief in the cause, and a firmness of purpose that we can only envy. The daily stress of such an underground life is enormous.³⁵

Those of us who served in Vietnam are only too well aware that a large number of Viet Cong *literally* lived underground, often for days at a time. The tunnel complexes that the Viet Cong built often extended right under big American bases such as that at Cu Chi. One can only marvel at the tenacity of a man who is willing to live sometimes for days on end in a dank, dimly lit, muddy hole.

Only very rarely does one see such incredible strengths on the part of regime soldiers and its civil servants.

³⁴ Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, p. 107.

³⁵ A recent example is the late al-Qaida in Iraq leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who moved almost on a daily basis from safehouse to safehouse, using disguises and false papers to slip through numerous police and U.S. military checkpoints, always a step ahead of the vast Coalition intelligence resources brought to bear in order to kill or capture him. Although Zarqawi was a pitiless killer, we would do well to reflect on Zarqawi's tenacious commitment to his cause, his operational skill and personal courage.

Ironically, one of the great strengths of an insurgent movement may also be its Achilles' heel. Ideological rigidity and total commitment to a narrow program, whether secular or religious, gives insurgents great internal strength. However, the group's intensity of commitment to their ideology may be so strong that it prevents the movement from forming coalitions or alliances with "outside" groups. The movement fears dilution of its ideals and therefore may have no tolerance for groups and individuals who do not share the movement's core beliefs. An example might be Iraqi Sunni insurgents who never could join forces with Shi'ite groups due to religious differences. By contrast, the more flexible Marxist Sandinistas of Nicaragua were able to ally themselves with political moderates, liberal Catholics, and indigenous groups that, by joining together, eventually toppled the Somoza dictatorship.

Insurgent movements of a preservationist nature may have a difficult time finding common cause with insurgents of a transformational nature such as secular nationalists. Further separating different insurgent groups may be ethnic differences and tribal rivalries or loyalties. In the Philippines, the Moro National Liberation Front (an Islamic group) had little in common with the Communist Party of the Philippines New People's Army (CPP/NPA.) The MNLF draws its membership from Moros living in Mindanao and adjacent islands whereas the CPP recruits its members from secular Filipino intellectuals and peasants living primarily in Luzon and the Visayas. Both could agree that the Philippine government was the target – but about little else.

It is not our purpose here to "glamorize" the guerrilla who must live a dangerous life among a sea of potential enemies. It is, rather, to give a glimpse into the very real strengths, characteristics and admirable qualities of the insurgent. If we fail to recognize these great personal strengths, we fail to understand the strengths of the movement itself that provide the core of the insurgent's motivation.

It is also to give clearer insight into the very real vulnerabilities of the insurgent. His life is difficult; indeed, it is downright hard. The job of a competent counterinsurgent force is to make the insurgent's life in such circumstances even more difficult, indeed impossible.

It should be immediately apparent that the guerrilla fighter living "in the bush" is heavily dependent upon his "middleman" of the infrastructure who, in turn, is dependent upon the resources and good will of the people of a given district. In effect, the "middleman" is asking the villagers to give up a portion of their own already meager resources – food, medicine, clothing, even their sons – so that the movement can feed, cure, clothe, and reinforce or reconstitute its fighting strength. The hidden apparatchik in the village or populated area is literally the umbilical cord for the guerrilla bands in the hills.

11. Everyday life in ancient times

Life in a peasant village or tribal area is definitely no bowl of cherries. To quote Thomas Hobbes once again, it is usually "*nasty, brutish, and short.*" The challenges that persons living in Third World villages or tribal areas must overcome on a daily basis are legion.

They include, just to name a few of the more obvious and onerous chores: obtaining potable water for drinking or cooking, obtaining firewood or some other combustible material, obtaining sufficient wholesome food to provide even a minimal caloric intake, finding suitable shelter for one's family, making or otherwise obtaining suitable clothing (some climates are more severe than others), avoiding disease or serious injury, avoiding loss of livestock or crops, avoiding depredations by bandits or other tribes, somehow surviving to the next day.

Life in rural parts of the Third World is constantly precarious. Indeed, it is a day-by-day thing. Tomorrow may bring catastrophe.

One does not really comprehend poverty, or the challenge of daily living as a peasant, when one is used to the comfort of a living room and a remotely operated television. The point must be made that "poverty" in the American context is still "middle class" when viewed by many thousands of people who live in the Third World.

In nearly any Third World country you can name, peasants get to have what journalist Ernie Pyle once described as "the worm's eye view" of life. There are relatively few peasants or villagers who hold Ph.D.'s and earn \$150,000 per year. Their education is spotty at best, and their conception of politics very much colored by local concerns.

The peasant lives life as close to the edge as can be imagined. A crop failure in the United States means that food prices will be higher. A similar failure in a Third World rural area means that thousands of people will starve to death.

Peasants and villagers are no strangers to infectious diseases that in the West are almost unknown. They are generally illiterate or, at most, have one or two years of primary education. Health and sanitation are decidedly not up to Western standards. And yet, life must go on. Like most folks on the planet, an Afghan or African villager will want to have a family and provide enough food to feed his children.

When one is living on the edge, any teetering of that edge can spell disaster. A man who earns the equivalent of, say, US\$300 per year does not have a lot of margin for failure. A lack of rain, too much rain, a plague of locusts, some new plant disease, or the tramping about of regime or American soldiers in his fields are just some of the potential worries this man carries with him each day as he labors with primitive hand implements in his small paddy or wheat field.

What a peasant most yearns for is predictability and stability. A man living close to the edge desires some type of standard or routine that he can depend upon.

Chaos and disorder are anathema to the majority of people. Chaos not only is unsettling psychologically, but it disrupts every facet of "normal" life. Planting a field or opening a small business cannot be carried out if thievery or vandalism abound. Irregular times and dates of administration make it hard if not impossible to carry out simple tasks to satisfy the demands of the regime. Capricious courts of justice, or those which are stacked by

the corrupt “favored few,” produce cynicism and fan a desire to “beat the system” either by outwitting it or confronting it. Paying “squeeze” to ensure that officials get off your back eats into the peasant’s meager yield from days of hard toil in the hot sun.

When a regime loses its ability to rein in vandalism, administrative chaos, and especially the cancer of corruption, the weight of these failures falls upon those at the bottom of the socio-political heap. As that weight grows, so too grow the pressures that could turn combustible material into a smoldering heap. What is then required for the smoldering heap to burst into flame is a bit of oxygen and a spark.

Case studies have shown that people will accept even harsh discipline *if* that discipline or regimen can be shown to be predictable and relatively impartial. As long as people know the rules, they are less concerned about who it is that governs. They obey or pay off the corrupt officials and find a way through or around the bureaucracy and its rules.

But when the peasant’s world goes into a precarious and unpredictable whirl, it is then that some action is in store. A desperate peasant is ready to support anyone whom he believes capable of providing security and ensuring predictability.

12. The DNA of the insurgent movement

Some authorities, such as T. E. Lawrence, assert that successful movements require only a small minority of armed insurgents in order to win, so long as the rest of the people are indifferent to the fate of the existing regime and make no effort to support it.

At the onset of an insurgency, the population may be divided into three groups according to their opinion or attitude toward the regime and the insurgent movement. At the poles are two small groups – one committed to the regime, the other dedicated to its overthrow. However, the group “in the middle” is by far the largest – and politically the most important of the three. This group contains the people who are uncommitted. They may be unhappy with the government, but they may be equally suspicious of the goals and plans of the insurgents. In most cases, these people simply wish to be left alone.

As armed conflict spreads between the two groups at the poles, this “middle group” finds itself unable to maintain its neutrality indefinitely. The insurgents usually realize more quickly than does the regime that this uncommitted majority will decide the outcome of the insurgency. For this reason, as has been mentioned, the insurgents early on develop a robust propaganda program intended to gain the support of those citizens who are uncommitted. Because the insurgent movement requires “the necessities of life,” and must obtain them from the people, the movement realizes that it is imperative to maintain regular, unimpeded contact with the target population.

In the beginning, the existing government has the political advantage despite its own weaknesses – and insurgent political warfare efforts – simply because it is the existing government and most people are reluctant to make a change. However, regimes often fail to capitalize on this initial advantage; they therefore do nothing, and end up abdicating

their natural advantage to the insurgents. Regimes are like incumbents who grow too complacent about their tenure in office, and too fond of the perks, and thus end up losing both their office and their perks to the aggressive young challenger.

As the insurgents' political warfare campaign gets further underway, the movement attracts ever-greater numbers of the uncommitted to its standard. If left unchallenged politically, the insurgents eventually will undermine the regime simply by developing a larger base of support than the regime. At that point, despite its military power, the regime is in danger of collapse because it can no longer enforce its laws and policies, nor receive the resources from the people it must have to survive.

While steadily leaching away the domestic political foundations of the vulnerable target regime, the insurgent movement also is busily working at separating the regime from its foreign allies and supporters. By carefully shaping foreign perceptions of the regime's "brutality," corruption or incompetence, external support can be cut off. With domestic political support on the wane and foreign assistance ended, the regime is in peril.

Thus we see that it is not the side that kills the greatest number of its opponents that will win the war, but the side that attracts the most uncommitted people to its side.

Remember: to win, the insurgents need only a small percentage of the people in arms, so long as the majority of other citizens remain passive or indifferent to a regime's fate.

We have noted that insurgencies are incipient governments that develop a central leadership and have all the attributes of a rudimentary government-in-waiting. These include supporting elements to protect and sustain the movement and administer the people living in the zones that it controls. The administrative-support mechanism is often referred to as the "infrastructure" and is the vital link between the central leadership and the people. Indeed, *the infrastructure is the indispensable growth element of the insurgency because it sustains and expands the movement that has brought it into existence.* As noted, guerrilla bands may time and again be wiped out, only to reappear because the infrastructure has been able to generate new ones. The prime target of a regime's counterinsurgency program should therefore be the insurgent movement's infrastructure, not its guerrillas. (See Annex B which describes VC recruitment of peasant men in Phu Yen Province, Vietnam.)

The infrastructure has a multiplicity of functions to include obtaining intelligence, performing "police" and counterintelligence (CI) functions, administering justice, collecting taxes, conducting guerrilla operations, carrying out systematic propaganda and political warfare work, and even providing health and social services designed to win broader popular support while simultaneously undermining support for the existing government.

13. Of jigsaw puzzles

In his insightful 1938 work “On Protracted War,” Mao Tse-tung described his war of resistance against Japan as a “*war of a jig saw pattern*.”³⁶ That is to say, instead of a pattern of definable front lines, as in conventional warfare, Mao’s war of resistance would be broken into many tiny bits each containing its own separate “mini-war.” Mao envisioned that some of the jigsaw pieces would be “safe” for his movement and others “safe” for his opponents, but the greatest number of pieces would be contested to some extent by both sides. Mao himself compared his “*war of a jig saw pattern*” to the ancient Chinese game of *wei-ch’i*, known in Japan as “*Go*.” In this game, played on a simple lined board using black and white stones, domination of the board rests upon a player’s ability to selectively surround and remove his opponent’s pieces, not upon physical occupation of everything on the board.

Many resistance movements show patterns that resemble Mao’s “jigsaw” puzzle. The insurgents strive to create “base areas” secure from government incursions. From these base areas, the resistance movement selectively targets other pieces of the jigsaw puzzle for domination. This was seen clearly in Vietnam and in El Salvador, to name only two relatively recent case studies.

The insurgent’s goal is to penetrate the regime’s jigsaw puzzle squares. In some cases, his intent is merely to disrupt the regime’s administrative machinery or to destroy vital facilities or supplies. In others, penetration is intended to achieve political conquest of the targeted area. In yet others, feints and raids are employed to cause the regime (or an occupying force) to dispatch reaction forces—thereby exhausting the enemy’s army and causing him to overextend. As we know, forces deployed in “penny packets” as static outposts are isolated and often too weak to withstand a concentrated assault by a locally superior force. They will be overwhelmed.

But the greatest danger to the occupying force or targeted regime is not usually where the heavy fighting is going on. Rather, as we have taken pains to point out, it is in the quiescent areas where the political warfare campaign, eating away like water on stone, slowly dissolves established governmental authority and replaces it with an alternative authority—that of the resistance movement. This is, in fact, the crux of an insurgency: *who commands whose loyalty and support*.

Now, the question becomes: how does one go about assessing the conditions of the “jigsaw” area of operations? How do you know “who commands whose loyalty and support?” The answer to that question is that it is only by thorough understanding of *all features* of the Area of Operations that one can have any hope of operating effectively in an insurgency. U.S. Army practice is usually to take note of terrain features, along with roads and bridges, railroads, oil facilities, and so on. Moreover, such area studies as are done are broad analyses and only rarely get down to the level of the “precinct.” Until very recently, Army intelligence officers tended to ignore *the most important operational factor in the AO – the attitudes of the people who live there*. Insurgent intelligence officers do not make this shortsighted mistake.

³⁶ Mao Tse-tung, “On Protracted War,” Selected Military Writings, p. 219.

Before an insurgent force considers a major move into a certain area – a contested zone or a government-held piece of the jigsaw puzzle – it will normally undertake an exhaustive study of the area. The insurgent intelligence staff will, of course, take note of the bridges, oil facilities, and so on, but will *pay particular attention to the groups of people who live in the area*. The insurgent command will want to know whether the people are disaffected from the government – and if so, why – or solidly pro-regime – and why – or again, completely neutral. The insurgents will want to know every detail of the tribal or ethnic groups, to include aspects of local culture that may set such groups apart from other, seemingly similar groups. Not least, the insurgent leaders will want to know who the leading personalities are, and where they stand relative to the insurgency.

By contrast, governments and occupying forces are slow to recognize the need to gain and hold broad popular support and are blind to the importance of “mere peasants.” This arrogance is repaid in blood on the battlefield. By the time that the slow-thinking leaders of the target regime recognize the need for popular support, the peasants have already thrown their “votes” to the insurgents. A major difference between the regime and the insurgent movement, I think, is the focus and quality of the Area Intelligence that is produced. The supreme irony in this is that both major American political parties, and thousands of American sales teams spend hundreds of millions of dollars trying to learn who will buy what product or how someone will vote in an upcoming election. By contrast, the U.S. military spends little time or money doing serious study of the people and their political attitudes. You get what you pay for.

Area Intelligence must first and foremost focus on the culture and traditions of the people who live in the Area of Operations. Every detail must be thoroughly understood. The second factor is to understand the microeconomics of the people, their ties to other groups, and the way local society works. Key personalities must be identified and comprehensive biographic material on those individuals collected and appraised. Of greatest importance is careful appraisal of the situation of the tribal or other ethnic groups relative to the government-in-being or the insurgent movement. An assessment asks: *What regime policies and decisions have either advanced – or eroded – the support of the people for the government-in-being? What insurgent proposals or beliefs do the people find most attractive? Why?*

Insurgencies are won from localities, not from capitals. The late Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill once noted that: *“all politics is local.”* Oligarchic regimes and military occupiers usually make the mistake of concentrating on capital cities and national governments. They hold meetings of moot cabinets and set scholars to draft constitutions. (As was wryly observed recently, even the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China guarantees freedom of speech and religious belief.) Well, I think we agree that constitutions say many things – in lofty words – but do not feed or employ many people. They do not always meet the ordinary needs of ordinary people.

The rural areas and the people who live there are generally ignored. It is here, in the absence of any visible, meaningful attention from Western-educated elites in the capital cities, that the peasants dwell. In Afghanistan the main focus of the regime in power

appears to be on Kabul, not on the countryside. So far as is known, necessities of basic daily life are still scarce in many rural areas. Unemployment is widespread, primary and secondary education is very spotty, agriculture has yet to recover, and security from crime or even Taliban exactions is questionable.

Ordinary people are understandably less concerned about lofty political nuances than they are about their ability to feed their families, put shelter over their heads, care for sick elders, and educate their children. Hence, political factors—specifically, *local* political factors—are of paramount importance in insurgencies. It is not how many battalions the regime can deploy that decides the outcome, but how effectively the regime—or its opponents—can meet the needs of ordinary people. *Where the regime is unwilling or unable to help the ordinary citizen, even meager help by the resistance movement binds his loyalty.*

In the “war of a jig saw pattern,” as we have said, the occupying power or target regime controls some pieces outright. For the sake of argument, let us say that the regime commands the support of the people in these areas; it administers these pieces effectively; and it meets the needs of the ordinary citizen. If that is the case, those pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are secure for the regime. The insurgents have under their control their own squares. This leaves the “in-between” squares up for grabs between the regime and the guerrillas. It is here where the war is decided.

For the regime to dominate the insurgents – or for the insurgents to defeat the regime – what must be adopted is what the French called the “*tache d’huile*” or “drop of oil” strategy. Like a drop of oil that falls on a pool of water and spreads out, the regime moves from a square that it controls into an adjacent square that is contested. It must then completely dominate the new square. But the key point in this domination is to *enable the people living there to organize themselves into an effective local government.* Many Third World governments often are loath to do this, because local self-government poses a threat to plutocrats in the capitals.

The insurgents, by contrast, have no choice but to work locally – they do not “own” the capital city. So, as in Kandahar province, they will content themselves to moving into some rural area, consolidating their political hold over that little area, and then expanding into the next adjacent square. Little by little, the insurgents surround the more populous areas and then slowly choke them off. As in *wei-ch’i*, the object is to surround the major cities – not capture them outright – but to isolate them.

Effective local governments are, in fact, the crucial building blocks upon which strong national governments are built. If the people realize that they—with the material help of the regime or occupying power—can meet their own needs, and meet them well, there is no “room” politically for an insurgent and his message. Indeed, the rebel will have no credible political message to use about “how much worse off the people are” under the existing regime. People can be counted on to ignore empty and ridiculous claims.

But if there is no credible government assistance forthcoming – and especially no regime presence or security protection – the “vote” will surely go to the insurgents.

If given a real choice, people will normally opt for the political choice that offers them the most benefit. Unfortunately, in guerrilla warfare, especially in the Third World, real choices are seldom if ever offered. If the insurgent movement is the “only game in town,” it is hardly surprising that it should capture political power—by default.

Closing Thoughts for Part One

Government ultimately rests upon the “consent of the governed” – public opinion. When a government fails at its central tasks of protecting the people and providing effective administration, it will lose public support and risks being replaced by a shadow regime that will assume quasi-governmental powers. By a careful mix of persuasion and force, the shadow government will slowly build its power at the expense of the government-in-being. Left unchecked, the insurgent movement will grow and absorb ever-greater parts of the land under the old government’s authority. Eventually the old regime will collapse as its domestic support dwindles to nothing and its foreign backers cut their ties.

Military force alone is insufficient to sustain a failing regime. Unlike Clausewitzian warfare in which an enemy force must be destroyed in order to determine the outcome of the war, in insurgency it is competition for the allegiance and active support of the people that is decisive. Thus, for either side to be victorious, information and administration are the paramount “weapons,” with armed force being placed in a supportive role.

Insurgents are drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds and for a number of reasons. However, as each insurgency is unique and takes its specific characteristics from the land in which it occurs, so too will be the “sociology” of the insurgency. If an insurgency is to be countered, it must first be understood. Insurgencies must be understood in terms of the people who join or support them and their reasons for so doing.

The “DNA” of an insurgent movement is its invisible infrastructure – the clandestine element that administers territory, politically indoctrinates the people in those zones, and obtains from the people intelligence, food, logistical help, new recruits and much else that is required to sustain the insurgency. It is therefore the insurgent infrastructure and not the guerrilla bands it creates that must be defeated in order to defeat the insurgency. For as long as the infrastructure exists it can regenerate guerrilla bands indefinitely.

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO: TO DRY THE OCEAN

Life consists not in holding good cards, but in playing those you do hold well.
Josh Billings

The use of force alone [to compel obedience] is but temporary. It may subdue for a moment; but it does not remove the necessity of subduing again; and a nation is not governed, which is perpetually to be conquered.
Edmund Burke

Clarity of vision and steadfastness of purpose require no funding.
Col. David J. Baratto

14. Securing a more perfect peace

Shortly after the close of the American Civil War, no less an authority than William Tecumseh Sherman noted that: “*The legitimate object of war is a more perfect peace.*”

The study of military tactics, whether at West Point or elsewhere, teaches a commander how to defeat an opposing armed force. Every new lieutenant is taught that a combatant force exists for the sole purpose of destroying the enemy’s armed forces.

The problem is that the mere destruction of an enemy’s armed forces does not, of itself, lead to “a more perfect peace.” Nowhere is this presently more obvious than in Afghanistan where the Taliban’s regular forces were handily destroyed in about three months. And yet the war persists.

Unfortunately, little is taught at West Point—or anywhere—about how commanders of an occupying force should go about effectively restoring an economy and a civil government, that is, how to go about attaining the “legitimate object of war.” Indeed, other than Iraq, the last experience that the United States had with civil administration of foreign territory is now more than sixty years in the past: Germany and Japan.

A commander of an *occupying* force – which is essentially what we have in many parts of Afghanistan – must always keep foremost in his mind that the mission of his unit is fundamentally different from that of a tactical force engaging a conventional armed enemy. Indeed, the mission of an occupying force is more complex and difficult than the combined arms mission taught at Fort Leavenworth.

An occupying force exists not merely to root out the last vestiges of the enemy’s armed force (thus preventing that armed force from resuming hostilities) but more importantly, it is tasked with the all-important policy objective of securing a just and lasting peace. That is to say, if the military victory over the Taliban’s repressive regime is not to be wasted, that victory must be used to create the conditions leading to the desired policy

objective of rebuilding Afghanistan in such a way that it becomes a cornerstone of peace in South Asia rather than a seedbed of terror.³⁷

With that end in view, the American occupying force must conduct itself in such a way as to create incentives for parties, individuals and groups supporting the policy objective, while actively hindering and disrupting the activities of parties, individuals and groups seeking to undermine or work against a better peace.

It is this last point that bears special consideration.

Edmund Burke, speaking in 1775 of Great Britain's military occupation of its American colonies, observed the following: "*The use of force alone is but temporary. It may subdue for a moment; but it does not remove the necessity of subduing again: and a nation is not governed, which is perpetually to be conquered.*"³⁸

The hubris surrounding U.S. expulsion of the Taliban—on the part of policymakers no less than many other American citizens—masks a hidden assumption that the mere defeat of the Taliban's regular forces and the destruction of Mullah Omar's regime was enough to make the occupying force loved and the attainment of "a more perfect peace" assured without any further effort.

Clearly, that is not the case today in places like Kandahar, Helmand, or Zabol. Recently published opinion polls indicate that Afghan support of U.S. operations has dropped from above 80 percent in 2002 to less than 50 percent as civilian casualties mount, confidence in the Kabul regime falters, and public expectations go unfulfilled.³⁹

Unfortunately, as our military forces are currently being used, they poorly serve U.S. postwar interests in Afghanistan. This is not always the fault of the commanders or of their units. American military doctrine has long ignored Clausewitz's concept quoted in Section 2 that "*War is not merely a political act, but also a political instrument, a continuation of political relations, a carrying out of the same by other means.*" Tactical commanders are taught that forces are to be used for *military purposes only—that is, to destroy an opposing armed force.* And in fact, our armed forces are very good at doing just this.

The military thinks that someone else will handle the politics – whatever that is.

What the Pentagon ignores is the use of U.S. military forces as "political instruments" and the need for those forces to be capable of continuing political relations and "*carrying out...the same by other means.*" This is not only the crux of military occupation, but is

³⁷ As is well known, for several years after its invasion of Afghanistan, the Pentagon was firmly opposed to what it (sneeringly) called "nation building." The Pentagon is perfectly happy to tear things up, but loath to repair what it has broken. This mentality only sows the seeds of future conflict, not a "more perfect peace."

³⁸ Edmund Burke, "Second Speech on Conciliation with America. The Thirteen Resolutions." 22 March 1775. Burke (1729-1797), a Member of Parliament, was a friend of America.

³⁹ Analysis of ABC/BBC/ARD opinion poll, February 2009, by Gary Langer in "Frustration With War, Problems in Daily Life Send Afghans' Support for U.S. Efforts Tumbling," p. 2.

especially true in an insurgency where Army or Marine units in a remote area are often the only tangible presence of American political will and intent. So far as the local population is concerned, the men and women of this forward deployed unit are truly our “ambassadors” in everything they say and do.

Citizens of occupied nations view the occupying force in one of three ways: “*does this occupation force benefit me, is it irrelevant to me, or does it harm me?*”

If the answer is that in some meaningful way an occupying force is viewed as beneficial, it ultimately will be accepted—even if reluctantly. *But if that force is viewed as irrelevant—or worse, harmful—it will become an object of scorn or hatred, and soon enough a target of angry citizens’ rocks, snipers’ bullets or even uprisings.* We have only to contrast the histories of the military occupation policies of the United States and the former Soviet Union in Central European lands to make this point.

If our occupying force is perceived as irrelevant or harmful to local interests, then far from supporting U.S. policy to attain “a more perfect peace,” it will sire a resistance movement that will spread like an oil fire, causing further deaths and destruction, and blot out any hope of achieving a better state of peace. We would do well to meditate on the effects of dropping 500 lb. bombs on peasants’ homes as we attempt to judge whether we are beneficial and therefore accepted, or harmful and therefore detested. The Air Force may brush off such deaths with its callous term “collateral damage,” but to the man whose kinfolk have just been shredded into blood and bones, “collateral damage” means that Americans are a mortal threat to him. He will draw his own conclusions and act accordingly.

Occupying forces must necessarily take on the character of armed police forces and leave the conventional weaponry at the airfield. It is the nature of a police force that makes it respected, feared, or hated. To be respected, a police force (or an army acting in that capacity) must develop deep roots into the soil of the community. Indeed, it must earn its spurs as an alert, professional, and disciplined force that demonstrates patience, restraint and consideration toward local civilians. *At the same time, an occupying force must also demonstrate its capacity to aid and protect those in the local community actively seeking the betterment of the community and its citizens.* None of this is easy to do.⁴⁰

The mistake too often made by occupiers is to act as occupiers—retaining heavy weaponry rather than small arms, using door-kicking “search and seizure” methods rather than careful police investigative techniques, and relying too heavily on intimidating or over-awing the local people rather than winning their cooperation. (The Soviets did this all the time.) Too often, an occupying force fails to transmute from a conventional combat organization supported by intelligence, psychological operations and civic action,

⁴⁰ Col. Newsham makes the valid point that in many instances, trained police forces simply do not exist in countries experiencing insurgencies. Therefore, in the absence of a police force, military forces must act in that capacity. This requirement implies a need to cross-train soldiers steeped in standard infantry fare as taught at Fort Benning to use law enforcement precepts and practices as taught at the FBI Academy at Quantico. It also implies that top priority be given to training a first class host nation police force.

into an organization that is primarily organized around police work and civic action supported by intelligence and Psyop.

Where a tactical force is opposing another armed force, intelligence resources always seek to determine the enemy's strength, location and intentions.

In occupation, however, intelligence resources must be used to ascertain what is going on not only in enemy ranks but, more critically, in the *community*. Occupation forces must be in a position to routinely and consistently “take the pulse” of all parties, groups and key individuals in a given area of operations. Intelligence must always strive to know what the community as a whole perceives or believes. Intelligence is not merely in the business of ferreting out enemy “bigwigs” or arms caches. *It must inform the commander what the civilian populace is thinking.* While part of the business of the occupying force is to pinpoint enemy arms caches and capture war criminals, a far more important part of their business is to use sophisticated Psyop based on solid Area Intelligence to consistently and methodically reinforce perceptions among the ordinary citizens that advance the cause of a just and lasting peace—and that discredit the agendas of parties and groups working against peace. We will discuss Area Intelligence shortly.

In such an environment, the military commander of an occupying force finds himself using his soldiers not as infantrymen, but in a radically new way. *Soldiers must be used as reporters of low-level “street intelligence” (what is seen and heard on the streets of the community) and, through their exemplary conduct, to advance the unit’s psychological operations effort as well.* The unit itself should stand prepared to assist ordinary local citizens in solving many of life’s daily problems. This is not to suggest that soldiers should be any less professional and proficient as soldiers. However, it is to say that soldiers must go well beyond the limited training received at Fort Benning, and become living examples of the political ideals that we as a people claim to stand for.

As we have seen when considering the situation of the rural people and the insurgents, food undoubtedly ranks at the top of the requirements list. Routine medical care (for which U.S. forces are justly renowned) also stands out. Support of local schools (to include providing school materials for children and even instructors, where appropriate) is greatly valued. Help in rebuilding damaged buildings is always appreciated, especially those having religious or economic importance. Employment of local laborers—even if it amounts to nothing more than having the local men dig wells or repave roads using labor-intensive methods—is a very wise course of action that helps feed families while draining away potential recruits from would-be extremist resistance movements. In doing good works, the commander and his soldiers are limited only by their native generosity as Americans and their imaginations.

One of the U.S. Army’s truly glorious achievements has been the creation of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (known as PRTs) which, though too few in number, achieve great things in the area of civil reconstruction and thus in securing “a more perfect peace.” The PRTs are generally well regarded by the Afghan civilian population and buy back for us

at least a small portion of the public support we lose each day through the ill-considered and sometimes callous use of our enormous firepower.⁴¹

In Section 26 we will consider the vital nature of Civic Action (CivAc) which is a subset of our broader psychological operations effort. It is more than psychological operations, of course. But as we will see, CivAc is “propaganda of the deed.”

The point is clear: a trained military force must re-invent itself into a constabulary force (and, in fact, more than a constabulary force) that is viewed by the local citizenry as having real value to the community. National constitutions are fine, and elections are desirable. But ordinary people are more concerned with shelter for their families, caring for their sick children, and earning their daily bread with dignity. *It is here, at the level of the ordinary citizen, where the war is really won or lost.*

If a community—or at least a significant part of a community—begins to recognize that the occupying force is beneficial to it, the unit commander will find that his Area Intelligence will increase in both quality and volume. His Psyop effort will become more effective, as his messages become ever more precise and credible in addressing issues relevant to the local residents. His security operations—directed at arresting the Taliban’s agents and top officials, and dismantling the movement’s infrastructure—will yield more captures of significant enemy players and hidden arms. And above all, the civic life of the community—its economic, religious and political life—will slowly begin to assume a new and positive pattern, a pattern that will lead to attainment of General Sherman’s “more perfect peace.”

That, hopefully, is why we are fighting.

15. Seeing all that is there

The question might be asked: “*How could a vulnerable regime possibly miss seeing that a clear and present danger exists?*” Fair enough, because as we’ve said, targeted regimes are quite often slow to react to mortal threats.

The simple answer is: *the regime wasn’t paying attention.*

But, frankly put, the deeper answer is: *complacency.* The government-in-being is so sure of itself that it simply cannot imagine any possible challenge.

To those in the business, intelligence collection and analysis is a 24-7 operation. It is both continuous and rigorous. Like a doctor checking the vital signs of his patient, even if it is only a routine check-up, the intelligence officer is keeping his thumb on the pulse of what is going on in his area of responsibility. Even if nothing much is going on, a

⁴¹ Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) are specialized units headed by a military officer, but which have civilian as well as military members. They tackle projects needed by Afghan communities, usually at the request of local shuras, and often with the help of local citizens. PRTs can provide a wide range of help, to include construction of roads, buildings, and schools; medical care; safe water, and other services.

good intelligence staff is constantly sniffing the air and checking the ground. It is the business of an alert intelligence service always and everywhere to develop new sources of critical intelligence information.

Part of the problem, I think, lies in the fact that many senior governmental officials – in any government, not just Third World governments – have little real conception of what intelligence is and what it is not. They either have a false idea that intelligence officers can do anything – they are nine feet tall – or that intelligence officers are untrustworthy and completely useless, and troublemakers to boot.

Policymakers and intelligence officers are two very different breeds. Their differing cultures formed over many years or even decades often create difficulties between them in communicating. Not least, there is often a latent animosity between policymakers and their intelligence subordinates that hampers effective teamwork.

Most senior leaders of government and their advisers – the policymakers – were put in office either by appointment or by “election” from the elite groups supporting the regime. Because this is so, many leaders are captive to their “constituents” – those very same elite groups. It follows that their policy choices and basic decisions tend to be made on factors other than the “realities” as revealed by intelligence. Instead, the regime’s leaders often are guided by preconceived ideas of *how the world should be* – and how that world should conform to the needs and views of the groups that backed the leader and put him in office. This is hardly conducive to positive change or reform.

Add to this the fact that a leader is quite often told only what his coterie of advisers believe their chief wishes to hear. Only rarely will an adviser dare to “*speak truth to power*”⁴² and tell the leader that all is not well in his kingdom. Examples of this phenomenon abound: sycophants surrounded Somoza, Mobutu, Diem, Chiang, and Batista. Hence, only on rare occasions does objective intelligence actually help shape the policies and decisions of the leaders of a vulnerable regime. More often than not, policy is decided largely upon “constituent interests.” And those interests, not surprisingly, are those of the clique in power. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah had it about right when he thundered that there are “*none so blind as will not see and none so deaf as will not hear.*”⁴³

Professional intelligence officers tend to be insatiably curious about “who is doing what to whom,” skeptical about human nature, extremely cautious in their dealings with men, shy of publicity, and used to living in a world of doubt, uncertainty, and probability. They are single-minded in their pursuit of secrets and committed to clear understanding of *probable* outcomes and consequences. Their judgments are based on careful study of available information, not on the wishes of “constituents.” The great challenge for professional intelligence officers, whether those in the field obtaining new information or analysts in headquarters making sense of it, is dealing with the unknown, dealing with possibilities, dealing with uncertainty. By contrast, a leader desires certainty; he is like a

⁴² Quaker phrase encouraging ordinary people to tell their leaders “how it really is.”

⁴³ Paraphrase of Jeremiah 5:21 by Mathew Henry (1662-1714)

gambler who above all else wants to place a sure bet that is bound to win. The intelligence officer, however, is wary of “certainty” and reflects that not only is his knowledge of men and things incomplete, but it must necessarily be so.

As should be readily apparent, the likelihood of accurate, timely, objective intelligence information reaching the top leader – in the form in which it was originally written – is slim. Advisers have a habit of massaging away unpleasant truths and substituting their own reassuring prose.⁴⁴ Moreover, if the intelligence director is “political,” then virtually all of his office’s “product” likely will be slanted to please His Excellency the President. In other words, the president’s intelligence will be pure fiction and fabrication. Taken together, the factors listed above create a policy atmosphere that has little pragmatism and even less flexibility in formulating cogent policies to deal with festering problems well before they become open wounds.

The insurgent movement has a very different approach to intelligence. The movement’s first and greatest requirement is to avoid detection and arrest. Since the survival of the movement (especially its leaders) depends upon clandestinity, the intelligence service supporting the movement will strive to penetrate the regime’s police and security service. This was done successfully by the Irish Republican Army during its struggle against Great Britain in 1919-1921, and by the Chinese Communists in their long insurgency against the Nationalist Government. Having informants inside the regime’s intelligence apparatus ensures the movement’s security by giving it advanced warning of the regime’s planned police or military sweeps.⁴⁵

But the second purpose of insurgent intelligence is to feel out vulnerabilities in the regime itself, its officials and departments, its relationships with foreign countries, and especially, in its relationships with important domestic groups. Any one of these intelligence targets is useful, but of special value is detailed knowledge of significant disaffection of domestic groups with the regime in power. This knowledge could be of inestimable value to the eventual success of the insurgent movement.

At the outset, insurgent intelligence officers generally are very bright amateurs. Unlike the sycophants and cronies often chosen to head regime intelligence services, the record suggests that insurgents choose bright young intellectuals committed to the insurgent movement for ideological reasons (this can, of course, include religious zeal.) Although novices early on, the insurgents’ intelligence services very quickly become “streetwise” and highly adept at operating in a clandestine environment. After all, this is a matter of survival for them.

As the regime slowly awakens to the spread of the insurgent movement’s influence, some attempt is made to locate and arrest the leaders and most committed members. If regime

⁴⁴ Author personally observed this in a Southeast Asian country where analysts had laid out a sobering (and truthful) appraisal of conditions, and then were directed by their bosses to change their conclusions to indicate that the government’s forces were winning, not losing, in a particular part of the country.

⁴⁵ In intelligence work, this is known as “offensive counterintelligence.” The idea is to recruit a spy in the enemy’s intelligence service who is in a position to reveal where the spies are in one’s own organization.

police are honest, effective, and respected, as was usual in British Malaya, local citizens having some knowledge of the insurgent infrastructure – names of members, locations of safehouses, means of communication, etc. – will come forward (discreetly) to report what they know. But if the public looks on the police with fear or disgust, like the Quan Canh “police” of South Vietnam,⁴⁶ it is all too easy just to stay at home and say nothing. All that the insurgent needs to survive is the public’s benign neutrality.

There is one further highly important fact. The insurgents almost always know how to make the best use of their intelligence. The “central committee” – or whatever the central body of the insurgent movement chooses to call itself – will appraise the intelligence that its officers have acquired and actually base their politico-military operations on it. Where an attack is called for – that in some way supports the political objectives of the insurgent movement – it will be based on solid intelligence. When political warfare opportunities present themselves, the intelligence arm will feed the propaganda and recruitment effort. And where regime vulnerabilities exist that are of strategic importance, the insurgents will study these intensively with an eye to creating fissures in the regime itself. In a very real sense, insurgent strategy and tactics will be shaped by its own intelligence.

By contrast, the target regime is unlikely to make fullest use of whatever intelligence on the insurgent movement it obtains. Quite often, political constraints will prevent the regime from making timely changes to policies that might otherwise undercut insurgent appeals. Departmental “turf” squabbles and rivalries often prevent sharing of intelligence information that could have been helpful to another department in dealing with the insurgency. This is especially true of conflicts between the regime’s military and police services. Not least, the idea of understanding the nature of the insurgency itself, comprehending its political foundation, mapping its structure and organization, developing in-depth vulnerability assessment on insurgent members and the movement as a whole, often completely escapes the notice of regime authorities. They simply cannot or do not see all that is there.

16. The central importance of Area Intelligence

The basis upon which a viable counterinsurgency strategy rests is accurate and thorough Area Intelligence. Area Intelligence establishes the political geography in almost microscopic detail of the Area of Operations. It identifies which districts, villages or hamlets actively assist the insurgents, which villages cooperate under duress with the insurgents, and which areas are generally supportive of the government-in-being. But not only does Area Intelligence identify local allegiances, it strives to give the underlying reasons for those allegiances.

Area Intelligence is constantly maintained and updated. It must reflect the day-to-day reality of insurgent as well as government activities, *political* as well as tactical. What is important is to define patterns of enemy political control and influence, and determine likely future insurgent moves into new areas. Conduct of census-grievance surveys is

⁴⁶ Dubbed the “white mice” by the GI’s because the QC invariably wore white uniforms and extracted bribes from peasants and others who passed their police posts – essentially nibbling the peasants’ “grain.”

one way of collecting information on attitudes in key areas. “Dotting” of enemy moves over time is a way of detecting established patterns and projecting likely trends of the insurgent infrastructure’s activities, here again, political as well as military.

Based upon accurate, detailed Area Intelligence – which is always a “work in progress” subject to continual updating and modification – counterinsurgency planners can identify “friendly” areas where there is little insurgent activity, “neutral” areas where the regime and insurgents are competing for influence, and “hostile” areas largely or completely under guerrilla control. When these are plotted on a map, as we have said, the pattern will resemble Mao’s jigsaw puzzle. Precinct-by-precinct granularity is required.

When the jigsaw puzzle has been thoroughly analyzed, the planners can mark off zones that are “Off Limits” for ordinary civilian commercial activity and freedom of movement. Special passes and approvals would be required for entry into these areas, coupled with strict vehicle searches and monitoring of individuals either entering or leaving the zones. Checkpoints should be established and vigorous patrolling initiated on the fringes of these prohibited zones. Economic measures should be taken to weaken pro-insurgent villages and hamlets, to include strictly controlling or indeed, totally cutting off food supplies going into those areas. These restrictions put pressure on the movement’s relationship with the locals since the insurgent will be forced to take what the people have – thereby jeopardizing his popular support – or do without – which hampers the movement’s operations. We will discuss this in Section 21 which is devoted to Population and Resource control – a key element of a viable counterinsurgency strategy.⁴⁷

The renowned Premier of France, Georges Clemenceau, once remarked that: “*War is much too serious a matter to be entrusted to the military.*” Leaving aside the humor of Clemenceau’s comment, the deeper truth he was addressing is that purely military thinking often sees only a small, technical part of the broad totality of war. Certainly this is true of an insurgency which is, in fact, “total war” if that phrase is defined as being “a war that affects all the people of a nation,” not just the professional soldiers thereof.

The problem with military intelligence is just that: it is “too military.” That is, the way that MI officers and specialists are trained in the United States, and possibly in most Western military forces, is to track purely “military” activities. And in conventional wars – wars between professional standing armies – it does this reasonably well.

A typical MI battalion will contain almost all the elements required for tactical coverage of its Area of Operations [AO]. This would include tactical HUMINT, tactical SIGINT, and even limited imagery – from aircraft or pilotless drones. Not least, there would be a

⁴⁷ Col. Newsham observes that, upon occasion, the insurgent movement’s occupation of a district may be a “catharsis” that ultimately helps change the sympathies of that district against the insurgents. Once the local people have experienced the harsh realities of insurgent occupation, they may seek a change. As in Buner and Swat in Pakistan, extremists often are their “own worst enemies.” They impose their will on the people, but overplay their hand ideologically and end up alienating the people.

capability to debrief prisoners of war and interview line-crossers, local residents, and others. The intent of this effort is to give a commander a clear picture of the battlespace.

And yet, in an insurgency, it doesn't.

The reason that this is so – or rather, that it is *not* so – is because the strictly “military” portion of the insurgency is only a small part of the picture. It would be like studying the blues, gray-greens, and orange tints of the Mona Lisa, but failing to see and comprehend the central smiling feature of the famous painting. Very few MI units or brigade S-2 shops have in-depth area or language expertise. MI personnel are generalists who are shifted from one theater to another as if they were infantrymen. Even area expertise formerly found in Psyop units arguably is today much thinner than it was in the era of Euro-communism.

One of the most egregious features of military intelligence is its almost religious notation of what are called “SigActs” or “significant activities.” A briefing officer reads these SigActs in sonorous tones at each morning and evening briefing of a senior commander, more or less as follows:

At 1025, a roadside bomb went off at Grid Coordinates 123456
At 1047, three shots were fired in the vicinity of Pimpeldorf
At 1115, two rounds of mortar fire were observed from POO 7654
At 1238, an unexplained explosion took place outside FOB Braveheart
At 1423....

Are you still awake? Those who *can* stay awake through such soul-deadening dross are insomniacs. Indeed, any reasonable man would ask: “*What does this mean?*” I leave you to guess the answer; I certainly have no clue.

Military intelligence units are not trained to conduct serious in-depth analytical work on insurgencies. This is not to say that they lack bright people. It is not to say that they lack equipment or the desire to do meaningful work. It is also not to say that MI units lack the ability to identify areas where guerrilla presence is significant or to identify “trouble spots” where heavier patrolling is called for. They also know some names of local guerrilla chiefs and usually have a handle on weaponry and many tactics.

But it is fair to say that MI battalions as presently constituted are simply not equipped to understand the “invisible” side of the conflict, that is, the slow and methodical political warfare work of the insurgency, the structure and vulnerabilities of the infrastructure, local cultural and religious perspectives that influence public opinion and insurgent activities, local politics and microeconomics that some of our field operations possibly might trip over or unwittingly disrupt, the attitudes of the local people – war weariness, causes of resentment against us or the insurgents or both, trends in insurgent propaganda operations, and a raft of other considerations that are central to insurgencies that are just not thought about by typical military intelligence units.

A conventional military officer would object, saying: “*these matters are for the national civilian intelligence organizations to consider.*” Dead wrong. These matters also should be considered on the scene, not thousands of miles away in Washington, D.C. Time is of the essence and, in general, those on the scene are more familiar with local realities in Zabol Province than are analysts who have never even been in the province.

While we are busy tallying “SigActs,” the insurgents are busy building political power by working villages and hamlets – paying attention to the people while we are engrossed in searching vainly for “main force units” and guerilla bands.

Conventional organizations only do what they know – conventionally. What is required is an unconventional approach to “military intelligence” that produces Area Intelligence.

Since insurgency is a captain’s war, not a general’s war, what is required is a true, miniaturized S-2 capability in every deployed rifle company. A company commander should be constantly “up” on everything going on in his immediate neighborhood; he should not be dependent upon battalion or brigade for this kind of immediate support. The captain’s S-2 shop should have its thumb on the pulse of the local AO. The battalion folks should be thinking about doing true all-source analysis on a larger area – doing in depth analytical thinking and forgetting about the SigActs. (Unless someone is having trouble falling asleep, that is.)

17. A peek into the war planner’s tent

As mentioned, when an insurgency is mapped it looks as though it consists of jigsaw pieces, or bits of a mosaic. The point is, since it is virtually without any definable shape, an insurgency must be fought militarily in fragments, bits, or pieces. In Section 20 we will expand on the idea that insurgency is a “captain’s war,” and that generalship counts for relatively little. From the guerrillas’ perspective, the war is also being fought by the insurgents’ equivalent of lieutenants and captains – who are also quite often its political warfare officers. Advancement in an insurgent organization is often – though not always – based upon merit and ability. By contrast, advancement in a regime’s army or police is all too often – though not always – based upon social position, family connections, wealth, or political influence, and has little to do with competence or demonstrated achievement.

The top boys on both sides stay safely out of the way in base areas well beyond their enemies’ reach, where their job is to marshal human, material, and financial resources, and provide spiritual and inspirational guidance. Bagram and Miram Shah squat in the baking South Asian sun and glower at one another.

And yet, despite having the consistency of a “mosaic” made up of little tiles of various shapes and colors, there is a unifying pattern over all that binds together the jigsaw puzzle that is insurgency. There is a transcending logic to the fragmentation that applies everywhere. *That is the overarching political situation that demands that a regime and its allies formulate a countrywide political strategy if the regime is to survive.*

As it happens, the Pentagon is only slowly getting the word about insurgency after seven years of combat in Afghanistan with what the JCS readily admits is a tenacious, resilient foe. (Those of us who “came of age” in Vietnam scratch our heads that the Pentagon seems to have learned very little from the costly mistakes it made a generation ago in Vietnam. Perhaps Santayana was right.⁴⁸⁴⁹)

Still, the tendency at the five-sided building seems to be “nothing much has changed.” American forces still tend to be road-bound and technology-centric, they deploy and operate in large bodies, they require an immense logistical tail, they rely on weaponry and air supremacy (which buys them relatively little), they rarely really get to know the people in their AO. Few troops speak even a smattering of any of the languages or dialects of the Afghan peoples, and the military’s inability not merely to fully integrate – *but fuse into one substance* – intelligence, Psyop, and security operations is downright dismal.⁵⁰ We are still dealing with an Army field staff system [G-1, G-2, G-3, etc.] that arguably was outmoded in 1945. Worst of all, in Afghanistan, Bagram’s dead hand reaches down almost every day not just to brigade and battalion, but tries to micromanage activities at company and even squad level. It is a wonder that we have not collapsed of our own weight.

True, there is limited innovation in some frontline units. True, there is some long range patrolling being done (here, I mean two or three weeks continually in the bush.) True also, soldiers on an individual basis do make friends with locals.

But this is despite current Army practice rather than because of it.

And then there is the larger picture which, in Afghanistan, resembles a circus mirror where the short become tall, the fat thin, and all players distorted.

The ability of the Americans to integrate effective political action through the Afghan government is anemic at best; political and economic reform exists on paper only; attempts to fully mesh the efforts of the Embassy with those of the military are weak (though State Department does have a few junior reps in forward areas.) And “unity of effort” between the CIA Station and bases, USAID, and other USG elements such as the Departments of Justice, Agriculture, and Commerce, along with those of the State and Defense Departments in a true countrywide counterinsurgency effort is a pipe dream.

⁴⁸ “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

⁴⁹ Dr. Arturo G. Munoz of RAND notes that in recent months senior leadership at the Pentagon appears to be moving toward new and positive thinking about insurgency and the challenge of nation building in Afghanistan as its cornerstone. The question is whether this new thinking will be sustained over time, or whether the lessons now being painfully learned in Afghanistan will in due course be abandoned and forgotten just as were the lessons learned in Vietnam a generation ago.

⁵⁰ Fortunately, little of this applies to the Special Forces ODAs which operate using irregular tactics and, in the main, have more language and area expertise than their conventional compatriots. The ODAs failing, however, is that they spend too much time kicking down doors and not enough time shaking hands. They may catch an “HVT” (acronym for “high value target,”) but in so doing anger and alienate entire villages.

“Counterinsurgency” is much like the weather; everyone talks about it, but...

And this, of course, speaks only to the American presence in Afghanistan. It says little about our European and Pacific allies’ contributions, and nothing at all about the central role that the Afghan government of Hamid Karzai should be playing in its own defense.

18. And then there is the Kabul regime

Here a comparison is in order with two successful counterinsurgency efforts against once-formidable opponents undertaken in Asian countries: Malaya and the Philippines.

In each of these cases, the authorities very quickly realized that the military alone was simply incapable of defeating the insurgency. In the well-documented Malay example, civil and military authorities were welded together into a War Executive Council that defined overall strategy and marshaled resources to support that strategy. “Unity of Command” did not mean a single general sitting at a desk with a phone, but a team of leaders from all parts of the civil and military powers *acting as one*. We have space here to offer only a quick recap of the events in Malaya; the serious student is directed to John Nagl’s excellent book, Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife.

The strategy in Malaya followed the general lines of the *tache d’huile*, with the British and Malay authorities consolidating administrative and political control over certain localities and cordoning off others. Population and Resource Control, the subject of a later section, was imposed where required. Intelligence was shared through the War Executive to all members of the team. Government effectiveness and responsiveness to local needs was made an absolute; corruption and sloth, where such existed, were immediately rooted out. The goal of strategy was to separate the people psychologically and politically from the so-called Malayan Races Liberation Army, to “box in” the MRLA in unpopulated and unproductive parts of the country, and to demonstrate to the ordinary citizen that the Malayan government-in-being under Tunku Abdul Rahman was competent, honest, and effective.

General Sir Gerald Templer, one of the architects of the combined civil-military plan designed to confront the MRLA challenge, is the author of the famous quotation, here given in full: *“The answer lies, not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in winning the hearts and minds of the people.”* Some might be inclined to laugh or sneer at Sir Gerald’s poetic phraseology. But remember this: *he won*.

In the case of the Philippines, as has been mentioned, the weak and corrupt government of Elpidio Quirino was mortally threatened by the Hukbalahap movement after 1946. Under American pressure, Quirino appointed Ramon Magsaysay as Secretary of National Defense – though hoping that Magsaysay would not “rock the boat” by rooting out the rats’ nest of sinecures, corruption, nepotism, and incompetence in the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the civilian administration.

But rock the boat he did. Magsaysay did not tolerate the corruption and nepotism which was rife in the regime's political and military structure.

Heretofore, the AFP conducted itself much like an army of occupation, seldom venturing afield in search of Huks, unless Manila headlines made it absolutely necessary, and most of the time preying heavily on the local populace. Magsaysay saw the military in a different light. He wanted it to become a major part of a large, coordinated development plan for the country, a plan that would incorporate the military as a participant in social reforms and public service. Not only did he demand that his forces abandon corrupt practices, he set the example himself. He refused special treatment, lived from his government salary (about \$500 per month) and a small stipend from being the Chairman of the Board of Philippine Airlines, and whenever possible presented a modest appearance in public. Not surprisingly, many within the Philippine military felt nervous about his intentions but felt just as confident that one man could not bring about such dramatic changes. These doubters soon were not only proved incorrect, but became jobless as well.⁵¹

The Philippine case study is well worth studying in depth. Here the very nature of the targeted regime was changed. By reforming the army and civil administration so that it actually helped and protected Filipinos instead of victimizing them, it was possible eventually to tip the scales of public opinion heavily in favor of the government. By his open personality, obvious incorruptibility, and fearlessness in sacking those who lived by bribes or "squeeze," Magsaysay became something of a folk hero. Magsaysay would appear unannounced in rural villages, at military outposts, or government administrative centers – and woe betide those caught napping. For five centavos any peasant could send Magsaysay a message reporting corruption or malfeasance – and the peasant would be heard. Magsaysay was easily elected President of the Philippines in 1953 and within two more years had forced Huk chief Luis Taruc to surrender and the Huks to disband.

The point of these two case studies which, as noted, deserve careful study for the lessons they teach, make this central point: it is possible to defeat an insurgency, but only *if* certain actions are taken, vigorously and without delay. There must be a central idea around which *all* government actions – not just military actions – revolve. There must be full coordination of all elements of the regime. And once again, we come back to Jean Monnet's exhortation to give the people a central political idea worth fighting and dying for. It may be that in Afghanistan, as in Vietnam a generation ago, we all understand (kind of) what we are fighting *against*. But nobody knows what we are fighting *for*.

Before leaving the Philippine case study, it is important to note that if senior officials are to be effective, they must be willing to "speak truth to power" and not play the role of the sycophant. It is said that when Magsaysay briefed President Quirino on the shift away from large battalion "sweeps" toward lighter, faster-moving forces that would actually engage the Huks in their base areas, Quirino rebuked Magsaysay saying that he had never heard of such a thing and that General Castaneda (the Chief of Staff that Magsaysay fired) "*has never suggested anything like this to me.*" "*Of course not,*" Magsaysay is said to have replied, "*General Castaneda does not know anything about guerrilla*

⁵¹ Major Lawrence M. Greenberg, The Hukbalahap Insurrection: A Case Study of a Successful Anti-Insurgency Operation in the Philippines, 1946-1955, p. 83.

*warfare. He does not understand the kind of strategy that has to be practiced against the Huks if we are to defeat them.”*⁵²

We must now turn our attention back to the Afghan reality. And the reality is not encouraging.

The Karzai government has three serious vulnerabilities, any one of which could spell its downfall. These are its total dependence upon foreign financial and military aid, its lack of trained professional administrators, and its apparent political ineptitude.

The Afghan government is eggshell thin in terms of real administrative talent. While it is true that several ministers and department heads are Western-trained, highly educated and committed to building a new state, it is equally true that there is little talent at lower levels to ensure that national programs are carried out effectively—or carried out at all. Corruption is rife at all levels, and many bureaucrats see nothing wrong in using their official positions for private gain. Indeed, in Mogul and Persian times, this was not only accepted behavior, but expected. But the net result of corruption and administrative incompetence is not only to render the regime ineffective at the tasks of government, but make it incapable of building genuine popular support. Presently, many ordinary Afghans in the provinces view their national government as irrelevant. However, it is possible that at some point they may also come to view the new government as rapacious. Should such a public perception come about, it would be a major step toward the government’s eventual overthrow.

Presently, more than 90% of Afghan government revenues originate from abroad. Less than 10% of the state budget is derived from taxation and domestic sources. The lack of internally produced revenue (due in large measure to an ineffective taxation system and pervasive graft) renders the Kabul government vulnerable to bankruptcy and collapse should foreign doles be cut off. The huge amounts of Western aid have helped fund programs of the national government, but they also create irresistible temptations for graft. How long the U.S. government and its European and Pacific allies will be willing to fund the Afghan treasury and pay its bills is an open question. If the funds are cut, the Kabul regime will be fatally undercut.

Politically, the central government inspires little enthusiasm in the provinces. Kabul, as the capital, has reassumed its traditional sense of superiority toward “mere provincials.” Ministers pay little attention to provincial needs and spend most of their time and energy politicking or intriguing in the capital. Even provincial governors – who are appointed by the president, not elected by the locals – often absent themselves for prolonged periods in the capital.⁵³ Karzai himself seems to have little interest in provincial affairs and has made very few domestic visits since assuming the presidency. By contrast, he frequently jets off to conferences in Washington, London, Strasbourg and New York.

⁵² Conversation reported by Carlos P. Romulo, *The Magsaysay Story*, p. 105, cited in Greenberg, op. cit.

⁵³ Author is personally aware of one provincial governor who was a United States citizen of Pashtun heritage and a resident of Virginia. His top adviser, also a Pashtun émigré and U.S. citizen, had been convicted on felony charges in New York state before returning to Afghanistan.

Hamid Karzai is respected as president, but it cannot be said that he is loved. While his portrait hangs in all government buildings, most Afghans view him as aloof, distant and detached—not as “their” president, or as a man of the people. He is certainly no Ramon Magsaysay.

Karzai’s ministers are no more attentive to domestic public opinion than is he. Perhaps, as long as foreign aid flows, they don’t have to be. For example, one minister believes the nation’s thousands of mullahs to be “politically irrelevant,” and stated that national conferences of mullahs (supportive of the regime) were little more than empty publicity stunts. Lack of serious attention to domestic constituent audiences demonstrates either political ineptitude or sheer arrogance. It should be obvious that at the local level mullahs continue to wield wide influence throughout Afghanistan and, as “key communicators,” they help shape public opinion. Moreover, there is little visible effort on the part of the national government to reach out to Afghanistan’s farmers, merchants, woodcutters, or laborers. The Karzai government ignores these groups at its peril.

As if this picture is not bleak enough, the Pentagon – egged on by State Department – has set for itself the creation of a new “Afghan National Army.” (This has been tried before, as far back as Amir Abdur Rahman’s time, with checkered results.) The idea of a “Made in USA” army – in which all ethnic groups in Afghanistan are happily melded together like so much vegetable soup – would not be so bad but for one thing. *The army being created is basically a conventional army...and is for the most part a garrison army.* With the partial exception of commando battalions, the ANA is not a force that is organized, equipped, much less trained, to serve a true counterinsurgency mission.

What sustains the Karzai government despite its many glaring weaknesses is the current political anemia of its adversary, the Taliban. However, it must be said that the Taliban’s political idea – though severe and highly “preservationist” as it would turn the clock back to a theocratic “emirate” – is slowly winning over certain elements of the general population. To be sure, this is partly from fear or self-interest. But it is also partly due to the growing view that the regime appears unable or unwilling to provide even a modicum of competent administrative services in rural areas. If conditions in Afghanistan worsen, the likelihood of the Taliban capitalizing on deteriorating conditions is high. So long as Western military forces remain in Afghanistan, the Taliban has no chance of defeating a Western army in battle or bringing down the Kabul regime. But if those forces should be withdrawn, and funding cut off, it must be said that little would stop the Taliban from subverting the country just as they did in the mid-1990s.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Where there is no vision there cannot be true leadership. It is not enough merely to “preside” or to “mediate” or play the “balancing act” between two or more factions. In the case of China, this was exactly the role played by Chiang Kai-shek relative to the many warlords and factions in Nationalist China. In the case of contemporary Afghanistan, it is the weak, neo-monarchical role assumed by Hamid Karzai. The dilemma for U.S. forces in Afghanistan, and the United States Government, is finding themselves trying to defend a regime that is increasingly venal, incompetent, and unpopular – just as in China and Vietnam.

19. Military operations as political instruments

We now at last come to the part that most practitioners had wished to get to on Page One – a consideration of the military actions associated with insurgency. Indeed, there are many excellent books already in print on this one aspect of insurgency.

As we have shown, the central principle of insurgent military operations is use of force to advance its political warfare campaign aimed at increasing the movement's public support (its base of power.) We have already covered the matter of popular support, but at this point it is well to get a glimpse of how military operations serve political ends.

What distinguishes true insurgent tactical operations from partisan warfare is the way in which insurgent units deal with the people and with their adversaries. Small unit hit and run tactics are common to both. The partisans of the Russian forests certainly used small unit tactics to hamper German operations in the rear areas. But only true insurgents look beyond the hit and run tactics to the more profound goal of enlisting the civilian populace as partners and auxiliaries, and *even to "recruiting" and absorbing one's enemies.*

Mao Tse-tung's twentieth century formulation of tactical operations, based on the fifth century B.C. classic, the Sun Tzu Ping Fa,⁵⁵ is stated in "sixteen characters" thus: "*When the enemy advances, we withdraw; when the enemy halts, we harass; when the enemy avoids battle, we attack; when the enemy retreats, we pursue.*"⁵⁶ Elements of this classic formulation can be seen in every successful resistance movement, East or West, since Master Sun's day in the fifth century B.C. Understood at once is the diaphanous nature of tactical operations – fluidity, elasticity, invisibility, and formlessness are its hallmarks. In complete contrast to Clausewitz and most other Western military thinkers, the central idea is to *avoid* cataclysmic battles that seek to destroy an opposing force, seeking instead to throw a sticky web around the enemy and gradually wear away his willingness and ability to resist.

Clausewitz recognized this formlessness in his observation: "*...above all, the most characteristic feature of insurgency in general will be repeated in miniature: the element of resistance will be everywhere and nowhere.*"⁵⁷

Mao spoke of a "war of a jig saw pattern." Indeed, he always assumed that his relatively small forces would be on the strategic defensive (until perhaps the very end of the war.) His idea was simple: *preserve oneself while wearing down the military power of one's adversary.* But the destruction of the enemy would be done in bits and bites, not in a major battle. What is often forgotten about Mao was that he was intimately familiar with China's history and was able to draw examples and lessons from events of the past. He understood clearly that weaker forces could not stand against strong conventional forces – this was proved in 1927 when the pro-Moscow elements of the Chinese Communist

⁵⁵ Literally, the "Soldier's Method" of Sun Tzu (Master Sun) a general of the ancient State of Ch'i.

⁵⁶ Sun Tzu, The Art of War, p. 51.

⁵⁷ Clausewitz, *op.cit.*, p. 186.

Party had attempted to seize and hold a major city in Hunan.⁵⁸ Yet Mao certainly knew of the foundation of the Ming Dynasty in 1368 which overthrew the last of the Mongols, basically through insurgency. He also knew of examples from the Three Kingdoms period and other eras where small, highly motivated forces had beaten significantly larger but less motivated armies.

The elements that Mao believed to be working in his favor were those of popular support, expansive (often difficult) terrain, and time. The Chinese Eighth Route Army was fighting on home soil and, with the active assistance of the peasants, it could strike pretty much at will. Though strategically always on the defensive, the Chinese guerrilla forces consistently maintained the offensive tactically. Ironically, while the Japanese army was on the strategic offensive in China through late 1944, it was invariably forced on the tactical defensive in the guerrilla areas of North China. Therefore, the Japanese were compelled to station large garrisons throughout its occupied area of China and defend “everywhere all the time.” As can be imagined, the practice of defending everywhere all the time not only is expensive in terms of money, but hugely wasteful in terms of manpower. Yet, it was the only strategy that occurred to the Japanese High Command or that would have been politically acceptable in Tokyo.

The guerrilla plan was to confine, so far as possible, the enemy forces in static garrisons in the larger cities and compel them to stay on the main roads and railroad lines. As mentioned, Mao used the analogy of the ancient Chinese game of *wei-ch'i* to describe his war of encirclement. Moreover, the Japanese were to be isolated, so far as possible, from moving about the countryside or having any positive contact with the people. The Chinese Communist command, meanwhile, methodically enlisted the peasants as full partners in the “anti-Japanese front.” It was in summarizing this relationship that Mao gave his famous aphorism about the people being the water in which the guerrillas, as fish, could freely swim.⁵⁹

The Chinese guerrillas were capable of moving about freely where they had peasant support, and could choose when, where, and how they would attack. Small outposts and enemy forces on the move were favorite targets. Likewise, static targets such as railroads and enemy supply points received guerrilla attention. The Japanese rarely knew where the guerrillas might strike next – or when. Here the invisible “dark matter” facilitating Eighth Route Army attacks was the peasantry, through its local units and especially supporting activities such as provision of intelligence and safe areas.

⁵⁸ The pro-Moscow Party members were subsequently demoted or expelled from the Party. Some historians believe that the early seeds of Mao’s antipathy to the Russians lay in this period.

⁵⁹ Mao Tse-tung, quoted in Stuart Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, pp. 287-288. The full quotation reads as follows: “There are those who feel that it is hardly conceivable for a guerrilla unit to exist for a long period behind the enemy lines. This is a viewpoint based on ignorance of the relations between the army and the people. The popular masses are like water, and the army is like a fish. How then can it be said that when there is water, a fish will have difficulty in preserving its existence? An army which fails to maintain good discipline gets into opposition with the popular masses, and thus by its own actions dries up the water. In this case, it naturally cannot continue to exist. All guerrilla units must thoroughly understand this principle.”

However, what must be emphasized is that guerrilla attacks did not deal mortal, or even really serious blows to the Japanese army in North China. They certainly did hamper Japanese operations and tie down great numbers of troops. But what was truly significant was the enlistment of common people into what the people viewed as “their” personal fight to drive out the hated invader.

Toward the goal of building his power among the peasantry, in 1928 Mao formulated his “Three Main Rules of Discipline” and the “Eight Points for Attention:”

The Three Main Rules of Discipline are as follows:

- (1) Obey orders in all your actions.
- (2) Don't take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses.
- (3) Turn in everything captured.

The Eight Points for Attention are as follows:

- (1) Speak politely.
- (2) Pay fairly for what you buy.
- (3) Return everything you borrow.
- (4) Pay for anything you damage.
- (5) Don't hit or swear at people.
- (6) Don't damage crops.
- (7) Don't take liberties with women.
- (8) Don't ill-treat captives.⁶⁰

What appears to have missed the attention of most professional military observers is that *Mao considered each and every soldier to be a propagandist*. Yes, it was the soldier's duty to bear arms against the Japanese – and later against the Nationalists. But first and foremost, every Eighth Route Army soldier was a propagandist. His duty was to go forward into hamlets and rural areas, speak to the people either singly or in small groups, and by his conduct as well as his words win the people's confidence. For many of the villagers, who were used to Japanese or Nationalist soldiers who regularly stole livestock and belongings, insulted the villagers, and sometimes raped the women, the fighter of the Eighth Route Army was truly “something new” – *a living example of an orderly, moral way of life*.⁶¹

So far as his enemies were concerned, Mao had already decided early on that the best source of modern weaponry and, later on, military manpower was the enemy force itself. The Nationalists routinely limited or denied access to weaponry to the Eighth Route Army, reserving for themselves the vast bulk of what armament was received from the United States. As a consequence, Mao's forces either made their own weapons – or captured what they needed. It is ironic that the Chinese Communists in 1949-1950 fell heirs to the greatest arsenal of U.S. weaponry outside Western Europe, exceeded only by

⁶⁰ Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writings*, p. 343. The Three Main Rules and Eight Points were first issued in 1928, reissued 1947 and again in 1969; these guidelines, a Code of Conduct, if you will, were taken very seriously. Local insurgent commanders would address infractions immediately, and the offending guerrilla fighter would be severely – and publicly – punished.

⁶¹ To the best of my knowledge, the only forces on the Afghan regime side having similar codes of conduct are the Khowst Provincial Force (KPF) which has a Nine Point code developed in 2005, and the Mobile Reaction Force (MRF) in Nangarhar whose similar code was developed in 2006.

the haul made by the Vietnamese Communist forces in 1975. But the point also must be made that Mao's forces not only defeated the Nationalist armies in mobile warfare during the winter and spring of 1948-1949, *but absorbed the great majority of the Nationalist soldiers into the burgeoning ranks of the new People's Liberation Army.*

The question immediately arises as to whether Taliban forces have the same potential to wear down their enemies as did the Chinese sixty years ago. The answer to this question is: "the jury is still out." It is much too early to see whether, through its skill at integrating political with tactical operations, the Taliban can duplicate even a portion of the Chinese model. The question of "military victories" is moot. What matters is whether the Taliban can credibly present themselves as liberators capable of offering an attractive political alternative to the secular regime in Kabul. If they can do this, and the targeted regime has no "better offer" to put before the people, it is just possible that the political foundation of the government could be gradually leached away. The final curtain would ring down on secular authorities when a large enough group of people refuse to accept the authority of the established government in Kabul and transfer their allegiance and active support to the insurgents.

20. Of Captainship

We now see that, in sharp contrast to the Clausewitzian concept of focusing all effort on the destruction of an enemy armed force, in insurgency that is irrelevant. Indeed, if the insurgent movement has put down deep roots in the population, and enjoys widespread popular support, it can reconstitute its guerrilla forces indefinitely. As the U.S. Army found in Vietnam, consistent victories over small bands of guerrillas – enshrined in the meaningless tally of "body counts" – led only to ultimate defeat. The Army fought only a tiny part of that war – and then, as it proved, fought the wrong part.

European and North American military thinking – shaped by the immense size of the forces arrayed by all the major players during World War II and the Cold War – has always emphasized strong central command and control. In theory, the execution of operations was left to subordinate commanders. But in practice, when orders went out from a field army to a corps commander, then to divisional level, and so on down the chain, the space left for imagination, innovation, and independence of action by the captain or lieutenant was small indeed. A company commander could decide whether to shoot his way into Pimpeldorf from the north or the south end of town – if capture of the town was given to him as his objective – but the rest of the decision making was at battalion, brigade or higher levels.

What counted in World War II was *generalship*. Any student of military history could rattle off the names of the exceptional generals: von Manstein, Patton, Montgomery, and Zhukov {to name but four} immediately come to mind. Each commander was expected to "out-general" his opponents. Mere captains were to follow orders. Few if any captains are remembered today in lectures at West Point or Sandhurst.

But in a “war of a jig saw pattern,” which is a fundamentally different kind of war, what matters most might be called “*captainship*.” Insurgencies must necessarily be fought by captains and by sergeants – and their guerrilla counterparts – not by generals. *The defining feature of “low intensity” conflict is its decentralization of tactical operations and its central focus on mobilizing the support of the people.* In the “jigsaw war,” a general becomes more of a coordinator and, if you will, a “forward Zone of the Interior.” A wise general will refrain from meddling in the vital business of captains and sergeants – taking corrective action only in egregious cases where front line leaders have somehow “slipped the track.” In a conflict that is “atomized,” responsibility and authority must be vested in the commanders at the lowest possible level, rather than at the highest, as is normal Defense Department practice.

In this sense, a wise general becomes something like the lead in a really good jazz group such as Miles Davis or Dizzy Gillespie. He knows the sound he wants. He selects only musicians who know their instruments well and who have a deep musical sense. He sets the pace with the drum or string bass, then turns his fantastic music-makers loose. The result may be unpredictable – very likely improvised as they go – but somehow the result is exactly what the doctor ordered. This is about as “un-military” as a typical American general can imagine, but it is the way that things must work if success is to be achieved in what is basically a formless, improvised war.

It then follows that to deal effectively with a “war of a jigsaw pattern,” what we might term “micro-strategies” are required. These micro-strategies would be tailored for each valley, district, and hamlet based upon the Area Intelligence compiled. A micro-strategy for one valley might well be completely different from that for an adjacent valley.

Captains and senior NCOs must be given the greatest possible scope for flexibility, and encouraged to exercise inspired imagination, creativity and innovation. Promotions should go to those who are most innovative and decorations to the most clever.

We have seen that the central principle of insurgency is gaining and holding the support of the people, for whichever side is successful will ultimately prevail. An insurgent movement that has no popular backing simply cannot survive. By the same token, a regime that has no writ beyond the limits of its capital city will inevitably collapse. I usually tell those who will listen that: “*if the people are for you, you cannot lose, but if the people are against you, you cannot win.*”

If we accept the premise given above, that ultimately it will be the sentiments of the people rather than the quantity of armament and number of troops – along with the conventional hallmarks of maneuver and firepower – that will decide the political outcome of an insurgency, it follows that Clausewitzian approaches to warfare cannot be applied without extensive modification.

Every American lieutenant is taught the nine “principles of warfare” that evolved over many years from experience in conventional warfare. These have been most recently restated in the Army's *Field Manual 100-5* published in 1994:

- *Objective*: Direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive and attainable objective. “The ultimate military purpose of war is the destruction of the enemy's armed forces and will to fight.”
- *Offensive*: Seize, retain, and exploit the initiative. Even in defense, a military organization is expected to maintain a level of aggressiveness by patrolling and launching limited counter-offensives.
- *Mass*: Mass the effects of overwhelming combat power at the decisive place and time.
- *Economy of Force*: Employ all combat power available in the most effective way possible; allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts.
- *Maneuver*: Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power.
- *Unity of Command*: For every objective, seek unity of command and unity of effort.
- *Security*: Never permit the enemy to acquire unexpected advantage.
- *Surprise*: Strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which he is unprepared.
- *Simplicity*: Prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders to ensure thorough understanding.⁶²

These principles apply to conventional warfare where the object is the destruction of an opposing (conventional) armed force. *Many of these principles, unfortunately, teach exactly the wrong lesson for a practitioner grappling with an insurgency.*

I am proposing that, in an insurgency, the following modifications to some of the nine principles be made:

- *Objective*: Gain and hold the support of the people; the objective of insurgency is political, not military. Merely killing guerrillas will exhaust you, expend your resources fruitlessly, make new enemies, and ultimately lose you the war. Your job is not to catch fish, but to dry up the ocean. Separate the people politically and psychologically from the insurgents and you accomplish that objective. Destruction of an “enemy force” is irrelevant.
- *Offensive*: Seize, retain, and exploit the initiative. There should never be a static defense; constant patrolling in unexpected areas at unexpected times should be the norm; you push the guerrilla, he should never be permitted to have the initiative. He should fear you and never know where you will be, nor when. Maintaining 24/7 operational activity will exhaust a guerrilla; he needs time and a place to rest and refit, and contact with the people. Without that, guerrillas cannot survive.
- *Mass*: Absolutely NOT! SMALL is the way to go. Use a scalpel, not a chainsaw. Moreover, use light mixed forces or indigenous forces rather than “all-U.S.” units. Small units are all you need to go after guerrilla squads in most cases; small units are agile and do not require a huge logistical tail. Moreover, they leave a small footprint and do not disturb people. Locals identify with other locals, not with

⁶² FM 100-5, 1994 edition

- Americans. Plus, joint operations with indigenous forces means that your locals are in OJT – and will eventually become as good as you are, if you help them.
- *Economy of Force*: Be VERY sparing of firepower and troop presence. Never send a battalion when a squad will do. Use more brainpower and less firepower. Avoid helo assaults, artillery preps, and especially 500-pound bombs. The more firepower you use, the more enemies you make. You want the people to support you, not hate you and thirst for revenge.
 - *Maneuver*: Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage. Always move to limit the guerrilla's area of free movement; systematically close off areas to him and constantly move to encircle him in an ever-tightening cordon. Above all, seek to separate him from contact with the people. Keep him out in the desert or up on top of a mountain; locate his rat lines for supplies and replacements; limit his access to food and medicine. Isolation of the guerrilla makes him irrelevant.
 - *Unity of Command*: For every objective, seek unity of strategy and unity of effort, but decentralization of tactical authority to the company level. At battalion and higher levels, there must be a seamless relationship between intelligence, security ops, and Psyop, with all players co-located and with the same clearances and equal voices, deeply involved in planning as well as in executing operations. No officer will serve in the G-3 shop unless he/she has at least entry level training in Psyop and full appreciation of the value of Area Intelligence.
 - *Security*: *De rigueur* in all things. Discipline is half the solution; your people must have a sense of discretion. Deception is the other half of security. As Master Sun observed: “All warfare is based upon deception.”⁶³ Confuse your enemy: make your opponent believe you are going to do what you aren't, and then convince him you will not do what you intend. Simplicity greatly aids security.
 - *Surprise*: Strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which he is unprepared. Don't be ambushed; set them! What doesn't he expect? Do it! Is there a favorite hiding place for the guerrillas? Stake it out. Is there a favored site he uses to place roadside bombs? Place a little exploding surprise there for him. Literally, leave no stone unturned; the guerrilla will never know when, or if, he is safe. He will learn to fear you (rightfully!) and fear will numb him.
 - *Simplicity*: The essence of guerrilla warfare. High tech is never a substitute for clear thinking and the “hand of friendship.” Success in both strategy and tactics will go to the operational plan having the fewest “ifs.”

So much for the nine original principles as formulated after World War I, modified a bit during World War II, and enshrined in FM 100-5.

Unfortunately, even with the modifications given above, the principles do not include four additional requirements that must be observed when dealing with insurgencies. I have listed these as: persuasion, presence, patience, and persistence.

- *Persuasion*: Always deal gently with the local people; always ask politely, never be rude. Consider the importance of village Elders and clerics and work through them at all times. Use the local Code of Ethics

⁶³ Sun Tzu Ping-Fa (“the Soldier's Method”)

to advantage; NEVER contravene it! Go heavy on propaganda suitable to the target audiences in your area (ALWAYS pre-tested) and employ political action methods. The best persuasion is “*not merely to seem, but to be*” helpful to the local population. If you have genuine value to the locals, they will ensure that you are protected. “*The love of the people is the king’s protection.*”

- ❑ *Presence*: You have to be there “on the scene” or at least nearby. If you are around the village, the villagers are more likely to be cooperative – reporting intelligence to you and rejecting insurgent blandishments. However, if you are never around, don’t expect help when you need it. Remember that people will speak up only when they can be sure that they and their families won’t be killed for helping you.
- ❑ *Patience*: Kipling once wrote in a poem the line: “*here lies the man who tried to hurry the East.*” Everything takes time. Take time to get to really know the Elders and clerics. Take time for the villagers. Do not EVER try to rush things, or worse, pull an end-run and bypass the Elders and villagers “to get something done.” You may have to sit in a *jirga* for several hours and listen to endless debate among Elders, but if you are willing to do this, you will be rewarded for your patience.
- ❑ *Persistence*: The only sure way to lose is to stop trying. Your efforts not only must be sincere, but consistent and sustained. Americans have a tendency to be spasmodic and piecemeal; units come and go, and local people seldom can depend on a consistent and understandable American approach to their community.

A word needs to be said about airpower. The godfather of airpower, Giulio Douhet, once envisioned wars being decided by the use of airpower alone. Indeed, U.S. Air Force doctrine developed during World War II stressed such important concepts as defensive and offensive counterair – intended to destroy an opposing air force – and of course the use of airpower in battlefield interdiction, close air support of ground forces, and strategic bombing. Unfortunately for the Air Force, World War II is now over with. Whereas air supremacy was helpful in gaining victory over the Wehrmacht and the Imperial Japanese Army, the over-reliance upon and misuse of air supremacy today in Afghanistan will result only in our defeat. *Air power has its role – aerial observation and intelligence collection, medevac, air transport, humanitarian assistance. But 500 lb. bombs dropped indiscriminately on villagers will only make new enemies and prolong the war, not end it.*

Let us conclude this section by observing once again that “*if the people are for you, you cannot lose, but if the people are against you, you cannot win.*” There, in simple form, is the very essence of insurgency.

21. Population and Resource controls

For a regime to defend itself successfully, it must sever the link between the insurgents’ leadership and the people that the insurgents seek to rule. In order to do this, the regime must undertake two closely related programs known respectively as “Surveillance” and

“Restriction” that are aimed at identifying the insurgent infrastructure and neutralizing its effects on the population. These programs are carried out only in the context of broader programs of intelligence operations (to include offensive CI ops), security operations, and psychological operations and political warfare directed against the insurgent movement.

Surveillance is a basic police function that keeps watch over the population and detects insurgent presence and activities. It is designed to “see” the otherwise invisible elements of the insurgent infrastructure and understand its specific tasks. If conducted effectively, Surveillance will reveal the identities of members of the infrastructure. It will also highlight insurgent efforts to exploit regime vulnerabilities and their specific strategy for doing this. If taken seriously by the regime leadership, this insight can help shape reform efforts and policies that will go far toward taking the wind out of the insurgents’ political warfare and propaganda sails.⁶⁴

There are two proven methods of implementing an effective Surveillance program. The first is to name Block Wardens responsible for the daily activities of each person in his/her block. In tribal communities, this could be a village elder or other respected individual. The Block Warden or village elder is held responsible for promptly informing a specific government official about insurgent activities such as recruiting, intelligence gathering, propaganda work, tax collecting and the like.

An alert government intelligence/CI service also will strive to recruit low-level agents who can report unilaterally about insurgent activities. These agents also serve as a check on the named Block Warden or elder in the event the individual is untrustworthy.

The second method is to establish a viable personal identification system. It can do this by issuing identification cards or by implementing other means of establishing identity. It is essential for the regime to determine who does – and who does not – belong in a certain area. The regime also can maintain lists of legitimate residents of given villages or rural districts. Without a viable identification system, based on registering the lawful residents of a given area, the police will find it nearly impossible to control the movements of enemy cadre into or out of contested areas.

The identification card system – using biometrics that will be difficult for an insurgent to duplicate – can also serve as the “ticket” for rationing and for access to certain regions.⁶⁵

Restriction programs are designed to prevent members of the enemy infrastructure from contacting insurgent cadres in a particular area, or from influencing the population. As mentioned, the insurgents depend in large measure upon the people for intelligence, food, shelter and hiding places, and a variety of other vital services. If enemy access to these services is restricted – or denied – the movement will suffer a mortal blow.

⁶⁴ Col. Newsham reminds us that Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s failure in Bolivia was due, at least in part, to the fact that a land reform program had been carried out in the area within living memory, thus taking the wind out of his “land to the peasant” cry. Not least, as an Argentine, Guevara was viewed as a foreigner.

⁶⁵ Such technologies as iris scans provide virtually unique means of individual identification. A clever security force should be able to apply biometrics to selected districts in its area of operations.

Restrictive measures aim to limit the following:

- ❑ Food supplies, diesel and other fuels, certain medical supplies, weapons and ammunition, explosives and certain key items such as electronics gear.
- ❑ Movements of people and vehicles, especially travel without permission into designated areas, or travel without permission during certain hours.
- ❑ Political activities and press coverage of events, including if necessary censorship and restrictions on certain organizations or the right of groups to assemble.

Penalties for violating control measures should be published and made widely known. Moreover, punishments for violations must be carried out impartially. Infractions and punishments also must be publicized. All residents must clearly know that any act that aids the insurgents will be detected immediately – and swiftly punished. On the positive side, the people must also be told that as soon as the insurgency is defeated, the various controls will be swiftly removed. Thus, there is a “carrot and stick” approach in place that will encourage people to cooperate with the authorities.

Population and Resource controls are most effective when imposed by a trained and respected police force or constabulary. The people (and the insurgents) must come to understand that the police or constabulary officials cannot be bribed or intimidated and that they are professionals who know their business. Here the British had an advantage in Malaya, since their police and constabulary usually were exemplary.

Movement of civil traffic is controlled through a series of static and mobile checkpoints. The location of checkpoints in sensitive areas is constantly changing. This defeats any insurgent efforts to attack or circumvent the checkpoints.

At the checkpoints, screening of individuals and searches of vehicles will be carried out in a systematic way. Vehicle searches focus on named contraband items on publicized lists. When such items are found, the vehicle is impounded and its occupants are detained for questioning. Anyone traveling in certain designated zones or after a certain hour is subject to screening. If a traveler’s documents are in order (identification papers or biometric I.D. card) and his reason for travel is valid, he is allowed to pass. However, a written record of the time and place of even legitimate travel is carefully maintained at the police checkpoint and reported to the unit’s intelligence center.

The legal underpinning for these searches and screening is either a law passed by the provincial legislature or an executive decree by the governor. So long as the regulations are uniformly enforced and carried out efficiently and impartially, the people will accept the restrictions imposed on them. Indeed, the point should be made over and over again that, were it not for the “murderous insurgents,” restrictions would not be necessary.

Areas considered “friendly” would have full (or nearly full) privileges of movement and commerce, with only spot checks by Block Wardens or others appointed for the purpose. There would be few checkpoints and even these would screen only persons obviously

from outside the “friendly” zone. Propaganda efforts would be “cohesive” in nature and aim at strengthening ties between the zone and the regime.

Areas considered “neutral” would be subject to careful Surveillance and Restrictive measures. Normally adjacent to guerrilla held zones, “neutral” areas can be offered a careful palette of incentives designed to persuade village or hamlet decision makers to choose the government side. As the insurgent infrastructure is identified and eliminated, the “neutral” areas gradually could be restored to “friendly” status and the population and resource controls relaxed by stages.

“Hostile” areas are to be kept firmly cordoned off from “friendly” and “neutral” areas and subjected to constant patrolling by small, fast-moving regime and allied military forces, raids by police, and intensive economic embargoes. Roads will be blocked off, water supplies shunted away, limits placed on food rations, and a variety of other punitive measures taken to weaken the villagers’ willingness to cooperate with insurgent cadres. Political warfare campaigns in these areas would be “divisive” and aim at fostering the people’s discontent with the guerrillas. Blame for the villagers’ difficulties would be placed on the guerrillas. At some point, it may be possible to induce the village elders to betray – or even apprehend – the key insurgent leaders in the village. When this occurs, the government side should immediately clear the roadblocks and take all reasonable measures to reward the villagers for their cooperation.

It will be seen at once that a core element of a comprehensive counterinsurgency program is what might be termed a “*strategy of incentives.*” *While critics might consider some measures taken to isolate “hostile” areas as “draconian,” it cannot be overemphasized that taking no punitive measures whatsoever merely aids the insurgents and says in effect that there are no negative consequences for supporting anti-government activities.*

Imposition of population and resource controls seeks to inhibit or deny insurgent access to vital sources of intelligence, manpower, food and medicine, safe haven, and so on. Controls are essential in order to separate the people from the insurgent infrastructure, much as a vaccination separates a patient from a potential infection.

At all times, care must be taken to explain the reasons for the controls, to explain the rules and regulations – along with penalties for those who violate them, and to publicize the consequences of cooperation or non-cooperation. As mentioned, “friendly” and “neutral-friendly” villages will enjoy privileges and reap tangible rewards for their cooperation. “Hostile” villages will be placed in disadvantageous circumstances and their conditions frankly made worse. The essence of a successful population and resource program is to establish powerful incentives, positive and negative, that will shape the villagers’ behavior.

Continuous propaganda should reinforce attitudes of cooperation on the part of “friendly” villages while demonstrating to recalcitrant villagers in “hostile” villages that as long as they support the anti-government movement, they will suffer the consequences. It may

take a long time for some villages to wake up to the costs and benefits, but some will probably take the hint fairly quickly.

22. Coping with riots and disturbances

The insurgent infrastructure can be expected to organize mass demonstrations and cause destructive riots either to provoke the regime into rash over-reaction or to instill fear in the people. Here the purpose is to gain wide attention – even international media coverage whenever possible – and to discredit the government-in-being. Moreover, in the sense that “worse is better,” insurgents hope to convey the impression that the regime is losing its grip and the people have no protection from mayhem and disorder.⁶⁶

Quite often, inept and repressive regimes play right into the hands of insurgent political warfare masters through heavy-handed, sometimes brutal, reactions. The insurgents merely set the stage, well aware of what an inept regime’s response will be.

In fairness, it should also be noted that insurgents historically are not above creating the alleged “regime brutality” through carefully concealed thuggery of their own. The terrible riots in Jalalabad following the Danish cartoon incident had the unmistakable element of planned thuggery – which included shooting into the crowd and pouring gasoline into certain buildings – to incite already excited crowds to frenzy. Here the political object clearly was to drive a wedge between the local people and the Kabul regime, painting it as a lackey of the “infidel” Americans and the “anti-Islamic” West generally. Months were required to rebuild good relations between U.S. forces in the area and local citizens.

Such activities must be uncovered through a combination of overt Block Wardens and clever offensive CI operations carried out by informants recruited in or near the insurgent infrastructure itself. With foreknowledge of enemy plans for demonstrations or other potentially destructive activities, the regime can block or defuse any such moves while using minimal force. Here again, brainpower is more effective than firepower.

It is vital that Riot Police and SWAT teams be well trained and disciplined so that they do not give the insurgents what they want – a wild over-reaction to their activities. Often a riot will cause untrained police to shoot into crowds or beat onlookers. These acts of brutality serve only to advance the insurgents’ political warfare effort to blacken the image of the regime. They rob the government-in-being of credibility and encourage many of the uncommitted to join or support the insurgent movement.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ It is worth noting that in order to weaken the Iraqi government, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi attempted to fan sectarian clashes between Sunnis and Shi’ites into a civil war. Fortunately, this effort failed. But had he succeeded in pushing the two sects far enough, the escalating violence would quickly have exceeded Baghdad’s limited capabilities to control the situation.

⁶⁷ The photo of the Saigon police chief summarily executing a VC during the Tet Offensive (1968) in Vietnam did irreparable harm to the regime’s image as being legitimate and law-abiding.

A key element of insurgent political warfare strategy is also to break the public support in foreign capitals for the local regime. In the case of Afghanistan, the Taliban understands that withdrawal of Western military forces and funding will cause the Kabul regime to collapse, just as the withdrawal of Soviet forces and aid brought about Najibullah's fall.

Raids may be necessary on illegal political gatherings, especially those used to foment street events such as violent demonstrations. Such raids should be carried out by police, not by soldiers, and should use the minimum amount of force required. Police have powers of arrest and are trained to collect evidence that may be used by prosecutors. By contrast, soldiers may only detain suspects and usually have no capability for carefully collecting and preserving evidence. While this distinction may not appear to be of great importance to the practitioner, an arrest signifies "criminal activity" with sentencing and jail time the result, whereas military detention gives the insurgent the appearance of legitimacy as an "enemy combatant."

When members of the insurgent infrastructure are taken into custody, they should be separated from their peers immediately and interrogated at once. In no case should captured members of the top leadership or infrastructure be kept together in common pens. Each cadre member should be treated as a respected opponent, as an individual. But isolated from all contact with their peers.

Bystanders injured in riots should be cared for immediately by the regime. Propaganda should be quickly disseminated about the "criminal intent" of the insurgents in causing the trouble that resulted in named persons being injured. The regime should follow this action by expressing sympathy for "victims of criminal activities" everywhere.

23. Bleeding away the enemy's strength

A key component of any counterinsurgency strategy is to bleed off its members. In any movement there always will be a hard core of totally committed members who will not under any circumstances surrender or defect. That said, most rank-and-file are not so committed and – offered a safe and suitable alternative – will leave insurgent ranks.⁶⁸ The regime should have in place a clear amnesty program that is well known to the public and to the insurgents.

The word "defector" carries with it a negative connotation. Since we want enemies to give up something "bad" for something much better, we must style those who come in under our attraction programs as "Ralliers." The criteria for these programs should be agreed upon and then widely publicized. In some programs a Safe Conduct pass or leaflet can be used to assure the Rallier of his personal safety when approaching government or allied police or security forces. Whatever the mechanism used, the Rallier

⁶⁸ Here we may put to good use the analyst's "ring" concept introduced in Part One concerning insurgent membership. The regime intelligence organization must, however, do extensive research and analysis of the composition of insurgent ranks and come up with valid "personality profiles" of the target audiences it hopes to attract. Appeals must vary since not all insurgents joined the movement for the same reason, and not all insurgents are motivated by the same things. One size does NOT fit all.

must understand that if he is willing to swear allegiance to the government and forswear anti-regime violence, he will be treated well and escape punishment for his past insurgent affiliation. Attraction programs used in Malaya and the Philippines are worthy of study.

What must be kept in mind is that for many guerrillas, warfare is a business and a way of earning their living. Often, not merely salaries, but housing and family benefits are tied to continued good performance in battling the regime's forces. Thus, a Rallier program based upon the assumption that a guerrilla will leave his employers to accept starvation and homelessness with the government is obviously unfounded. Programs must therefore offer tangible benefits such as housing and jobs, coupled with the regime's guarantee that Ralliers will be protected from insurgent retribution.

As noted in Part One, the life of a guerrilla in the bush is not an easy one, nor is the double life of members of the infrastructure in populated areas. If life becomes even more difficult for these insurgents, their vulnerability to an attraction program becomes greater. Like a magnet pulling at iron filings, if the magnetic force is great enough, and the filings are loosely aggregated and nearby, they will be attracted to the magnet. It is the job of a competent counterinsurgent program to increase the hardship and desperation of life "in the bush" while cranking up the magnetism to the highest level possible.

For an attraction program to work, it must be honestly and competently run, and discreet. Above all, it must live up to whatever "advertising" has been put forth on its behalf. It is the program's credibility that will cause it to succeed or to fail. If an insurgent who has become disenchanted with the movement can be 100% certain that he will be well treated by the regime and guaranteed to receive the benefits of the plan, he is much more likely to take the high risk of leaving the movement. And remember, for him this is literally a "life or death" decision.

If a small number of insurgents find that indeed they have been well treated and received the benefits, some may be willing to "go public" and make speeches or radio broadcasts. This in turn could bring in more defectors. If the trickle grows to a stream, the insurgent movement is seriously imperiled.

The benefits to the government-in-being of such a program are enormous. The obvious gain is that of intelligence on the insurgent movement – not merely what attacks a guerrilla unit is planning (that's purely military thinking again,) but its recruitment and training activities, problems of supply or logistics, political warfare programs and their successes or failures, personal squabbles among the leaders, and the state of morale of the rank-and-file among other topics. Not least, ralliers can disclose the insurgents' appraisal of popular attitudes in each hamlet or valley, and the villagers' reasons for support or disaffection. This information greatly aids our own Area Intelligence.

Area Intelligence can be put to immediate use by an imaginative and effective Psyop organization to pick open any "sores" in the insurgent movement, continue "divisive" campaigns to separate the insurgents from the people, tout the benefits of "rallying," and reassure the general populace of the inevitable victory of the regime and its friends.

But beyond intelligence and Psyop, the loss of a guerrilla fighter means the need for the insurgent movement to recruit, train, and equip a replacement. A loss puts an added strain on the already heavily burdened insurgent infrastructure. To the extent that pressure is put on insurgent manpower, this will be transmitted by the infrastructure to the people under its control. If these villagers already are losing patience with guerrilla recruiters, a step-up in recruitment to replace defected guerrillas could very well cause a break. That is, a “hostile” village may withdraw its support of the insurgents!

Not least, the leakage of intelligence to the regime and its allies will render insurgent operations more vulnerable to compromise and disruption, and the leaders of the movement will become increasingly paranoid and suspicious – with good reason – of their followers. The more paranoid the leaders become, the harsher will be the discipline for the rank-and-file. If the followers can be shown that there is a “double standard” for the top boys and for them, the insurgent movement’s foot soldiers will be all the more susceptible to your attraction program.

A Rallier program is especially likely to work where a community is fully involved and welcomes the Rallier back as its lost “prodigal son” returned home. A job and dwelling must be made immediately available, and every effort made – by the regime and the local community – to integrate the returnee into society. This was done in the Philippines under Magsaysay with help from Lansdale and Bohannon, and in Malaya under Sir Gerald Templer. The results speak for themselves.

There is one other point to be made. Publius Ovidius Naso observed that: “*We can learn even from our enemies.*”⁶⁹ Indeed we can, we should, and we must. Some Ralliers could be used to train regime – and even U.S. soldiers – in Taliban tactics and methods. Others could form a kind of “Kit Carson Scout” unit that would be a valuable tactical resource.⁷⁰ And if there are senior leaders who rally, they could instruct at the War College level on insurgent warfare. It’s quite clear that the War College needs it.

24. Do you want to help the insurgency grow?

We presume that the regime or the occupying power wishes to put a stop to the growth of the insurgency. Partly this can be done, as we’ve seen, by establishing honest, effective regime presence and administration in areas distant from the capital city. It is also partly accomplished by the various political reforms undertaken, the use of flexible tactics, and an imaginative Psyop program based on solid Area Intelligence.

And yet, all too often, this good work can be undone by our poor treatment of prisoners that actually helps foster the movement and promotes the growth of the insurgency.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Publius Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphoses IV*, 428. Ovid lived between 43 B.C. and 18 A.D.

⁷⁰ Col. Newsham notes that about half the members of the “Selous Scouts,” an effective counterinsurgency unit in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe,) had been ZANU or ZAPU insurgents.

⁷¹ The reader is directed to David Kilcullen’s book *The Accidental Guerrilla* for more on this subject.

We accept as a “given” that there will be significant numbers of insurgents, especially those who inhabit the innermost rings on our membership chart, who will never rally to the government side no matter what offer is made. We must confess that no matter how courteously and professionally we treat a captured *fanatic*, he will remain uncooperative. However, there are hundreds more who do not share the same degree of commitment to The Cause. As arrests are made, or our patrolling brings in captives, they normally will be placed in some kind of detention facility and the standard interrogations and processing completed.

What is often overlooked is the fact that prisons, concentration camps, and interrogation centers all are fertile recruiting grounds for the insurgent movement – just as they are, in many cases, for criminal groups. It might be argued that a prison such as Abu Gharaib in Iraq, or the detention facility at Bagram may have facilitated insurgent recruitment or reinforced extremist indoctrination rather than prevented same.

In the case of modern Afghanistan, Saudi-funded madrassas in Pakistan and elsewhere, and Islamic relief organizations inside the refugee camps have served to “spot and assess” promising young leaders for the Taliban or other insurgent movements. The madrassas, by teaching a severe and narrow form of Islam, also made possible the indoctrination of youth. The following two excerpts from Jacques Ellul serve to illustrate the power of religious indoctrination:

From then on, the individual in the clutches of such sociological propaganda believes that those who live this way are on the side of the angels, and those who don't are bad; those who have this conception of society are right, and those who have another conception are in error. Consequently, just as with ordinary propaganda, it is a matter of propagating behavior and myths both good and bad.⁷²

One of the most effective propaganda methods in Asia was to establish ‘teachers’ to teach reading and indoctrinate people *at the same time*. The prestige of the intellectual – ‘marked with God’s finger’ – allowed political assertions to appear as Truth, while the prestige of the printed word one learned to decipher confirmed the validity of what the teacher said. These facts leave no doubt that the development of primary education is a fundamental condition for the organization of propaganda.⁷³

Boys kept pretty much isolated in a Deobandi madrassa⁷⁴ for up to sixteen years, hearing the same shrill lessons again and again, and being repeatedly told the same reasons for Afghanistan’s ills, are highly likely to be thoroughly indoctrinated, perhaps permanently so. Arguably, this indoctrination helps shape their behavior.

When “true believers” (fanatics) are captured as men, whatever their cause may be – fascist, Communist, Islamist – we should recognize that they have enormous reserves of willpower and confidence that will cause them to cling to their beliefs even in prison. Moreover, if permitted to do so, they will share those beliefs with others and in some

⁷² Ellul, op cit., p. 65.

⁷³ Ellul, op cit., p. 110; italics are Ellul’s.

⁷⁴ The famous Dar-ul Uloom madrassa in Pakistan is merely the “West Point” of the Taliban. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of lesser madrassas – but teaching the same lessons of hatred. The “Deobandis” are Islamic clerics either trained in the mosque at Deoband or who subscribe to that brand of theology.

cases win them over as “converts.” The first step, therefore, is to prevent the hardcore from preaching to the less convinced. This should be done at once.

What is needed in this case is a careful review, prisoner by prisoner, of who should be sent to a “maximum” security facility, and who might be sent to one of several holding facilities of less severity. It is highly important to segregate quickly those who are in the outer rings of the insurgency from those who are hardcore. It is also important to recall the last of Mao’s Eight Points for Attention: *captives are to be well treated*.

The Communists developed what they called “re-education camps” for captured soldiers and bureaucrats of the fallen regime. South Vietnam after its fall in 1975 was a prime example. The idea of these camps was not so much to punish captured individuals as it was to indoctrinate them. The plan was to present careful “lessons” to the prisoners about the cause of the “liberation war,” colonialism, the vices of the overthrown regime, the virtues of the new system, and so on. It must be reported that many of those who graduated from these “re-education” programs completely changed their political and social views and accepted, in whole or in part, the New Teaching.⁷⁵

This approach could indeed be adapted to young Muslim men, if the right teachers are selected and a thoughtful, persuasive “curriculum” is followed. An ideal approach would be to have pro-regime mullahs, or better, Maulvis⁷⁶ teach or re-educate the prisoners and gradually re-shape their views. The object would be to have the captives understand with more clarity that Islam is not a severe, but a tolerant religion, that the regime has its faults, but is addressing those faults, that education and democracy are not anti-Islamic, and that the American and other allied forces are contributing positively to Afghanistan’s future. The goal is to substitute a new set of beliefs and attitudes for the old.

Yes, this is “re-education,” a concept that grates on American ears since it is so closely associated with the practices of our Communist foes. That said, it is a practical approach to weaning away some portion of the insurgents who might likely re-join the insurgency upon release. We have a choice: we can maltreat our prisoners or attempt to reach out to some of them. If we want to help the insurgency grow, then by all means maltreatment is in order. Then we will have to fight forever.

A better approach is one that turns enemies into friends, and transforms hostility into amity. Not so doing – and especially mistreating captives – merely allows old attitudes to survive and perhaps harden during the long months of captivity. Then you will be required once again to arrest, capture, or kill the man you could have befriended.

25. The Rules of Engagement

The Rules of Engagement must be carefully spelled out by commanders and must be understood and followed by even the rawest new rifleman. *And the Rules must above all*

⁷⁵ See the 1970 Phu Yen, Vietnam, case study included verbatim as Annex B.

⁷⁶ A *maulvi* is a religious elder of far greater stature than a *mullah*. A *maulvi* would be a “doctor of divinity” in the Christian sense. *Maulvis* (also known as *maulanas*) are highly respected for their learning.

support the political objective of the war – which is to gain and hold the support of the people, NOT to kill the greatest number of insurgents possible.

In an insurgency, the enemy often hides in and among the people. At times, it is true that some villages actively assist the insurgents and willingly cooperate with guerrilla tactical tricks designed to draw regime or allied forces into making rash and foolish attacks on populated areas. But at other times – perhaps the majority of cases – insurgents use neutral, or even pro-government villages, to further their political agenda by capitalizing upon your tactical blunders.

Insurgents have been known to sneak one or two fighters into Village X and wait there for a military aircraft to pass overhead or a patrol or convoy to pass through the village. Their orders are to fire a burst of automatic weapons fire, or perhaps an RPG, and then depart the area. The object of this tactic is to induce the regime or allied force to return fire immediately. When regime troops fire into the village, people are likely to be hurt or killed, and certainly the village will be shocked and dismayed. The guerrillas have long since disappeared, but the very instant that you touched the trigger to return fire they succeeded in their political mission – to separate the people from you. Nothing will turn a friend into your most bitter enemy faster than the shooting death of his relatives caused by you and your men. Indeed, Pashtun code – *Pashtunwali* – demands through “*badal*” that some revenge be taken on you.

Fire discipline is a matter of the highest order of importance in insurgencies.

We train our infantrymen to “return fire” immediately when fired upon. And this is a natural human instinct: when we are attacked, we instinctively strike back. But this is precisely what our enemies hope that we will do!

The problem is that in an insurgency, as opposed to a conventional war, the “incoming” is often not so much intended to kill our soldiers as it is to provoke us into using our overwhelming firepower to turn friendly villages into enemy strongholds. In a matter of a few minutes – through our unthinking, reflexive reaction, and injudicious use of our firepower – we do the insurgents’ work for them. Our after-action report will say that we won the engagement, but the truth is that we have lost the village. Put a more strategic way: as dupes, we have helped the insurgents gain and hold the support of the villagers – whom we alienated by our rash and foolish action.

What is required is a high order of self-restraint when we receive “incoming” from villages and populated areas. Platoon and squad leaders must resist the urge to return fire. Indeed, restraint and withholding fire goes against their training and even against human nature. But the wise leader must obey Hippocrates’ famous command: “*First, do no harm.*” The wise combat leader will at first do nothing, at least nothing rash that he will later come to regret and that indeed could result in international headlines and press condemnations of “genocide” and apologies for causing civilian deaths. The small unit commander must remember that a tiny village in present-day Afghanistan is not Peleliu

in 1943 where we immediately fired on anything that moved. Remember that it is brainpower, not firepower that wins the day.

Apart from ensuring that there are no friendly casualties from the RPG or burst of fire (and for the most part there will be none) the leader should first stop and think about the total situation in which he finds himself. The village did not fire on him; a couple of carefully planted shills did. And they probably are squirting out the back alleys into the surrounding fields and trees hoping to leave the villagers to face the terrible onslaught of unbridled American firepower. If the leader can send a fast-moving patrol around back of the village, he should do so. Or if there is a helicopter above the village, it should acquire visual contact with the shills and track them relentlessly to their spider hole.

But even if he cannot send a patrol, or if there is no air capability, the leader should do something far more important: *immediately seek out the village elders and hold an impromptu meeting with the council*. It is vastly more important that the leader and village elders reach an understanding about the security of the village and establish some level of rapport than it is to catch a couple of low-level squirts. Let them go. *The prize is the support of the village, not the capture or killing of a couple guerrillas.*⁷⁷

Our patrol leader should assure the village elders that Americans mean no harm to the villagers – indeed, quite the contrary – but that we seek to partner with the village council in protecting the people and their land from the insurgents.

If we are as good as we say, slowly by slowly we will gain the trust of the villagers. And this will be followed by their cooperation. When the villagers gain confidence in us as protectors and benefactors, they will share intelligence with us, perhaps even provide food and shelter in times of battle, and form part of the cordon that limits the ease of guerrilla maneuver and access to populated areas. If this can take place, we have moved one step closer to our goal of separating the people from the guerrillas.

Separating the people from the guerrillas is accomplished through patience, restraint, and friendship – not by firepower, and certainly not by “shock and awe” and tactical bravado. Rather, our victory is the village itself, and our success will not be measured in guerrilla “body counts,” but by the gratitude and active support of the people who live there.

26. Civic Action – Propaganda of the deed

As we have noted earlier, life in rural parts of the Third World is precarious. Indeed, it is a day-by-day thing. Disease, poverty, and famine are the constant companions of the peasant. Death, though grieved as elsewhere on the planet, is an every day event.

⁷⁷ The author wishes to make clear that he supports the right of a unit to defend itself – and to engage armed guerrillas tactically. However, the author holds that weapons only should be used when the unit can actually see its armed enemies. In those rare instances when guerrilla bands fight on hilltops or desert areas, well away from populated areas, the author has no objection to bringing firepower to bear. Even in these circumstances, however, use of arms must be sparing and highly focused.

Americans who have never lived in the Third World, or at least traveled there, cannot possibly comprehend the desperation of a peasant family caught in a war.

Let us imagine a group of 15-20 African tribesmen – men, women, and children – who are gathered around a pipe projecting from the ground and standing in the middle of a low, muddy pool of water. The pipe slowly bubbles water, perhaps from an artesian well. The pipe and the pool form the village’s sole somewhat unreliable water supply. The little group wades into the pool, the women with jars to collect water, some tribesmen cup their hands to drink, the children splash and play.⁷⁸

What is important to bear in mind is that even these tribesmen, living perhaps only two or three steps removed from our common hunter-gatherer ancestors of very ancient times, have political ideas. It may be that those ideas are ill formed and laced with tradition and myth, even prejudice. Certainly the thoughts and ideas of a tribesman will be vastly different from the political ideas of a Frenchman at St. Tropez, a Japanese who lives in Roppongi, or an American from Shaker Heights. But whatever may be their attitudes and thoughts, to the tribesmen, they have force and value. Their own political ideas are valid.

The point here is that Americans tend to bring their own values, attitudes, and opinions into the theater of war and tend – perhaps unconsciously – to form negative views toward local populations. A sociologist might call this “cultural chauvinism;” a man in the street would call it arrogance; a practitioner of insurgent warfare should call it butt-stupid.

Elite forces, such as the American Special Forces, the British Special Air Services, and similar French and other forces, understand that in insurgency it is important to leave the cultural baggage at home. Sadly, American regular (conventional) forces generally are not culturally sensitive and often – unwittingly – create problems for themselves.

Where there is a cultural gap of wide dimensions, the insurgent has a great advantage. The insurgent is homegrown. He speaks the language, and usually even the dialect of the local people. The insurgent may in fact be a “home town boy.” And as we all know, hometown boys – even bad boys – carry a lot of weight politically against “outsiders.”

A Western counterinsurgency force has an enormous cultural canyon to bridge. The first step, as noted, is to prepare a highly detailed Area Intelligence study that focuses on every aspect of the people in the Area of Operations. The second step is to take time to become familiar with the Elders, religious figures, merchants, teachers and the populace in general. Try to learn what concerns and issues are of highest interest to the local people. Pretend that you are a kind of “candidate” making the rounds before the election – because, in fact, that is precisely what you are.

Meet the people on their terms, not yours. Leave your American ideas at home. No one in your AO has heard of Tom Jefferson or the Fourteenth Amendment or the Freedom of Information Act or the “need” to brush your teeth and comb your hair. Locals are not

⁷⁸ Author witnessed this scene in a certain African country.

especially concerned with what is important to you; they are far more concerned with what affects their own lives and interests.

Civic action is a form of propaganda and political action. It is “propaganda of the deed” and is *prima facie* evidence – credible, tangible evidence – that the regime we are supporting actually is delivering services to the people. The best part of CivAc is that it involves the local people in a positive way that builds confidence and gives the people a sense of “ownership” in the project.

Always bear in mind that you are a guest, not the owner. If it is custom to take off one’s shoes before entering a home, do so unless your host bids you not to do so. If there are American women in your group, and you are in an Afghan village, our women will don headscarves and wear long sleeves when meeting with locals. If the chief of a Southeast Asian fishing village takes a piece of fish from his plate and puts it on yours, show your appreciation and eat that piece of fish with gusto despite your concern about germs.

Let’s go back to our African villagers and their water supply for a moment. The usual American response is: “*this is terrible; we will fix this situation right away.*” After all, if we found Americans living in squalor and standing in muddy water, wouldn’t we do all in our power to “fix the problem” right away?

Our typical response is to bring in bulldozers, drilling equipment, quality materials and – above all – our own skilled people, because, as we “know,” the only way to do a thing right is to do the work ourselves. Right?

Wrong.

We are guests, and our stay (hopefully) will be temporary. We are in the position of “playing God” when we take it upon ourselves to decide “what is right” for another people, and then proceed to “fix the problem” in a typically American fashion. This is one of the major flaws in the USAID approach, as that agency focuses on major projects such as highways that connect cities but do little for rural villagers. Moreover, USAID often hires foreign or Kabuli contractors with heavy equipment, not local men with shovels. The PRTs and local U.S. units occasionally fall into this same trap of deciding what the people “really need.”

The people themselves have both the right and the duty to address their own social, economic, and political issues, and to “fix problems” in their own fashion and in their own good time. Many well-intentioned civic action projects have foundered – not for lack of bulldozers and concrete – but due to our haste and lack of sensitivity to local interests, local opinions, local folkways. “*Here lies the man who tried to hurry the East,*” said Kipling.

T.E. Lawrence had this to say about working with Arabians in World War I: “*Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for*

them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is."⁷⁹ This astute observation applies to all aspects of working with foreigners of any country at any time.

The question becomes "*what is needed, by whom, why, and when.*" A political scientist will immediately recognize the similarity with Prof. Harold Lasswell's famous dictum that "*politics is how who gets what when.*" If the village council reaches a decision that a new well is needed, then and only then should American help be made available. For if Americans dig a well without local approval and participation, it is patently absurd to then expect locals to be overjoyed with "what we have done for them." Thirty local men working with shovels at a dollar a day for a month on a jirga-approved project is a far better bargain than one American driving a bulldozer for six hours on one day on a USAID project approved by Washington. Think about it.

Always bear in mind our own understanding of the value we place on things we make with our own hands versus things that are given to us. People in Third World societies do appreciate gifts, that's true. However, *non-Western communities will fight like banshees to guard what they themselves have harvested, built or created. This principle is central to the conduct of all civic action.*

When Americans build something for the locals, with little local involvement, there will probably be a nice ribbon cutting ceremony with little community interest. But where the locals have built something (perhaps with American help) the community has a unique sense of pride, "ownership" and accomplishment. These psychological factors come into play when insurgents enter the village and destroy what the people themselves have created. In the cruel logic of insurgency, while the destruction of a school or clinic built by the locals is a military defeat, it is a political victory. That is because the local people will never forgive the insurgents this insult. No amount of Taliban persuasion or threat can undo their deed of destroying what the community perceives as its own work.

The object that must always be kept in mind is that projects such as wells, markets or roads serve two purposes. They are undertaken so that Americans, and our regime allies, will have prolonged positive contact with the local people, and they are undertaken to fill a need recognized by the community itself. In this way, the community begins to perceive value in the presence of the occupying force and the government-in-being. The locals also gain an appreciation of what can be accomplished by partnership, and a major step forward will have been taken toward gaining their political allegiance and active support.

It is also worth noting that a village by village micro-strategy – again part of a "strategy of incentives" based upon solid Area Intelligence – has more value in counterinsurgency than does strengthening ministries in Kabul:

The United States and others in the international community have focused the bulk of their efforts since 2001 in trying to create a strong central government capable of

⁷⁹ T.E. Lawrence, The 27 Articles of T.E. Lawrence, art. 15.

establishing security and delivering services. This goal is ahistorical in Afghanistan and it is not likely to be effective.

The most effective bottom-up strategy in Afghanistan is likely to be one that taps into already-existing local institutions in two ways: by helping legitimate local actors provide security and services to their populations, and by better connecting them to the central government when necessary. A bottom-up strategy should be deeply inter-linked with counterinsurgency goals, especially in recognizing that the local population – including their security – should be the center of gravity. Local tribal and religious leaders best understand their community needs, but need help in delivering services. In some areas they also need security, since many have been killed by insurgent groups or forced to flee to urban areas. If organized and run appropriately, village- and district-level institutions that include legitimate local actors can effectively (a) assess local needs, (b) design aid programs to meet those needs, (c) help ensure sufficient security for their projects and their constituents, and (d) monitor the adequate completion of programs.⁸⁰

There is one other consideration. Before undertaking any project whatsoever, we must carefully assess its impact on local power and status relationships. The question is not necessarily one of wealth. Obviously, a man who has no cattle would be happy with one cow, even happier with two. A man with no land would be delighted to get a small plot, ecstatic to get an acre of prime farmland. Another man living in a tent would be pleased to have a hovel, and enormously grateful to have a small, but neat cottage with a vegetable garden. These are obvious.

What may be less obvious are the unintended consequences stemming from an attempt to be helpful, to fix problems, to help the community. Helping one sub-tribe or small group may stir the envy of another similar group.⁸¹ Conceivably, by fixing the school that has been burned rather than the madrassa that is merely falling into ruin, we might inadvertently send the message that we were “for” secularism and “against” Islamic learning. Such may not have been our intention, but may nonetheless be the way our “help” is interpreted. Unintended consequences must be identified and seriously considered. To the extent that we can follow Pogo’s advice to “*think ahead to put trouble behind,*”⁸² we are very well advised to do so. In the vast majority of cases, if you listen to the village or tribal council, you cannot make a cultural or political misstep.

We come back then to the point raised at the beginning of this section – *the ability to see people and events through local eyes rather than through our own*. When evaluating a proposal, we should make every effort to use as our yardstick, not American values or attitudes, but those of the local population. For only their perspective really matters.

27. Exploiting tactical success

The challenge for the government side is to be prepared to move rapidly into areas changing sides in favor of the regime. No time must be lost in doing this. Should

⁸⁰ Seth G. Jones, op. cit., p. 7.

⁸¹ Of course, if your intention is to stir the envy of a presently “hostile” village or group, so as to cause them to dump their insurgent allies and come to your side, that is a cogent political use of envy. Just make sure that you do not fall into the trap of inadvertently stirring envy or controversy through lack of foresight.

⁸² Wisdom from the 1950s cartoon strip, “Pogo.”

villagers hand over insurgent cadres to the government, they must be rewarded at once for their cooperation. Careful assessment of a village's needs (through Area Intelligence) also enables the regime to stand ready to meet those needs at the appropriate moment.

Importantly, each village and hamlet in the "friendly" category must have the means of defending itself. Not to have a home guard or self-defense force is first of all demeaning in a culture such as that of the Pashtuns. But beyond the cultural dimension, a self-defense force can slow insurgent attempts at penetrating into new areas, it can serve as a trip wire until constabulary or allied forces can arrive in numbers, and it affords at least some modicum of protection to village authorities and any resident government officials. An excellent case study of the successful use of such village "*auto-defensa*" units was that of General Rios-Montt in Guatemala in 1983. His use of local auxiliaries freed the regular army to conduct offensive patrols into areas held by the Communist ORPA and EGP movements in the western highlands of Guatemala. Though there were some setbacks, in the majority of cases the villagers were able to look after their own defense with only occasional help from the Guatemalan army. This also fostered a real sense of partnership between the villagers and the army and was a source of pride to all.

If a "strategy of incentives" is implemented with patience and persistence, the area open to the insurgents will begin to contract. Helped along by continuous raids and patrols into zones the insurgent believes "secure," Population and Resource controls will extend permanent political control village by village, precinct by precinct. With time, the guerrillas will have no secure base areas, no sources of food or intelligence, and no opportunity to recruit new supporters. At that point, for all intents and purposes, with government authority restored, the insurgency is defeated.

Closing Thoughts for Part Two

Military forces alone are incapable of defeating an insurgent movement having deep roots in the people and having as its adversary a regime that commands no respect at home and little support abroad. What is required is a strong central political idea and a leader who can capture the people's imagination, broad reforms that include sharply improved administration, and well-conceived security programs that are conducted professionally and rigorously, but always with impartiality and due regard for the people's rights.

To carry out an effective counterinsurgency program, it is essential that war planning cells bind civilian and military members with their respective skills and authorities into one unified effort. Plans cells will ideally include specialists in intelligence, psychological operations, security, and public administration all of whom shall have equal clearances and equal voices in planning and decision-making.

The basis upon which a successful strategy rests is in-depth Area Intelligence that assesses all aspects of the situation, not merely military factors. Daily analyses must examine trends in cultural, political, economic, sociological, and many other aspects down to the "precinct" level. Intelligence must "see all that is there" and keep the War Executive team well informed as to what the people are thinking and why. Intelligence

must be shared with all parts of the civil – military team. Area Intelligence must be used to identify “friendly, neutral, and hostile” hamlets and villages that will help shape the actions we take to frame a “strategy of incentives” designed for each locality.

The defining feature of “low intensity” conflict is decentralization of tactical operations and central focus on mobilizing the political support of the people. This is a “captain’s war” and generals must understand that conditions in one valley may be completely different from the next valley – hence, the proper business of the most innovative and adaptable captains and senior NCOs. Generals must thus learn to be good “support personnel,” place more trust and considerable authority in the hands of their captains, and suppress the temptation to “meddle.” All forward deployed companies should have a miniature “S-2 shop” so that there is less need for company commanders to routinely rely on battalion S-2 staffs for immediate intelligence support. All key personnel should receive at least some basic language and area training before deploying to theater.

The tools at the disposal of counterinsurgency forces are principally those of population and resource controls that strive to separate the insurgents from the people. Also vital to success is a highly sophisticated – and omni-present – propaganda effort based on thorough and penetrating analyses of the various target audiences in the AO. Soldiers must be trained as low-level intelligence collectors and propagandists, and units must also acquire police and investigative skills while leaving off with midnight door kicking. Special attention must be given to proper and disciplined methods for dealing with riots and disturbances so that our mistakes do not play into the hands of the insurgents. A meaningful “Rallier” program can bleed off insurgent strength and, cleverly used, can bolster counterinsurgent skills and capabilities. Not least, prisoners – even hardcore leaders – are to be treated with respect. A “re-education” program should be undertaken to reduce recidivism and thereby obviate the need to repeatedly kill or capture the same men. These features are used in tailored micro-strategies appropriate to precincts.

Every effort should be made to include Afghan security forces into the overall effort. If patrolling is contemplated, the patrol should be conducted with a “mixed” force – not an “all-U.S.” force. Afghan troops should be encouraged to retrain as true counterinsurgent forces, not as sedentary garrison troops that add little or nothing to local security. There should be an “Afghan face” in each military and especially civil activity.

The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) are the truly unique and great innovation of the American effort in Afghanistan. They are close to the people and generally have both the respect of the local people and the capability to affect their lives in a positive way. As long as Civic Action is practiced with a political object in mind, and our efforts – whether by front line units, the PRTs, or USAID – closely conform to the wishes of the local people, CivAc will be a major propaganda asset.

There is a serious lag in both development of doctrine and training of military personnel to understand and deal effectively with insurgency. Although FM 3-24 is an important and valuable step in the right direction, it is merely a first step. Western military minds

must learn not to apply “Clausewitzian” conventional warfare concepts to what is a fundamentally different kind of war, namely “The People in Arms.”

END OF PART TWO

ANNEX A: Precepts for consideration and debate

- ❑ If we should have to fight, we should be prepared to do so from the neck up instead of from the neck down.
- ❑ Where governmental authority is respected and popularly accepted, and administration is fair and effective, insurgencies are unlikely to appear – or if they do appear, they will quickly expire for lack of general support. Where governmental authority is neither respected nor popularly accepted, and administration is corrupt and ineffective, insurgencies are more likely to appear – and if they do appear, may prosper if they gain widespread support.
- ❑ War is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.
- ❑ Power is based on opinion. What is a government not supported by opinion? Nothing.
- ❑ Insurgency is armed competition between two or more groups for the political allegiance and support of the people.
- ❑ Those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable.
- ❑ People will only fight for what is inside them and what they believe, and we must give them something to believe.
- ❑ Armament is an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor. Man, not material, forms the decisive factor.
- ❑ A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both.
- ❑ The defining feature of “low intensity” conflict is its decentralization of tactical operations and its central focus on mobilizing the support of the people.
- ❑ If the people are for you, you cannot lose, but if the people are against you, you cannot win.
- ❑ Where the regime is unwilling or unable to help the ordinary citizen, even meager help by a resistance movement binds his loyalty.
- ❑ Effective regime administration will bind the majority of citizens.
- ❑ If an insurgency is to be countered, it must first be understood.
- ❑ Think ahead to put trouble behind.

ANNEX B: VC political mobilization in Phu Yen Province, Vietnam

The following material is reprinted verbatim from an article written by George McArthur of the Los Angeles Times that appeared in 1970 in the Pacific Stars and Stripes. The author, then stationed in Binh Dinh Province immediately north of Phu Yen, had been grasping for some understanding of the reasons for Communist success in insurgency despite overwhelming American military power. McArthur's article gave insight into Viet Cong methods, especially as they relate to building political power through careful indoctrination at the grassroots level.

Because the article describes what happened in Phu Yen in late 1969 and early 1970 to reverse completely what the U.S. command in Saigon had believed was "pacification" of that province, it stands as a model against which other insurgent efforts at indoctrination and political mobilization may be compared.

George McArthur, "Phu Yen – Province That 'Went to Sleep'" Los Angeles Times, reprinted in Pacific Stars and Stripes, 10 April 1970

TUY HOA, Vietnam – In recent weeks, a rejuvenated Communist guerrilla force in Phu Yen Province has been slipping down by night from the foothills overlooking the verdant coastal plain and abducting – with little or no resistance – about 400 men.

In the official language of this war they were "abducted," but the word is not entirely accurate. All of them may or may not have been taken by force. Some have come back not at all displeased at having been given Communist indoctrination.

And although the more or less official number is 400, it may well have been higher. Such things frequently do not get reported in South Vietnam.

The precise number is hardly significant. It is significant that the abductions met with little resistance, if any, and that they were done on such a scale right under the noses of militia forces well enough armed and supposedly strong enough to curb such things.

In short, the abductions indicate that the war is going badly in Phu Yen Province, a test area for the "Vietnamization" process where the confrontation is largely between old-fashioned Communist guerrilla forces and militia of the Saigon government.

This is not to say that Phu Yen Province is going down the drain or that the reversal has been total. It is evident, however, that Saigon's forces have suffered one of those setbacks which Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird warned were inevitable. And although U.S. and top South Vietnamese officials in Saigon are well aware of the erosion in Phu Yen, measures to restore the situation are not in sight.

The difficulties of accurately judging what is happening in Vietnam are indicated by the situation in Phu Yen. Recently it was 14th from the top of South Vietnam's 45 provinces on the Saigon pacification scale. Nowadays, one expert said, it is one of the three or four worst.

Midway up the coast between the Mekong Delta and the 17th Parallel, Phu Yen's white-sand beaches, ocean breezes and languid palms arouse visions of South Sea delights. Fat cows and chubby youngsters wander through seemingly placid villages. There is enough rice and fish for the 300,000 population.

Although the province was an oldtime Viet Cong stronghold, it seemed until late last year to be approaching surprising pacification. All the statistical indicators pointed in the right direction.

Then, one official recalled, "The rains came and everyone went to sleep." There was 21 inches of rain on one night alone last October {ed. 1969}. Nobody wanted to fight. By the end of the year the Communist force in the hills had quietly changed its tactics, however, adapting to the political warfare and small-unit maneuvers now called for.

The abductions began in earnest during early February. With evident ease, small guerrilla bands slipped through militia outposts and areas where ambushes were supposedly set up.

Of the 400 men and boys abducted, about half or more have come back. They told South Vietnamese interrogators they were held four or five days for indoctrination by the Viet Cong. Many have reportedly totally accepted the Communist version of the war and the accusation that the Saigon government is a puppet.

Several explanations for the abductions were offered. But the most significant is that the Communist command is seeking out soft spots in South Vietnam to win "defectors" and then leave them to influence future political developments.

ANNEX C: Why political warfare and propaganda are effective

This Annex draws heavily on the thought of Jacques Ellul, French theologian, member of the French Resistance during World War II and former Marxist. The author considers Ellul to be the preeminent authority on propaganda and its power to motivate large groups of people. Ellul witnessed the rise of Russian Communism (he was originally a Marxist) and Hitler's triumph in Germany. Ellul's book: Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes, should be read cover to cover by anyone who wishes to understand the psychological basis of insurgency and methods of persuasion. He draws on examples from several countries, to include Mao's political mobilization and American advertising.

In this Annex, my purpose is to help the reader better understand the Taliban mindset by using Ellul's observations as if they were images projected on a wall, interspersed with a framework that hopefully will set in context the reasons for propaganda's power. In my view, the indoctrination process of the Taliban mirrors almost exactly the models put forward by Ellul which were drawn from Communist and fascist examples.

The typical American tendency is to blow off propaganda as "lies, hot air, and of no importance." As the reader will see, this view is tragically far off the mark. The great movements of the twentieth century – to include even American commercial and political "advertising" – are all built, more or less, on attitude formation described by Ellul. Good propaganda is based on what is credible, verifiable, and appropriately addressed to the needs of a particular individual or group. But a key aspect of propaganda's effectiveness is its need to completely saturate the target audience and pitch messages to the audience's level of understanding and his psychology. Our domestic propaganda does this very well indeed. But our overseas effort is anemic – a joke, at best.

We must first start with a general theory of motivation formulated by Abraham Maslow, an eminent psychologist. Maslow stated that when the needs of a person or group are given an appropriate incentive, action would follow. His formula is written: $N + I = A$. An example would be a hungry man who is told that if he sweeps floors for two hours he will be given a hot meal. The man's desire (need) is for food. The incentive is the offer of a hot meal in exchange for two hours' work. The action is a well-swept floor.

Taking a half step sideways, as we begin to explore what Ellul has to say about the power of propaganda, we might think of this process in three steps:

Explanation → Justification → Action

For propaganda to find fertile soil, it must first of all provide cogent explanations that are credible and expressed in language appropriate to a target audience aware of a problem. If the *explanation* of the cause (or impact) of a perceived problem lacks credibility, there is no possibility that effective persuasion, much less action, will take place. Therefore a propagandist must follow a two-step process: *understand in detail the problem itself, and carefully analyze his intended target audience.*

Here are two quotations from Ellul regarding the nature of explanations:

“The news is only about trouble, danger, and problems. This gives [the ordinary] man the notion that he lives in a terrible and frightening era, that he lives amid catastrophes in a world where everything threatens his safety. Man cannot stand this; he cannot live in an absurd and incoherent world nor can he accept the idea that the problems, which sprout all around him, cannot be solved, or that he himself has no value as an individual and is subject to the turn of events. He needs explanations and comprehensive answers to general problems; he needs coherence. And he needs an affirmation of his own worth. *And the more complicated the problems are, the more simple the explanations must be; the more fragmented the canvas, the simpler the pattern; the more difficult the question, the more all-embracing the solution; the more menacing the reduction of his own worth, the greater the need for boosting his ego.* All this propaganda—and only propaganda—can give him.” (145-6)

“Man modified in this fashion demands simple solutions, catchwords, certainties, continuity, commitment, a clear and simple division of the world into Good and Evil, efficiency, and unity of thought. He cannot bear ambiguity. He cannot bear that the opponent should in any way whatever represent what is right or good.” (255)

Ellul notes that the human demand to “understand” the problems he faces is universal. Educated persons have the ability to do their own research, to make inquiries, read and attend meetings and lectures. Intellectuals are thus somewhat “self-propagandizing.” By contrast, persons with little education have little ability to seek out explanations through independent study and may lack an inquiring and dispassionate mind. Therefore, these people are given the simple solutions and catch phrases like: “Land – Peace – Bread” that were indeed sufficient to motivate hungry and landless Russian peasants in World War I. *It should be noted that the teaching in the madrassas also aims at providing explanations of the world’s ills – and assigns blame for those ills – thereby shaping malleable, captive minds of the youths who are often kept for years in these institutions.*

“Once propaganda begins to utilize and direct an individual’s hatreds, he no longer has any chance to retreat, to reduce his animosities, or to seek reconciliation with his opponents. Moreover, he now has a supply of ready-made judgments where he had only some vague notions before the propaganda set in; and those [ready-made] judgments permit him to face any situation. He will never again have reason to change judgments that he will thereafter consider the one and only truth.” (162-3)

“[Propaganda] creates a man who is suited to a totalitarian society, who is not at ease except when integrated in the mass, who rejects critical judgments, choices, and differentiations because he clings to clear certainties. He is a man assimilated into uniform groups and wants it that way.” (256)

“A man who...is subjected to propaganda is being drained of the democratic content itself--... understanding of others, respect for minorities, re-examination of his own opinions, absence of dogmatism.” (256)

“The more an individual participates in the society in which he lives, the more he will cling to stereotyped symbols expressing collective notions about the past and future of his group. The more stereotypes in a culture, the easier it is to form public opinion, and the more an individual participates in that culture, the more susceptible he becomes to the manipulation of these symbols.” (111)

Ellul then moves to the “second stage” of the propaganda process: justification. Ellul states that it is absolutely vital for a propagandee to be convinced that what he does and what he believes are completely correct, and that he is fully justified in taking whatever action is demanded of him to “eliminate evil.” This justification may amount to little more than a rationalization of his actions, but it is essential that the individual have it.

“Finally, propaganda gave him justification. The individual needs to have this justification constantly renewed. *He needs it in some form at every step, for every action, as a guarantee that he is on the right path.* When propaganda ceases, he loses his justification; he no longer has confidence in himself. He feels guilty because under the influence of propaganda he performed deeds that he now dreads or for which he is remorseful. Thus he has even more need for justification. And he plunges into despair when propaganda ceases to provide him with the certainty of his justice and his motives.” (185)

“Such an individual will have rationalizations not only for past actions, but for the future as well. He marches forward with full assurance of his righteousness. He is formidable ... because it is very difficult to break his harness of justifications.” (165)

“... propaganda will permit what so far was prohibited, such as hatred, which is a dangerous and destructive feeling and fought by society. But man always has a certain need to hate, just as he hides in his heart the urge to kill. Propaganda offers him an object of hatred, for all propaganda is aimed at an enemy. [Propaganda thus displaces and liberates feelings of aggression by offering specific objects of hatred to the citizen; this generally suffices to channelize passion.] *And the hatred it offers him is not shameful, evil hatred that he must hide, but a legitimate hatred, which he can justly feel. Moreover, propaganda points out enemies that must be slain, transforming crime into a praiseworthy act.*” (152)

“It is extremely easy to launch a revolutionary movement based on hatred of a particular enemy. Hatred is probably the most spontaneous and common sentiment; it consists of attributing one’s misfortunes and sins to “another,” who must be killed in order to assure the disappearance of those misfortunes and sins.” (73)

“First, man needs to be right in his own eyes. He must be able to assert that he is right, that he does what he should, that he is worthy of his own respect. Then, man needs to be right in the eyes of those around him, his family, his milieu, his co-workers, his friends, his country. Finally, he feels the need to belong to a group, which he considers right and which he can proclaim as just, noble, and good. But that righteousness is not absolute righteousness, true and authentic justice. What matters is not to *be* just, or to *act* just, or that the group to which one belongs *is* just—but to *seem* just, to find reasons for asserting that one is just, and to have these reasons shared by one’s audience.” (155)

In Ellul’s view, if the explanations offered are understood and accepted, and if the individual comes to feel himself fully justified in taking the action directed, the next step – action – is the endpoint desired by the propagandist.

“Seen in this perspective, action is the result of a certain number of coordinated influences created by propaganda. [One must offer the individual a specific, clear, simple task to be undertaken at a given moment. From the moment propaganda succeeds in personalizing its appeal, the individual who feels concerned is placed in a situation that demands a decision.] Propaganda can make the individual feel the urgency, the necessity, of some action, its unique character. And at the same time propaganda shows him what to do. *The individual who burns with desire for action but does not know what to do is a common type in our society. He wants to act for the sake of justice, peace, progress, but does not know how. If propaganda can show him this “how,” it has won the game: action will surely follow.*” (209)

“The individual also must be convinced of the success of his action, or of the possible reward or satisfaction he will get from it. *Man will act when he feels that a certain result needs to be obtained and that the need is urgent.* Advertising demonstrates it to him in the commercial domain; propaganda demonstrates it in politics. Finally, man will be helped in this progression to action by example, by similar action all around him. But such similar action would not come to his attention except through the intermediary of propaganda.” (209)

“The man of whom such super-sacrifices are demanded finds himself in the middle of an incessant world conflict, pushed to the very limit of his nervous and mental endurance, and in a sort of constant preparation for ultimate sacrifice. He cannot live this way unless sustained by powerful motivations, which he will not find either inside himself, or spontaneously. Obviously, some simple ‘information’ on the international situation or on the need to defend one’s country is insufficient here. *Man must be plunged into a mystical atmosphere, he must be given strong enough impulses as well as good enough reasons for his sacrifices, and, at the same time, a drug that will sustain his nerves and his morale.* *Only propaganda can put man into a state of nervous endurance that will permit him to face the tension of war.*” (142-3)

Although Ellul probably had in mind the National Socialist (Nazi) political mobilization of Germany prior to 1939, and the “mystique” that was fostered to give a near-religious aura to Hitler and to Nazism, the author believes that the above-cited passages may also be applied to groups of Islamic extremists like the Taliban, as well as to extremists of other stripes.

Propaganda may also be used to weaken, divide or demoralize one’s adversaries. This is especially true where the opponent’s views are weakly held, confused, or filled with doubt and disillusionment. Where a target audience is vulnerable psychologically, a well-planned campaign may cause it to withdraw from its current allegiance and possibly impel that audience to transfer its allegiance. This is the basis for a “divisive” effort.

“We have seen the strength propaganda develops when it furnishes the individual a feeling of security and righteousness. But propaganda also stimulates guilt feelings. In fact, to develop such feelings is its principal objective when it addresses a hostile group. *Propaganda seeks to deprive the enemy of confidence in the justice of his own cause, his country, his army, and his group, for the man who feels guilty loses his effectiveness and his desire to fight. To convince a man that those on his side, if not he himself, commit immoral and unjust acts is to bring on the disintegration of the group to which he belongs.*” (189)

“But propaganda can also destroy the group, break it up—for example, by stimulating contradictions between feelings of justice and of loyalty, by destroying confidence in the accustomed sources of information, by modifying standards of judgment, by exaggerating each crisis and conflict, or by setting groups against each other.” (190)

The above sequence of “Explanation – Justification – Action” illustrates the probable method used by many extremists to motivate followers to act in ways that “normal” people would not. The Deobandi approach to shaping young minds fits this paradigm exactly. The author believes that the only way to undo “programming” of a true believer is through an adaptation of “re-education.”

Turning now to the tools of the trade, Ellul notes that to be effective, propaganda must be total. That is, it must saturate and penetrate the mind of the target. Although Americans

routinely deny that this happens to them, commercial advertising strives for just such a goal. “Branding” is extremely important as a tool; the “memorization” of certain jingles and slogans likewise; and also symbols (eg. “the Golden Arches”) play a vital role. The commercial use of propaganda by Madison Avenue makes use of the very same methods as does a mullah in a madrassa.

“Propaganda must be total. The propagandist must utilize all of the technical means at his disposal—the press, radio, TV, movies, posters, meetings, door-to-door canvassing. Modern propaganda must utilize all of these media. There is no propaganda as long as one makes use, in sporadic fashion and at random, of a newspaper article here, a poster or a radio program there, organizes a few meetings and lectures, writes a few slogans on walls; that is not propaganda.” (9)

“Propaganda must be continuous and lasting—continuous in that it must not leave any gaps, but must fill the citizen’s whole day and all his days; lasting in that it must function over a very long period of time. Propaganda tends to make the individual live in a separate world; he must not have outside points of reference. He must not be allowed a moment of meditation or reflection in which to see himself vis-à-vis the propagandist, as happens when the propaganda is not continuous. At that moment the individual emerges from the grip of propaganda. *Instead, successful propaganda will occupy every moment of the individual’s life:* through posters and loudspeakers when he is out walking, through radio and newspapers at home, through meetings and movies in the evening. The individual must not be allowed to recover, to collect himself, to remain untouched by propaganda during any relatively long period, *for propaganda is not the touch of a magic wand. It is based on slow, constant impregnation.*” (17)

As can readily be understood, sporadic and disconnected efforts will not persuade anyone of anything. Seen in this light, the poorly conceived U.S. Army and CIA propaganda effort in Afghanistan attempting to denigrate the Taliban is laughable, even pathetic. And the Kabul regime has no real propaganda effort at all – of course, it has no message to project. As matters currently stand, the Taliban has the propaganda field all to itself.

To conclude this Annex on propaganda warfare, we should examine the following three observations by Ellul. These observations concern themselves with the reasons for the success or failure of a propaganda campaign. Ellul’s views may be applied equally to commercial propaganda (“advertising”) or to political campaigns, such as that conducted in the United States in 2008:

“[Propaganda] not only reflects myths and presuppositions, it hardens them, sharpens them, [and] invests them with the power of shock and action.” (41)

“An analysis of propaganda therefore shows that it succeeds primarily because it corresponds exactly to a need of the masses. Let us remember just two aspects of this: the need for explanations and the need for values....” (146)

“The secret of propaganda success or failure is this: Has it or has it not satisfied the unconscious need of the individual whom it addressed? No propaganda can have an effect unless it is needed, though the need may not be expressed as such but remain unconscious.” (139)

All people are predisposed by their experience or situation toward certain attitudes and preferences. That is why the American world features Democrats and Republicans, Ford fans and Chevrolet devotees, cat-lovers and dog fanciers. What Ellul is saying is that to be effective propaganda must take all this and more into account. Messages that are designed for Democrats who drive Chevrolets and love cats must necessarily be couched in different terms from those used to motivate Republicans who drive Fords and have

their dog in the back seat. Rigorous analysis of one's target audience is a must. It goes almost without saying that neither the U.S. Army nor the CIA does detailed, in-depth target audience analysis before disseminating its "propaganda."

Ellul's final word also bears careful consideration. Since in-depth knowledge of the intended target audience is required for propaganda to be effective, it is probably a good bet that persons from that audience are the ones most knowledgeable of its pre-existing preferences, attitudes, and needs. Here the Kabul government bears a considerable share of responsibility for the ultimate success or failure of the overall propaganda effort, for it is the Afghans themselves who are in the best position to speak persuasively to other Afghans. Indeed, no matter how skilled he may be, no foreigner can do a better job.

"We are really facing here the greatest obstacle to psychological action: it can be fully effective only in the hands of nationals addressing themselves to their fellow citizens." (298)

For the last time we now revisit Jean Monnet's ringing observation: "*People will only fight for what is inside them and what they believe, and we must give them something to believe.*"

ANNEX D: Learning to see ourselves as others (may wish to) see us

Many American military men are all but blind when it comes to analyzing the political messages carried in insurgent propaganda. The usual reaction is to sneer at such messages and dismiss them as “the usual lies.” Seldom do commanders – or even trained Psyop officers – take enemy propaganda seriously and conduct the thorough analysis called for. The enemy’s output is ignored...and therefore remains invisible to us.

By not studying carefully what the enemy is saying about us, we may never become aware of our own failings, weak points, and vulnerabilities. But that doesn’t prevent others from seeing our warts and imperfections clearly enough.

The renowned Scottish poet Robert Burns once quipped, “*Oh wad some pow’r the Giftie gie us, to see Oursels as Others see us! It wad frae monie a blunder free us, An’ foolish notion.*”⁸³ Wouldn’t it be nice to try to see ourselves as others see us, at least once in a while? And would you not agree that it is vital to see the image of ourselves that our enemies try to paint? I think it important to view ourselves in the mirror coldly and objectively because, in many cases, the unfortunate fact of the matter is that our deeds and our words play directly into the hands of the clever enemy Psyop staffs. Our mistakes and cultural insensitivity give credibility to enemy propaganda! We are handing the Taliban the very “ammunition” they need to kill us.

Those who persist in viewing the Taliban as illiterate ragamuffins who have become stuck in the 13th century are setting themselves up for a truly colossal fall. The average guerrilla fighter may not have a Ph.D. from Yale, but in his own way he is smart and clever. *But it is the insurgent infrastructure where the real brainpower is found. It is a fact that some of these folks are Western educated, media savvy, and technically adept.*

The political warfare cadres serving today’s Taliban are developing a new “persona” from the ashes of the old Taliban. While preserving the political core which centers on a strict interpretation of Islam of the Deobandi school, the Taliban are now transforming their image into that of a “national liberation army” struggling to oust “foreign invaders” and their “puppet government.” Thus, two powerful themes are being blended into one attractive package: the legitimacy of God’s Word and the age-old “call to arms” against “foreign invaders” regardless of their national origin.

The Taliban argument is that Americans and their allies – now branded as “new Russians” – have invaded Afghanistan and installed the Karzai regime to rule over Afghans just as the Soviets invaded a generation earlier and set up a puppet or two. Here the image is of “infidels” ruling over Muslims (anathema to Islamic belief) and imposing a witches’ brew of Christianity, naked women, Western clothes and customs, booze and pornography, and – worst of all – what the Taliban damns as the “American democracy of bombs.” Violence, depravity, and exploitation are the only possible outcomes of alien political institutions imposed from Europe by the Bonn Agreement.

⁸³ Robert Burns [1759-1796], “To a Louse,” stanza 8; 1786

While we might recoil from this picture as unwarranted distortion, there is sufficient truth to it in Afghan eyes to give a measure of credibility to Taliban propaganda – hence to their political line.

Our enemies also take pleasure in touting the line that Americans are disrespectful of Afghan culture and beliefs. They highlight instances of U.S. forces forcibly entering the homes of ordinary Afghans, trashing the family's belongings, and even manhandling the women of the household (a cardinal violation of Islam and Pashtun Code.) The Taliban lose no time in publicizing incidents involving the Coalition's killing of civilians. Do we see an element of truth here – however painful it might be to admit it?

As American bombs obliterate Afghan homes, the Taliban rejoices since it knows that with each bomb its eventual victory over the “invaders” draws nearer.

Let us now take a journey into the world of the ordinary Afghan who receives both American 500 lb. bombs and Taliban persuasive messages:

In volatile Helmand Province, in the south of Afghanistan, Ahmadullah, 23, told IRIN that siding with the insurgents against the weak administration of Hamid Karzai and his Western supporters had become an indisputable personal commitment for him. “I lost my family in an air strike on our village in April this year [ed. 2007],” the young man said, adding that nothing had come of his tribe's pleas to investigate his family's death.

Another young man in Gereshk District, in the north of Helmand Province, presented a dual rationale for his decision to join the Taliban. “This government is corrupt, oppressive and a puppet of the Americans and it is my Islamic obligation to stand against it. If we win the war we will establish Islamic rule in the country, but if I die I will go to heaven,” said Abdul Bari, 27, who has never been to school.

Hashem Watanwal, an outspoken member of parliament (MP) from central Uruzgan Province, said he had no doubt many people disagreed with Karzai's government, particularly Pashtoons in the south, west and east of the country. “People have no choice but to join the Taliban,” said Watanwal who also explained why Pashtoons were drawing closer to the Taliban. “Life has got far worse for the people of Uruzgan since Karzai took over. Insecurity is rampant, corruption is endemic, reconstruction and development is absent, poverty has deepened and people do not have access even to very basic services,” said the MP who recently visited his impoverished constituency.⁸⁴

A considerable element of the Taliban's political warfare campaign is handed to them on a silver tray. The Karzai Administration – precisely because many of the charges made against it of corruption and ineptitude are absolutely truthful – has lost credibility in much of the hinterland as it focuses on aping Western political institutions in Kabul.

While over US\$10 billion in aid money has reportedly been spent in the country since 2002, the Afghan government has been unable to establish a meaningful presence in large swaths of its territory, predominately in the south and east, say analysts.

In the absence of a central and provincial authority to effectively enforce law and order and protect civilians from insurgents and criminal gangs, many rural communities have fallen prey to a resurgent armed Taliban. “If we defy the Taliban and do not comply with

⁸⁴ IRIN, “Afghanistan: Taliban propaganda effective among Pashtoons,” 1 August 2007.

their demands, no one will be there to protect us from their wrath,” said one local man in the insurgency-affected Helmand Province.⁸⁵

As mentioned in Part One, where governmental authority is “*neither respected nor popularly accepted, and administration is corrupt and ineffective,*” we should hardly be surprised that the insurgent movement should find fertile ground for its message.

A British Ministry of Defence analyst, Tim Foxley, has made a careful study of the strengths and weaknesses of Taliban propaganda. Foxley points out that Taliban political warfare output is not without its own flaws and gaffes, but the fact remains that where it is most influential is often where Allied and regime missteps have given it credibility.

According to Foxley, the Taliban focuses its messages on four main areas: (1) extolling its tactical successes; (2) propounding its Islamic beliefs and values; (3) whenever possible, destroying the credibility of Coalition and Afghan government claims; and (4) providing instructions and information to the Afghan population. The first theme is intended to hearten the Taliban’s well-wishers while sowing apprehension among its opponents about the ultimate outcome of the war. The second theme captures a central facet of the struggle – Islamic legitimacy (“fighting on behalf of God.”) The third area aims to erode the credibility of the Western allies and the Karzai government so that the public will come to doubt the truthfulness and good faith of those players. And the last main theme is keyed toward establishing effective administration of the rising Taliban government-in-waiting.⁸⁶

Foxley notes that the Taliban is gaining in its sophistication, both in formulation of persuasive messages and in application of technology to its propaganda. He notes the Taliban’s use of television and radio, CDs and DVDs, and various websites and the Internet. Although the Taliban has much room for improvement, what they have achieved thus far with these media is impressive. Bear in mind, though, that these media – with the exception of cheap “action” CDs – are generally intended for audiences of the wealthier classes or Taliban supporters outside Afghanistan.

However, what has almost escaped Western notice is adept use of the Taliban of low-tech approaches to propaganda – the use of Direct Propaganda and simple pieces of print material called “night letters.” Here the Taliban are virtually unchallenged by the Karzai government and the Coalition. The U.S. military is only sporadically able to mount campaigns using Direct Propaganda (that is, direct contact with the population via speeches, rallies, meetings, and other people-to-people mobilization efforts.) The CIA is totally inept in this area. The Western preference, obviously, is for technology-dependent forms of communication. We love electronic equipment. Of course, where people live in remote areas and lack televisions and radios, electronic media are of doubtful value in influencing public opinion.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Tim Foxley, “The Taliban’s propaganda activities,” p. 6.

Foxley has this to say about Taliban use of Direct Propaganda and their success in some areas in establishing what amount to “base areas:”

Most Afghans do not have access to TV or radio, let alone the Internet. Talking directly and passing out leaflets are labour intensive and have limited reach, but are often the most effective means of communicating with the populace. These simple methods have the added advantage that they are difficult for ISAF to intercept. With the Taliban now better established in southern Afghanistan, they have had more opportunity to engage directly with the Pashtun populace. Many fighters are local, making it easy to approach the tribes and try to persuade them, if not to fight for them, at least to cooperate with or turn a blind eye to Taliban activities. The concern of local communities over such issues as poppy eradication, corrupt police and ISAF air strikes can be used to gain support: “Most of the attacks are by local people,” said a Taliban spokesman in Nadali district. “But the Taliban are helping them. This is a good opportunity to win local support. We can continue our jihad, and local people can keep their lands.” Threats of retribution have also been more persuasive where the Taliban have been able to establish a semi-permanent presence; something that ISAF and Afghan Government forces have demonstrably struggled to do.⁸⁷

In some areas the Taliban have started enforcing Sharia law, highlighting the government’s inability to impose law and order: “In some areas, there is now a parallel Taliban state, and locals are increasingly turning to Taliban-run courts, which are seen as more effective and fair than the corrupt official system.” This sort of activity, if it continues and develops, will send a strong message that the Taliban are back on a more permanent basis.⁸⁸

This latter point is critical and cannot be overemphasized: *it signifies that the Taliban is governing certain territories*. Only an insurgent movement having an effective infrastructure is capable of doing this. The fact – or at least the perception – that regime administration of justice is corrupt opens a fertile field to the Taliban to insert themselves as being able and incorruptible administrators. We are mindful of Bernard Fall’s observation in Part One that “*When a country is being subverted, it is not being outfought; it is being out-administered.*”

The lesson in this is that propaganda, as we have asserted, is the means by which political ideas are conveyed to the public with the intent to sway opinion. Since power is based on public opinion, propaganda is to be taken very seriously and studied closely. Moreover, if we are willing to be honest with ourselves, we must step in front of the mirror to “see ourselves as others see us.” We might well come away with new and valuable insights about ourselves – and how our deeds and words affect others. That in itself is worth the price of admission to the insurgency!

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 10-11. Foxley quotes the article “Saving Afghanistan” which appeared in Foreign Affairs, Volume 86, Number 1 (Jan/Feb 2007)

ANNEX E: Other places, other times, other wars

There is a belief held by some – Clausewitz included – that a war of “the people in arms” can only take place where the land is expansive, such as China or Algeria, where there is inhospitable terrain such as mountains, deserts or extensive jungle, and where the insurgents have the advantage of “sanctuaries” across a border. While these factors do play a role in many insurgencies, they are not imperatives.

Two examples serve to make the case in point: Ireland (1919-1921) and Cyprus (1955-1959) both of which happen to be islands. As is well known, Ireland has no mountains to speak of, while those in Cyprus do not stand comparison with the Hindu Kush. The territories of the two countries are not expansive and, being islands, there is obviously no safe place for insurgents to hide across a foreign border. Moreover, in both cases the British had total command of the sea – for what that was worth.

Today, Michael Collins and George Grivas are little known in military circles, yet the case studies of both Ireland and Cyprus are well worth study. While the British triumph in Malaya is justly hailed – and studied by many – the British failures in Ireland and Cyprus are not. They should be studied because at least they serve as good examples how not to conduct a counterinsurgency effort.

General Grivas’ own testimony presents insights into why the British were forced to the negotiating table after four years of unproductive (and costly) effort:

For four years, alongside the armed campaign, there went on a continuous struggle as to which of the two opponents would win the population over to his side. The weapon used by the British was force. But it was found that the harsher the measures resorted to by the British, the more the population became estranged from them and inclined to our side. Civilized peoples cannot be won over through violence, only through good treatment and a just and paternal administration. The representatives of Britain in Cyprus, both soldiers and civilians, behaved towards the inhabitants with an animosity which was far from politic. They were completely deficient in that understanding of the mass psychology which is so essential a factor of success in such circumstances.⁸⁹

One can only wonder what the outcome of the struggle in Cyprus might have been had the British shown willingness to grant self-government to the Cypriot people, behaved themselves more as guests than as occupiers, and applied a true counterinsurgency plan as in Malaya rather than the heavy-handed, haphazard methods used.

The Russians have a history of using partisans as well as battling insurgents. During World War II, swarms of partisans took up arms behind the German lines and made life very difficult for rear area troops and logisticians. Lines of communication were never completely secure, and regular units often had to be diverted to safeguard what supplies the Reich was able to send to its frontline soldiers in the Soviet Union.

As we have noted, partisans and insurgents use many of the same armed tactics – hit and run, ambush, fading quickly into the forest, etc. – *but the major distinction between the*

⁸⁹ George Grivas, “The Cyprus Liberation Campaign,” General Grivas on Guerrilla Warfare, p. 11.

two is the insurgents' relentless, continuous mobilization of the people. Partisans do not place much emphasis on political warfare indoctrination designed to undercut a regime and supplant it with a new political structure. Insurgents do.

To judge from recent activities in the Caucasus, especially in Chechnya, it would appear that the Russians seem to have learned very little from their own historical experience. As long ago as the early 1830s, when Tsarist armies occupied the Transcaucasus region, a series of native uprisings took place, the most serious of which was the insurgency of an Avar chieftain named Shamil. To capture Shamil and destroy his Murids, the Tsars sent in one heavy column after the other. Shamil not only eluded these attempts, but fell upon Russian outposts and detachments and inflicted thousands of Russian casualties.

Only in 1859 was a thoughtful Russian campaign put in motion that methodically limited Shamil's area of activity, and eventually cornered him. Prince Baryatinskiy can claim credit for conducting what might be considered a pre-modern counterinsurgency effort. But let the record show that, until Prince Baryatinskiy came on the scene, the war in the Caucasus lasted more than 25 costly years with very heavy loss of Russian life.⁹⁰

It is not surprising that most Western military officers are unfamiliar with Shamil or his exploits, although they should be. What is surprising is that the Russian army in the early 1990s confronted the Chechens in the very same area, but demonstrated ineptitude in attempting to forcibly suppress the Chechen insurgents. It was as if they had learned absolutely nothing from the Murid wars of the 19th century.

And beyond the Chechens, there is the earlier experience of dealing with the Basmachi in the Turkic republics of Central Asia. The Basmachi operated against the Bolsheviks from just after World War I until they finally retired into Afghanistan about 1931. The Soviet forces did not distinguish themselves by any particular skill or innovation during this long campaign against their lightly armed opponents. It should be noted, however, that M.V. Frunze did make use of locally raised units of Turkmen and Uzbeks against their kinsmen, sent fast-moving units against the Basmachi, and attempted to prevent the insurgents from having contact with the people. That said, mass arrests and deportations, summary executions, and use of counter-terror by the Cheka also played a part in the campaign. The result was the devastation of Soviet Central Asia.

We may also briefly mention the Soviet Army's effort to stamp out Ukrainian insurgents in the western Ukraine from 1945 to 1950. The Soviet effort proved successful despite its heavy-handedness, at least in part because the insurgents were tainted by their wartime association with the German army and Nazi occupation authorities, and could not effectively mobilize the otherwise highly nationalistic Ukrainian people. That was left for a later day and more peaceful political action.

Then, of course, we come to the Soviet adventure in Afghanistan, about which much has been written. In an effort to rescue what they viewed as a client regime, the Soviets sent more than 100,000 soldiers into Afghanistan with modern weapons and air cover to

⁹⁰ See Lesley Blanch, *The Sabres of Paradise*, pp. 299-301.

dominate the country. Indeed, they succeeded in installing their satraps, Babrak Karmal and later, Najibullah Ahmadzai, but as is well known, they failed to get the cooperation of the rural population. Of course, it may also be said that the Russians never really tried.

A serious student of contemporary Afghanistan should read and re-read everything he can regarding the “Anti-Soviet War” from 1979 – 1989. But a point needs to be made here: *the Soviet occupation was devastating to the land and people of Afghanistan and left lasting scars, both physical and psychological.* For example, before the Soviet invasion, the province of Nangarhar, midway between Kabul and Peshawar, was filled with orange groves and almond trees. As of 2006 there were few trees of either kind left – they were either chopped down or burned. One sees the hulks of tanks and armored vehicles here and there, and the city of Jalalabad is now crowded with people who had to move there to escape the wanton devastation of their homes in rural villages. In its propaganda the Taliban tries to paint Americans and its allies as “new kinds of Russians” and the Karzai government as “puppets.” On some occasions our actions tend to give credence to their propaganda.⁹¹

From its birth in the Revolution, the United States has had considerable experience with irregular warfare and insurgency, but failed to learn much from this experience.⁹² In the 19th century, the U.S. Army battled Indian tribes until Wounded Knee in 1890. Little from this experience was translated into military doctrine or studied at West Point. In the 20th century, Marines intervened repeatedly in Caribbean and Central American crises. The U.S. Army had its hands full in the Philippines suppressing first the nationalist movement of Aguinaldo and later a variety of tribally-based uprisings. Unfortunately, the Army squelched an attempt by a certain Captain J.R.M. Taylor to produce an insurgency manual. The Marine Corps did succeed in publishing its celebrated Small Wars Manual in 1935 based on experience gained in Nicaragua and other countries, but unfortunately, the onset of World War II caused American military forces to forget what they had learned. As a consequence, the Army and Marines were forced to re-learn many of the earlier lessons in the crucible of the Vietnam War.

No quick survey of insurgencies would be complete without at least mention of the Yugoslav insurgency (and partisan activity) directed against the Italians and Germans during World War II. Milovan Djilas, in his book Wartime describes often narrow escapes from the occupying forces and occasional very sharp clashes not only with German and Italian regular forces, but with predominantly Serbian Cetniks who sometimes collaborated with the occupiers. What is relevant to the contemporary case of Afghanistan is the fact that Tito’s insurgents (mainly Croats) operated in a multi-ethnic environment, just as the Taliban is doing with increasing success. But Tito’s political warfare campaign focused upon a specifically *non-ethnic* message: that a new and better country was possible under his Marxist ideology. In a curiously similar way, the Taliban

⁹¹ Author’s personal observation in Khowst and Jalalabad, 2005-2006. Those who visit Khowst should view the impressive junkpile of more than 20 ruined Soviet transport aircraft at Chapman airfield.

⁹² As has been mentioned, American heroes noted for their prowess in irregular warfare, such as Francis Marion, the “Swamp Fox,” and John Singleton Mosby, “Grey Ghost of the Confederacy,” are all but ignored by military academies and writers of doctrine.

(which is heavily Pashtun) is presenting a non-ethnic message to the effect that, only under its leadership and full acceptance of its brand of Islam, is a peaceful and orderly Afghanistan possible. Tito's movement sought to paint foreign forces as common enemies of the people, and existing regimes (such as that of Ante Pavelich in Croatia) as puppets of the foreign invaders. The Taliban is doing exactly the same today.

En avant, gens d'armes!

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