Part I

Theoretical and analytical issues
The academic study of insurgency and counterinsurgency is a relatively modern development, and even its professional military study was often neglected in the past.

Insurgency is usually taken to refer to the means by which, increasingly through the twentieth century, the traditional methods associated with the long history of guerrilla and irregular warfare became revolutionary in both intent and practice. Social, economic, psychological and, especially, political elements were grafted on to traditional hit-and-run tactics in order to radically alter the structure of a state by force.

Clearly, as well as a pre-history of insurgency, there was also a pre-history of writing upon irregular warfare. In so far as this was undertaken, however, it was mostly by military practitioners with the first real texts emerging in the late eighteenth century from two Hessian officers, Johann von Ewald and Andreas Emmerich, who had served in North America with the British army, and by the Prussian, Georg Wilhelm von Valentini. Similarly, the experience of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars stimulated others to record their impressions in the course of the 1820s, including the Prussian, Carol von Decker; the Russian, Denis Davidov; and the Frenchman, Le Mièrè de Corvey. Most major military theorists, however, such as Antoine-Henri Jomini and Carl von Clausewitz eschewed any form of ‘people’s war’ as something to be avoided at all costs. Indeed, only revolutionary nationalists such as the Italians, Giuseppe Mazzini, Giuseppe Garibaldi and Carlo Bianco; and the Poles, Wojciech Chrzanowski, Karol Stolzman and Józef Bem, identified ‘people’s war’ as a viable means of asserting a national consciousness in a liberation struggle. Though they made an effort to understand it, Marx and Engels did not produce any coherent theoretical position on guerrilla warfare, believing that there was little scope for it within a rapidly industrialising Europe.

The expansion of European colonial empires, with increasing exposure to ‘savage’ warfare in Africa and Asia, led a few soldiers to produce theoretical works on the nature of irregular warfare and the appropriate response to it. These included the Dutchman, Klaas van der Maaten, and most prominently, the British soldier, Charles Callwell, whose classic study, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, was first published in 1896. Following the First World War, other such works appeared, including Charles Gwynn’s *Imperial Policing* (1934), and from the US Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual* (1940), largely the work of Harold Utley. The increasing possibilities of guerrilla warfare were also recognised by T.E. Lawrence, whose *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935) and contribution to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1927, based on his role in the
Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Turks during the war, proved an elegant and influential exposition of its potential when waged in a political cause. Yet, few soldiers or academic writers had any real interest in irregular warfare, and this long remained the case. To illustrate the point, comparison can be made between the two editions of the well-known Makers of Modern Strategy, published respectively in 1943 and 1986.

The first, edited by Edward Gordon Meade, comprised 547 pages of main text and had 20 separate chapters on the development of military theory from Machiavelli to Hitler. Just one chapter of 25 pages by Jean Gottman discussed the nineteenth-century French counterinsurgency theorists, Bugeaud, Gallieni and Lyautey. No other form of insurgency or counterinsurgency was mentioned. The second edition, edited by Peter Paret, specifically claimed to take a broader view than the original, its 28 chapters now running to 871 pages. Yet, apart from Douglas Porch’s updated version of Gottman’s chapter, only one new chapter of 47 pages by John Shy and T.W. Collier was devoted to ‘revolutionary war’. It was included on the grounds that, what had not been presumed to exist in 1943, was now a significant, but conceivably short-lived factor in warfare through the decline of European colonial empires, and of conflict between nation-states. Moreover, Shy and Collier had only six pages on counterinsurgency. Six paragraphs were devoted to American counterinsurgency efforts, two to the French 1950s concept of guerre révolutionnaire, and one uninformative paragraph to the extensive British experience.

It would appear by the 1950s and 1960s then that little had changed in over 40 years in the perception of insurgency and especially counterinsurgency as a legitimate subject for study. Most other standard histories of warfare or military thought at the time were equally dismissive of all forms of what might be termed low-intensity conflict. No reference at all was included in Preston et al.’s Men in Arms, first published in 1956, until the fifth edition in 1991, which finally included a single chapter of 32 pages (out of 292) on the subject. Curiously, the Algerian and Vietnam Wars were briefly discussed in a previous chapter on conventional warfare. There was no mention at all in J.F.C. Fuller’s The Conduct of War (1961), Theodore Ropp’s War in the Modern World (1973), or even the first edition of Michael Howard’s War in European History (1976). Archer Jones’ The Art of War in the Western World (1988) had a number of references in his 723 pages to ‘raiding strategy’, but these included examples from antiquity, and only two pages were devoted to nineteenth-century colonial warfare. Even works specifically devoted to modern war since 1945 such as Laurence Martin, Arms and Strategy (1973) and Lawrence Freedman, Atlas of Global Strategy (1985) barely mentioned insurgency or counterinsurgency. What was then a standard student text, Baylis et al.’s Contemporary Strategy had 19 pages out of 312 devoted to revolutionary warfare in its original 1975 edition: the much extended two-volume edition in 1987 was not much better with just 23 pages (out of 518). Within this, the section on counterinsurgency had increased from two to four pages, largely through the addition of a discussion of the then Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

Such neglect of insurgency and counterinsurgency would now be unthinkable. New ideological, political and commercial imperatives encouraging intra-state conflict and insurgency were already beginning to emerge in the 1980s, amid the breakdown of the international bipolar political system, and the emergence of identity politics and of many more non-state actors. Thus, there was beginning to be a corrective to the neglect of insurgency and counterinsurgency. Perhaps surprisingly, as long ago as 1961, Cyril Falls had an 11-page chapter on ‘small wars’ in his The Art of War, though Falls chose to describe what those he termed ‘partisans’ as having exerted less influence on history than ‘commonly asserted’. Hew Strachan, European Armies and the Conduct of War (1983) included a full chapter on colonial warfare in his survey of the development of warfare between 1700 and 1945, while the essays edited by Colin McInnes
The historiography of insurgency


The neglect of insurgency and counterinsurgency was the more surprising when low-intensity conflict was already the most prevalent form of conflict. Notwithstanding two world wars, this had been so throughout the twentieth century, if not before. In the case of the British experience of warfare, the instances of conventional warfare as opposed to some form of low-intensity conflict since 1945 were especially few, amounting to 35 months of the Korean War, in which no more than five battalions were deployed at any one time, ten days at Suez in 1956, and 25 days of the land campaign of the Falklands in 1982. Only 14 out of 94 separate British operational commitments between 1945 and 1982 were not in the form of low-intensity conflict of some kind, and only 1968 had seen no British soldier killed on active service in that same period. For understandable reasons, military professionals have long tended to perceive themselves as existing primarily to wage conventional warfare, whatever the actual experience. It was not just a matter of institutional conservatism and a preconceived concept of what constituted ‘real’ war, but a reflection of the unglamorous and uncomfortable nature of irregular warfare, in which results might not be obtained quickly, in which success could not be measured in conventional military terms, and in which soldiers were confronted with political and social pressures to a far greater extent than most other forms of conflict.

Just as some soldiers in the past such as Gallieni, Lyautsy, Utley, Callwell and Gwynn had recognised the reality of routine colonial soldiering, so there had been those who had attempted to analyse the emerging pattern of insurgency after 1945. Studies such as Roger Trinquier, *La Guerre Moderne* (1964); David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (1964); John Pushtay, *Counterinsurgency* (1965); John McCuen, *The Art of Counterrevolutionary Warfare* (1966); George Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare* (1962); and the analysis of the British success in the Malayan Emergency of 1948–60 in Robert Thompson’s influential *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (1966), were essentially responses to the perceived significance of the prevalence of Maoist methods of revolutionary warfare following Mao’s victory in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, and the transmission of such methods to Malaya, French Indochina, and the Philippines. Equally, Castro’s success on Cuba in 1959 had reputedly led the US armed forces to buy up much of the first edition of *The War of the Flea* (1965) by the American left-wing journalist, Robert Taber. The work of revolutionaries such as Vo Nguyen Giap, *People’s War, People’s Army* (1962); Mao, *Selected Military Writings* (1963); Che Guevara’s *Guerrilla Warfare* (1969) and *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* (1968); Amilcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea* (1969); and Carlos Marighela, *For the Liberation of Brazil* (1971) became generally available in English. Two insurgent leaders had also published useful accounts, namely Menachem Begin, *The Revolt* (1951), and George Grivas, *Guerrilla Warfare and EOKA’s Struggle* (1964). There were also some early analyses such as Samuel Griffith, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare* (1965); Richard Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America* (1970); D.C. Hughes, *The Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla* (1973); Robert Moss, *Urban Guerrillas* (1972); and A.C. Porzecanski, *Uruguay’s Tupamaros* (1973). The emphasis upon Latin America’s urban guerrilla groups was understandable in terms of the apparent threat to US interests, but the phenomenon was short-lived.

Then, in 1971, another practitioner, Frank Kitson famously challenged the assumptions underpinning Robert Thompson’s approach to counterinsurgency in *Low-intensity Operations*. Kitson called for British soldiers not only to consider the practical requirements of counterinsurgency,
but also to look beyond the Malayan example. It was in the spirit of Kitson’s challenge that the late John Pimlott and Ian Beckett introduced counterinsurgency as a special subject for study at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst in the early 1980s. It gave rise to Armed Forces and Modern Counter-insurgency (1985), the intention being to arrive at a general framework for analysis that could then be applied to a variety of different campaigns. Ronald Haycock had edited a rather discursive collection of essays, Regular Armies and Insurgency (1979) that, while similarly organised as a series of case studies, did not require individual authors to try to conform to such a analytical framework as was envisaged. Subsequently, the case study approach has remained popular as in David Charters and Maurice Tugwell, Armies in Low-intensity Conflict (1989); Max Manwaring, Uncomfortable Wars (1991); and Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian, Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare (2008). Subsequent to Armed Forces and Modern Counter-insurgency, a similar methodology of analysis was used in Ian Beckett’s edited collection, The Roots of Counter-insurgency (1988).

In the case of the United States, it was the experience of Vietnam that stimulated a new interest in insurgency and counterinsurgency. Of course, it has continued to generate an enormous amount of new scholarship. Early important work included D.S. Blaufarb, The Counterinsurgency Era (1977); Andrew Krepinivich, The Army and Vietnam (1986); Larry Cable, Conflict of Myths (1986); and D. Michael Shafer, Deadly Paradigms (1990). Representative of the continuing work in this area is Eric Bergerud, The Dynamics of Defeat (1991); Michael Hennessy, Strategy in Vietnam (1997); Richard Hunt, Pacification (1995); and John Nagl, Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife (2005). As Nagl’s work suggests, comparisons between Malaya and Vietnam are still popular, as shown by Donald Hamilton, The Art of Insurgency (1998) and Sam Sarkesian, Unconventional Conflicts in a New Security Era (1993). The continued relevance of the comparison, however, is doubtful.

Armed Forces and Modern Counter-insurgency was able to draw upon some early analyses of individual campaigns. These included for the British experience, J. Bowyer Bell, Terror Out of Zion (1977); Anthony Clayton, Counter-insurgency in Kenya, 1952–60 (1976); Richard Clutterbuck, The Long, Long War: The Emergency in Malaya, 1948–60 (1966); Julian Paget, Counterinsurgency Campaigning (1967) and Last Post (1969); and Anthony Short, The Communist Insurrection in Malaya (1975). For the French experience, there was A.A. Heggoy, Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Algeria (1972); Alistair Horne, A Savage War of Peace: Algeria (1977); Peter Paret, French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria (1964); and John Talbott, The War Without a Name (1981). The formative American experience in the Philippines had also been covered in N.D. Valeriano and C.T.R. Bohannan, Counter-Guerrilla Operations (1962).

As interest in counterinsurgency has grown appreciably, so more and more individual studies have appeared. In the British case, knowledge of campaigns has been extended by Susan Carruthers, Winning Hearts and Minds (1995); David Charters, The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945–47 (1989); John Coates, Suppressing Insurgency (1992); David Easter, Britain and the Confrontation with Indonesia (2004); Raffi Gregorian, The British Army, the Gurkhas and Cold War Strategy in the Far East (2002); Robert Holland, Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus (1998); Tim Jones, Post-war Counter-insurgency and the SAS (2001) and SAS: The First Secret Wars (2005); J.E. Petersen, Oman’s Insurgencies (2007); Richard Stubbs, Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare (1988); and Jonathan Walker, Aden Insurgency (2004). There are also valuable overviews by Thomas Mockaitis, British Counter-insurgency, 1919–60 (1990) and British Counter-insurgency in the Post-imperial Era (1995); John Newsinger, British Counter-insurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland (2002); and Charles Townshend, Britain’s Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century (1986). Surprisingly, perhaps, there is still no adequate monograph on the long-running British campaign in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1998.
One aspect of British counterinsurgency that has aroused particular controversy is the issue of ‘minimum force’. Initially, it was suggested by John Newsinger’s questioning of the concept in the context of the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya between 1952 and 1959. Newsinger and Mockaitis debated the issue in the journal Small Wars and Insurgencies in 1992 and the matter has been debated again most recently in the same journal by Huw Bennett and Rod Thornton. In passing, it might be noted that Small Wars and Insurgencies itself, first published in 1990, was a real indication of the growing academic interest in the subject. Subsequently, books by David Anderson, Histories of the Hanged (2005) and Caroline Elkins, Imperial Reckoning (2005) have revived the controversy. There has also been further critical appraisal of the notion of the exceptionalism of British minimum force in the inter-war period. In this latter regard, it should be noted in passing that there has been an increasing interest in the pre-history of insurgency and counterinsurgency prior to 1945, with many excellent monographs. Unfortunately, space precludes any coverage here of this particular area of research and writing.

Equally, knowledge of the French experience, particularly in Algeria, has been greatly extended by Martin Alexander et al., The Algerian War and the French Army (2002); Martin Alexander and John Keiger, France and the Algerian War (2002); and Tony Clayton, The Wars of French Decolonisation (1994) and Frontiersmen (1999). There has been less on Portuguese, Rhodesian and South African campaigns. For Rhodesia, there is J.K. Cilliers, Counter-insurgency in Rhodesia (1985); Paul Moorcraft and Peter McLaughlin, Chimurenga (1982), which has been republished in an updated version as Counter-insurgency in Rhodesia (1985); and Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock, Rhodesians Never Die (1993). For the Portuguese experience, there is the important analysis in John Cann, Counterinsurgency in Africa (1997) and his edited collection, Memories of Portugal’s African Wars (1998).

Elsewhere, Maoist ideology as motivation survived in some areas such as Peru, Thailand and Nepal. Tom Marks examined the phenomenon as a whole in Maoist Insurgency since Vietnam (1996), while the particular case of the ‘Shining Path’ in Peru was studied in David Scott Palmer, The Shining Path of Peru (1992). The vestiges of the Cold War in Central America were depicted in J. Dunkerley, The Long War: Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador (1982); Hugh Byrne, El Salvador’s Civil War (1996); William Robinson and Kent Norsworthy, David and Goliath: Washington’s War against Nicaragua (1987); R. Pardo-Maurer, The Contras (1990); and Jorge Osterling, Democracy in Colombia (1989). Colombia has remained a focus for insurgency, as examined in Claire Metelits, Inside Insurgency (2010). Almost the last of the Cold War campaigns was that waged by the Soviets in Afghanistan, as studied by David Isby, War in a Distant Country (1989); Mark Galeotti, Afghanistan (1995); and Lester Grau in The Bear Went Over the Mountain (1998) and The Soviet-Afghan War (2002).

While the end of the process of European decolonisation and of the Cold War and its concomitant ideological competition has removed many earlier motivational impulses behind insurgency, insurgency remains just as prevalent. If anything, while globalisation has decreased the likelihood of states being able to sustain inter-state conflict unilaterally, intra-state conflict has increased where state systems remain underdeveloped, as in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Moreover, in some cases, the distinction between war and organised crime has become increasingly blurred. It is not possible to encompass all the writing on ongoing insurgencies in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, but monographs include Martin Smith, Burma (1991); Ram Mohan, Sri Lanka (1989); Christopher Clapham’s edited collection, African Guerrillas (1998); Ruth Lyob, The Eritrean Struggle for Independence (1995); Paul Richards, Fighting for the Rain Forest (1996); and Bard O’Neill, Armed Struggle in Palestine (1978).

The wealth of new research is reflected in Ian Beckett, Modern Insurgencies and Counter-insurgencies (2001), while some of the key journal articles were reproduced in Ian Beckett,

Perhaps inevitably, events in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 have not only re-focused military minds on insurgency and counter insurgency but stimulated further academic studies. It is also the case, however, that much of this work must remain provisional in nature given the continuing conflict. With respect to Iraq, the most useful monographs thus far are Ahmed Hashim, Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq (2006); David Kilcullen, The Accidental Guerrilla (2009); Thomas Mahnken and Thomas Keaney, War in Iraq (2007); Thomas Ricks, The Gamble (2007); and Bing West, The Strongest Tribe (2008). On Afghanistan, there is Peter Marsden, The Taliban (1998) and Hy Rothstein, Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare (2006).

Writing on insurgency and counterinsurgency has come a long way from the first tentative attempts by military practitioners to understand the emerging patterns of irregular warfare in the eighteenth century, and its subsequent examination by those confronting opposition to colonial rule. Just as its study was something of a minority interest among military professionals, so its consideration by academe was also slow to develop. Serious academic study of insurgency and counterinsurgency has only really emerged since the mid 1980s and, even then, its growth as a subject has not always been one of uniform progression. Indeed, its recent currency as an issue of immediate contemporary relevance has given writing on the subject new emphasis after arguably another downturn in interest. The frequent recurrence of the ‘poor man’s war’ should long ago have encouraged continued examination of insurgency and counterinsurgency but, then, as in so many counterinsurgency campaigns since 1945, lessons seemingly have to be constantly relearned.

**Recommended readings**


**References**


The historiography of insurgency

Callwell, Charles (1896) Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice. London: HMSO.
Giai, Vo Nguyen (1962) People’s War, People’s Army. New York: Praeger.
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The historiography of insurgency