What is the state of the art in the field of insurgency and counterinsurgency studies? This is the central question we posed the authors at the outset of this volume. Answering this question unavoidably leads to arguments and examples that are time and also place specific. By bringing together established scholars and some up-and-coming young thinkers, we have sought to provide the reader with an insight into what is available at present and where the challenges lie. The study has been an effort to take stock of current points of view. We asked the contributors to focus on three questions:

1. What is the state of knowledge and the accepted positions?
2. What are the topics that are currently subject of debate?
3. What are the challenges and pressing questions for future research?

The approach we have adopted in this volume is in some ways artificial. We have asked the authors to discuss insurgency and counterinsurgency separately, whereas in practice they feed off each other and are intertwined in an enduring interactive relationship. Moreover, Part II of the volume mostly focused on states rather than organizations or actors, though some authors also took a more regional approach. This of course does not fully engage with the complex and transnational nature of many insurgencies past and present. However the volume as a whole has been able to provide a general picture of the field of insurgency and counterinsurgency studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century and it is through these three general questions that we seek in this concluding chapter to provide an overall assessment of the field of study at the present time before looking forward, in the final section, to where the field might be going in the years ahead.

The state of knowledge

A number of chapters, especially that of Ian Beckett, have pointed to insurgency’s long historical roots. Beckett argues that we should see insurgency as deriving from an elevation of traditional hit-and-run tactics to a strategy in its own right by adding political, social and environmental factors at the start of the twentieth century. As discussed in the introduction, this is one of several ways of conceptualizing insurgency. Increasingly prominent, especially in the American
literature, seems to be a conceptualization of insurgency as a tactic of war, e.g. the chapter by Ucko. Geraint Hughes also concludes that the prominent instruments employed to deal with insurgency – he discusses in particular the role of intelligence, targeted killing, the use of special forces and air strikes – all amount to tactical rather than strategic effect. Steven Metz, on the contrary, presents an argument in the volume to see counterinsurgency primarily as strategy.

Despite these diverging insights, the study of the past remains important. Contexts have changed and questions abound about applicability of counterinsurgency ideas to current day exigencies, the past remains about the only source we have available for inspiration. As Chin notes, ‘you cannot fight insurgents today in the same way you fought the Viet Cong, but [at the same time] … most insurgencies follow a similar course of development and consequently the past remains and important source of learning’.

A common thread in almost all chapters is the centrality of the political challenge in insurgencies. Insurgencies can arise out of a lack of effective governance, security and lack of political access. An important differentiation can be made between internal and external insurgency; in the case of India, the indivisibility of the stakes, secession from the Union, could not be negotiated, leading, according to Fidler and Ganguly, to a certain extent to a deterrent effect for other militant groups. The price to pay to achieve the goal of independence became extremely high. It led most groups to fall apart and revert to crime in order to assure survival. The political challenge was recognized by the state and translated into more autonomy, the creation of new provinces and federated states, improvements in governance and security structures, elections, social and economic development.

Insurgency is also a social phenomenon and therefore a product of the society from which it derives. William Reno argues in his chapter that African insurgencies even mirror the governments against which their main actions were directed. He distinguishes two ideal types of insurgency: a hierarchical Maoist variant and a network type of insurgency. Their individual logic they largely derive from the context in which they are formed and carried out. In a hierarchical Maoist variant, conducted in many post-colonial states, the insurgents aim at building up a shadow government in preparation for an eventual takeover of power. In the network variant, displayed in a patronage predatory state, the access to resources and economic opportunity is used as a means of population control. Challengers in the Maoist variant need to have developed some measure of social autonomy for an ideologically infused struggle. While in the network-centric insurgency, the challengers almost exclusively come from the ruling circles themselves.

An important feature of many of the insurgencies dealt with in this volume concerns the prevalence of a shadow government, not only in the cases of India, Hezbollah and Hamas, but also Iraq and Afghanistan. This could be interpreted as a sign of the strategic nature of insurgency, rather than the tactical. This organizational feature makes it stand out from other expressions of political violence, such as terrorism (see also Duyvesteyn and Fumerton 2009). The latter, because of its secretive nature, does not invest in building up structures capable of taking over political power and responsibility. In the cases of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the insurgencies in the Punjab, Assam, Nagaland and Manipur in India but also in the cases of Hamas and Hezbollah, the chapters conclude that these organizational structures help in attaining some measure of legitimacy for the insurgents. The existence of a shadow government or state-like structures could place these insurgents in the category of Maoist rather than the post-Maoist variant, as discussed in the introduction.

When insurgency is seen as a social phenomenon, it changes with its environment. Developments in information technology have provided a new dimension to current insurgencies, as they have changed society in which they gestate. David Betz notes that ‘as the organizing principles of human society have changed with technological development, above all in the range,
forms and velocity of communications, so too has changed the pattern of warfare generally and the character of insurgency specifically’.

It has also been confirmed in the cases under consideration in this volume that the role of neighbouring states as facilitators and safe havens can act as a catalyst for insurgencies (Record 2007; Staniland 2005–6). The role of Pakistan is of paramount importance to understand the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and the many insurgencies in India. Iran is crucial to Hezbollah and Hamas. In fact, Antonio Giustozzi in his contribution notes that the raising of the backbone of the insurgent cadres in Pakistan has enabled the Taliban to continue and expand its struggle over the past few years within Afghanistan. Cutting off supply lines from abroad formed the key to success in defeating the Tamil Tigers, according to David Lewis. Namrata Goswami argues along similar lines for the cases of insurgency within India’s borders.

As with insurgency, counterinsurgencies also possess long historical roots. Despite the reluctance among Western militaries to deal with counterinsurgency, academic interest in the subject, while steady over the course of the twentieth century, has risen steeply over the last few years. As the introduction pointed out, much modern counterinsurgency can be traced back to debates over the management of ‘small wars’ in nineteenth-century European empires. Beckett in his chapter also notes that one of the problems with historical approaches to counterinsurgency is the widespread temptation to generalize from a very limited number of cases. Kilcullen also reinforces this in his chapter when he points to the evolution of counterinsurgency in the United States in the early 1960s on the basis of a very narrow range of colonial counterinsurgencies. Both authors in fact go as far as questioning whether the comparison of the Malaya and Vietnam cases has not been exhausted. The use of the ‘lessons’ of Malaya, which are quite prominent among others in the latest American Counterinsurgency Manual FM 3–24, might in fact stretch their utility. There is a dominant stream in the literature about the role of ‘hearts and minds’. Almost elevated to law in the American doctrine, the support of the population is seen as a sine qua non for successful insurgency and counterinsurgency. It forms the central battleground and the essence of the strategy employed in Afghanistan in the past few years. Giustozzi, however, sceptically writes that the implementation of the hearts and minds strategy turned out to be difficult to realize against an opponent excelling in adaptation and fluidity.

Furthermore, Alice Hills contends in this volume ‘support [of the population] may be achieved by coercion, rather than conviction’. Elsewhere, Paul Dixon and Huw Bennett have shown that the Malaya case has been successful because of – and not despite of – the use of coercion and force, rather than the acclaimed hearts and minds idea (Dixon 2009; Bennett 2009). These ideas go against the prevalent recipe about how to conduct a successful counterinsurgency today. They might also go against the fundamentals of ethics, as Christopher Coker notes, to not undertake any action in war that makes subsequent peace impossible. Nevertheless, this forms an important and pressing research challenge; there is a mismatch between historical fact and counterinsurgency ideology.

The apparent consensus on the hearts and minds idea, however, runs skin deep. The case of Israeli counterinsurgency, discussed by Sergio Catignani, is also illustrative of the coercive approach. He concludes that the Israeli heavy-handed campaigns usually have the effect of temporarily halting the violence for it to reappear later in a different locale with higher intensity. The violent methods have also had the function to placate the domestic Israeli audience, showing that something is being done. Yuri Zhukov argues in the Russian case that it ‘has one of the most successful track records of any modern counterinsurgent’. India but also Latin America is another case in point where the harsher forms of counterinsurgency have proven their worth. David Lewis, looking at the case of Sri Lanka, speaks of a Sri Lankan model of counterinsurgency based on attrition. Zhukov concludes that these cases have not received the academic
interest they deserve. He shows that regime type matters in counterinsurgency and authoritarian regimes are more likely to use repression. In fact, he argues, the harsher the repression, the greater are the chances of success.

Abel Esterhuyse shows in his chapter on South African counterinsurgency that the South African Defense Forces, while not pursuing an all-out strategy of attrition in Angola, were able to successfully create a battlefield stalemate by using purely military means. This set the stage for an eventual political solution to the Angolan problem.

Other historical cases offer supportive evidence for the value of an ‘enemy-centric’ approach. Missing in this volume is a specific French perspective on counterinsurgency. Treated in other studies, great French thinkers, such as Lyautey, had traditionally an eye for the effectiveness of repression. It was widely practised in French colonial conflicts and to a certain extent quite successful in stabilizing French colonial presence. The case of Algeria provides a moot point. In recent years it seems that the French record of counterinsurgency is preferably forgotten or brushed over, with some exceptions such as the publication of the controversial memoirs by Paul Assaresses about his experiences in Algeria (2005).

Even in the current operations in Afghanistan, the common front when it comes to the application of the hearts and minds strategy shows painful fissures. As Geraint Hughes discusses, there are important voices, including that of Vice President Biden, who try to promote a ‘counter-terrorist strategy’ in which enemy-centric and attrition aspects feature more prominently.

While the discussion about the validity and application of hearts and minds ideas and population-centric operations is important, David Betz also points in his contribution to the role of the hearts and minds of the domestic audience. Not only the risk of losing the hearts and minds of the local population, but also loss of support from the domestic audience, can undermine the chances of success. Betz writes in his contribution that the latter is the ‘master narrative’ or the ‘Leitmotif’ of operations in Afghanistan. We are losing the war at home, as we did in Vietnam and Somalia, rather than on the ground in the battle theatre. Similarly, Martin Wayne stresses in his contribution that an essential element in counterinsurgency is political will. It is ‘a set of deep beliefs and preferences held by society’, which was available in abundance in the case of China and contributed to its success to date in Xinjiang. These ideas point to the increasing recognition that narratives and strategic communications are playing crucial roles in counterinsurgency (Freedman 2006).

Apart from the prevalence in practice of the enemy-centric approach of counterinsurgency, as opposed to the population-centric one, an important mechanism manifests itself. Many of the cases studied in this volume describe a steep learning curve for the state in counterinsurgency operations. The state starts out by using repression deliberately or by default to only later consider alternatives. Thomas Mockaitis notes that hearts and minds policies are often instituted only after a highly violent phase of conflict (see also Hack 2009). Fidler and Ganguly conclude for the Indian case that in its counterinsurgency response the security services started out with a coercive approach, with little civil–military coordination. Only subsequently were thoughts devoted to alternatives. In the case of Pakistan, as Julian Schofield argues, there was a similar pendulum swinging between repression and conciliation. Martin Wayne argues that the Chinese state had a repressive approach at the outset but effectiveness increased with the introduction of more conciliatory measures. In the case of China, social policies affecting the fundamentals of society were successful to curb insurgent violence. He analyses that the secret of the Chinese success was that ‘the state countered the insurgent dream by creating a competing dream, one more plausible and tangible, achievable only through participation in the state’s project’. It needs to be recognized that discriminate force requires not only reliable intelligence but also
highly skilled forces, commodities not many states possess in the amount necessary to carry out a counterinsurgency.

One aspect of the counterinsurgency repertoire that seems to elicit widespread agreement between the enemy-centric and population-centric approaches is the fundamentally political nature of the counterinsurgency. It is common to find references to this idea. With insurgency, unlike conventional warfare, once the decision to go to war has been made by governments, operational decisions in war are often made by senior military commanders. Counterinsurgent warfare is warfare where, as David Galula has pointed out, ‘politics becomes an active instrument of operation’ (Galula 2006: 5). However, by stressing the political nature of war, it is as if the author aims to stress that insurgency is somehow more political than conventional warfare. Famously Galula, who is often quoted, stated that insurgency is 80 per cent political and 20 per cent military. In this volume David Ucko argues that ‘US military thinking now reflects greater awareness of war’s political essence’ (emphasis added). David Kilcullen and Warren Chin argue among similar lines in their contributions.

This discussion, however, is highly misleading. It is based on a limited understanding of the essence of war and, frankly, dangerous. If one understands war in the Clausewitzian sense, all wars are 100 per cent political. It is only the ‘admixture’ of other means that may vary. It is the responsibility of the politician to make available the optimum means to conduct the war, using the correct strategy to deal with the political challenge. Regarding the political nature of armed conflict, the case of Malaya comes to the fore time and again. Chin, in his contribution about British counterinsurgency, starts out by pointing to the success in Malaya but also in other conflicts of the dissolution of empire. He argues that ‘lacking sufficient force to impose its will resulted in the British understanding that success depended on dealing with the political roots of a conflict rather than prosecuting a campaign to annihilate the threat’. A political solution in the shape of independence underpinned the success of the British model of counterinsurgency in the era of decolonization.

Catignani points, in the case of Israel, to the absence of a feasible political strategy and political will, which has led to the military filling the policy void. This situation has been remarkably consistent since the late 1960s. He sees this as the ultimate weak point of this state’s approach; the substitution of a military strategy for the lack of a political idea to deal with the insurgency. This conclusion finds confirmation in the chapter by Harik and Johannsen, dissecting the cases of Hezbollah and Hamas. As noted in the introduction, today also in places like Afghanistan, counterinsurgency ideas and the operational level of war tend to be a substitute for clear policy and strategy (Strachan 2010).

While it might be one thing to have uncovered the key to success to counter an insurgency, it is quite another to disseminate this wisdom to those who matter. The British were effective during the period of decolonization through the fact that many officers involved in these conflicts were posted in one conflict zone after the other; Palestine, Kenya, Malaya, etc. In the case of India, the problem of dissemination of counterinsurgency knowledge surfaced. As Fidler and Ganguly argue, it was not passed on in a formal fashion but based on the insights of participation from the civilian and military agencies involved. This led to a repetition of mistakes. Thomas Mockaitis draws the same conclusion about the Philippine insurrection and the neglect of the lessons of that conflict for US armed forces. However, Mockaitis is hopeful that this time around, based on experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States will retain the lessons and pass them on to the next generation. For the case of South Africa, Esterhuyse concludes that the South African experiences with counterinsurgency belong to a period in the past that is preferably forgotten. In this case, institutional retention of the counterinsurgency past is non-existent mainly due to political correctness.
These divergent perspectives question the apparent existence of a universal set of counterinsurgency principles. One cannot help but observe that there are few uncontested elements in what has been considered the state of the art. The current debate about existing insights and wisdom in this area is lively. There seem to be areas of convergence around the importance of history and historical studies (cf. Peters 2007; van Creveld 2006) and about the political and social dimensions of insurgency. Dividing lines in the discipline revolve around the role of force and hearts and minds and their measure. The counterinsurgency repertoire of what to do and when is highly ideological and prescriptive, the success of coercion is preferably brushed aside and the lack of counterinsurgency learning remains a problem. It is striking that the more theoretical treatises of counterinsurgency are dominated by the Anglo-Saxon contributions. In fact, the non-Western world has largely been absent in the discussion, save as producers of insurgencies. This is illustrated by the conclusion in the chapter by Fidler and Ganguly that India, since its inception, has been subject of a large number of insurgencies. Its counterinsurgency record, however, hardly features in any serious discussions about the subject. We now turn to the topics that the contributors to this volume have identified as subject of important debate.

The topics of debate

Despite its long historic roots and attempts at a more or less consistent delimitation of insurgency, there have been efforts to question the overall validity of the concepts. This debate has already been touched upon and the contributions in this volume further underline its importance. As Robert Bunker writes in his contribution, private warfare of warlords and militias and privatized warfare by mercenary companies push the boundaries of the concept of insurgency. Furthermore, he argues that narco-insurgency might warrant inclusion into the category of insurgency. Piracy does not fit because of its purely criminal nature rather than a link with politico-military agendas. We should not forget, however, that many early modern states in Europe started out as criminal outfits or overly successful protection rackets. Economic success can enable political action and vice versa. Riches creates power and power creates riches. Warren Chin adds to this discussion with the idea of hybrid wars, the fashionable buzzword of the day, to describe what was previously known as insurgency. Chin argues that recently it has been ‘recognised that insurgency was mutating and becoming more hybrid in nature, meaning that past distinctions between high and low intensity combat were becoming increasingly blurred’.

Furthermore, conceptual misunderstanding is also increasing in the case of counterinsurgency. First, what is counterinsurgency but an intention, if one reads the American Field Manual, according to David Ucko? Second, what is the exact role of counterinsurgency in relation to the popular comprehensive approach concept and the previously popular peacekeeping discourse? Without acknowledging it, at the end of the Cold War many techniques of counterinsurgency were re-invented to conduct the peace operations (Mackinlay 2009). As Chin writes in this volume, ‘many of the tactics, techniques and procedures used by the British in past counterinsurgency campaigns were used to good effect in . . . peacekeeping mission[s], which probably served to reinforce the impression that existing counterinsurgency doctrine remained “fit for purpose”’. Furthermore, elsewhere James Pritchard and M.L.R. Smith have argued that ‘it would seem that much of what comprises the so-called five principles [of Thompson] can be seen in the “Comprehensive Approach”, which is the modern British incarnation of COIN theory’ (Pritchard and Smith 2010: 68). Thjis Brocades Zaalberg tries to create some more clarity in this rather muddled debate by identifying the distinguishing factors. He argues that the concepts are not interchangeable. At its core, he writes, ‘[p]eacekeeping was by definition an
outider’s job, while counterinsurgency was essentially about the local government’. The conceptual quagmire was largely the result of misuse of the term peacekeeping. In the case of Afghanistan, ‘[a]s long as the armed opposition against the Western-backed Karzai government was minimal and the job of the average NATO “peacekeeper” on patrol in Kabul differed little from that in Kosovo, the misuse of the term went largely unnoticed’. He argues that the term peacekeeping should be exclusively reserved for missions deployed at the request of formerly warring parties to monitor a ceasefire they have agreed to.

Not only do we face important conceptual challenges, practical interpretations of (counter) insurgent agendas pose serious problems. In the case studies of Hezbollah and Hamas, Harik and Johannsen conclude that for both organizations the issues of contention for the insurgents are the subject of debate among scholars. The existence of the state of Israel, the pathways towards peace and the role of regional states supporting the organizations has led to divergent interpretations of the actions and intentions of both these groups. For the case of Iraq, Ahmed Hashim notes a similar lack of unity among the vision of the insurgents. The diverse groups espouse different and sometimes conflicting agendas. Giustozzi notes the same about the groups in the Afghanistan insurgency. Beyond the aim of getting rid of the foreigners on Afghani soil, the agreement between experts ends. Is the insurgency merely a response to outside presence, or are the fighters involved in a communal clash or tribal uprising? Similarly, what are the ideas informing the counterinsurgent agenda in Afghanistan; removing the Taliban regime, fighting terrorism, state-building, keeping NATO alive and pleasing the Americans? These ideas seem to be continually evolving. Also David Spencer engages in this discussion about the confusion over strategic agendas in his treatment of the FARC and Sendero Luminoso in Latin America.

Conceptual issues and interpretations of agendas of the actors are the two main topics of debate that the authors in this volume have identified. These, of course, give rise to research challenges.

The challenges and pressing questions

The contributors to this volume have raised several important challenges for the research agenda. First, the conceptual debate about the essence of (counter)insurgency deserves more of a research effort. As Thomas Mockaitis has noted in his description of American counterinsurgency thinking, it has for a long time been considered the bastard child of the military profession. After the Vietnam War the concept was hidden deep within supposedly new categories of Operations Other Than War or Low Intensity Conflict. Counterinsurgency ideas were not revived in the decade of peacekeeping in the 1990s. But as Thijs Brocades Zaalberg writes the commonalities were often much more prominent than the differences.

A second important challenge forms the question of the proper application of counterinsurgency ideas in light of the changing circumstances under which they are applied (Pritchard and Smith 2010; Marshall 2010; Egnell 2010). There are those who see counterinsurgency in different guises being applied in Afghanistan. Thomas Mockaitis for example writes in his contribution that the Americans in Afghanistan have been largely engaged in the capture, if not the killing, of terrorists and insurgents rather than in a proper counterinsurgency campaign. Only since the arrival of General McChrystal in Afghanistan in 2009 have efforts been made to apply a full-blown counterinsurgency approach. While a comprehensive campaign plan was developed, its application has been hampered by a coalition, rather than a unitary actor carrying it out, with each participant adhering to diverging outlooks and caveats. These observations have been echoed by the work of Rudra Chaudhuri and Theo Farrell as well as Pritchard and Smith that a counterinsurgency strategy is really being employed in the Afghan and Pakistan context.

Conclusions
(Chaudhuri and Farrell 2011; Pritchard and Smith 2010). Their arguments diverge over the degree of success of this application. Others do not recognize a counterinsurgency strategy in current operations in Afghanistan. David Kilcullen is most adamant in his contribution to this volume that in fact COIN should not be a guide to operations at all. What is being applied in Afghanistan he calls accelerated counterinsurgency; ‘combining extremely intensive counter-network targeting with intensified efforts at reconciliation (of senior Taliban leaders) and reintegration (of lower-level foot-soldiers)’.

One of the obstacles for carrying out a counterinsurgency, is the fact that a coalition is carrying it out at present. Chin notes that despite the wealth of British experience of counterinsurgency and doctrinal adaptability, British counterinsurgency awaits an uncertain future because of the coalition and resources necessary to conduct it at this point in time. In these circumstances, is it at all possible to conduct counterinsurgency as a coalition? The past offers few guidelines and this pressing question still awaits an answer.

Not only has the application formed a challenge, the role awarded to the local allies seems to have changed. Only a few years ago, the ‘Afghan model of war’ was highly celebrated, i.e. indigenous forces together with special forces were used to do most of the fighting (Biddle 2007). Now Geraint Hughes writes of the recognition that proxy forces bring a host of unforeseen problems:

In cases where elite military units engage local surrogates to help them fight irregular adversaries, the consequences for state stability can be grave. US and allied special forces weakened Karzai’s government in Afghanistan by using militias against al-Qaeda, thereby empowering warlords involved in destabilizing and unsavoury activities such as drugs trafficking. Furthermore, surrogate forces may prove unreliable.

There are many examples where NATO troops have become victims of local power feuds.

Third, in her chapter on the role of policing, Alice Hills points out a glaring paradox in the existing literature and practice of counterinsurgency. On the one hand, policing is seen as crucial in conducting any kind of counterinsurgency. Police men and women are the individuals with a most direct finger on the pulse of local dynamics and the best sources for intelligence. In the case study of Indian counterinsurgency, the role of the police forces has been awarded crucial importance. On the other hand, few studies exist that do justice to this crucial role. Also in practice, not only is a solid police strategy lacking, but also many policing missions are under-resourced. In fact, she laments ‘international and local militaries alike regard policing – and police – as in some way inferior, and this is reflected in the political attention and resources policing receives’.

Fourth, the information revolution and consequences for fighting insurgency and counter-insurgency are only starting to be recognized. Coker provocingly claims that ‘we use technology as a substitute for risk’. This of course provides the opponent a strategic chance to try and raise the cost of war in human lives by attacking civilians via terrorist attacks. Being able to take large-scale losses in human lives might provide strategic weight to the insurgents. This disparity breaks what Coker terms the ‘community of fate’ opponents in war usually share and it negates the recognition of the humanity of the enemy. Thereby we enter a slippery slope towards a moral and ethical quagmire. Glimpses of this are available in the discussion about the use of drones by Geraint Hughes. Also on the topic of the information revolution David Betz notes that cyber-insurgency is still the domain of science fiction but the use of cyberspace does give current insurgencies new dimensions, in particular with respect to narrative and transmission of ideas.
Fifth, there are few studies, and this present one is no exception, which deal with the distinction between counterinsurgency at home and abroad. It remains unclear what the differences are, if any. Fidler and Ganguly offer the internal nature of Indian counterinsurgency as one of the reasons why these experiences have not been part of the wider counterinsurgency debate. Furthermore, they argue that the domestic counterinsurgency campaigns, as waged in India, are subject of a different form of appraisal than international campaigns. For instance, as they state ‘there is no “exit strategy”’. Steven Metz calls the external counterinsurgency practices ‘counterinsurgency support’, with the most important effort being local. What is often neglected is the possibility that there are important in-group out-group dynamics at play, which might influence the applicability and effectiveness of counterinsurgency ideas. Acting against a domestic political opponent who has taken up arms might require a different mix of measures, compared to acting against a political opponent on the territory of an incumbent, allied state. In the latter case the staying power of the counterinsurgent can be fundamentally questioned. As Thomas Mockaitis writes in his overview of American counterinsurgency experiences, ‘How long will you stay, and what will happen to us when you leave? [This] [u]ncertainty over America’s long-term commitment made recruiting locals difficult’. This situation makes it inherently questionable whether trust and legitimacy can be awarded to an outsider. Can the outsiders credibly commit and possess staying power necessary for building up a fragile state?

So having drawn this research and argument together where does this leave work on insurgency and counterinsurgency in the decades to come? At the time of completing this volume in the early months of 2011 it is becoming increasingly evident that we might be living through major political transformations in international politics. A number of militant popular insurrections have challenged the authority of several Middle East dictatorships with the downfall of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. Osama Bin Laden, the West’s number one ‘bogeyman’ as the titular head of al-Qaeda and the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, has been killed by a US Navy Seal team in a safe house in Pakistan. Further insurrections look likely to continue to destabilize the Middle East in the following few years, presenting, to some analysts at least, the serious possibility for the partial neutralization of Islamist and jihadist challenges to the West by a range of low intensity democratic structures.

We may therefore be living through a watershed period in which the older debates around insurgency and counterinsurgency in the decades to come to? At the time of completing this volume in the early months of 2011 it is becoming increasingly evident that we might be living through major political transformations in international politics. A number of militant popular insurrections have challenged the authority of several Middle East dictatorships with the downfall of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. Osama Bin Laden, the West’s number one ‘bogeyman’ as the titular head of al-Qaeda and the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, has been killed by a US Navy Seal team in a safe house in Pakistan. Further insurrections look likely to continue to destabilize the Middle East in the following few years, presenting, to some analysts at least, the serious possibility for the partial neutralization of Islamist and jihadist challenges to the West by a range of low intensity democratic structures.

We may therefore be living through a watershed period in which the older debates around insurgency and counterinsurgency structured around a ‘war on terror’ in the aftermath of 9/11 become increasingly redundant. What they will be replaced with of course is an open-ended question. It is possible that a new democratization agenda will begin to emerge in the politics of the Middle East and the Islamic world more generally after decades in which scholars have often pondered on the possibilities of this (see for example Salame 1994). Such a process is likely to heighten, at least in the short term, social conflict and actually escalate in some areas insurgent conflicts (Mansfield and Snyder 2005). However in the longer term it promises to provide political mechanisms for the internal resolution of social and ethnic and regional disputes and the avoidance of a resort to insurgent warfare.

In a more general historical perspective this shift towards a more open political arena should not be seen as too surprising – though academic analysts of international politics have on occasions been prone (as with the failure in the 1980s to foresee the end of the Cold War) to being caught out by the sudden emergence of unforeseen events. Insurgency and counterinsurgency from at least the second half of the twentieth century can be seen as part of the response to the rapid modernization of societies that had formerly been under Western imperial control. What emerged by the 1950s and 1960s as ‘third world modernisation’ often led to a situation where post-colonial regimes were under the domination of small bourgeois elites keen to push through programmes of modernization and ‘development’ on the basis of Enlightenment ideas of
progress. These programmes have broadly ranged from market orientated capitalist ones to state controlled socialist efforts at centralized planning though the downfall of communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR in the late 1980s has ensured the demise of almost all of these.

Most of the regimes have been authoritarian in nature and this has been the cause for a number of anti-state insurgencies, especially when the regime has been seen to be marginalizing or discriminating against minority groups – the chapters in the volume on Sri Lanka and China, for example, exemplify this. However, as Michael Howard has pointed out in a cogent examination of the concept of peace, the alternative to this authoritarianism has often not been a simple shift towards Western style representative democracy but a more anarchic collapse into state failure (Howard 2001: 110–11). This has been the roots for a number of insurgencies in sub-Saharan Africa in the post-Cold War period as the chapter by William Reno illustrates. In turn the response by some counterinsurgencies such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan (though not significantly in China and Russia) has been to move these societies some way towards the establishment of some form of democratic political system that is capable, to some degree, of reflecting popular demands.

It is still too early to say whether the Middle East is on the brink of experiencing something like a ‘fourth wave’ of democratization following the formulation of Samuel Huntington (Huntington 2002). However if such a process does occur over the next few years it will radically transform the political context in which insurgencies are being fought in the region. Even limited forms of democratization offer the prospect for the inclusion of radical Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt into the political process and to a considerable degree undermining the appeal of insurgency and terrorism.

The popular democratically-inclined insurrections currently under way in the Middle East may of course extend beyond this region to a wider swathe of states in the less developed world. On the hand, they may just be contained within a few Middle East states with the rest remaining in some form of authoritarian control. Whatever the case, they do promise to transform the current axis of global insurgencies over the next few decades further into the sphere of failed or failing states.

This is not the place to get involved in the extensive and wide-ranging debate in International Relations on the various possible futures of the international system beyond the nation state. It clearly impacts in a general manner though on the way work on insurgency and counterinsurgency is formulated. As many of the chapters in this volume illustrate much of this work is orientated still around the centrality of the state despite the interesting recent debate on the possible emergence of a globalized Islamic insurgency against the West (Kilcullen 2005; Mackinlay 2009; Rich 2010). In a broad sense this debate relates to a wider discussion about the future of war itself in global politics with a range of possible scenarios being suggested to replace those of a system anchored in the territorial state. Hirst has suggested in particular four such scenarios of:

1. a ‘borderless world’ of liberal capitalism;
2. a ‘new Middle Ages’ with a collapse of centralized authority into competing plural powers operating within and beyond the territorial state;
3. a ‘network society’ in which power is diffused along a range of networks of wealth, power, information and images; and
4. a new ‘cosmopolitan’ global order where the relative decline of the state leads to the emergence of a new series of global power centres that regulate and order the international system (Hirst 2001: 112–14).

These four new scenarios offer the potential for a range of important new questions to emerge over the form and nature of insurgency in the international system. The first scenario of...
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a world without borders perhaps suggests an increased possibility for the emergence of global insurgent movements – but then it is precisely this possibility which will in turn limit the feasibility of the scenario emerging in the next few decades as states seek increasingly to cooperate in defeating such insurgent challenges. Likewise the ‘new Middle Ages’ resembles in some respects the doomsday scenario of collapsing states outlined in Robert Kaplan’s thesis and which might be increasingly nullified by the democratic advances being made in the Middle East (Kaplan 2000). The third scenario of a network society does indicate a fertile area for increasingly salient forms of networked ‘terrorism’ by both state and sub-state movements; as we have previously noted, the research on networked forms of insurgency may well prove to be one of the most important and fruitful areas for analysts in the years ahead.

Finally there is the last scenario of a ‘cosmopolitan’ world order that has become associated with the work of both radical liberal internationalists and some neo-Marxists in IR. This scenario offers, perhaps, the most fruitful avenue for advanced cooperation on a global basis to confront insurgencies with the increasing enforcement of human rights norms and international law against local and regional insurgent and warlord leaders. It presumes some form of global police force and counterinsurgency body capable of enforcing these norms – though how this might be constructed and on what basis remains as vague. This is an area for much future research since if there is growing evidence for an increasingly powerful ‘globalized insurgency’ then in turn this presumes a growing international cooperation in meeting this threat on a global basis. Much might grow out of existing international as well as regional bodies. However the experience of bodies such as the UN, NATO and the European Union since the end of the Cold War suggests that the lead will still be taken by a small number of key states with continuing difficulties over free-riding by some states, problems in forging a commonly agreed military doctrine and political resistance by democratic electorates to the expense and commitment to long-term cooperation.

Given these general dynamics at work within the international system it is clear that we can expect a lively debate on the changing shapes of insurgency and counterinsurgency in the years ahead. It is especially important though that ‘non-Western’ perspectives, outside the traditional arc of the North Atlantic and Australasia, are brought to bear within an increasingly globalizing field of insurgency and counterinsurgency studies. This would need to include the stories and experiences of insurgency groups through detailed field work, which needs to award a far greater role to regional specialists and anthropologists, as David Ucko also concludes in his contribution.

A further important consideration, based on the material in this volume, is that we can no longer escape the politically inconvenient truth that coercive and repressive counterinsurgency has in a large number of cases achieved the desired effect of pacification and stabilization (Merom 2003). As others have stated ‘coercion was the reality – “hearts and minds” the myth’ (Jackson 2006: 17). Our preferred views on how to deal with political violence in the shape of hearts and minds policies has led us to distorting and misreading history (Duyvesteyn 2011). In fact, Robert Egnell has recently suggested that the causal relationship between hearts and minds policies has to be make-believe. He argues that ‘a highly restrictive approach should be adopted until the causal relations between aid, security and legitimacy are established’ (2010: 300).

A third consideration is that counterinsurgency ideas are by no means wedded to existing state-building theory (though see the various analyses in Rich and Stubbs 1997). Counterinsurgency thinking, fundamentally, still lacks an understanding of state building theory, failing states and role of regime type. Metz, Reno and Hashim have noted in their contributions the close links between patronage politics and insurgency. Cline, in his case studies of Thailand,
the Philippines and Burma, but also Qazi in his study of the Pakistani insurgents, point out that insurgency is often founded on pragmatism and exploitation of the lack of delivery of coveted social goods by the central state (Kilcullen 2009). It remains unquestioned whether it is at all possible for an outside force to exert positive influence on state building. As Alex Marshall writes ‘[t]he advocates of liberal peace theory have ... emphasised a state-building strategy of “institutionalisation before liberalisation”, involving the imposition upon subject societies of a coercive modernisation process, framed by tightly externally policed economic and political conditionalities’ (2010: 244). Existing state-building theory, which is largely based on the formation of states in early modern Europe, shows that it is importantly also a bottom-up process. Our efforts today are based heavily on a top-down process and on exogenous influences rather than endogenous development. This is an area that requires urgent elucidation because it forms the fundament of the currently dominant counterinsurgency thinking.

Fourth, a largely neglected area forms the role of insurgents in international law and a human rights perspective on the application of counterinsurgency. During colonial times, the British government had declared the Geneva Conventions, article 3 as not applicable to the empire (Marshall 2010). As Christopher Coker concludes there is a moral hiatus in the fact that insurgent movements have not signed up to the Geneva Conventions. In fact, most international humanitarian law is based on a state-based perspective on international affairs. The whole development of the prohibitions and limitations on warfare and their implementation and adherence are mainly focused on states. Today there seems to be little recognition of this state of affairs and much more could be done. A notable exception is the work of the Geneva Call NGO which aims to make insurgent movements sign up to the Geneva Conventions with the argument that it will make it harder for them to be tried for human rights abuses, if cases were to be brought to the attention of the International Criminal Court in The Hague (Sassòli 2006).

The aim of this volume has been to demonstrate the rich thinking in the study of insurgency and counterinsurgency. Despite important advances in recent years, as we have tried to show, a whole exciting research agenda remains open.

Notes

1 Corroborative evidence is that military victories offer stable peace (Licklider 1995; Toft 2006).
2 This impression was further confirmed at the Conference on Insurgency and Counterinsurgency of the Commission Internationale d’Histoire Militaire, 29 August–3 September 2010 in Amsterdam.
3 One exception might be Beckett, who distinguishes offensive insurgency aimed at disposing a national government from defensive insurgency focused on expelling an occupational power (2005).

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