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INSURGENCY, COUNTERINSURGENCY AND POLICING

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In Iraq in the summer of 2007, Sunni insurgents began a systematic campaign to kill police chiefs in their homes, policemen at road checkpoints, and would-be officers at recruiting posts, as they had done throughout the insurgency (Australian, 27 August 2007); in 2005 alone, 1,497 officers were killed and 3,256 wounded (New York Times, 16 January 2006). Thai and Yemeni police are similarly targeted, as are police in India where, in April 2010, Naxalite insurgents ambushed paramilitary police in the eastern state of Chattisgarh, killing 74 officers sent to reinforce the inexperienced local police (Financial Times, 7 April 2010). Meanwhile international forces in Afghanistan rely on indigenous police to distract attention from their troops or to provide the local security that will enable them to leave. Hence three-quarters of the US$14.2 billion requested in 2010 for Afghanistan’s reconstruction is intended for training, equipping and mentoring the Afghan National Police (ANP) and army (Special Inspector, 2010).

This chapter addresses the issues raised by police and policing in insurgency and counterinsurgency. Police refers to the public or statutory police whose significance results from the political objectives it symbolises, the power relationships it reflects, and its close engagement with local populations. In counterinsurgency, police refers to indigenous officers and to the international civilian or paramilitary volunteer officers advising or mentoring them; it may also refer to retired officers contracted by international private security companies to train local police. In contrast, policing is a descriptive term alluding to the problem-solving, regulatory, enforcement and coercive activities of statutory and non-statutory (or customary) security groups.

The police role in insurgency is relatively straightforward. Local police play a negative role in insurgency because they reproduce the political order that insurgents challenge; their functions usually include regime representation and regulatory activities so they are targeted. In the early days of an insurgency police may attempt to police, but once violence reaches certain levels they either support the insurgents, or they disappear or they are killed. This is notably so in rural areas where police are rarely present. In contrast, the police role in counterinsurgency is multifaceted and assertive. International, national and local police are used in combination with troops to contain or crush insurgency, as in Iraq or Chechnya, or, more rarely, to address its root causes, as in Northern Ireland. Increasingly, as in Afghanistan, police are seen as an enabling element in non-military security operations involving Western forces (though all counterinsurgency is predicated on coercion), and are accordingly regarded as key local actors.
Understanding of the police role is, however, limited. Specifically, there is a fundamental lack of knowledge concerning the role and culture of the non-Western police on which strategic success in international operations rests.

The discussion that follows, which focuses on the police’s role in counterinsurgency involving international forces, is organised in four sections. First, it offers an overview of the state of knowledge concerning the police role. Second, it notes topics currently the subject of debate. Third, it identifies the challenges and pressing questions confronting scholars and analysts before, fourth, drawing brief conclusions.

**Current state of knowledge**

It is sometimes claimed that there is an international consensus about counterinsurgency (e.g. Bayley and Perito 2010: 55), but the accuracy of this assumption is questionable. There may be general recognition of the principles thought to underpin contemporary Western counterinsurgency, but each campaign must still be understood in its historical and regional context. Thus to say that the ‘support of the people’ is ‘essential for success’ (Ellis quoted in Bayley and Perito 2010: 55) may be true as far as liberal democracies are concerned; it may even be ‘the fundamental premise of the contemporary COIN consensus’. But consensus is often temporary, and support may be achieved by coercion, rather than conviction; activities such as ‘hearts-and-mind’ operations have always concerned control requirements, rather than beliefs.

Similarly, although US forces in the vanguard of counterinsurgency currently promote protection of the populace, this is not necessarily proof of the term’s accuracy or abiding truth. Indeed, it took seven years of campaigning before a US commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan (General McChrystal) admitted that ‘our strategy cannot be focused on seizing terrain or destroying insurgent forces; our objective must be the population’ (JDW, 30 June 2010: 21). Further, while counterinsurgency forces around the world follow US developments, they do so in order to exploit or anticipate, rather than emulate. Few are under any illusions as to the operational and political challenges of counterinsurgency, and many (e.g. India, Indonesia, Israel and the Russian Federation) have more experience. Even so, most conventional militaries agree that counterinsurgency is best avoided, especially in cities where population density and media presence exacerbate the political challenges of conducting operations.

The current state of knowledge is fragmented, especially in relation to police. This is not to suggest that the orthodoxies associated with international and/or regionally-located policy-makers, practitioners and scholars are analytically separate. Rather it is to emphasise that while there is an established literature covering the role of conventional militaries, consensus is usually temporary and localised; officials focus on time-urgent political and legal challenges, practitioners are aware of counterinsurgency’s technical constraints, while scholars are influenced by academic and policy-relevant debates. Lessons from past operations remain influential, and the enduring challenge of translating military achievement into political success means that the writings of men such as Galula and Thompson are periodically rediscovered. But the resultant literature focuses on the military role, and policing and police are addressed only in so far as they affect military concerns. That few Western practitioners, officials and scholars attempt to understand the role and culture of indigenous police exacerbates divisions between rhetoric and reality.

There is no coherent or comprehensive orthodoxy regarding the police role in counterinsurgency, and consensus is offset by contingencies, political calculations, and national and institutional differences. Even so, certain strands and perspectives coalesce around the need for a police
presence, and commonalities can be identified. Western assumptions are evident from policy, and are supported (and in some cases contradicted or undermined) by the knowledge of practitioners and scholars.

**Policy-relevant approaches**

International understanding reflects Western (i.e. US) responses to an amalgam of experience, political objectives and time-urgent problems that rarely, if ever, amounts to a long-term strategy. Thus officials in Washington, London and Brussels focus on reforming or reconstructing indigenous police because democratic-style policing is believed to be inherently desirable, and because transforming local police into a ‘professional’ police service offers their troops an exit strategy. Police are the favoured providers of local security because their use emphasises the commitment of governments to desirable goals such as the rule of law, lessens the chances of coups, and reinforces perceptions of insurgents as criminals rather than freedom fighters. Indeed, insurgents are usually criminalised, making them a police or (as in the case of Russian Federation forces in Chechnya) an internal security problem. This is understandable because counterinsurgency requires police work in the sense of identification, and regulatory and (for many liberal democracies) evidence-related activities. Also, insurgents’ fund raising is often linked to transnational organised crime (Williams 2009). But beyond this divisions appear.

Western democracies prefer to police using civilian or gendarmerie officers, rather than troops, but opinions differ according to contingencies, national traditions and political calculations. In 2003–4, for example, insurgents in Iraq forced the Pentagon to reconsider its approach to policing: US warfighting troops did not want to police cities such as Baghdad, international civilian police officers were incapable of doing so, and the new Iraqi Police Service was not trained or equipped for counterinsurgency. The acrimonious nature of the debate that ensued between the departments of defence and state is evidence of the contested nature of even national orthodoxy. The UK’s Chilcott Enquiry into the UK’s involvement in Iraq, 2003–9, suggests that a similar situation existed in London as the ministries for defence, foreign affairs and development pursued their own sometimes contradictory and often obstructive agendas. Indeed, the Chilcott Enquiry is particularly instructive because it emphasises how UK ministries, like their international peers, recognised the police’s potential but were unwilling to resource it adequately. This is evident from the testimony of Douglas Brand, the UK’s chief police adviser in Iraq, 2003–4, who notes that while the US training system for a new Iraqi army involved 400 individuals and a big budget under a two-star general, there was nothing for police: ‘There seemed to be . . . [the] expectation that the police would . . . rise like a phoenix and just get on with things’ (Brand 2010a: 15).

Unrealistic expectations are intensified by analytical opaqueness, which is exacerbated by the Western tendency to conflate the police’s counterinsurgency role with security sector reform (SSR) and peacekeeping (Kernaghan 2010a: 84). Despite the dramatically different levels of violence involved, officials tend to see the police role as part of an all-purpose kit for stabilising and reconstructing fragile or post-conflict countries. Indeed, the US government explicitly endorses the concept of SSR as a component of stabilisation and, by extension, counterinsurgency (Meharg et al., 2009; US Army Field Manual 3–07 2008). There is an equally strong tendency to see the police role as peacekeeping. Witness a UK chief police adviser in Iraq arguing in 2006 that the UK’s police task was covered by its UN police mission statement: ‘to assist in the development of an efficient, effective, credible and community supported police service’ (Smith 2010a: 3). In consequence, similar models tend to be adopted regardless of context; the version of SSR implemented in Baghdad in 2005 was that used in Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo (Smith 2010b: 12).
Practitioner perspectives

Brand and his colleagues share a perspective that is common amongst Western officers. There is no liberal consensus enshrined in a police equivalent to FM 3–24 (which discusses police in counterinsurgency primarily in relation to host-nation support), but there is broad support for the view that successful counterinsurgency requires a multi-agent approach to supporting the local population and host-nation government, and that ‘the police is the most important actor in counterinsurgency. Local police provide the first line of defense in COIN ... accurate intelligence, and efficient police and law enforcement are the key capabilities to defeat an insurgency early’ (RAND 2008: 186).

Consensus is underpinned by the widespread conviction that responsibility for social order is primarily the police’s (Neocleous 2000). Accordingly, counterinsurgency requires a police presence because it aims at facilitating or imposing a new form of order, and because developing a police is conventionally seen as ensuring justice and the security (i.e. well-being) of a populace. Additionally, Western advisers often believe that complex policing issues can be viewed in the light of the basic police principles and occupational commonalities that they take for granted. But this is to downplay the differences between counterinsurgency policing and policing in more benign environments (Kilcullen 2009: 61), and between different cultures. There are occupational commonalities shared by police (O’Neil et al. 2007) – organisations such as INTERPOL could not otherwise function – but local culture, norms and practices invariably influence what is understood as appropriate, and international advisers reform or rebuild local police in the light of their national or professional experience. This is notably so regarding issues such as the status of a police vis-à-vis military forces. Brand’s opinion that the police function is to maintain order by providing a police presence, and that the resultant interaction is best managed through criminal justice processes may be orthodox among UK practitioners who believe that the military does not have the skills or training to keep order (their purpose is to disperse or repress disorder), but an officer from Italy’s Carabinieri (which is a branch of the armed forces) may disagree.

Context matters, and while the elements of a Western policy-relevant orthodoxy can be identified, they reflect contingencies, rather than enduring truths. As the writings of strategists such as Trinquier remind us, attitudes and perspectives shift over the years; so does the case of the Thai police, which in the 1960s refused to play a role in counterinsurgency (Blaufarb 1977: 194–6). Arguably, it is the role of the academy to place policy-relevant and functional knowledge in its broader context, but in practice the scholarly record is even more uneven.

Academic knowledge

There are few if any accounts of police and policing in counterinsurgency written by scholars with expertise in comparative policing and counterinsurgency. Those with a police studies background (Bayley is the most eminent) focus on Western policy problems and generic liberal solutions even as they acknowledge that ‘police activity is affected in predictable ways by social environment’ (contrast Bayley 1977: 7). In contrast, the most insightful and influential analyses of counterinsurgency come from soldier-strategists (e.g. Kilcullen 2009), historians (Horne 1977), political figures (Thompson 1966) or regional specialists who acknowledge the police role, though do not analyse it in depth. Few explore the implications of ethnographic accounts of insurgencies in rural Africa, which is where most insurgencies occur, and where a conventional police presence is essentially irrelevant (Boás and Dunn 2007).
Admittedly, many scholars working on counterinsurgency discuss policing, but the term usually refers to regulatory, investigative or public security activities by military forces during post-conflict or peacekeeping operations. Policing is understood as control measures that shift into preliminary or holding measures until responsibility can be handed over to a police, and is often spoken of as a security gap. This term came to prominence with the publication in 1998 of the Washington-based National Defense University’s *Policing the New World Disorder* (Oakley *et al.* 1998: 8–15). Prompted by the US experience in Somalia and the Balkans, the term offers a conceptual tool for analysing developments during, for example, the early weeks of the Iraq insurgency when local police forces proved incapable of providing law and order, US military forces were neither trained nor equipped to do so, and the international gendarmerie forces capable of operating in such an environment were few in number.

As this implies, the police role in counterinsurgency is invariably analysed in terms of Anglo-American beliefs about what police should do, or are supposed to be, and what forms of social control are appropriate: there are few if any systematic and rigorous analyses of the role and perspectives of the indigenous police from which so much is expected. To paraphrase the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, we do not know how ‘natives’ think (Sahlins 1995).

The foundations for a better understanding exist, but are as yet undeveloped. Findlay and Zvekić’s 1993 analysis of alternative policing styles is suggestive of the possibilities, though it does not address counterinsurgency as such. For it argues that policing is best approached as a process of interaction of interests and powers within a specific environment: ‘the particular interactions of interest, power and authority which distinguish the structures and functions of police work should be viewed as constructed around expectations of policing within a given cultural, political and situational context’ (Findlay and Zvekić 1993: 6). Their work emphasises the localised and specific nature of police, policing and security in such a way as to challenge conventional priorities such as crime prevention (counterinsurgency related policing tends to be specific whereas crime control is more diffuse). But for now, knowledge of policing and the police in counterinsurgency is partial in both senses of the word.

**Current debates**

Current debate is shaped by the uneven record of US-led counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. It relates to the question of who should provide policing, but focuses on police reform as a solution to operational and strategic challenges, and is judged in relation to military and political requirements. Two issues have broad relevance.

**Types of police and policing**

Counterinsurgency is a violent and brutal business, and policing in counterinsurgency is not the same as peacetime policing. Even so, international policy-makers expect military and police to perform miracles. In 2003, for example, the British troops who took Basra were expected to fill the gap left by the 16,000 Iraqi policemen who had formerly kept order in the city. Three years later, a 24-strong team of British police advisers, supported by 70 civilian private security staff employed by Armor Holdings, were expected to reform and/or train Basra’s increasingly sectarian police forces even though their influence over them was negligible. The question therefore arises as to the type of police that can – or should – provide policing, what its relationship with military forces should be, and at what point police should take responsibility for local security. Police and military roles are widely seen as separate and distinct, and it is generally agreed that police should not be used (as has been the case in Afghanistan) as ‘little soldiers’. The point at
which transition should take place – and the skills required to handle it – is a matter for professional judgement, but also it is politically critical for governments wishing to drawdown troops. The timing of handovers is therefore the subject of debate.

Militaries are used for policing in multinational counterinsurgency operations because they are present, capable and well-resourced whereas police (international and indigenous) are absent, under-resourced, ineffective or sectarian. Perhaps for this reason, a military’s choice of policing activities is selective. Depending on their remit, policing ranges from high-profile ‘arrests’ of war criminals to providing police with specialised weapons training. In between are house-to-house searches conducted in order to seize weapons, capture suspects, create a security cordon, and support or monitor local forces. Identification and intelligence are key objectives. Overall, the military approach to policing is shaped by specific problems, vested interests and fears of mission creep. Troops are not trained, equipped or recruited to police, and their response to disorder tends to involve dispersal or repression. That an intermediate stage between the two often arises adds a layer of ambiguity.

The critical variable affecting the type of police and the style of policing employed is the level of violence in the locality concerned. Combat troops were used in the early days of the Iraq insurgency, but there were never enough of them to police big cities, they were not trained for such work, they often used inappropriate tactics, and their reliance on technology intensified, rather than alleviated, the problems presented by operating in the midst of a population (Hills 2010: 45). Civilian police cannot operate in such circumstances, so the choice appears to be that either combat troops provide policing when there is no alternative, or that they (or other troops) are organised with policing duties in mind, or that some type of paramilitary force specialising in this work should be developed. A number of options were discussed at the time.

One possibility entailed the creation of a designated force that could carry out security missions, operating within the body of combat troops. Standing paramilitary forces such as Carabinieri and Gendarmerie Nationale, which share the characteristics of military and police, offer one model. They can fight as light infantry, but also they are trained as police and equipped to maintain public order, conduct investigations, make arrests and direct traffic. They can deploy quickly and were used successfully in the Balkans in the form of Multinational Specialised Units (MSU) and Special Police Units (SPUs). The UN’s formed police units (FPUs) are another possibility. Indeed, the first all-female Indian FPU in Liberia in 2007 had seen service in Kashmir. Even the UK military favoured a Carabinieri-style police for Basra, as did Paul Kernaghan, the international policing representative to the UK’s Association of Chief Police Officers, who argued that in order to police a locality police needed to be able to protect themselves; only then could they protect the populace (Kernaghan 2010a: 22). Other British advisers disagreed, however, and their views proved more influential (e.g. Smith 2010b: 15–17).

In fact, the discussion prompted by Iraq was merely the latest iteration of a long-running debate, which had, for example, been strong in US defence circles in the aftermath of the 1989 invasion of Panama as practitioners and analysts sought to share the policing task, or to shift it to organisations other than the US Army (e.g. Beaumont 1995; Field and Perito 2002; RAND 2008). But Iraq introduced a further tension as the United States’ increasing reliance on commercial contractors led to companies such as DynCorp International providing the officers needed for police training. US domestic police structures mean that Washington has little choice to using contractors, but the costs are high, and the value of sending US officers from small towns to teach handcuffing and traffic duties to ANP recruits working in war zones is controversial (DOD 2010).

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Police reform

Western counterinsurgency operations are currently predicated on protecting the populace; i.e. on providing local security in order to win the acquiescence or toleration of the host population – which includes policemen and their families and neighbours. Achieving this will, it is argued, allow international forces to exit. It is also thought to require the creation of a relatively reliable, effective and incorrupt police. In other words, successful counterinsurgency depends to some extent on police reform. But police reform is notoriously problematic (and expensive) even in benign circumstances. Not only is the police institution superbly resistant to change, but also officers live and work alone in their home neighbourhoods, and are susceptible to intimidation by local power brokers and sectarian interests. Most are notoriously ineffective, untrained, corrupt or brutal, and must therefore be trained, equipped and persuaded or coerced into adopting practices less likely to alienate local people. This is thought necessary because a second international goal is to enhance the legitimacy of not only the police, but also the governments concerned. In the Iraqi city of Tal Afar, for example, reform involved recruiting officers from a broader range of residents. They were then trained in a police academy (US forces and the Iraqi Army also trained police in military skills). Corrupt or brutal police were dismissed or prosecuted by the local and provincial government, and new senior officers from outside the locality were appointed (US Army Field Manual 3–24 2010: 5–23). But this picture glosses over the superficial and temporary nature of such projects.

Police reform is arguably the most significant – and intractable – of current debates because it raises fundamental questions about not only the West’s understanding of policing realities in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, but also its comprehension of the dynamics underpinning counterinsurgency. Given several years, it is usually possible to retrain or reconstruct a police such as the ANP, but the chances of reforming it on democratic lines are minimal, especially when reform is not in the interests of the indigenous government. Counterinsurgency based on the utility of indigenous police and policing is for such reasons problematic. That there appears to be no real alternative makes the challenges even more pressing. Hence, perhaps, the banner Colin Smith saw when he attended the launch of ‘2006 – Year of the Police’ at Baghdad Police College: ‘Just enough is good enough’ (Smith 2010a: 4–5). As he comments, this was, while realistic, ‘not particularly encouraging’.

Challenges and pressing questions

The functional challenges associated with developing suitable local forces relate to resources, leadership, exercising power and organisational structures (US Army Field Manual 3–24 2009: Chapter 6), but those associated with comprehension are equally demanding.

The reality behind FM 3–24’s headings is evident from Mark Etherington’s account of his time as head of a small Coalition Political Authority (CPA) team in al-Kut, a provincial capital to the southeast of Baghdad. On arrival he found:

Police clustered in small groups on the steps of their stations and nearby fences like crows. There appeared to be thousands of them, in almost comical disarray. The police had no infrastructure, rules, leadership or staff worth the name; most had no weapons and few officers appeared to do any work though it was clear that many were directly implicated in widespread and systematic corruption if not criminal activity.

(Etherington 2005: 27)
Addressing this situation was problematic because equipment and clothing were distributed according to status and hierarchy, and morale was undermined by fears of retribution, assassination and mutiny (Etherington 2005: 217, 288). Later, the police in al-Kut sought protection by joining sectarian militia, just as they did in cities such as Basra. Those that did not hid behind the blast walls of the stations in which they were besieged. But this was understandable, as the case of Kirkuk in 2009 showed: ‘The police chief had survived several assassination attempts, but since 2004, 680 police men had been killed in action in and around Kirkuk, with more than twice that number seriously injured’ (FT Magazine, 13–14 June 2009). There was no possibility of developing the police intelligence capacity (i.e. special branch) that received wisdom recommends.

There is nothing novel or unexpected about this situation, yet the knowledge and experience associated with it has yet to be integrated into a coherent or inclusive understanding. Regarding comprehension, three points are noteworthy.

First, although the notion of an international consensus is promoted by IGOs such as the UN, and seemingly evidenced by the influence US doctrine and practice exerts on governments and security forces around the world, this actually reflects the tendency of Western policymakers, practitioners and scholars to universalise on the basis of specific cases while neglecting the social and political conditions that make them possible; contextual realities are neglected, as is the logic of practice embedded within them. This is notably so with counterinsurgency strategies reliant on a reformed police. Hence Stewart’s observation from his time as a governorate co-ordinator in Iraq in 2003 that too many international police advisers fail to question the transferability of their usual practices (Stewart 2007: 87).

Assessing accurately the potential contribution of local police is a major challenge. Not only has southern police culture yet to be analysed, but also the gulf between international expectations and local realities is deepened by the extent to which international assessment teams draw on previous operational experience, and are subject to political pressure. For example, in the summer of 2003, Coalition advisers in Iraq based their plans for policing on what had worked in Kosovo and Haiti, where restructuring had been part of a stabilisation programme. Their goal was to recruit, train and equip primarily in order to increase police numbers. But judging success by the numbers of recruits usually results in the recruitment of unfit, illiterate or inappropriate individuals, thereby undermining the aim of establishing a professional police. Further, the programme’s 18-month timeframe was dictated by the timing of the 2004 US presidential elections, and by military pressure, for the military could not withdraw from policing operations until the number of police was considered sufficient for local control (Brand 2010b).

Second, the operational challenges of counterinsurgency are pressing, but the need for strategic clarity is even more so. And it is usually missing, as is analytical clarity.

International forces must to strike a balance between the short-term needs of conducting COIN effectively and the long-term goal of establishing a sustainable police reflecting Western norms and procedures, but the two tend to be conflated. Confusion is then made worse by failure to develop a policing strategy. As Paul Kernaghan told the Chilcott Enquiry, there were plans for policing (though they usually proved incapable of responding to changes in the operational environment), but there was no ‘clear, comprehensive, realistic strategic plan in Iraq’ (Kernaghan 2010b: 4). Further, training projects were often mistaken for a strategy, with Coalition authorities judging success according to quantitative measures that were all too often meaningless. As General Martin Dempsey told the US House Armed Services Committee in 2007, more than 32,000 of Iraq’s 188,000 police officers in the IPS (the largest Ministry of Interior force, with a presence in every province and district) were no longer working as police; 8–10,000 had been killed in action, 6–8,000 had been wounded, and some 5,000 had deserted. But
7–8,000 were unaccounted for, and he did not know how many had joined the insurgents (JDW, 20 June 2007: 5).

Third, despite the rhetoric attributing value to police and policing, 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. Just as Massu’s paratroopers hated policing Algiers because it was a ‘flic’s job’, so US Marines or British Army troops see their job as fighting, rather than collecting evidence or investigating kidnappings. This can affect the levels of security, logistical support, travel and accommodation offered to police officers who cannot operate without the support or protection of their military colleagues. The situation is made worse by the difficulty of recruiting good international officers (the numbers of those that volunteer is small) and technically proficient indigenous officers capable of providing leadership.

Police forces are, despite their enabling role, of secondary status, and military concerns take priority. This may reflect the degree of insecurity prevailing, or it may be more the result of institutional rivalry. In Iraq in 2003, for example, UK attempts to develop a strategic aim delivering ‘an efficient, effective, credible and community-based, accountable police service’ were quickly subsumed into military operational and logistic plans capable of dealing with the burgeoning insurgency. But status also reflects the small numbers of police advisers as compared to military forces. In practice, ‘he who pays the piper calls the tune’ (Smith 2010a: 4), and in Iraq this was the US military. Similar considerations apply to the relationship between local police and local militaries, which is easily upset by international interventions.

Significantly, the secondary status of police is mirrored in the academy where, with the exception of police studies (which has yet to address police in the context of COIN systematically), and international peacekeeping (which focuses on UNPOL and SSR), the police role is neglected. Counterinsurgency is emerging from military history to become an aspect of critical security studies (e.g. Bell and Evans 2010), but police and policing remains on the penumbra of conventional security studies.

Conclusions

There is an international consensus that police can play an enabling role in counterinsurgency, but the nature and purpose of their role is debated. Authoritarian regimes use paramilitary police to support military forces in internal security operations, while the United States and its allies (and IGOs such as the UN, NATO and EU) provide international police advisers to reform, mentor and/or train indigenous police on the basis that they can provide the local security required to win the support of the populace, enhance the legitimacy of the host government, and facilitate the exit of international militaries. Some commentators go even further, arguing that ‘a well-trained, professional police force dedicated to upholding the rule of law and trusted by the population is essential to fighting . . . insurgency . . . and creating stability’ (Thruelsen 2010: 80).

Despite decades of experience to the contrary, most Western policy-makers, advisers and scholars assume that local police culture and practice can be manipulated to accommodate international goals. The development of realistic plans for using police in counterinsurgency is accordingly rare. Most international campaigns are conducted without a clear police strategy – training is not a strategy – and are based on aspiration and the lack of viable alternatives, rather than policing realities. Not only are police in many countries predatory, but even where Western (and Westphalian) models are accepted, multiple tensions underpin the police role. Thus the use of local police can ensure the local security essential for strategically successful counterinsurgency, or it can trap local people, forcing them to take sides and risk punishment. The desirability of using
indigenous police to provide local security is taken for granted, yet their role is typically limited by corruption, brutality, ineffectiveness and sectarianism, and by the knowledge that international counterinsurgency forces will leave. Similarly, local police are well-placed to gain the intelligence at the heart of efficient counterinsurgency, yet intelligence gathering is all too often influenced by the police’s need to satisfy local power brokers or the government of the day. There is often no alternative to using police, but their potential is rarely assessed accurately; poorly paid and inadequately trained men in battered trucks cannot contain an insurgency.

**Recommended readings**

NB There are no texts rigorously and systematically analysing police and policing in COIN. Further, most contemporary texts address the topic primarily in the light of current US policy challenges.


**References**


*FT Magazine* (2009) ‘“Manhunt”: How can Poor Local Police Solve the Problems?’.


