



Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Training in Vietnam.

Intervention in Intrastate Wars

The Military Planning Problem

BY WILLIAM J. GREGOR

Scholars Sebastian L.v.Gorka and David Kilcullen recently observed that modern Western counterinsurgency (COIN) theory is built on a handful of books based upon practitioner experiences in a handful of 20th century conflicts.¹ They also lamented that almost all the better known examples of counterinsurgency are limited to cases where colonial or post-imperial governments were fighting on the territory of dependent ex-colonies; conditions that are atypical of today's insurgencies. Thus, they concluded that the translation of classic COIN doctrine to the contemporary threat seemed forced and misguided at best.² The situation, however, is far worse than that. Drawing conclusions about how to counter insurgencies from a limited number of cases certainly brings into question whether those experiences can be generalized. However, expanding the range of cases not only increases the dataset but also challenges the doctrinal framework itself. It challenges the military doctrinal framework because understanding contemporary conflicts requires understanding those conflicts as politics, not as war.

Classic COIN

It is easy to establish that U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine is informed by a small canon of classic commentaries. U.S. Army FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* lists in its bibliography works deemed classics. The books listed deal almost exclusively with colonial insurgencies in the 1950s and 1960s. Among the works are books such as *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* by David Galula, and *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* by Roger Trinquier. All the classics are offered as general theory. The tenets of these works are seen as applicable to all insurgencies even though most of the references were written before 1970 or deal with insurgencies that occurred well before 1970. The bibliography also has a section labeled special subjects in counterinsurgency. Those works are of more recent vintage but largely deal with the same set of insurgencies; for example, John Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, or Bard E. O'Neill's 1990 work, *Insurgency & Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary*

Dr. William J. Gregor is Professor of Social Sciences and General J. Lawton Collins Chair for Operational Art, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Warfare. The references reveal a general fascination with the French experience in Algeria, and U.S. and French wars in Vietnam, as well as nostalgia for communist or Marxist revolutions. Conspicuously absent is any reference to ethnic or religious insurgencies and conflicts such as the Algerian civil war 1991-2002.

Contemporary Conditions

The tenets of FM 3-24 come from the study of insurgencies associated with mass political movements, post-World War II anti-colonialism, and the Cold War. However, John Mueller has observed that imperial and colonial wars ended in the late 1980s, and international

John Mueller has observed that imperial and colonial wars ended in the late 1980s, and international wars between nation-states have declined. Most conflicts now fall into the category of civil wars.

wars between nation-states have declined.³ Most conflicts now fall into the category of civil wars. However, the term civil war masks the variety of armed intrastate conflict. Intrastate conflict can include rebellions, revolutions, secession movements, terrorism and coups d'état. Thus, intrastate conflict might be appropriately called political violence, not war.⁴ Unfortunately, the framework for military doctrine is war and the use of military forces regardless of the particular political setting is considered war. The military operations the United States undertakes in response to intrastate violence are doctrinally grouped under the concept of irregular warfare. The irregular warfare operating concept specifically

states, "Insurgency and counterinsurgency are at the core of IW (Irregular Warfare)."⁵

Some observers of contemporary conflict have noticed that contemporary conflicts differ from those of the past; that is, they do not look like interstate war. General Rupert Smith in *The Utility of Force* found it useful to distinguish between interstate industrial war, the Cold War, and wars among the people. The primary distinction he drew was that wars among the people are conducted by non-state groupings.⁶ More recently, Emile Simpson commented that contemporary conflicts cannot be characterized as a polarized conflict, as a Clausewitzian duel between two opponents.⁷ Parties to the conflict frequently do not lie in clearly defined opposing camps. Nevertheless, U.S. military commanders have long resisted making a distinction between war and other uses of military forces, military operations other than war (MOOTW).⁸ Former Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army General Gordon Sullivan remarked on the distinctions between war and MOOTW.

*Categorizing "war" as separate from all other uses of force may mislead the strategist, causing him to believe that the conditions required for success in the employment of military force when one is conducting "war" differ from use of military force in "operations other than war."*⁹

Nevertheless, despite official resistance to distinguishing between the Clausewitzian concept of war as a duel and contemporary conflicts, the distinction is made in U.S. military doctrine, albeit indirectly.

The May 2007 edition of Joint Publication (JP) 1 *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* directly quoted Clausewitz' *On War*, Book 1, Chapter 1, Section 24, "War is Merely

the Continuation of Policy by Other Means.”¹⁰ The latest version of JP 1 goes further. The manual expressly refers to war as a duel on a larger scale.¹¹ However, unlike General Sullivan, Chapter 1 goes on to divide warfare into two forms: traditional and irregular. The previous edition of JP 1 did not make that distinction, but it did acknowledge that something was different about contemporary conflicts. In that manual, in the discussion of war termination, the doctrine added a vague third outcome to Clausewitz’ two categories, surrender and negotiated settlement; the indirect approach. That third category suggested that there was something different about how contemporary conflicts ended and, thus, these conflicts differed from traditional warfare. Unfortunately, the doctrine just could not specify how they differed. The current version of JP 1 does not discuss war termination. Yet, despite the division of warfare into traditional and irregular forms the doctrine clings to Clausewitz’ conception of war as a duel, leaving little room for understanding intrastate wars differently.

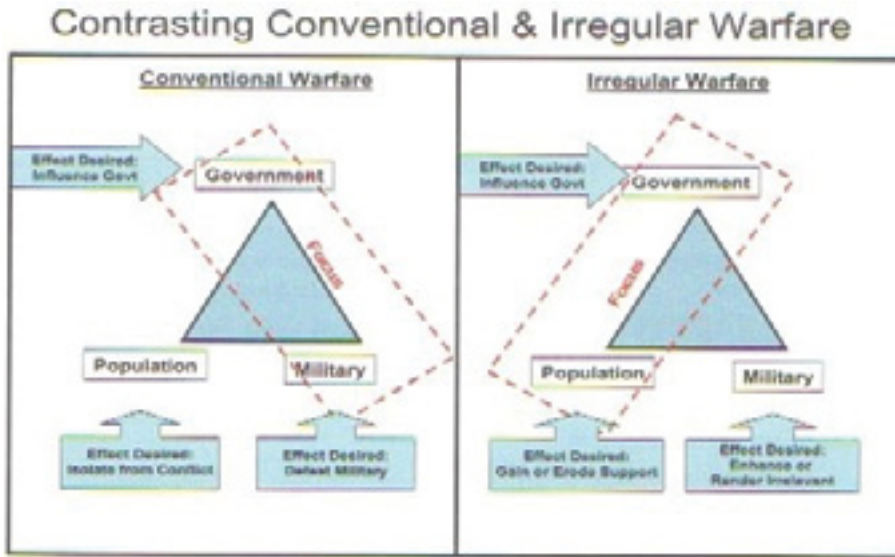
The U.S. military’s commitment to a Clausewitzian framework, however, cannot mitigate the pressure to respond to contemporary military planning requirements. The planning challenges are manifest in several ways in military doctrine. For example, version 1 of the Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC) defines irregular warfare as, “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over relevant populations.”¹² This definition does not differ greatly from the definition of political violence cited earlier. The Irregular Warfare JOC notes too that IW is inherently a political struggle that differs from the political element of conventional war.¹³ IW campaigns are also

protracted, requiring a prolonged and persistent effort of at least a decade to achieve a political outcome.¹⁴ Hence, the planning requirements are different from those of conventional war. Unfortunately, like JP 1, the Irregular Warfare JOC cannot separate itself from the Clausewitzian framework and thus, tries to use Clausewitz’ trinity: the government, the population, and the military, to explain the difference between conventional and irregular warfare.¹⁵

IW campaigns are also protracted, requiring a prolonged and persistent effort of at least a decade to achieve a political outcome. Hence, the planning requirements are different from those of conventional war.

The military planning systems have also recognized that war among the people or irregular warfare cannot be planned using conventional methods. Beginning with the aftermath of the conflict in Kosovo, new planning concepts have been introduced, starting with Effects Based Operations and Systemic Operational Design and finally incorporating into Army planning doctrine a design methodology and into Joint Doctrine operational design. In recognition of the fact that irregular warfare campaigns are typically protracted, operational design is now a significant element of theater campaign planning procedures.¹⁶ It is not necessary here to discuss the reasons for introducing these planning methods and the arguments for their inclusion in military planning doctrine.¹⁷ What is important is the military’s recognition that planning for contemporary conflicts needs new methods. However, the new methods have been introduced without any real effort to put aside the traditional

Figure 1. The IW Trinity



or conventional framework. Thus, the doctrine labels the new planning methodology design, but design of what? Design gives form to some concrete response to a problem, a building (architectural design), a product (product design) or a machine or structure (engineering design).¹⁸ The conventional military planning system was built on a base of knowledge. Hence, conventional military operations are planned using the assembled knowledge about those operations. That is why there is a well-known military lexicon of terms associated with designing conventional military operations and a list of consistent military information requirements. What then is the body of knowledge that informs design for wars among the people? The obvious answer would seem to be current counterinsurgency and stability operations doctrine. Unfortunately, as will be shown, that doctrine does not adequately comprehend the current security environment. Additionally, the new methodology does not stand alone. Instead, the new methods have

been merged with conventional military planning processes, which impedes effective use.

A New Perspective

To assess what is wanting in both the counterinsurgency theory and doctrine, and in planning doctrine's application, it is necessary to define a standard with which to compare the current doctrine's approach. That standard needs to address both the insurgencies that inform the classic COIN canon and those that followed. Fortunately, a work bridges that gap. In *States & Social Revolutions*, Theda Skocpol reviewed the established explanations for revolutions, reexamined the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions and produced a new explanation. Although the French and Russian revolutions have not influenced U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, the Chinese revolution figures prominently in the discussion of anti-colonial revolutions and the U.S. war in Vietnam. Skocpol's explanation of the Chinese Communist success differs from the

explanation found among the works in the classic COIN canon. Additionally, her work has influenced more recent analyses of non-European revolutions, such as Misagh Parsa's book, *States, Ideologies & Social Revolutions*. Consequently, it is useful to begin a critique of COIN doctrine by reviewing Skocpol's work.

However, before discussing theories of revolution, it is important to highlight some of the elements of Army and Joint design methodology to direct attention to those portions of the theory that relate to design. There are three primary elements to design: framing the operational environment, framing the problem, and developing an operational approach.¹⁹ The Army manual states that these activities are accomplished through dialogue and critical and creative thinking.²⁰ Nowhere in the discussion of design can be found a discussion of theories that guide the collection and interpretation of data relevant to the perceived problem at hand. Thus, planners assigned to develop the operation frame for the environment must puzzle about where to begin. Similarly, when developing an operational approach – that is actions to address the problem and move the political system toward the policy goal – planners are again without a guide to assessing the relationship between actions and effects. To the extent that counter-insurgency doctrine seeks to be scientific, i.e. abstract and universally replicable, it makes no distinction between rebellions, secession movements, or revolutions. In contrast, political theory is context dependent and there is no guarantee that results can be replicated. Hence, the review of theories of revolutions should highlight both data related to an operational frame and elements of an operational approach.

Writing in 1979, Skocpol identified four major families of social-scientific theories of revolution. In her estimation, none was adequate. The first family of theory reviewed was Marxist theory. Marx understood revolutions as class-based movements growing out of objective structural contradictions between the modes of production and class relations related to property ownership. To Marx revolutions were not isolated episodes of violence.²¹ The revolution results from class action led by a self-conscious, revolutionary class. Marxist analysis clearly influences all theories of revolution but specifically informs those who have written about the insurgencies in Malaya and Vietnam.

Skocpol labels the second family of theory *aggregate-psychological* theory. Aggregate-psychological theories explain revolutions in terms of a people's psychological motivations for engaging in political violence or joining oppositional movements.²² Ted Gurr's book, *Why Men Rebel*, lies in the aggregate-psychological family. A third family consists of *system/value consensus* theories. These theories posit that political violence results from the actions of ideological movements spawned by social disequilibrium. The fourth family embraces *political-conflict* theory. Political-conflict theory rejects Ted Gurr's notion that revolutions arise from economic and political discontent. Rather political-conflict theory argues people cannot engage in political violence unless they are members of at least a minimally organized group with access to resources.²³ Skocpol rejects all these approaches in part because they all argue that revolutions arise from well-defined purposes. All these theories suggest that social order rests on the consensus of the majority that their needs are being met. The concept that social and political order rely on

some type of popular consensus does not find empirical support from the survival of many blatantly repressive regimes.²⁴ In contrast to these four families, Skocpol proposes a *structural* approach to revolutions. The structural approach to revolution argues that political violence arises in the context of the state, which is anchored in both the class-divided socioeconomic structures and the international system of states. The internal and external relationships of the state and the state's response to the struggles and crises determine whether the regime maintains the support of politically powerful and mobilized groups. According to Skocpol, the acquiescence or support of the popular majority is not a major element in a regime's demise.²⁵

States & Social Revolutions provided a new explanation of revolutions and established a fifth family in the theory of revolutions. That

explanation has significantly influenced the study of revolutions since 1979. In contrast, U.S. military doctrine does not consciously recognize the existence of any of these families of theory, and reflects the available theory when the classic COIN canon was formed. In other words, doctrinally there are only two explanations of intrastate conflict, Marxist and aggregate-psychological theory. Shortly after publication of FM 3-24, Frank Hoffman, a member of the manual's writing team, commented that in writing the manual the classicists focused heavily on Maoist and colonial wars of independence and over-generalized the principles drawn from them.²⁶ The Marxist influence is easily found in FM 3-24. For example, FM 3-24 states, "An insurgency is not simply random violence; it is directed and focused violence aimed at a political purpose."²⁷ That sentence comes directly from Marxist theory.



2005 visit to Kosovo by NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer meeting with Kosovo police.

The doctrine's reiteration of Mao Zedong's theory of protracted war just as easily might have quoted directly the orthodox pattern from David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* published in 1964.²⁸ Yet, by 1966, political theorists such as Barrington Moore, Jr., had already begun to challenge the classic interpretation of the Chinese revolution,²⁹ which suggests that by 2006 the emphasis on Marxist revolution was myopic.

The doctrine also is enamored with aggregate-psychological theory, although the doctrine does not explicitly acknowledge that fact. The attention to aggregate-psychological theory can be inferred from the discussion of legitimacy and the focus on the population. The objective of COIN is the development of effective governance by a legitimate government. Legitimate governments rule primarily with the consent of the governed.³⁰ The manual lists six measures of legitimacy that are collectively interpreted to mean that the government is supported by a sufficient majority of the population who find that their basic needs for security and services are met.³¹ These doctrinal observations do not comport well with the observation in *Understanding Civil War* that civil war is more a function of greed than grievance.³² These observations also stand in contrast to Theda Skocpol's critique of the four families of theory she reviewed. They are, however, consistent with Ted Gurr and aggregate-psychological theories of revolution.

The fact that the counterinsurgency doctrine presents a very narrow perspective of intrastate conflict is clear. However, the narrowness of the perspective has other implications. First, the existing doctrine is supported largely by arguments by warrant, rather than by evidence. David Galula cannot be faulted for not considering evidence concerning the

Chinese civil war that did not become available until after the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution, but doctrine writers can be. There seems to be no military concern for evidence supporting the assertions in the classic COIN references. Both Barrington Moore, Jr., in 1966 and Theda Skocpol in 1979 placed emphasis upon the role the Japanese played in the triumph of the Chinese Communist Party. More recently, Anthony James Joes in *Resisting Rebellion* challenged the classic COIN interpretation in a chapter labeled, "The Myth of Maoist People's War."³³ Nevertheless, FM 3-24 is content with examining only Mao's self-pronounced account, *On Guerilla Warfare* and David Galula's maxims. Similarly, the manual cites T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* as an account of his attempt to organize Arab nationalism, even though Lawrence's account is largely fictional.³⁴ The inclusion of Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer* among the classics is particularly telling. *The True Believer* is clearly a work that might be considered among the aggregate-psychological theories of revolution, except that Eric Hoffer was an atheist, long-shoreman philosopher whose work is certainly not an empirical study. Written in 1951, the book represents Mr. Hoffer's observations of mass political movements prior to World War II. Nevertheless, the COIN manual offers *The True Believer* as a general explanation of why people join cults and supposedly al-Qaeda. Clearly, Mark Juergensmeyer's book, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, would have been more appropriate. Arguments by warrant simply require the acceptance of the author's inferences without a proper concern for the evidence that supports the inference. This is a key shortfall because design begins with the need to develop an environmental frame. Hence,

design begins with the collection of evidence. Hence, classic COIN references and FM 3-24 do not directly support design.

Limiting counterinsurgency doctrine to two theoretical perspectives produces another problem for design. It constrains the collection and interpretation of data for both the environmental frame and the operational approach. A theory represents an intellectual commitment to a particular method of organizing, viewing, and explaining a phenomenon. Consequently, it directs attention to particular data and it guides interpretation. Thomas A. Marks' pamphlet, *Insurgency In Nepal*, shows the impact of classic COIN theory. Dr. Marks devotes approximately ten percent of the pamphlet to assessing the Communist Party of Nepal, (Maoist) (CPN-M) action program. The CPN-M program was consciously Marxist but the conditions in Nepal did not support Marxist theory. Although CPN-M demanded an end to capitalist exploitation, the economy of Nepal was not capitalist. There was no industrial base, 90 percent of the population was rural, and 90 percent of the farmers were classified as owner operators.³⁵ Contrary to Maoist literature the CPN-M could not draw resources from its base areas since the base areas were among the poorest regions in the country.³⁶ Additionally, despite the attention paid by the CPN-M and Dr. Marks to the action program, the followers and the cadre were ignorant of both.³⁷ The ignorance of the CPN-M cadre is even commented upon by Emile Simpson in *War From the Ground Up*. Emile Simpson not only found that the CPN-M guerrilla's understanding of Marxism was incorrect but he observed that understanding Nepal's civil war in insurgent versus government terms would be overly simplistic.³⁸ To be fair to Dr. Marks, his text notes

that in many areas the cadre appealed to local concerns and that the movement created a high level of popular fear, not conversion.³⁹ Nevertheless, organizing the analysis of the CPN-M in accordance with classic COIN doctrine tends, as Emile Simpson would argue, to obscure rather than illuminate the dynamics of the Nepalese civil war.

Design Analysis

As mentioned earlier, design begins with the development of the environmental frame. Whether following Joint or Army doctrine the purpose of this step is to describe the current conditions and envision desired conditions consistent with the policy objectives. The Army manual refers to framing as building a mental model to help individuals understand situations,⁴⁰ in essence making sense of both the situation and the policy objectives. Although FM 3-24 argues that the Army must learn and adapt, Hoffman observed that the manual did not address environmental factors that require us to rebuild our mental models.⁴¹ In other words, it is more likely that planners following the doctrine will collect and interpret data in accordance with the manual's prevailing theories, Marxist and aggregate-psychological, rather than accurately interpret new phenomena. The planners will bring their theoretical frame to the data. When planners do not have multiple perspectives to drive the collection and interpretation of data, their inferences can be logical but also impoverished. This can be seen in Hoffman's article. Among the new environmental factors he sought to illuminate were trans-national and trans-dimensional actors.⁴² Yet, Skocpol's reinterpretation of the Chinese Communist Revolution decried the existing theories' focus on intrastate conflict and the neglect of the international context.

Specifically, she wrote, “social revolutions cannot be explained without systematic reference to international structures and world-historical developments.”⁴³ Thus, the attention paid by doctrine writers to counterinsurgency theory has left them blind to insights political theory made long ago.

Army and Joint doctrine require planners to describe the environmental frame by constructing a narrative and by developing a graphic. The causal explanation provided in the narrative is likely to be subjective and reflect the limited theoretical perspectives of the planner. The method for developing the graphic contains its own problems. Joint doctrine in discussing operational design and the environmental and operational frame layers a system approach addressing complexity upon the Clausewitzian derived concept of the center of gravity. This reflects, in part, the

unwillingness to depart from the conventional war framework. Into the mix is thrown the concept of an Effects-Based Approach. However, the Effects-Based Approach figures more prominently in developing the operational approach than either the environmental or the operational frame. Nevertheless, it too is a problem. The concept of a center of gravity may be a misinterpretation or mistranslation of *On War*. In the translation of *On War* by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, the German word *schwerpunkt* is translated as center of gravity and as Emile Simpson has noted, the center of gravity is the physical representation of the enemy’s will.⁴⁴ *Schwerpunkt* might also be translated as focal point, the point of main effort. In physics, the center of gravity or the center of mass is a unique point where the weighted relative position of the distributed mass is zero. Center of gravity is a simplifying



Nirmal Dulal

Out of work protesters from the People’s Movement of Nepal challenge Nepal police.

construct that permits understanding the motion of a body despite a complex shape. It is a simplifying method. Similarly, in military planning the entire military problem can be simplified by concentrating on the center of gravity. If, however, the military problem can be understood in terms of the center of gravity, then the problem is not complex. Similarly, military doctrine also refers to centers of gravity: tactical, operational, and strategic. In that case, the problem cannot be understood using a single focal point but can be by finding the

focal point in three levels. A military problem that can be addressed by understanding centers of gravity is not simple; it is complicated. Military doctrine describes insurgency and counterinsurgency as inherently complex. Thus, describing the operational environment using the center or centers of gravity approach would not apply, but JP 5.0 mixes these methods with system analysis. Methodologically this is an error. This befuddlement is found in JP 5.0 Figure III-4. That figure lists the key outputs of the environmental frame as a system

Figure 2. JP 5.0 PMESII

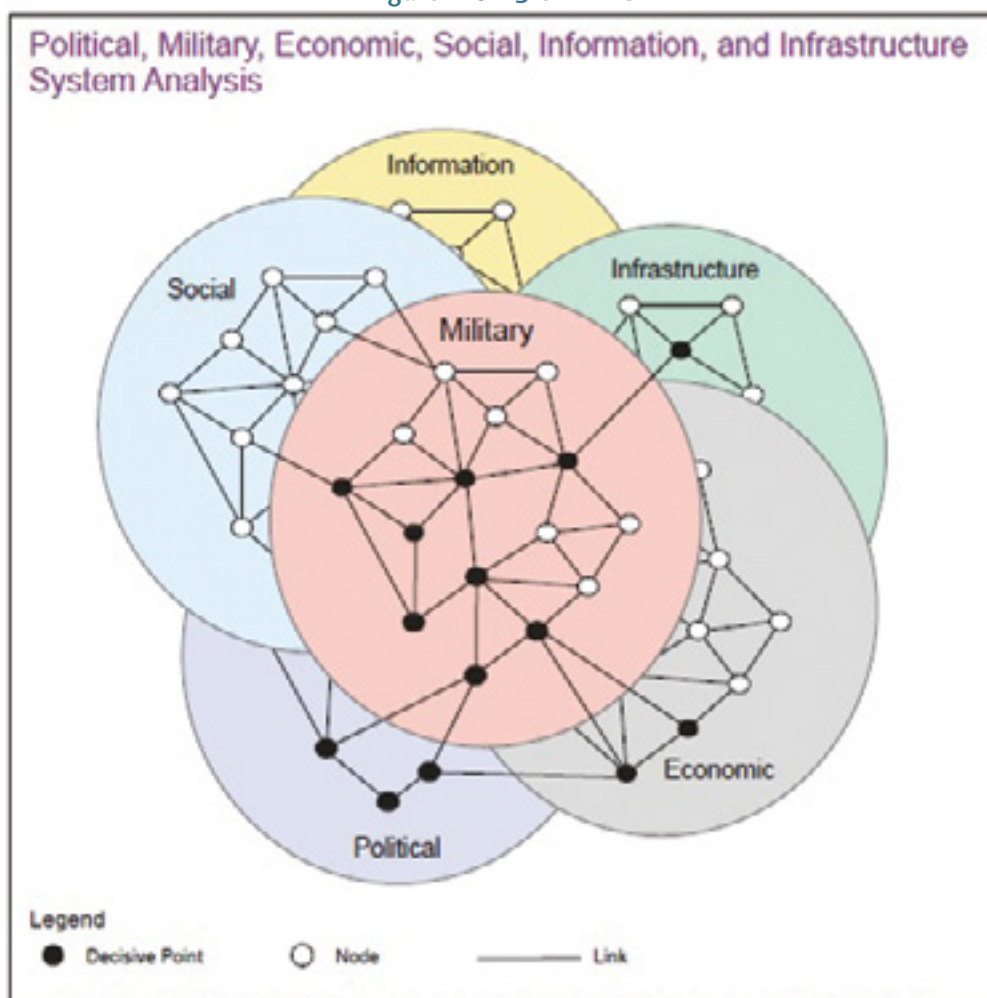
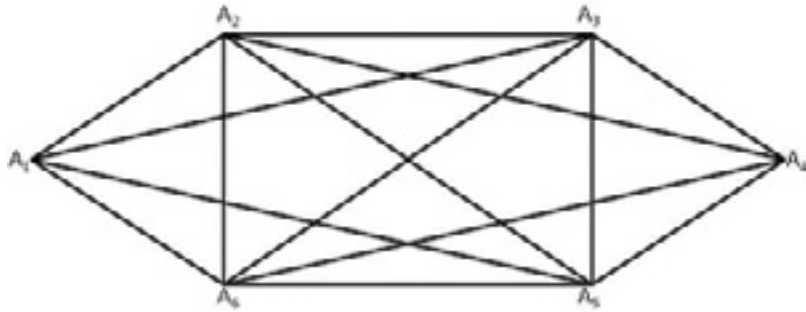


Figure 3. A Full Lattice Matrix



perspective of the operational environment and the centers of gravity.

Another methodological problem related to developing the graphic is the doctrinal discussion of the system perspective and system analysis. There is no actual discussion of how planners should prepare and present an empirical description of the operating environment. The figure provided in the manual, shown below, is not actually a system. It is at best a confusing network.

The definition of a system requires that the elements that are interrelated work together to produce an output. Defining the boundaries of the system in design requires the planner to define what elements of a polity he needs to understand. The planner is not interested in the social, military, political or economic systems per se and it is difficult to comprehend information and infrastructure as somehow separate from those systems. Additionally, the manual by arguing that systems analysis will produce a holistic view of enemy, neutral, and friendly systems creates the impression that the visualization of the environment begins with, rather than ends with a depiction of the system. In other words, rather than beginning the process of analysis with a description of the operational environment and making a subsequent decision to

present the analysis as a system, the planner creates a graphic of a whole with little or no serious analysis. Naturally, the graphic will always include decisive points and centers of gravity.

Military planners are not interested in complexity theory and not every military problem is complex. They need to avoid what Michael J. Gallagher, Joshua Gelter, and Sebastian L.v.Gorka called the complexity trap.⁴⁵ To avoid judging every problem as complex, planners need to recognize that military problems fall into a category that Todd R. La Porte labeled Organized Social Complexity. Organized complexity refers to systems in which there are a moderate number of parts related to each other in interdependent ways. Organized social complexity further limits attention to social groups with conscious purposes whose members are engaged in relatively self-conscious interactions. In other words, the members are aware of their connections and that their activities impinge on the activities of others.⁴⁶ Such a system might resemble that described by Robert Axelrod and Michael D. Cohen in *Harnessing Complexity*.⁴⁷ In any case, the process of describing the system would begin by identifying the members (persons or groups) and their number, the relative degree of differentiation, and the degree and nature

of their interdependence. A small number of members with little differentiation and low interdependence would not constitute a complex system. Similarly, if the dependence were hierarchical; that is, resources or influence flowing one way from top to bottom the system would not be complex. It would be a tree. If every member influenced every other member in the system then the system could be displayed as a full lattice.⁴⁸

The world, however, displays few actual trees and probably even fewer full lattice matrixes. What that means is that any depiction of an actual system would be semi-lattice. A semi-lattice system might have some groups displayed with an abundance of inter relationships but those groups might only be loosely connected to other groups. Thus, the full system of interest would be decomposable, albeit not fully decomposable, into subsystems. The subsystems can be analyzed independently to explain the internal interactions and then the interaction between subsystems might be explored separately. If the system were fully decomposable then the system would present a situation similar to that conceived for centers of gravity. It would be complicated rather than complex.

Military doctrine recognizes that counterinsurgency is more political than military but political theory is rarely consulted.

What does the admittedly abstract discussion of organized social complexity mean in practical terms for design and military planning? First, it means the planner does not need to start development of an environmental frame from the concept of a whole system.

Where he begins the analysis will depend on the policy guidance he has received and the contemplated use of military force. He will still face the problem of defining the members or groups that compose the system but it will be possible to develop and interconnect subsystems defined differently. There will still be the requirement to specify what factors will constitute dependent and independent variables in the causal chain. For example, in some policy contexts it might be useful to examine poverty as a cause of civil war, in others the civil war might be the cause of poverty. Second, understanding that the system can be decomposed into subsystems enables the planner to avoid the problem identified by Emile Simpson. He will not need to be tied to Clausewitzian polarity; the motivations of the participants will not need to be understood in similar terms and their rules for interaction can be analyzed separately. That will be important for moving from the environmental and problem frame to defining an operational approach. Lastly, it will make possible, although perhaps unlikely, that the graphic that accompanies the narrative actually conveys information, instead of being a prop for the briefer.

Systems analysis or the system perspective should aid the planner's assessment of a complex security environment. However, it must be understood as a method separate from those used for conventional warfare. Combining systems analysis with conventional planning requirements in the context of current counterinsurgency doctrine creates an impediment to developing an operational approach, the third step in design. As Gian Gentile put it, counterinsurgency becomes a strategy of tactics. Despite the call for system analysis, focus is always on the population as

the center of gravity and, regardless of the polity or the nature of the conflict, the operational approach is always long-term nation building and efforts to win the hearts and minds of the people.⁴⁹ The Clausewitzian framework of war as a duel contributes to this problem. In irregular warfare operations such as stability operations and counterinsurgency, the United States military always intervenes to aid a failing government. In the recent example of Libya, the responsibility to protect concept sees the failing government as the predator and hence, intervention is always on the side of the rebels. Yet, in the case of intrastate war, the parties should not be understood as two opposing camps and U.S. security interests may not be best achieved by aiding one or the other. The current civil war in Syria is a case in point. If systems analysis and design are to produce creative operational approaches then new theoretical perspectives are needed.

Benefits of Political Theory

Ernest R. Alexander observed in “Design in the Decision-Making Process” that design is a mix between search and creativity.⁵⁰ A significant rational element in the design process is systematic search and information retrieval. He also observed that superior searches might be an indispensable ingredient of creativity.⁵¹ Systems analysis, properly employed, offers a new method for understanding the environment and displaying information. However, without a broader set of theoretical perspectives, there is little chance of drawing useful inferences about causal relationships and the military actions that will achieve intended effects. Military doctrine recognizes that counterinsurgency is more political than military but political theory is rarely consulted.

In the space of this paper, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive survey of relevant theory concerning intrastate war, but it is possible to make some initial recommendations. First, planners should take direction from works in the family of structural conflict theory, such as *States & Social Revolutions*. Military planners working on the environmental frame should consciously attempt to understand how the regime worked, if ever, prior to the current exigency. For example, it would have been useful in assessing the situation in Egypt in early 2011 to describe how the Mubarak regime had maintained its rule and particularly, how it maintained the support of influential elites and obtained the acquiescence of segments of the population. In that category,

Indiscriminate violence is counter-productive in civil war. Using violence discriminately requires the user to clearly understand his purpose and to assess how the population will judge the use of force.

Marina Ottaway’s book, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism*, provides useful insights into the working of the Egyptian government as well as the role of elections and the problem of succession in semi-authoritarian regimes.⁵² Misagh Parsa, whose work draws from both the structural and political conflict families of theory, identifies structural variables that set the conditions for conflicts but do not determine their occurrence, timing or process. Parsa argues that the actual dynamics of revolutionary conflict are related to the exploitation of opportunities, organization, mobilization options, and perhaps, most importantly, coalition formation.⁵³ The government’s opponents are rarely a coherent

block committed to a particular action program and a common goal. Instead, as Parsa observed, the revolution brings different social groups together. Thus, counterinsurgency might entail efforts to prevent the creation of an anti-government coalition. Recent events in Egypt suggest that any group seeking to overthrow the Egyptian government must get the Egyptian army on its side.

Every intrastate war will have its own characteristics and the causal relationships observed in any given case may not be applicable in another.

Despite the emphasis on aggregate-psychological theory in counterinsurgency doctrine, recent works suggest that approach is not useful for understanding intrastate war. *Understanding Civil War* applies the quantitative Collier-Hoeffler model of civil war onset using “most similar system design” to compare cases in Africa (volume 1), and the Caucasus (volume 2). The authors found that the proxy measures of grievance, with the exception of ethnic dominance, were not prominent factors in the onset of civil war.⁵⁴ Instead of focusing on popular grievances, it might be more useful to pay closer attention to the use of violence and to government and rebel control. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* suggests concern for survival determines whether people adhere to a particular faction or the government. Stathis N. Kalyvas argues that military resources trump the population’s prewar political and social preferences in spawning control and “control has a decisive impact on the population’s collaboration with a political actor.”⁵⁵ However, military resources are limited in a country

ravaged by civil war. Therefore, governments must use their limited military resources judiciously if they are to use violence effectively as a means of control. No hearts and mind theory here except for attention to the different implications for how violence is used. Indiscriminate violence is counter-productive in civil war. Using violence discriminately requires the user to clearly understand his purpose and to assess how the population will judge the use of force. The planner would be wise not to make that assessment based on a broad concept of a culture. He should have detailed understanding of the local population. Barrington Moore Jr.’s book, *Injustice: The Social Basis of Obedience and Revolt* provides some insight to what might be common norms.⁵⁶

Kalyvas’ definition of civil war leads naturally to an investigation of how rebels and governments seek and establish control over territories. U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine also has that focus. However, not all rebellions aim to replace governmental structures. Some in Africa simply extract resources for their own benefit. Jeremy M. Weinstein’s book, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, identifies factors that shape the development of rebel organizations and how violence is used. His review of the theories of rebellion revealed that most theories conceptualized rebel organizations either as social movements or as states in the making.⁵⁷ That observation is consistent with the Marxist and aggregate-psychological approach to rebellions and military doctrine. What makes *Inside Rebellion* useful is Professor Weinstein’s micro approach to understanding the rebel organization’s economic and social endowments and how those endowments influence the rebel structure and strategy. *Inside Rebellion*, therefore, informs the

military counterinsurgency planner when he attempts to assess the insurgency's structure. FM 3-24 provides a list of questions about the insurgent organization; such as, "Is the organization hierarchical or non-hierarchical?" or "Is the organization highly structured or unsystematic?"⁵⁸ These questions are not particularly helpful. The questions tell the planner what to ask but provide no insight into what the answer means. So what if it is hierarchical? Empirical studies of recent rebellions address the implications of the organizational data and, more importantly, suggest what that data mean.

Recent political theories of revolutions and civil war are not the answer to all a military planner's problems. Every intrastate war will have its own characteristics and the causal relationships observed in any given case may not be applicable in another. Therefore, every inference should be treated as a working hypothesis until the inference is tested in the new setting. Nevertheless, moving outside the literature that considers counterinsurgency as the focus into the literature that focuses on intrastate war and political violence provides a means to break the reliance upon personal experiences during counterinsurgencies in the anti-colonial era. Additionally, by developing an explanation for the success or failure of the revolutionaries, secessionists, or rebels these theories identify data from the social, political, and economic systems that may be relevant to developing an environmental frame and to defining the problem. These theories also suggest operational approaches to counter the insurgents. They also avoid the counterinsurgency literature's problem of addressing every insurgency as if the political goals, and hence, the insurgent's strategies are the same. It might even be possible, if there are sufficient recent

studies, to identify for the planner not only the right questions to ask but also to suggest what the answers might mean. The proper response to Drs. Gorka and Kilcullen call for a wider range of counterinsurgency case studies is greater attention to understanding intrastate war. **PRISM**

Notes

¹ Sebastian L.v. Gorka and David Kilcullen, "An Actor-centric Theory of War: Understanding the Difference Between COIN and Counterinsurgency," *JFQ* 60 (1st Quarter 2011), 15-16.

² *Ibid.*, 16.

³ John Mueller, "War Has Almost Ceased to Exist: An Assessment," *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 2 (2009), 301.

⁴ H.L. Nieburg's definition covers much of what will be discussed in this paper, "acts of disruption, destruction, injury whose purpose, choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation, and/or effects have political significance, that is, tend to modify the behavior of others in a bargaining situation, that has consequences for the social system." H.L. Nieburg, *Political Violence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969), 13. See also Fred R. von der Mehden, *Comparative Political Violence* (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

⁵ Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC) (Washington, D.C.: The Joint Staff, 11 September 2007), 10.

⁶ General Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2007), 374.

⁷ Emile Simpson, *War From the Ground Up: Twenty-First-Century Combat as Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 54-57.

⁸ In 1995, Joint Publication (JP) 3-07 was named Military Operations Other Than War. The current version of JP 3-07, dated 29 September 2011 is labeled Stability Operations. Stability operations are a type of irregular warfare operations.

⁹ David Fastabend, "The Categorization of Conflict," *Parameters* XXVII (Summer 1997), 79.

¹⁰ Joint Publication (JP) 1 *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (14 May 2007), I-1.

¹¹ JP 1 *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (25 March 2013), I-3.

¹² Irregular Warfare JOC, 6.

¹³ Irregular Warfare JOC., 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵ Irregular Warfare JOC, 7-9.

¹⁶ Army design methodology is found in Chapter 2, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0 *The Operations Process* (May 2012), 2-4 to 2-11. Joint operational design is discussed in Chapter III, JP 5-0 *Joint Operation Planning* (11 August 2011) and in Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual (CJCSM) 3130.01 *Theater Campaign Planning Policies and Procedures* (31 August 2012).

¹⁷ Those interested in the evolution of the planning methods might want to read my article in *PRISM* concerning this matter. William J. Gregor, "Military Planning Systems and Stability Operations," *PRISM* 1, no. 3 (June 2010), 99-114.

¹⁸ Ernest R. Alexander, "Design in the Decision-Making Process," *Policy Sciences* 14 (1982), 280.

¹⁹ ADRP 5-0 *The Operations Process* (May 2012), 2-6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-5.

²¹ Theda Skocpol, *States & Social Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 7.

²² Theda Skocpol, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁵ Theda Skocpol, 32.

²⁶ Frank Hoffman, "Neo-Classical Insurgency," *Parameters* XXXVII (Summer 2007), 71. This article was republished in *Parameters* XLI (Winter 2011-12).

²⁷ Field Manual (FM) 3-24 Counterinsurgency, 1-13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-6 and 1-7 and David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 2005), 44-58.

²⁹ Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 162-201. Barrington Moore's work is representative of the systems/value consensus family of theories.

³⁰ FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency*, 1-21.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, *Understanding Civil War* vol. 1 Africa (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2005), 17-18.

³³ Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 191-208.

³⁴ See Scott Anderson, *Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Doubleday, 2013). Professor Efraim Karsh's review of this book in the *Wall Street Journal*, August 10-11, 2013, was entitled, "Seven Pillars of Fiction." See also Efraim Karsh and Inari Karsh, "Myth in the Desert, or Not the Great Arab Revolt," *Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 2 (April 1997), 267-312.

³⁵ Thomas A. Marks, *Insurgency in Nepal* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, December 2003), 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁸ Emile Simpson, 227-228.

³⁹ Marks, 17.

⁴⁰ ADRP 5.0 *The Operations Process*, 2-5.

⁴¹ Hoffman, 73. However, Mr. Hoffman took the phrase from David J. Killcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28 (August 2005), 615.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Skocpol, 14.

⁴⁴ Simpson, 132.

⁴⁵ Michael J. Gallagher, Joshua Gelter, and Sebastian L.v.Gorka, "The Complexity Trap," *Parameters* XLII, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 5-16.

⁴⁶ Todd R. La Porte, "Organized Social Complexity: Explication of a Concept," in Todd R. La Porte, ed. *Organized Social Complexity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 5-6.

⁴⁷ Robert Axelrod and Michael D. Cohen, *Harnessing Complexity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

⁴⁸ La Porte, 8-9.

⁴⁹ Gian P. Gentile, "A Strategy of Tactics: Population Centric COIN and the Army," *Parameters* XXXIX, no. 3 (Autumn 2009), 6-7.

⁵⁰ Alexander, 281.

⁵¹ Ibid., 287.

⁵² Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington, D.C.: Caregie Endowment for International Peace, 2003).

⁵³ Misagh Parsa, *States, Ideologies & Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25.

⁵⁴ Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, 18.

⁵⁵ Stathis N.Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 111.

⁵⁶ Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice: The Social Basis of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1978).

⁵⁷ Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 34-36.

⁵⁸ FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency*, 3-19.