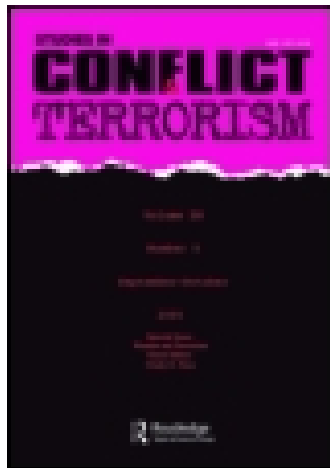


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### Strategy in Counter-Insurgency: A Distilled Approach

Dr. Spyridon Plakoudas Ph.D<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Reading, MScEcon, University of Aberystwyth

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## **Strategy in Counter-Insurgency: A Distilled Approach**

Name and Surname: Dr. Spyridon Plakoudas

Academic Affiliation: Ph.D., University of Reading

MScEcon, University of Aberystwyth

Mail Address: Euseviou 6, Patras, Achaia, Greece, Postal Code: 26443

E-Mail Address: [spiros\\_plakoudas@yahoo.gr](mailto:spiros_plakoudas@yahoo.gr) and [vd024042@reading.ac.uk](mailto:vd024042@reading.ac.uk)

### **Abstract**

How does an established state authority respond to an insurgency? How does such an authority plan and carry out its struggle to counter an armed non-state actor and why? The issue of strategy in counter-insurgency (COIN) remains a rather contentious subject and several practitioners and theorists on COIN have prescribed various remedies to the same problem. This article offers a re-evaluation of the concept of strategy in COIN and outlines the practices and mentalities that a counter-insurgents should adopt (and avoid) to successfully counter an insurgency.

### **Statement**

This article has not been published anywhere else nor has it been submitted simultaneously for publication elsewhere.

## The Realm of Counter-Insurgency (COIN)

Insurgency, one of the oldest and most common types of war, could be succinctly defined as an “organized, protracted politico-military struggle” waged by an armed organised movement to critically “weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control”.<sup>1</sup> Control over what or whom? Quite obviously, over the (local) population. The primary objective in this variant of irregular warfare could be ideally summarised as the struggle to “mobilise people in a struggle for political control and legitimacy”.<sup>2</sup>

Insurgency basically amounts to a contest for the control of the population (undoubtedly, one of the most critical determinants for victory) between an established state authority and a non-state actor that employs an irregular modus operandi.<sup>3</sup> Ergo, insurgency constitutes a war fought within the population<sup>4</sup> – a war “waged by the few but dependent on the support of the many”.<sup>5</sup> How does a government choose to respond to an insurgency and why?

Although no standard type of COIN exists,<sup>6</sup> two core approaches to COIN can be identified in the theory and practice of COIN. The proponents of an *enemy-centric* approach consider the insurgent’s military defeat as the primary task of the government. According to the central idea of this school of thought, the extermination of the insurgents will definitely terminate the (local) population’s rebellion. Viewing “counterinsurgency as a variant of conventional warfare”, this approach manifests an offensive character since – according to its logic – the insurgents must be wiped out through vigorous military operations.<sup>7</sup> For example, successive Turkish governments employed an “enemy-centric approach” against the rural Kurdish insurgency between 1984 and 1993 as the Turkish security forces routinely searched the mountains of South-Eastern Turkey to

destroy the Kurdish insurgents. On many occasions, the counter-insurgents target not only the insurgents but also their civilian supporters with military action and use high levels of repression as a tool of “pacification”. The Romans, for instance, treated the combatants and non-combatants of the various rebellious peoples with equal ruthlessness and sometimes committed excesses of a colossal scale – as for example against the Jews in the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-136 AD).

In contrast, the partisans of a *population-centric* approach claim that counter-insurgents must, first and foremost, seize control of the (local) population in order to isolate and overpower the insurgents. According to its central tenets, the (local) population constitutes the key to victory in irregular warfare and, consequently, the counter-insurgent must secure control over the former in an effective way.<sup>8</sup> The latter approach can be further divided into two sub-categories on the basis of the means and ways a counter-insurgent uses to obtain control over the people: a “population-centric approach” with an emphasis on coercion and another “population-centric approach” with an emphasis on selective violence and targeted reforms.<sup>9</sup>

According to the first variant of the “population-centric approach”, the insurgents constitute a violent minority that uses coercion to obtain the support of the “silent majority” of the population and, therefore, a counter-insurgent must resort to higher levels of coercion to seize control of the population and subsequently overpower the increasingly isolated and enfeebled insurgents.<sup>10</sup> The Bolsheviks, for example, used poisonous gas during the Tambov Rebellion (1920-1921) to deny anti-Bolshevik insurgents the vital support from the friendly (local) population. According to the second variant of the “population-centric approach”, the insurgents comprise an armed political movement that capitalises on the grievances of the (local) populace against the government and, consequently, the counter-insurgent must prioritise the isolation of the insurgents from the (local)

population through a combination of targeted reforms and protective security policies; deprived of the indispensable popular support, the insurgency will eventually subside. In the contemporary conflict in Afghanistan, the ISAF strives to isolate the local tribal populations from the Taliban by denying the insurgents control over the rural settlements and simultaneously implementing an ambitious program of educational, socio-economic and political reforms in cooperation with the legitimate Afghan government.

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the “population-centric paradigm” on COIN has won a large number of adherents among the academic community and military establishments of the West – although this approach has recently undergone severe criticism for underemphasising the need to pursue and vanquish the insurgents.<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding the validity of these criticisms, the people constitute the “centre of gravity” in this variant of irregular warfare. Without substantial support from the (local) populace, neither the insurgents nor the counter-insurgents can prevail<sup>12</sup> – unless of course external actors intervene in support of either side in an overwhelming way.

Recent studies have shown that “enemy-centric approaches” in COIN have proven successful on several occasions – though only for a short period. The “enemy-centric approaches” in COIN have on most cases proven militarily effective in the short run and counter-productive in military and political terms in the long run.<sup>13</sup> For example, the Russian Empire quashed the insurrections of the Muslim mountainous tribes in the Caucasus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with ruthless effectiveness. However, the savage policies of the Tsarist armies alienated the Muslims peoples and when the Russian Empire collapsed in 1917 they immediately sought their independence from Moscow. A counter-insurgent must indeed score a clear-cut and permanent victory over the insurgents, not an inconclusive or temporary one since “time and space allow insurgent groups to recover and

recoup their losses”.<sup>14</sup> And yet, even the “population-centric approaches” have not been crowned with success in every single case – as the contemporary conflict in Afghanistan proves beyond doubt. But why?

Suppressing an insurgency has always constituted a challenging task for every government no matter its military power.<sup>15</sup> Van Creveld claimed that insurgencies have been suppressed only on rare occasions.<sup>16</sup> Although such statements cannot stand up to scrutiny,<sup>17</sup> the defeats of counter-insurgents (particularly the powerful ones) by insurgents have in general received more publicity than their victories. The explanations for the counter-insurgents’ defeat by the insurgents can be grouped into three principal categories.<sup>18</sup> In the first category, defeat in COIN has been imputed primarily to a dramatic shift in the balance of power at the expense of a counter-insurgent.<sup>19</sup> The second category includes the explanations related to political causes such as the asymmetry in will,<sup>20</sup> the type of the regime and the duration of the conflict.<sup>21</sup> The third category contains the sources of defeat that relate to military causes: an incorrect military policy,<sup>22</sup> a crucial deficiency in intelligence,<sup>23</sup> a misinterpretation of the intentions and capabilities of the insurgents,<sup>24</sup> and a monolithic military culture.<sup>25</sup> What about the sources of victory in a COIN campaign?

### **The Strategy of the Counter-Insurgent**

How should a counter-insurgent tackle an insurgency? Numerous treatises have been written over the centuries which prescribed various solutions to what essentially amounts to an armed contest for legitimacy and popular support:<sup>26</sup> from the “oil-spot” (*tache d’huile*) method of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>27</sup> to the “3D approach” in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>28</sup> These theories strive to invent a versatile formula that could permanently cure insurgency, “one of the most forgiving and flexible forms of irregular warfare in terms of defeat”.<sup>29</sup>

Max Manwaring has argued that all insurgencies demonstrate “analytical commonalities at the strategic and high operational levels” and, therefore, counter-insurgents should strive to achieve six core objectives: defend their legitimacy as the sole authority, destroy the insurgents, achieve unity of effort, develop reliable intelligence and propaganda services, deny the insurgents of their sources of internal and external support, and elicit a foreign intervention.<sup>30</sup> Other scholars have contended that the counter-insurgents must out-compete their irregular enemy in the “effective use of four tools”: “coercive force, economic incentive and disincentive, legitimating ideology and traditional authority”.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, the counter-insurgent should strive to deprive the insurgents from their internal and external sources of support. Ergo, a sound strategy to counter an insurgency should contain a wide spectrum of policies (diplomatic, political, economic, ideological and military). However, a counter-insurgent might not employ all these *means* or apply them in different combinations at different phases of the conflict. The *ways* a counter-insurgent uses these five basic *means* varies for a number of reasons which range from the unavoidable interaction with the insurgents to the bureaucratic politics within the government. For instance, the counter-insurgent may simply put into effect a military strategy to counter an insurgency or use a military approach in the initial stage and afterwards complement the military effort with diplomatic or economic actions.

### **The political dimension (or the imperative of “governance”)**

Several theorists and practitioners of COIN have recognised the paramount importance of the political element of COIN<sup>32</sup> – which the axiom of David Galula (a French soldier-theorist of the Cold War) that “political actions remain foremost throughout the war” ideally encapsulated.<sup>33</sup> In fact, every action (military, diplomatic, economic, etc.) in COIN possesses an intrinsic political

weight due to the indisputable political effects that each action produces.<sup>34</sup> Several theorists and practitioners on COIN have underlined the imperative of political primacy in COIN – the need to subordinate every policy to the pursuit of specific political objectives and, moreover, secure civil control over the military and the overall campaign.<sup>35</sup> The case of the Algerian War (1954-1962) clearly shows the dangers of the lack of a lucid political focus and a civilian supervision over the military. Successive French governments of the Fourth Republic gave the French colonial army *carte blanche* to tackle the crisis in Algeria and the latter waged a savage campaign against the Arab insurgents and their civilian supporters identical to the French “wars of pacification” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Northern Africa. Autonomous and powerful, the colonial army interfered in the political affairs of France and caused the collapse of the Fourth Republic in 1958 – organising even an eventually abortive coup against President De Gaulle in 1961.

The political element of a counter-insurgent’s strategy has been narrowly associated with the imperative of “good governance”, i.e. the need for a counter-insurgent to provide legitimate and just governance to the population.<sup>36</sup> In a wider sense, David Kilcullen (an Australian theorist and practitioner on COIN) has claimed that the political actions in COIN serve four main functions: rallying public support for the government, strengthening the institutional capacity of the state mechanism, providing law-abiding and competent governance to the people, and promoting the social reintegration of the insurgents.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the political component of the counter-insurgent’s strategy primarily targets the population.

Since the insurgents and the counter-insurgent vie for population control, each side strives to propagate a convincing cause around which the (local) populace can rally. The more the counter-insurgent’s cause resonates with a population’s special characteristics (e.g. political views, social

values, ethnic identity etc.), the greater popularity and legitimacy the counter-insurgent secures among the people.<sup>38</sup> In fact, an adaptive and attractive cause helps a counter-insurgent not only win the “battle of ideas” (and, thus, the “hearts and minds” of the people) but also gather outside support from external allies and the international community.<sup>39</sup> For example, by portraying the campaign against the communist insurgency as a heroic struggle for the protection of the Greek nation and the Orthodox faith from the sinister plots of atheist agents of the Slavs, the Greek royalist regime propagated a cause during the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) that struck a chord with the nationalist and pious population of Greece.

Targeted reforms and law-abiding and competent governance tend to increase the legitimacy and popularity of the counter-insurgent.<sup>40</sup> However, legitimate and effective governance should not be associated exclusively with a particular type of regime (e.g. a Western-style democracy)<sup>41</sup> – an axiom that the U.S.A. (and the West in general) tend to overlook whenever they intervene in support of a third country threatened by an insurgency (recently, in Afghanistan and Iraq) and attempt to export their own system of governance. On several occasions, the person who governs and not the method of governance, matters most for the population.<sup>42</sup> Ergo, the counter-insurgent ought to understand and respect – instead of antagonising – the culturally-acceptable standards of legitimacy of the population.<sup>43</sup> For example, the councils of elders in every village and town of Afghanistan possess in fact a far greater degree of legitimacy in the eyes of the conservative rural population of Afghanistan over those state officials who have been elected through rigged elections and appointed by the corrupt government in Kabul.

In summary, a counter-insurgent should focus on how to ameliorate the quality of governance rather than on what political system to adopt<sup>44</sup> and, in addition, formulate a sound and consistent

political program in order to win the support of the people.<sup>45</sup> In the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), Britain promised to offer independence to the country and critically improved the quality of governance – thus undermining the cause and popular support of the communist insurgents. However, efficient governance alone cannot secure victory<sup>46</sup> and a fair measure of security and economic development for the population must be also provided by the counter-insurgent.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Diplomatic Element (or the imperative of “outside support”)**

The diplomatic element in COIN pertains to the efforts of the counter-insurgents to neutralise external assistance to the insurgents and, at the same time, mobilise outside support for their own cause.<sup>48</sup> Since outside support has been recognised as a key factor<sup>49</sup> and even the most critical determinant of victory for the insurgents,<sup>50</sup> the reduction of external assistance to the insurgents promises to improve a counter-insurgent’s prospects of success.<sup>51</sup> The vigorous propagandization of a persuasive cause<sup>52</sup> and the continuous support from powerful external allies<sup>53</sup> tend to further increase the effectiveness of the counter-insurgent’s diplomatic campaign. For example, the new military regime in Egypt (which seized the reins of power by overthrowing the elected Islamist government) successfully portrays inside and outside Egypt the armed opposition of the Egyptian Islamists as jihadist terrorism and profits from continuous support from powerful Arab and non-Arab countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia and Russia) – in sharp contrast to the Egyptian Islamists who receive diminishing international support and sympathy.

However, diplomacy does not always yield results and the neutralisation of outside support for the insurgents may require military operations against the insurgents’ foreign supporters.<sup>54</sup> An internal conflict could thus easily escalate into a regional or international one due to the policies adopted by a counter-insurgent and other international or regional actors involved in the irregular

conflict. Such policies may include the export of the internal conflict by the counter-insurgent to other neighbouring countries, the intervention by external actors in support of either the counter-insurgent or the insurgents, and peace enforcement operations by external actors (e.g. a regional or international organisation of collective security).<sup>55</sup>

The Syrian Civil War stands out as a typical case of an internal conflict which has developed into a peripheral one. The external allies of the internal armed opposition to the Ba'athist regime have offered sanctuary as well as military, diplomatic and economic aid to the insurgents and, in addition, they repeatedly appealed to the international community and organisations of collective security (e.g. the Arab League and NATO) to authorise the use of force for the removal of Assad from power; some of them (namely Turkey) have been engaged in minor border clashes with the army of the regime. On the other side, the peripheral Shiite allies of Assad (Hezbollah and Iran) did not stay idle either and intervened militarily in support of their co-religionists in Syria. The predominantly Sunni insurgents have in turn expanded their military activity to the neighbouring countries with substantial Shia populations (Lebanon and, in particular, Iraq) and embroiled the whole region into a bloody sectarian conflict. The savage terrorism of the Islamic State (a radical Sunni organisation close to Al Qaeda) and its lightning victories in Syria and Iraq have prompted a diverse coalition of countries (Western and Arab alike) to stage intensive air strikes against the organisation inside Syria and Iraq. Last but not least, the struggle of the Kurds in three countries (Turkey, Iraq and Syria) for autonomy threatens to unbalance the whole region and redraw the national borders. Thus, due to the evident danger of an internal conflict's spill-over, the counter-insurgent must exercise caution and patience (two virtues extolled by several COIN theorists and practitioners<sup>56</sup>) when implementing various policies to counter an insurgent threat.

**The Economic Aspect (or the imperative of “development”)**

The counter-insurgent’s economic policy could prove crucial in determining the outcome of a conflict that revolves around the issue of population control.<sup>57</sup> In a wider sense, such a policy performs the main functions of the civil section of a COIN campaign – namely, providing public services (e.g. public health) and emergency humanitarian relief to the population, reinforcing the regime’s capacity-building potential (e.g. through reforms in the state apparatus) and securing sustainable economic development.<sup>58</sup> How the counter-insurgent should implement an economic policy still remains a source for contention: should the economic actions be treated simply as an adjunct to the counter-insurgent’s politico-military efforts or should the strategy of the counter-insurgent revolve around the economic element?<sup>59</sup> Anyhow, economic measures cannot secure victory alone; instead, they should be complemented with politico-military actions.<sup>60</sup>

A counter-insurgent may receive economic aid from external allies – a development that can, under specific circumstances, decisively contribute to the success of the COIN campaign. The donors must thoroughly assess the needs and particularities of the recipient state and, in close cooperation with the latter, determine realisable objectives; most importantly, the donors must respect the “native ownership” of the economic policy. The two sides should focus on the most appropriate policies that guarantee the prompt reconstruction of the recipient state’s war-ravaged society and economy. A fair measure of flexibility and public accountability from the side of the recipient state would substantially increase its legitimacy and effectiveness.<sup>61</sup> For instance, the Soviet Union wanted to promote the rapid socio-economic transformation of its Afghan socialist ally and, for that reason, squandered precious resources to large-scale infrastructural projects that cost dearly and did not solve the urgent short-term problems of Afghanistan (e.g. the deficiency

in food supplies). These over-ambitious projects of the Soviets did not succeed in stabilising the anaemic economy of their ally during their military intervention (1979-1989) and, worse, caused an unstoppable economic haemorrhage to the faltering economy of the Soviet Union.

Aid programs could cause more harm than good when the donor and recipient states take no precaution against the possible misuse of the aid. In fact, economic aid could be squandered by corrupt officials of the recipient state and even confiscated by the insurgents.<sup>62</sup> For example, the widespread corruption in the state apparatuses in the African continent has inter alia inhibited the effective usage by the war-ravaged African countries (e.g. Somalia and Mali) of the aid programs offered by their external allies (e.g. France) and the international community. Therefore, the aid programs must not be considered a panacea for all ills of a war-torn country; instead, they should be regarded as useful tools that supplement other policies of the counter-insurgent.

### **Ideological Element (or the imperative of a “narrative”)**

Frank Kitson claimed that an insurgency differed from other types of war by being “primarily concerned with the struggle for men’s minds”.<sup>63</sup> Obviously, ideology forms an integral part of a conflict fought for the “hearts and minds” of the people.<sup>64</sup> Ideology requires a dynamic medium for its expression and development and the “narrative” serves exactly that mission.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, an astute understanding of the “narrative” of the insurgents and the society within which they operate would enable the counter-insurgents to correctly comprehend the insurgents’ true aims and adjust their own policies.<sup>66</sup> However, understanding alone does not secure victory in COIN. In fact, the counter-insurgents ought to propagandise a “narrative” that explains their intentions and appeals to the population in an effective way.<sup>67</sup>

The extent of the appeal of the message depends critically on its content and the attitude of its transmitter. Instead of propagating an adaptive, simple and convincing “narrative” that seizes the crucial “initiative of ideas” from the insurgents, a counter-insurgent may in fact propagandise “a narrative of defence” that regurgitates standardised and politically correct – albeit unattractive and vague – concepts (e.g. a Western-style liberal democracy).<sup>68</sup> The counter-insurgents should address the “narrative” to every actor of crucial importance in the war: the population of the war-ravaged country,<sup>69</sup> the allies of the regime and even the international community.<sup>70</sup> The external actors who intervene in support of an allied regime threatened by insurgents must also persuade in turn their national audiences to support their interventionist enterprises.<sup>71</sup> For instance, ISAF propagates a “narrative of defence” that reiterates unattractive concepts (e.g. war on terror and advancement of democracy) for the majority of the conservative Afghan population and rapidly recedes in popularity among the international public opinion and the national audiences of the ISAF members.

### **The Military Component (or the imperative of “security”)**

Military actions in a COIN campaign intend to achieve two inter-related objectives: provide a fair measure of security to those sections of the population that support the government or simply remain neutral and, in addition, rout the insurgents. Since the majority of the population usually stays neutral until coerced or convinced to support one particular side,<sup>72</sup> the counter-insurgents can fatally weaken the insurgents by denying them control of this “silent majority”.<sup>73</sup>

However, a counter-insurgent’s security policies interact with other policies. Absent sufficient security levels, economic development and political reforms stall and recede.<sup>74</sup> The military and civil (political) actions remain intertwined throughout the course of the war.<sup>75</sup> And since military

actions produce political effects, they remain subordinate to political calculations.<sup>76</sup> After all, the integration of civil and military policies (“unity of effort”) constitutes one of the core principles of the theory and practice on COIN.<sup>77</sup> Sir Gerald Templer, the British High Commissioner in Malaya from 1952 to 1952, concentrated in hands all civil and military powers and implemented a sound and coherent strategy that would finally succeed in defeating the communist insurgents during the Malayan Emergency.

An insurgency constitutes an armed contest for legitimacy,<sup>78</sup> and, hence, the military policies of the counter-insurgent must strengthen rather than undermine the latter’s candidacy as the sole legitimate authority. Providing security to the population under the rule of law – though a quite strenuous task – promises to increase the popularity and legitimacy of the government.<sup>79</sup> The use of selective violence and minimum force would reinforce such an endeavour.<sup>80</sup> A legal system finely harmonised with the cultural norms and practices of the population would equally prove constructive in augmenting the counter-insurgent’s popularity.<sup>81</sup> The Algerian War stands out as a stark reminder of how repressive policies can sorely reduce the popular support for the counter-insurgents. The French colonial authorities employed indiscriminate violence against civilians to eliminate the insurgents to such an extent that they ultimately estranged the Arab population and even the French public opinion.

Military actions critically depend on timely and reliable intelligence for their preparation and execution with the utmost efficiency. However, intelligence cannot be properly understood and employed unless an accurate understanding of the societal and operational environment has been previously accomplished.<sup>82</sup> Nor could reliable intelligence be collected unless the (local) people feel less threatened from the insurgents’ retribution<sup>83</sup> or more intimidated by state reprisals.<sup>84</sup> In

Afghanistan and Pakistan, the state authorities cannot obtain reliable intelligence on the Taliban since the population – inadequately protected by the security forces of the two countries – proves reluctant to provide information and provoke the anger of the Taliban who rule the countryside with impunity. Thus, the counter-insurgents must offer a fair measure of security to the people in order to receive information.

However, intelligence should not be utilised exclusively to determine the outcome of military actions. In fact, actionable intelligence must inform all policies of the counter-insurgent with the aim of increasing the efficiency of the various policies. For example, the problem of information asymmetry (i.e. the deficiency of information about the capabilities and intentions of the enemy) has been imputed as one of the primary causes for the collapse of peace negotiations between the belligerents in a civil war.<sup>85</sup>

Apart from mastering intelligence, the counter-insurgents must also manage information and, thus, expectations about the prospects of victory. They should undertake diligent information campaigns to both counter the enemy propaganda and reduce discontent among their internal and external allies. However, counter-insurgents must cultivate only realistic expectations of victory among the population and the former's external allies (and even the international community) to avoid credibility issues.<sup>86</sup> In reality, measuring success in COIN still remains a complicated issue despite efforts to generate quantifiable and, by extension, measurable criteria.<sup>87</sup> In 1968, the Tet Offensive shattered the assumptions of the U.S. public opinion and government that the Vietcong had suffered an irreversible defeat and, accordingly, that the U.S. intervention in Vietnam would prove short and victorious.

Although no magic formulas for victory in COIN has been invented thus far,<sup>88</sup> certain policies have proven successful over the ages<sup>89</sup> and the counter-insurgents should better take them into account when implementing their own military policies. The security apparatus of the counter-insurgent must develop, first and foremost, the necessary military capabilities for COIN<sup>90</sup> and, in addition, absorb harsh-learned lessons and adapt to the prevailing circumstances.<sup>91</sup> And since the support of the population constitutes a critical determinant for victory in irregular warfare, the counter-insurgents must set as a priority the security of the population and not the extermination of the insurgents.<sup>92</sup> However, counter-insurgents must not restrict themselves to a defensive role and surrender the initiative to the insurgents. Instead, they should protect the (local) population and, at the same time, pursue the insurgents.

However, the adoption of a military policy usually owes less to strategic calculi and more to other non-military considerations. In fact, the type of a regime<sup>93</sup> and its military culture<sup>94</sup> usually exert a substantial influence on military policy. For example, Nazi Germany pursued a vicious COIN campaign against Soviet partisans during World War II that conformed to the racist ideas and genocidal practices of the totalitarian Nazi regime. Kitson cautioned that “no such thing as a purely military solution” could ever succeed.<sup>95</sup> Consequently, the (tactical) military actions of the counter-insurgents ought to be connected with “operational and strategic military objectives and essential political goals”.<sup>96</sup> The Vietnam War (1955 – 1975) serves as a reminder to the counter-insurgents that military successes alone cannot secure victory in irregular warfare. Although the U.S. military forces routed the communist insurgents in every single battle, the U.S.A. did not implement a sound strategy and eventually suffered a strategic defeat.

### **No Magic Formulas for Victory**

Despite the significance of the insights of previous theorists and practitioners on COIN, one must always remember strategy does not remain static during the course of a conflict – either an insurgency or a conventional war. In reality, the “*reciprocal nature* of all action in war” suggests that the policies of the counter-insurgents interact with the actions of the insurgents.<sup>97</sup> As shown on more than one occasions in the recent past, the counter-insurgents that evolved their policies vis-à-vis the insurgents and adapted to the prevailing circumstances in a timely and productive way did in fact prevail over their irregular opponents.<sup>98</sup>

Despite several claims to the contrary, no magic formula for victory in irregular warfare has been invented<sup>99</sup> and, as a consequence, the counter-insurgents should adopt a situation-dependent policy to counter an insurgency.<sup>100</sup> Confronting an insurgency remains a serious challenge to any established state authority – no matter how much power that authority may wield. In fact, every counter-insurgent should remember that the conflict against the insurgents includes a formidable variety of principles, imperatives and paradoxes.<sup>101</sup> However, these principles should be used as a guide and not as a gospel.

Instead, the counter-insurgents should primarily struggle to deprive the insurgents from their internal and external sources of support. In case the counter-insurgents successfully isolate the insurgents from their external allies and denies them control over the population, the insurgents will suffer a critical blow from which they will probably never recover. The counter-insurgents should spare neither time nor resources in their struggle against the insurgents and prepare for a protracted and challenging conflict that will test their very limits of endurance, adaptability and

resourcefulness. However, what means and in which ways the means available to the counter-insurgent will be used varies from for a number of reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, “The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24: Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5” (Chicago; London: Chicago University Press, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 8.

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