

New and innovative COIN-related books

The roles of the ‘state’ and ‘politics’ are crucial in what usually are called ‘insurgencies’ and their negations, ‘counterinsurgencies’. Several publications that deal primarily with a better insight into the political context of the phenomenon can be helpful to enrich our thinking about counterinsurgency. They challenge us to substitute the ‘goals’ of interstate ‘industrial war’ for the internal goal in ‘wars amongst the people’. First, however, it is necessary to take a closer look at the definition of counterinsurgency.

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Let me start by making two cautionary remarks on the definition of counterinsurgency. First of all, like many concepts in our field, the term counterinsurgency is ill-defined. Definitions only make sense if the defined concept is part of a classification of phenomena. Classifications should be complete, while the concepts included in the classifications should show no overlap. In the case of counterinsurgency, there are two plausible classifications. One classification is based on characteristics of the participating actors in the armed struggle. A well-known classification based on this criterion is developed in the framework of the ‘Correlates of War’ Project, led by the recently deceased researcher J. David Singer. In this quantitative-historical research project the state is considered the principal actor in warfare. Consequently, Singer and his research group distinguish between three forms of war:

1. Interstate, where both participating actors are states or alliances of nation-states;

2. Extra-systemic, where a state is confronted with a political unit not yet recognized as a state. This extra-systemic category includes colonial wars and decolonisation war or wars of liberation;
3. Civil wars, in which the government of a state fights a group intended to take over the political authority in a state. German researchers used the term ‘anti-regime wars’ for this category. But civil wars may also have characteristics of what has been termed ‘communal violence’, where groups (e.g. Hindus and Muslims in India) are fighting each other without direct commitment of the ruling authorities. Civil wars can be internationalized through the participation of external states, as was the case in the Spanish Civil War and in the Vietnam War.

(Counter) insurgencies may as well be part of the extra-systemic category of wars (campaigns by the coloniser and decolonisation wars) as of the category of civil wars. The concept of counterinsurgency was coined during the revolutionary wars, where communist insurgents attempted to overthrow either the ruling capitalist elite (China, Greece) or the coloniser (Indonesia, Indochina, Malaysia). In recent wars, such as the ones in Iraq and Afghani-

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stan, however, an indigenous government, established after a foreign military intervention and assisted by an international force, has been confronted with resistance which has as well anti-regime, communal as secessionist characteristics. Moreover, crime (e.g. drug trafficking) has become part of the confrontation.

A second classification of which the concept of counterinsurgency plausibly could be a part is based on the way violence is used. A possibility is the continuum terrorism-guerrilla-conventional war-nuclear war. The terrorist is militarily so weak that he avoids targeting the military machinery of his opponent. Instead, he targets innocent civilians to demonstrate in an indirect way his political purpose and the fact that he is willing to frighten the population to attain his objectives. During a guerrilla, the militarily weaker side attacks military targets of its opponent. But it uses hit-and-run tactics (raids) and avoids sustained open battle.

Insurgents can avail themselves of terrorist as well as guerrilla tactics of warfare. According to

the doctrine of guerrilla warfare of – amongst others – Mao-Tse-Tung, the ultimate goal of revolutionary warfare, however, is the capture of political authority after the defeat of the governmental forces in a conventional struggle. Insurgencies therefore encompass several modalities of conducting armed (terrorism, guerrilla, conventional warfare) conflict, which make them unfit as a separate category in this classification.

A second warning refers to the value-loadedness of concepts in our discipline. ‘Violence’ and ‘War’ have a negative connotation, while concepts such as ‘peace’ and certainly ‘positive peace’ ignite warm feelings. Furthermore, there is a tendency to define concepts in terms of the negation of positively defined concepts. ‘Peace’, for instance, is often defined as the absence of war. In Galtung’s definition of ‘positive peace’, ‘peace’ remains the opposite of ‘structural violence’ while a definition of (positive) peace with positive connotations is still lacking. Similar problems are connected with the definition of counterinsurgency. Firstly, counterinsurgency is defined as the opposition of ‘insurgency’. Consequently, a concrete content of the concept itself is lacking. Secondly, counterinsurgency has a negative connotation because it is linked to the ruthless ways in which colonialist and capitalist regimes attempted to remain in power. ‘Counterinsurgency’ therefore has often been set equal to ‘reactionary’, although the aim of contemporary counterinsurgency operations has been emancipatory (for example in promoting citizen’s and women’s rights in Iraq and Afghanistan).

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These two caveats show that the roles of the ‘state’ and ‘politics’ are crucial in what usually are called ‘insurgencies’ and their negations, ‘counterinsurgencies’. The books having recently most enriched my thinking about ‘counterinsurgency’ consequentially deal primarily with a better insight in the political context of the phenomenon. My favourite nine contributions come from Mancur Olson, Arend Lijphart, Amitai Etzioni, Paul Collier,



Rupert Smith, in pointing out a paradigm shift from ‘industrial war’ to ‘wars amongst the people’, assigns an important role to policy instruments

Cor Lammers, Herfried Münkler, Sir Rupert Smith, David Galula and Robert Kaplan.

Olson

I'd like to start not with a book, but with a contribution to the *American Political Science Review*, written in 1993 by Mancur Olson.¹ Olson introduces a distinction between three kinds of political systems: roving bandits, stationary warlords, and democracies. In a system of roving bandits people enrich themselves by theft and plunder. There is no central authority restraining the use of violence. This is comparable to Hobbes' state of nature, in which every individual is the enemy of everybody else and life is 'solitary, nasty, brutish and short'. In contradiction to this state of anarchy, 'stationary warlords' have acquired a monopoly of violence. These Leviathans are the dictatorships and totalitarian regimes, ruling over a defined territory and capable to tax the revenues of production of their citizens. Politically, these citizens have no rights. They can be thrown in jail or even executed if the dictator wishes so. Not surprisingly, the citizens are best off in the third political system: democracy. In democracy, as well as in the case of stationary warlords, individual citizens are disarmed by the government. But in exchange, the elected government protects them against the violence of other citizens. Moreover, the government itself refrains from using violence against its innocent citizens (that is: it refrains from state terror).

Olson shows that a democracy is the superior political system for the individual welfare of the citizens. He also shows, however, that a stationary warlord is preferable to roving banditry because dictators have an interest in the productive activities of their citizens. For this reason, continuation of production and a corresponding consumption is guaranteed. The level of consumption, which is higher than in

an anarchical situation, is divided between the autocrat and the working citizens. This is an important reason for a rehabilitation of the position of authoritarian regimes vis-à-vis anarchy and thinking twice before attempting to topple them. The result may not be 'democracy', but 'roving banditry'.

Lijphart

In his mathematical model, Olson adheres to the individualistic definition of democracy, for which the 'one man-one vote' principle and majority rule are characteristic. This reflects homogeneous societies, in which various collectivities have disappeared. In developing countries, however, societies – even if they are democratically governed – are composed of strong subnational identities (tribes, religions, etc., often concentrated in geographical areas). In those cases, governmental stability often results from compromises between the political leaders of these identity groups, who are able to elicit the necessary support of their followers by offering them jobs and other revenues as a power-sharing formula. Olson's scheme therefore should be completed by introducing democracies operating through formulas of power-sharing as an intermediary stage between autocratic systems and individualistic democracies. The political theorist who has elaborated on this topic by introducing the concept of 'consociational democracy' is Arend Lijphart.² Lijphart, born in the Netherlands, used the Dutch 'pillar system' (consisting of catholic, protestant, socialist and liberal columns during the fifties and the sixties of the 20th century) as exemplary for his concept of 'consociational democracy'. Since most so-called counterinsurgency operations follow interventions in heterogeneous developing countries and define the internal stability of the state as their political purpose, constitutional formulas of power sharing and the political machinery of consociational democracy are worthwhile to build upon.

Etzioni

In the same line of reasoning, I want to make a plea for Amitai Etzioni's book *Security First*.³

1 Mancur Olson, 'Dictatorship, Democracy and Development' in: *The American Political Science Review*, Volume 87, Issue 3 (September 1993) 567-576.

2 Arend Lijphart, *Thinking about Democracy. Power Sharing and Majority Rule in Theory and Practice* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2008).

3 Amitai Etzioni, *Security First. For a Muscular, Moral Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007).

Etzioni warns against the neoconservative purpose to simply export democracy to Africa, Asia and the Middle East. According to him, the sudden introduction of democracy can even threaten stability because it distorts equilibrium within heterogeneous states. The effect of the strife for democracy, therefore, may not be more stability, but more anarchy. Etzioni, emphasizing concepts such as 'community' and 'civil society', introduces some caveats with respect to Western interventionism. In his



In studying foreign interventions, the military sociologist Cor Lammers came up with the term 'benevolent occupations'

view, in the foreign and security policies of Western states 'security' should prevail over the spread of democracy and human rights. Order, also if it is supported by traditional structures, is often more beneficial to citizens and international stability than the turmoil set in motion by the difficultly predictable outcomes of a war. Basic security, not socio-economic development, should have priority.

Collier

To counterbalance these publications, which are sceptical towards interventionism, let me mention several contributions by Paul Collier.⁴ Collier argues that the costs of 'failed states' in the long run far exceed the costs of intervention. These costs not only consist of an increased risk of terrorist attacks, but also of obstacles to economic development, flows of refugees and regional instability. Collier ascribes the 50% reduction in the number of major armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War to the sharp increase of the number of UN operations. In comparison with other instruments of foreign policy (increased export opportunities, emergency aid, and other forms of development cooperation), military operations are by far the most effective method to bring stability. For this reason it is difficult to believe that the reservations of Western governments to participate in peace operations (especially those of the UN) in Africa are that great.

Lammers

As a fifth author providing us with illuminating ideas, I want to mention Cor Lammers.⁵ Lammers, who died last year, was a military sociologist who had compared the effects of violent resistance with those of collaboration in various European states during the Nazi occupation. In terms of humanitarian and economic losses, collaboration of the elite with the occupying forces often seemed preferable. In his last book, Lammers applied this result to countries in which peace operations took place. Although the intervening international organisations and the intervening states emphasize the ownership of local governments, the situation in states which are the targets of peace operations can be compared with occupations in the sense that foreign troops are

4 For example Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion. Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About it* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007).

5 C.J. Lammers, *Vreemde overheersing. Bezetten en bezetting in sociologisch perspectief* (*Foreign Rule. Occupying and Occupation in Sociological Perspective*) (Amsterdam, Bert Bakker, 2005).

deployed on their territories. Lammers calls the result 'benevolent occupations'. He argues that cooperation of the indigenous elites may shorten the duration of the intervention and minimize its costs. At this point, of course, his plea is complementary to the advocacy of power-sharing arrangements between heterogeneous groups in developing or failed states as a prelude to the establishment of Westminster-like types of democracy.

Münkler

Collaboration with ruthless enemies, as with the Nazi's in their treatment of the Jews, does only aggravate the consequences of occupations. In this respect, during revolutionary wars cooperation was no alternative vis-à-vis the communist insurgents directed by their Soviet directorate. Is this also true for the religiously-inspired insurgents who became active after the Cold War, first in the Balkans and later in the Middle East and Asia? (Although it should be noted that, for example, the Huk rebellion in the Philippines was already raging during the East-West confrontation). The most illuminating analysis of what have been called 'new wars' has been written by Herfried Münkler in his book *Die neuen Kriege*.⁶ Münkler compares the conflicts in the Balkans with the Thirty Years War, in which religion was a motive as well as an instrument for the disintegration of existing states and the simultaneous formation of new states. The severity of these wars was extreme, indicating that the term 'low intensity conflict' is not applicable to them. This is equally true for the so-called 'new wars'. What we are witnessing is a return to anarchical violence in which the state has lost its monopoly of violence. Wars are no longer executed by two (or more) well-organized states, safeguarding that their armies adhere to the laws of humanitarian warfare, but by terrorists, mercenaries and warlords. Additionally, criminality and plunder are fully integrated in the financing and conducting of the struggles.

Smith

The role of the military instrument in contemporary conflict has been eminently sketched by Sir Rupert Smith.⁷ According to Smith, we are witnessing a paradigm shift from 'industrial war' to 'wars amongst the people'. Smith differentiates between 'conflicts' (armed hostilities) and 'confrontations'. Confrontations are unlimited in time. During confrontations, negotiations and fights succeed each other and are intermingled. The role of the military instrument during 'wars amongst the people' is limited since annihilating the military capabilities of the opponent (either by 'maneuver' or by 'attrition') is not the major aim in confrontations because a military victory is impossible. In 'wars amongst the people', according to Smith, 'We seek to create a conceptual space for diplomacy, economic incentives, political pressure and other measures to create a desired political outcome of stability and if possible democracy' (p. 50). This means that the intervening party does not aim to influence the balance of power by kinetic means, but by changing the position of the pole (the power balance between the warring parties) on which the seesaw rests. This signifies a shift in the support of the citizens in favour of the indigenous government and the intervening power, often called 'winning the hearts and minds' of the people. Smith's analysis stresses that Western powers should prepare for a long duration of the confrontation. While it is not necessary to deploy extensive fighting units all the time in the area, activities such as 'information operations', intelligence gathering and psychological warfare should be executed continuously. Smith assigns an important role to other policy instruments, such as political capacity-building, 'Security Sector Reform' (SSR), establishing a strong and reliable police force and armed forces, and 'Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration' (DDR).

Galula

For the implementations of strategy during 'wars amongst the people', David Galula's classic book *Theories de la contra-insurrection*

⁶ Herfried Münkler, *Die Neuen Kriege (The New Wars)* (Hamburg, Rowohlt, 2002).

⁷ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force. The Art of War in the Modern World* (London, Penguin Books, 2005).



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Herfried Münkler compares the conflicts in the Balkans with the Thirty Years War and concludes that the severity of these wars was extreme

(1964) remains an excellent introduction.⁸ Galula's insights were based on his experiences in China, Indochina and Algeria. Galula advises the counterinsurgent to select a local minority benefiting from his support and gradually increase its power position vis-à-vis the insurgent minority. He emphasises the main dilemma in acquiring the support of the people: 'Intelligence is the principal source of information on guerrillas, and intelligence has to come from the population, but the population does not talk unless it feels safe, and it does not feel safe until the insurgent's power has been broken (p. 50). Galula defines a victory not in military terms, but as 'the permanent isolation of the insurgent from the population, isolation not enforced upon the population but maintained by and with the population' (p. 54). Protection of the population begins with a thorough census, after which citizens acquire identity cards and family booklets. A safe area ('tache d'huile' or 'ink spot') is subsequently protected by, amongst others, roadblocks. All these measures (including additionally the offering of labour) are primarily intended to gather intelligence, not as a device to guarantee safety immediately.

Kaplan

As a last contribution I want to mention Robert Kaplan's book *Imperial Grunts*.⁹ Kaplan makes clear that the days of massive heavily-armed military formations are gone. In 'wars amongst the people' (the term I prefer to counterinsurgencies) they are replaced by small units, often consisting of special forces. The example of one American lieutenant-colonel active in Mongolia illustrates how effective the deployment of even one single soldier can be. Training indigenous forces and assistance in the setting up of the security sectors in failed states have become the most urgent military tasks. Cultural knowledge and language skills have become important abilities for the military. The building of political and military

capacities is the main challenge in stabilisation operations in failed states. This requires the involvement of not only diplomats, the military and development workers, but also a greater contribution of specialists in public administration, the police and the judiciary.

Conclusion

The main political objective of contemporary military operations is the creation of internal stability in failed states or states under (re)construction. This concrete content of a war goal was absent in the thinking of von Clausewitz. Political purposes are still guiding the meaning and significance of force. In this sense Clausewitz is still relevant. Our primary task is, however, to substitute the 'goals' of interstate 'industrial war' for the internal goal in 'wars amongst the people'. Mentally, this is a difficult task since the armed forces of Western countries are also still expected to be able to fight an 'industrial war'.



⁸ Translated as *Counterinsurgency Warfare. Theory and Practice* (Westpoint, Praeger, 2006).

⁹ Robert D. Kaplan, *Imperial Grunts. On the Ground with the American Military, from Mongolia to the Philippines to Iraq and Beyond* (New York, Random House, 2005).