

Forward to the Past

Reflections on British Responses to Insurgency

Over the past 200 years, the British Armed Forces have been involved in countless military campaigns in faraway countries. Thoughts on counter-insurgency were put to paper and the debate about what a 'real war' was has always been alive. In recent years there has been an academic rediscovery or rather reconsideration of the concept of the British Way in Warfare.

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The conference's emphasis upon the roots of counter-insurgency is a welcome one since a particular army's counter-insurgency practice has so frequently evolved from its past colonial experience and, though subsequently modified as needs dictate, still invariably displays the influences of the distant past for, in insurgency and counter-insurgency, the past is rarely a distant country. Weapons may change and new ideological or other motivational imperatives for insurgency emerge, but the difficulties of meeting the challenges in this form of conflict most certainly do not. There is an essential continuity over time, therefore, in British military responses to insurgency and the historical past remains an important tool for the understanding of what works and what does not work in counter-insurgency.

In tracing the roots and continuing trends in British military practice, it is necessary first to say something about the position of counter-

insurgency theory in British military thought before then following a broadly chronological framework to establish the body of theory that has evolved, its application in practice, and the continuing underlying themes.

Academic rediscovery

In recent years there has been a British academic rediscovery or rather reconsideration of the concept of the British Way in Warfare, primarily through the debate concerning the true nature of the westerners and easterners debate during the Great War. In its classic form, as originally outlined by Julian Corbett in *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* in 1911 and as popularised by Basil Liddell Hart in *The British Way in Warfare* in 1932, it was argued that British wartime practice had traditionally rested upon economic pressure on its enemies exercised through seapower, that is to say subsidising continental allies, blockading continental opponents and deploying amphibious expeditions against their colonies and vulnerable points.¹ At most, this only ever really applied to the period between 1714 and 1763 and, in reality, there was a blending of maritime and continental strategies in most of Britain's wars against other major powers. Nonetheless, whatever the perceived limitations of the theory, it can be said that it did represent a distinctive contribution to strategic debate by British theorists, albeit in

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1 Michael Howard, 'The British Way in Warfare: A Reappraisal', in Michael Howard, *The Causes of War and Other Essays* (London: 2nd edn., Counterpoint, 1985), pp. 189-207; Hew Strachan, 'The British Way in Warfare Revisited', *Historical Journal* 26, 1983, pp. 447-61; idem, 'The British Way of Warfare', in David Chandler and Ian Beckett, eds., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 417-34; David French, *The British Way in Warfare, 1688-2000* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

the narrow sense of an interpretation of British historical practice rather than an attempt to establish a universal theory.

It could be argued, of course, that in analysing what he saw as British maritime practice, Alfred Thayer Mahan did attempt a more universal theory which did have a wide impact following the publication of *The Influence of Seapower Upon History* in 1889 and *The Influence of Seapower Upon the French Revolution and Empire* in 1893. Mahan, however, was an American although it was a British geographer, Halford Mackinder, who did contribute the heartland theory to geopolitics. For the most part, however, with two exceptions, British military thought has been almost entirely derivative of continental models rather than innovative and universal. The first exception is arguably the theory of armoured and mechanised warfare to which, among others, J.F.C. Fuller and Liddell Hart contributed in varying ways. The other exception, however, is the theory of counter-insurgency and I would argue that, in terms of the body of theoretical work produced and the practical application of that theory, albeit sometimes unconsciously, counter-insurgency represents by far the most distinctive British contribution to the art of war.

Prevalent form of conflict

Now, guerrilla warfare, insurgency, low-intensity conflict, small wars, or however it is described, has always been the most prevalent form of conflict. It was certainly so for the British in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, if not before. Between Queen Victoria's accession in 1837 and 1854, for example, the British army fought 17 major campaigns and another 35 between 1872 and 1899, none of them in either period in Europe. On the North West Frontier of India alone, in addition to two major wars in Afghanistan, there were 51 large-scale expeditions between 1849 and 1908 and, between 1899 and 1906, a total of 602 more minor frontier incidents requiring some form of military response. The range of the Queen's enemies was extraordinary from Afghan tribesmen to the Maoris of New Zealand, the Zulus and Boers of South Africa,

the fanatical dervishes of the Sudan and armies structured on European lines such as those of the Sikhs and the Egyptians. They differed widely in tactics, weaponry and fighting qualities while the British also confronted an equally daunting range of terrain types and climatic conditions from bush and jungle to desert and mountain. Indeed, George Henderson wrote in 1900 'it is as useless to anticipate in what quarter of the globe our troops may be next employed as to guess at the tactics, the armament and even the colour of our next enemy'.²

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British Marines on their way to Port Stanley, Falklands, 1982

Particular scorn has always been reserved for the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir George Milne, who remarked in 1926 that the First World War had been 'abnormal'.³ In fact, the apocryphal 'real soldiering' on the frontiers of empire, to which regulars were supposedly eager to return in 1918, did actually represent the collective experience of the inter-war army just as it had represented that of the

² Jay Luvaas, *The Military Legacy of the Civil War: The European Inheritance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 185.

³ Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the World Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 36.

Victorian army. It has been no less the principal fare of the British army since 1945. While British soldiers died on active service somewhere in the world in every year between 1945 and 1997 – with the exception of 1968 – the only significant conventional experience comprised 35 months of British participation in the Korean War, involving no more than five infantry battalions at any one time; ten days at Suez in 1956; 25 days of the land campaign of the Falklands in 1982; and 100 hours of land operations in the Gulf in 1991.

Yet, as with other armies, the British have often discounted the prevalence of small wars. In 1896 one of the adherents of what has been characterised as the ‘British Imperial’ school of military thought, Thomas Miller Maguire,

tions of this form of conflict, as Smith implied. Results will not be obtained quickly and, in many cases, success cannot be measured in conventional military terms of decisive battles won. What have been described as ‘uncomfortable wars’ also confront soldiers with political and societal pressures to a far greater degree than other forms of conflict. In short, to utilise the imagery of Christopher Marlowe in *Tamburlaine*, guerrilla conflict is no short cut to a triumphant ride through Persepolis. It is by no means a new phenomenon. Back in 1763, William Smith writing of the prospects of the coming campaign against the Ottawa chief, Pontiac, in the Ohio valley had written to an army friend, ‘The war will be a tedious one, nor can it be glorious, even tho’ attended with success. Instead of decisive battles, woodland skirmishes – instead of Colours and Cannons, our Trophies will be stinking scalps. Heaven preserve you, my Friend, from a war conducted by a spirit of murder rather than of brave and generous offence.’⁵

Similarly, as Charles Callwell wrote in his classic *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* in 1896, ‘The crushing of a populace in arms and the stamping out of widespread disaffection by military methods, is a harassing form of warfare even in a civilised country with a settled social system; in remote regions peopled by half-civilised races or wholly savage tribes, such campaigns are most difficult to bring to a satisfactory conclusion, and are always most trying to the troops.’⁶ That brings us neatly to Charles Callwell as the starting point for a consideration of the evolution of a defined body of British theory.

Theory and practice

Callwell as a starting point

Callwell is an obvious and, indeed, significant starting point though he was not the first to address the phenomena. The interest of a number of Victorian soldiers such as Colonel J.C. Gawler in what was then called generally ‘savage warfare’ can certainly be divined through the pages of the *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* in the 1870s and,

What mattered to Callwell was practical example rather than slavish principle

commented on what he regarded as the obsessions of the rival ‘continentalist’ school within the British army, ‘While looking at the stars, we may tumble in a ditch, and while lost in wonder at how to move effectively from Strasbourg, Mayence and Metz towards Paris with many divisions of cavalry and armies consisting each of from three to eight corps, we may forget how to handle a few battalions in the passes of the Suleiman Range or in the deserts of Upper Egypt.’⁴

‘Uncomfortable wars’

In part, the problem of reconciling conventional armed forces to a counter-guerrilla role has arisen from the perception of most armies that they exist primarily to wage major conventional wars. It has not been, however, just a matter of institutional conservatism and a preconceived notion of the nature of ‘real war’. The difficulty also lies in the distinctly unglamorous implica-

4 Howard Bailes, ‘Patterns of Thought in the Late Victorian Army’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 4, 1981, pp. 29-45.

5 Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1908), II, p. 62.

6 Charles Callwell, *Small Wars: their Principles and Practice* (London: HMSO, 1896), p. 26.

famously, Garnet Wolseley had issued a memorandum to his troops on bush warfare tactics for the Ashanti campaign of 1873-74 though this was actually compiled not by Wolseley but by George Greaves and Archibald Alison.⁷ Callwell himself contributed articles on the strategy and tactics of small wars to the *Proceedings of the Royal Artillery Institution* in 1884 and 1885. He then won the Gold Medal in the annual essay competition of the RUSI in 1887 for his contribution on 'Lessons to be Learnt from the Campaigns in which British Forces have been employed since the year 1865'.⁸ *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* appeared in 1896 with two more editions in 1899 and 1906.

Contrasting with the continental school of thought within the army, what mattered to Callwell was practical example rather than slavish principle for, as he wrote, 'Theory cannot be accepted as conclusive when practice points the other way'. After the publication of

Small Wars, other British soldiers wrote on specific aspects such as bush warfare and mountain warfare, W.C.G. Heneker's *Bush Warfare* appearing in 1904 and George Younghusband's *Indian Frontier Warfare* in 1898.⁹ None, however, covered the whole spectrum of small wars as systematically as Callwell, or as comprehensively. Moreover, these later books were clearly modelled on Callwell's methodology. Callwell himself did not initially cover mountain warfare in his first edition but added a chapter on it as well as one on bush warfare to the 1899 edition.

Document of its time

Clearly, *Small Wars* is a document of its time. Indeed, some of the operational and tactical methods advocated were already outdated in contemporary European warfare.

There were limitations, too, in the sheer diversity of the campaigns Callwell studied, which could render the applicability of the lessons problematic elsewhere. Callwell also emphasised operational solutions to political problems for all that he recognised that most campaigns were a result of political decision and military problems were determined by objectives that might be political. Nor did he show much concern for what would later be termed hearts and minds, Callwell's attitude towards indigenous peoples being entirely consistent with the racial assumptions of his time. There are frequent references, indeed, to the assumed characteristics of indigenous opponents. In guerrilla warfare, therefore, he believed punitive action – butcher and bolt as the British tended to call it – unavoidable. He felt the uncivilised attributed leniency to timidity and that 'fanatics and savages must be thoroughly brought to book and cowed or



Charles Callwell

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- 7 'Notes for the Information and Guidance of the Soldiers and Sailors about to take part in the operations north of the river Prah', 20 Dec. 1873.
- 8 Charles Callwell, 'Notes on the Tactics of Our Small Wars', *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Royal Artillery Institution* 12, 1884, pp. 531-52; idem, 'Notes on the Strategy of Our Small Wars', *ibid.*, 13, 1885, pp. 403-20; idem, 'Lessons to be Learnt from the Campaigns in which British Forces have been Employed since the year 1865', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 31, 1887-8, pp. 357-411.
- 9 Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 270; W. C. G. Heneker, *Bush Warfare* (London: Hugh Rees, 1907); George Younghusband, *Indian Frontier Warfare* (London: Kegan Paul Trench Trubner & Co, 1898).

they will rise again'. Yet, he also argued that 'to filch the property of irregulars when they are absent is not the true spirit of waging war against such opponents; the proper way to deal with them is to kill them or to wound them, or at least to hunt them from their homes and then to destroy and carry off their belongings' and recognised that stepping beyond the bounds of the laws of war could make it difficult to make the imperial power acceptable to the conquered and that it might also 'shock humanitarians'. Consequently, overawing rather than exasperating an enemy population might be required to ensure a lasting peace.¹⁰

Generally, Callwell indicated that the strategy employed must conform to the methods of one's opponent for, as he wrote in his prize winning essay in 1887, 'it is the disciplined army that is obliged to conform to the methods of those of adversaries infinitely inferior in intelligence and armament'. Indeed,

of population. Thus, Callwell quoted with approval Wolseley's dictum that the objective should be 'the capture of whatever they prize most, and the destruction or deprivation of which will probably bring the war most rapidly to a conclusion'. It might, therefore, involve what we would now understand as an economic target, Callwell defining this at the time in terms of livestock, crops and villages. Above all, it was necessary to seize and maintain the initiative with boldness and vigour in order to avoid those dangers of protracted guerrilla warfare mentioned previously.¹²

One must be a little wary of overestimating Callwell's contemporary influence since *Small Wars* appeared at a moment when the army was increasingly turning its face to Europe. Callwell also initially lacked influence within the Indian army since, as indicated earlier, he did not at first include mountain warfare in his analysis. In any case, as Tim Moreman has shown, the Indian army had its own view of colonial warfare, principally as interpreted by the Punjab Frontier Force but its codes and standing orders were never properly disseminated and no manuals were published. As Callwell noted, there was also a kind of parochial trade unionism borne of the Frontier Force's autonomous position that meant that other British and even Indian units were left largely to learn by experience. Indeed, while the Second Afghan War did shake complacency to some extent, it was only the great tribal uprising on the frontier in 1897-98 that brought greater attention to the specific requirements of hill warfare, hence Younghusband's book in 1898. Kitchener as Commander-in-Chief directed that all Indian battalions be trained in hill warfare but interest waned and only six paragraphs on hill warfare were added to *Field Service Regulations* in 1912, all dealing with rear guards.¹³

One also has to acknowledge with respect to Callwell that the official drill books and manuals made little attempt to distinguish between conventional and irregular warfare and remained primarily concerned with the requirements of European warfare. Though

Klaas van der Maaten's study in 1896 was ignored in the Dutch official manuals

such an opponent 'tends to drag down those opposed to him to his own level'. Moreover, in their own environment, opponents who were warriors by nature rather than training might be the true professionals and the regulars amateurs for regulars 'do not possess the same fertility of military resource, they have not the same instinctive capacity for contriving ambushes and for carrying out surprises; they are amateurs while their adversaries are professional fighting men'.¹¹ It was possible that an opponent might have no sovereign, no capital, no organised army and no centre

10 Callwell, *Small Wars*, pp. 40, 42, 146-49.

11 Callwell, 'Lessons Learnt' p. 362.

12 Callwell, *Small Wars*, pp. 26, 40

13 Tim Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849-1947* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 53; idem, 'The British and Indian Armies and North-West Frontier Warfare, 1849-1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 20, 1991, pp. 35-64; idem, 'Small Wars and Imperial Policing: The British Army and the Theory and Practice of Colonial Warfare in the British Empire, 1919-39', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 19, 1996, pp. 105-31.

sanctioned by the War Office Intelligence Department, *Small Wars* was, to quote the preface to the third edition by the Chief of the General Staff, 'recommended to officers as a valuable contribution on the subject... But it is not to be regarded as laying down inflexible rules for guidance, or an expression of official opinion on the subjects of which it treats'.¹⁴ Yet, Callwell was required reading at the Staff College until at least the appearance of Charles Gwynn's *Imperial Policing*, in 1934, and also one of the texts recommended for preliminary reading for entrants to the RAF Staff College throughout the 1920s. Callwell's influence is also evident in the discussion of the drives by mobile columns included in the first true official manual of counter-insurgency, *Notes on Imperial Policing*, largely compiled by Gwynn, which also appeared in 1934.¹⁵

No precise set of principles

Callwell did not offer a precise set of principles to encapsulate his approach to small wars such as those put forward by some of his successors such as Gwynn and Thompson. Callwell's method of deriving lessons from practical examples, however, was certainly a significant influence on them. It might be added that no comparable study of colonial warfare was produced by any other nineteenth century soldier with the possible exception of the Dutch officer Klaas van der Maaten, but his three-volume study in 1896 dealt only with the Dutch experience in the East Indies and was ignored in the Dutch official manuals.¹⁶

In turn, Callwell also had a profound influence on the development of small wars theory in the US Marine Corps. The pages of the *Marine Corps Gazette* in the inter-war period have repeated references to Callwell and all the leading Marine authors at this time, such as Harold Utley, Merritt Edson and Samuel Harrington, were familiar with *Small Wars*. Utley's seminal articles, *Tactics and Technique of Small Wars* in the *Gazette* in 1931-33 began by citing Callwell's definition of small wars while Harrington's influential article in 1921, *Strategy and Tactics of Small Wars*, took 22 of his 45 historical examples directly from

Callwell. Utley, of course, was the principal author of the *Small Wars Manual* of 1935 and the latter follows the Callwellian method of deriving lessons from examples. The 1940 edition, largely fashioned by Edson, removed many of the historical examples but retained most of the references to Callwell. It should be stated, however, that Callwell's contribution to Marine Corps doctrine was largely one of methodology and of confirmation of those lessons Marine theorists had detected in their own experience in areas like Haiti, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.¹⁷

Gwynn's Imperial Policing

Elements of Callwell's empirical approach have continued to define the parameters of British counter-insurgency. However, if Callwell was perceived to be losing his

Many British soldiers experienced guerrilla warfare during the Second World War by promoting it rather than countering it

relevance to contemporaries by the 1930s then there was Gwynn's *Imperial Policing* in 1934 and also Hugh Simson's *British Rule and Rebellion* in 1937. The product of Gwynn's tenure as commandant of the Staff College between 1926 and 1930, *Imperial Policing* was based on a number of case studies such as Amritsar, the Moplah Rebellion in India's Malabar region in 1921, and the revolt on

14 Callwell, *Small Wars* (3rd edn., London: HMSO, 1906), p. 4.

15 Allan English, 'The RAF Staff College and the Evolution of British Strategic Bombing Policy, 1922-29', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 16, 1993, pp. 408-31; *Notes on Imperial Policing* (London: HMSO, 1934), pp. 17-19.

16 Jaap de Moor, 'Colonial Warfare: Theory and Practice: The Dutch Experience in Indonesia, 1816-1949', Paper presented to the Dutch-Japanese Symposium on the History of Dutch and Japanese Expansion, Tokyo and Kyoto, October 1989; idem, 'War Makers in the Archipelago: Dutch Expeditions in Nineteenth Century Indonesia', in Jaap de Moor and H. L. Wesseling, eds., *Imperialism and War* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 50-71.

17 Samuel Harrington, 'The Strategy and Tactics of Small Wars', *Marine Corps Gazette* 6, 4, 1921, pp. 474-91; *ibid.*, 7, 1, 1922, pp. 84-93; Harold Utley, 'An Introduction to the Tactics and Techniques of Small Wars', *Marine Corps Gazette* 16, 5, 1921, pp. 50-53; *ibid.*, 18, 2, 1933, pp. 44-48; *ibid.*, 18, 3, 1933, pp. 43-46; Keith Bickel, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915-40* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001), pp. 137, 226; Ronald Schaffer, 'The 1940 Small Wars Manual and the Lessons of History', *Military Affairs* 36, 1972, pp. 46-51.

Cyprus in 1931. Gwynn laid down four principles of imperial policing that were sufficiently sound to be fundamental to the post-1945 British approach to more politically motivated insurgency. It should be noted, however, that, in keeping with Callwell's approach, these were drawn from experience and generally flexible in practice. These four principles were firstly, the primacy of the civil power; secondly, the use of minimum force; thirdly, the need for firm and timely action; and, fourth, the need for co-operation between civil and military authorities.¹⁸

Gwynn's principles responded to the realities of the experience since 1919. While Gwynn recognised that propaganda was a weapon in the hands of the insurgent, however, he still favoured collective punishments and saw little need to address the grievances of an insurgent population. Nor did Gwynn choose to describe the campaign in Ireland – a failing also of Simson – although, paradoxically, he did recommend reading memoirs by IRA members as throwing 'an instructive light on the psychology of irregular forces'.¹⁹ The influence of Gwynn is manifest in the official manual issued in January 1934, *Notes on Imperial Policing*, later supplemented by *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power* in 1937. Indeed, Gwynn may have written the manual, which identified six principles of military action: provision of adequate forces; the necessity for offensive action; co-ordinated intelligence under military control; efficient 'inter-communication'; mobility; and security measures, by which was meant care to preserve secrecy as to military movements. Primarily, however, the manual dealt with the military minutiae of cordons, searches and drives as well as spelling out the nature of martial law at length. As might be expected, therefore, the

manual did not address wider political issues beyond differentiating between general unrest and 'a more highly organised opposition'.²⁰

Simson, who had been the British military attaché in Japan from 1930 to 1932, made some limited reference to Ireland but primarily based his book on his experiences as Brigadier General, General Staff (BGGs) during the first phase of the 'Arab Revolt' in Palestine between 1936 and 1939. He correctly identified the growing politicisation of what he characterised as 'sub-war', with terror tactics and propaganda utilised to undermine the police and to wage a political-psychological campaign against government. He suggested, therefore, that an equally sophisticated political response was required with co-ordination of civil, military and police agencies, especially in the matter of intelligence. He still regarded martial law, however, as both a viable and desirable option.²¹ Much more clearly related to the experience in Ireland was Major B.C. Denning's article in *Army Quarterly* in 1927, *Modern Problems of Guerrilla Warfare*. Like both Gwynn and Simson, Denning recognised that propaganda had become a weapon 'which draws blood upon the home front of the great power'. Consequently, security forces must display restraint despite the advantages thus conceded to their opponents. Denning, however, did not countenance making political concessions to insurgents.²²

Application of certainties

Generally, in practice, as perhaps suggested in the political limitations of Gwynn, Simson and Denning, British soldiers much preferred the application of the certainties of martial law. Nonetheless, entrusting primacy to the civil authorities and the primary role in meeting initial violence to the police rather than the military did often help prevent escalation and joint army and police headquarters and closer co-ordination of civil, police and military responses does appear to have emerged particularly in the Tharrawaddy revolt in Burma in 1930-32.²³ The development of techniques in Burma was echoed in a more purely military context by some continuing work on hill war-

18 Charles Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1934), pp. 10-33.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

20 *Notes on Imperial Policing*, op cit.

21 H. J. Simson, *British Rule and Rebellion* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1937).

22 B. C. Denning, 'Modern Problems of Guerrilla Warfare', *Army Quarterly* 13, 1927, pp. 347-54.

23 Tom Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 38-40, 80-83, 154-56.

fare, which had arisen from the seemingly perennial operations in Waziristan for much of the 1920s and 1930s. Hill warfare was even included on the syllabus of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst after the First World War, *Notes on Frontier Warfare* being compiled for use at the college in 1922. Sir Andrew Skene's *Passing It On: Short Talks on Tribal Fighting on the North West Frontier*, was published as a handy guide for officers in 1932 and rapidly went through four editions within seven years. Meanwhile, changes wrought by technology such as the introduction of airpower and light tanks were recognised in the *Manual of Operations on the North-West Frontier of India*, produced in India in 1925 and revised as *Frontier Warfare (Army and Royal Air Force)* in 1939. During the Second World War, moreover, a Frontier Warfare School was opened at Kakul in 1941 and certainly frontier lessons were to prove of some value to British officers after 1945, especially those serving in South Arabia and the Radfan in the early 1960s.²⁴

Turning to the post-1945 period, many British soldiers had experienced guerrilla warfare during the war years in terms of promoting it rather than countering it in response to German occupation of Europe and the Japanese occupation of South-east Asia. In most respects, the ideas of men like Order Wingate – like T.E. Lawrence before him – belong more properly to the development of the theory of insurgency than to counter-insurgency for all that Wingate had originally operated with the Special Night Squads in opposition to the Arab Revolt. But former members of the Special Air Service were instrumental in formulating the policy of the British Military Mission in Greece in 1946 as well as in response to the first experience of the new-style politicised insurgency in Palestine. Lessons from Greece and Palestine were then applied to Malaya though, as is well known, the response to communist insurgency in Malaya was by no means instantly effective.²⁵

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Malayan Emergency, 1956. Gunners of 25 Regiment Royal Artillery, with their 25 pounder gun/howitzer, Fort Iskandar.

Lessons of Malaya

The lessons of Malaya were enshrined in a new manual overseen by Gerald Templer but written largely by Walter Walker, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya* (known as ATOM). Published in July 1952, it was partly based on the syllabus of Walker's Training Centre as well as two wartime pamphlets, MTP Nos. 51 and 52 issued to the British 14th Army in Burma in 1944. Some 6,000 copies had been distributed on publication and regular courses were begun for all units from August 1952. In turn, ATOM was to form the basis for *A Handbook of Anti-Mau Mau Operations*, issued in Kenya in 1954, as well as being published in two more Malayan editions in 1954 and 1958.²⁶

24 Moreman, 'Small Wars and Imperial Policing', pp. 105-31.

25 Tim Jones, *SAS: The First Secret Wars. The Unknown Years of Combat & Counter-insurgency* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005); idem, *Post-war Counterinsurgency and the SAS, 1945-52* (London: Frank Cass, 2001); idem, 'The British Army and Counter-guerrilla Warfare in Transition, 1944-52', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 7, 196, pp. 265-307; idem, 'The British Army and Counter-guerrilla Warfare in Greece, 1945-49', *ibid.*, 8, 1997, pp. 88-106.

26 Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-insurgencies* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 103.

Moreover, the Malayan lessons were enshrined by Robert Thompson, a former RAF liaison officer with the Chindits, who was assistant commissioner for labour and Chinese affairs in Perak when the emergency was declared. Thompson had helped establish Ferret Force, the forerunner of the revived SAS, and became the civil staff officer to the first Director of Operations, Harold Briggs, going on to be co-ordinating officer (security) in 1955, deputy secretary of defence in 1957 and, in 1959, permanent secretary for defence. In what became known as the 'five principles', Thompson outlined the requirements for successful counter-insurgency as the need for government to have a clear political aim; to function within the law; to establish an overall plan, whereby all political, socio-economic and military responses were co-ordinated; to give priority to the elimination of political subver-

five principles were only widely made known outside the British army with the publication of *Defeating Communist Insurgency* in 1966.

Doctrinal emphasis

Again, as with other British theorists of counter-insurgency, caution needs to be exercised as to the impact of Thompson and the Malayan model for, as both Tom Mockaitis and David Charters have pointed out, the army suffered both from what Mockaitis called historical amnesia and Charters an absence of an institutional memory.²⁹ The army did seem to have to keep relearning the same lessons through the era of the wars of national liberation in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, Richard Clutterbuck remarked on the penchant for 'nostalgic' Second World War-style large-scale sweeps in Malaya.³⁰ The doctrinal emphasis remained heavily slanted towards conventional operations in central Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, where the army did focus on counter-insurgency, it was the Malayan model that caught its attention, hence the critique of what appeared the traditional approach mounted by Frank Kitson whose *Low Intensity Operations*, published in 1971, attracted much controversy.

Following his service in Kenya, Kitson had moved to Malaya during the latter stages of the emergency and then to Oman, where he participated in the defeat of insurgents on the *Jebel Akhdar* in 1959. Kitson then served on Cyprus from 1962 to 1964, experiencing UN peace-keeping operations, and wrote *Low-intensity Operations* while a Ministry of Defence-sponsored defence fellow at the University of Oxford from 1969 to 1970.³¹ When it was published, Kitson was commanding 39 Infantry Brigade in Belfast.

Kitson's starting point was that, like other major armies, the British trained mostly for conventional warfare when the majority of its operations since 1945 had been in some form of low-intensity conflict. Kitson therefore believed it as important to train and educate the army for counter-insurgency as for conventional war. Kitson's analysis of the nature of insurgency itself differed little from that of

Insurgencies are by no means pre-destined to succeed

sion; and to secure the government's base area before conducting a military campaign. Implicit within the five principles was Thompson's belief in the primacy of the police over the military while, in terms of military operations, Thompson stressed the need for small-unit operations to meet and defeat the insurgents in their own element.²⁷ Subsequently, Thompson headed the British Advisory Mission to South Vietnam (BRIAM) between September 1961 and March 1965.²⁸ Ironically, though encapsulating the British experience and method, Thompson's

27 Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency. Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966).

28 Ian Beckett, 'Robert Thompson and the British Advisory Mission to South Vietnam, 1961-65', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 8, 197, pp. 41-63; James McAllister and Ian Schulte, 'The Limits of Influence in Vietnam: Britain, the United States and the Diem Regime, 1959-63', *ibid.*, 17, 2006, pp. 22-43.

29 David Charters and Maurice Tugwell, eds., *Armies in Low-intensity Conflict. A Comparative Analysis* (London: Brassey's, 1989), pp. 169-250; Mockaitis, *British Counter-insurgency*, pp. 180-91; *idem*, 'The Origins of British Counter-insurgency', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 1, 190, pp. 209-25.

30 Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies*, p. 98.

31 Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations. Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-keeping* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971).

other theorists of counter-insurgency such as Thompson and merely reflected evolving British practice. Kitson's suggested response to insurgency, however, differed considerably from Thompson's in terms of the relationship between army and police. Kitson argued that the police were usually the first target for insurgent attack and, in effect, the army frequently had to rebuild the intelligence organisation anyway. It would be better, therefore, to train army officers in advance to take early control of intelligence operations, since the army was the primary user of intelligence. Coupled with Kitson's call for a radical overhaul of the army's training with regard to counter-insurgency – he also wanted a permanent corps of indigenous 'trackers' – the issue of military primacy aroused particular controversy primarily because the book's publication coincided with the escalation of the 'Troubles'. Thus, in some quarters, Kitson found himself depicted quite unjustly almost as a potential military dictator, particularly by one left-wing French journalist who claimed that Kitson had been sent to Belfast as a 'testing ground' for his theories. In reality, Kitson had little opportunity to implement his idea outside of his own brigade area.

Kitson's approach

In the longer term Kitson was more successful. The manual, *Land Operations Volume III Counter-Revolutionary Operations* which replaced the 1963 edition of *Keeping the Peace* in 1969, stressed much of the accumulated experience though focusing heavily on Malaya and markedly skating over urban situations such as Palestine, Cyprus and Aden though it did stress the importance of intelligence and that it should be centrally controlled. The 1977 edition reflected more of Kitson's approach, especially his flexibility, which freed the army from its fixation on Malaya. Kitson's influence was seen in a greater willingness to study campaigns

other than Malaya such as the important Dhofar campaign in Oman between 1965 and 1975, which like Walter Walker's outline campaign plan for the Confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia in 1962 saw a classic operational approach

to counter-insurgency in the now established pragmatic British tradition in the campaign plan drawn up by John Watts in 1970.

At Sandhurst in the mid 1980s and early 1990s, the late John Pimlott and others also produced what are sometimes referred to as the Pimlott principles, but which was in reality an analytical framework for comparing different approaches to counter-insurgency by stressing six areas required for success, namely the recognition of the political nature of insurgency, the requirement for co-ordination of the military and civil response; the need to ensure co-ordination of intelligence; the separation of the insurgents from their base of popular support either by physical means or by a government campaign designed to win the allegiance of the population; the appropriate use of military force; and long-term reform addressing those political and socio-economic grievances that have contributed to the insurgency in

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A Twin Pioneer shuttles Gurkhas into a forward area during the Indonesian Confrontation

order to ensure that it does not recur. The *Army Field Manual Volume V. Operations Other Than War*, published in 1995 begins significantly with a quotation from Kitson and also outlines six principles which should look somewhat familiar: requirements for political primacy, co-ordinated government machinery, intelligence and information, separation of the insurgents from support, neutralisation of the insurgents, and longer-term post-insurgency planning. Kitson and Thompson together remain, too, significant influences on American counter-insurgency theory.³²

'Minimum force' called into question

In following its particular approach to counter-insurgency, more often than not, the British army was much more successful than other armies in meeting the challenges they faced after 1945 but, of course, this was not always the case. Indeed, the urban environment posed more difficult problems for the army in campaigns such as that in Cyprus between 1955 and 1959, Aden between 1963 and 1967 and Northern Ireland after 1969 precisely because of the greater proximity of the modern media. As Raffi Gregorian has reminded us, the covert 'Claret' operations mounted into Indonesia during the Malaysian Confrontation between 1962 and 1966, would probably not have been possible anywhere else.³³ Moreover, the idea of minimum force, which has certainly been central to the theory of British counter-insurgency since Gwynn, has been called into question with particular respect to the campaign

against the Mau Mau in Kenya. John Newsinger and Tom Mockaitis entered into a debate on this issue in 1992 and, more recently, the two similar books were published by a British scholar, David Anderson, and an American, Caroline Elkins, going over much the same ground.³⁴ In a sense it depends what you mean by minimum force in the contemporary era, but what matters is that the security forces act within the bounds of legality, which may imply a raft of emergency regulations provided those extended boundaries are widely publicised and understood. In fact, liberal democracies generally need to tread the thin line in counter-insurgency between imposing appropriate security measures and impinging upon the democratic rights of their citizens and it is undoubtedly difficult for democratic societies to eradicate insurgency altogether but violence may be reduced to what might be regarded as an acceptable level to use a famous remark of Reginald Maudling about Northern Ireland in 1971.³⁵

No universal blueprint for success

There is no universal blueprint for success in what remains a most difficult form of conflict to counter. Yet, insurgencies are by no means pre-destined to succeed though it was the case that the balance shifted to some extent towards insurgent groups in the period of European decolonisation between the 1940s and 1960s. Thus, there have been many successes for armed forces though, on average, the mean duration of successive counter-insurgency campaigns since 1945 has been nine years.³⁶ Certain principles of counter-insurgency have emerged, however, of general applicability. It must be said that most of those principles have been a product of British experience and, therefore, it does highlight the distinctive, original and lasting contribution to this form of warfare made by British theorists like Callwell, Gwynn, Thompson and Kitson. Indeed, this particular British way in warfare has been substantially more significant than any alternative way of warfare encapsulated by Julian Corbett and Basil Liddell Hart. ■

32 Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies*, pp. 225-26.

33 Raffi Gregorian, 'Claret Operations and Confrontation, 1964-66', *Conflict Quarterly* 11, 1991, pp. 46-72; idem, 'Jungle Bashing in Malaya: Towards a Formal Tactical Doctrine', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 5, 1994, pp. 338-59.

34 John Newsinger, 'Minimum Force. British Counter-insurgency and the Mau Mau Rebellion', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 3, 192, pp. 47-57; Tom Mockaitis, 'Minimum Force: British Counter-insurgency and the Mau Mau Rebellion: A Reply', *ibid.*, 3, 1992, pp. 87-89; David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged. The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York: Norton & Co, 2005); Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning. The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 2005).

35 Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies*, p. 230. See also Rod Thornton, 'The British Army and the Origins of Its Minimum Force Philosophy', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 15, 2004, pp. 83-106.

36 David Hossack, *Historical Analysis of Terrorist Campaigns with Observations on Current Operations in Iraq* (Salisbury: Policy and Studies Department, Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, 2004).