

**A Strategy for the Long War:
The Key Components of Counterinsurgency from Malaya and the Philippines**

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Abstract

This paper examines the counterinsurgency strategies implemented by the British during the Malayan emergency from 1948-1960 and the Philippine's during the Hukbalahap Rebellion from 1946-1954 in order to determine a set of key components that comprise successful counterinsurgency strategy. The purpose of the paper is to inform policymakers and military leaders of the complexities of counterinsurgency, yet provide a framework for developing a robust counterinsurgency strategy that transcends time and geographic location. Given the increased threat from asymmetric, irregular enemies, this paper is an attempt to better prepare the U.S. for these relevant, dangerous threats.

This examination is developed in three parts. First, in order to develop a framework for defeating insurgency, an understanding of insurgency strategy is necessary. Second, historic counterinsurgency doctrine is analyzed in order to determine the most essential components of successful strategy. In this section, four key components of counterinsurgency are developed. First, the population must always be defined as the center of gravity. Second, dynamic leadership is a critical element. Third, a government must redefine its national and military strategy to counter the asymmetric threat. Fourth, a government must be capable of altering the structure of its military forces away from conventional war models. The final section utilizes case study methodology to analyze the two successful counterinsurgency operations based on the key components developed earlier in the paper.

The long war against terrorist networks extends far beyond the borders of Iraq and Afghanistan and includes many operations characterized by irregular warfare – operations in which the enemy is not a regular military force of a nation-state... To succeed in such operations, the United States must often take an indirect approach, building up and working with others. This indirect approach seeks to unbalance adversaries physically and psychologically, rather than attacking them where they are strongest or in the manner they expect to be attacked. Taking the “line of least resistance” unbalances the enemy physically, exploiting subtle vulnerabilities and perceived weaknesses. Exploiting the “line of least expectation” unbalances the enemy psychologically, setting the conditions for the enemy’s subsequent defeat.¹

- Excerpt from the 2006 QDR, Fighting the Long War, page 11.

Introduction

Throughout America’s history it has engaged in wars both close to home and in distant lands. Its greatest military successes were achieved in the American Civil War, the Second World War and the 1991 Gulf War. The themes of using dominant military force, leveraging superior technology, and relying on superior production and distribution of resources emerged as the key ingredients for success on the battlefield and enabled the U.S. to demand the unconditional surrender of its foes. Thus, our national security and defense strategies have developed under the shadow of these victories that support our natural strengths as a nation. Nevertheless, the U.S. military has engaged in many other military campaigns that have resulted in less than dominant victories and have looked very different from the large formations, identifiable enemies, and clear political and military objectives of the previous three examples from above.

The enemies in these conflicts are generally defined as insurgents and utilize irregular or asymmetric tactics against a better-equipped opponent. The strategy to defeat these forces is generally described as counterinsurgency. Despite the frequency of our involvement in these irregular conflicts, the U.S. policymakers have generally lacked a willingness to study

¹ Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report: Fighting the Long War* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 6 February 2006), 11.

these events and focus some of our resources and energy toward developing strategies and tactics to succeed against armed insurgency. However, by looking in depth at the national and military strategies of several ‘successful’ counterinsurgency operations, leaders and policymakers can learn valuable lessons of counterinsurgency and help implement these practices into our own strategies for counterinsurgency.

This examination of counterinsurgency is developed in three parts. First, in order to develop a framework for defeating insurgency, an understanding of insurgency strategy is necessary. Second, historic counterinsurgency doctrine is analyzed in order to determine the most essential components of successful strategy. Finally, the case study methodology is used to analyze two successful counterinsurgency operations: the British government’s response to the Malayan emergency from 1948-1960 and the Philippine government’s response to the Hukbalahap Rebellion from 1946-1954. These two examples were chosen because the nature of their counterinsurgency strategies transcend across both time and borders. Thus, they make excellent case studies for U.S. leaders and policymakers as they develop strategies to combat enemies that look less like the ones we faced at Normandy or the Wadi al-Batan and more like the ones in Malaya or the Philippines.

Part I: Understanding the Enemy and the Environment

“The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”²

Why a Need for Counterinsurgency? The Threat of Insurgent Warfare

Despite the cliché of facing a ‘new kind of war’ described with various terms such as guerrilla warfare, asymmetric warfare, and fourth generation warfare, the history of insurgent warfare is anything but new.³ Insurgencies, defined as protracted political and military activities directed toward partially or completely gaining control over the territory of a country through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations, have remained a dominant strategy used against governments and occupying forces.⁴ From Caesar’s frustration with the Gauls over two thousand years ago, Napoleon’s struggles against Spanish partisans in the early 19th Century, to the U.S. and French experience in Vietnam, insurgents have successfully exploited the weaknesses of their larger, more powerful opponents. In response, governments have attempted to respond to this ‘new’ threat in various ways, covering a broad spectrum of strategies and eventual outcomes. However, before exploring some of the various strategies for counterinsurgency, it is important to take a closer look at the insurgents.

² Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 88.

³ Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the US Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 179. He uses “A New Kind of War” as the title of his chapter describing the Corps experience in Vietnam against the Vietcong.

⁴ Richard Shultz, Douglas Farah and Itamara Lochard. *Armed Groups: A Tier One Security Priority* (Boulder, CO: INSS, September 2004), 18. Definitions of “insurgency” abound, however, this one best captures the combination of military *and* political activities while remaining flexible to incorporate innovative *tactics* that transcend the writings of Mao Tse-tung. For a more limited definition, see the CIA’s *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, no date), 3.

Just as there have been countless strategies developed to defeat insurgencies, there have been at least as many attempts to develop strategies to gain control over territory from a government through irregular force or illegal organizations. Similarly, this process has resulted in more failed policies than successful ones. Thus, as we hope to develop a successful strategy for defeating insurgents, it is important to fully understand the doctrine and tactics of *successful* insurgents. As a foundation for this study, we begin with the writings of Sun Tzu in *The Art of War*. While other military theorists have captured the essence of their era or described maxims applicable to the dominant mode of military strategy, Sun Tzu's theories and strategy for war have been able to transcend time and apply to both conventional and unconventional warfare. Thus, many of his thoughts on warfare reappear in subsequent writings on insurgent warfare. The best writings on this type of irregular warfare are from Mao Tse-tung. Mao's work, especially *On Guerrilla Warfare*, serves as an example of successful theory and practice in carrying out insurgent warfare, both against the Japanese occupation forces and the Nationalist forces under Chiang Kai-Shek. Thus, studying his classic writings on strategy is still valuable in developing successful counterinsurgency doctrine and tactics. While others have developed and carried out successful insurgent strategies, this study is limited to Mao's writings on guerrilla warfare because other strategies have been either largely based on his concepts or have proven unsuccessful outside the unique political, social, and geographical environment in which they were initially successfully. The insurgent strategy of Ho Chi Minh and General Giap in Vietnam fit the former category, while Che Guevara's *foco* strategy falls under the latter category.⁵

⁵ In Cuba, Guevara and Castro modified Mao's strategy by emphasizing insurgent capabilities as a way to gain public support. This demonstration of violent capabilities became the focus, or *foco*, of the insurgency. It

Roots from Sun Tzu

While numerous thinkers and practitioners have written extensively on insurgent warfare, many of its most enduring characteristics were derived from Sun Tzu's classic treatise, *The Art of War*. Despite a vintage of over two thousand years, the principles set forth in this work maintain their relevance today. As the rising costs of developing modern military technology and maintaining this equipment continue to widen the traditional capabilities gap between various states and armed groups, Sun Tzu's emphasis on attacking an enemy's weakness, maintaining flexibility and the initiative, and the psychological nature of warfare are actually more important now than ever. Thus, B.H. Liddell-Hart's description of Sun Tzu's "clearer vision, more profound insight, and eternal freshness" remains accurate.⁶

A successful insurgent warfare strategy must develop around the concept of the indirect approach to offensive operations. An army "may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strength and strikes weakness."⁷ Sun Tzu's writings focus on this approach, especially the idea that "those skilled in war subdue the enemy's army without battle."⁸ Whether attacking the enemy's military or civil plans or disrupting his internal or external coalitions, insurgents learn to avoid direct attacks on the enemy's military forces or other resources that are well-defended. However, rarely can insurgents win by completely avoiding direct battle. Thus, they must seek advantageous situations in which they "alert him to the front, surprise him to

skipped Mao's initial stage of building an organizational base within the population for support. While clearly successful in Cuba, the poor economic and social conditions of the corrupt Batista regime eroded the legitimacy of the government to a point where insurgent support from the people was more easily attained. With Guevara's subsequent failures in Latin America, the *foco* strategy lost most of its credibility.

⁶ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), v.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

the rear, create an uproar in the east, and strike in the west.”⁹ Today’s conflicts described as guerrilla, asymmetric, or irregular warfare owe their birth to this simple principle introduced over two thousand years ago.

Flexibility is another hallmark of successful insurgencies. Just as an army is likened to water as it avoids strength and strikes weakness, it also “shapes its flow in accordance with the ground” and “has no constant form.”¹⁰ Through this metaphor, Sun Tzu emphasized maintaining a vague shape of plans, not repeating past tactics, and understanding that there are no constant conditions in war. Similarly insurgent warfare doctrine has developed around this theme. Another related concept to flexibility is the requirement for insurgent forces to avoid a static attitude. While Sun Tzu believes “invincibility lies in the defense,” this tactic cannot force an enemy to be vulnerable for victory lies in the attack.¹¹ Successful insurgents attack an enemy’s weaknesses; they cannot change a regime by simply relying on the defensive.

Another key tenet for insurgents is psychological warfare. This includes an emphasis on deception and attacking the morale and image of the enemy’s army and government in order to isolate it from the population. Sun Tzu states that all warfare must be based on deception.¹² For an insurgent, this is critical if he hopes to achieve victory against overwhelming numerical and financial superiority. Also, insurgents must focus on defeating the morale of their enemy. Sun Tzu repeatedly emphasizes keeping the enemy under strain and dividing the leadership and separating it from the population.¹³ Sun Tzu’s psychological element to warfare can also be extended to his views on protracted warfare. Long wars will

⁹ Ibid., 80.

¹⁰ Ibid., 101.

¹¹ Ibid., 85.

¹² Ibid., 66.

¹³ Ibid., 68-69.

deplete a state's resources as well as depress its morale "for there has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited."¹⁴ Thus, successful insurgencies in history have sought protracted wars to wear down the state and defeat him psychologically, economically, and militarily.

Mao Tse-tung and Guerrilla Warfare

In defining the characteristics of successful insurgency doctrine and tactics, the best model is Mao's strategy for guerrilla war. His extensive writings and the methods used in his war against the Japanese and Chinese Nationalists were strongly influenced by Sun Tzu's thought.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Mao was able to translate Sun Tzu's general characteristics of warfare into an operational guide specifically designed for insurgent warfare. He did not view guerrilla operations as an independent form of warfare, but saw them as one step in the process of total war.¹⁶ For the successful prosecution of war, Mao saw three phases.¹⁷ First, the leaders must establish an organizational base during the defensive stage. Next, is the transition to guerrilla warfare as the balance of strength shifts toward the insurgents. The third and final stage is the transition into offensive, mobile warfare. While these phases are meant to be sequential, the distinction between them is often blurred and multiple stages can exist simultaneously. Mao's revolutionary war model could transition between the phases, especially two and three based upon local conditions or military setbacks. In the following paragraphs a description of the key insurgent doctrine and tactics at each level are explained.

¹⁴ Ibid., 73.

¹⁵ Ibid., 45. BG Samuel Griffith described Mao's interest in Sun Tzu's work in his introduction.

¹⁶ Mao Tse-tung, *Mao Tse-tung On Guerrilla Warfare* (Baltimore, MD: Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1992), 69.

¹⁷ Douglas S. Blaufarb and George K. Tanham, *Who Will Win? A Key to the Puzzle of Revolutionary War* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1989), 11. This framework is developed in Mao Tse-tung on Revolution and War, Blaufarb and Tanham summarize this quite succinctly and it is included here.

Organization of the Base Area

“A revolution’s need for a base area...[is] just like an individual’s need for a buttocks. If an individual didn’t have a buttocks, he would have to run or stand...his legs would get tired and collapse under him.”¹⁸

Mao’s first stage of revolutionary war is his greatest contribution to the development of insurgent warfare strategy. In this phase, he articulates the importance of the Clausewitzian principle of maintaining the trinity of the army, the government, and the people. Also, he understood Clausewitz’s description of warfare as an extension of politics by other means, especially guerrilla warfare.¹⁹ Describing the complexities of guerrilla warfare, he complains that “it is vital that these simple-minded militarists be made to realize the relationship that exists between politics and military affairs.”²⁰ In his work, *On Protracted War*, he states:

“The problem of political mobilization of the army and the people is indeed of the utmost importance...political mobilization is the most fundamental condition for winning the war.”²¹

Thus, insurgents must clearly articulate their political goals to the people and develop the psychological, political, and military strategies to achieve them. The critical element of this phase is the people. If an insurgency hopes to be successful it must understand its dependence on the population for food, shelter, intelligence, and providing the human resources necessary to change the regime. Mao emphasized the “unity of spirit” that must exist between the people and the army.²²

¹⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁹ Clausewitz, 69.

²⁰ Mao, *Mao Tse-tung On Guerrilla Warfare*, 110.

²¹ Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2004), 51.

²² Mao, *Mao Tse-tung On Guerrilla Warfare*, 112. As an example of enforcing good relations between the troops and the population see Mao’s “The 3 Rules and the 8 Remarks” that served as a code for soldiers interactions with civilians. While strict enforcement of these measures has been disputed, especially in individual units, the important point is Mao’s understanding of the importance of the population.

Mao and Guerrilla Warfare

Once a base is established, insurgents are capable of initiating guerrilla attacks on the government or the occupying force. In this stage, Mao's tactics closely follow the lessons of Sun Tzu, especially in terms of the indirect approach and psychological warfare.

Understanding the inherent disadvantage of insurgents in terms of quantity and quality of military arms and equipment, Mao viewed asymmetric attacks against the enemy as not only desirable, but of necessity. Successful insurgent tactics depend upon avoiding the enemy's strengths and exploiting its weaknesses. In plagiaristic similarity to Sun Tzu, Mao describes guerrilla warfare tactics as "seeming to come from the east and attacking in the west; avoid the solid, attack the hollow; attack; withdraw; deliver a lightning blow, seek a lightning decision."²³ In order to execute successful asymmetric warfare, insurgents must maintain the initiative and force the enemy to be reactive. While 'seizing the initiative' has become an overused cliché of military operational art, Mao understood the deeper implications of the concept. Beyond just attacking the enemy when and where he least expects it, he believed insurgents could "gain and retain the initiative only by a correct estimate of the situation and a proper arrangement of all military and political factors."²⁴ Again, Mao captures the essence of the relationship between strategy and policy, as well as the importance of intelligence. By maintaining the initiative and collecting key intelligence about the enemy, the guerrilla warfare stage can then transition into offensive operations designed more along conventional forces to defeat the enemy's army.

²³ Ibid., 73.

²⁴ Ibid., 120.

Mao's Final Stage—Offensive, Mobile Warfare

An overarching aspect of Mao's strategy for revolutionary and guerrilla warfare is the emphasis on protracted warfare. Just as Sun Tzu realized that long wars drain a national treasury, sap the confidence of the opposing army, and create restlessness among the population, Mao saw extended conflict as the greatest weakness of a government or occupation force. Thus, the transition to this final stage of mobile warfare is not intended to be quick, but emerges only after the organizational base is firmly entrenched and the guerrilla warfare phase has produced an able enough cadre of leaders to train a mobile force. Furthermore, this stage may not be necessary at all if the insurgents are successful at destroying the government's will to resist without defeating the enemy in a decisive battle. Also, this phase is characterized by the simultaneous action of both guerrilla and mobile warfare. "The concept that guerrilla warfare is an end to itself and that guerrilla activities can be divorced from those of regular forces is incorrect."²⁵ While this phase of Mao's strategy seems to contradict the asymmetric approach to warfare, he saw this phase as a critical part to the psychological aspect of revolutionary warfare. Until the enemy army is defeated in the field by a similar force, they still have the means to survive and disrupt the insurgents. Thus, achieving victory through mobile warfare, still focused on indirect attacks, is the psychological blow necessary to defeat the enemy.

²⁵ Ibid., 80.

Part II: The Development of a Robust Counterinsurgency Strategy

Counterinsurgency Theory and Practice

John F. Kennedy, in his U.S. Military Academy graduation speech of 1962, emphasized the threat of insurgency, which he referred broadly to as “wars of national liberation:”

“This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin—war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him...It requires...a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training.”²⁶

While identifying the threat of insurgent warfare and realizing the need for a new kind of strategy are fundamental steps to defeat this enemy, the development of such strategies and the tactics has proven difficult for most nations, especially the United States. Moreover, military theorists and practitioners have struggled to agree on the best practices for defeating insurgencies.

Since World War II, numerous counterinsurgency doctrines and tactics have emerged and evolved with very different outcomes. These strategies have often reflected the geography of the area, the level of sophistication of the enemy, and especially the national character of the nation fighting against insurgency. David Galula, a French officer involved in his nation’s counterinsurgency operations in the post-colonial era, was one of the first to publish a lasting work on defeating insurgencies. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* develops two principles of counterinsurgency warfare. First, he correctly identifies the limits of conventional warfare as the “enemy holds no territory and refuses to fight for

²⁶ John F. Kennedy, Speech delivered to USMA graduation on 6 June 1962, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=8695&st=&st1=>

it.”²⁷ Second, he recognizes that attempting to mirror the insurgents by fighting their type of warfare cannot succeed by itself. Galula’s lasting value to counterinsurgency strategy is his emphasis on the population as the center of gravity for both the insurgent and the counterinsurgent forces.²⁸ Roger Trinquier, another French veteran of insurgent warfare, draws a lot of the same conclusions. His popular book, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* also sees the unconditional support of the population as the “sine qua non” of victory in counterinsurgency.²⁹ In addition to seeing the interlocking system of the political, economic, psychological, and military dimensions involved in fighting against insurgency, he also emphasized the requirement for change. Describing the French military as a “piledriver attempting to crush a fly, indefatigably persisting in repeating its efforts,” he explains the heavy consequences for an army or a government that cannot adapt itself to the changing requirements for warfare.³⁰

The colonial legacy of the British also forced them to respond to insurgencies throughout the world. From the Second Boer War at the turn of the 19th Century, Iraq in 1920, through Malaya, Kenya, Oman, and Northern Ireland, their history of warfare in the past century has been greatly influenced by combating insurgencies. From this vast experience, the British have been able to achieve various levels of success and develop some common themes in strategy and tactics that remain relevant today. The focus of their operations has been on integration, coordination, and interagency processes that emphasize the war of ideas rather than just battles.³¹ Beyond these lessons, Britain’s national identity

²⁷ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 71.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁹ Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

³¹ Hammes, 230.

further enhances their ability to develop successful counterinsurgency doctrine and tactics. With a history of long, protracted wars, the British government and public are weary to believe in the shortness of war. Instead, the British military experience is one dominated by long, yet limited conflicts, quite similar to battles against insurgencies.

Unlike the British and French military experiences, the U.S. approach to counterinsurgency has been dominated by their history of large wars against conventional enemies. Thus, the U.S. Army's approach to counterinsurgency still has an undercurrent of thinking that is based on the writings of Henri Jomini. Unlike Clausewitz's emphasis on the true power of armies resting with the people and the government, Jomini's analysis was one-dimensional and only stressed the destruction of the enemy army in the field.³² Although this strategy was shown as too simplistic during the American Civil War through Grant's focus on the morale of the enemy's population and government, the checklists and simple principles of Jomini appeal to most soldiers and statesmen who are typically uncomfortable with ambiguity.³³ This simplicity of approach has evidenced itself in the counterinsurgency strategy of not only the U.S., but other nations who have difficulty resolving difficult issues and struggle to adapt their doctrines and tactics.

Nevertheless, through the careful study of counterinsurgency operations since World War II and the results of these struggles, some common themes in successful strategies and tactics repeat themselves and provide a basis for developing a robust counterinsurgency doctrine. However, this doctrine cannot hope to become a rigid checklist of Do's and Do Not's in the spirit of a Jominian principle. Just as Lawrence of Arabia described the Arab

³² John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya to Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 19

³³ *Ibid.*, 18. The author has added his own details to the original metaphor from Lawrence to emphasize the complexity of counterinsurgency.

insurgency movement against the Turks as “an influence, a thing invulnerable, intangible, without front or back, drifting like a gas...the Arabs might be a vapor, blowing where they listed,” counterinsurgency doctrine must be flexible to counter the amorphous shape that insurgencies can take.³⁴ Nevertheless, common themes of successful counterinsurgencies have emerged throughout the past century that must be considered by governments and occupying forces as they consider these unique environments. The following few pages will form the framework of ‘Counterinsurgency’s Key Component’s’ and then utilize these in an analysis of the Malayan and Filipino insurgencies.

Key Components of Counterinsurgency

As evidenced by the poor record of ‘victories’ attributed to large, powerful nations and armed forces in defeating insurgents, fighting against insurgents is a complicated affair. T.E. Lawrence’s comparison of it to “eating soup with a knife” is an appropriate metaphor as long as one understands the knife is very sharp and the soup is very watery.³⁵ However, by carefully studying the counterinsurgency operations of the past and gleaning the recurring themes, both positive and negative, an army and a nation can develop a strategy of defeating insurgents that has a much higher probability of success. While insurgencies will always be characterized by Lawrence’s metaphor, this paper hopes to dull and widen the knife, as well as add more meat to the soup. In this study, four key tenets of counterinsurgency doctrine emerge. First, the population must always be defined as the center of gravity. Also, leadership is a critical element to any operation against a well-developed insurgency. Third, a government must redefine its strategy, both national and military, as well as adapt its tactics

³⁴ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (Oxford: Alden Press, 1935), 192.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

in dealing with an asymmetric threat. Finally, a government must be willing to alter the structure of its military forces away from conventional war models.

5. Center of Gravity defined as the population

No matter how powerful a nation is economically or militarily, it cannot defeat insurgent forces if it fails to gain the support of the population. As long as the population remains under the control of the insurgent, he retains the initiative and the ability to choose battle on his terms. Nevertheless, this does not mean the government must have the support of the entire population. Trinquier correctly gauges the public with his assessment that “it is by no means necessary to enjoy the sympathy of the majority of the people to obtain their backing; most are amorphous, indifferent.”³⁶ Instead, support is gained through an active minority. From this base, the government can begin to collect more accurate intelligence and work to separate the insurgent from the population. History has shown that in order to achieve victory in counterinsurgency operations, the insurgents must be permanently isolated from the population.³⁷

Under this component of counterinsurgency, the government must make every effort to focus on the population. This encompasses showing attentiveness to their needs in terms of food, clean water, and adequate shelter, but more importantly to their concerns of security. One of the critical battles between insurgents and the government or occupying force will be over whether or not the latter can provide security to the people. This is a key legitimating goal for any counterinsurgent force, yet difficult to achieve. The traditional reflexive response for government forces to prioritize the killing and capturing of the enemy is often

³⁶ Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 109.

³⁷ Galula, 77.

counterproductive to the requirements of providing for the population. Regardless of the sophistication of modern ‘smart’ munitions and tracking devices, the risk of exposing the people to additional violence through careless targeting, inaccurate intelligence, or over-aggressive tactics remains present.

Furthermore, the government must have a strategy to establish, maintain, and expand secure areas for the population. This satisfies two important goals. First, it confirms the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the government or occupying force. Second, it serves to further isolate the insurgent from its lifeblood, the people. Providing secure areas for the population is very dependent on the geography and stage of the insurgency. The more dispersed an area, the more difficult it is to secure. Also, the border doctrine correctly defines porous borders, coastlines, and airspace as a permanent weakness for counterinsurgents.³⁸ The quick implementation of a strategy for providing security is also important because the more advanced the insurgency, the more difficult it is to begin a dedicated effort at maintaining and expanding security.

Finally, focusing on the population as the center of gravity demands a comprehensive and efficient psychological operations (PSYOPS) campaign. This strategy goes well beyond just ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of the affected population, but must include five distinct audiences. First, the general public must be a target. Also, the international arena is becoming increasingly important to influence and inform. Third, a government’s own armed forces must be targeted as their loyalty and will to continue the fight is essential to success. As already mentioned, gaining the support of the population in the affected areas is critical for counterinsurgents. Finally, PSYOPS must reach the insurgents in order to demoralize them and make them question their own legitimacy.

³⁸ Ibid., 35.

6. Leadership

Although leadership is a critical component of any military operation or national crisis, it must be uniquely emphasized in the conduct of counterinsurgency operations. The nature of the conflict against insurgents confronts any government with significant obstacles, but these problems are magnified for large, democratic governments like the U.S. Counterinsurgency operations cut across traditional norms and hierarchies, force us to do things that are only indirectly related to basic missions, and often require bypassing the normal chain of command and flouting time-honored institutional loyalties.³⁹ Thus, history has shown that only strong, charismatic, and dynamic leaders are able to handle the complex challenges of coordinating the defeat of insurgent forces.

Another critical aspect of leadership in a counterinsurgency is the importance of overall civilian control. Civil-military relationships are often questioned and can become strained during any military operation and counterinsurgency operations are no exception. However, as war is politics by another means, the political nature of combating insurgency is even more pronounced than conventional warfare. Thus, it remains paramount that one charismatic civilian maintain control over the conduct of the counterinsurgency operation. This leader should have authority to manage and coordinate the entire combined military, police, and civil effort.⁴⁰ In order to effectively accomplish this overarching task, this leader must have increased authority beyond normal peacetime government processes. This will enable him or her to effectively coordinate and manage resources and capabilities that are typically divided among various agencies. Intelligence, security, and reconstruction are a

³⁹ Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York: The Free Press), 298.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 310.

few of the key areas in which a single leader must have overall control. However, this leader must still be accountable to the people and the national leader in order to preserve the principles of democracy.

7. Strategy Redefined and Tactics Altered

Since the population is the center of gravity for an insurgency, the strategy to defeat it must be defined in a way much different from strategies to defeat a conventional enemy. The primary concern is avoiding a strategy that does not subordinate military operations to political objectives. The British clearly emphasize this in their doctrine with the statement: “undue focus on military action clouds the key political realities which can result in a military-dominated campaign that misses the real focus of an insurgency.”⁴¹ The best place to begin de-emphasizing military operations is by building a strategy around effective intelligence. Sun Tzu’s timeless advice to “know the enemy and know yourself” is fundamental for both sides in the counterinsurgency struggle.⁴² While signals, imagery, and measurement intelligence can play an important role in counterinsurgency, effective human intelligence is the most critical element. Human intelligence enables a government or occupying force to help connect the divide with the population that the insurgent forces are working to widen. Instead of making large, obtrusive patrols hoping to find clues about an elusive enemy, good intelligence enables an efficient use of military force and limits collateral damage among the population. At the same time, quality human intelligence enables the government to isolate the insurgents from the population. As previously

⁴¹ Nagl, 27. Taken from the primary source of British Army Code # 71596 (Part 2), Army Field Manual, Volume V, *Operations Other Than War*, Section B, *Counter Insurgency Operations*, Part 2, *The Conduct of Counter Insurgency Operations*, 2-1 through 2-2.

⁴² Sun Tzu, 84.

mentioned above, the psychological impacts in insurgent warfare are very important and effective intelligence clearly serves as combat multiplier.

Redefining strategy and altering existing tactics is a broad component to successful counterinsurgency doctrine. Avoiding a focus on military operations is clearly the most critical element to this component. This is a fundamental corollary to the understanding that the population and not the insurgent military forces are the center of gravity. Other elements of redefining strategy and tactics are important, but they are best explained within the context of the individual case studies. By looking at examples from each case study, the specific strategy and tactics are explained and justified within the context of focusing on the political objective through intelligence and the population instead of seeing it through the narrow lens of a military operation.

8. Re-shape Conventional Military Forces

As insurgents depend upon an asymmetric approach to defeat a more powerful force, the utility of conventional armed forces is no longer as valuable. As successful counterinsurgency strategy demands a shift away from seeing the destruction of the enemy's military forces as the key objective for victory, the traditional structure and priorities of the military must also adjust. Conventional military forces must be reoriented for counterinsurgency. Unlike the wars in which the U.S. relied upon the mass, firepower, and shock effect of battalions, brigades, and divisions, the forces that have proven most adept at defeating insurgents and their movements are focused on small-unit tactics.⁴³ Patrols, squads, and platoons represent the typical size of effective counterinsurgency forces. These

⁴³ As a reference, battalions typically consist of between 400-1000 soldiers, brigades would be 2 to 4 times this large, and divisions can consist of 20,000 soldiers.

operations are characterized by decentralized leadership in which the leader of these smaller units has a wide discretion in his decision-making. Also, the forces maintain minimal logistical requirements in order to remain flexible to new intelligence and to cause minimal disruption among the population. Also, this change in structure to an army must include an increased emphasis on advisors, such as, but not limited to, special operations forces.⁴⁴

Altering the structure of conventional forces is not, however, just limited to the size and structure of patrolling counterinsurgency units. It also requires a close assessment of the utility of all non-infantry type forces. In an effort to win the support of the people and avoid excessive damage within an area of operations that includes civilians and their property, the utility of heavy weapons such as tanks, artillery, and close air support must be carefully considered. While these weapons can prove highly valuable in situations where intelligence is accurate and the insurgents are isolated from the population, the misuse of these capabilities can have a deleterious effect on the population's confidence in the government. Thus, the decision-maker in counterinsurgency operations must make a careful assessment of the geography, enemy, and people in structuring an armed force that can fight and win in an insurgency.

⁴⁴ Kalev I. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency" *Military Review* (May-June 2005), 10.

Part III: The Case Studies of Malaya and the Philippines

Case Study Rationale

In developing a model for successful counterinsurgency practices, the case study method of structured, focused comparison is used.⁴⁵ In the past one hundred years, dozens of insurgencies have occurred throughout the world with a wide variety of results. Nevertheless, this study initially looked at the 53 insurgencies listed in Kalev Sepp's "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency" in an effort to select ones that satisfied three requirements.⁴⁶ First, the insurgencies must have been successfully defeated by a counterinsurgency strategy. Second, the insurgencies studied must have still been well-developed and organized in order to require a concerted effort by government forces. Finally, the insurgencies needed to be on a scale and scope of significant size in order to replicate the challenges the U.S. may face in future counterinsurgencies. Through this analysis, the British experience in the Malayan Emergency from 1948 to 1960 and the Filipino government's experience in the Hukbalahap (Huk) Rebellion from 1946-1954 were chosen.

Both of these insurgencies were eventually defeated by the government forces and, thus, satisfy the first requirement. Although the argument that one learns more from failures than from successes certainly has credence, both of these case studies appear to ignore this axiom. Nevertheless, the length of time necessary to win these struggles is a testament that the path to success was not simple or straightforward. Both counterinsurgency strategies faced setbacks and initially were focused on strategies that resulted in more failure than success. However, in both Malaya and the Philippines, the governments were able to adapt,

⁴⁵ Alexander L. George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison" in *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy* (New York: Free Press), 62.

⁴⁶ Sepp, 8.

evolve, and even radically change their strategies and tactics to eventually defeat the insurgencies. Thus, they serve as excellent examples for successful counterinsurgency strategies.

Both the Chinese communists in Malaya and the Huk rebels in the Philippines were well-organized, led, and equipped. Thus, they required their opposing governments to devote substantial time, energy, and resources towards their defeat. Both insurgencies were viable threats to the stability and legitimacy of the government. Therefore, the strategies and tactics developed to defeat them serve as excellent examples for building a robust doctrine on counterinsurgency.

As the U.S. faces the challenge of asymmetric warfare in the 21st century, it must carefully consider the influences of advanced technology, complex bureaucracies, and global politics and media. Thus, an argument can be made that lessons learned from insurgencies that occurred roughly fifty years ago are limited in their applicability today. While the significant changes in warfare, technology, and communication certainly change certain aspects of waging counterinsurgency warfare, the relevance of the struggles in Malaya and the Philippines is still strong. Specifically, the size and scope of these insurgencies, in terms of number of insurgents and sympathizers as well as the challenges of dispersed operations and difficult terrain remain a challenge that exist regardless of time or technology. Therefore, the historical case studies of Malaya and the Philippines are still appropriate for U.S. policymakers and warfighters concerned with counterinsurgency today.

Case Study 1: The Malayan Emergency: 1948-1960

Strategic Environment (Background)

Malaya, in 1948, consisted of 53,240 square miles on a peninsula that was approximately 400 miles long and 200 miles across at its widest point. (*See Figure 1*) Of this total area, almost eighty percent consisted of jungle and forest.⁴⁷ The climate was tropical and humid with 90 inches of annual rainfall. Within this tropical environment, Malaya held many natural resources that were becoming strategically important in the age of industrialization. Before the outbreak of World War II, Malaya had over 3.3 million acres of rubber estates. In 1939, this rubber production met 40 percent of the worldwide requirement.⁴⁸ In addition to this substantial rubber production, Malaya had over 700 tin mines. Control over these resources became a war aim for expansionist Japan and resulted in Japanese occupation during World War II.

⁴⁷ Edgar O'Ballance, *Malaya: The Communist Insurgent War, 1948-1960* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books), 36.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.



MALAYA, showing relief, main cities and towns and communications

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The population in the late 1940s was 5.3 million, of which 49% were Malays, 38% were Chinese, and 11% were Indians. European settlers in Malaya were limited to approximately 12,000 during this period.⁵⁰ Prior to Malayan independence, its political organization consisted of many independent federated and unfederated states with internal autonomy over all affairs.⁵¹ During the Japanese occupation during World War II, the ethnic tensions on the peninsula, especially between the Malays and the Chinese, were greatly exacerbated as the previously invincible control by the British was quickly eliminated. The Chinese population tended to resist, both actively and passively, the occupying force. On the

⁴⁹ Map of Malaya taken from O'Ballance, inside jacket.

⁵⁰ Nagl, 60.

⁵¹ O'Ballance, 38.

other hand, the Malays generally cooperated with the Japanese.⁵² In the aftermath of World War II, these ethnic tensions, combined with the return of a tarnished, imperial British rule, provided a ripe environment for the application of communist insurgency modeled after the Chinese example.

Development of the Insurgency

Roots.

The insurgency in Malaya took place at a time when the people of Asia were inspired and fascinated by the success of Mao Tse-tung and his formula for revolutionary, communist insurgent warfare. Nevertheless, the roots of the Malayan emergency developed before Mao's strategy of protracted rural insurgency was developed. The success of communism in Russia and its spread into China was not lost on the people of Southeast Asia, especially Malaysians. In April 1930, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was formed on the platform of establishing a Soviet Republic of Malaya.⁵³ It had a substantial membership of 15,000 full members and an estimated 10,000 active sympathizers that largely consisted of the Chinese minority.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it lacked broad-based appeal because Malaya was relatively prosperous at the time and the revolutionary model was molded around an urban proletariat, which Malaya essentially lacked.

The prosperity and well-being of Malaysians greatly eroded with Japanese occupation that began with the British defeat in Singapore in early 1942. In this environment, the MCP was the only remaining organization capable of mobilizing the population against the

⁵² Nagl, 62.

⁵³ O'Ballance, 23.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 24.

Japanese.⁵⁵ The MCP formed the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) and began slowly training and equipping its members. Although the resistance was not ultimately successful, it allowed the MPAJA to learn how to live and fight in the jungle. Furthermore, it established an organization, leadership, and access to arms and ammunition that would enable it to emerge into a much stronger organization after World War II. The population, especially the Chinese, associated the MCP as their only protectors against the harsh Japanese occupation and often their only source for food.⁵⁶ As the war progressed, the MPAJA had amassed greater strength and a substantial number of weapons that enabled it to effectively control most of the country when the Japanese left in 1945.⁵⁷ However, the return of British control prevented an immediate communist takeover in Malaya. Nevertheless, the period of post-war confusion did not eliminate the communist threat and its foundations were still solid enough to begin a new strategy for the establishment of a new government in Malaya.

Strategy

In the aftermath of World War II, the leadership of the MCP was not united on their strategy to undermine the British colonial government. Initially, they settled on a moderate policy of stirring up industrial protest and causing economic chaos instead of overt insurrection.⁵⁸ The communists hoped that these conditions would encourage an accelerated British departure that would enable the communists to legally assume full control. Nevertheless, the British showed no signs of an immediate departure from Malaya and the

⁵⁵ Robert C. Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 14.

⁵⁶ O'Ballance, 46.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

leadership within the MCP changed in 1947. This change in leadership initiated a new strategy for the Malayan communists.

The new strategy of the MCP was to establish a communist republic in Malaya through armed insurrection in four separate stages. The first stage would consist of guerrilla warfare in the interior. The next stage would see the development of temporary guerrilla bases in evacuated areas. The third stage would consist of the territorial expansion into the towns and villages. Finally, a guerrilla army would be trained and employed against the British forces on a conventional battlefield.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, this strategy closely followed the model developed by Mao in his writings on revolutionary warfare. In February 1948, MCP members attended the Communist Asian Youth Congress in Calcutta, India where the group most likely received approval from the COMINTERN for the planned insurrection. At the same time, the remnants of the MPAJA re-formed to create a new Malaya People's Anti-British Army (MPABA). By April and May, the MCP had engaged in acts of violence and intimidation against the population. In June the strategy became focused on driving all Europeans, government officials, and police in from the isolated areas through murder and terror. This stage was highlighted by the MPABA's killing of three European planters on 16 June 1948.⁶⁰ The following day, Sir Edward Gent, the high commissioner of the Federation of Malaya, declared a state of emergency and the British efforts at counterinsurgency began.

Leadership

The Malayan Communist Party was initially led by Lai Teck. Lai Teck was a Vietnamese who arrived in Singapore in 1934 with the mission to solidify the MCP base. He was known for his organizational skills as well as his ambition and ruthlessness. By 1939, he

⁵⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁶⁰ Nagl., 63.

had organized a communist cell system all over Malaya and was unanimously elected Secretary General of the MCP.⁶¹ Remaining in command throughout the Japanese occupation, Lai Teck supported the moderate, non-violent policy when the British returned in 1945. However, this stance became more and more unacceptable to many in the party. Thus, he began to lose power within the MCP and he disappeared after March 1947, believed to have been killed by MCP forces.⁶²

His successor was Chen Ping, a 26 year old known for his intelligence and shrewdness. Chen initially continued the non-violent opposition to British rule through strikes, demonstrations, and subversion, but within a year the strategy had shifted to open violence.⁶³ He remained the leader of the MCP throughout the armed insurgency. Another key member of the MCP was Lau Yew. He was the chairman of the Central Military Committee and a student of Mao's writings.⁶⁴ Charged with the responsibility for the military conduct of the insurrection, Lau was the mastermind in the formation of the MPABA in February 1948 and its strategy of guerrilla warfare.⁶⁵ While he was instrumental in the initial establishment of the armed resistance against the British, his influence was subsequently diminished after his death in a clash with security forces in July 1948.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Richard L. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 15.

⁶² O'Ballance, 71.

⁶³ Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 30.

⁶⁴ O'Ballance, 79.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

Counterinsurgency Strategies of the British

Before analyzing the specific aspects of British counterinsurgency doctrine that proved successful, a general summary of the evolution of strategy and a description of the various phases are necessary.

Initial Response

Despite the eventual success of the British over the insurgent forces in Malaya, the initial strategy was not successful and violated several of the key components of successful counterinsurgency operations. After the state of emergency was declared on 17 June 1948, the British used their adequate intelligence resources to identify that the Chinese squatters were aiding and providing bases for the communists and generally disrupting security. Nevertheless, their collective punishment strategy against the entire Chinese population only exacerbated tensions with the government and between the Chinese and non-Chinese people of Malaya.⁶⁷ Moreover, the initial British response was very reactive and limited to the means and doctrines it currently had in place. Despite additional powers being issued to the police forces, the organizational structure was still based on the strict hierarchies and divisions of labor in peacetime conditions that proved inadequate to meet the demands during a time of insurgency. This produced ineffectual leadership as well as confused responsibilities. Also, no clear strategy emerged for ending the conflict as it was seen as a mere nuisance. Finally, the reactive response by the British led to several atrocities among the population that increased the standing of the insurgents at the expense of the government officials. By 1950, the British had achieved some successes against the insurgents, but it had also experienced many frustrations. Despite some tactical innovations, the counterinsurgency strategy was still viewed through a conventional warfare lens. Moreover,

⁶⁷ Nagl, 66.

the MCP used this confused, lethargic response by the British to build its own capabilities to a level equal to the British in terms of materiel and superior in gathering intelligence.

Subsequent Strategy

In April 1950 the British selected Lieutenant General Sir Harold Briggs as the Director of Operations.⁶⁸ Unlike his predecessors, he was responsible for coordinating *all* civil administration, police, and armed forces. During his short tenure in power, he developed the “Briggs Plan” for defeating the insurgents. This plan recognized the population as the center of gravity and worked at isolating the insurgents from their popular base. However, the strategy for defeating this robust insurgency was not yet fully developed. Despite the improved emphasis on coordination, disunity of command between the police and the military forces still existed and resulted in an overall lack of direction.⁶⁹ This was highlighted by the nadir of the British experience at the end of 1951. The High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney was killed in a terrorist ambush, Briggs retired and the Police commissioner resigned due to ineffectiveness. Nevertheless, from these setbacks, the British government was able to develop an improved strategy for counterinsurgency that would eventually result in victory.

General Sir Gerald Templer arrived in Malaya in February 1952 as the High Commissioner of Malaya and the Director of Operations.⁷⁰ Thus, the British had effectively put civilian and military operations under the control of one leader. Another key development under Templer was the emphasis on the independence of Malaya as soon as possible. During his 28 months of control, Templer continued to focus the government’s

⁶⁸ O’Ballance, 106.

⁶⁹ Nagl, 78.

⁷⁰ Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya: 1948-1960* (New York: Crane, Russak, and Co., 1975), 336-337.

attention on the people, displayed strong personal and managerial leadership, and adapted the strategies of both the police and armed forces to defeat the insurgency. His successor, Sir Donald MacGillivray, continued this successful strategy and oversaw Malayan independence on 31 August 1957.⁷¹ By this time the insurgents were isolated to the northern areas of the country and largely unable to mount any effective guerrilla operations. Thus, in July 1960, Malaya's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, declared the end of the emergency.

Analysis of British Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Malaya

The Population as the Center of the Gravity

Despite Britain's eventual success against the Malayan communist insurgency, the initial response in the late 1940s was certainly not a strategy that would lead to counterinsurgent victory. A key component of success is identifying the population, not the insurgent army, as the center of gravity. Nevertheless, the British, with the lessons of World War II less than three years distant, initially ignored the population and targeted the insurgent forces of the MPABA and the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA). The military strategies were not subordinate to the political objectives of winning over the people. However, the British showed an aptitude for reflection and a willingness to adapt their strategies toward the population that eventually became the most important reason for their eventual success.

Although the British correctly identified the Chinese population as the source for insurgent bases, their response was to collectively punish the 38 percent of the population that was Chinese. Instead of separating the population from the insurgents, the British

⁷¹ Harry Miller, *Prince and Premier: A Biography of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj. The First Prime Minister of the Federation of Malaya* (London: George G. Harrap and Co., 1959), 207.

government effectively isolated itself from the Chinese population. This isolation was further aggravated by large, conventional military forces that often destroyed large areas of land and damaged property within the villages. Nevertheless, the British leadership recognized this deficiency and adjusted its strategy beginning with the policies of Sir Harold Briggs. The keystone of his revolutionary “Briggs Plan” was placing the priority on winning the support of the population rather than killing insurgents.⁷² He understood that until he could isolate the insurgents from the population, his forces could not get access to effective intelligence that would allow more discriminate targeting of the enemy and minimize collateral damage in the villages. Thus, he emphasized that “one of our most vital aims throughout the emergency must be to commit the Chinese to our side.”⁷³

In order to isolate the insurgent from the population, the government must be able to assert its legitimacy by providing security and life services to the people. Throughout the early stages of the insurgency, the MCP had used blackmail, intimidation, and violence to control the peasants in the Chinese villages. Thus, the legitimacy of the government was seen as negligible. This was further exacerbated by the legacy of British defeat in Malaya during World War II and the success of the Chinese communists. To counter this initial disadvantage, Briggs focused on two areas: the resettlement of the Chinese population and the logical clearing of the communist insurgents from the south to the north.

The first key component of the Briggs Plan was the resettlement of the Chinese squatters to new secure areas known as the “New Village” plan.⁷⁴ These villages enabled the government to provide increased security, prevent access of insurgent forces, and yet maintain most aspects of daily life for the Chinese. The process of resettlement was slow,

⁷² Nagl, 72.

⁷³ Ibid., 74.

⁷⁴ O’Ballance, 110.

but by February 1952, over 400,000 Chinese squatters were moved to 400 new villages. Another key aspect of the “New Village” plan was the emphasis on giving the Chinese more of a stake in their own security. Security within the villages was augmented with Chinese auxiliary police.⁷⁵ This program not only provided ownership and security within the villages, but would eventually serve as a foundation for the police force when Malayan independence was achieved.

The other aspect of the Briggs Plan that was critical for winning the support of the population was the systematic clearing of the insurgent forces within specific geographical areas. Eliminating insurgent forces from an area greatly enhanced the legitimacy of the government and provided the necessary security to isolate the population from the insurgents. However, the British experience in eliminating insurgents from particular areas was not an easy or quick process as evidenced by the first “white area” not being declared until September 1953.⁷⁶ However, the process was critical in slowly starving the insurgents of their critical base areas and enabling the military and police forces to focus on specific areas to eliminate the remaining Huk threat.

Another critical element in counterinsurgency that is focused on the population is a psychological warfare strategy. In Malaya, the British exhibited great flexibility in their psychological operations (PSYOPS) directed at the affected population, the general population, and the enemy insurgents. However, like its initial use of force, the British PSYOPS machine was unfocused and often counterproductive. Initially, the government placed almost all of its emphasis on leaflets. Also, these leaflets were very generic or had the tendency to help the insurgents by publicizing their atrocities (highlighting the inability of

⁷⁵ Nagl, 74.

⁷⁶ O’Ballance, 141.

the government to provide adequate security).⁷⁷ Until at least 1951, MCP propaganda was considered to be far superior to that of the government.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the British PSYOPS campaign greatly improved, first under LTG Briggs and then again under GEN Templer.

Long before it became cliché, one of GEN Templer's favorite expressions was "winning the battle for the hearts and minds of the people."⁷⁹ The first published priority of the new propaganda campaign was "to raise the morale of the civil population and to encourage confidence in government and resistance to the communists."⁸⁰ This was done by targeting specific villages and tailoring the information and tactics to the local level. A key element for successful counterinsurgency operations is the ability to influence the individual and the British strategy for PSYOPS clearly evolved into having this capability.

Nevertheless, the most important element of winning the hearts and minds of the population were the statements in early 1952 and subsequent actions of emphasizing a quick transition to Malayan independence.⁸¹ With general elections scheduled in July 1955, the British were showing the genuineness of their statements. This not only encouraged the local population, but also took away one of the key grievance platforms of the insurgency.

The British also adjusted their PSYOPS strategy in terms of targeting the enemy. This was highlighted by their special interest in increasing the number of surrendered enemy personnel (SEPs) and then employing them for intelligence purposes. Using the argument that this was an ideological war where the convert would have the most effect on his former comrades, SEPs became the cornerstone of the government's propaganda against the

⁷⁷ Short, 416. Leaflets are also limited to literate populations. Targeting illiterate populations is another sign of an out of touch, illegitimate government.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 417.

⁷⁹ O'Ballance, 129.

⁸⁰ Short, 417.

⁸¹ O'Ballance, 117.

insurgency.⁸² Rewards for capture and amnesty for voluntary surrenders were published and had a positive effect on bringing in more insurgents. In 1953, 372 guerrillas had voluntarily surrendered. This was an increase from 257 in 1952, 201 in 1951, and only 147 in 1950.⁸³

Strong, Efficient Leadership from the British Military

Just as the realization that the population was the real center of gravity in the insurgency took time, the search for strong, dynamic leaders and the necessary authority granted to them was also an evolutionary process. Nevertheless, the British ability to adjust their normal peacetime administration into an effective emergency government was a critical element of their eventual success against the communist insurgents. The first evolution in this regard was under the leadership of LTG Harold Briggs. As Director of Operations in charge of all counterinsurgency efforts, his goal was to create a culture of “jointness” between the civil administration, military, and police. This was first carried out with the creation of the Federal Joint Intelligence Advisory Committee in May 1950.⁸⁴ This committee coordinated the collection, analysis, and distribution of intelligence throughout Malaya. He also created another joint agency, the Federal War Council, to coordinate all counterinsurgency operations. Although LTG Briggs had increased powers granted to him due to the emergency circumstances, his joint committees still did not have absolute authority for all aspects of strategy in Malaya. Coordination between the Police Commissioner, the High Commissioner of Malaya, and the Director of Operations was not necessarily assumed and could conflict with one another. Thus, in the dark days at the end of the 1951, when Briggs was soon to retire due to poor health, the High Commissioner was killed by an

⁸² Short, 418.

⁸³ Ibid., 424.

⁸⁴ Nagl, 71.

insurgent ambush, and the police commissioner was forced to resign for ‘dispirited leadership,’ an opportunity for large, sweeping changes arose.⁸⁵

The colonial secretary, Oliver Lyttleton, identified these shortcomings and advocated for a more absolute leader in Malaya. In his comprehensive report on Malaya, he argued “the most effective single measure to be taken is the unification and concentration of command and responsibility in one man.”⁸⁶ Thus, General Sir Gerald Templer was essentially given a dictatorship over Malaya with the combined powers of the High Commissioner and the Director of Operations. Nevertheless, the dictatorship was understood from the beginning as a temporary measure with the term lasting only two years.⁸⁷ A decorated veteran of the campaigns in Palestine and formerly responsible for the military government in Britain’s zone in occupied Germany, he had the intellect and the experience for the responsibility. His primary focus was on building Malayan nationalism and preparing the country for independence. His inaugural speech emphasized the British policy of making Malaya a “fully self-governed nation” and his subsequent actions were directed towards this goal.⁸⁸ In September 1952, he granted Malayan citizenship to all aliens born in the country.⁸⁹ This immediately satisfied the Chinese population that had previously been denied this coveted status. Furthermore, his exceptional civil and military powers were an immense asset that enabled him to cut across the formality and mistrust between the two that had previously contributed to misunderstandings and delays.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ O’Ballance, 114-115.

⁸⁶ Nagl, 77.

⁸⁷ Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 80.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

⁸⁹ O’Ballance, 119.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

However, the eventual success in Malaya could not have been achieved with only the *authority* granted to Templer. The counterinsurgency also gained a boost from the *energetic, personal leadership* of General Templer. As just one example, he personally visited Tanjong Malim, a district capital fifty miles north of Kuala Lumpur, in March 1952 after a particularly violent insurgent attack in a long series of similar incidents in the area.⁹¹ He personally talked to over 300 residents and local leaders in order to gain their support against the insurgents and admonish them for their past unwillingness to help the government. In the following days, the town arrested forty insurgents and remained one of the most peaceful areas for the remainder of the war.⁹² Furthermore, he was able to manage his staff and give effective instructions to the decentralized local authorities that resulted in a coordinated social, political, economic, police and military effort to defeat the insurgency. When he departed in 1954 after 28 months of leading the counterinsurgency efforts, Malaya was much more secure and, thus, much closer to its goal of independence.

It is important to comment on the fact that the British selected a career military officer to lead all aspects of the counterinsurgency operation in Malaya, appearing to violate the principle of civilian control over the military. However, there were still democratic controls and civilian leadership at the top of British government. GEN Templer had absolute authority within Malaysia to fight insurgents, but Churchill could have relieved him if he was not competent or abusive of his authority. Also, the term was specifically limited to a single two-year mandate.

⁹¹ Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 81-82.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 82.

The Ability to Alter Strategy

When the British first declared the emergency on 17 June 1948, their strategy was focused on defeating the insurgent armed forces. As evidenced by their initial heavy-handedness and indiscriminate tactics, gaining the favor of the population was a secondary objective at best. Nevertheless, the British ability to change the underlying purpose of their counterinsurgency doctrine toward identifying the people as the center of gravity enabled it to achieve eventual success in Malaya. More than any other component of counterinsurgency, this ability defined the British approach to defeating insurgents and differentiated it from the inflexible strategies of the French and U.S. in Indochina/Vietnam. Thus, the British were able to eventually subordinate the military strategy to the fundamental political objectives. As described above in the implementation of the Briggs Plan and the restructuring of command and control under the leadership of General Templer, the British strategy evolved over time and was responsive to change. Within this development of a better strategy, the most critical element was the renewed focus on timely and accurate intelligence.

The British have historically prided themselves as a nation that has used intelligence as a combat multiplier. Nevertheless, the initial intelligence operations in place at the beginning of the Malayan emergency were not strong. The amount of information collected was minimal and most of this intelligence was of low importance, unreliable, and stale.⁹³ The situation was best summarized by General Sir John Harding, Commander in Chief, Far East Land Forces, in April 1950:

⁹³ Short, 359.

Our greatest weakness now is the lack of early and accurate information of the enemy's strength, dispositions, and intentions. For lack of information an enormous amount of military effort is being necessarily absorbed on prophylactic and will o' the wisp patrolling and jungle bashing and on air bombardment. Information services must depend almost entirely on the police who in their turn must depend on the confidence of the people, especially the Chinese, and the civil administration generally and its power to protect them.⁹⁴

However, the emphasis on intelligence soon gained momentum, especially under LTG Briggs. His Federal Joint Intelligence Advisory Committee established in May 1950 is a clear example of identifying the need for better and timelier intelligence that is shared and coordinated across the entire spectrum of counterinsurgency operations. Intelligence's influence, however, is rarely immediate, but tends to have a cumulative effect.⁹⁵ Thus, by the time that GEN Templer took charge in Malaya, the progress was beginning to show.

Under the new consolidated command and control structure of General Templer's government, a new position of Director of Intelligence was added that was responsible for intelligence, but not the intelligence collecting mechanisms. The latter were controlled by the special branch of the police.⁹⁶ This structure enabled the collection of resources to be unencumbered by the typical demands of bureaucracy while raising the importance of intelligence within the government hierarchy to a level commensurate with the service commanders on the Directorate of Operations Committee.⁹⁷ The results were quite impressive as evidenced by an intelligence brief of an operation that occurred in August 1952. The special branch of the police had made deep penetrations in the MCP lower ranks such that 75% of the entire organization could be identified and that many of these MCP members

⁹⁴ Nagl, 73.

⁹⁵ Short, 359.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 360.

⁹⁷ This organizational mechanism is quite similar to the recent change within the U.S. government where the new position of Director of National Intelligence (DNI) was created with some oversight over the intelligence collection within the various agencies such as the CIA, FBI, DOD, and the State Department.

were actually paid by the government as informants. At this point, the ‘agents’ were being promoted from within the MCP and the level of intelligence was vastly improving.⁹⁸

A final important point about the ability of the British to adapt their intelligence strategy was their strict policies on interrogations. The British intelligence and police services did not permit torture during interrogations.⁹⁹ In order to maintain the focus of the counterinsurgency efforts on the people, the use of torture was seen as counterproductive. Major General Richard L. Clutterbuck, a senior member in the Malayan government from 1956-58, aptly described torture as the “the most shortsighted method of trying to get information.”¹⁰⁰ While he understood torture may provide information about yesterday or even tomorrow, it would never make the victim an agent for the government in order to betray the communists. Thus, the British were successful at using the tactics necessary to support their strategy of winning the support of the people and defeating the insurgency.

Transforming the Military to Respond to the Threat

One of the greatest challenges governments face when responding to insurgencies is adapting their militaries to the new asymmetric threat. This is due to the fact that the means necessary to defeat conventional forces are often diametrically opposed to the ones needed to defeat irregular guerrilla forces. The British experience in the Malayan Emergency of 1948 to 1960 is a good example of a military force that struggled to accept changes in operational tactics to match their strategy, but eventually embraced important changes and successfully concluded the campaign. The evolution of the British counterinsurgency doctrine is best viewed through the challenges faced by the regular police and infantry forces as well as the changes made in the use of combat multipliers such as aircraft and artillery.

⁹⁸ Short, 361.

⁹⁹ Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 97.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

In the initial response to the insurgent attacks on the population and the government officials, the British relied on battalion-sized army forces. Nevertheless, these forces were essentially useless in dealing with the elusive communist guerrilla tactics. The British adviser in the Pahang region described the operations as “trying to cut our golf green with a scythe rather than a small, fine mowing machine.”¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the willingness to change to smaller, more flexible fighting forces was not readily accepted. In July 1948, an innovative officer received permission to organize units of approximately 14-20 men specially trained in jungle warfare against the guerrilla threat. These forces were known as ‘ferret forces.’¹⁰² Despite their success, these teams were disbanded only several months later due to disagreements over policy, organization, and tactics.¹⁰³ Furthermore, other commanding officers were unwilling to accept the early lessons of the insurgency. A Scots Guards commanding officer responded to recommendations for change by saying: “We were raised and trained and organized to fight in Europe. I’m not going to upset the whole organization and training of my battalion just to chase a lot of communist terrorists around the jungle.”¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, most commanders were receptive to change and commanders began to use smaller forces tailored to the threat of the enemy and the terrain in which they operated. This significant shift in tactics was made possible through both the dramatic improvement in timely and accurate intelligence and a willingness to accept tactical innovation.

Just as massive battalion-sized sweeps were counterproductive in defeating the Malayan insurgency, the overpowering firepower of artillery and the Royal Air Force (RAF)

¹⁰¹ Short, 209.

¹⁰² Nagl, 68-69.

¹⁰³ O’Ballance, 87.

¹⁰⁴ Nagl, 195.

was also to have a muted impact on the communists. Under LTG Briggs, the use of heavy firepower was minimized. The rationale was both practical and strategic—bombing on a random basis would be far too costly and it would most likely do more harm than good in a battle for the hearts and minds of the population.¹⁰⁵ The shift in mission focus for the RAF is also telling of an organization that identified the weaknesses of its initial counterinsurgency strategy and was taking steps in the right direction. In 1952, the RAF attacked nearly 700 targets and flew almost 4000 offensive sorties. One year later, the tally was only 300 targets in 2300 sorties while the number of supply drops increased by 30 percent.¹⁰⁶ The RAF also greatly increased its number of voice flights that spread propaganda via speakers to the villages throughout the country. In 1955, 87 hours of voice flights were flown with seventy percent of all surrendered enemy personnel citing these missions as influencing their decision to surrender.¹⁰⁷ Unlike leaflets, voice flights were able to influence the significant population of illiterates. Thus, the military evolved to achieve two critical principles in counterinsurgency operations; first, it recognized the goal of using minimum force as well as the ability to employ tactical flexibility to match the strategy.

Counterinsurgency in Malaya: A Critical Assessment and Key Lessons for the U.S.

Critical Assessment

It has been almost sixty years since the MCP killed three European planters and initiated a guerrilla warfare campaign that lasted twelve years. The nature of the world in which we live today has radically changed from then. Thus, there are some limitations to applying the British model of successful counterinsurgency. The most significant factor in

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰⁶ Short, 371.

¹⁰⁷ O'Ballance, 151.

Malaya that limits the current applicability of the strategy used is the international isolation of the MCP. The extent of the communication revolution and globalization in the 21st Century makes all insurgencies accessible to various international actors. Thus, counterinsurgency doctrines today must factor in this added complexity. Nevertheless, this dynamic does not erase the relevance of the key elements of British counterinsurgency strategy used in Malaya. Another limitation of the Malayan case study is the narrow segment of society that the insurgents represented. Dominated by the Chinese minority, the MCP's appeal outside this ethnic group was minimal and the capability to expand the insurgency was marginal. Thus, some argue the insurgency was relatively easy to isolate and eventually defeat.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the Chinese comprised 38 percent of the population and were able to disrupt the government and significantly degrade security throughout Malaya. Given the current arguments for nationalism across the world, 38 percent is a significant amount of people and many other nations are currently threatened by ethnic minorities of much smaller percentages. Examples such as Kurdistan and Baluchistan are prime examples. Thus, the threat of the Malayan insurgency was real then and a similar situation could still be dangerous today.

Key Lessons

The fundamental lesson of the Malayan Emergency is the importance of emphasizing the population as the center of gravity. As British counterinsurgency strategy evolved during the twelve years, they placed more and more emphasis on “winning the hearts and minds” of the people. This was more than just an ‘assumed’ objective. The public statements from Generals Briggs and Templer continually re-emphasized this paramount strategy. Thus, it permeated its way throughout the ranks and the population as a constant reminder of what

¹⁰⁸ Blaufarb, 48.

was at stake. Another critical lesson from the British counterinsurgency experience is their effective leadership structure that consolidated power into the hands of a dynamic, effective commander. From intelligence priorities to civil works projects, the management was efficient and eliminated many of the tensions that arise in typical interagency work in large bureaucracies, like the U.S. Finally, the lessons of learning from past mistakes and the ability to alter policies and strategies to the appropriate threat must be embraced by the US government and its armed forces. Resistance to change will be natural and is necessary in order to refine changes into a workable, realistic solution. Nevertheless, a government that cannot transform its institutions will be doomed to failure in counterinsurgency operations.

Case Study 2: The Philippine Experience against the Hukbalahap Rebellion: 1946-1954

Strategic Environment (Background)

The Philippines gained independence from the U.S. on 4 July 1946, which most Americans and many Filipinos felt was too early.¹⁰⁹ The concern was based on the long legacy of Spanish, U.S., and Japanese rule that had denied the archipelago of a robust cadre of its own national leaders. Also, the economy and civil services were still in ruins from the aftermath of World War II. Nevertheless, the spirit of nationalism was strong throughout the world and the Filipino nationalists pragmatically viewed that the time for independence must happen sooner rather than later. In the fledgling years of the new republic, the Philippines suffered from the power and influence of the land-holding oligarchy as well as

¹⁰⁹ Albert Ravenholt, *The Philippines: A Young Republic on the Move* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1962), 71.

mismanagement, corruption, and social injustice.¹¹⁰ Thus, the seeds for rebellion were firmly planted and fertilized in these critical years immediately following independence.

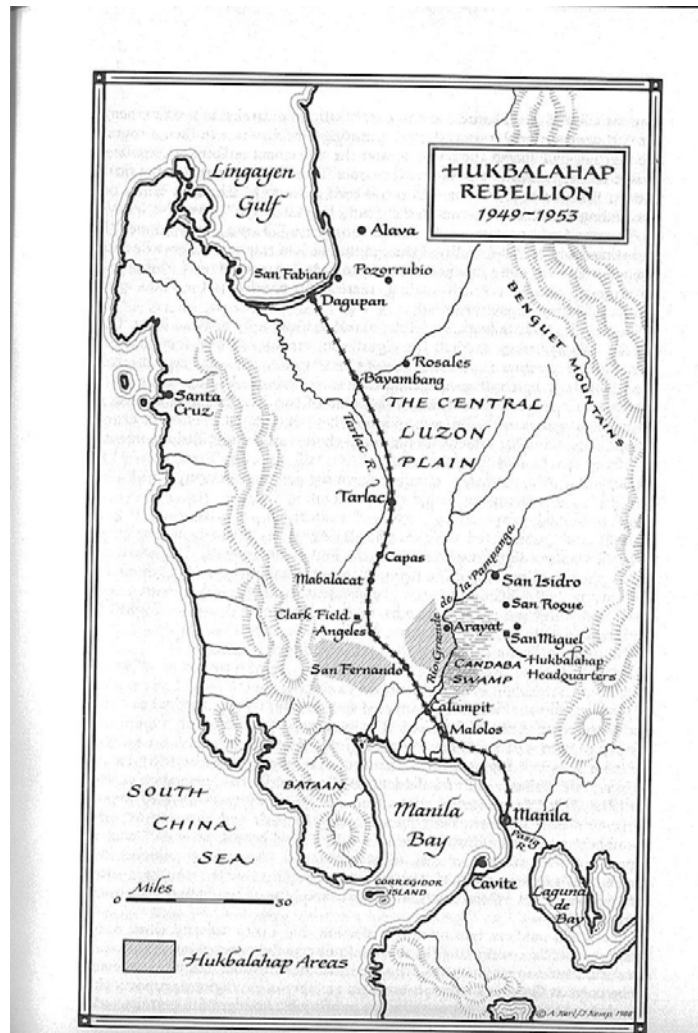
In this case study, the area of interest is Central Luzon. (*See Figure 2*) Despite limited efforts to spread the insurgency beyond the island, the Hukbalahap (Huk) Rebellion was restricted to this limited region. Luzon is the largest of the major islands in the Philippine archipelago that is home to the capital, Manila. The approximate size of Luzon is 40,420 square miles, consisting of rugged mountains on the east and west and areas of deep jungle, swamps, and a wide plain that is dominated by agriculture.¹¹¹ Like most other Asian countries, the Philippines experienced a significant increase in population from 1903 to 1939. Specifically, the four main provinces of Central Luzon saw the population almost double from 717,000 in 1903 to over 1.3 million people before the outbreak of World War II in 1939.¹¹² The island was dependent on agriculture with rice and sugar cane as the two dominant crops. With the population growing faster than agricultural production and the wealthy landowners controlling the trade and profits, the potential for unrest was increasing with each passing season.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Random House, 1989), 330.

¹¹¹ <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9049467?query=Babuyan%20Islands&ct=>. Accessed 17 April 2006.

¹¹² Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 18-19.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.



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Development of the Insurgency

Roots

Ever since the establishment of the COMINTERN in Soviet Russia after their successful communist revolution, communist parties began to emerge throughout the world. Just like Malaya, the communist party in the Philippines was formed in 1930. During the fighting of World War II, when the colonial empires of the 19th Century began to erode and even crumble, this phenomenon of communist groups organizing in the name of national

¹¹⁴ Map of Luzon island taken from Karnow, 343.

liberation rapidly spread throughout Asia. These were the external conditions that helped create the Huks in the Philippines. Although not initially communists, these dissidents were organized in 1942 in order to resist the foreign invaders from Japan.¹¹⁵ Translated, the name Hukbalahap means the Army of Resistance against Japan.¹¹⁶ Despite many valiant efforts in fighting the Japanese occupation forces, they were ignored by the U.S. forces under MacArthur and arrested upon the U.S. return.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, they resisted and kept their weapons and ammunition and remained an organized group after the departure of the Japanese. When many of the Japanese collaborators were pardoned and given political power in Luzon, the Huks were naturally mistrustful of the government and discouraged of the prospects for improved conditions.

The Huks didn't officially become communists until 1946. This change in posture was due to the rise of their most capable leader, Luis Taruc, in 1945.¹¹⁸ In the initial elections of 1946, the group elected six men to the legislature (including Taruc), but the legislature refused to seat them. Thus, they returned to the rural areas of central Luzon and began planning for armed insurrection against the government. They had agreed to a truce under the new Philippine leader, Manuel Roxas, but the murder of a Huk leader on August 24, 1946 ended the truce and officially began the Huk Rebellion.¹¹⁹ The Huks were simply a peasant movement focused on agrarian reform, an end to government and landlord repression, and justice for its veterans. Thus, the harassment of the landlord class became their tactic of choice. They also believed the landlords as having nominal control over the government.

¹¹⁵ Eduardo Lachica, *Huk: Philippine Agrarian Society in Revolt* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1971), 4-5.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹⁷ Karnow, 340. Luis Taruc, the military commander of the Huks, claimed to have killed over 20,000 Japanese troops and Filipino collaborators during the war. They also freed several towns and established local governments

¹¹⁸ Smith, *Philippine Freedom: 1946-1958*, 141.

¹¹⁹ Karnow, 341.

Thus, they clearly stated their objective as the overthrow of the current government.¹²⁰ The Huks also had lingering grievances over back pay for their U.S. Army service during the war, that was denied since they were not recognized by MacArthur's forces as a legitimate group.¹²¹

Strategy

With a policy objective of overthrowing the current government and maintaining their own sovereignty over the area in central Luzon known as 'Huklandia,' the Huks closely modeled their strategy around Mao's 'People's War.' With adequate arms, ammunition, and organizational structure left over from the war against the Japanese, the Huks were prepared to fight a protracted, insurgent warfare that focused on asymmetric tactics like ambush, terror, and harassment.¹²² In accordance with Mao's first stage, they established their base areas and support organizations in the villages, called Barrio United Defense Corps, that provided food, intelligence, and recruits to the growing insurgency.¹²³

Due to the bleak conditions of the peasants, the Huks had the natural support of most of the population. They understood the importance of having these villagers as allies and focused much of their attention on propaganda directed against the government and the landowners. The Huks used PSYOPS effectively throughout the war and were very good at developing simple slogans that were easily memorized and repeated by the peasants. Some of the examples were: "Land for the Landless" and "Bullets, not Ballots."¹²⁴ The Huks also attempted to build schools and provide some semblance of infrastructure in the villages

¹²⁰ Mamerto Ventura, *United States-Philippine Cooperation and Cross-Purposes: Philippine Post War Recovery and Reform* (Quezon City: Filipiana Publications, 1974), 147.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹²² Blaufarb, 25.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹²⁴ Edwin Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars*, 69.

where they operated in return for ‘taxes’ to fund the growing struggle against the Philippine government. Although atrocities committed by the Huks were reported, the overall reputation of the Huks was good within central Luzon and helped establish their legitimacy among the people. In one village in central Luzon, the people remembered the Huks as “decent men”, “polite,” and “helpful.”¹²⁵

As insurgents, the Huks had also developed into an impressive force by 1950. Although they engaged in several spectacular attacks like the battalion-sized raid on the government base in Tarlac province that killed 26 troops and embarrassed the government, Taruc remained focused on a strategy of protracted war that continued to expose the serious weaknesses of the Roxas and the subsequent Quirino governments.¹²⁶ The insurgents also targeted the land-owners property and forced a significant refugee problem for the inefficient government. Thus, the Huks were able to gain significant momentum in the first several years of the insurgency as their base of support increased both geographically within central Luzon and numerically as people became more and more dispirited with the governments inability to provide security and basic services. By 1950, the Huks had a force of 17,000 regulars, 50,000 reservists and a mass base of nearly all the peasants in central Luzon.¹²⁷

Leadership

Throughout most of the Huk Rebellion, Luis Taruc was their leader. He was 28 years old in 1945 when he first took over and had experience as the Huk military commander against the Japanese.¹²⁸ He was unique in that he actually had a peasant background, yet he was able to attend some college in Manila. He was introduced to Marxist thought during the

¹²⁵ Kerkvliet, 165.

¹²⁶ Karnow, 344.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 342.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 338.

world economic crisis of the 1930s and believed the problems of the peasants could be solved through the remedies of socialism. He gained his first notoriety during the 1940 elections in Luzon where he showed substantial organizational skill in managing the campaigns of several socialist politicians.¹²⁹

Nevertheless, as the insurgency suffered a number of setbacks, the Huk senior leaders became restless. Jose Lava, the communist party chief, made an attempt to control the conduct of the insurgency in 1951. He called for an escalation of the insurgency and a shift into Mao's third stage of revolutionary war, offensive warfare with a conventional army.¹³⁰ Taruc vehemently argued against this strategy and was subsequently removed from his position within the communist party for his "excessive humanism."¹³¹ At this point, Taruc began secret communications with the government that would eventually lead to his voluntary surrender and the end of the insurgency by 1954.

Counterinsurgency Strategies of the Philippine Government

Initial Strategy

Similar to the initial response by the British in Malaya, the Philippine government's first actions against the insurgents were lethargic and foolish. The response was characteristic of exactly what not to do in a counterinsurgency environment. The police and military forces both lacked effective intelligence, so they attacked the only target available—the peasants in the affected areas. Thus, the population embraced the Huks and made the government's job even more difficult. Furthermore, the Philippine Constabulary (police) and the military lacked effective training and tactics in counterinsurgency that became obvious in

¹²⁹ Ibid., 339.

¹³⁰ Kerkvliet, 230.

¹³¹ Ibid., 232. Taruc remained in charge of the Huk armed forces until his surrender in May 1954.

the initial encounters against the insurgents. Atrocities committed by the police and military were commonplace in the first stage of the insurgency (1946-1950). One of the worst acts committed by the police was the killing of more than forty innocent civilians in a raid in Maliwalu, Pampanga in early 1950.¹³² All of these poor tactics were overshadowed by the inability of the government to state a clear, overarching strategy that could resonate with the affected population in Luzon. The government saw the threat posed by the Huk insurgents as only a military problem that could be defeated with only a military response. The failure of recognizing the people as the center of gravity was clearly shown in the rigged elections of 1949. The people were widely disaffected with the widely reported stuffed ballot boxes, threatened citizens, and murdered campaign officials of rival parties.¹³³ By the beginning of 1950, the government lacked legitimacy in almost all of Luzon.

Subsequent Strategy

Despite the bleak outlook after the first four years of the Huk insurgency, the period of mid-1950 through 1954 marked a complete reversal of fortune for the government's counterinsurgency fight. The critical element in this radical change was the leadership of Ramon Magsaysay. As Secretary of Defense, he was given wide latitude to defeat the insurgency. Most importantly, he understood the connections between the popular grievances of the peasants and the support by the insurgency.¹³⁴ Thus, the population became the target for the government and the strategy and tactics used soon followed from this premise. By working with the people, the intelligence greatly improved and the ability of smaller, more flexible forces to find the insurgents in the jungle greatly increased. This was also accomplished by reforming the army and the police through leadership changes and

¹³² Ventura, 166.

¹³³ Blaufarb, 27.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

the intolerance of corruption. The turning point in the insurgency occurred with the ‘free’ election in November 1951 when large turnouts of people voted without fear. The Huk boycott of the election showed the new isolation between the insurgents and the people. In Mao’s metaphor, the fish (insurgents) found themselves in a pond without water (the people).¹³⁵

After 1951, Magsaysay continued to place the political objective of gaining the support of the peasants ahead of any narrowly focused military strategies that ran against this goal. He continued his reforms within the military organization and gained even greater popularity among the people. In 1953, he won the presidency in a landslide as the insurgency continued to wane. In May 1954, Luis Taruc turned himself in and with him in custody, the insurgency essentially ceased to exist.¹³⁶

Analysis of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy

“I know you’re supposed to be a diplomat and that warfare is not supposed to be your game; but you’ll discover soon enough out here that statesmanship, diplomacy, economics, and warfare just can’t be separated from one another.”¹³⁷

-Ramon Magsaysay to Ambassador MacWhite in *The Ugly American*

The Population as the Center of Gravity

The fundamental principle of a successful counterinsurgency strategy is understanding the political nature of the conflict and the importance of the people under the government’s authority. Nevertheless, the initial response by the Philippine government was to treat the Huk Rebellion as a military problem and apply only military and police pressure. Nevertheless, the government eventually learned from its mistakes and altered its strategy in

¹³⁵ Lansdale, 85.

¹³⁶ Kerkvliet, 247.

¹³⁷ William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1958), 109.

order to respond to the concerns of the agrarian population. During this phase, the government, under the leadership of Ramon Magsaysay, focused on training the army and police to better respond to the population in which it operated as well as emphasizing psychological operations.

In the early years, Philippine officials rarely mentioned the political and social factors and focused exclusively on the military operations. Lansdale aptly described the tunnel vision: “like shopkeepers worried about going bankrupt and counting the goods on the shelves instead of pondering ways to get customers coming in again.”¹³⁸ In the late 1940s, the stated grievances of the peasants, such as land reform, back pay, and government corruption, were hardly acknowledged by the government. Instead, the government under Manuel Roxas vowed to wield a “mailed fist” and vanquish the rebels in sixty days.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, the brutal and indiscriminate tactics of his soldiers and police only further isolated the government from the rural population. Furthermore, as one Philippine senator explained, “the government’s planes and tanks were making it worse” by compelling more peasants to join the insurrection.¹⁴⁰ If things in the government didn’t change quickly, the unrest in the Philippines would only get worse. Fortunately, a new player emerged on the scene that had an immediate impact on the course of events; his name was Ramon Magsaysay.

Magsaysay’s first noticeable impact was his commitment to reform the strategies of the military and the police, especially their treatment of the population. He issued a directive “declaring that every soldier had two duties: first, to act as an ambassador of good will from

¹³⁸ Lansdale, 19.

¹³⁹ Karnow, 341.

¹⁴⁰ Kerkvliet, 194.

the government to the people; second, to kill or capture Huk.”¹⁴¹ While acknowledging that victory had to include the defeat of the Huks through force, he emphasized the responsibility to the people as the first priority. These reforms had an immediate impact on the insurgent. Jesus Lava, a senior member of the Huks, recalled “it had an impact not only on the movement’s mass support but on the armed [Huk] soldiers as well. Many left because repression was ending, and they were not ideologically committed enough to stay in the movement.”¹⁴² Furthermore, Magsaysay was able to initiate several new projects in central Luzon to improve the government’s image. They included cash credit for peasants, medical treatment, improved agrarian courts, and civil works projects.¹⁴³ While all these projects were relatively small, they were well received because they were supplemented with good public relations. The weapon of psychological operations (PSYOPS) was no longer solely in the hands of the insurgents.

Another significant reform initiated by Magsaysay was the emphasis on PSYOPS. Driven by both pragmatism and innovation, he emphasized the imagination over sheer technology in defeating the Huk rebellion.¹⁴⁴ All reforms, even the smallest or simplest gestures were well publicized and often accompanied by the Secretary of Defense, himself. His constant travels to the countryside enabled most villagers to see the man and even shake hands with him. Although the Huks tried to portray his reforms as merely ‘showcase,’ the peasants wanted to believe Magsaysay and gave him the benefit of the doubt.¹⁴⁵ Magsaysay was also skilled at directing his psychological operations abroad. After his initial visit to the U.S. in early 1950, Magsaysay was able to endear himself to the U.S. public as a leader that

¹⁴¹ Blaufarb, 30.

¹⁴² Kerkvliet, 238.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 239.

¹⁴⁴ Blaufarb, 31.

¹⁴⁵ Karnow, 351.

was worth supporting. Thus, these efforts paid off in approximately half a billion dollars in U.S. economic and military aid between 1951 and 1955.¹⁴⁶

Strong Leadership from Ramon Magsaysay

Of all the leaders who faced the challenges of counterinsurgency, Ramon Magsaysay stands out as one of the most charismatic and also one of the most successful. His leadership qualities were not limited to just strong, charismatic personal traits, but also his ability to make progress in reforming and organizing the counterinsurgency efforts.

Edward Lansdale described Magsaysay as having the “qualities sorely needed in the fight against the Huks. He knew the fears and frustrations of guerrilla life from first hand experience; he was close to the people; and had a firm grasp of current military affairs.”¹⁴⁷ Peasants appreciated the regular visits he made to the villages in order to check on conditions and interact with the people. He was personally committed to ensuring the elections of 1951 were conducted fairly and freely, regardless of their outcome. When they were carried out successfully, it caused a dramatic shift in opinion among the peasants. The Huks were also aware that people would see open elections as an attractive alternative to rebellion.¹⁴⁸ Thus, they tried in vain to disrupt the elections and use their propaganda to de-legitimize the efforts of the government. Nevertheless, by this point, Magsaysay’s ability to use propaganda was superior to the Huks. This outcome was played out in the 1953 election as Magsaysay won the presidency by obtaining the largest popular vote in Philippine history, as well as the widest margin of victory.¹⁴⁹ By this point, however, his earlier examples of charismatic

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 350.

¹⁴⁷ Lansdale, 21.

¹⁴⁸ Kerkvliet, 238.

¹⁴⁹ Smith, 169.

leadership had seriously weakened the foundation of the Huk insurgency to a point where it was hardly considered a threat.

Courage, selflessness, and a popular image can take a leader only so far. In order to effectively manage a robust insurgent threat, a leader must also be able to manage and organize the vast resources and personnel at his disposal. Magsaysay was an effective leader as Secretary of Defense in the struggle against the Huks. One of the critical components of a strong counterinsurgency doctrine is for the leader to have wide, discretionary powers to adequately deal with the threat. In his discussions with President Quirino, he was reported to have demanded and received “an absolutely free hand” to rid the country of the Huks.¹⁵⁰ However, Magsaysay’s ability to combine and integrate multiple agencies within the government was assisted by the general state of apathy that existed within other departments within the Quirino government.¹⁵¹ He was also assisted by a group of loyal and dedicated young technocrats. By Fall 1952, Magsaysay was fielding questions and concerns that went well beyond the purview of the Secretary of Defense. Lansdale saw Magsaysay becoming *the* government, *the* leader, and *the* champion of the people.¹⁵²

Ability to Alter Strategy

As the challenges of defeating an insurgency are unique, complex, and rarely expected, the government’s task to respond to these challenges can be extremely daunting. This is especially true in the case of the Philippines where the government not only had to modify its strategy toward defeating the Huks, but it also had to reform itself of much of the corruption and inefficiency that was an underlying cause of the rebellion. In order for the government strategy to work, it had to carefully balance the initiation of reform while still

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 155.

¹⁵¹ Blaufarb, 31.

¹⁵² Lansdale, 101.

maintaining power and overall stability. The main adjustment to strategy consisted of the reform of the police and military forces and their eventual consolidation under one command.

Upon assumption of duties as Secretary of Defense, Magsaysay immediately saw the structure of the police and military forces as inefficient and flawed. The primary focus of the new strategy was focused on the connection between the popular grievances of the people and support of the insurgency. Thus, the poorly trained police (Philippine Constabulary) were cut in size and merged into the Army. The new effort against the Huks was now led by the Army. The Army nearly doubled in size to 56,000 men by 1952 and was modeled on a small, mobile force structure.¹⁵³ Magsaysay also made a concerted effort to breakup the culture of the army. The Philippine Army he inherited in 1950 was composed of clique-ridden officers that lacked initiative and had no interest in interacting with their soldiers, much less the population they were assigned to support. Furthermore, the organization was dominated by corruption and graft, especially within the supply system.¹⁵⁴ In order to instill a new energy into the troops, he wasted no time in firing several high-ranking Army officers on his first day. Also, he promoted many younger officers that had guerrilla experience from the years of Japanese occupation, but more importantly had the initiative to find and fight the insurgents in the jungle.¹⁵⁵ The most important result of this new vigor in the armed forces was the ability of the counterinsurgency forces to penetrate deep into the jungle and deny the Huks of their safe havens. Previously free to roam the jungle at will and choose the time and place of their ambushes, the Huks were now constantly harassed and forced deep into

¹⁵³ Karnow, 350.

¹⁵⁴ Lansdale, 37.

¹⁵⁵ Smith, 155.

swamps and mountains where hunger often sapped the morale of even the most hardy of insurgents.¹⁵⁶

Transforming the Military to Respond to the Threat

During the second phase of the insurgency, 1950 to 1954, the Philippine military and constabulary forces greatly adjusted their tactics. This shift in tactics was done in the name of subordinating military tasks to support the goal of attracting the support of the peasants. Thus, Magsaysay and his government were able to understand the supremacy of political objectives and base their military tactics on achieving this goal. The most important adjustment in military tactics during the Huk rebellion was the formation of new army units, specifically the Battalion Combat Team (BCT) and smaller hunter-killer teams. Another important element in the eventual success of the counterinsurgency operation was the employment of civil affairs units to the countryside to assist the population.

Prior to Magsaysay's tenure as Secretary of Defense, the Army was largely subordinated to the constabulary (police) force in the fight against the insurgents. Nevertheless, the substantial size of the insurgent armed guerrillas was overwhelming for the poorly trained and equipped police. With the help of U.S. financial aid, Magsaysay merged the police into the Army and formed battalion combat teams (BCTs). These self-sufficient units consisted of an enlarged infantry battalion with attached artillery, heavy weapons, and all necessary logistics and support units to number about one thousand men.¹⁵⁷ These units were valuable in counterinsurgency due to their relatively small size. Unlike the U.S. structure at the time of large combat divisions that usually fought battles with whole battalions, the Filipinos were able to send these self-sustaining battalions into the countryside

¹⁵⁶ Kerkvliet, 242.

¹⁵⁷ Blaufarb, 28.

and deploy smaller, more flexible company and platoon-size formations against the asymmetric threat posed by the insurgents. Eventually, the government organized twenty-six of these units and assigned them each to a particular geographic region where they assumed responsibility for all security forces, including the local police, within the area.¹⁵⁸

Another key innovation to the way the Filipino Army fought was their use of highly trained small teams against the Huks. These Scout Rangers were five-man squads who operated in a hunter-killer formation in which they sought out the insurgents far from their base and were trained to collect intelligence against larger, more alert troops or destroy smaller and unprepared guerrilla formations.¹⁵⁹ The strategy of these units became as focused on using irregular tactics as the insurgent forces. In the name of psychological warfare, one of the Army's tactics was to organize units disguised as Huk guerrillas. These units would infiltrate another Huk unit or village and both undermine the Huk presence and confuse their own forces. On one occasion, two insurgent units actually fought each other thinking the other unit was a deception force.¹⁶⁰ The result of these innovations resulted in a much more efficient fighting force that was able to both engage the enemy on equal footing and greatly increase the legitimacy of the government.

In the spirit of subordinating military operations to political objectives, Magsaysay also emphasized civic action groups. The incorporation of civil affairs units in an army at war was unprecedented, but it served as a model that continues to have relevance today. Lansdale compared the Civil Affairs Office (CAO) in the Philippines to the political commissariat within every communist army.¹⁶¹ Clearly, the Filipinos were figuring out the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 28.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁶⁰ Lachica, 132.

¹⁶¹ Blaufarb, 30.

armed forces needed a capability to help shape the political objectives of the struggle. The civic action programs ranged from handing out chewing gum and candy to children to dedicated PSYOPS work focused on gaining support of the population.¹⁶²

Counterinsurgency in the Philippines: A Critical Assessment and Key Lessons for the U.S.

Critical Assessment

Although the Philippine government's development of a robust counterinsurgency strategy serves as a valuable case study of a new government responding to internal challenges and reforming itself at the same time, it has a few potential limitations to its universal application for defeating armed insurgents. First, the Huk Rebellion was a relatively isolated event that was limited to the central plain of Luzon island. Unlike subsequent insurgent groups that operated in the Philippines, there was little effort at expanding their base beyond the 40,420 square miles of Luzon. Thus, the challenges imposed on the government were not nearly as threatening as they could have been. Nevertheless, this case study still holds merit because of the realistic challenges that a fledgling democracy, like the Philippines was in 1946, may face due to its own inefficiencies or the grievances of those groups that were unable to mobilize themselves as a viable political group through peaceful means. A second potential weakness in this case study is the significantly diminished threat the Huks posed after only a few years of active insurgency. By 1951, the insurgents were severely weakened and even before this point their ability to seriously threaten the government's survival was marginal. However, this example overlooks the legitimacy issue in the Philippines. Prior to 1951, the Huks possessed a monopoly on legitimacy in central Luzon. Nevertheless, the open elections were a complete

¹⁶² Ibid., 31.

disaster for the Huk platform against the government. The Philippine government essentially took the base of support away from the Huks overnight. Although the government's survival was never threatened, the Huks still caused significant disruptions within the political, economic, and psychological components of Filipino society. Thus, it was a grave threat to the stability of a regime that sought to preserve a democratic constitution.

Key Lessons

The critical lesson in counterinsurgency doctrine from the Philippines example is the fundamental requirement of a good government in order to defeat an insurgent force. This includes strong leadership, minimal corruption, and a bond with the population it governs. The lack of good government in the late 1940s was a key cause of the Huk Rebellion, yet its ability to reform itself while simultaneously confronting the insurgents was essential to the eventual victory. Despite American involvement in the Philippines during the Huk Rebellion, this critical lesson was ignored in Vietnam as the U.S. supported a leadership regime that was not connected to the people and was steeped in corruption. Without a good government as a viable alternative for the people, success in counterinsurgency is extremely difficult.

Another key lesson is the importance of being able to transform the military force into a viable counterforce to insurgent warfare. Magsaysay's emphasis on self-sustainable, light, and mobile infantry forces limited to battalion-size greatly enhanced the Army's ability to locate and destroy insurgent forces. Furthermore, the use of military forces to achieve political objectives such as the civic action program served as a combat multiplier. The Army was now recognized by the peasants as a critical part of the solution and its ability to collect intelligence and operate in the villages was greatly enhanced.

Conclusion

In this examination of two historical case studies of successful counterinsurgency doctrine, the goal was to help policymakers and military leaders better understand the complexities of counterinsurgency and develop a framework for developing a robust counterinsurgency strategy against future asymmetric threats. While the future is sure to be uncertain, the U.S. will continue to have vital national interests that are vulnerable to attack from our enemies. As our economic and military power is clearly dominant over other nation-states, the threat from conventional forces will remain nominal for the near future. Nevertheless, the expansion of non-state armed groups, terrorists, and instability in many parts of the world greatly increases the threat from irregular, asymmetric forces. Thus, understanding and preparing for counterinsurgency warfare is critical in the 21st Century.

In order to develop a useful counterinsurgency strategy, this study first examined the roots of insurgency and the key tenets of its most successful strategies. From this understanding of how the enemy thinks, operates, and fights, a brief exploration of past counterinsurgency doctrine enabled the creation of a framework for counterinsurgency strategy that could stand the test of time and universal application. The result was four key components of counterinsurgency. First, the government's center of gravity must be defined as the support of the population. Next, strong, efficient leadership is a critical element needed to combat any well-developed insurgency. Third, the government must be able to redefine both its national and military strategies to align with the insurgent threat. Finally, the armed forces must be capable of transforming into a structure that is designed specifically to defeat asymmetric threats. Using these four key components, the final phase of this paper analyzed the counterinsurgency strategies of the British government during the Malayan

Emergency from 1948 to 1960 and the Philippine government's response to the Huk Rebellion from 1946 to 1954.

Both of these case studies serve as great examples for successful counterinsurgency doctrine. Both governments initially struggled with the irregular strategies and tactics of the guerrilla forces. Nevertheless, they both were able to redefine their political objectives and develop civil and military strategies that supported these political goals. The result was two rare successes in the fight against insurgents in the 20th Century. More importantly, the lessons learned from these examples helped validate the key components of counterinsurgency and are still relevant to the U.S. national security strategy today. While the struggle against irregular forces will always be likened to “eating soup with a knife,” a close historical study of past efforts of counterinsurgency, especially Malaya and the Philippines, will certainly help widen the knife and thicken the soup.

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