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Before Small Wars: Early Thoughts on the Strategy of Colonial Warfare and Their Relevance

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the British precursors to C. E. Callwell's *Small Wars* and their prevailing views on the strategic dimensions of colonial warfare. It examines how the interplay between the theory of regular warfare and the practice of irregular operations contributed to shaping the emerging theory of small wars. Finally, it addresses the use of indiscriminate violence and its strategic rationale in managing the asymmetries inherent in wars of imperial conquest and pacification, highlighting the continuities between earlier small wars and modern counterinsurgency in the application of such violence.

KEYWORDS
Callwell; logistics; Wolsely; small wars; strategy

A Summary of Past Experience

Charles Edward Callwell's *Small Wars* has been credited with representing the starting point of the British approach to counterinsurgency and, more generally, with enshrining lessons of enduring validity for modern asymmetrical warfare.[1] It can be contended, though, that the treatise serves more as a recapitulation of the era of imperial wars of conquest than as the main intellectual foundation for further theorizing on COIN warfare. Of the three classes of conflicts encompassed by the term "small wars" as defined by Callwell, only that of "campaigns for the subjugation of insurrections, for the repression of lawlessness, or the pacification of territories conquered or annexed" stands as the likely antecedent of counterinsurgency operations as these are currently understood.[2]

Callwell indeed took care to point out that campaigns of conquest and annexation often passed through two distinct stages, the second represented by operations to stamp out a

diffuse resistance made "of ambushes and surprises, of murdered stragglers and of stern reprisals."[3] While such an observation blurs the boundaries between the aforementioned classes of campaigns, this second stage, made of counter-guerrilla operations, still differs significantly, with regard to the prevailing political circumstances, from the subsequent British experience of counterinsurgency warfare during the second half of the 20th century. Callwell's operations of pacification brought about the stabilization of the imperial edifices, leading the colonial expansion, while the majority of the internal conflicts between "insurgent groups and counter-insurgent security forces," on the rise after the end of the Second World War, are understood to have originated "in decolonization, in the global process of empire disintegration.[4] Therefore, the fundamental outlines of counterinsurgency operations in these two distinct periods might be perceived as analogous because, as stressed by Carl von Clausewitz, war has a grammar of its own: tactics converge while, as for the logic of war, the political aims dictating the nature and course of these conflicts differ between the historical phase of imperial conquest and that of decolonization.[5]

In countering the notion of "an apparent absence of any formal doctrine" shining through the British colonial operations of the period, Simon Anglim stressed how Callwell, in his effort to provide a strategic and tactical summary of colonial warfare, actually "reflected prevailing opinion as much as influenced it".[6] The array of experiences shaping the composition of *Small Wars* is notoriously wide, although together with the practical knowledge gained by the British Army on the various colonial battlefields, two major focal points could be singled out: the seminal importance of the French experience, chiefly represented by Hoche in Vendée and Bugeaud in Algeria and Callwell's enduring interest in the Russian operations in Central Asia.[7] The British experience in small wars, however, was not purely empirical: even though in campaigning in Africa and India "the experience of one war often was reversed by the next,"[8] thereby hindering the formulation of a comprehensive theory, there was already a consensus on a series of principles conveyed by a body of literature Callwell drew upon extensively.

Small Wars as an Art by Itself

Even though he resorted to a term such as *small wars* which, by his admission, he was not entirely satisfied with—a loose label denoting "in default of a better, operations of regular armies against irregular, or comparatively speaking irregular, forces"[9]—Callwell is credited with being the first to have recognized small wars as a branch of the military art separate from conventional war, thus striving to "demonstrate that small wars should be accorded a professional status equal, if not superior to, continental soldiering."[10] According to his famous dictum, "the conduct of small wars is in fact in certain respects an art by itself, diverging widely from what is adapted to the conditions of regular warfare, but not so widely that there are not in all its branches points which permit comparisons to be established".[11]

Such a stance was hardly original: Garnet Wolseley had already spoken of "savage warfare" as "an art in itself", going as far as to declare that "almost all our colonial misfortunes during the reign of Queen Victoria, are to be accounted for by the fact that we have attempted to fight great warlike native races with the same formal tactics as those which succeeded at Waterloo».[12] Therefore, it can be concluded that the kind of regular warfare small wars had to depart from, while retaining some of its principles of enduring validity,

was the sort of post-Napoleonic warfare expounded by the Archduke Charles, William F. P. Napier and especially Antoine de Jomini; and summarized in Great Britain by textbooks such as MacDougall's *The Theory of War* and, chiefly, Hamley's hugely influential *The Operations of War*.[13] Albeit without being dogmatic, Patrick L. MacDougall and Edward B. Hamley were rather conservative interpreters of the Jominian thought. In *The Theory of War* the principles of war pinpointed by the author amounted to three fundamental rules, reflecting a strict focus on the operational level of strategy: "to places masses of your army in contact with fractions of your enemy"; "to operate as much as possible on the communications of your enemy without exposing your own"; "to operate always on interior lines".[14] Of these principles, Hamley would offer a more articulate and detailed discussion, for example, illustrating, by means of an analysis of the 1849 campaign of Novara, the advantage for an army to operate "on a front perpendicular to the line communicating with its base" instead of parallel to it.[15] The fact that this very same analysis—quoted *verbatim* by Luvaas because paradigmatic of Hamley's approach—has already been cited by Reginald da Costa Porter in his 1881 essay demonstrates its influence on British strategic thinking in the 1870s and 1880s.[16]

Da Costa Porter's "Warfare against Uncivilized Races" can lay claim to the distinction of being the first comprehensive British essay dedicated to the realities and specific exigencies of colonial warfare. Although it is overwhelmingly rooted in the experience of the Zulu War of 1879—the only campaign the author took part in before his untimely demise in 1882[17]—it stands apart from the histories of single campaigns, such as Brackenbury's semi-official history of the Ashanti War and Rothwell's official narrative of the Zulu War, insofar as it attempts to identify "certain main principles" common to all campaigns "which may serve as guides in future cases".[18] It is also safe to assume that Da Costa Porter's approach, albeit carefully eschewing any criticism of the strategic orthodoxy of the day, exemplifies the process of building a theory of small wars by deducing from regular warfare principles those that could still be applied to irregular warfare, linking them up with the lessons learned on the battlefield: this process would be crowned by the publication of Callwell's *Small Wars*. In such a fashion, the author first made mention of the disadvantage of operating on a front parallel to one's own line of communication, stressing that, to a certain extent, this was the case with the 3rd Column stationed at Helpmekaar and depending upon the Helpmekaar-Durban line, whose Greytown-Helpmekaar section ran parallel to the Zulu boundary.[19] Then, he took care in highlighting that in savage warfare the enemy had "usually […] no fixed whereabouts" and he was "almost entirely independent of lines of communication", which made "his movements freed from the restraint of civilized armies".[20] This trait had profound implications, not only for offensive, making a futile exercise out of any attempt of maneuvering in order to threaten the enemy communications:[21] "protect[ing] our line of communications from attack" carried out by an enemy endowed with such a latitude of movement was "frequently impossible" as well.[22] Therefore, the analysis proposed by these first theorists of colonial warfare tentatively moved back and forth between two poles: the reassurance that even in "the peculiar conditions of campaigns in savage countries, many of the ordinary rules of warfare do still apply in the majority of cases"; and, as Wolseley put it, the fact that "the theory of war as we learn it from books is an excellent servant, but to him who obeys its orders literally it is often the falsest and most fatal of masters."

The Capture of Whatever They Prize Most

Hamley had observed that "whenever the *causa belli* is something less definite and tangible than disputed territory […] the acquisition of some material guarantee can alone be expected to bring the adversary to terms. That guarantee is generally sought in an enemy's capital" because "the occupation of its chief city paralyses a civilized country". True to the Napoleonic lesson, though, Hamley stressed that the mere possession of the enemy capital was not enough, and that a collapse of the enemy resistance was to be expected only when "the seizure of the capital is coupled with such ascendancy over the defensive armies […] that further resistance is felt to be hopeless".[23] But what to do, wondered Da Costa Porter—glossing Hamley obliquely—when faced, in a colonial context, with "the absence of a capital of prime importance to the country and "the peculiar nature of the enemy's army, which generally makes it quite impossible to ensure driving it before us"?[24]

On an operational level, the absence of organized bodies of regular soldiers occupying key positions in the theatre of war meant that there were no flanks, strictly speaking, which could be overturned, and as for a supposed outflanking movement, the already stressed absence of any significant enemy line of communication made it devoid of much of its strategic significance even if successfully carried out. Thus, if "strategy fails to ensure a successful conclusion to any series of operations," as Da Costa Porter put it, the solution must be sought at the level of moral forces: namely, by relying on the "combating and aggressive spirit on the part of the natives" which "will lead them sooner or later to attack any force that advances into the country."[25] Therefore, striking deep into the country, "prepared to give or accept battle wherever we may find the enemy" had to be assumed as the primary aim of colonial warfare,[26] to which Da Costa Porter added two strictly related objectives: directing the march upon "the king's residence" or "the chief stronghold of the nation"; and doing "as much material mischief as possible to the enemy […] by destroying his huts and crops, and seizing his cattle."[27]

Exasperating the enemy by systematically destroying the means of living of warriors and civilians alike went hand in hand with advancing "well into the interior of the enemy's country," and it might turn out to be the best way for compelling him to accept a set-piece battle. One of the chief features common to this early generation of theorists of colonial warfare was the striving to bring wars back to the conventional battlefield, where the European superior firepower could be most efficaciously brought to bear. As aptly stressed by Whittingham, Callwell himself "was not a theorist of counterinsurgency as we would understand the term today." In order to attain decisive results, "he believed that irregular warfare should be kept as 'regular' as possible."[28] Such an assertion clearly diverged from the population-centric/network-centric approach typical of the French school of counterinsurgency.[29]

The preceding remark is true for Da Costa Porter as well. In other words, what made these practitioners of imperial wars stand apart from the COIN theorists of a later age was the unwillingness to embrace the asymmetrical nature intrinsic to this class of conflicts. Rather, they thought it would be better to try to overcome it by aiming at a swift collapse of the enemy morale, to be obtained by forcing a series of symmetric engagements on the opponent, or resorting to widespread destruction, deprivation, and collective punishments. Whenever these efforts failed to bring about a decisive result, the specter of protracted war

was looked at in horror; and the elusive enemy of Da Costa Porter, described as "one of those brainless, back-boneless animals, which may be destroyed, but can scarcely be killed" anticipates the "protracted, thankless, *invertebrate* war" which, according to Callwell, showed up in "the quelling of rebellion in distant colonies."[30]

Such concerns raised by the nature of colonial warfare and the corresponding remedies were shared by Wolseley, whose recipe for a swift victory was based on both the attack on the king's residence or some other vital points of the country, provided there was any—and the deprivation of the enemy of his resources. According to Wolseley's dictum, quoted at length by Callwell,[31] "in planning a war against an uncivilized nation who have perhaps no capital, your first object should be the capture of whatever they prize most, and the destruction or deprivation of which will probably bring the war most rapidly to a conclusion." "Thus"—Wolseley continued—"the capture of their cattle and the destruction of their crops and of the grain stored in their kraals or villages in depriving them of food is most efficacious."[32] In any case, aside from the usual advice to "strike hard and strike quickly," Wolseley refrained from offering a comprehensive analysis of colonial warfare and its predicaments. The preface to the fourth edition of his *Soldier's Pocket-Book* unambiguously declared to deal "with all subjects connected with the actual practice of warfare, especially under those phases in which it is most commonly presented to us in our wide-extending Empire," then directing the reader interested in the study of science of war to "Sir Edward Hamley's most admirable work."[33] Thus, the nature and genesis of Wolseley's ideas on colonial warfare could be outlined only by taking into consideration an assortment of letters, articles, and memoranda. For instance, his recommendation to capture whatever the enemy prized most can be traced back to the planning and execution of the 1873-74 campaign against the Ashanti Empire. Already in the first memorandum submitted to Lord Kimberley[34]—of which no original copies survive, but whose text is preserved by Brackenbury in his history of the campaign—Wolseley stressed that, after freeing the British Protectorate from the Ashanti invaders, his intention was "to advance into the Ashanti territory and, by the seizure and destruction of Coomassie, strike a decisive blow at the Ashanti power."[35] A swift victory, followed by a timely retreat, was all the more essential because, as pointed out in a letter to his brother, "the season for operations is December, January and February, when inland the climate is by no means bad."[36] Judging from this letter and another one addressed to Evelyn Wood, it is also apparent that the first scheme submitted to the War Office envisaged a strike deep into the Ashanti Empire going up the Pra River, thus recycling the general concept of the 1870 Red River Expedition.

As noted by Adrian Preston, the first modern editor of Wolseley's diaries and journals —and hardly a sympathetic one—the Red River Expedition was "Wolseley's first independent command and a cameo of logistical planning […] left an indelible mark upon the few inflexible strategic concepts that Wolseley […] possessed."[37] That the basic scheme of the Gordon Relief Expedition had been borrowed, once again, from that earlier model was a notion already clear to its contemporaries.[38] Hence, Wolseley's ostensible lack of strategic inventiveness and inflexibility was subjected to harsh criticism in the aftermath of the campaign's failure, all the more because the choice of the Nile as a line of advance had been vehemently contested.[39] In the course of the acrimonious strategic debate, Lord John Hay had a point in highlighting that "obviously the proposal is made in the belief that the features and circumstances of the Nile in those parts are very similar to those presented to the Red

River Expedition"; and, such a similarity being untrue, he felt "compelled to report unfavorably on [the] proposed operation."[40] However, if considered in the context of what Daniel R. Headrick pointed out about river steamboats as the chief means of the European penetration in Asia and Africa,[41] Wolseley's insistence on choosing rivers as the main lines of advance seems less obtuse than usually suspected; and, I dare say, lends credibility to him as a strategist attuned to the realities of the day and sensible to the new possibilities offered by contemporary technological progress.[42]

In this respect, Preston's interpretive suggestion of Wolseley as the proponent of an amphibious strategy[43]—and his Ashanti Ring as something more than the mere outcome of a personalized approach to command, thus pitted against the continental school represented by the Indian Army—is intriguing, albeit not entirely devoid of pitfalls. Specifically, it is convincing that the "continental Indianization of British strategic policy seemed not only logical but unanswerable"; all the more so in view of the continental commitment pursued during the First World War, when the "land-powers capacities for defensive concentration and maneuver" backed by a "spreading web of interior railroads," as first practiced by the British in India, were fully brought to bear in the war against Germany.[44] *En passant*, and without wishing to hint at any kind of crude technological determinism, I believe that Preston's intuition is also substantiated by some broader facts: with the partial exception of the Ganges River—which, in any case, became increasingly difficult to navigate due to "massive deforestation, erosion and silting"—the other rivers of India were "too shallow or fickle to become major highways of steamer traffic."[45] Therefore, aside from the immediate imperatives of the defense of a vast continental landmass from the alleged Russian menace, there were multiple reasons for the development in India of a railway network—in turn giving rise to a new continental school of strategic thinkers—while the rest of the British Empire continued to be an essentially maritime network: one whose existence depended on the defense of the sea lines of communication. Nonetheless, in Frederick Roberts' letter quoted by Preston, where Roberts expressed his deep puzzlement at Wolseley's choice for the Nile route, the same also suggested the long-discussed Suakin-Berber route as an alternative.[46] Such a choice, though, would have implied the close cooperation of the Royal Navy in maintaining Suakin as the main base of operations, landing all the supplies the Expeditionary Corps would have needed in its advance along the Suakin-Berber route: the very option Wolseley had rejected, thus starting the feud with the Royal Navy already mentioned above.[47] Therefore, we see how the dividing line between the two "schools" of strategic thinking was more blurred than Preston maintained, and that Roberts himself still relied on a combined operations scheme when it came to offer an answer to the Khartoum quandary. I do not intend to argue that such a distinction between strategic approaches did not actually exist; only that, still at this stage, the difference rose to significance on specific issues, such as the war planning against Russia.[48]

Campaigns against Nature

In *Small Wars,* a long and detailed recounting of the Nile route, its salient features, and the difficulties encountered by the Relief Expedition was attached to the end of Chapter V as an example of the extent to which the organization of supplies weighed on colonial warfare.[49] Such a choice is hardly surprising, not only for his paradigmatic value— the author stressing that by the time the Desert Column reached Gubat, both that and the River Column had

become "practically inoperative […] on account of supply"[50] —but also because Callwell had a profound knowledge of the subject. At the time, he was assigned to the Intelligence Department, "in entire charge of matters in connection with Egypt and the Sudan" and had also been tasked with revising and completing Colvile's Official History.[51] Indeed, if one of Callwell's well-known dicta is that "it is perhaps the most distinguishing characteristics of small wars […] that they are in the main campaign against nature," the Nile Campaign was all the more relevant inasmuch as "it was essentially a campaign against nature, a struggle against the difficulties arising from supplying the wants of troops traversing great stretches of desert country."[52] Such a forceful statement might engender a common misconception: namely, that provided that all the difficulties related to the barrenness of the theatre of war were overcome, the fight proper would have had a foregone conclusion due to the technological and organizational superiority of the Europeans. The idea was already widespread back then, with Da Costa Porter candidly admitting that, as for the battle of Amoaful fought during the Ashanti Expedition, "by the small loss inflicted to our men […] I have been accustomed to regard the fighting as mere child's play"; this until a veteran had startled him by saying "that at one moment he thought matters very critical."[53] It seems that, due to his own field experience and by querying veterans of other colonial campaigns, Da Costa Porter had then changed his mind and come to the conclusion that "savage wars are fought against immense odds" to the point that "a feather would […] turn the scale." In other words, while concentrating enough forces on the battlefield would of course secure the victory, the challenge posed by colonial campaigns was precisely that of being able to concentrate enough forces, well fed and with enough ammunition, at the right moment. At Isandlwana, Da Costa Porter conversely concluded, "the scale was turned, the disaster occurred."[54]

The hair's breadth between victory and defeat in colonial warfare—or the feather capable of turning the scale, according to Da Costa Porter—was aptly expressed by Callwell who noted that "so great indeed are the difficulties that arise in many small wars from supply, that it becomes necessary to cut down the forces engaged to the lowest possible strength consistent with safety." Borrowing the words of Henry IV, the author thus concluded: "invade with a large force and you are destroyed by starvation, invade with a small one and you are overwhelmed by a hostile population."[55] Again, using the Zulu War as an example, Da Costa Porter noted that "nothing could be obtained by the country. Everything had to be carried; the army had to be absolutely self-supporting. And so it must be in all our native wars."[56] In consequence, any force had to be accompanied by a far larger logistic train than regular armies were accustomed to, and this had to be fed in turn, further compounding the strain. Thus, it seems plausible that a division of force might have represented an attempt to address and relieve such a logistical quandary. Indeed, Callwell observed that "the division of force in the theatre of war"—something generally considered a display of bad strategy in a regular war—was often necessary in small wars, citing supply concerns as one of the motives making such a division desirable. However, this does not appear to have been the chief reason justifying a similar course of action.[57]

According to Callwell, far more poignant in motivating a division were the diverging objectives of a campaign – for instance, an invasion of Afghanistan requiring two different lines of advance, one to Kabul and the other to Kandahar – and the goal of overawing the enemy with a show of force or even confusing his plans, so that "in attempting to cover all

points he covers none."[58] Already in Da Costa Porter's essay, it is made clear that "the first question which will strike every organizer of an expedition must be, shall I advance in one column, or in two, or in three?" The author never made mention of compelling logistic constraints in order to justify a splitting-up of the available forces: provided that "sufficient men are available to render each column strong enough for independent action"– and taken for granted, we may gloss, that the logistic apparatus was enough to support separate masses of soldiers – there were different considerations that "may induce us to use more than one line of advance."[59] The plan for the invasion of Zululand, subjected to a critical reappraisal by the author, provides the reader with one of these considerations: while Da Costa Porter predictably found fault in a scheme according to which the different columns had been mistakenly presumed to be strong enough to resist any attack on their own, he deemed that it was reasonable to expect that the moral effect engendered by such a division "have some weight even with a nation like the Zulus." More importantly, though, "by increasing the area of country occupied and devastated by our men, it was also thought that the rigour of war would the sooner be brought home to the natives, and a speedier conclusion to the war be brought about."[60] Although published three years after the disaster of Isandlwana, such an analysis remained consistent with Frederic Thesiger's[61] first memorandum addressed to Henry Bulwer,[62] in which the general identified "five main lines of advance from Natal and Transvaal into Zululand […] equally adapted for attack or defence," proposing to occupy all of them with an equal number of columns "thoroughly complete in every particular."[63] This arrangement would not only have ensured the defense of Natal from potential Zulu forays whose likelihood, we know, Chelmsford considered rather high;[64] in case of a general invasion of the Zululand it would have also made the British forces spread out on the enemy territory burning down the kraals, seizing the mealies and resorting to any means to compel the Zulus to accept a general engagement. This relatively reckless approach was shaped in Chelmsford by his particular experience of the kind of desultory warfare typical of the Ninth Frontier War against the Xhosas,[65] and by a more general over-reliance on the technological edge enjoyed by the British troops on the battlefield.[66] En passant, the very same over-reliance turned out to be fateful on more than one occasion: by studying the correspondence of William Hicks Pasha during the 1883 Sennar and Kordofan campaigns, it is quite apparent that Hicks duly recognized the low morale of the troops, the questionable competence of the European officers attached to his command and, still, showed confidence in the outcome, provided that his men merely learnt how to fire low at the enemy.[67]

As for Zululand, the concern of the British general commanding officer was to prevent the enemy from evading a decisive battle, but aside from Chelmsford's specific miscalculations, this remained the chief concern of colonial warfare *en général*. As we already pointed out, Da Costa Porter stressed that against so mobile enemy such as that represented by the "savage" nations – one not constrained by the customary burden of maintaining lines of communication – any strategical combination was useless: after examining the opening stages of the Zulu War he further reiterated the concept by pointing out that "no stress should be laid upon the strategical importance of the movement." The "only comparative certainty of meeting the enemy" lay in advancing deep into the enemy country and "bringing the rigour of war home to him."[68]

A Lesson They Will Not Forget

As already highlighted, success in colonial warfare depended on the ability to strike some kind of delicate balance between the two extremes of deploying a large force, which ran the risk of being crippled by the logistical constraints of a barren and underpopulated theatre of war, and a small force, flexible and commensurate with such a logistic challenge, but liable to be overwhelmed by the enemy numerical superiority. It is worth asking whether these early theorists of colonial warfare ever managed to realize that success also depended on striking another kind of balance: namely, between desultory and dragged-on operations, and levels of sheer violence liable to turn the scale and become counter-productive. Whittingham aptly noted that, according to Callwell, the conduct of small wars "justified a degree of violence that would not have been permissible in regular warfare."[69] In *Small Wars,* this level of violence was justified by two strictly-intertwined reasons: the need to attain a "moral effect […] often far more important than material success," brought about by operations "sometimes limited to committing havoc which the laws of regular warfare do not sanction,"[70] and the racist belief that such a moral effect was particularly impactful on the "lower races" because they were "impressionable" and "greatly influenced by a resolute bearing and by a determined course of action."[71] It is also apparent that, for Callwell, it was not just a matter of waging war in a fashion attuned to the alleged low levels of civilization of the savage nations, as was true in the recommendation "of bringing such foes to reason […] by the rifle and sword, for they understand this mode of warfare and respect it."[72] If the stress on the moral effect was aimed at swiftly bending the enemy will, thus overcoming the otherwise insurmountable advantages enjoyed by the natives, it is reasonable to conclude that such a moral effect was confidently presumed to be decisive: the savages were considered to be impressionable just because of their primitive nature, therefore their primitive polities were liable to be disarticulated by a sufficiently brutal display of force.

In a way, this conclusion was anticipated already by the writers preceding Callwell: in Da Costa Porter "the capture and destruction of the king's residence has usually sufficed at least to alter the character of the war" because if the native king inspires "awe, physical or superstitious, in the hearts of his subjects […] should he, however, fail in war, his potency vanishes at once."[73] By the time he was writing his essay, stressed Da Costa Porter, the validity of this assertion was shown by the examples of Kumasi, Ulundi, Sekhukhune's stronghold, and Magdala, representing either the king's residence, some kind of final place of resistance for the natives, or both.[74] The recourse to such vigorous measures, as the destruction of the king's residence and the burning of the crops, was dictated by the belief that "the savage on war path can seldom be influenced by mild measures. To spare his home and crops seems to him a sign of weakness, and generally acts as an inducement to hold out longer against our efforts."[75] Crop destruction was not exclusively aimed at disarticulating relatively organized polities like the Zulu Kingdom; for instance, in recounting his experience during the Kafir War of the 1850-53, colonel John C. Gawler made clear that preventing the Xhosas from "cultivating anywhere" represented an integral part of a strategy intended to eject them from their lands.[76] Indeed, the writings of this age pay lip service to the need to moderate the violence exercised in small wars. According to Da Costa Porter, "wanton and unnecessary cruelty […] should never be resorted to under any circumstances,"[77] thus anticipating Callwell's word of caution that "there is a limit to the

amount of license in destruction which is expedient"; a limit dictated by the purpose to "ensure a lasting peace" which could be achieved only if "the overawing and not the exasperation of the enemy is the end to keep in view."[78] Still, it is apparent that widespread violence and destruction were fundamental aspects of colonial warfare and, far from being considered reprehensibly indiscriminate, were openly advocated by its early theorists and practitioners in the name of achieving a swift and decisive victory.

In 1990, Thomas R. Mockaitis declared the employment of the minimum force as one of the "three broad principles" that shaped British counterinsurgency, stemming from the appreciation of the limits of military means in solving political problems.[79] The author made a neat distinction between modern counterinsurgency – that is, internal campaigns of pacification warranting only a highly selective exercise of violence – and Imperial small wars, whose external nature justified the use of methods of a far more indiscriminate nature.[80] This line of reasoning seems to be consonant with Callwell's limits as denounced by Porch, i.e., the over-reliance on operational solutions to disentangle political quandaries.[81] Despite the fact that Callwell had already dealt with operations for "subjugation of insurrections […] repression of lawlessness or […] pacification of territories,"[82] in turn justifying harsh measures in order to swiftly tackle such an *invertebrate* kind of war and make it come to a quick end, Mockaitis singled out the British experience in the Boer War, the Irish Troubles and the Amritsar as a watershed: episodes which forced "a change in the attitude of educated Britons towards acceptable conduct in warfare," thus strengthening the upholding of the rule of law in the subsequent counterinsurgency campaigns.[83] This being the case, Callwell's *Small Wars* would amount to something of a false start in the history of British counterinsurgency, which would rather trace its origins in the 1934 *Notes on Imperial Policing.*[84] Thus, the stepping stones of the modern counterinsurgency doctrine should more appropriately be identified in works such as Gwynn's *Imperial Policing,* with its apparent stress on minimum force. The latter also introduced the distinction, then reworked by Mockaitis, between small wars in which "no limitations are placed on the amount of force which can legitimately be exercised" and situations in which the Army "becomes the main agent for the maintenance of or for the restoration of order where civil control does not exist, or has broken down." It is relevant, though, that Gwynn considered the Army to be trusted to "act with good sense and restraint" insofar as it was timely called to intervene before the situation got out of hand, thus hinting at the legitimate use of more brutal means if warranted by the need to deal with a deteriorated situation.[85]

Recent scholarship has been increasingly critical of Mockaitis' interpretive framework, with David Frenc—the foremost advocate of the "nasty not nice" approach to counterinsurgency—challenging both the upholding of the rule of law and the use of minimum force by the British. The former was significantly curtailed by the use of the 1939 Emergency Powers Order-in-Council, giving colonial governors the power to declare a state of emergency and issue emergency regulations amounting to "a wholesale repudiation of many of the human rights enshrined in the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and "tantamount to police state control."[86] As for the latter, French stresses that, rather than minimum force, "coercion through exemplary force was everywhere the mainstay of British counter-insurgency policy"[87] forced resettlements and harsh means such as the "aerial proscription" employed in Radfan—that is, the strafing of herds and bombing of irrigation systems in order to deny the enemy the basic means of livelihood[88]—echoed the

seizure of livestock and the destruction of crops already advocated by Wolseley and Da Costa Porter. Therefore, rather than a hiatus between the slash-and-burn tactics typical of the small wars and the minimum force advocated by modern counterinsurgency, there is the strong suggestion of a substantial continuity, as for the use of indiscriminate violence aimed at beating the insurgents into swift submission, between the new methods of counterinsurgency and the old realities of Imperial wars of conquest and pacification.

Endnotes

1   As for *Small Wars* as the starting point of British counterinsurgency, see Daniel Whittingham, "'Savage Warfare': C. E. Callwell, the Roots of Counter-insurgency, and the Nineteenth Century Context," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, nos. 4–5 (2012): 592, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2012.709769. As for Callwell's enduring relevance, see the Introduction by Douglas Porch in Colonel C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars. Their Principles and Practice. Third Edition* (University of Nebraska Press, 1996), v, vii-viii, xvii.

2   C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars. Their Principles and Practice. Third Edition* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1906), 26.

3   Callwell, 26.

4   Martin Thomas and Gareth Curless, eds. T*he Oxford Handbook of Late Colonial Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 1.

5   Carl von Clausewitz, *On War. Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret* (Princeton University Press, 1976), 605.

6   Simon Anglim, "Callwell versus Graziani: How the British Army Applied 'Small Wars' Techniques in Major Operations in Africa and the Middle East, 1940–41," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no. 4 (2008): 592, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310802462455.

7   Daniel Whittingham, *Charles E. Callwell and the British Way in Warfare* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 49; Douglas Porch, C*ounterinsurgency. Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 4-8, 18-23. In view of Porch's avowed polemical target, i.e. the American approach to COIN doctrine enshrined in the *FM 3-24* and its allegedly distorting effect on the ability of waging conventional operations, *Counterinsurgency* must be approached with caution; nevertheless, the author's remarks on Callwell's facile simplification of the operations in Vendée, as well as on Bugeaud's *razzia* as the immediate forerunner – only slightly reworked by Hubert Lyautey – of the population-centric approach typical of modern COIN doctrine, are sound. For a critical reappraisal of Callwell's views on Russian operations, see Alexander Morrison, "The Extraordinary Successes which the Russians have achieved – The Conquest of Central Asia in Callwell's Small Wars" in *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, nos. 4-5 (2019): 913-936, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2019.1638548. As for Callwell readily gauging the importance of seizing fixed positions in the ultimate success of the Russian strategy, see Alex Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia 1800-1917* (Routledge, 2006), 60-61.

8   Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army: British Military Thought, 1815-1940* (Cassell, 1965), 200.

9   Callwell, *Small Wars*, 21.

10   Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, 50.

11   Callwell, *Small Wars*, 23.

12   Garnet Wolseley, "The Negro as a Soldier," in *The Fortnightly Review*, No. CCLXIV. New Series. – December 1, 1888, 702-703.

13   Luvaas, *Education of an Army*, 102-103, 139-141.

14   P. L. McDougall, *The Theory of War. Illustrated by Numerous Examples from Military History. Third Edition* (Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862), 51. As for the purely Jominian lineage of the emphasis on interior lines, see the "Maxims on Lines of Operations" in Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War by Baron the Jomini. Translated from the French by Capt. G. H. Mendell and Lieut. W. P. Craighill* (J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1862), 114-123.

15   Edward Bruce Hamley, *Operations of War. Explained and Illustrated, Fourth Edition* (William Blackwood and Sons, 1878), 76.

[16] Luvaas, *Education of an Army*, 142; Reginald Da Costa Porter, R.E., "Prize Essay 1881. Warfare against Uncivilised Races: or, How to Fight Greatly Superior Forces of an Uncivilised and Badly-Armed Enemy," in *Professional Papers of the Corps of Royal Engineers, edited by Mayor R. H. Vetch, R.E., Royal Engineer Institute, Occasional Papers*, Vol. VI, 1881 (Published for the Royal Engineer Institute by Edward Stanford, 1882), 306.

[17] Luvaas, 306. Despite Da Costa Porter's assertion of having frequently mentioned "the wars in New Zealand, Abyssinia, Ashanti and Afghanistan," the examples taken from these campaigns are sparse and most of the concepts are illustrated through episodes taken from the Zulu War.

[18] Luvaas, 305-306. As for the mentioned histories of campaigns, see Henry Brackenbury, T*he Ashanti War. A Narrative Prepared from the Official Documents by Permission of Major-General Sir Garnet Wolseley* (William Blackwood and Sons, 1874); *Narrative of the Field Operations Connected with the Zulu War of 1879. Prepared in the Intelligence Branch of the Quartermaster-General's Department* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1881).

[19] Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 306-307.

[20] Da Costa Porter, 311.

[21] Da Costa Porter, 316. Da Costa Porter remarks that "the absence, or comparative unimportance, of the enemy's line of communication destroy the chance of using strategical combinations (in the higher sense of the word)."

[22] Da Costa Porter, 312.

[23] Hamley, *Operations of War*, 50-51.

[24] Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 309.

[25] Da Costa Porter, 310.

[26] This recommendation will be reworked in a more articulated fashion by Callwell: "in a small war the only possible attitude to assume is, speaking strategically, the offensive. The regular army must force its way into the enemy's country and seek him out. It must be ready to fight him wherever he may be found." See id., *Small Wars*, 75.

[27] Da Costa Porter, 312.

[28] Whittingham, *Callwell and the British Way*, 40.

[29] Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, 20-24, 52-56.

[30] Callwell, *Small Wars*, 27; Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 310.

[31] Callwell, *Small Wars*, 27.

[32] Garnet J. Wolseley, *The Soldier's Pocket-Book for Field Service, Fourth Edition* (MacMillan & Co., 1882), 398. The section dedicated to colonial warfare, under the heading of "Wars in Bush or Hill Country with Savage Nations" appeared in this edition for the first time and was slightly reworked for the Fifth Edition of 1886.

[33] Wolseley, iii.

[34] John Wodehouse, 1st Earl of Kimberley (1826-1902), Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1870-74 and again in 1880-82; see, John Powell, "Wodehouse, John, first earl of Kimberley," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36987.

[35] Brackenbury, *Ashanti War*, vol. I, 117.

[36] "Wolseley to Surgeon Major Richard Wolseley," in Ian F. W. Beckett, ed., *Wolseley and Ashanti. The Asante War Journal and Correspondence of Major General Sir Garnet Wolseley, 1873-1874* (The History Press for the Army Records Society, 2009), 57.

[37] Adrian Preston, ed., *In Relief of Gordon. Lord Wolseley's Campaign Journal of the Khartoum Relief Expedition 1884-1885* (Hutchinson & Co., 1967), xvii-xviii.

[38] On April 25, 1884, Lord Hartington, the then Secretary of State for War, wrote to Sir Frederick Stephenson, first GOC of the British Army of Occupation in Cairo, stating that "Lord Wolseley

has underrated the difficulties of the Nile route, relying very much as he does on the experience under different conditions of the Red River Expedition." The letter is reproduced in Bernard Holland, *The Life of Spencer Compton, Eighth Duke of Devonshire* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), vol. I, 451.

39 As for the so-called "Battle of the Routes" preliminary to the planning of the campaign, see Halil Kochanski, *Sir Garnet Wolseley. Victorian Hero* (The Hambledon Press, 1999), 156-157.

40 Vice-Admiral Hay was the then Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Station. His letter, addressed to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty and based on the report made by Commander T. F. Hammill, is reproduced in H. E. Colvile, *History of the Soudan Campaign. Compiled in the Intelligence Division of the War Office* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1889), Part I, 37-38.

41 Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire. Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1981), 18-19.

42 Rather the opposite of the figure sketched by Ian Hamilton, that of a "leading soldier of the greatest industrial nation of the nineteenth century" re-embarking "upon the methods of the ninth century." Hamilton might have a point as for the untimely and chaotic organisation of the Camel Corps entrusted with the dash through the Bayuda Desert, but as a former Indian officer and protégé of Lord Roberts, his opinion was anything but unbiased; see Ian Hamilton, *Listening for the Drums* (Faber and Faber, 1944), 176-177.

43 On this point also see, Adrian Preston, "Frustrated Great Gamesmanship: Sir Garnet Wolseley's Plans for War against Russia", 1873-1880, in *The International History Review* 2, no. 2 (1980): 239-240, https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.1980.9640213.

44 Adrian Preston, "Wolseley, the Khartoum relief expedition and the defence of India, 1885-1900", in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 6, no. 3 (1978): 257-258, https://doi.org/10.1080/03086537808582510. As for the shift of the British strategy from the "limited/maritime construct" shaped by Julian Corbett to a full continental commitment along the lines of a "German strategy", see Andrew Lambert, T*he British Way of War. Julian Corbett and the Battle for a National Strategy* (Yale University Press, 2021), 307-335.

45 Headrick, *Tools of Empire*, 23.

46 "Reinforcements could only reach them *via* Suakim [sic], and under the most favourable circumstances, several weeks must elapse before a properly equipped force could march to Berber. I could never understand why Wolseley insisted upon the Nile route." See "Roberts to Grant Duff", in Brian Robson, ed., *Roberts in India. The Military Papers of Field Marshal Lord Roberts 1876-1893* (Alan Sutton for the Army Records Society, 1993), 316.

47 See above, notes 39 and 40.

48 Based on what Preston stated in his "Frustrated Great Gamesmanship", Beckett recently suggested that Wolseley's amphibious vocation amounted to championing the idea "that any war fought against Russia should be primarily amphibious and aimed at peripheries such as the Baltic Sea, Black Sea, or the Turkestan/Caspian area. Any posture adopted by the Indian army should be primarily offensive": see, Ian F. W. Beckett, *A British Profession of Arms. The Politics of Command in the Late Victorian Army* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 74-75. I may add, though, that Wolseley's stance was liable to play into the hands of those in India who upheld a strategy of "masterly inactivity", as opposed to the supporters of a "forward policy" like Roberts.

49 Callwell, *Small Wars*, 68-70.

50 Callwell, 70.

51 C. E. Callwell, *Stray Recollections* (Edward Arnold & Co., 1923), vol. I, 318-322. According to the author, in addition to completing the History after Colvile fell ill and proved unable to bring the work to a conclusion, Callwell was also tasked with expunging the opening chapters Sir Evelyn Baring had taken exception to on the grounds that "they went into political matters relating to the events which had led up to the expedition […] and […] they conveyed an entirely false impression as to some aspects of those political matters."

52 Callwell, *Small Wars*, 44, 68.

53 Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 338-339.

54 Da Costa Porter, 338.

55 Callwell, *Small Wars*, 60.

56 Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 321.

57 Callwell, *Small Wars*, 109: "supply is a great difficulty, and only a certain amount of supplies can be moved along a particular route within a given time."

58 Callwell, 108-110.

59 Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 317.

60 Da Costa Porter, 317.

61 Frederic Augustus Thesiger, 2nd Baron Chelmsford, after the death of his father on October 5, 1878. Henceforth addressed as such.

62 Lieutenant Governor of the Colony of Natal (September 1875 to April 1880); see John Laband, *Historical Dictionary of the Zulu Wars* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 22.

63 John P. C. Laband, ed., *Lord Chelmsford's Zululand Campaign 1878-1879* (Alan Sutton Publishing for the Army Records Society, 1994), 6.

64 "Lieutenant-General Thesiger the Hon. F. A. Thesiger to Colonel F. A. Stanley", in Laband, 13.

65 John Laband, *The Shadow of Isandlwana. The Life and Times of General Lord Chelmsford and his Disaster in Zululand* (Greenhill Books, 2023), 204-205.

66 "I am induced to think that the first experience of the power of the Martini Henrys will be such a surprise to the Zulus that they will not be formidable after the first effort": KZNA, *Wood Mss, II/2/2, Chelmsford to Wood*, 23 Nov. 1878, quoted in Beckett, *Profession of Arms*, p. 201.

67 "I never in my life saw such a rabble – like a flock of frightened sheep. […] If my Egyptians only stand firm I am prepared for 40.000. I learnt 'stand firm' – 'fire low' in Arabic and […] I went up and down the ranks while they were firing, quietly repeating these two short sentences"; see M. W. Daly, ed., *The Road to Shaykan: Letters of General William Hicks Pasha written during the Sennar and Kordofan Campaigns, 1883* (University of Durham, Occasional Papers Series No. 20, 1983), 35, 87.

68 Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 315, 317.

69 Whittingham, "Savage Warfare," 594.

70 Callwell, *Small Wars*, 42.

71 Callwell, 72. See also 78: "The records of small wars show unmistakably how great is the impression made upon semi-civilized races and upon savages by a bold and resolute procedure."

72 Callwell, 41.

73 Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 312.

74 Da Costa Porter, 311.

75 Da Costa Porter, 315.

76 Colonel Gawler, late 73rd Regiment, "British Troops and Savage Warfare, with Special Reference to the Kafir Wars", *RUSI. Journal* 17, no. 75 (1873): 925, https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847309433598.

77 Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 315.

[78] Callwell, *Small Wars*, 41-42.
[79] Thomas R. Mockaitis, "The Origins of British Counter-insurgency", in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 1:3 (1990): 211, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592319008422956.
[80] Mockaitis, 211-212.
[81] Porch in Callwell, *Small Wars*, xv.
[82] See above, note 3.
[83] Mockaitis, "Origins of British Counter-insurgency", 212.
[84] *The National Archives*, WO 279/296.
[85] Charles W. Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (MacMillan and Co., 1939), 2-3, 14-15.
[86] David French, "Nasty not Nice: British Counter-insurgency Doctrine and Practice, 1945-1967", in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 23:4-5 (2012): 748, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2012.709763.
[87] French, 751.
[88] French, 752.

Sabotage From the Sea: The U.S. Navy's Guerrilla Force in China During WWII

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ABSTRACT

Unbeknownst to many, the U.S. Navy raised an irregular army in China during World War II by training Nationalist guerrillas through the Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO). This paper examines SACO as a case study in unconventional warfare, drawing lessons from the China Theater to inform contemporary large-scale combat operations (LSCO) in denied or contested environments. It analyzes how guerrilla forces can impose strategic costs, enable deep operations, and complicate adversary control through asymmetric means—including population disruption and counterinsurgency responses. The SACO experience demonstrates how indigenous guerrilla networks, when supported by external actors, can tie down enemy forces, gather critical intelligence, and shape operational outcomes. By bridging historical insights with today's operational realities, this paper argues that unconventional warfare remains a vital complement to LSCO planning, particularly in regions like East Asia where terrain, civilian populations, and logistical constraints mirror those of wartime China.

What began as a plan to establish weather stations in mainland China to support the U.S. Pacific Fleet quickly evolved into a vast resistance network aligned with Chinese guerrillas, disrupting Japanese forces across the country. The Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO, pronounced "Sock-O") was a bilateral partnership between Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government and the U.S. Navy. It merged Chinese intelligence networks with American resources to create a combined-joint command capable of executing the full cycle of find, fix, and finish against Japanese targets. SACO initially focused on weather reporting but gained momentum after integrating with the Nationalists' intelligence apparatus. The result was a coordinated effort that forced Japan into a strategic dilemma: confront the U.S. naval fleet in the East or face Allied armies advancing from the West.

Despite significant challenges within the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater, by the end of World War II, SACO's efforts culminated in measurable success and demonstrated the

potential of future U.S.-backed guerrilla warfare campaigns. With only 2,500 U.S. personnel, SACO managed to train nearly 100,000 guerrillas by mid-1945.[1] The development of necessary infrastructure, training camps, and theater-wide permissions took several years, but paid off once SACO was fully operational by 1944.[2] Although SACO was originally focused on meteorology and intelligence, its leadership ultimately exceeded expectations and fulfilled a broader strategic directive. SACO's integration with China's intelligence network and shifting U.S. strategic priorities allowed it to become a key actor in guerrilla warfare operations. As guerrilla columns were trained, they gained notoriety for sabotage, target acquisition, and their ability to disrupt large conventional forces on land and at sea.

SACO is a remarkable, yet often forgotten, piece of history that serves as a case study for the use of U.S.-supported guerrilla warfare with the Republic of China (ROC) against an overpowering aggressor—characterized by Japan yesterday, and potentially the People's Republic of China (PRC) tomorrow. Like most crisis-generated WWII special operations, SACO was dissolved after the war ended. Still, SACO presents a unique case study to examine the challenges of bureaucratic infighting, coalition-building with national parties in political turmoil, and the factors that made the organization effective. This article uses qualitative research with select primary sources in a historical narrative to demonstrate how SACO's mission, organizational model, challenges, and overall results provide an example of the advantages and risks relevant to unconventional warfare today. SACO's unique U.S.-ROC partnership against an occupying power highlights enduring challenges—particularly relevant amid growing tensions between the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, and the United States: contested logistics, command and control, population control, and cost imposition.

From Weather Stations to Guerrilla Armies: SACO's Mission

In 1939, Commander Milton "Mary" Miles had returned from the Asiatic Fleet and was serving on the Navy's Interior Control Board (ICB) in Washington, D.C. He had previously served in China on the Yangtze River Patrols, beginning in 1922 and again in 1934.[3] His experience fostered a deep fascination with Chinese culture, and he became fluent in Mandarin during his deployments. In 1941, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest King directed Commander Miles to "go to China and set up some bases as soon as you can for the U.S. Navy landings in three or four years. In the meantime, do whatever you can to help the Navy and to heckle the Japs."[4] Acting on broad marching orders, Miles began by meeting his intelligence counterpart.

Upon arriving in China, Miles met with the U.S. Naval Attaché, Colonel James McHugh, and then went to meet Dai Li, the head of the Military Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (MBIS). Dai Li was Chiang Kai-shek's chief of intelligence, known for his vast network across China and his fervent loyalty to Chiang—particularly in tracking Chinese communist activity and defending against Japanese forces. Prior to 1941, Dai Li had worked closely with Britain to train a guerrilla force tasked with conducting sabotage operations against Japan. However, the scheme ultimately failed, as Dai Li was deeply suspicious of outside organizations with colonialist pasts and was determined to maintain operational control over all actions taken within China.

Milton's success depended heavily on his ability to gain Dai Li's trust. Upon their first meeting, Miles understood the importance of rapport and gift-giving within Chinese culture, presenting Dai Li with a camera and a snub-nose revolver similar to his own. This simple act conveyed the message that he saw Dai Li as an equal he respected, not a subject to exploit for his own purposes. Following that meeting, James McHugh, the Naval Attaché, wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, "[Miles] has seen and done things I never thought any foreigner would be able to do."[5] Miles' cultural fluency, language skills, and ability to build rapport were critical to securing a foothold in China's intelligence network.

Within weeks, Miles set off on an expedition to survey the Chinese coast. The expedition aimed to provide Admiral King with an initial report on Japanese control and the potential for establishing weather stations throughout southern China. During those weeks, Miles came to grasp the scale of Dai Li's intelligence network—and with it, an opportunity to rapidly expand U.S. influence in China's guerrilla campaign. On June 9, 1942, after arriving in Pucheng to meet with members of the Military Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (MBIS), their presence in the city was compromised, and Japanese aircraft continued bombing runs through the area.

It was at this moment that Dai Li offered Milton Miles the key to what would become a combined-joint U.S.-Sino irregular warfare campaign. Dai Li proposed that Miles help train 50,000 guerrillas to fight the Japanese. In return, Dai Li would help establish weather stations, provide intelligence, and appoint Miles a general in the Chinese Army to assist in commanding irregular forces.[6] Understanding Admiral King's intent—and recognizing the rare opportunity offered by Dai Li—Miles agreed. He saw his initial objectives evolve from weather reporting into the creation of a combined-joint organization with tangible operational impact. Together, they saw real potential to coordinate resistance against Japan's occupation and to attrit Japanese forces through sustained guerrilla pressure.

China was well-positioned for guerrilla warfare. Since the fall of the Chinese empire in 1911, the country had endured feuding warlords, economic hardship, and an internal civil war between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists. While China had a large population willing to fight, it lacked institutional training and resources. In 1937, following near extinction at the hands of the Nationalists and occupation by the Japanese, Mao Zedong wrote *On Guerrilla Warfare*. In his essay, he astutely notes:

> Guerrilla warfare has qualities and objectives peculiar to itself. It is a weapon that a nation inferior in arms and military equipment may employ against a more powerful aggressor nation. When the invader pierces deep into the heart of the weaker country and occupies her territory in a cruel and oppressive manner, there is no doubt that conditions of terrain, climate, and society in general offer obstacles to his progress and may be used to advantage by those who oppose him. In guerrilla warfare, we turn these advantages to the purpose of resisting and defeating the enemy.[7]

While China did not have the materiel or training necessary, it could leverage its advantages in manpower and territorial size to hamper Japanese military objectives. When paired with U.S. training and coordinated with "the operations of… regular armies," China would be positioned to resist—and eventually overcome—Japanese occupation.[8] In light of the advantages of a U.S.-Sino partnership, Milton Miles and Dai Li shaped a mission for their organization. The two men began formalizing the partnership, drafting a bilingual

document that combined Chinese military and U.S. naval interests: establishing an organization to train, equip, and conduct guerrilla warfare, in addition to intelligence collection and weather forecasting. On April 1, 1943, the agreement for the Sino-American Special Technical Cooperative Organization (later shortened to SACO) was signed and approved by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Chinese Nationalist President Chiang Kai-shek.[9]

Organizing a Combined-Joint Agency

Dai Li was designated as the director of SACO, and Captain Miles was appointed as the deputy director, but both had veto power for major decisions.[10] Appointing a Chinese director was essential to maintaining the partnership, given China's historic distrust of foreign motives rooted in past alliances. Given the divergent goals that often accompany irregular warfare, carefully structured frameworks are essential for building mutually beneficial partnerships. This structure dignified the Chinese position and ensured they were fully invested, while incorporating checks and balances to align each nation's goals. For Dai Li and Miles, their roles were distinct, but they shared operational decisions. Both leaders maintained administrative control of their respective countries' soldiers, but operational decisions were first mutually agreed upon by both leaders and approved by Chiang Kai-Shek himself, with oversight from the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.[11] SACO's chain of command shifted after General Stilwell was replaced by General Wedemeyer, who amended the agreement to place SACO under U.S. theater control rather than under Chiang Kai-shek.[12]

SACO slowly expanded from its headquarters in Happy Valley near Chungking, ultimately stretching from the edge of Indochina to Mongolia by the end of 1945. What began as a small schoolhouse to train guerrillas and intercept radio messages grew into a broader network, with the establishment of thirteen training camps, as shown in Figure 1. According to author Linda Kush in *The Rice Paddy Navy*:

> While the curriculum varied by location, all camps taught small arms, grenades, demolition, scouting and patrol, ambush, close-range fighting, and teamwork in the field. Camps close to water included instruction in coast watching, ship identification, mining, and underwater demolition, while those near air routes added aircraft identification. Soldiers likely to work in urban areas got special training in street fighting.[13]

Within Happy Valley, SACO mirrored traditional staff structures, appointing Chinese and American directors and deputies based on expertise, and eventually establishing a combined-joint headquarters to streamline communication.[14] As SACO established training camps, each one was placed near Japanese lines of control. Each camp partnered with guerrilla columns, allowing trainees to plan operations during instruction and join combat missions immediately after graduation.[15]
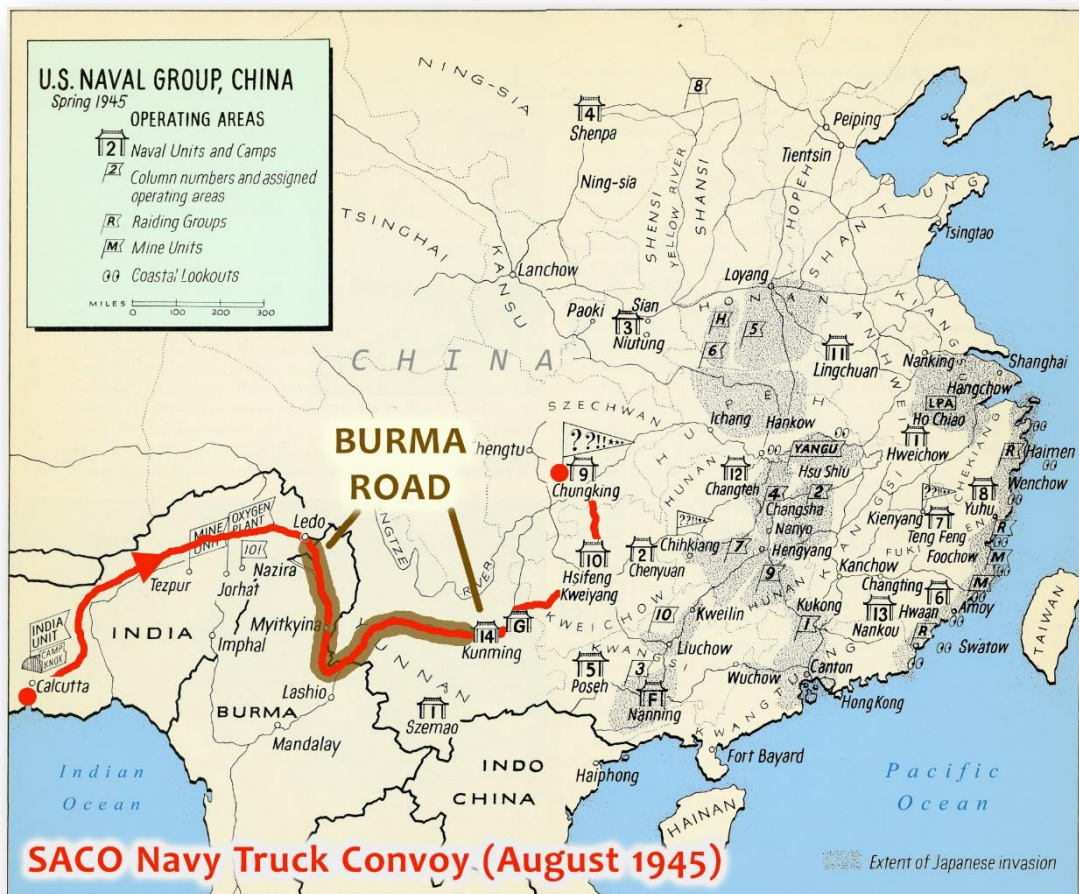
Figure 1: SACO Operations and Logistics Route by Spring 1945[16]

Although China offered vast terrain for operations, Captain Miles had to import nearly all equipment due to the country's limited internal resources. Japan controlled and closed the Sea Lines of Communication along the Chinese coast, making maritime supply routes inaccessible. As a workaround, U.S. forces shipped equipment to Calcutta, India, then airlifted it "over the Hump" of the Himalayas. Describing this route, the National Museum of the United States Air Force noted, "despite being the closest point for supply distribution, the Assam Valley in India was still 550 miles from China. To fly the 'Hump,' transport aircraft would take off from just 100 feet above sea level in India and climb at a drastic rate of 300 feet per minute until they reached 18,000 feet to navigate the Himalayan Mountains."[17]

Barbara Tuchman, in her biography of General Stilwell, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, emphasized that for every ton of munitions dropped by General Chennault's Air Force, 18 tons of supplies were required to support it. The Hump

alone caused approximately 13 plane wrecks per month, meaning that by the time materiel completed the journey—via ocean shipping, railroads, flights, and final transport by rivers and roads—much of it never reached the resistance forces at the end of the 13,500-mile trip.[18] Additionally, SACO had to compete for materiel with General Stilwell's forces, who were charged with outfitting 30 Chinese divisions.

From 1941 to 1945, there was no direct way to ship materiel to China. With no direct maritime option, SACO and the Navy relied entirely on the Army to transport personnel and supplies from India. SACO even contributed to the effort by supplying additional oxygen, which increased the Army's monthly tonnage capacity from 3,500 to 22,000 tons. [19] Unfortunately, SACO remained a low priority and received far less tonnage than General Stilwell had originally allocated.

This scarcity severely hindered U.S. efforts to support Chinese resistance forces and contributed to General Stilwell's relentless push to reopen the Ledo Road from India to China through Burma. The Allies lost control of the Ledo Road in the spring of 1942—the only land line of communication into China—and did not regain it until 1945.[20]

Despite its modest size, SACO required extensive logistical infrastructure to sustain operations across a wide geographic footprint. In response to transport delays, SACO established facilities in Calcutta, India, to hold personnel and equipment until they could be flown over the Hump. In India, SACO built housing for incoming personnel, a radio relay station, an oxygen plant to support air transport, and a printing facility for maps, training materials, and operational forms.[21] With the flow of personnel bottlenecked in India, these facilities enabled SACO to put idle staff to work until they could fly onward to headquarters.

Challenges for an Emerging Organization

SACO faced considerable challenges: it was a Navy unit operating in an Army-controlled theater, partnered with Chinese forces, and constrained by limited space and resources. Though united in their goal of defeating Japan, each party had different ideas about how to achieve it—and competed for influence wherever possible. In this environment, SACO struggled to execute its mission amid bureaucratic infighting, constrained logistics, and battlefield limitations. These challenges consumed valuable time and energy, ultimately reducing SACO's overall impact. By the time SACO was fully operational and capable of conducting large-scale guerrilla warfare, the Axis had fallen in Europe, and the Pacific war was winding down.

SACO's most significant obstacle was inter-service rivalry over who controlled the unit and its capabilities. Initially, Miles served as head of Naval Group China, operating under the U.S. Navy with oversight from the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater Commander, General Stilwell. General Claire Chennault, in a letter to Miles, captured the frustrations many leaders faced in the CBI Theater:

> I always found the Chinese friendly and cooperative. The Japanese gave me a little trouble at times, but not very much. The British in Burma were quite difficult sometimes. But Washington gave me trouble night and day throughout the whole war![22]

Under the SACO agreement, Miles reported directly to Chiang Kai-shek and the Joint Chiefs of Staff—not to the theater commander. This frustrated both General Stilwell, who eventually accepted it, and General George Marshall, who favored a consolidated command structure for land forces.[23] Miles also held the title of Chief Naval Observer at the American Embassy—a position the embassy interpreted as placing him under its authority. These overlapping chains of command—each with competing objectives—were further complicated by the arrival of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

Following Japan's strike on Pearl Harbor, "Wild" Bill Donovan, head of the OSS, moved quickly to establish an intelligence network in East Asia. Recognizing a gap in U.S. intelligence efforts in China, he sought to develop clandestine operations and intelligence collection directly under his command. Frustrated by the Navy's reliance on Chinese intelligence, Donovan envisioned a single, globally integrated network under U.S. control. Under his agent, Esson, he launched the "Dragon Plan," which aimed to build a network in China and along Japan's borders, ultimately using Korean partisans to operate against the Japanese mainland and occupied territories.[24]

However, with SACO already operating in China, Miles was designated the OSS coordinator for activities within the country. Like Donovan, Dai Li sought total control over intelligence and aimed to eliminate all foreign organizations outside his jurisdiction. By 1942, Dai Li succeeded in folding U.S. intelligence activities into the SACO agreement with the Nationalist government. At first, Donovan accepted this arrangement. The OSS even supported SACO by providing equipment and training, including 100,000 single-shot pistols known as Woolworths—a contribution the Navy would have struggled to procure independently.

Although initially cooperative with SACO to avoid Army interference, Donovan quickly resumed efforts to establish OSS autonomy. He resisted having OSS operations subject to Miles and Dai Li, particularly as he sought cooperation with the Chinese Communists—a prospect both SACO leaders rejected outright. On October 27, 1943, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued directive JCS 11/11/D, placing all OSS activities under the control of the relevant theater commander.[25] At this point, Donovan had alienated Miles but still needed a way to conduct independent operations in China—something neither Miles nor the Nationalists would permit. In a final effort to remove Miles, Donovan attempted to have him relieved from both SACO and the OSS. To protect Miles and preserve SACO's autonomy, Admiral King convinced President Roosevelt to promote him to Commodore—equal in rank to Donovan—and to remove him from embassy oversight. This move prevented the embassy from claiming him and ensured Donovan could not usurp his authority in SACO.[26]

One of SACO's greatest challenges involved defining the U.S. advisor role within the Chinese partner force. Dai Li initially insisted that American personnel train guerrillas but refrain from accompanying them into combat. He justified this as politically necessary and a matter of honor—arguing that Chinese forces would not tolerate U.S. trainers being killed under their watch. Critics of Dai Li, however, claimed this restriction allowed him to divert resources toward anti-Communist efforts instead of fighting the Japanese.[27] In the case of one instructor, he "led his guerrillas up to the moment of attack, at which point they shunted him to the rear for fear that he would be wounded or worse."[28] Under these conditions, SACO's American personnel could only provide equipment and instruction. After repeated mission vetoes and growing frustration, Dai Li eventually allowed U.S. servicemembers to

accompany guerrilla forces in the field. This marked a major turning point, transitioning SACO from an "advise-only" model to an "advise-and-assist" role—though the greatest resistance had come from the partner force itself.

The challenges SACO faced—interservice rivalry, logistical constraints, conflicting authorities, and friction with partner forces—remain highly relevant today. SACO's experience underscores both the enduring value and persistent challenges of irregular warfare in combined-joint, multi-domain environments.

The Effects From SACO

Within a few years, SACO's efforts bore fruit, emerging as the primary force harassing Japanese occupation forces in China. The organization grew to encompass thousands of guerrillas operating behind Japanese lines, supported by a vast intelligence network that extended as far as Tokyo. SACO's effectiveness expanded through its partnership with the 14th Army Air Force and by integrating U.S. advisors into combat missions with Chinese guerrilla units.

Shortly after Miles met General Claire Chennault, who led offensive air operations across China, it became clear their organizations would benefit from close coordination. Chennault's 14th Army Air Force, working with SACO photographers, captured aerial intelligence on enemy force dispositions.[29] When pilots were shot down—a common occurrence—SACO's network enabled rapid personnel recovery. Even OSS agents captured in Japanese-occupied Shanghai were sometimes recovered within ten hours. As Milligan recounts in *By Water Beneath the Walls*, "the bicycle couriers would deliver the [counterfeit] cash in exchange for the prisoner, unfold [a] second bicycle for the prisoner to ride, and lead him to a waiting agent outside the city."[30] Aerial intelligence and personnel recovery helped the conventional forces better understand their enemy and stay in the fight.

SACO's partnership with the 14th Army Air Force enabled effective ground-to-air communications and precision targeting. SACO advisors grew adept at coordinating with pilots, relaying intelligence, and guiding airstrikes via radio. At times, they used ground signals to identify specific strike points. With small teams of Chinese and American outposts known as coast watchers, the Army Air Force and Navy destroyed up to 141 Japanese ships.[31] In Xiamen (formerly Amoy), a major port in southern China, coast watchers directed bombers to strike an airfield, a fuel depot, and a Japanese destroyer. These naval targeting efforts—alongside harbor and riverine mine emplacements—forced the Japanese to reroute shipping to areas more vulnerable to submarine attack.[32] SACO's integrated intelligence and reporting were critical to naval and air operations in identifying and targeting enemy assets.

SACO's works of sabotage and guerrilla warfare successfully disrupted and fixed numerically superior Japanese forces, preventing their redeployment elsewhere in the Pacific. One summary, compiled by SACO veteran Roy Stratton from alumni records, reported that: "From June 1, 1944 to July 1, 1945, SACO guerrillas, at times led by Navy and Marine Corps personnel, killed 23,540 Japanese, wounded 9,166, captured 291… Destroyed 209 bridges, 84 locomotives…141 ships and rivercraft…Aided in the rescue of 30 Allied pilots and 46 air crewmen.[33] Accounts vary, but some estimates suggest up to 97,000 Chinese were trained and 71,000 Japanese killed.[34] The majority of these actions took place only in the last fourteen months of the Pacific Campaign.

In 1944, Column Four demonstrated SACO's operational impact. Over three months, the column ambushed a 10,000-man Japanese force, killing 967 with only 14 guerrilla casualties. [35] In one combined-joint operation, a SACO column utilized guerrillas as informants within the city to identify patterns of life and used sabotage to destroy Japanese stockpiles with the perception that the Japanese were surrounded. A force of 6,000 Japanese soldiers ultimately surrendered to a column of just 300 guerrillas. [36] At the end of the war, over 4,000 Chinese puppet troops (working for the Japanese) surrendered to SACO's First Guerrilla Field Unit in the span of a month. The guerrilla columns were conducting sabotage and ambushes in full force by the beginning of 1945.

SACO's operations demonstrated the asymmetric advantage of guerrilla warfare in secondary theaters. At the height of their operations, SACO saw a significant return on its investment, disrupting supply lines and the movement of Japanese units. Under darkness, Ensign John Mattmiller pushed off from shore on a "junk" boat with his four guerrillas in "Operation Swordfish" to sabotage a Japanese freighter in Amoy harbor. [37] From their boat, the guerrillas slipped into the water, quietly swimming to the freighter, attaching two magnetic limpet mines. Minutes after their return, the ship erupted in flames. Lieutenant Joe Meyertholen, a coast watcher in Amoy, coordinated airstrikes and ambushes that harassed 4,000 Japanese troops, reportedly reducing the force by 1,018. [38] Lieutenant Phil Bucklew, an experienced diver who had conducted coastal reconnaissance at Normandy and Salerno, planned an ambitious amphibious raid on Amoy Island. [39] His experience would prepare him for additional amphibious missions in the future, eventually establishing the Navy SEALs and becoming known as the father of Naval Special Warfare. [40]

From 1941–1945, U.S. and British conventional forces focused their efforts on the Ledo Road to secure a logistical land bridge that could supply China. During this period, Chiang Kai-Shek largely relied on Chennault's 14th Army Air Force to strike Japanese positions across China. With very little defense, intelligence, or ground support from conventional forces, SACO and the Chinese guerrillas filled a role that was crucial for disrupting Japanese forces. As historian Andrew Hargreaves of King's College London writes in *Special Operations in World War II*, the purpose of irregular warfare is "to compel the enemy to alter their force dispositions unfavorably and expend resources unnecessarily, tying up men and materiel in wasteful tasks." [41] Within this realm, SACO did an extraordinary job in their last year to attrit Japanese forces and keep them in China instead of reallocating them across the Pacific islands.

Contemporary Applications

SACO's experience during World War II offers a valuable case study for addressing the challenges of irregular warfare today. Its relevance spans enduring geographic challenges in East Asia, persistent inter-service friction over operational control, and the strategic utility of guerrilla warfare in both peripheral and primary theaters. For the ROC, the asymmetric characteristics of guerrilla warfare present a unique deterrent to the PRC.

As tensions rise in the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan continues to seek ways to deter aggression and defend the island. In January 2022, the ROC established the All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency (ADMA), envisioning a whole-of-society approach to supporting its national defense. Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, Taiwan has reinforced the population

with the tools and mindset for defending its country and resisting any occupiers. Just as Ukrainian civilians have sabotaged and impeded Russian advances, Taiwan aims to prepare its population for similar resistance in the event of a PRC invasion. In its 2023 *National Defense Report*, the ROC outlined a layered "all-out" defense strategy that integrates main forces, garrison units, reserves, and civil defense.[42] The ROC has shifted its defense strategy from primarily investing in high-tech defensive capabilities to include Integrated Air Defense System (IADS), ships, and airpower, to a comprehensive approach that uses the support of its public. SACO's intelligence network, which grew from Dai Li's FBI-like Military Bureau of Investigation and Statistics, provides a historical parallel. Similarly, the ROC is now identifying how to incorporate its population into a layered defense framework by building mobilization structures *before* conflict begins.

Logistics in a Denied Environment

Fundamental to guerrilla warfare is the necessity for a stable logistical backbone. Admiral King is famously credited with saying, "I don't know what the hell this 'logistics' is that Marshall is always talking about, but I want some of it."[43] For SACO, logistical challenges began with the complex task of shipping personnel and supplies across the Pacific Ocean, through India, and then flying materiel "over the hump" of the Himalayan Mountains. Hindered by mountains in the west and a Japanese-controlled coast on the east, all materiel and supplies were bottlenecked, limiting SACO's growth.

Today's contested regions present similarly difficult conditions. The ROC is confined to an island just over 100 miles from the PRC's coastline—approximately the same distance undertaken on D-Day for the Normandy invasion.[44] Since 2024, the PRC has significantly strengthened its IADS, extending coverage up to 300 nautical miles from its coast, severely limiting the ability to provide conventional support to the ROC if the PRC decides to blockade or isolate the island.[45]

Like SACO's experience of sustaining operations in a denied environment, modern guerrilla warfare requires a multi-faceted logistics strategy. Pre-conflict preparation is essential to any large conflict; guerrilla warfare depends on outlasting the enemy's will, which can only be done if they have the supplies to last.[46] During competition, to deter and prepare for potential conflict, the government must prepare secure stockpiles for food, ammunition, and equipment.[47] While much of this can be stored in centralized warehouses, it requires distribution across Taiwan to support local communities and potential guerrilla forces.[48] This can be supplemented with external support through pre-positioned stock. During wartime, guerrilla forces may find most of their auxiliary networks and materiel resupplied through battlefield recovery or acquisition, conducting raids and ambushes on supply lines to support their own unit.

Isolated regions like Taiwan also need to identify unconventional approaches to resupply and sustainable practices in agriculture and food production.[49] While traditional air resupply might not be feasible in the face of PRC IADS, materiel could be delivered in small quantities by unmanned, potentially autonomous vehicles with reduced signatures compared to larger ships or planes.[50] Likewise, building strong auxiliary and underground networks to sustain guerrilla forces will be essential. Learned by necessity, SACO understood the importance of developing its own infrastructure in the region to reduce dependence on external support and to build a close relationship with the native population.[51] Supporting networks can also

enable sustainable agricultural practices in remote areas and leverage additive manufacturing to produce drones, replace parts, and support continued combat operations.

Command and Control

The greatest sources of friction for SACO occurred at the strategic-to-operational levels, where political interest and service rivalry threatened SACO's capabilities.[52] SACO had to navigate competing demands from multiple entities—including each military service and the American embassy—all of which sought some degree of control, oversight, or influence over its activities. These competing interests significantly hindered operational efficiency. Much of the time spent by Miles and his staff was spent working on additional requirements and meetings to clarify the organization's command and control.

While there is a greater appreciation for combined-joint operations today, future crises will produce new organizations with novel command and control structures. Operational control of units needs to be clearly delineated and supported with the necessary resources to fulfill their mission. Although Operational Plans (OPLANs) often outline command structures in advance, they do not account for organizations established in response to changing conditions. For units to focus on combat operations, it is essential for higher elements to clearly define and set subordinate missions and subsequent requirements.

Training exercises and wargames tailored to contingencies in the South China Sea can help alleviate some of the issues experienced in Stilwell's theater of operations. Multinational Joint Chiefs of Staff exercises and strategic-to-operational level wargaming exercises both play a key role in identifying organizational tensions and defining clear delineations of command and control. In China during WWII, SACO took advantage of the shift in resources initially, while General Stilwell and later General Wedemeyer sought to keep control of both unit missions and resources. SACO's mission was effectively hindered because the bulk of its resources went to Army units, and Miles had to spend most of his time fighting for SACO autonomy and navigating the changes from theater commanders and the OSS. Bureaucratic infighting remains a risk today—particularly during conflict in a denied maritime environment, where operational resources may be diverted away from land-based or irregular forces.

Population Displacement in Relation to Guerrilla Warfare

It is important not only to study the role that SACO took in guerrilla warfare, but also Japan's response and subsequent counterinsurgency methods. Within China, Communist and other rebel forces switched from conventional-style attacks to guerrilla warfare. One Japanese soldier recalled, "wherever we went, we won. The difficulty was that although you beat the Chinese in one place, they were still everywhere else. Every night, we were liable to be harassed by guerrillas."[53] In 1940, the Communist forces organized a conventional assault known as the "Hundred Regiments" battle, taking the Japanese by surprise. While initially impactful, Japanese forces eventually repelled and broke down the Communists' conventional military, forcing them to return to guerrilla warfare. In turn, Japanese forces adopted a new counterinsurgency policy known as the "Three All"—kill all, burn all, loot all—which indiscriminately sought to destroy guerrilla safe havens and their civilian support networks.[54]

Beyond physical destruction, the policy emphasized the strategic use of population control and guerrilla warfare. Japan used a stronghold strategy, securing key lines of communication and urban centers to preserve resources and control the Chinese coast.[55] To break down areas of resistance, Japanese forces implemented population control measures to undermine the will to resist. While the utter destruction of towns was part of the counterinsurgency policy, it also involved massive relocations of people to other areas, including detainment and labor camps in China, Manchukuo, and Japan.[56] In the case of one border region, over 17,000 people were deported to Manchuria.[57] In total, 41,862 Chinese were "sent to become slave labourers in Japan."[58] Historian Mark Selden notes that by 1942, "in North China, Japanese intelligence sources estimated that the population of the base areas had shrunk by almost half from 44,000,000 to 25,000,000."[59] In addition to the physical removal of potential support for guerrillas, Japan also imported Japanese civilian workers to dilute the population and reduce potential areas of resistance.[60] Within population centers where the Japanese implemented such control measures, both SACO and the Chinese Communists had little leverage outside of intelligence collection. By the end of the war, there were one million Chinese and Koreans relocated to Japan, with 1.5 million Japanese (including soldiers) living within China.[61] The importation of Japanese workers and the relocation of Chinese civilians are often seen as practices of Japanese imperialism and colonization, but they also played a key role in their counterinsurgency campaign to reduce public support for guerrilla fighters.

Population displacement and control measures, historically used to deny support for guerrillas, continue to be effective tactics used today. Population control can significantly intimidate areas to limit interactions with guerrillas based on the opposing actor's control. Japan's tight control through the "Three All" policy in large urban areas significantly reduced the population's interactions with guerrilla forces. On the other hand, increased violence against the public can have the opposite of the desired effect, inciting more people to fight against the occupier. Russia has used population displacement and relocation heavily since 2022, removing Ukrainian civilians from the contested border regions. According to U.S. officials, in 2022, Russia had moved "tens of thousands," with local reports stating over 402,000 people had been removed from the conflict areas and placed in different camps within Russia.[62] Russian news reported that over 1.9 million people were deported from Ukraine into Russia, which could have a significant effect in undercutting public support against the Russian offensive.[63] Similarly, in the PRC's anti-extremism campaign in Xinjiang province, over 1.1 million Han government officials were imported to integrate with the local populace in 2017, while over 600,000 Uyghurs were relocated across China to work in government factories.[64] This population displacement is supplemental to the 10% of the Uyghur minority, approximately 1.8 million, that have been settled in "vocational and training centers."[65]

If Taiwan became forcefully occupied by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), it would be highly likely the PRC would establish similar population displacement procedures during stability operations in a counterinsurgency campaign. Forces like the People's Armed Police, which operates heavily in Xinjiang to enforce population control measures, would detain and relocate Taiwanese within areas conducive to guerrilla safe havens, also importing PRC civilian workers and officials into the large population centers to reduce the likelihood of coordinated resistance. For SACO, the guerrillas had the advantage of China's massive land

size to avoid total Japanese control. For Taiwan, the island's separation by the strait poses an advantage for now, but could quickly become a weakness if the PRC vied for total control.

The Cost Imposition of Guerrilla Warfare

The CBI Theater was not the primary, nor secondary, focus for Allied operations. As a coalition, the Allied forces balanced the Atlantic (European, North African, Mediterranean, Soviet fronts) and Pacific (CBI, Southeast Asia, Pacific Rim Islands) Theaters precariously. Prime Minister Churchill had adopted a peripheral strategy that directed the first half of WWII: to "weaken Germany by attacking its more vulnerable periphery, opening up new fronts in distant theaters… bringing new support for the British-French-Russian Triple Entente, while [forcing] Germany and the other Central Powers to rearrange their military and economic resources to the detriment of their western defenses."[66] Peripheral campaigns focused on airpower, guerrilla warfare, and attrition—militarily and economically—of the Axis' strength.[67]

The United States established a "Germany first" policy with England, looking to the war against Japan as secondary. As such, "The U.S. Army's main role in China was to keep the Chinese in the war through the provision of advising and materiel assistance. As long as China stayed in the war, hundreds of thousands of Imperial Japanese Army soldiers could be tied down on the Asian mainland."[68] In fact, it is recorded that at the height of occupation, over one million Japanese soldiers were in China, alleviating other fronts of the Pacific.[69] According to historian Max Hastings, the amount was estimated to be 45% of Japanese forces in China.[70] Engaged in a global war against the Axis, guerrilla warfare was instrumental in U.S. strategy through organizations like SACO to attrit and delay Japanese forces and eventually build momentum to provide additional options to take the offensive against the mainland of Japan. If war were to break out across the Taiwan Strait, units trained in unconventional and guerrilla warfare would provide both military options and an indigenous avenue for the people to defend themselves while sabotaging an occupying power.

Guerrilla warfare remains a relevant method that provides options to state and non-state actors seeking to avoid or amplify direct military confrontation. Prior to World War II and after, guerrilla warfare has been a major part of combat operations. During the Cold War, proxy warfare became the main instrument between the nuclear powers of the United States and the Soviet Union, as they supported nearby allies to shape the strategic environment. In the Korean War, guerrilla warfare was prominently used by the Chinese People's Volunteer Army, as well as the North Korean partisans that the United States supported in 1950 with the 8240th Army Unit under Eighth U.S. Army.[71] Similar guerrilla units were raised with the Mujahideen in Afghanistan and the Montagnards in Vietnam. In the 21st century, non-state and paramilitary forces are similarly used as a method to claim non-attribution and reduce direct military conflict. These smaller, asymmetrical units continue in organizations like the Chinese Maritime Militia, Yemen Houthis, or Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Conclusion

SACO represents a unique case study of U.S. guerrilla warfare during WWII within a periphery campaign, with a Chinese Nationalist leader as its director. From its inception, SACO was the Navy's reach into mainland China to provide intelligence, eventually trying

to capitalize on Dai Li's vast network to conduct guerrilla warfare.[72] SACO was plagued with logistical issues and competing interests from the U.S. military services and the OSS. Examining the Japanese occupation highlights the use of population control to reduce the viability of guerrilla warfare—while possibly having the unintended effect of encouraging local resistance. Ultimately, SACO reveals the potential that guerrilla warfare can provide in a secondary theater, utilizing the latent power of the indigenous population to harass the enemy, forcing them to dilute resources from other campaigns.

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Warfare in the Mountains to Wage War in the City: The Cypriot War of Independence and Lessons for Contemporary Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism

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Abstract

The Cypriot War of Independence is a critical case study for contemporary counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism (CT) studies. Given COIN and CT's ongoing significance, policymakers and practitioners benefit from theories developed from a wide range of case studies. Theories constructed from diverse examples are more likely to be useful and avoid the pitfalls of a narrow perspective. In the case of the Cypriot War of Independence, the hybrid rural-urban approach of the Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (EOKA) confounded British counterinsurgency efforts. While Britain failed in its COIN campaign in part due to a misreading of the insurgency's nature, key insights into contemporary COIN can be learned from this failure. Unfortunately, the immediate need for COIN and CT frameworks in the post-9/11 era led to theories that were geographically limited and insufficiently grounded in the cases selected. A closer engagement with the Cypriot War of Independence can serve as a corrective for existing COIN and CT theory.

> *No one complained of cowardice when we ambushed trucks or killed soldiers from concealed positions in the mountains, but, in principle, there is no difference between mountain guerrilla attacks and street killings by the brave boys who formed our close-range execution teams.[1]—General Georgio Grivas*

In his memoirs, General Georgios Grivas—the individual most crucial in launching and successfully executing the Cyprus Liberation Struggle—noted a key feature that beguiled

the British in their efforts to stamp out the insurgency: the campaign was not limited to one area.[2] Various British army commanders and governors, many with experience elsewhere in the British Empire, expected to face a classic rural insurgency. General Grivas, however, defied their expectations. Instead, *Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston* (EOKA) or the *National Organization of Cypriot Fighters*, attacked targets of opportunity across Cyprus and, contrary to the counterinsurgency doctrine of the day, focused much of their effort in the country's cities. EOKA's success can be seen in the fact that the British, who initially refused to engage with Greek Cypriot demands, were ultimately forced to make significant concessions at the London and Zurich Agreements in 1959.[3] Although Britain did not meet all of EOKA's demands, the insurgents' success, despite the disparity in force, constitutes an outstanding military success. It also provides an important case study on a topic that, although currently in vogue, is too often viewed through a narrow lens: counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism (CT).

The Cypriot War of Independence is a critical case study for contemporary counterinsurgency and counterterrorism theory. Given COIN and CT's continued relevance, policymakers and practitioners benefit from frameworks grounded in a wide range of historical case studies. Theories constructed from such a range are more likely to be useful and avoid the pitfalls of narrow thinking.[4] In the case of the Cypriot War of Independence, EOKA's hybrid rural-urban approach confounded British counterinsurgency efforts. While Britain failed in its COIN campaign partly due to its misreading of the insurgency's nature, key insights into contemporary COIN can be learned from this failure. Unfortunately, in the post-9/11 environment, the immediate need for COIN and CT led U.S. policymakers and military theorists to develop frameworks grounded in a narrow geographic focus and insufficient engagement with diverse case studies. A closer examination of the Cypriot War of Independence not only adds value to the field but also offers a much-needed corrective to existing theories on COIN and CT.

A Narrow Field: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism Studies

Counterinsurgency and counterterrorism have become synonymous with twenty-first-century warfare. However, both fields suffer from a limited pool of case studies and an overly narrow perspective. U.S. experiences during the Cold War and the post-9/11 period have largely dictated and determined the discourse on these two fields.[5] While some non-American examples, such as Britain in Malaysia or France in Algeria, are occasionally referenced, their contribution to the discourse remains limited. Further complicating this systemic study of the topics is that research in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism typically occurs in spurts, which limits the field's ability to develop a more comprehensive theory. The most prominent example of this issue came after the United States' experience in Vietnam, when policymakers neglected the lessons of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism in favor of focusing on conventional operations.[6] Unfortunately, policymakers today seem primed to repeat this issue. In the emerging era of great power competition, where conventional warfare once again seems probable, the lessons of counterinsurgency and terrorism theory from the past two decades appear to be under threat.[7]

This flux in focus on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism studies, however, presents an opportunity to develop a stronger theory on the subject. In the post-9/11 period,

when COIN and counterterrorism were in focus, policymakers' goal was to quickly distill historical insights into actionable policy. This perspective was most evident in *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, which David Petraeus, James F. Amos, and their team of research assistants quickly developed in 2006 to provide an actionable plan for soldiers stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan.[8] While *FM 3-24* was, on the whole, far superior to what existed before, the need to rush its implementation meant that the authors could not spend sufficient time critically analyzing the case studies that served as the basis for the doctrine. The insights gained from individuals like David Galula in Algeria were, at best, romanticized and, at worst, distortions of his individual experience.[9] Likewise, the "hearts and minds" approach, which scholars and practitioners generally attribute to the British experience in Malaysia, largely ignored the context of the Malaysian Emergency. Specifically, scholars do not place enough emphasis on the kinetic operations it required, let alone the forced relocation of significant numbers of people.[10] In short, while *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency* represented an important development in counterinsurgency theory, Amos, Petraeus, and their team were limited by the tight timeline required to produce and implement it in the field. What is now needed are correctives grounded in detailed case study examinations of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism efforts at a truly global level.

It is through case studies that theory is most effectively developed and continually tested. Clausewitz, more than perhaps any other writer on warfare, recognized and emphasized this point. As Hew Strachan noted:

> Clausewitz consistently stressed that strategy in reality had to trump theory, that contingency in war demands decisions which are instinctive because those who take them have to respond to the situation in front of them. The function of theory is to alert them to the possible implications of those decisions, so that the past informs the present to shape the future.[11]

Theory, in other words, must constantly give way to practice and be tested against it. In the absence of conflict, the best way to develop theory is through a detailed examination of historical case studies. Since theory is ultimately based on what case studies we utilize, those cases should be from as broad a range as possible. Thus, an examination of the Cypriot War of Independence offers a valuable example for alerting policymakers to the potential consequences of their actions, specifically by demonstrating that urban insurgency is neither a new phenomenon nor necessarily as significant as scholars like David Kilcullen have suggested in recent works.[12]

Urban Guerrilla Warfare: Something Old, Something New

During the Cold War, governments in the Western bloc were primarily concerned with combating communist insurgencies. Mao Zedong provided not only an analytical framework but also an example of how a predominantly rural insurgency could topple a nominally democratic government.[13] Fidel Castro's success in Cuba, a scant distance from the United States, and Che Guevara's popularization of the *foco* strategy, which relied on a dedicated revolutionary cadre to lead the rural masses, reinforced this trend.[14] Western politicians, academics, and practitioners focused their efforts on defeating rural communist insurgency movements at this time.[15] When urban insurgencies did occur, such as in Algiers, they were

treated as exceptions, and analysts still tended to focus on the rural aspects of these campaigns.[16]

Another major factor also contributed to the West's rural-centric view of insurgency: decolonization. Decolonization further reinforced the perception that insurgency was a primarily rural phenomenon. Most of the territories conquered by the imperial powers were rural, and chronic underinvestment in infrastructure only reinforced this trend. From France's *tache d'huile* tactics in nineteenth-century Algeria to Britain's bombing campaigns against Iraqi villages in the 1920s, imperial powers invariably considered dissent and unrest to be a rural phenomenon.[17] Imperialist powers believed that it was here, away from the urban centers where they had concentrated their strength, that dissent and insurgency were most probable. This assumption would later influence Britain's reaction to the unrest in Cyprus, a point to which we will return.[18]

The post-Cold War and the end of the Soviet Union did not, as Francis Fukuyama proclaimed, mark the "end of history" or the triumph of liberalism around the globe.[19] However, it did cause conflict among scholars and policymakers to reprioritize their analyses. The United States, now acting as a global police force, found itself confronting conflicts that its decades-long preparation for conventional war with the Soviet Union had not adequately anticipated. In Somalia, the United States encountered the problem of facing an urban-based insurgency.[20] Nor was the U.S. alone: Russian forces faced stunning setbacks in Grozny as part of their efforts to subdue Chechnya's efforts to break away from the Russian Federation.[21] These were not isolated phenomena. In a post-Cold War, globalized world, many scholars have argued that warfare is becoming increasingly urban.[22]

For much of the twentieth century, this was not the case: cities were a secondary theatre for armies. While battles like Stalingrad, Manila, and Berlin have captured the popular imagination, these battles were the exception rather than the norm. Even in those cases, urban combat represented only a fraction of overall military strength. In the twenty-first century, however, we are seeing armies increasingly engage in operations where cities, rather than being secondary targets, are the focus of the operations. The Iraqi Army's campaign against ISIS, specifically the siege of Mosul, is but one example of this phenomenon. Warfare, in short, is going urban, even if the reasons for it remain debated amongst scholars and practitioners.[23]

While the urbanization of warfare is clear in conventional operations, the trend is less evident in guerrilla warfare and insurgent movements. David Kilcullen has argued that increased global urbanization and new technologies are driving a similar shift in irregular warfare.[24] This perspective, however, may be influenced by Kilcullen's own combat experience, as well as the broader American experience in Iraq, and is not reflective of trends within warfare at a global level. Even within the American experience, the Taliban remained largely a rural insurgency until its return to power in 2021.[25] This does not mean that scholars should disregard the possibility of insurgencies operating in an urban environment. Such movements have occurred in the past and will undoubtedly occur in the future. Likewise, rural insurgencies have long existed and will continue, which is why EOKA, an insurgency movement that operated in both rural and urban locales, is a vital case study for the field.

Background to a Revolt: The History of Cyprus after 1878

The history of Cyprus is significant because, despite its contested nature, all sides in the 1950s drew upon it to justify their political actions.[26] Cyprus, like most of the territories of the Ottoman Empire, was multi-confessional at the start of the nineteenth century. By the time of the Greek War of Independence in 1821, however, Orthodox Christians had come to constitute the majority of the island's population—a trend that continued throughout the nineteenth century.[27] They were not, however, a population isolated from international events.

Specifically, nationalism emerged as a political force in the nineteenth century, and much of the intellectual class of the Orthodox population of Cyprus identified with the burgeoning Greek identity and nation-state founded in the southern Balkans. When several prominent Cypriots left the island to fight in the Greek War of Independence, the Ottoman authorities responded by massacring many prominent Greek Cypriots, including members of the religious leadership.[28] This had two long-term effects on the island. First, for much of the Orthodox population, it reinforced their nascent sense of Greekness—if they were to be persecuted for their identity, they might as well fully embrace it. Second, it started the process of turning the Church of Cyprus against the Ottoman establishment. Religious institutions possessed a privileged position within the Ottoman state, with authorities relying on religious officials to maintain order over the various groups of the empire.[29] The Church of Cyprus, until this point, had performed this function effectively, albeit with occasional dissent. The massacre of much of its leadership, however, would help turn the Church of Cyprus towards the forces of nationalism.

The Church of Cyprus's pivot towards nationalism coincided with changing political circumstances. In 1878, Britain gained de facto control of the island from the Ottoman Empire in exchange for political support. British rule brought considerable economic and social development to Cyprus, but did not eliminate the desire for *Enosis* (unification of Cyprus with Greece) between Greece and the Orthodox population, which had largely embraced a Greek identity.[30] Furthermore, British efforts to introduce economic and social reforms were consistently disadvantaged by the island's relative poverty and Britain's unwillingness to invest resources from elsewhere to fully develop Cyprus.[31] Over the next 70 years, both Cypriots and Greeks made numerous moves, for various reasons, to bring about *Enosis.* British efforts to stamp out *Enosis*, however, just amplified demands amongst Cyprus's Greek-speaking population. So long as the British Empire was at its apex, there was little Greece, or the Cypriot Greeks, could do to achieve *Enosis.* The end of the Second World War, however, left Britain in a more vulnerable position—one in which Greece, even amid its own civil war, could begin to champion Cyprus's cause.[32]

Greece's emergence as an effective advocate of the Cypriot cause at the international level coincided with intensified Greek Cypriot support for *Enosis.* A 1950 referendum by the Church of Cyprus confirmed this sentiment, which returned results of approximately 96% of Greek Cypriots in favor of union.[33] Critically, the Turkish Cypriot population and other minorities in Cyprus did not participate in the vote. While the specific percentage of Greek Cypriots that favored *Enosis* is certainly up for contestation, given that the referendum was unofficial and organized by the pro-*Enosis* Cypriot church, the broader sentiment of the Greek Cypriots was clearly supportive of *Enosis.*[34] EOKA would work to maintain this

support of the Greek Cypriot population, both through various benevolent acts and coercive measures, throughout the Cypriot War of Independence. The individual who would lead EOKA, however, stood bestride both the Cypriot people and their Greek patrons: Georgios Grivas.

Georgios Grivas was not the typical leftist revolutionary figure that dominated Cold War-era counterinsurgency efforts. By most accounts, Grivas was not an overtly charismatic individual.[35] Besides the Greco-Turkish War and a limited role in the Greek resistance in the Second World War, he was a traditional military officer.[36] The Greek resistance, being primarily a center-left organization formed in response to the excesses of the Metaxas regime immediately before the war, meant that his overall conduct was further restricted.[37] Nevertheless, while Grivas was not an individual who had an exceptional amount of insurgency experience that he could draw upon, his firsthand experience during the Second World War and his fighting against the Democratic Army of Greece in the Greek Civil War proved invaluable.

Grivas, furthermore, was an individual who possessed a remarkable fatalistic determination once he set himself to a task. It was a trait that would serve him well when he began coordinating with Archbishop Makarios for the Cypriot War of Independence, as the material situation was not favorable to success. EOKA, at the beginning of their preparations for the Cypriot War of Independence, only possessed limited means. On Grivas' own account, this material strength amounted to: 3 Brens (British), 3 Beretta machine-guns (Italian; one in poor condition), 4 Thompson sub-machine-guns (American), 17 automatics, stens (British) and marcips (German), 47 rifles (of various origins and ages), 7 revolvers (ditto), 32,150 rounds (various calibers), 290 hand grenades, 20 kilos explosive, with fuse.[38]

This amount of weaponry did not constitute a large arsenal, especially given that the British garrison immediately before the start of EOKA's activity numbered 6,000 British soldiers. Nevertheless, Grivas and Makarios, at least initially, recognized that the Cypriot War of Independence was not one that would be won by strictly military means.

Before the Cyprus War of Independence formally began in April 1955, Grivas outlined his plans for the revolt much earlier. He noted:

> To draw the attention of international public opinion, particularly of the allies, through acts of heroism and sacrifice, to the Cyprus question, which could in this way cause trouble for them, if it is not solved to our satisfaction. To demonstrate our firm resolve and will, through constant and serious harassment of the English in Cyprus, that we shall not recoil from any sacrifice, but to the contrary, we shall keep on until we achieve our aim. The fight shall continue until international diplomacy— UNO [United Nations Organization]—and especially the English are forced to consider the Cyprus issue and IMMEDIATELY offer a solution in accordance with the aspirations of the Cypriot people and of the Greek Nation as a whole.[39]

The size of EOKA relative to the British forces on the island—let alone those of Great Britain and its empire—meant that a strict military victory was impossible. Instead, the only way that Cyprus could realistically gain success was through obtaining the support of the international community, and specifically the newly empowered United Nations. EOKA, in turn, prioritized actions that would attract international attention. Grivas noted the priorities of EOKA as follows:

A. By carrying out acts of sabotage against government installations and military garrisons.

B. By the surprise action of a small number of flexible combat groups against the English army.

C. By organizing the population into passive resistance.

Considering the difficulty of carrying out a systematic and large-scale irregular armed campaign and also bearing in mind the fact that the terrain is not suitable for large guerrilla groups, the main activity has to be the first one, that is, sabotage.[40]

EOKA's operational priorities dictated where it conducted its activities. Most government and military facilities were near the urban centers of Cyprus. Furthermore, the urban cores were more likely to have a greater journalist presence, which would convey EOKA's message to the world.[41] Attacks against isolated outposts in rural Cyprus benefited from the lack of concentrated British forces but suffered from the disadvantage that journalists were unlikely to be present to report on them—limiting EOKA's ability to broadcast its message to the broader world.

While urban operations were the most important for EOKA in gaining international attention, this did not mean they gave up fighting in the rural areas of Cyprus. The terrain and size of Cyprus, as Grivas noted, were not ideal for guerrilla operations.[42] Two issues, however, meant that EOKA could not concentrate its forces solely in the cities, even if those were the areas where they gained the most ground toward their goal of international recognition. The first issue was the disparity in strength between EOKA and the British authorities, as British forces significantly outnumbered EOKA throughout the conflict. Operating in the countryside produced two advantages to offset the British numerical advantage. First, it forced British forces to disperse their efforts. Authorities constantly attempted to strike Greek Cypriot insurgents in the countryside, launching large-scale envelopment maneuvers to eliminate the EOKA forces. Several of these operations were successful; most notably, a series of operations in the late spring/summer of 1956, which, although commonly framed as a failure due to an incident where a forest fire killed 21 British servicemen, served to halt EOKA operations.[43] Nevertheless, these operations simultaneously took soldiers away from the urban centers where EOKA could conduct its sabotage operations.

Second, EOKA realized that in order for their message to be taken seriously—and to maintain operational security for rural forces—the Greek Cypriot population needed to be united behind them. This reality made EOKA's rural operations critical, as the population of Cyprus was still predominantly rural in the 1950s. Grivas and EOKA used British cordon-and-search operations in villages to inflame anti-British sentiment. In the fall of 1955, EOKA published a leaflet that read: "Do not stand the humiliation of the army of the Gauleiter of Cyprus entering your villages, putting you into wire-fences and searching your houses and your wives. Every village must organize its own defense against such attacks of the barbarians and receive them with any means it has at its disposal."[44] The attempt to inflame rural Greek Cypriot sentiment—by referencing the British as *gauleiters*, despite many Greek Cypriots having fought in the Second World War, and by implying that the searching of women was a violation of patriarchal norms—was blatant. Nevertheless, this positive messaging, combined with EOKA's efforts to silence Greek Cypriots opposed to the insurgency, helped maintain support in the countryside.[45]

The inability of Britain to deploy adequate soldiers to cities, combined with EOKA's campaign to silence collaborators, led British authorities to increasingly rely on civilian police from the Turkish minority to control the cities. This is often considered the best possible scenario in a COIN situation, as it leads to a normalization and legitimization of the government by adhering to the rule of law.[46] The problem with this tactic, however, was that tensions between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots rose during this time: the former sought *Enosis* with Greece, while the latter received support and encouragement from Turkey to block such an endeavor.[47] Furthermore, Grivas' cultivation of the Greek Cypriots, both genuine and coerced, resulted in few Greek Cypriots joining the police after their large-scale resignations in 1955. This left the Turkish Cypriot minority, and to a lesser extent other groups, to carry out policing. Britain, in employing the Turkish Cypriot population for law enforcement, inadvertently intensified tensions between the two communities, as EOKA strikes against government facilities increasingly resulted in Turkish Cypriot casualties, and over time, EOKA came to see the Turkish Cypriots as a potential threat.[48] This development, in turn, led to the increased formalization of Turkish Cypriot paramilitary organizations on the island, which—like EOKA with Greece—received support from Turkey. Indirectly, these developments helped EOKA's short-term goal of demonstrating the unjustness of the colonial regime, as struggles between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot populations made it clear to all parties concerned that the current situation was untenable.

Lastly, Grivas and EOKA cultivated a resource that proved both powerful and difficult for the British to counter: Cyprus's youth. From the outset of the revolt, Grivas emphasized their importance to the struggle. In his memoirs, he noted:

> There were two other factors to which I attached prime importance: public support and the organization of a youth movement. I knew that with these on our side, applied with the proper strategy, the size of the material forces against us would be irrelevant. The use of young people in a battle of this kind was entirely my own idea. I know of no other movement, organization, or army which has so actively employed boys and girls of school age in the front line. And yet there is every reason to do so: young people love danger; they must take risks to prove their worth.[49]

In short, Grivas sought to make the Cypriot youth the foundation of the resistance and place them in dangerous situations. Grivas had EOKA target both elementary and secondary school students through two publications: *Upbringing of Youth* and *Reveille*, respectively. An article from the *Upbringing of Youth* in 1958 illustrates how this indoctrination operated:

> One must be a soldier of peace as long as Freedom and Justice are not abused. But when these two goods are at risk, then maintaining peace amounts to cowardice, indignity and dishonesty. And the Cyprus people has seen these two goods being viciously trampled upon by its oppressors.[50]

The article was representative of the journal's overall tone. Romanticizing the struggle as part of a broader historical struggle fought by the Cypriot (and Greek) people, it was a powerful message.

EOKA's employment of the youth placed the British in a dilemma: although children were actively participating in the insurgency, targeting them risked provoking the sort of reaction that aided EOKA's cause. British disciplinary measures against pro-EOKA students typically included corporal punishment, most notably caning and whipping. The British ultimately stopped these measures in late 1956, but the damage had been done; such abuse

against the Cypriot youth further turned the Greek Cypriots away from the British.[51] In short, British efforts to suppress youth participation in EOKA only further alienated the Greek Cypriot population from the British authorities.

For all of EOKA's success in overcoming Cyprus's geographic constraints to build an effective resistance, the organization had three critical weaknesses. The first was structural: operations were entirely centralized under Georgios Grivas. As Grivas later admitted, "The lack of sufficient experienced assistants compelled me to centralize command, though I did my best to diminish the disadvantages attached to such a system."[52] While Grivas' centralization of control gave EOKA a clear purpose and function and guaranteed unity of action, it also meant that it was highly vulnerable. Grivas himself acknowledged, "Had I been eliminated, the whole struggle would have collapsed because no one could have taken my place."[53] Grivas' propensity to overemphasize his own importance aside, given his importance to the struggle, it is unclear if EOKA could have survived such a loss.

The second weakness of EOKA was demographic. While Grivas worked to consolidate control over the Greek Cypriot population, there were still minority groups that he could not control and who were opposed to his efforts, most notably the Turkish Cypriots. Grivas and EOKA recognized that the Turkish Cypriot population posed a potential obstacle, given their opposition to *Enosis*, and initially sought to avoid antagonizing or directly targeting them.[54] While increasing tensions between Greek and Turkish Cypriots may have served the immediate goals of EOKA, these tensions had long-term consequences, most notably, resulting in the division of the island in 1974 that continues to the present.

The third weakness that EOKA faced was ideological. While its push for *Enosis* possessed mass appeal amongst the Greek Cypriot population, there were significant sections of the population that were not believers in the right-wing ideology espoused by Grivas and EOKA. Before the revolt, the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) was one of the most popular parties in Cyprus, winning a plurality in the 1953 municipal elections.[55] While not opposed to *Enosis*, AKEL preferred a gradual approach to Cyprus' political status. This distinction provided a potential lever that the British could have used to divide the Greek Cypriots. Fortunately for EOKA, British authorities, particularly concerned about communist influence, viewed AKEL as the greater threat before the launch of EOKA's insurgency on 1 April 1955. Although Britain's focus eventually shifted toward countering EOKA, AKEL continued to be perceived as a primary threat. Governor Harding, in describing his decision to ban AKEL in late 1955, well after EOKA had commenced its insurgency campaign, noted:

> It was the communists who, since the war, led the way in resorting to riot, sabotage and physical intimidation in the pursuit of their political aims. It was they who developed the whole paraphernalia of 'struggle' against established authority – the mass demonstrations, political strikes, daubing of slogans, seditious propaganda and monster petitions … In this strategically important Island, Communist activity has an especially sinister significance for the free world.[56]

In short, Cold War ideology caused the British to miss a potential opportunity to divide the Greek Cypriots. Instead, their actions inadvertently helped unify the island's left- and right-wing factions over time.

British COIN: Tactical Solutions to Strategic Problems

While EOKA's tactics presaged contemporary insurgency and terrorism movements by recognizing that success would not be won on the battlefield but through eroding the enemy's will, British COIN efforts likewise reflected a common trend among governments: holding broad strategic aims while lacking—or being unwilling to apply—the necessary means to achieve them. British officials convinced themselves that they could not surrender Cyprus for geostrategic reasons.[57] The loss of bases in the Suez Canal made it essential, in their view, to retain a position in the Eastern Mediterranean to preserve Britain's force projection capabilities. While Cyprus lacked a deep-water port, its airfields offered the potential to project military power across the Middle East. Furthermore, given Britain's burgeoning relationship with Turkey amid the development of the Baghdad Pact, British officials feared that allowing *Enosis* with Greece would jeopardize their ties with Ankara.[58] What British officials failed to note, however, was that by making Cyprus a Turkish concern, they inadvertently magnified Turkey's interest in the island. Britain, in other words, helped create the very scenario it feared.

British efforts to quell the Cypriot revolt have often been criticized. James Corum famously described Britain's counterinsurgency as that of a "blundering elephant."[59] In other words, Britain acted irrationally and without adequately considering the means to solve the problem. Other analysts, while perhaps not as pithy as Corum, likewise rated the British performance substandard, at best.[60] Recent writings, most notably those of David French and Preston Jordan Lim, take a more nuanced perspective.[61] While they note the problems of the British counterinsurgency effort, they also acknowledge that Britain did possess a plan, and while it ultimately failed, it was considerably better than previous analysts gave credit. In part, this discrepancy is due to the fact that Grivas' memoirs, while useful in gaining insight into EOKA and its strategy, were, as Corum notes, "at times hyperbolic and historically inaccurate."[62] As such, in looking at the British counterinsurgency effort through additional sources, primarily those of Britain itself, it becomes clear that a plan did exist, but it was undermined by ultimately not attaching means to an end.

Britain's strategy for winning the 'hearts and minds'—the often-quipped British approach to counterinsurgency—was flawed in that Britain focused its efforts on winning over the minds, but not the hearts, of the Cypriots. British efforts to convince Cypriots of the benefits of remaining in the British Empire focused almost exclusively on the economic and social benefits that it would bring to the island's inhabitants. Field Marshall Harding, the individual in charge of Cyprus for much of the emergency, noted soon after arrival that:

> There will be an open conflict involving a full-scale emergency campaign in which improvement in social and economic conditions would be equally important as the principal political and psychological weapon. In either case, we shall have to break up EOKA and the Communist organisation to achieve a lasting solution.[63]

Harding later acquired a negative reputation due to the authoritarian manner in which he approached the Cypriot War of Independence.[64] Even if that reputation was not entirely undeserved, Harding recognized that the key to British success on the island was not repressive measures, but rather providing an alternative—and better—future than what EOKA offered with *Enosis*. The problem with Harding's approach was that while it arguably appealed to the minds, it did not appeal to the hearts of the Greek Cypriots who desired *Enosis*.

The inability of the British to successfully stop the Cypriots from creating enough disruption to force alternative arrangements points to an issue that confounds COIN experts and has no easy answer: the time to stop the Cypriot War of Independence was years, if not decades, before *Enosis* took hold in the minds of the Greek Cypriots. Although the story of Archbishop Sophronios greeting the first British High Commissioner with a demand for *Enosis* in 1878 is a fabrication, it does not detract from the fact that the Cypriot Church became nationalistic in the aftermath of 1821.[65] Critically, when British authorities acquired de facto rule of the island in 1878, they did nothing to change the Ottoman policy of allowing religious institutions to control education.[66] As the Cypriot Church sought *Enosis*, it aligned its education system with that of Greece, which only magnified the spread of pro-*Enosis* sentiment among the population. In 1935, the British first attempted to counter this development by making English a mandatory subject in primary schools in Cyprus, but the effort floundered due to a lack of funding.[67]

Harding, upon assuming the role of High Commissioner in 1955, likewise saw education as a key element in defeating EOKA. His efforts to counter what he perceived as radicalization in schools took two forms. First, he closed schools where coercive acts had occurred and dismissed teachers identified by the authorities as promoting *Enosis*.[68] These efforts, however, treated the symptom more so than the root cause—a fact Harding recognized. As such, he proposed that the British Cypriot authorities establish a secular education system, detached from the control of either the Greek or Turkish Cypriots. As Harding noted in an appeal:

> I trust that you and your colleagues will agree with me that we must now deal vigorously with the root causes of the current troubles. We must also show by our deeds that we are at least as much concerned with helping the youth of this island to a better future as we are with carrying out the stern measures which the present disorders demand.[69]

This effort, however, encountered the same problem as the 1935 initiative: a lack of funding. Britain wished to maintain control of Cyprus but consistently proved unwilling to pay the cost required to secure it. They were not the first—nor the last—state conducting COIN to face such a problem.

British finances and the shifting politics of the 1950s further compromised the country's ability to use force to impose a solution to the Cypriot Question. The British use of force during the Cypriot War of Independence has often drawn condemnation from academics, who have unfavorably compared it to Britain's approach in Malaysia. What is commonly overlooked in these assessments, however, is that the British military was effective in several instances, either significantly curtailing EOKA's operations or forcing the group to declare a unilateral ceasefire.[70] The problem, however, was less about military efficacy and more about two compounding factors: an international environment that made the use of force increasingly problematic, and the limited material resources available to Great Britain. From a military standpoint, the end of conscription in 1957 meant that British forces could no longer maintain the numerical superiority they had previously enjoyed on the island.[71] Quite simply, they ran out of time to eliminate EOKA as a threat before their capabilities declined.

Ultimately, Britain's inability to present an effective political solution to the Cypriot Question meant that its military efforts, though occasionally effective, were overtaken by political events. The clearest example of this came when British forces in Cyprus achieved

a significant breakthrough immediately before the formalization of the London and Zurich Agreements in 1959. Specifically, British intelligence established the location of Grivas.[72] Given the centralization of EOKA's operations under Grivas, as discussed earlier, eliminating Grivas would likely have significantly disrupted, if not outright destroyed, the organization. However, locating Grivas came too late in the Cypriot War of Independence to have a meaningful effect.

The problem, as MI5 agent Peter Wright argued in his autobiography, was that effective intelligence was not linked to political policy until late in the conflict.[73] British High Commissioners and forces on the island, well before the armed phase, were operating with relatively narrow budgets, especially for non-kinetic initiatives. As a result, Britain's intelligence apparatus, the Special Branch, had to rely on local informants. Since most Greek Cypriots refused to cooperate with British authorities—due to patriotism, intimidation, or both—the Special Branch often had to accept the cooperation of informants who were, in fact, EOKA spies.[74] Only later in the conflict did British authorities, recognizing the deteriorating civil relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots and shifting international opinion, begin seriously coordinating intelligence and military operations. By then, it was far too late to alter the course of the conflict.

For all the faults of Britain's approach to the Cypriot Question, it did ultimately achieve its minimum goal for the island. As part of the London and Zurich Agreements, Britain retained the right to maintain military bases on the island—a right reaffirmed in the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee.[75] Maintaining these bases, and thereby preserving its ability to project power in the region, had been Britain's primary aim from the beginning and the key reason for opposing Cyprus' *Enosis* with Greece.[76] Great Britain, in short, achieved the goal that it had at the outset.

Britain ultimately achieved its goal of maintaining a military presence in Cyprus by focusing on an absolute victory, rather than one of compromise, but in doing so, it undermined both its own and its allies' long-term position in the region. The Baghdad Pact, one of the critical reasons Britain sought to involve Turkey in Cyprus, is considered by historians to be one of the least successful Cold War alliances, largely due to the internal tensions within its membership.[77] Britain's engagement with Turkey over Cyprus further weakened NATO's southern flank, a far more important and stable alliance.[78] Even during the Cold War, Cyprus' independence and Archbishop Makarios' ties to the USSR caused significant concern within Britain and the United States.[79] In short, while Britain may have maintained its minimal goals, it ultimately created lasting issues and complications that it could have easily avoided.

Lessons Not Learned and Conclusion

Britain's approach to counterinsurgency and counterterrorism in Cyprus illustrates several enduring myths that continue to shape modern doctrine—despite the fact that these lessons are now over seventy years old. As the Cypriot case shows, the barrier between counterinsurgency and counterterrorism is not as pronounced as much of the literature suggests. The British focused their efforts on both "hearts and minds" strategies and more direct measures. Yet the common refrain that the British school of counterinsurgency emphasizes a hearts and minds approach is misleading; at best, it emphasizes the minds. Additionally, the fact that the British method included a strong kinetic aspect cannot be

ignored. Lastly, while the employment of ethnic minorities may appear to be the only option available, it can aggravate tensions in the long term.

There are also important lessons to be learned from EOKA's approach to insurgency. The idea that war is becoming more urban, while not without merit, should not be taken for granted. Although EOKA conducted an extensive urban campaign, it also operated in rural areas in ways that forced British forces to disperse and adapt, complicating their counterinsurgency efforts. This highlights how combining urban and rural operations can confound conventional forces, as seen in Cyprus. Furthermore, EOKA's experience shows that conventional military officers, such as Grivas, though not typically seen as ideal insurgents, are often drawn into insurgent campaigns, a pattern which has become increasingly common in the contemporary world.

These points are worth emphasizing because they directly apply to the insurgency the United States faced in Iraq. In many ways, the United States replicated many of the same issues the British encountered in Cyprus. The overarching goal of "democratizing" Iraq, though noble in intent, left the United States fighting for an objective that was nearly impossible to achieve given its resource constraint.[80] This issue became especially problematic as political attention shifted elsewhere. Furthermore, the United States' employment of Sunni tribesmen in Anbar Province as part of the Sunni Awakening, while tactically effective against al-Qaeda in Iraq, exacerbated sectarian tensions in the long term. These tensions, in turn, provided the Islamic State with a body of soldiers from which to recruit.[81]

Lastly, the tactics used by insurgents in Iraq bore a remarkable similarity to those employed by EOKA. Attacks in urban areas, particularly in the so-called Green Zone, helped publicize the insurgency to the world.[82] While these urban operations were critical for challenging the perception of American strength, rural attacks served to divide coalition forces. The United States' need to commit significant forces to Anbar Province and supplement them with local tribes as part of the Sunni Awakening illustrates this point.

Furthermore, Grivas demonstrates how a military officer with minimal insurgency training can nonetheless be an effective leader. Counterinsurgency and insurgency are two faces of the same coin.[83] The former Ba'athist officers of the Iraqi Army, who ended up forming the backbone of the Iraqi insurgency, lacked prior insurgency experience. However, the Ba'athist officers had fought a protracted insurgency in northern Iraq against the Kurdish population.[84] In short, the political decision to dismiss the Ba'athist officers in Iraq provided the foundation for an insurgency movement—something an examination of the Cyprus Emergency ably demonstrates.

The Cypriot War of Independence is not the only insurgency case study that deserves incorporation into counterinsurgency and counterterrorism literature. The field benefits most from studying a broad range of movements. Naturally, there is a temptation to focus on case studies that appear immediately relevant to one's specific task. This perspective, however, is fraught with challenges and can lead first to ineffective theory, and then to ineffective practice. A brief examination of EOKA's insurgency and the British efforts to counter it demonstrates that many of the issues present in the literature and theory of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism are not new—and that a critical engagement with the past can enrich the field.

Endnotes

[1] Georgios Grivas, *The Memoirs of General Grivas: Guerrilla Warfare and EOKA's Struggle*, ed. Charles Foley, trans. Alexandros A. Pallis (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 47.

[2] The name itself, Cypriot Liberation Struggle/Cypriot War of Independence, is problematic due to ongoing politicization of the conflict in contemporary politics. This paper generally uses the term Cypriot Liberation Struggle/Cypriot War of Independence due to it being the accepted term in the Republic of Cyprus, although it acknowledges that other terms are applicable depending upon the context.

[3] For an analysis of EOKA's transformation post-Zurich see: Andreas Karyos, "The Unitary Democratic Front of Reconstruction: EOKA's Transformation from an Armed Movement to a Political Formation," ed. Anastasia Yiangou and Antigone Heraclidou, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2018), 112–26.

[4] For an example of how limited case studies can create misperceptions regarding contemporary war, see: Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

[5] Carter Malkasian, "Strategies of Counterinsurgency and Counter-Terrorism after 9/11," in *The New Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Hal Brands (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), 918–45. This issue applies to related subfields, like Special Operation Forces, as well. See: James Horncastle, "Unfamiliar Connections: Special Forces and Paramilitaries in the Former Yugoslavia," *Special Operations Journal* 2 (2016): 12–21.

[6] For an example of an individual who attempted to carry on those legacies see: Larry E. Cable, *Conflict of Myths: The Development of American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

[7] For an explanation of the current shift see: Alexander Boroff, "What Is Great-Power Competition, Anyway?" *Modern War Institute*, April 17, 2020, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/great-power-competition-anyway/.

[8] David Petraeus and James F. Amos, "FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency," 2006.

[9] Joseph MacKay, *The Counterinsurgent Imagination* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2023), 156-92.

[10] Paul Dixon, "'Hearts and Minds'? British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009): 353–81.

[11] Hew Strachan, "Clausewitz," in *The New Makers of Modern Strategy: From the Ancient World to the Digital Age*, ed. Hal Brands (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), 116–44, 141.

[12] David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013).

[13] The specter of Maoism was such that American officials believed that China possessed the ability to brainwash individuals to the cause. See: Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History* (New York City: Vintage Books, 2019).

[14] Vera Carnovale, "'We'll Be like Che' Foquismo and Sacrificial Ethics within the Latin American Revolutionary Activism," *Globalizations* 20, no. 8 (November 17, 2023): 1540–54.

[15] Most famous and influential of these texts was: Robert Grainger Ker Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1966).

[16] David Galula is particularly noteworthy in this regard as an individual who has continued to provide inspiration for American COIN with an admittedly ahistoric examination of Algeria and other case studies. See: David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 1964).

[17] Jacques Frémeaux and Bruno C. Reis, "French Counterinsurgency in the Era of the Algerian Wars, 1830–1962," in *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures*, ed. Beatrice Heuser and Eitan Shamir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1830–1962. David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919–1939* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990), 19-20.

[18] David French, *Fighting EOKA: The British Counter-Insurgency Campaign on Cyprus, 1955-1959* (New York: Oxford UP, 2015), passim.

[19] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), *passim*.

[20] Marshall Ecklund, "Task Force Ranger vs. Urban Somali Guerrillas in Mogadishu: An Analysis of Guerrilla and Counterguerrilla Tactics and Techniques Used during Operation GOTHIC SERPENT," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 15, no. 3 (2004): 47–69.

[21] Mark Galeotti, *Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine* (Oxford: Osprey, 2022). 62-78, 105-20.

[22] Stephen Graham notes that "warfare, like everything else, is being urbanized." See: Stephen Graham, *Cities under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (London: Verso, 2010), 16.

[23] Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*. Anthony King, *Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century*, vol. Medford, MA (Polity Press, 2021). Richard J. Norton, "Feral Cities," *Naval War College Review* 56, no. 4 (2003): 1–10. Gian Genile et. al, *Reimagining the Character of Urban Operations for the U.S. Army: How the Past Can Inform the Present and Future* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2017).

[24] Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, *passim*.

[25] Hassan Abbas, *The Return of the Taliban: Afghanistan after the Americans Left* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 11-73.

[26] This politicization extends to the historiography, as the states placed considerable pressure upon academics in their respective territories to create narratives that adhered to the country's perspective. As such, while there are some exceptional works and scholars in Cyprus, Turkey, and Greece, such as Andreas Karyos, the ongoing pressure that academics face in said countries means that this work primarily relies on those secondary works in English.

[27] Robert F. Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6-7.

[28] Holland, 5-6.

[29] Karen Barkey and George Gavrilis, "The Ottoman Millet System: Non-Territorial Autonomy and Its Contemporary Legacy," *Ethnopolitics* 15, no. 1 (2016): 24–42.

[30] William Mallinson, *Cyprus: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

[31] French, *Fighting EOKA,* 17.

[32] For a detailed account of the Greek Civil War see: Andre Gerolymatos, *An International Civil War: Greece, 1943-1949* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

[33] Andreas Varnavas, *A History of the Liberation Struggle of EOKA (1955-1959)*, trans. Philippos Stylianou (Nicosia: The Foundation of the EOKA Liberation Struggle 1955-1959, 2004), 23.

[34] Official plebiscite results seen in: Νικου Κρανιδιωτη, *Πορεια Στο Χρονο* (Αθήνα: Ίδρυμα Α. Γ. Λεβέντη, 1981), 19.

[35] French, *Fighting EOKA.*

[36] Preston Jordan Lim, *The Evolution of British Counter-Insurgency during the Cyprus Revolt, 1955–1959*, 1st ed. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 9.

[37] Gerolymatos, *An International Civil War: Greece, 1943-1949*, 109.

[38] Grivas, *The Memoirs of General Grivas: Guerrilla Warfare and EOKA's Struggle*, 28.

[39] Grivas, Appendix 3.

[40] Grivas, Appendix 3.

[41] Jonathan Stubbs, "Making Headlines in a State of Emergency: The Case of the Times of Cyprus, 1955-1960," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45, no. 1 (2017): 70–92.

[42] Grivas, *Memoirs of General Grivas*, 21.

[43] Grivas, 81.

[44] "TNA FCO 141/3709," November 21, 1955.

[45] Although EOKA later claimed they only targeted individuals who actively coopted with the British, EOKA's campaign of silence was much more expansive than it claimed. For an analysis of this point, see: French, *Fighting EOKA,* 158-70.

[46] Petraeus and Amos, "FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency."

[47] Daria Isachenko, *The Making of Informal States : Statebuilding in Northern Cyprus and Transdniestria / by Daria Isachenko*, Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 39

[48] Britain's role in weaponizing the Turkish Cypriot population was generally one of a lack of understanding and a need for any Cypriot individuals, rather than a deliberate plot. Still, the implications of such a policy were not lost on British officials at the time. See: Jan Asmussen, "Conspiracy Theories and Cypriot History: The Comfort of Commonly Perceived Enemies," *The Cyprus Review* 23, no. 2 (2011): 127–45.

[49] Grivas, *Memoirs of General Grivas,* 38.

[50] Cited in: Varnavas, *A History of the Liberation Struggle of EOKA (1955-1959)*, 68.

[51] Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60* (London: MacMillan, 1990), 136.

[52] Grivas, *Memoirs of General Grivas,* 224.

[53] Grivas, 224.

[54] Grivas, 70-1.

[55] Vassilis Protopapas, "The Rise of a Bi-Polar Party System, Municipal Elections 1940–1955," in *Britain in Cyprus: Colonialism and Post-Colonialism 1878–2006*, ed. Hubert Faustmann and Nicos Peristianis (Mannheim: Bibliopolis, 2006), 269–94.

[56] John Harding, "TNA CO 141/3646," December 14, 1955.

[57] Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency,* 1-7.

[58] Mallinson, *Cyprus: A Modern History*.

[59] James S. Corum, *Training Indigenous Forces in Counterinsurgency: A Tale of Two Insurgencies* (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2006), 31.

[60] Michael Dewar, *Brush Fire Wars: Minor Campaigns of the British Army since 1945* (New York City: St. Martin's Press, 1984). Andrew R. Novo, "Friend or Foe? The Cyprus Police Force and the EOKA Insurgency," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 3 (2012): 414–31. A Novo, "On All Fronts: EOKA and the Cyprus Insurgency, 1955-1959" (Oxford, Oxford University, 2010).

[61] French, *Fighting EOKA*; Lim, *The Evolution of British Counter-Insurgency.*

[62] Corum, *Training Indigenous Forces.*

[63] John Harding, "TNA WO 32/16260," October 5, 1955.

[64] Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959*, 135.

[65] Andrekos Varnava and Michalis N. Michael, "Archbishop-Ethnarchs since 1767," in *The Archbishops of Cyprus in the Modern Age : The Changing Role of the Archbishop-Ethnarch, Their Identities and Politics / Edited by Andrekos Varnava and Michalis N. Michael.*, ed. Andrekos Varnava and Michalis N. Michael, Cyprus Historical and Contemporary Studies (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 1–17.

[66] Barkey and Gavrilis, "The Ottoman Millet System: Non-Territorial Autonomy and Its Contemporary Legacy." *passim.*

67 Panayiotis Persianis, "The British Colonial Education 'lending' Policy in Cyprus (1878 - 1960): An Intriguing Example of an Elusive 'Adapted Education' Policy," *Comparative Education* 32, no. 1 (1996): 45–68.

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69 John Harding, "TNA CO 1045/678," December 16, 1955.

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74 French, *Fighting EOKA,* 126.

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76 Mallinson, *Cyprus: A Modern History*. Kindle Edition.

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79 Henry Kissinger, *Introduction of Soviet Troops to Cyprus* (Department of State, 1974), http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/government-official-publications/introduction-soviet-troops-cyprus/docview/1679066775/se-2?accountid=13800.

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82 For an example, see how Asaib Ahl al-Haq's attacks in the Green Zone helped further turn US opinion. See: Yochi J Dreazen, "Breaking Up with Iraq Is Hard to Do," *National Journal*, 2011.

83 John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), *passim*.

84 For an examination of this campaign see: Michael J. Kelly, *Ghosts of Halabja : Saddam Hussein and the Kurdish Genocide* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), *passim*.

Divergent Conflict Drivers in the West African Sahel: The Inaccuracy of Global War on Terror Counterterrorism Heuristics

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ABSTRACT

United States security policies and counter-extremism strategies in the West African Sahel often mirror the Icarus paradox—grand in ambition but ultimately falling short of lasting success. This paper argues that U.S. strategies have focused too heavily on the assumed international nature of violent extremist organizations (VEOs), while overlooking the local dynamics that sustain them. By misreading the sources of legitimacy, societal integration, and strategic objectives of groups such as Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam Wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and the Islamic State West African Principate (ISWAP), U.S. efforts have failed to produce effective or enduring outcomes. Using a path dependency theory framework, the analysis traces how Global War on Terror (GWOT)-era heuristics have shaped U.S. definitions of terrorism and operational responses in the Sahel. It then contrasts this with a locally grounded view of extremist groups, understanding them as embedded in longstanding social systems, some predating colonial rule. The paper concludes with policy recommendations grounded in regional complexity, local legitimacy, and irregular conflict.

Introduction

In mid-2023, the United States military experienced its second major setback in the West African Sahel since 2017. This time, the junta government in Niger ordered the removal of all U.S. military equipment and personnel from the American-led and -operated airbase in Agadez, except for Embassy staff stationed in Niamey, the capital.[1] Although surprising to many, this development was merely the latest in a long series of setbacks to U.S. security efforts in the Sahel. The recent wave of coups in the region coincided with a growing preference for security assistance in the form of regime protection provided by the Russia-linked Wagner Group—support that the U.S. had no intention of supplying.

The shift in preferred partners involved a complex set of dynamics: growing anti-French sentiment, a dislike for Western dominance in the region, political and military programs that were running in parallel to other countries' programs, and a general disillusionment with democratic styled governance. Prior to this, U.S.-led training efforts, aimed at professionalizing Sahelian state militaries to counter violent extremist organizations (VEOs), had done little to stem the rapid expansion of Jihadi organizations.[2] This is highlighted by the tragic events in October 2017, when four U.S. Special Operations Soldiers lost their lives in the village of Tongo Tongo in northwestern Niger. Although the 2023 expulsion highlights broader symptoms of flawed U.S. policy in the region, the Tongo Tongo incident more clearly illustrates the core issue by offering a snapshot of how violent extremist groups are defined and engaged in practice.

To better understand the complexity of U.S. security efforts in the region, this essay analyzes the extremist landscape in the sub-Saharan West African (SSWA) Sahel. Using examples such as Tongo Tongo, it identifies key characteristics of the U.S. military response to extremist threats and highlights where that response has been unsuccessful. The central research question guiding this analysis is: How are U.S. policies and strategies in SSWA aligned towards countering extremist violence, and how do they account for socio-political realities on the ground? To address this, the essay evaluates U.S. policy directives and responses in the Sahel, analyzing the policy choices made and whether those decisions contributed to a misalignment between policy solutions and environmental contexts. The discussion then concludes by incorporating aspects of irregular warfare to provide greater fidelity to policymaking, followed by practical suggestions for shifting or realigning U.S. strategies within a path dependency theory framework.

This analysis uses the theory of path dependency—specifically, a delayed or interrupted complexity model—to better explicate the factors shaping U.S. counter-extremism policy in the Sahel. This analysis examines two specific violent extremist organizations—Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam Wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and the Islamic State West African Principate (ISWAP)—to evaluate how U.S. policies attempted to counter them, and how those efforts fell short due to a failure to consider key sociological factors, particularly the tendency to perceive violent extremist organizations in the Sahel as separate from the societies in which they operate.

Within a path dependency framework, initial conditions prove critical in determining the trajectory an organization will ultimately follow. As Djelic and Quack note, organizational path dependency "suggests that the evolution of institutions, organizations, or practices does not necessarily follow a pure logic of efficiency. Early steps can, in certain circumstances, lead to the stabilization of less efficient solutions."[3] Hanger-Kopp, et al. similarly describe it as a process "that has the property of staying on a particular path so that past decisions and contingent events pre-determine what further steps may be taken."[4]

The discussion below identifies the initial conditions as a Global War on Terror (GWOT) heuristic for identifying and pursuing violent extremist organizations. Two possible strategic paths emerge from this foundation: one GWOT-focused (Path One) and the other non-GWOT-focused (Path Two). This essay focuses primarily on Path One, which the U.S. ultimately followed, while identifying Path Two as a potential alternative for pursuing more effective policy strategies. Path One is examined through a closed-system lens, as U.S. security policy in the region remained largely unchanged from 2001 to 2005 and failed to adapt to shifting

contemporary conditions. This stagnation suggests a closed system without substantial feedback loops.

The concept of heuristics, defined as a "strategy that ignores part of the information with the goal of making decisions more quickly, frugally, and/or accurately than more complex methods," serves as a core element of these dependent paths.[5] Two distinct heuristic lenses distinguish between Path One and Path Two. Path One relies on a GWOT heuristic that attempts to predict behavior based on poor modeling.[6] In Path Two, by contrast, there is a complex social heuristic that informs both analysis and sensemaking, adding depth and contextual understanding to any strategy focused on countering extremism.[7] Indeed, other scholars have also identified and applied the concepts of path dependency and heuristics in the strategic analysis of extremism. Samar Al-Balushi, in his book on Kenya, the U.S., and the war on terror, notes that "there have been two primary ways of characterizing armed conflicts: localized ethnic wars and globally threatening Islam."[8] Just as he argues for one path over the other, this essay makes the case for a shift to Path Two.

There are two potential ways for shifting path dependency. The first involves transitioning from a closed to an open system within the organization, allowing for internal modifications before deeper multilateral interactions redirect its trajectory.[9] The second method involves a disruptive collision—a shift necessitated by either complete failure or the recognition that success depends on integrating new modalities through interaction with a competitor or rival system.[10] While these potential shifts are explored later in the article, understanding the initial policy conditions is essential for identifying when and how such shifts might occur.

To interrogate the initial conditions underlying the GWOT heuristic, this article posits two key postulations, which are analyzed throughout the discussion. The first asserts that the United States—through policy proscription and military mission execution—has identified extremist groups within the conflict ecosystem of the Sahel as terrorist groups acting counter to the states in the region. The second postulation recognizes that, although recent policy has begun to acknowledge the local dynamics of extremism, groups such as JNIM and ISWAP are portions of a broader, non-deterministic system within the Sahel.

This system is best understood through indicators highlighting its resilience. Stressors that affect one part of a group, such as financial constraints, do not necessarily degrade the entire organization, since these groups are embedded in complex systems with multiple interaction points. Nonetheless, U.S. policy documents, military analysis, and strategic discourse continue to view these groups—and the broader conflict ecosystem—in a linear fashion, assuming that "A+B=C," despite the lack of grounding in temporally structured interactions between system elements. In reality, "A" does not always come before "B", nor does "C" exist solely if "A" and "B" are present. When viewed through the lens of path dependency theory, these postulations offer a structured framework for identifying more viable and adaptive policy trajectories.

U.S. National Security Policy in Africa: A (Counter)Terrorism Focus

Before developing a firm understanding of the endogenous social dynamics underlying Sahelian extremism, it is necessary to identify the effects that external actors—particularly the United States—have sought to produce, as well as the strategies designed to achieve them. The first guiding document is the 2022 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) under the Biden administration,[11] which outlines seven specific lines of effort (LOE) aimed at addressing a

range of problematic contexts in Africa. Notably, all six GWOT-era National Security Strategies prior to 2022 also discussed African contexts.[12] This marks the point at which GWOT heuristics under Path One take shape, as U.S. strategy categorized terrorist groups in a linear, relatively static way, with little evolution in its approach toward Africa.[13]

The first of these LOEs in the 2022 NSS focuses on the impact of global climate change on Africa's many conflicts. As one of the regions most affected,[14] the Sahelian belt is experiencing an expanding Sahara Desert and shrinking Lake Chad, both of which have contributed to a litany of needs-based conflicts. The second major point emphasized in the NSS is Africa's growing geopolitical significance. This is reflected in its growing population, projected to make up one-quarter of the world's population by 2050, and its modernizing cosmopolitan urban centers, especially along the coastal regions, the Great Rift Valley, and much of southern Africa. A third point of importance is the directly mentioned Prosper Africa Build Together Campaign, which seeks to strengthen strategic and economic partnerships between the U.S. and African countries by developing bilateral trade and investment flows.[15] Additionally, the strategy identifies "peace and prosperity" as a measure of effectiveness across economic, human, and hard security arenas. At this juncture, the National Security Strategy shifts from localized strategic initiatives to a broader geopolitical perspective, identifying Africa as a theater of strategic competition with China and Russia. It further outlines that terrorism remains a major concern, noting that many extremist groups—most of which are located in the West African Sahel—have the potential to strike the U.S. homeland. However, while terrorism is identified as one of the key challenges the U.S. must address on the continent, the strategy offers few specific proposals for how to do so. It does, however, directly link sub-regional groups to larger global extremist organizations such as Al-Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS), hinting at potential counterterrorism strategies—an important context for Path One.[16]

Overall, the U.S. National Security Strategy outlines only seven substantive areas in which the U.S. should collaborate with African partners to develop strategies and programs aimed at quelling portions of the violence and instability witnessed across the continent. However, there is a nascent disconnect between the primarily economic NSS strategy and any potential Department of Defense (DoD) strategy. While the 2022 National Security Strategy is vague for various reasons, many of which point to the grand strategic nature of the document, more refined strategic documents exist to address several of the issues mentioned within the National Security Strategy.

The U.S. Strategy Towards Sub-Saharan Africa fills in some of these strategy gaps. Written in 2022, this companion document to the U.S. National Security Strategy discusses four major objectives of how the United States will engage with a sub-region of the African continent: (1) fostering openness and open societies; (2) delivering democratic and security dividends; (3) advancing pandemic recovery and economic opportunity; and (4) supporting conservation, climate adaptation, and a just energy transition. The third of these four tenets proves the most influential to this research. The document directly mentions that the U.S. will prioritize counterterrorism (CT) missions and allocate resources towards reducing the threat from terrorist groups on the U.S. homeland, while also retaining the ability to act unilaterally in situations where threats are particularly acute.[17] Finally, regarding the issue of CT, the U.S. Strategy Towards Sub-Saharan Africa mentions that the U.S. will "employ tailored programs to build the capacity of local partners' security, intelligence, and judicial institutions to identify, disrupt, degrade, and share information on terrorists and their support networks."[18] Although

this section does discuss other initiatives such as democratic backsliding, support for African democracies, and the prioritization of diplomatic efforts, this counterterrorism section remains most impactful due to its strategic focus, language, and priorities, which keep it strictly focused on Path One heuristics.

Sahelian-Focused Strategies

The Sahelian-focused strategies examined in this section align with those discussed above, as they continue to follow within the Path One track. The first U.S. initiative seeking to address widespread insecurity in the West African Sahel was the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI).[19] This initiative began in 2002 by the U.S. State Department and was designed to coordinate and enhance border control against terrorist movement and arms trafficking and to identify drug smuggling routes in Mali, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger.[20] It was eventually subsumed within the larger Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI), run by U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM). However, a critical aspect of the Pan-Sahel Initiative was that it did not seek to address the root causes of extremism or terrorist activity. Instead, it was concerned with the potential risk of extremists from Afghanistan moving to the West African Sahel Region and finding refuge there.[21] There were even mentions of the area's large communities of Muslims living there who had a history of taking issue with state behavior. In practice, the initiative helped to facilitate the training of local military units, primarily through U.S. Special Operations Forces, to carry out counterterrorism tasks. This highlights the continuity in strategic aims and goals from the early 2000s to the contemporary strategies mentioned here. Further, we can see focal points in this strategy that highlight the idea of terrorism and counterterrorism as being merely a function of training units to defeat it. This continues to scale in the subsequent initiatives below, serving as a key ingredient for the premise of this article.

The TSCTI, run by the U.S. Africa Command, played a key role in shaping U.S. policy in the region. It implemented several significant initiatives and, though later remade, has continued in some form up to the present.[22] The first of these was to assist countries with large Muslim populations in countering the rise and proliferation of extremist ideologies and the appeal that terrorist groups had within younger and disaffected groups by extending substantial aid packages. This effort was largely championed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. State Department (DoS) via various governance projects.[23] The military aspect of the initiative, overseen by U.S. AFRICOM, centered around supporting partner countries—Algeria, Senegal, Niger, Morocco, Mali, Chad, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Mauritania—through provision of equipment, logistical support, and training. These efforts aimed to enhance border control techniques, rapid response capabilities, and terrorism prevention measures.[24]

A notable military component was the establishment of Flintlock, an annual multinational security exercise led by Special Operations Command–Africa (SOCAF), which started in 2005. More significant structural efforts came in the establishment of a West Africa-focused Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF), which was able to focus its efforts on managing and directing the U.S. special operations footprint and activities within West Africa. In short, terrorism was still labeled as a driver of violence and conflict in and of itself, and little effort was made at a strategic level to better identify drivers. Over time, the TSCTI morphed into the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSTCP), expanding to eleven North and West African states, most strongly in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Guinea.[25]

The final key to understanding the nebulous nature of the U.S. strategic focus in Africa is the mandate given to U.S. AFRICOM. Although it has remained largely unchanged since the command's inception in 2007, there have been some advancements in how the U.S. identifies priorities on the continent. The first mandate centered around the idea that U.S. AFRICOM— a diverse command made up of military and Department of State leadership—would focus on training African security forces by improving their capabilities, sharing intelligence once gathered, and assisting in the coordination of regional responses.[26] Path One further becomes noticeable through this trend of information sharing thus propagating the same heuristics through allies and partners. The mandate further stated that U.S. AFRICOM would continue to coordinate all activities via inter-agency collaboration, particularly in matters related to terrorism and humanitarian assistance.

The most recent posture statement presented to Congress in 2024 by the current (as of the time of writing) commander of AFRICOM, General Langley, reflected only a slight shift from the original intent. While it provided more specificity regarding extremism and terrorism by acknowledging the need to identify some behavioral drivers, it did not go beyond that.[27] A more significant concern of the document, at least where West Africa is concerned, was the implementation of the Global Fragility Act (GFA) and the broader theme of great power competition.[28] This is in keeping with the U.S. strategic shift since 2008 towards competition with China and Russia, as well as a more refined focus on integrated deterrence—a framework that brings multiple U.S. agencies into a coordinated effort, but now with a focus on countering China and Russia, rather than extremism. Overall, the way the U.S. defines its strategic focal points in West Africa prioritizes near-peer competition in the region, offering little in terms of refining the definitional drivers of extremism and terrorism. Even as strategic and tactical units remain engaged in counter-extremism operations across West African countries, the broader strategic focus has not evolved similarly.

How the United States Defines the Complex Violence Extremism Ecosystem in the Sahel Through a Military Lens

With counterterrorism identified as a continued priority, understanding Path One's fixation on the definitional identification of terrorist groups in the Sahel requires first examining how the U.S. government currently defines the two largest groups in the region—and how those Path One heuristics have transferred to partner forces, both international and local. This section is organized into three parts: Director of National Intelligence (DNI) definitions and descriptions of violent extremist groups in the Sahel,[29] a discussion on the differing interpretations of counterterrorism versus counterinsurgency and how this divergence has created potential gaps in reasoning, and finally, a review of how U.S. military NATO partners have viewed these same conflict systems.

The DNI's interpretation and definition of violent extremist organizations in the Sahel is used here because it represents the most widely recognized classification system within the U.S. government, including the Department of Defense (DoD). These definitions serve as real-time references for policymakers and senior DoD decision-makers, shaping their understanding of these groups in the absence of classified reporting.[30] However, policy and strategy actions taken by the U.S. DoD in Sub-Saharan West Africa align with the broader characteristics discussed here, suggesting that classified reporting largely functions as a controlled variable with minimal influence on overarching policies and strategies regarding the social positioning of these groups.

Granted, as discussed below, lower-level DoD teams operating directly within conflict zones often take sub-state and subgroup drivers of conflict and instability into account. Nonetheless, it is the broader campaign-level frameworks that establish authorities, permissions, and strategic guidance, ultimately shaping the mission sets that lower-level teams are tasked with executing. Accordingly, the focus here remains on the broader, campaign-level decisions that define U.S. engagement in the region.

At the time of writing, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam Wal Muslimeen (JNIM) is the most militarily capable extremist group in the Sahel. The DNI website classifies JNIM as a terrorist group formed through the merger of several different groups.[31] It is further described as a Salafi-Jihadist entity aligned with the global Al-Qaeda ideology, exploiting local divisions and socio-economic grievances to build support in northern and central Mali. According to the DNI, the group finances its operations through ransom payments, the collection of *zakat* (Islamic taxation), weapons smuggling, and the extortion of human and drug traffickers. The definition also notes that JNIM has a strategic goal of territorial expansion.

There are, of course, numerous platitudes—such as references to the exploitation of local divisions—that typically accompany government-level descriptions of violent extremist groups, often in place of more substantive analysis. Overall, the description of the group matches most of their actions. However, it lacks meaningful context, aside from a locator point of 'Mali.' Without that, the description could be transferred to any AQ-associated group. The second major group in the Sahel is the bifurcated group of the Islamic State West Africa Principate/Jamaat al as-Sunnah lid-Da'Wah Wa'l Jihad, commonly known as Boko Haram. This is a complex group made up of several factions, including the Ansaru strain, which operates primarily in Niger.[32] Boko Haram was considered the most violent extremist group in the world in 2015-2016,[33] but has since reduced the severity of its campaign due to infighting and successful operations by the Nigerian military and the Lake Chad Basin countries' Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Nevertheless, the group remains a powerful foil to state stability in the region.

The DNI definition of ISWAP/Boko Haram is absent of most descriptors found in the JNIM definition. It simply states that the group "seeks to overthrow the Nigerian government and replace it with a regime based on Islamic law."[34] The definition also notes that the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2015 and is opposed to Western interests in the region. Those who have studied Boko Haram and its variants know that this is a severely reductionistic view of the group and one that is not well suited to inform policy or strategy.

There exist other definitions and characteristics used by sub-echelons within the U.S. DoD, especially within the Special Operations community,[35] but these remain either within classified systems or are largely equivalent to the descriptors above. Overall, these descriptions reduce violent extremist groups to generic terrorist characteristics that could apply to most violent extremist groups. This lack of specificity fails to account for deeper contexts, such as the underlying drivers of extremism, the groups' connections to the societies in which they are located, and the ways in which states leverage ethnic grievances. Without a nuanced understanding of these elements, along with a clear placement of each group in its historical, social, and geopolitical context, policy responses risk falling into the trap of "lumping," or treating diverse conflict dynamics as monolithic.

The concept of "lumping" refers to the tendency—whether purposeful or inadvertent—to assign diagnostic similarities to diverse conflicts that actually differ significantly in origin, structure, and objectives. This includes categorizing groups that emerge from resource-based conflict, banditry, and violent extremism under the broad umbrella of terrorism. External to the U.S. DoD, there are volumes of extant literature that discuss the differentiation of drivers.[36] Yet within the group definition discussions elucidated above, there is an apparent lack of such differentiation. For example, the characteristics ascribed to JNIM in the DNI definition could easily fit several Fulani-centric, resource-based conflicts in the Sahel.[37]

Importantly, the vast majority of conflicts in the Sahel are deeply rooted in local dynamics, with little, if any, connection to international terrorist or extremist organizations.[38] Many of the groups in the region, including the two discussed above, blend ideological objectives with illicit ventures that often provide livelihoods to communities in the areas where they operate.[39] The impact of this "lumping" is further discussed below, but a brief mention here is necessary to highlight the key actions taken to streamline the definitions of these groups and integrate them into existing strategies and policies designed to counter terrorism, particularly those shaped by Path One GWOT-era frameworks.[40]

Counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (COIN) are critical concepts from a policy perspective, as they guide how courses of action are aligned with violent extremist organizations. U.S. Department of Defense CT strategy centers on the definition of terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents."[41] To counter this form of violence, the DoD defines CT as "activities and operations taken to neutralize terrorists and their organizations and networks to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals."[42] Similar, but distinct, is the U.S. Army's counterinsurgency field manual definition of insurgency: "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict."[43] As with CT, the military has developed a corresponding definition of COIN: "a comprehensive civilian and military effort designed to simultaneously defend against and contain insurgency while addressing root causes," often executed through shape–clear–hold–build strategies.[44] While these conceptual definitions and their respective counterstrategies share overlapping features, violent extremist groups often move fluidly between terrorism and insurgency to achieve their goals, highlighting another vulnerability in the rigid policy alignment within Path One heuristics.

In the definitions of both JNIM and ISWAP/Boko Haram above, the DNI notes that both groups are expansionist and that Boko Haram, specifically, seeks to overthrow the Nigerian government. Though CT and COIN are identified as distinct strategic approaches, they are often applied interchangeably in practice, with the terms frequently used as substitutes for one another.[45] For example, the U.S. strategy in the Sahel[46] references CT five times in the context of supporting partner countries in countering threats to the U.S. homeland, yet does not mention the term *insurgency* even once, despite JNIM and Boko Haram displaying insurgent characteristics, as acknowledged by the DNI. Similarly, the U.S. National Defense Strategy for 2022 references terrorism but not insurgency,[47] and the U.S. National Military Strategy for 2022[48] has largely shifted to a pure focus on strategic competition, largely overlooking CT and COIN. The 2024 U.S. Africa Command Posture Statement does mention insurgencies, but only in the context of the ISIS-Mozambique conflict, while CT efforts in both Western and Eastern

Africa are emphasized primarily in relation to U.S. partnerships.[49] This reflects a broader inconsistency in how the U.S. defines and distinguishes between terrorism and insurgency in the Sahel, both in group classification and in strategic response. At the policy level, this may appear to be a trivial distinction. However, in practice, these definitions inform lower-level operations, resource allocations, and, most critically, the strategic and operational understanding of the conflict ecosystems in which these efforts are carried out.

The general misalignment of U.S. strategy and group definition—relying on austere definitions that fail to account for complex social factors in the Sahel—has not only impacted U.S. efforts but also those of its partners. The Nigerian response to Boko Haram/ISWAP oscillates between CT and counterinsurgency, depending on the document in question.[50] Portions of Nigeria's strategy have been shaped by observing and working with U.S. Africa Command, with actions in northeast Nigeria reflecting this strategic vacillation.[51] Both Mali[52] and Nigeria, in turn, have largely avoided looking towards the root causes of terrorism and insurgency, shifting instead to an almost exclusively CT-focused approach—mirroring the U.S. strategy in the region. Granted, Nigeria and Mali are both complex conflict ecosystems, and both countries have other extenuating circumstances that provide other factors within the causal chain, such as Mali's coup government and the existential threat of banditry and resource-based conflict in Nigeria. Nevertheless, it is well documented that countries that engaged with the U.S. military tend to adopt similar strategies through the process of norm diffusion, further reinforcing this broader pattern.[53]

This same phenomenon is not purely endemic to U.S. partner countries like Nigeria[54] but also extends to alliance member countries under collective security arrangements. Such dynamics can amplify the influence of faulty or overly predictive Path One heuristics. Until recently, France, a key NATO partner, maintained extensive security engagements in the West African Sahel. However, its agreements and treaties were overturned by governments in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and, most recently, Chad, leaving France with few viable options for pursuing unilateral or multilateral objectives in the region.[55] Prior to these setbacks, France led large-scale CT operations, often in partnership with Sahelian countries, such as Operation Serval (2013) and Operation Barkhane (2014), designed to protect French interests and counter extremist threats, some of which targeted the French homeland directly[56]

Slightly counter to the U.S. example of simplistic definitions of regional security dynamics, French military leaders in the Sahel region identified a wider set of contributing factors to the rise of JNIM and broader instability: "poverty; weak institutions; ethnic, religious, and tribal conflict; corruption; an abundance of small arms; deeply rooted conservative Islamic traditions; lingering postcolonial anti-European sentiment; and proximity to both Europe and the Middle East."[57] Despite this more comprehensive understanding of conflict drivers in the region, France still pursued an almost exclusively CT-based strategy, treating violent extremist groups as largely separate from the societies they inhabit or manipulate.[58]

Ultimately, this section has shown that the United States has maintained a myopic view of violent extremist groups in the Sahel, conceptualizing them as isolated from their social and political environments. This framing has directly impacted the implementation of both CT and counterinsurgency strategies by the United States and by its partners, through norm diffusion. As a result, this misalignment has had tangible effects on how both U.S. partners and allies have approached similar conflict situations in the region, underscoring a broader struggle to adapt CT frameworks shaped by monolithic and entrenched heuristics.

Path One vs. Path Two: Rethinking Counterterrorism in the Sahel

With a firm footing in the GWOT-focused Path One dependency framework, we now shift to an alternative trajectory, referred to here as Path Two. As outlined in the introduction and methods sections, this approach challenges the assumption that violent extremist groups exist separately from the populations in which they operate. Instead, it posits that such groups fundamentally require population support in some fashion[59] to sustain their activities. Additionally, these groups often seek to establish political authority within society, making their integration, however marginal, into their 'host' populations a critical factor in their survival and expansion.

This section will examine this issue from a different angle, focusing on four different indicators of violent extremist groups that have not been adequately considered at a policy level by the United States: (1) deep historical context, (2) local sentiment toward the groups, (3) motivations for joining, and (4) governance vacuums—otherwise referred to as a lack of state consolidation. These four characteristics shift the prevailing view that violent extremist organizations are not isolated entities, but rather *part of* the social fabric of their respective regions.

Prior to delving into these characteristics, it is worthwhile to identify another model that experts in the field of counterterrorism studies identify as being representative of sound analysis of violent extremist groups. Shultz and Dew[60] propose a method of analysis that examines a 'terrorist' group's concept of warfare, organization, and command and control, areas of operation, types of targets and operations, constraints and limitations, and the roles of outside actors. Although several of these characteristics can indeed house concepts such as those discussed below, they are largely bereft of any discussion of the groups being part of the social fabric. Instead, they primarily frame extremist groups as reactive social defense mechanisms—an incredibly important characteristic in its own right, but an incomplete perspective. Further, several studies have identified that the United States is reticent to analyze violent extremist groups outside of the 'terrorism' concept.[61] This hesitancy is not due to the violent acts these groups commit, but because of the high costs of 'getting it wrong.' Rather than countering the groups in a more sustainable manner, the U.S. often defaults to short-term, reactionary measures.

Path Two counters this idea and proposes a more sustainable approach to understanding and engaging these groups. The first key characteristic—deep time—situates extremist groups within a broader temporal and spatial framework. For example, Boko Haram/ISWAP is not simply a Jihadi group that emerged in 2002 out of a cohort of university students at the University of Maiduguri, led by Muhamed Yusuf until his death in 2009. To fully understand Boko Haram's origin, one must look further back to the historical context of the Kanem-Bornu Empire, which until the early 1900s was the hegemon in the region. Indeed, Boko Haram became fractionalized in part over arguments as to whether the group should serve as a new version of the 'Kanuri Caliphate'[62] or pursue alternative objectives.[63] Developing this idea of deep historical linkages within contemporary groups, there was discussion amongst the founders of the group, including Yusuf, over what language sermons and religious writings should be delivered. Some advocated for Kanembu, the language of the defunct Kanem-Bornu elites and still the primary medium for religious scholars of Borno and Yobe states.[64] Others argued for Hausa or Arabic so that more of the population in northern Nigeria could understand them and interact.[65] Expanding these historical facts into a more wide-ranging analytical

framework, Scott MacEachern's years of ethnographic and empirical research in Northeastern Nigeria suggest that Boko Haram is a continuation of long-standing economic and political dynamics at the frontiers of empire, now delineated as contemporary country boundaries.[66] The group is very much a Salafi organization, but it also follows the traditions of slave-raiding states such as Kanem-Bornu, maintaining linkages between elites and illegal activities, including smuggling and trafficking. In this sense, the group operates not just as an ideological movement but as an extension of a deeply embedded historical system identified through language, collective identity, and embodiment of past empires—one that young men continue to seek entry into for economic and social mobility.

This same idea of deep history can also be applied to groups such as JNIM. Historian Adu Boahen developed similar studies of the Tuareg of Mali, highlighting homologous patterns.[67] Control over the Saharan caravan trade routes, especially those between Gao, Mopti, and Timbuktu, were the prize protectorates of the Tuareg federations of the Northern Mali region. These routes were thrown into disarray when the Moroccan sultanate attacked the Western Sahara region to seize them in the early 1600s, although this was never fully accomplished. Ag Ghali, the emir of JNIM and an Ifhogas Toureg, has taken part in several Toureg uprisings over the years, previously leading the free Azawad movement[68] and openly seeking to leverage power in the Northern Mali region through controlling trade.[69] Ag Ghali's political moves not only serve his strategic interests in the present but also represent an attempt to overturn the chaos caused by the Moroccan caliphate in the past, as well as to shift the intra-Touareg confederation power structure.[70] Indeed, these linkages to deep time give both Boko Haram/ISWAP and JNIM different locations in space and time than previously identified. While this is less critical for external, outsider understandings of these groups, it is vital for understanding how locals might interpret their motives.

This interpretation of how extremist groups are perceived by locals can be assessed through local sentiment surveys. With regard to JNIM in Mali, respondents to a 2016 Mali Metré[71] survey had little to no opinion about the violent extremist groups operating in their regions. However, close to fifteen percent of respondents believed that reconciliation should occur prior to any other developments within the country. Granted, this was prior to the spate of coups the country experienced in the early 2020s, but several extremist groups were already operating in the country—groups that would eventually coalesce into JNIM (Al-Mourabitoun, Ansar al-Dine, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and a portion of Katiba Macina). Furthermore, security was thought to have improved in recent months[72] in regions such as Sikasso, Ségou, Mopti, and Timbuktu. Yet data showed that violent extremist attacks had, in fact, increased substantially in those same regions.[73]

The 2024 Mali Metré[74] survey sheds more light on how local sentiment has evolved. While no new data was collected specifically for that year regarding disarmament or reconciliation, the report referenced 2018 survey results, in which 47 percent of respondents felt that the reconciliation process was no longer as important as it once was, without indicating what other approaches should be pursued. Returning to the 2024 data, most regions, except for Gao and Ménaka, were perceived as becoming more secure.[75] However, reported attacks had increased in all regions of Mali that year.[76] This highlights that, although sentiment may shift slightly regarding what should be done to stem attacks, there remains a disconnect between perceived security and the actual frequency of attacks across all regions in Mali. This can be interpreted in a few ways, but the most compelling understanding is that locals take a pragmatic stance

toward the groups operating in their areas. Rather than viewing these groups as external 'invaders,' the local population appears largely ambivalent toward the presence of these extremely violent groups, perhaps suggesting that they play a specific role in society or provide security dividends against other violent actors that the state is unable to address. This underscores the need for a more nuanced, contextualized understanding of local sentiment when formulating counterterrorism policies.

The third characteristic—reasons for joining extremist groups—further supports the idea that these organizations may play integral roles within the societies of northern Nigeria and Mali. Although this follows a similar methodological approach as the analysis of local sentiment, examining motivations for recruitment provides insight into how locals perceive the dichotomy between state-provided security and the security offered by extremist groups. In many cases, individuals join extremist groups as a direct response to violence perpetrated by the state—violence paradoxically intended to defeat the very groups locals are joining, ultimately forming a reinforcing feedback loop. Regarding JNIM, reasons for joining include personal motivations, protection, social influences, ethical concerns, group influence, economic necessity, family ties, political factors, religious beliefs, coercion, environmental stressors, and broader cultural, community, or sociological pressures.[77] Indeed, one individual surveyed remarked that "[t]here are many armed groups that defend the interests of their own communities[,] so the communities identify with certain armed groups, and to show their good faith they have a member of their family join the group so they can fight for their community."[78]

In the case of Boko Haram/ISWAP, motivations include revenge for military actions, a sense of belonging, unemployment, and peer pressure. Interestingly, religious reasons did not factor highly with Boko Haram/ISWAP or JNIM recruits,[79] contradicting the narrative of the DNI, which understands each group to be centered on religio-political conflict. Integrating reasons for joining further substantiates that these groups—and their connections with local communities—run far deeper than current security policies acknowledge. Rather than being isolated actors, extremist groups are often embedded within the strategic calculations of local populations, who weigh the risks and benefits of engagement based on their lived realities. This suggests a far more complex entanglement than is typically recognized in counterterrorism frameworks.[80]

The final characteristic to consider is the lack of state consolidation and what that means for perceptions of the security provisions provided by extremist groups.[81] In essence, this lack of consolidation refers to the state—in this case Mali, Niger, and Nigeria—never having had the opportunity or capability to establish a firm monopoly on the use of force (in the Weberian sense) or to consistently provide quality political goods that citizens recognize as serving their best interests. There are many arguments as to why this has never occurred, but the majority center around the region's socially diverse human landscape, longstanding traditions of self-rule, and the abundance of internal antagonisms that have prevented the state from fully coalescing.[82]

Most important for this discussion is how the characteristics of state non-consolidation can be identified. The first indicator is the recurring coups, primarily in the Sahel, that have occurred since independence was granted in the 1960s. Nigeria is a slightly different case in that it has largely gained a monopoly on the use of force and achieved a degree of consolidation; however, this has been largely relegated to the South of the country, due to colonial-era development policies by the British Empire that prioritized the South while leaving the North

impoverished and marginalized.[83] Another indicator of weak state consolidations is the presence of governance vacuums,[84] especially in the case of Mali and Niger, where state authority remains focused on securing power in and around the capital cities, largely resorting to external power brokers (France, the U.S., and now the Wagner Group) to assist in the provision of security throughout the rest of their countries. The second method of assessing this lack of consolidation is through localized peace deals brokered by Jihadis in and around central Mali.[85] One striking example is the peace agreements facilitated by JNIM in Mopti, where tensions between Dogon farming communities and Fulani pastoralists have escalated in recent years due to increasing resource pressures. To help stem the bloodshed, which numbered in the hundreds,[86] and to enhance their governance role in the region, JNIM brokered a peace deal between both groups using the recitation of 'blood pacts' rooted in generational memory between the Dogon and Fulani. This type of activity can only be accomplished in the absence of strong or even weak states and further helps to highlight the lack of consolidation.

These indicators and characteristics form and identify a complex system in the Sahel, where groups such as JNIM and Boko Haram/ISWAP are not necessarily separate and distinct actors, but instead part of the social fabric of the region. They should therefore be analyzed within their historical and societal contexts, rather than as external insurgent forces. Although the four characteristics above were chosen for their ability to best illustrate this phenomenon, other theories help highlight this interconnected nature, further supporting a shift toward a Path Two frame.

Vamik Volkan[87] discusses the idea of trans-generational trauma transmission, which can stretch back tens of generations through stories passed down through cultural groups. As mentioned, Ag Ghali was involved in several Tuareg rebellions in Mali in response to the Malian state atrocities in the north of the country, as well as for other external pressures from the northern reaches of Africa. While this can impact individual psyches, Volkan notes that such trauma must be cultural in nature to motivate collective action or violence. In this case, Ag Ghali has successfully linked numerous disparate groups together under the JNIM banner to fight on behalf of such a cultural trauma.[88] There are also the works of Mike Martin,[89] who condenses volumes of literature on *why* human and social groups come to blows with a simple, yet complex framework of five problems: identity, hierarchy, trade, disease, and punishment. Several of these concepts are easily identifiable above, especially within Oginni's argument of civilians having to hedge their bets between the state and extremist groups in a search for identity, stability, and safety.

Finally, the four characteristics above, as well as the two concepts discussed here, can be wrapped into the basic root causes of conflict. Proximal causes, such as reasons for joining and the deep social fabric connections, provide immediate explanations for extremist group membership, but are not explicitly factored into the DNI group definitions. Remote causes should also be considered in deeper analysis, such as this. For instance, the issue of state consolidation—or lack thereof—should be integrated into any deeper analysis, as it remains a foundational factor shaping the persistence of violent extremist groups in the region. Overall, these characteristics and arguments challenge the current U.S. policy prescriptions within the Sub-Saharan African Sahel and suggest substantive additions to a Path Two frame. To help better identify how Path One's misaligned characteristics manifest in practice, the following section examples two key examples: the Tongo-Tongo incident in 2017 and the Malian and Wagner Group failure in Tinzawaten.

Impacts: Real and In-Potentia

The first event demonstrating the real-world consequences of U.S. strategy in the Sahel is the fatal ambush in the village of Tongo Tongo (Niger) in October 2017.[90] Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 3212 of the U.S. Army's 3rd Special Forces Group was on an approved mission to capture a local commander who operated within the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) extremist group.[91] ODA 3212 was unable to locate the commander and was forced to turn back, stopping in Tongo Tongo on their return to base. It was there that they were ambushed by ISGS fighters. ODA 3212 and the accompanying Nigerien military unit suffered several casualties, and the incident triggered multiple inquiries within U.S. AFRICOM and SOCAF. Of interest to this argument is a particularly telling excerpt from the investigation transcript, which states:

> While there is evidence to indicate that the enemy enjoys freedom of movement in Tongo Tongo, there is not enough evidence to conclude that the villagers of Tongo Tongo willingly (without duress) aid and support them. Additionally, there is insufficient evidence to determine if villagers aided the enemy or participated in the attack.[92]

This passage makes it clear that U.S. counterterrorism policy views extremist groups and the populations in which they operate as distinct and separate entities—a binary perspective rooted in Path One heuristics that does not accurately reflect the reality of group dynamics. While this assumption reflects a policy-level framework, numerous reports indicated that ODA 3212 had a more nuanced understanding of the local environment but was nonetheless ordered to proceed with the mission.[93] In reality, ISGS is known to work openly with and leverage local populations in their areas of operation through both kinship ties and coercion. Given that Tongo Tongo was within ISGS's operational zone, and the local population (predominantly Zarma) shared ethnic affinities with the group,[94] it is highly unlikely that locals were entirely uninfluenced by ISGS. Whether through coercion, passive acquiescence, or strategic alignment, local populations often navigate a complex landscape in which they must hedge their bets between state forces and extremist groups.[95] This incident exemplifies Path One's shortcomings at the policy level, where flawed assumptions and inadequate analysis within counterterrorism strategy failed to account for the deeply embedded relationships between extremist groups and local communities in the Sahel. This lack of conceptual understanding ultimately undermines the effectiveness of U.S. security strategies in the region.

The second empirical example is the failed military operations by the Malian Armed Forces (FAM) and their Wagner Group (Africa Corps) counterparts in the small Northern Malian town of Tinzawaten in July of 2024. This incident highlights the far-reaching impact of faulty Path One heuristics via "downstream" or norm diffusion effects observed in how the Malian military planned for and engaged a group that shifts between terrorism and insurgency.[96] Between 2001 and 2019 (prior to the onset of Section 7008 restrictions following Mali's coup), the United States was Mali's primary security partner through Section 333 partner capacity-building funding.[97] With this support came training on how to conduct counterterror operations based on U.S. methodologies. As part of the failed military expedition to root out JNIM extremists and cut off smuggling routes in Algeria, the Malian military took the lead in identifying how and when to strike.[98] In attempting to rely on locals to support the operation, similar to the Tongo Tongo incident, the Malian military miscalculated by assuming a binary dynamic often embedded in U.S. counterterrorism frameworks regarding extremism in the Sahel.[99] Granted,

Mali is no longer a current security partner of the U.S.; however, the example remains illuminating as a downstream effect of the U.S. military training's influence on (former) partner forces in the region. Indeed, Path One dependency shows clear limitations in its ability to address or understand the root causes of extremism, an issue that the Biden Administration identified as a priority in West Africa.[100]

Suggestions for Strategy and Policy Augmentations and Conclusion

As a concluding reflection on this study, it is evident that U.S. security policy in the West African Sahel remains rooted in a GWOT-era heuristic that views extremist groups as separate and distinct from the societies in which they operate. This approach is increasingly primed for failure, as demonstrated by the two case studies of Tongo-Tongo and the Malian military's failure in northern Mali. A second path—still viable if policymakers acknowledge these failures as path collisions, even ex post facto—would require clearer inclusion of the four characteristics identified above: deep history, sentiment, reasons for joining, and lack of state consolidation.

By taking these into account within policy design, a few recommendations present themselves. First, current counterterrorism and counterinsurgency concepts may not be effective in the Sahel. As noted, extremist groups in the region do not function as purely external threats; rather, they are deeply embedded within the local social fabric, enabled by the absence of legitimate state authority. Instead of treating these groups as distinct entities to be countered through conventional military strategy, U.S. policy must reframe them within the broader sociopolitical ecosystem in which they exist—that is, along Path Two. Second, conflict analysis and resolution-informed approaches may be better suited to addressing the complexity of extremism in the Sahel. These approaches, when tied to conflict mapping models such as the sustainable livelihoods framework,[101] allow policymakers to develop more nuanced interventions and to identify which conflicts require direct engagement and which should be left alone, recognizing that external actors may have limited influence.

Finally, aspects of irregular warfare strategies may provide a more effective long-term approach, as they heavily rely on civil-military coordination, information operations, foreign internal defense, and state-level legitimacy-building effort.[102] Current developments in irregular warfare strategies are primarily focused on strategic competition, but since their core emphasis is on legitimacy development at the substate level, the missions and operations designed to achieve those objectives can be dual-hatted to address broader violent extremism paradigms. Irregular warfare also incorporates dynamic understandings of sub-state violence, making it adaptable to countering extremist threats at a localized level. Further, irregular strategies have long been employed by small states against those more powerful,[103] lending further credence to the argument for utilizing strategies that capitalize on fewer resources and focus on the fungible aspects of non-standard means. As an example, civil-military aspects of irregular warfare can and should be built around "approaches that are informed by the enemy and the populations around him, their attitudes, beliefs, frustrations, and the [group's] periphery."[104] Although several aspects of irregular warfare strategies can be gleaned from CT and counterinsurgency definitions and requirements, those models are largely locked into Path One dependency. By contrast, irregular warfare strategies introduce new definitions of success, such as building legitimacy for partner forces or locals rather than relying on attrition-focused strategies, and are still emerging, meaning they have not yet fused into a path dependency. Similar arguments can be made for the other irregular warfare aspects discussed above. Indeed,

a mixed strategy that integrates conflict resolution models with irregular warfare programs and initiatives can help avoid the kind of path dependency shift seen in CT and COIN approaches. Ultimately, stability in the West African Sahel will not be found without addressing extremism concerns. The U.S. might have shifted to a strategic competition focus, but extremist groups cannot be counted out as spoilers in many areas where the U.S. seeks dominance. They are ignored at the peril of all.

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Agents of Influence Weaponizing Credibility: How to Win a Wartime Narrative from Within

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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether—and how—a communist agent of influence, Pham Xuan An, contributed to narrative patterns in *Time* magazine's Vietnam War coverage, and what this reveals about contemporary information warfare. Using a mixed-methods design and natural language processing, the analysis covered 245 *Time* articles and identified high levels of rhetorical convergence with Vietnamese communist propaganda. Strategic failure framing, moral ambiguity, and civilian victimhood appeared in over 60% of the coverage, closely aligned with North Vietnamese messaging themes. The most predictive factor of convergence was not emotional language, but how journalists framed cause, blame, and moral weight—highlighting framing as a primary vehicle for narrative influence. While direct causality cannot be established, the patterns demonstrate how adversaries can exploit open information systems through trust-based manipulation. This case illustrates that narrative dominance can be achieved without lies or censorship, making agents of influence a critical threat vector in the cognitive domain of irregular warfare.

In 2018, Maria Butina, a covert Russian agent, was arrested in the United States after infiltrating political and ideological networks tied to the presidential administration. Her mission was not traditional espionage but rather to gain influence—cultivating relationships and shaping narratives to align American discourse with Russian interests.[1] Her case revived an older, more elusive threat: the agent of influence. These strategically embedded individuals subtly reshape public opinion within a target society to serve a foreign power's goal.[2] Agents of influence have played a particular role within communist societies, where the aim is to ideologically subvert a non-socialist foreign nation and incite revolution.[3]

Operating covertly in the cognitive domain, agents of influence co-opt existing values, divisions, and sympathies through trusted roles in journalism, academia, diplomacy, and civil society. As irregular warfare evolves, the role of information warfare will only become more salient. Open democratic societies, lacking centralized controls and gatekeeping mechanisms, remain especially vulnerable to these tactics.[4] The survival of these agents depends on plausible deniability and cumulative psychological effects. Measuring impact on public opinion is difficult enough; covert attempts at influence muddy the waters further.[5] The question remains: do agents of influence actually achieve tangible results? How dangerous are they to an open democratic society? The answer to this research problem may lie in a case study of a Vietnamese communist agent of influence during the Vietnam War.

The Perfect Influence Agent

Pham Xuan An was a South Vietnamese communist spy and influence agent who primarily worked for *Time* magazine while freelancing for other news outlets as a journalist. He served as a fixer and trusted assistant to many prominent American journalists working in South Vietnam.[6] An graduated with an associate's degree in journalism from Orange Coast College in California and was fluent in English. He was recognized by American journalists as the go-to expert on Vietnam and the war. Eminent journalist David Halberstam said, "[An] was the most trusted Vietnamese in the press corps. If An said it, it had to be true."[7] An's American biographers and apologists argue that he was not an agent of influence, just a spy, because he never lied or spread disinformation to his American colleagues. However, this interpretation overlooks a key reality: information warfare and propaganda do not require deception or disinformation. In fact, disinformation poses a significant liability if the lie is discovered. The most effective propagandists avoid lying—something that, in An's case, would have threatened his survival.[8]

An's role as a journalist and his close personal relationships with American colleagues put him in an excellent position to spy. However, his real power lay in his ability to shape how those colleagues thought about the war by framing it for them. He stated, "I always tried to tell the truth. But I used the truth in such a skillful way that no one could complain. That's how you do it. Truth was a weapon, and I used it to my best advantage."[9] An explained how he handled inconvenient information: "I never lied in my reports. I simply left out the parts that would hurt the revolution. That's not lying. That's editing."[10] This can be explained through a number of theoretical frameworks and established social influence techniques. For example, An employed the social proof technique, where colleagues looked to him, and other knowledgeable people they trusted, for cues on how to interpret ambiguous situations or make decisions.[11] Thus, it is clear that An was an agent of influence. But how successful was he?

The Vietnamese communist leadership understood that eroding the American will to fight was the key to their victory. According to North Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, "We need not defeat the Americans militarily in Vietnam. It is sufficient to break their will to continue. That war is fought in their newspapers and their streets."[12] An, then, would have sought victory in the information domain by influencing journalists.

This project aims to determine whether An's influence on American journalists manifested in *Time* magazine's news coverage of the conflict. Specifically, it examines whether the themes, metaphors, and frames found in Vietnamese communist propaganda can also be found—

knowingly or not—in *Time*'s coverage of the war. In doing so, it asks a deeper question: can a single well-placed agent of influence shift the discourse of an entire nation?

Literature Review

There are a couple of research articles that examine *Time*'s coverage of Vietnam.[13] John Newhagen found that *Time* exhibited a pro-war bias in 1967, adopted a neutral stance in 1968, and shifted to a more critical perspective from 1969 through 1974. The thesis suggests that, during the later years, some articles may have misrepresented events in ways that aligned with anti-war sentiments. This could reflect An's influence, or it might simply mirror broader trends that were already emerging. William Hammond explored how structural constraints, such as editorial pressures and ethical dilemmas, shaped reporting. *Time*'s reporters faced limited access, ambiguous information, censorship efforts, and the high personal risk of field reporting in a war.[14] Journalists clearly operated in a high-stress, high-risk environment that made both reporting and analysis especially difficult.[15]

Communist Conceptions of Agents of Influence

Agents of influence can be defined as individuals covertly serving a foreign entity within their society from a position with access and ability to influence public opinion or decision-making that benefits the foreign entity.[16] In communist strategic doctrine, particularly in Soviet and Vietnamese models, agents of influence were conceptualized as integrated irregular warfare assets. Their task was to covertly operate within the ideological, cultural, or media ecosystems of rival societies. Their purpose was to infiltrate positions of discursive authority and reshape narratives, beliefs, and perceived realities in ways that would erode the adversary's political will and delegitimize its institutions over time.[17] A narrative can be defined as a structured representation of events and characters that convey meaning by organizing experiences into a coherent, interpretable form. Narratives provide cognitive frameworks that guide how individuals interpret information, attribute causality, and make moral evaluations.[18] This reflects the broader Leninist view that ideological struggle is a terrain of warfare in itself—and that winning the war of ideas, particularly inside the enemy's society, is as vital as winning on the battlefield.[19]

The Soviets institutionalized Lenin's conceptualization through their active-measures doctrine, which explicitly defined agents of influence as individuals who could "penetrate and manipulate foreign media, parliaments, academic communities, and religious institutions."[20] These agents, often holding legitimate professional credentials, were not expected to lie outright but to subtly frame issues, promote division, and amplify existing doubts or contradictions. This is in keeping with the Marxist-Leninist understanding of contradiction as a tool of dialectical destabilization.[21] North Vietnam's Central Propaganda Department trained operatives not only in ideological doctrine but also in Western rhetorical strategies and influence techniques. For example, they studied Western journalism to enhance their effectiveness with foreign journalists and NGOs. These agents were expected to speak the language—both literally and metaphorically—of Western liberalism. This knowledge helped them gain access to intellectual elites and media platforms from which they could shape dominant narrative.[22] They also had to manage what Marxists refer to as internal contradictions. As An put it, "I was a spy, yes, but I was also a journalist. Both jobs were the same: to understand, to explain, to influence."[23] Yet he also said, "I was able to read documents and

attend press briefings. I gave the information to the revolution, and I gave a clean version to *Time*. The trick was knowing how to use each one."[24] And he insisted, "I never lied to anyone. I gave the same political analyses to *Time* that I gave to Ho Chi Minh."[25] Success in his work and securing his survival depended on managing the contradictions of Western journalism and the imperatives of information warfare.[26]

Framing and Strategic Truth Telling

An's own words show that he avoided outright deception or fabrication by using a tactic best described as strategic truth-telling within the framework of framing theory. Through omission, selective emphasis, and credibility, he framed the war in ways that reinforced communist narratives and undermined American resolve. Framing elevates certain facts while omitting others to guide perception in ways that serve strategic objectives.[27] One fictional example of framing, based on a historical operation, illustrates how An might have framed a military action for American journalists:

> In the shadow of the Iron Triangle, U.S. helicopters thundered across once-quiet rice fields, and entire hamlets were evacuated 'for their protection.' Villagers watched as their ancestral homes were burned, not by the communists, but by American forces wielding napalm and bulldozers. While U.S. officials called it 'pacification,' to the people of Ben Suc, it felt like punishment. 'Why must we suffer for politics we do not understand?' one old woman asked.

This passage exemplifies strategic truth-telling through narrative framing. It presents factually accurate details—U.S. helicopters, civilian evacuations, use of napalm and bulldozers, and official terminology like "pacification"—but does so in a way that guides readers toward a morally charged, emotionally resonant interpretation. Rather than falsifying events, the account emphasizes civilian suffering, displacement, and the dissonance between official language and lived experience.[28]

Determining whether *Time* magazine reflected themes found in Vietnamese communist propaganda is not merely a matter of identifying narrative convergence; it is a question of understanding potential audience impact. Narrative convergence refers to the alignment of rhetorical, thematic, or ideological elements across distinct texts, institutions, or platforms, highlighting how seemingly independent discourses may reflect shared interpretive structures, whether through coordinated influence or parallel meaning-making.[29] Decades of research in political communication and media psychology show that audiences actively interpret messages through cognitive shortcuts, including framing cues, moral evaluations, and emotional salience.[30] For example, if a reader encountered a headline like "U.S. Bombs Viet Cong Stronghold in Strategic Victory," the brain would quickly extract meaning from the embedded framing. Words like *"stronghold"* and *"strategic victory"* frame the event as militarily necessary and morally justified, activating schemas of security, patriotism, and success. This primes the reader to interpret further details through a lens of legitimacy and purpose.[31]

If *Time* adopted frames that foregrounded U.S. moral ambiguity, civilian victimhood, or the inevitability of withdrawal—frames also present in Vietnamese communist messaging—then those stories may have done more than inform the public; they may have shaped the cognitive and emotional terrain of the Vietnam War debate. In this sense, framing is not merely

a stylistic choice but a mechanism of influence that can affect public attitudes and democratic decision-making.[32]

Journalists as Agents of Social and Cognitive Influence

In liberal democracies, journalists have traditionally occupied a unique position as mediators of public knowledge, though in today's information environment, that role is rapidly changing. In the 1960s, however, journalists shaped not only what the public knew but also how people interpreted and morally evaluated unfolding events. They served as gatekeepers, interpreters, and framing agents whose choices helped construct reality in public discourse. [33] One illustrative case is that of Richard Gott, a senior journalist at *The Guardian*, who was revealed in the 1990s to have maintained a covert quid pro quo relationship with the Soviet KGB during the Cold War. Rather than fabricating stories, Gott amplified anti-imperialist frames and Cold War skepticism that aligned with Soviet ideological goals.[34] He used his editorial voice to launder adversarial perspectives into the British mainstream. Like Pham Xuan An, Gott operated within the media institution itself—not as an outsider—and influenced discourse not through outright deception, but through strategic framing and selective emphasis, leveraging his professional credibility to carry state-aligned narratives under the guise of independent journalism.[35]

In the context of information warfare, journalists can function as vectors of cognitive influence. A vector, in military and epidemiological terms, is a vehicle that carries something, such as ideas, without originating it. Vectors enable the delivery, amplification, and integration of ideas into the host system. They create pathways for transmitting narratives, frames, and psychological cues into the target population's information environment. In operational terms, the journalist becomes a narrative relay node, particularly vulnerable in contested environments where access is constrained and local intermediaries shape what they see and understand.[36]

In contemporary terms, new media technologies have disabled journalists' exclusive ability to vector ideas. However, during the Vietnam war, trusted informants like Pham Xuan An, exerted powerful gatekeeping abilities. Deliberately embedded within the journalistic vector, An shaped not only what got reported but also how events were morally and causally interpreted. This was a form of indirect fire in the cognitive domain, achieving psychological effects through carefully calibrated, credible, and truthful-seeming narratives that bypassed overt propaganda filters. The journalist, in this case, became an unwitting force multiplier for adversarial influence precisely because the messages they carried benefited from perceived neutrality and institutional trust.[37]

War Journalism and Source Dependency

War reporting is arguably the most difficult and dangerous domain of journalism. It presents unique challenges that often undermine the journalist's ideal of independence. Access to sources, documents, and events is constrained by language and cultural barriers. Reporters frequently depend on local informants, fixers, translators, and stringers to interpret both the physical and cultural terrain. [38] As a result, these local actors can become gatekeepers of meaning—shaping not only what journalists see and hear, but also how they understand, frame, and prioritize events.[39]

Source dependency is particularly acute in asymmetrical or insurgency-based conflicts like the Vietnam War. Foreign journalists, especially early in the war, often lacked embedded status

with U.S. military units. Urban-based reporters rarely had firsthand access to combat zones.[40] Instead, they relied on local insiders fluent in both language and narrative—individuals who could navigate the conflict's ideological complexities and provide context that shaped the reporter's interpretive frame.[41] In this information ecosystem, trusted sources could act as epistemic authorities, subtly guiding which stories were covered and how they were told.

A clear example of source dependency comes from Pham Xuan An's role as a narrative intermediary during the 1963 Battle of Ap Bac, where Viet Cong forces faced superior Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) units. The Viet Cong held their ground, an outcome An framed for American journalists as a sign of communist resilience and South Vietnamese weakness. He highlighted real tactical failures, poor coordination, delayed reinforcements, and ARVN reluctance to advance as evidence of incompetence and low morale. By contrast, he emphasized the discipline and effectiveness of the Viet Cong, portraying their survival as a symbol of resistance and legitimacy. The resulting coverage helped seed early doubts in the American press, demonstrating how a trusted local source could subtly recalibrate foreign perceptions of the war.[42]

Narrative Convergence

To assess whether *Time* magazine reflected themes found in Vietnamese communist propaganda, this study applies the concept of narrative convergence. Narrative convergence refers to the extent to which distinct sources—possibly operating under different intentions—produce similar thematic, rhetorical, or moral representations of key events. It serves as a methodological lens for detecting and describing the overlap between *Time*'s reporting and Vietnamese communist propaganda. While overt alignment is rare, covert influence strategies, particularly those involving trusted intermediaries, can result in overlapping frames and parallel narratives, even without direct coordination.[43]

Narrative convergence can be measured through several research methods. One approach is to identify rhetorical markers, such as emotionally charged metaphors, appeals to moral outrage, or dichotomous constructions like "oppressor vs. victim."[44] In media framing analysis, convergence is assessed through frame identification and frequency comparison, examining how different sources define problems, assign responsibility, and propose solutions.[45] In communication science, scholars have applied techniques like topic modeling, sentiment analysis, and lexical similarity metrics to quantify thematic overlap across corpora, especially in comparative political or wartime media research.[46]

In this study, coding for narrative convergence involves identifying instances where *Time* magazine articles reflect themes, frames, or rhetorical strategies found in Vietnamese communist propaganda. For example, a hypothetical article influenced by An might describe a U.S. pacification campaign as leaving "scorched fields and orphaned children," framing the war as punishment rather than liberation. If a propaganda document similarly portrays U.S. actions as imperialist cruelty, the two sources are coded as converging. Convergence is determined by shared moral framing, emotional salience, and interpretive alignment, not identical wording.[47] This approach helps capture how An's strategic truth-telling, through selective emphasis and framing, may have aligned *Time*'s reporting with North Vietnamese messaging.

Research Questions

The preceding review establishes that agents of influence like Pham Xuan An operated within vulnerable discursive ecosystems such as war journalism, using strategic truth-telling and narrative framing to shape Western understanding of the Vietnam War. Given the known mechanisms of source dependence, rhetorical convergence, and framing effects on public opinion, the following research questions guide this study's empirical investigation of whether—and how—*Time* magazine's coverage reflected ideological themes consistent with North Vietnamese propaganda:

Research Question One: To what extent do the thematic frames and rhetorical devices found in Vietnamese communist propaganda appear in *Time* magazine's coverage of the Vietnam War during Pham Xuan An's tenure?

Research Question Two: How frequently, and in what rhetorical functions, do emotionally resonant frames (e.g., civilian victimhood, moral ambiguity, the psychological toll of war) appear in *Time*'s Vietnam War coverage, and how do these align with communist propaganda objectives?

Research Question Three: To what extent does *Time*'s coverage of the Vietnam War incorporate oppositional or subversive framing patterns consistent with North Vietnamese propaganda goals?

Methods

This project employs a convergent mixed methods design to examine whether *Time* magazine's coverage of the Vietnam War during Pham Xuan An's tenure reflects themes and rhetorical strategies consistent with Vietnamese communist propaganda. This approach is well suited to complex communication phenomena where both measurable patterns and interpretive nuance are analytically significant. Quantitative content analysis allows for systematic, replicable measurement of rhetorical convergence, capturing the frequency, distribution, and statistical significance of narrative features across large textual corpora. [48] Complementing this, qualitative rhetorical comparison offers contextual and discursive insight into how frames are constructed, morally positioned, and emotionally mobilized within specific historical and cultural settings. [49] The convergent design is particularly appropriate when neither method alone can fully capture the phenomenon of interest. [50] It enables the researcher to triangulate findings—using numerical data to identify patterns, and interpretive methods to explain their meaning—producing a richer, more valid understanding of strategic narrative alignment and potential influence operations.

Sources

Two data sets were used in this project. The first was a propaganda document dataset (N = 50), consisting of captured North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front propaganda materials drawn from the Texas Tech Vietnam Center & Archive. These documents were either untranslated (with Google Translate used for preliminary translation) or accompanied by official English translations prepared by Vietnamese translators working for the U.S. government. Documents were selected based on their discussion of propaganda strategy and ideological concepts. The second dataset comprised (N = 245) randomly selected *Time*

magazine articles on the Vietnam War, published between 1965 and 1975. These were sourced from the *Time* archives on EBSCOhost. Articles focused solely on the U.S. anti-war movement or domestic politics were excluded, as An is unlikely to have influenced that coverage. *Time* articles from this period were published under institutional voice, meaning authorship was anonymous; therefore, texts cannot be parsed by author for a more specific analysis of individual influence. All articles and documents were transcribed using optical character recognition (OCR) software to convert scanned images of printed or typewritten material into machine-readable text.[51]

Data Analysis
Quantitative Analysis
Texts were processed using Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques to quantitatively code rhetorical features across *Time* magazine articles and Vietnamese propaganda documents. After OCR conversion, TF-IDF (Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency) vectorization identified high-salience terms, while sentiment analysis flagged emotionally charged language consistent with propaganda themes. Cosine similarity scores were then used to compare thematic alignment between *Time* articles and propaganda documents. This approach enabled efficient detection of candidate texts for manual coding, ensuring consistency, scalability, and empirical grounding in the identification of narrative convergence.[52]

Qualitative Analysis
The data was explored qualitatively through deductive, human-led systematic coding. Predefined categories—including key terms (e.g., *imperialism*, *puppet government*), metaphors, and other communication devices rooted in theoretical frameworks—guided the process. Manual coding identified the presence of rhetorical features such as moral framing and emotional appeals. The analysis began with the propaganda documents, which informed the codebook used for coding *Time* magazine articles. Unlike automated NLP tools, manual coding allowed for context-sensitive interpretation, particularly in evaluating tone, implied meaning, or narrative nuance that might elude machine classifiers. Two coders used a shared codebook and achieved strong intercoder reliability (Cohen's Kappa > 0.82) on a 20% subsample of the propaganda documents, and (Cohen's Kappa > 0.86) on a 20% subsample of the *Time* articles.

Mixed Methods Integration
Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings in this mixed methods design was conducted in parallel and then combined to deepen understanding of potential narrative convergence. Quantitative results—such as elevated cosine similarity scores, frequent use of emotional language, or alignment in high-salience terms—identified candidate articles for deeper rhetorical inspection. A total of $n = 40$ *Time* articles were selected using a matrix sampling strategy that accounted for high vs. low similarity, high vs. low sentiment, and historical time frame (early war: 1965–1967; late war: 1972–1975). These articles were then subjected to qualitative manual coding, where interpretive nuance, context, and strategic framing were assessed.[53] Findings were integrated during analysis and interpretation: instances where both methods aligned were treated as strong convergence, while discrepancies prompted closer review of contextual or rhetorical divergences. This integration enhances validity and

explanatory depth, ensuring that empirical patterns are supported by theoretically informed interpretation.[54]

Statistical Analysis

Several statistical techniques were employed to assess the degree of narrative convergence between *Time* magazine articles and Vietnamese propaganda documents. Correlation and regression analyses were conducted alongside natural language processing tools. First, TF-IDF vectorization was applied to generate document-level term profiles.[55] These profiles were compared using cosine similarity, producing a continuous measure of lexical and thematic alignment. To explore the relationship between convergence and specific rhetorical features (e.g., emotional tone, moral framing, strategic themes), point-biserial correlations were calculated between cosine similarity scores and binary-coded variables.[56] This approach enabled assessment of whether articles reflecting certain rhetorical strategies were more likely to align with propaganda narratives.

Next, multiple linear regression models were constructed to predict convergence scores based on the presence of rhetorical variables. These models tested whether combinations of features—such as emotional appeals, symbolic metaphors, or moral evaluations—significantly explained variance in convergence, controlling for publication year and sentiment score. This approach offers a more robust analysis than simple frequency counts or chi-square tests, allowing examination of how rhetorical elements interact to produce strategic narrative alignment. Finally, while the findings will cover themes involving morality, it is not the goal of this paper to make normative judgments about the Vietnam War. The focus is to assess the effectiveness of Pham Xuan An as an influence agent.

Findings

The analysis revealed compelling evidence of narrative convergence between *Time* magazine's coverage of the Vietnam War and Vietnamese communist propaganda documents. Of the 245 *Time* articles analyzed, 63% contained at least three rhetorical features commonly associated with communist strategic messaging. Quantitative analysis showed a strong correlation between convergence scores and the presence of these rhetorical features. Multiple regression confirmed that combinations of emotional appeals, moral framing, and symbolic metaphors significantly predicted narrative alignment with propaganda documents. These results suggest that *Time*'s reporting often reproduced ideological patterns found in communist messaging, whether due to direct influence or coincidental convergence. Manual coding deepened these findings, revealing how specific articles employed framing devices that aligned with North Vietnamese objectives, recasting U.S. intervention as morally compromised, militarily unsustainable, and psychologically disintegrating.

Research Question One

RQ1 asked: *To what extent do the thematic frames and rhetorical devices found in Vietnamese communist propaganda appear in* Time *magazine's coverage of the Vietnam War during Pham Xuan An's tenure?*

The data provides substantial evidence that thematic frames and rhetorical devices commonly found in Vietnamese communist propaganda also appeared across a significant portion of *Time*'s Vietnam War coverage. The most prevalent device was moral positioning (71%), which manifested in frequent portrayals of South Vietnamese leaders as immoral and U.S. actions as morally questionable or counterproductive. Next were strategic failure themes (66%), which emphasized American futility, Vietnamese resilience, and the inevitability of U.S. withdrawal. The third most common feature was the use of emotional triggers (58%), which appeared through graphically and emotionally charged imagery centered on displaced civilians, grieving families, and battlefield trauma.

For example, a *Time* article from August 26, 1966, titled "The Illusion of Control," emphasized the failure of ARVN forces to hold territory despite heavy U.S. air support. The article described the campaign as "a costly demonstration with no lasting impact" and noted that "ARVN commanders showed little initiative, waiting for American helicopters to lead the way."[57] This framing cast doubt on the strategic coherence of U.S. operations and highlighted the dependency and ineffectiveness of South Vietnamese forces. These themes closely mirror a 1966 National Liberation Front (NLF) directive, which referred to the South Vietnamese regime as "a hollow shell kept alive by imperial air power" and declared, "No fire from above can fix what is broken in the heart of a puppet."[58] The parallel use of language—terms like *hollow*, *puppet*, and references to strategic futility—demonstrates narrative convergence. While not necessarily intentional, this reflects shared rhetorical positioning and moral interpretation. This alignment exemplifies how communist propaganda objectives could be echoed, even unintentionally, within mainstream Western reporting.

Below, Figure 1 illustrates the progression of narrative convergence between *Time* magazine articles and Vietnamese communist propaganda documents. Using cosine similarity scores derived from TF-IDF vectorization, the graph measures how closely each article's rhetorical and thematic content aligns with that of propaganda texts. The y-axis represents the degree of similarity, while the x-axis approximates chronological publication order. The dashed line marks a threshold (0.70) indicating significant convergence; articles above this line exhibit notable rhetorical alignment with adversarial messaging. The shaded region below represents the "area of vulnerability," where articles fall short of strategic alignment. Annotations highlight key moments in this convergence trajectory, beginning with initial alignment, followed by intensifying rhetorical overlap, and culminating in a peak phase during the late-war period. Adapted from McRaven's "Relative Superiority" framework,[59] the figure conceptualizes influence in the cognitive domain, showing how narrative dominance may be achieved not through deception, but through sustained rhetorical alignment with adversarial themes.
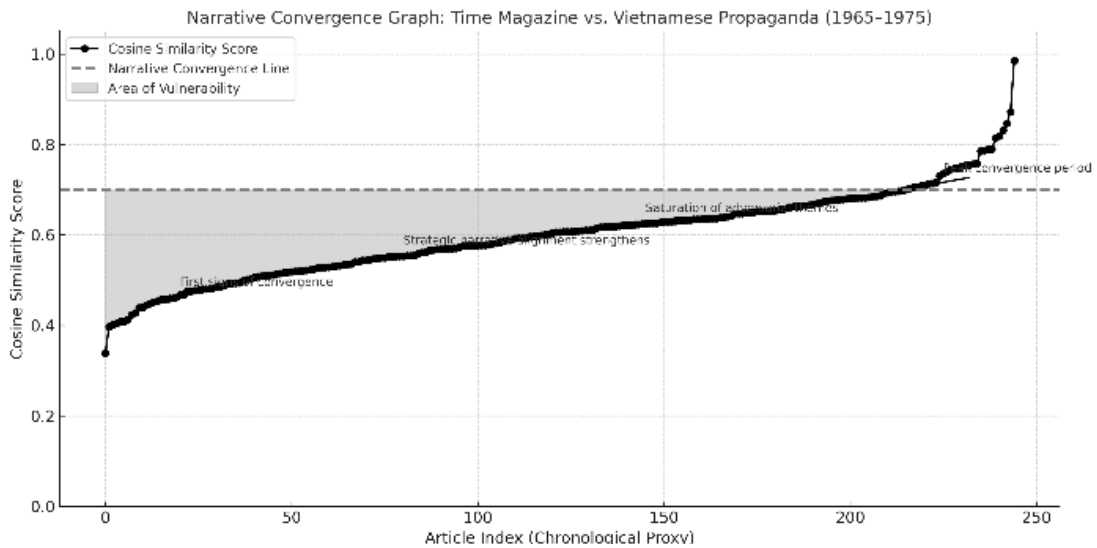
Figure 1. Narrative Convergence Between *Time* Magazine and Vietnamese Propaganda (1965–1975). Graph depicting the progression of rhetorical convergence between *Time* magazine articles and Vietnamese communist propaganda documents, based on cosine similarity scores. The dashed *Narrative Convergence Line* (0.70) marks the threshold for significant ideological alignment. The shaded region below represents the *Area of Vulnerability*, where alignment remains below this threshold. Annotations highlight key moments of escalating convergence over time. *Source: Created by author.*

Research Question Two

RQ2 posits: *How frequently, and in what rhetorical functions, do emotionally resonant frames (e.g., civilian victimhood, moral ambiguity, or the psychological toll of war) appear in* Time *magazine's Vietnam War coverage, and how do these align with communist propaganda objectives*?

Emotionally resonant frames appeared in 58% of Time articles, most often highlighting civilian suffering, grief, and moral disillusionment with the war. These emotional narratives frequently functioned to recast U.S. intervention in morally ambiguous terms, echoing propaganda portrayals of the U.S. as an illegitimate occupier.

Quantitative analysis supports this alignment. Articles featuring emotional triggers showed significantly higher cosine similarity scores (mean = 0.67, SD = 0.09) compared to those without (mean = 0.58, SD = 0.11). Regression analysis confirmed that emotional framing, when paired with moral positioning, significantly predicted narrative convergence ($\beta = 0.019$, p = 0.042). The point-biserial correlation between emotional triggers and convergence scores was positive (r = 0.035), though not independently significant.

These findings are illustrated in Figure 2, which depicts the relationship between emotionally resonant framing and narrative convergence in *Time*'s Vietnam War coverage. Articles containing emotional themes—such as civilian suffering, battlefield trauma, or moral

disillusionment—exhibited significantly higher cosine similarity scores when compared to Vietnamese communist propaganda documents. On average, emotionally framed articles scored 0.67, while those without such framing averaged 0.58. This suggests that emotionally charged narratives were more likely to align with adversarial messaging, particularly in how they humanized Vietnamese combatants and emphasized the psychological and ethical costs of the war. These findings reinforce the idea that emotional framing did not merely enhance storytelling; it also served as a conduit for ideological alignment, amplifying themes consistent with North Vietnamese strategic communication goals.
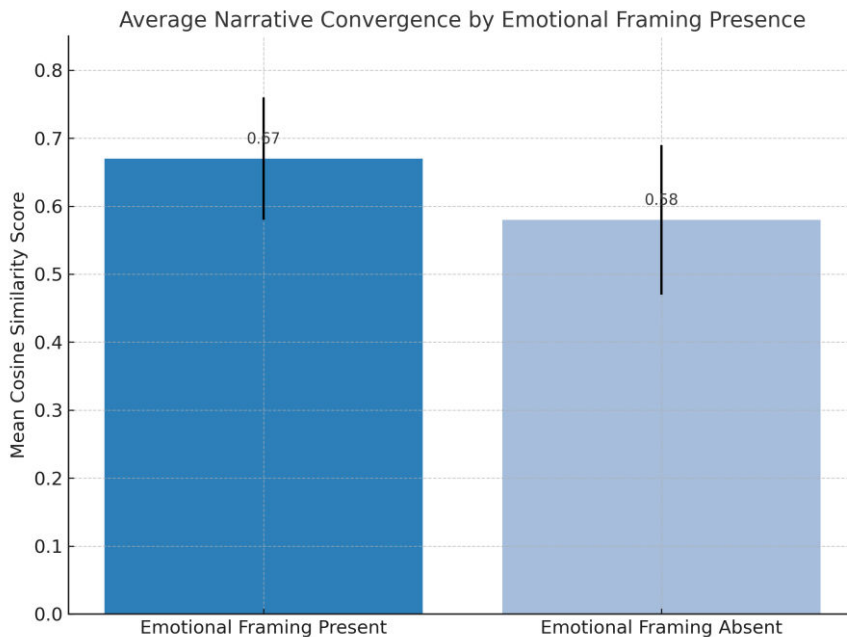

Figure 2: Emotional Framing and Narrative Convergence in *Time* Magazine Articles (1965–1975). Chart comparing mean cosine similarity scores between articles with emotionally resonant framing and those without. Articles containing emotional narratives— such as civilian suffering, battlefield trauma, and moral disillusionment—exhibited significantly higher convergence with North Vietnamese propaganda. *Source: Created by author.*

A *Time* magazine article from March 2, 1970, titled "A Risky New Phase," describes a shift in U.S. military strategy aimed at transferring more combat responsibility to South Vietnamese forces. Rather than emphasizing battlefield outcomes or military momentum, the article focuses on uncertainty, questioning whether ARVN units are prepared to lead and whether American withdrawal signals confusion rather than confidence. The shift is framed as a gamble rather than a coherent plan, mirroring messaging found in North Vietnamese propaganda, which often portrayed U.S. strategy as reactive and desperate. This alignment illustrates how narrative convergence can occur through subtle framing, even in the absence of overt ideological language.[60] This framing closely parallels a 1971 National Liberation Front psychological operations leaflet, which declared: "The American mask of moral purpose is slipping beneath the weight of failure. Their strategic retreat is disguised as noble withdrawal, but their desperation shows." Both the *Time* article and the NLF document interpret U.S. withdrawal not

as a demonstration of strength, but as collapse veiled in rhetoric. This alignment illustrates how narrative convergence can occur through strategic framing, even without overt ideological language or coordinated messaging.[61]

Research Question Three

RQ3 asked: *To what extent does* Time *magazine's Vietnam War coverage incorporate oppositional or subversive framing patterns consistent with North Vietnamese propaganda objectives?*

A substantial portion of *Time*'s Vietnam War coverage contained framing patterns that aligned with rhetorical strategies found in Vietnamese communist propaganda—particularly in how the war was framed as morally compromised, strategically futile, or psychologically corrosive. Among the 245 articles analyzed, 71% included moral positioning that cast doubt on U.S. or ARVN legitimacy, while 66% framed the war as a losing or aimless endeavor. Articles containing these features had significantly higher cosine similarity scores (mean = 0.69, SD = 0.08) compared to those without them (mean = 0.59, SD = 0.10), indicating stronger convergence with propaganda narratives. Regression analysis confirmed this pattern: moral framing and strategic failure themes jointly predicted higher narrative convergence ($R^2 = 0.018$, $p = 0.027$). Notably, articles critical of the war's moral and strategic basis were more likely to reflect the same framing logic used by the National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese messaging operations.

Figure 3 below illustrates the relationship between rhetorical convergence features and narrative alignment with Vietnamese propaganda. Each article received a composite score based on the presence of three key rhetorical devices: moral positioning, strategic failure themes, and emotional triggers. The chart shows a clear positive linear relationship between this *Rhetorical Convergence Score* and cosine similarity, indicating that articles with more of these features were significantly more likely to align with adversarial messaging. The shaded area represents the 95% confidence interval, further validating the strength and consistency of this relationship.
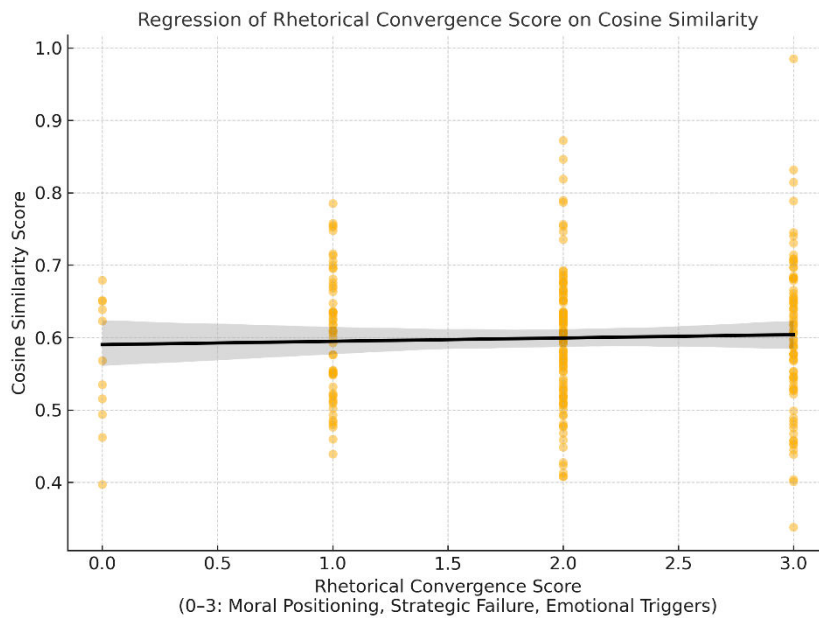
Figure 3. Regression of Rhetorical Convergence Score on Narrative Alignment. Graph showing the positive linear relationship between the composite Rhetorical Convergence Score—based on the presence of moral positioning, strategic failure themes, and emotional triggers—and cosine similarity scores. Higher rhetorical feature density is associated with greater narrative convergence with Vietnamese propaganda. The shaded region represents the 95% confidence interval. *Source: Created by author.*

Qualitative evidence further strengthens the quantitative conclusion. One 1971 *Time* article described the war effort as "a costly exercise in national self-deception,"[62] a phrase echoed almost verbatim in a contemporaneous NLF leaflet referring to "the American mask of moral purpose slipping beneath the weight of failure."[63] This rhetorical alignment, whether intentional or not, illustrates how oppositional journalism can function as a discursive amplifier of adversarial messaging, particularly in open societies where dissent and investigative framing are central to media culture.

An Unexpected Finding

The analysis revealed a serendipitous finding that was not specifically anticipated. Certain framing devices—particularly problem definition, causal attribution, and moral evaluation—proved more predictive of narrative convergence than emotional triggers. While emotional framing appeared in 58% of *Time* articles and often aligned with adversarial messaging, it was the structure of framing that showed the strongest correlation with convergence scores. In point-biserial analysis, framing devices had the highest correlation ($r = 0.116$) of any rhetorical feature and were the only variable approaching statistical significance independently ($p = 0.070$). Regression analysis further confirmed that when framing devices were present, articles were more likely to align with themes found in Vietnamese communist propaganda. This suggests that the way stories were structured and morally positioned—rather than simply their

emotional appeal—was more central to narrative alignment. For influence practitioners, this underscores that strategic truth-telling relies less on pathos alone and more on shaping causal logic and moral interpretation, echoing core principles in propaganda theory and cognitive framing.[64]

Figure 4 below illustrates the relationship between the use of framing devices and narrative convergence in *Time*'s Vietnam War coverage. The scatter plot shows that articles containing framing devices tend to exhibit higher narrative convergence, with scores clustering above the mean. The regression trendline confirms a positive association, suggesting that framing structure—not just emotional content—plays a critical role in aligning journalistic narratives with adversarial messaging. This supports the broader finding that strategic truth-telling operates through interpretive framing, guiding how audiences assign blame, perceive legitimacy, and evaluate policy outcomes.
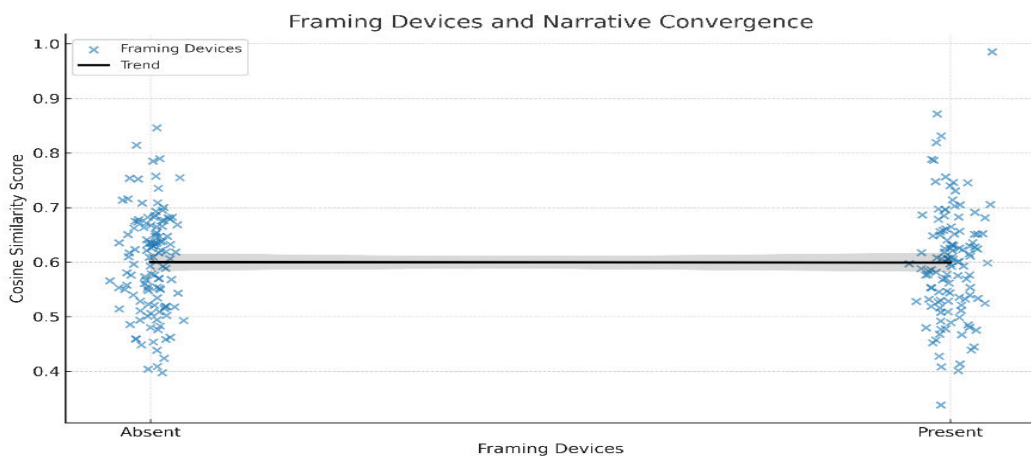

Figure 4. Framing Devices and Narrative Convergence. Scatter plot showing the relationship between the presence of framing devices (problem definition, moral evaluation, and causal attribution) and cosine similarity scores. The data indicate higher narrative convergence when framing devices are present. The regression trendline reveals a positive association, supporting the finding that structural framing—not just emotional appeal—is a key driver of narrative alignment with adversarial messaging. *Source: Created by author.*

The qualitative evidence also reinforces this finding. A *Time* magazine article published on February 16, 1970, titled *"The War That Won't End"* framed the Vietnam conflict not as a military challenge, but as a crisis of U.S. political will and moral legitimacy. The article stated, "The longer America insists on salvaging Saigon, the more moral capital it burns at home and abroad," and attributed the prolonged conflict to "Washington's refusal to accept the limits of its own credibility."[65] These framing devices—problem definition, moral evaluation, and causal attribution—closely mirror a 1970 broadcast from the Voice of the National Liberation Front, which claimed the U.S. was "trapped in a war of its own making, unable to exit without admitting the moral lie that started it." [66] This alignment suggests that structural framing, more than emotional appeal, served as the primary mechanism through which *Time* articles occasionally mirrored adversarial messaging logic.

Discussion

The Vietnam War was fought not only in jungles and rice paddies, but also in headlines, photographs, and the imagination of the American public. This study set out to explore whether—and how—a specific agent of influence was able to fight the information war, with the aim of drawing broader lessons about influence agents in general. The findings provide strong evidence that the influence tactics Pham Xuan An later described in interviews were indeed highly effective. To be clear, the data from this study cannot assert a direct cause-and-effect relationship between Pham Xuan An and the American journalists whose work was analyzed. There is no claim that reporters knowingly echoed communist narratives or acted as agents of influence.

However, the evidence is compelling: across hundreds of articles, rhetorical elements associated with adversarial propaganda—particularly strategic failure narratives, moral ambiguity, and civilian victimhood—recurred throughout *Time*'s coverage. The results raise important implications for irregular and information warfare, the science of social influence, and cognitive-domain operations. A key lesson is that narrative convergence does not require coordination. It requires shared framing logic, moral resonance, and contextual conditions ripe for reinterpretation. In open societies where journalists operate freely, and where trusted local sources help shape the flow of information, adversaries do not need to invent stories—they need only guide the interpretation of truth.

Across all three research questions, the findings reveal a consistent pattern: *Time* magazine's Vietnam War coverage frequently reflected rhetorical elements aligned with Vietnamese communist propaganda. Articles featuring these themes showed higher narrative convergence scores, suggesting that adversarial-aligned messaging can enter trusted media ecosystems not through overt disinformation, but through framing and emphasis. Moreover, the analysis revealed that framing devices—how events were interpreted and morally evaluated—were even more predictive of convergence than emotional content, underscoring that influence is often embedded in structure, not sentiment. Figure 1 illustrates the deeper risk: open societies are vulnerable to narrative manipulation through trusted media channels.

As *Time*'s reporting increasingly aligned with communist messaging, particularly during turning points like the Tet Offensive and U.S. withdrawal, the data shows that influence does not require lies or censorship. It requires access, credibility, and the ability to guide how events are explained. An, as a strategically placed and culturally fluent source, operated within this vulnerability. Journalists in conflict zones rely on trusted locals to navigate unfamiliar terrain; when those locals serve a dual agenda, the result can be the unintentional amplification of adversarial narratives under the guise of neutral reporting. This case study highlights how agents of influence can shape strategic outcomes not by changing facts, but by changing how those facts are framed and understood.

Theoretical Implications

While the practical implications for irregular and information warfare are paramount, this study also contributes to theoretical understandings of propaganda and narrative influence. The findings affirm that framing theory, particularly the roles of moral evaluation, causal attribution, and problem definition, is central to how narratives shape public perception.[67] Articles that employed these framing devices showed significantly greater convergence with adversarial messaging, reinforcing the notion that framing is not merely a journalistic device but a strategic

tool for influence.[68] The results also support emerging perspectives on *strategic truth-telling*, where truth is not denied but selectively emphasized to achieve persuasive or ideological outcomes. This tactic aligns closely with the methods Pham Xuan An described: omission, emphasis, and framing rather than fabrication. In cognitive-domain operations, the findings suggest that narrative architecture—the way stories are structured and framed—may exert more influence than content alone, a claim increasingly echoed in hybrid warfare literature.[69] Future theoretical work should further examine how adversaries exploit open media systems through rhetorical framing and how democratic institutions can develop safeguards against subtle narrative infiltration without undermining press freedom.

Practical Implications

This case makes one thing clear: agents of influence represent a serious and dangerous threat to national security. It is easy to mistake the symptoms for the cause. The real threat is not a troll farm or a viral meme; it is a highly trained, well-placed agent of influence who creates the memes and operates inside newsrooms, think tanks, or universities, where they can quietly spread these ideas. These individuals earn trust, build credibility, and slowly shift how journalists, academics, and policymakers see the world. A single well-positioned influence agent working on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party could quietly shape how Americans understand Taiwan, human rights in Xinjiang, or U.S. policy in the Indo-Pacific—all without ever being flagged as a hostile actor. They wouldn't need to lie. They would simply tell selective truths, frame key events in ways that benefit Beijing, and let a free society do the rest.

That's the danger: open societies are vulnerable not because they are weak, but because they are transparent. Influence agents don't need to control media—they need only to shape the lens through which credible institutions interpret reality. If we wait until these operatives are exposed, it's already too late. We need early-warning systems that flag narrative shifts, not just misinformation. We need training that teaches operators and analysts how to spot subtle framing manipulation, not just obvious propaganda. And we must stop thinking about influence as something that happens *over there*. It's happening here, now, and we're not prepared.

Finally, these findings carry important lessons for journalists. The results reflect a more complex and human reality: in high-stress, information-scarce environments like Vietnam, journalists were subject to the same cognitive shortcuts, emotional heuristics, and trust-based judgments that shape all human decision-making.[70] Research on cognitive load and information processing shows that when people are overwhelmed, they rely more heavily on trusted sources and emotionally salient frames.[71] Add to this the dynamics of source credibility and in-group trust—both of which influence how we judge truthfulness—and it becomes clear how an embedded agent like An could shape perception, not through overt manipulation, but by strategically offering what felt like clarity amid chaos. Journalists need to be equipped to evaluate source risk and discern how to identify signal from noise. Counterintelligence professionals and information warfare specialists must play a role in supporting that effort.

Limitations

First, we acknowledge that agents of the United States government committed immoral and illegal acts during the Vietnam War. These actions deserved to be exposed and criticized by journalists. Thus, the results of this study must be interpreted with caution. We cannot rule out that the repulsiveness of these acts—not Pham Xuan An's influence—was the primary driver

of negative news coverage. This study does not establish a direct causal link between Pham Xuan An and the *Time* magazine articles analyzed. While the findings show strong narrative convergence with Vietnamese propaganda themes, *Time*'s use of institutional voice during the war (publishing without bylines) makes it impossible to attribute specific content to individual journalists or to confirm An's direct influence in any documentable way.

Additionally, the study did not include formal coding of U.S. government messaging, so divergences were inferred from alignment with adversarial themes rather than measured directly against official narratives. While NLP and cosine similarity effectively highlighted rhetorical overlap, they could not fully capture implied tone or sarcasm. Manual coding helped address this, but some interpretive subjectivity remains. Finally, the dataset is limited to a single outlet and time period, which restricts generalizability, though the influence tactics observed are likely relevant to contemporary information warfare environments, where trusted institutions remain vulnerable to narrative manipulation.

Conclusion

This study reveals a truth that should alarm every strategist, policymaker, and defender of democracy: you do not need to control the press to control the narrative. You only need to influence the people who shape how reality is framed. Pham Xuan An did not write propaganda because he did not have to. By earning the trust of American journalists and carefully framing the truth, he helped insert communist narratives into the bloodstream of U.S. public discourse. The power of that strategy lay not in disinformation, but in weaponized credibility.

This case is not merely history—it is a warning. Influence agents are operating right now, in new forms and with new technologies, but using the same principles. They exploit trust, leverage open information systems, and guide public understanding in ways that favor authoritarian agendas. If we fail to take this threat seriously, we will continue to lose ground—not on the battlefield, but in the minds of our own people. Democracies will not survive on facts alone. They must be defended at the level of perception, narrative, and trust.

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BOOK REVIEW

To Liberate Hong Kong: Stories from the Freedom Struggle by Brian Kern

ISBN: 978-1-7394243-2-9, BUI JONES, 2023, 288 pages, $19.51 (Paperback)

Reviewed by: **Stephen G. Craft**, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, Florida, USA
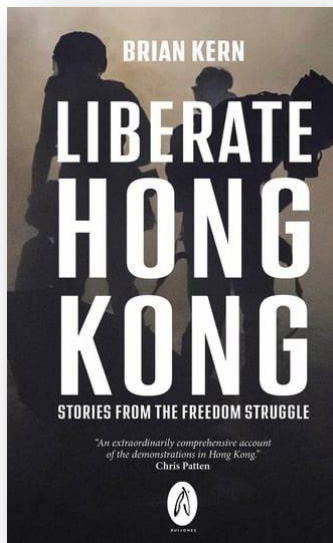
To Liberate Hong Kong is an account of the protests in Hong Kong in 2019 in opposition to an extradition bill officially titled the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance. The author, Brian Kern, is an American citizen and human rights activist who lived there for over a decade before departing for what he calls "exile" in the United States. Kern briefly taught at a school there years earlier, where he encouraged the creation of human rights groups that he claims became student-led and proliferated within Hong Kong's school system. He also co-hosted a human rights program that was broadcast on a pirate radio station. Since his return to the U.S. in 2020, Kern has given testimony before Congress regarding the CCP's political repression in Hong Kong.[1]

The book's title comes from a slogan that emerged after the Umbrella Movement of 2014, when students protested the CCP's decision to circumscribe universal suffrage in Hong Kong. Unlike previous peaceful protests, the police responded with force and arrests. Kern, who participated in those protests that lasted nearly 80 days, describes the Umbrella Movement as a turning point for the overwhelming majority of young Hong Kongers who became opponents of the CCP. Kern faults the CCP's efforts to impose control on Hong Kong and assimilate its citizens for radicalizing young people who did not have resistance in their DNA. This included introducing "Moral and National Education," or what critics called Communist brainwashing, into the school system. Young people felt that the Umbrella Movement failed, with some concluding that it revealed the limits of non-violent demonstrations.

The protests started in March, but on June 9, 2019, over 1 million people engaged in the first mega-march against the extradition bill, with over 3 million participating in 12 acts of

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[1] See the author's Substack, About - Brian Kern/Kong Tsung-gan/江松澗 (substack.com); Testimony of Brian Kern to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China May 11, 2023, <u>2023.05.11 Kern CECC Testimony (house.gov)</u>.

protest that month alone. Three days later, approximately 100,000 peaceful demonstrators surrounded the Legislative Council (LEGCO), forcing the postponement of the bill's second reading. The protesters threatened to escalate the situation if a total recall of the bill did not occur by 3:00 p.m. The call to escalate went out anonymously online. Kern also observes that it was that day that the notion of a "leaderless movement" was born. As he feared, the police struck back at all 100,000 protesters, who were labeled as "rioters." Kern argues that the police, in their victory, set a pattern that persisted for months: police overreaction provoked a stronger counter-reaction that drew in more supporters as police brutality worsened.

Those protesters who put up barricades, disrupted transportation, wrote graffiti, destroyed pro-CCP businesses, and engaged in direct confrontation with the police were called "frontline protesters." Kern, an opponent of the use of violence, described the frontline protesters as disciplined: no looting and no attacks on civilians. They laid siege to the police headquarters and occupied LEGCO. Most protesters, however, were non-violent. They used social media, such as Telegram and WhatsApp, to communicate, coordinate, and keep tabs. Citizens showed solidarity by opening their homes to those trying to escape police dragnets, donating money and supplies to protesters, supporting those put on trial, and helping those who were fired from their jobs to find new employment with what became known as the "yellow businesses," which supported the protests, as opposed to the "blue businesses" that supported the police and the CCP. Students held strikes and engaged in human chain events. Acts of defiance were shown by singing "Glory to Hong Kong" or maintaining Lennon Walls. Frontline protesters were shielded from police attacks by older Hong Kongers who formed Protect the Children, and many aided protesters by serving as medics, cooks, or human mules who hauled supplies in backpacks. Kern described the frontline protesters as the glue that held it all together, but they were, to paraphrase Mao Zedong, the fish, and ordinary people were the water.

By December, the protests seemingly achieved their intended effect. The extradition bill was removed from LEGCO on October 23. On November 24, democracy candidates for the District Council won a landslide victory that gave them 389 out of 452 seats and 17 of 18 district councils. Just days later, Donald Trump signed into law the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act and the Protect Hong Kong Act, which called for imposing sanctions on Hong Kong and Chinese officials accused of abusing the human rights of people in Hong Kong and prohibited the sale of crowd control equipment to China.

Yet, events also proved more violent and tense. Protesters were injured both by police and hired thugs, and some committed suicide. When a university student died under mysterious circumstances in early November, with some believing it to be police-related, protesters launched Operation Dawn, which sought to paralyze Hong Kong's transportation. At the Chinese University of Hong Kong, riot police fired everything but live bullets at protesters, who repelled them with Molotov cocktails. Kern believes that the assault on the school crossed a Rubicon: the police were now viewed as one of the CCP's proxies for cracking down on dissent.

By now, Kern had not only been threatened by thugs but also found himself the target of party-owned newspapers that published articles about him and photographs of him and his children. To protect himself from doxing, Kern assumed the identity of a young Hong Konger named Kong Tsung-gan and wrote articles and gave interviews under that pseudonym. Pro-CCP and pro-authoritarian media outlets, such as Greyzone, revealed his true identity and accused him of being a foreign agent, if not a member of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The protests continued into 2020, but the number of events and participants declined considerably. In January, they were centered on the Hong Kong government's refusal to close the border despite the COVID outbreak. In March, the government took advantage of the pandemic to ban all gatherings involving more than four people. Then, on June 30, the CCP imposed the Safeguarding National Security Law in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. A protest the next day led to numerous arrests on terrorism charges.

Kern wrote his account prior to the passage of that law and the CCP's continued efforts to destroy any remaining shreds of democracy and autonomy as understood by protesters and their supporters. At the time, he hoped that the damage to the CCP's image and rising global anti-authoritarian sentiment might create opportunities for Hong Kongers to continue their resistance. Yet he was right at the time to suggest that Hong Kongers had to find their own path to save their home because, even if the world viewed China as a growing threat, democracy advocates could not expect foreign support.

To Liberate Hong Kong is a highly readable introduction to the protests. While not an exhaustive study, it will likely appeal mainly to those knowledgeable about human rights and democracy movements or events specific to Hong Kong. Although Kern's portrayal includes the voices of several Hong Kongers, including middle-aged women who were politicized by the protests, it remains a one-sided account by an expatriate that needs to be supplemented by the experiences and motivations of other protesters.

Kern tried to end on a note of hope. One slogan used during the protests was, "See you at the pot," meaning to realize the dream of no longer living "in an abnormal society, an oppressive society." Four years later, that dream, sadly, remains unfulfilled.

BOOK REVIEW

The Secret History of the Five Eyes: The Untold Story of the International Spy Network by Richard Kerbaj

ISBN 978-1789465037, Union Square & Co., 2025, 448 pages, $29.99 (Hardcover)

Reviewed by: **David P. Oakley**, University of South Florida – Global and National Security Institute, Tampa, Florida, USA
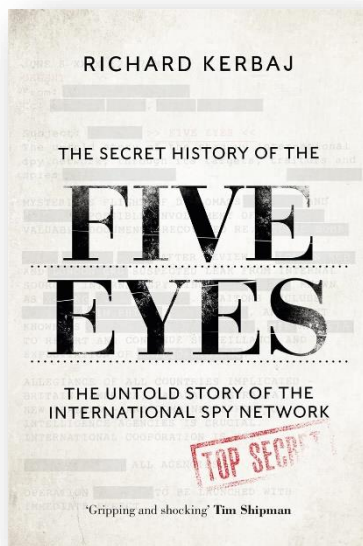
Richard Kerbaj's *The Secret History of the Five Eyes: The Untold Story of the International Spy Network* is a captivating read that is a valuable contribution to the literature on the Five Eyes partnership. The book considers the evolution of the intelligence relationship among the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand ("the Five Eyes"). Although focused on the partnership, Kerbaj uses historical events and personal stories, both known and unknown, to take the reader on an entertaining journey through the ebb and flow of the relationship. Beyond the fascinating historical accounts, he interviewed over one hundred politicians, practitioners, and academics to get a broad perspective on the Five Eyes partnership. Kerbaj, a renowned journalist and BAFTA award-winning documentarian, interviewed numerous former senior leaders, including two British prime ministers and two Australian prime ministers. This impressive access enables him to provide first-hand perspectives from those who not only experienced the relationship but led their states through the highs and lows of the partnership.

The book's main theme is that the Five Eyes partnership did not evolve through a deliberate plan but is the result of each member pursuing its own interest while finding common cause based on the shared threats they faced. This relationship has its challenges, as the various rocky patches that Kerbaj describes highlight, but the Five Eyes partnership has not merely survived these periods—it has strengthened due to them.

The book is broken into four historical periods: Origins, The Cold War, The War on Terror, and Unconventional Battlefields. The Origins section begins before the well-known UK and U.S. signals partnership that originated during the Second World War. It begins with the story of Jessie Jordan, a beautician and Scottish expatriate, who returns to her native home and begins spying for the Third Reich after 30 years in Germany. Through Jess, Kerbaj introduces several characters to weave the story of how intelligence collaboration between the UK and the U.S. started prior to the Britain–United States of America Agreement (BRUSA). With this

foundation, Kerbaj then explains how the relationship evolved based on the necessity of war and the interests of the countries involved.

The remaining three sections take a similar approach to the Origins section by providing stories that establish strategic context and explain how and why the relationship evolved. Importantly, Kerbaj does not focus merely on success stories and *kumbaya* tales. Instead, his selected accounts provide the reader with an appreciation of how relationships shift both between individual countries and within the group as a whole. His approach captures both the tension and value in the relationships, while also highlighting that the partnership takes nurturing and sacrifice from all states involved.

As with any research on intelligence partnerships, *The Secret History of the Five Eyes* does not capture all the bureaucratic details of how the alliance evolved or the operations that occurred. This is less a critique than an acknowledgment that telling the story of secret partnerships is always incomplete and therefore a developing story. Kerbaj's contribution is that, through masterful storytelling, he increases all our knowledge of the relationship while presenting the foundational elements in an engaging way that allows for further development. Along the way, he uncovers secrets that might never have been known without his research efforts. Each one is a valuable contribution to our shared understanding.

Although the existence of the Five Eyes partnership is well known, there is scarce scholarship focused solely on the topic. This is unfortunate given the current political climate and the significant changes being brought about through policy and rhetoric. In this environment, we all need a better appreciation of a relationship that has existed for over eight decades and helped transition us through a world war, a Cold War, and a war on terrorism. Richard Kerbaj's *The Secret History of the Five Eyes* helps fill this gap in an enjoyable way that provides the reader with a better understanding of the evolution of the relationship.

I recommend this book for readers who want to understand the evolution of this important alliance or anyone who enjoys a gripping story. Hopefully, Kerbaj, who is also a successful filmmaker, will turn his book into a documentary or mini-series to reach a broader audience. We would all benefit from knowing more about this important partnership and would enjoy being engrossed in his masterful storytelling as we do. If you like to both learn and be entertained, I highly recommend *The Secret History of the Five Eyes*. You won't be disappointed.

BOOK REVIEW

They Eat Our Sweat: Transport Labor, Corruption, and Everyday Survival in Urban Nigeria by D. E. Agbiboa

ISBN 978-0-19-886154-6, Oxford University Press, 2022, $77.39 (Hardcover)

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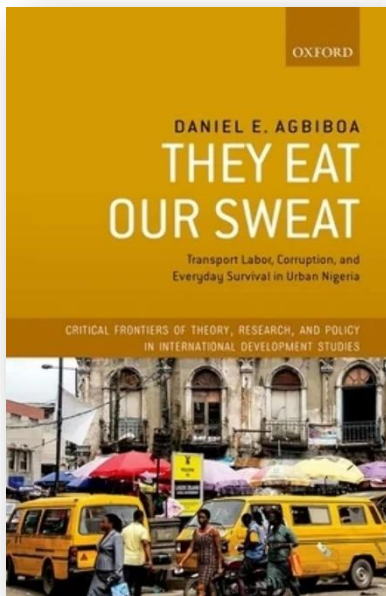
In *They Eat Our Sweat*, D. E. Agbiboa presents a detailed ethnographic inquiry into the complex interplay between corruption and survival strategies within Nigeria's informal transportation sector, primarily focusing on Lagos's vibrant yet challenging urban landscape. This well-structured book unfolds six meticulously crafted chapters, each delving into various facets of corruption, which Agbiboa reframes as an essential social practice deeply entrenched in urban life's economic and political nuances rather than simply a moral failing.

The book begins with an illuminating introduction, "Rethinking Corruption," where Agbiboa boldly critiques conventional perspectives that traditionally categorize corruption merely as an ethical lapse. He argues for a paradigm shift, urging readers to reconceptualize corruption as a fluid social phenomenon—an adaptive, almost necessary response to pervasive economic distress and systemic inefficiencies that characterize everyday life in Lagos. This foundational concept significantly shapes the discourse in subsequent chapters, providing a fresh and critical lens through which to explore the implications of corruption within the transport sector and its broader ramifications for urban life across the African continent.

Agbiboa's examination of societal values in Nigeria is particularly thought-provoking. He contends that corruption is not simply a byproduct of cultural tendencies or individual moral failings; instead, it emerges as a pragmatic response to the multifaceted socioeconomic hardships individuals encounter daily. By challenging readers to adopt a more empathetic stance towards moral evaluations of corruption, Agbiboa emphasizes that survival often mandates navigating through and engaging with corrupt structures rather than wholly rejecting them.

Richly woven ethnographic narratives bring to life the daily struggles of Lagos's transport workers, primarily focusing on *danfo*—public transport vehicles ubiquitous in the city. Agbiboa highlights how the slogans displayed on these vehicles resonate with the personal and collective

experiences of the workers, serving as essential tools for resilience amidst often precarious working conditions. He profoundly asserts, "Vehicle slogans not only convey the lived experiences and precarious labor of *danfo* workers, but they also serve as vital means through which these marginalized individuals navigate life and strive for advancement" (p. 111). This linguistic dimension underscores the critical role of language as a mechanism for coping, resistance, and expression of solidarity among workers.

The author further investigates the entrenched historical connections of corruption within the transportation sector, illuminating the intricate dynamics between motor park operators and governmental authorities. By challenging the reductionist view that positions these entities as antagonistic, Agbiboa reveals how their interactions often perpetuate corruption as a systemic phenomenon from which both sides derive mutual benefits. He examines the role of transport unions, drawing compelling parallels to organized crime groups, which dominate workers' lives while reinforcing symbiotic relationships with political entities. Agbiboa skillfully documents the coercive tactics these unions employ, exploring how fear, dependency, and systemic inequalities contribute to normalizing corruption in the industry, engendering a complex cycle of disruption.

In his insightful critique of urban development in Lagos, Agbiboa tackles the paradoxical nature of political rhetoric surrounding modernization, wherein political figures advocate progress while simultaneously exploiting informal transport networks to bolster their power. Through a noteworthy case study of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Agbiboa illustrates how corrupt practices are intricately woven into the fabric of political governance and urban planning, raising critical questions about accountability and the ethics of power.

One of the standout features of Agbiboa's work is his immersive ethnographic approach. Over two years of intensive field research, he cultivated direct relationships with transport workers, giving him a unique glimpse into their daily lives and struggles. Assuming the role of an informal bus conductor himself, Agbiboa shares vivid personal anecdotes of police corruption, extortion, and the pervasive influence of unions, thereby offering a compelling portrayal of the harsh realities faced by those reliant on Lagos's transport system for their livelihoods.

Moreover, the book explores the linguistic dimensions of corruption, drawing inspiration from linguistic anthropology. 'Eating' encompasses "nourishment, accumulation, exploitation, plunder, attack, and defeat" (p. 80)—to reveal broader patterns of transactional dynamics that transcend Nigerian society and resonate across various African contexts. His interactions with *danfo* operators, street enforcers (known as *agberos*), and motorcycle taxi drivers (*okadas*) enrich his analysis, highlighting the innovative ways individuals navigate the corrupt milieu while seeking to assert agency and find pathways for advancement. According to Agbiboa, an *agbero* is described as "dreaded urban youths who survive through their parasitic dependence on the spatial regulation of public transport in Lagos" (p. 146).

Although the book's ethnographic foundation is praiseworthy, it would gain from a more profound theoretical examination of Lagos's contemporary politics. While Agbiboa situates his research within a broader African urban framework, a more in-depth engagement with place-making theories could improve the comprehension of how corruption influences the transportation sector and the city's identity and dynamics. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of how national policies and global economic trends interact with local corruption in the

transportation sector could shed light on the complexities of Lagos's urban life and its residents' adaptive strategies.

Conclusively, Agbiboa's *They Eat Our Sweat* is crucial for African studies, urban anthropology, and the socio-political analysis of corruption. By reframing our perception of corruption from a mere moral deficiency to a multifaceted social practice, Agbiboa encourages us to delve deeper into the lived experiences of those navigating these problematic circumstances, highlighting the resilience and ingenuity that often arise in response to systemic challenges. I recommend this book to scholars, practitioners, and students interested in understanding corruption in urban Africa.

BOOK REVIEW

Urban Operations: War, Crime, and Conflict Edited by: John P. Sullivan, Nathan P. Jones, and Daniel Weisz Argomedo

ISBN: 979-8990915831, KeyPoint Press, August 2024, 421 pages, $29.00

Reviewed by: **Zachary Z. Horsington**, Small Wars Journal, El-Centro, California, USA
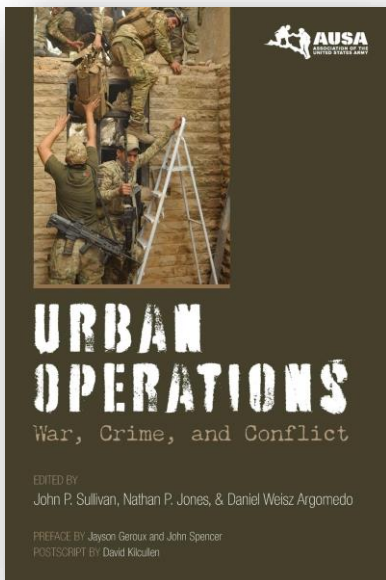
As human populations continue to increase and urbanize, dedicated interdisciplinary security studies focused on urban warfare are absolutely necessary. *Urban Operations: War, Crime, and Conflict*, a multi-author volume edited by John P. Sullivan, Nathan P. Jones, and Daniel Weisz Argomedo, is a rich and accessible companion for anyone interested or involved in urban security, regardless of their background or experience.

The book examines a temporally and culturally diverse range of case studies across defense and law enforcement contexts and serves as a functional, multidisciplinary source of material related to urban operations. The editors—Dr. John P. Sullivan, Dr. Nathan P. Jones, and Dr. Daniel Weisz Argomedo—are highly accomplished security studies scholars, as are the other contributing authors. There is a skillful blend of practitioner and academic insight throughout. Each chapter includes a bibliography, and several relevant book reviews are attached in the appendix, forming a highly practical treasury of subject material. Considering the many active urban combat zones around the world today, the book's multifaceted content is timely, and its consistent focus on human security is refreshing.

The preface effectively contextualizes the importance of civil-military affairs, the spectrum of threat actors in urban environments, and the broader trend toward militarizing the topic. The introduction explains how much of the book originated from a special issue on Urban Security in the *Journal of Strategic Security* and acquaints readers with the additional chapters included in this volume.

Chapter 1 succinctly clarifies megatrends concerning rising populations and urbanization, and explains the conventional military legacy of operating in rural environments. The spectrum of activities and threats related to urban operations is adroitly framed here, introducing readers to twin insurgency, terrorism, transnational organized crime, and the jurisdictional complexities of state authority. The remainder of the book's chapters are previewed, with discussion of feral cities, mega-slums, and the rise of sophisticated transnational illicit networks rounding out the section.

Chapter 2 offers insight into civil affairs in Antwerp during WWII. It presents a concise history of the Canadian Army Civil Affairs unit—its purpose, training, selection, force structure, and deployment—followed by a short history of the liberation of Antwerp and the Battle of the Scheldt. Given that the V-1 cruise missile and V-2 ballistic missile were the first of their kind, Antwerp's case study is critically relevant, highlighting one of the premier examples of expeditionary civil-military administration under direct aerial bombardment. The chapter effectively describes the structural administrative challenges in the post-Nazi context.

Chapter 3 continues the WWII focus with a thorough analysis of the American liberation of Manila in 1945. It covers MacArthur's assault on Japanese-occupied Manila, the aftermath, and post-conflict reconstruction. Asymmetric warfare complexities are explored—including Japanese use of human shields, victim-operated traps, and disguised combatants—as well as the propensity for friendly fire and civilian casualties. The chapter insightfully explains how a military assault's destructiveness affects post-conflict recovery, and how proactively designing operations with this in mind presents deep strategic challenges, particularly in urban settings.

Chapter 4 shifts forward in time to analyze the two Battles of Culiacán (2019 and 2023). It introduces the concepts of "virtual urban siege" and non-state actor swarming, and provides comparative context through examples such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the 2013 Westgate Mall attack, and the 2015 Paris attacks. These cases exemplify how marauding terrorist assaults and barricaded sieges paralyze cities by weaponizing fear, distorting threat perception, and exploiting media effects. While all terrorism is communicative, this chapter highlights how such violence is leveraged tactically to obscure actor strength and confuse both law enforcement and civilians.

Chapter 5 provides a unique look at the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS) through their application during the Boston Marathon bombing response. It identifies "Things Done Well," "Issues Needing Improvement," and "Recommendations." Communication issues within the Joint Information Center are examined alongside broader challenges of logistics, resource management, and command coordination. The chapter makes clear the need for further practice and stress-testing to ensure more effective preparedness, and additional commentary on how macro-scale exercises should function would have strengthened the discussion.

Chapter 6 explores six operational case studies of Israel's urban operations, examining associated challenges and adaptations. It introduces the nature and character of urban warfare and outlines major operations—*Defensive Shield*, the *Second Lebanon War*, *Cast Lead*, *Pillar of Defense*, *Protective Edge*, and *Guardian of the Walls*. The chapter emphasizes Israeli full-spectrum, multi-domain dominance, particularly in precision strike, C2 capabilities, and cyber/space assets, though it omits discussion of the strategic effectiveness of its bombing campaigns.

Chapter 7 delves into artificial intelligence and lethal autonomy, covering topics from killer robots to human-computer targeting systems used by JSOC and Israeli forces. While the chapter notes the contrast between fast computational processing and the slow tempo of urban operations, it could further explore the ethical and practical challenges of identity dominance and targets of opportunity. Discussion of proportionality under international law is framed narrowly through casualty ratios, missing the broader informational dynamics of public casualty sensitivity.

Chapter 8 offers a brilliant critique of Wide Area Motion Imagery (WAMI) through the lens of panoptical colonial surveillance. It traces WAMI's evolution from Mauritanian plantations to the present, exploring the dehumanizing effects of pervasive surveillance, including risk group construction and erosion of privacy. The concept of the "postmodern plantation" is particularly compelling, and frameworks like this deserve wider use in security studies.

Chapter 9 examines urban conflict wargaming, focusing on six games based on the Battle of Hue. It introduces the design and research challenges of wargaming and breaks down how each game addresses asymmetric combat, C2 frictions, population perceptions, infrastructure, and media dynamics. The chapter's use of figures and tables is effective, though greater attention to modeling non-combatant behavior in urban wargames would be valuable.

Chapter 10 explores the 2022 fall of Guayaquil, Ecuador. It provides insight into criminal contagion, crime wars, and criminal insurgency, with strong statistical analysis and institutional context. Corruption, prison system management, and Ecuador's *Mano Dura* approach are all covered, alongside a useful timeline of institutional security reforms.

Chapter 11 investigates the crime-government nexus in Mexico. It offers a rich historical overview of urban life and criminal violence since the early 20th century, drawing on interviews and contextualizing conflict through land access, political dominance, and economic inequality. Its emphasis on reconciliation, rule of law, and local institutional development is insightful and timely.

Chapter 12 outlines NATO's work on urbanization and littoral zones, highlighting principles for multi-domain operations in these environments. While it presents strong conceptual foundations and future outlooks, more analysis of the information environment and climate-conflict linkages would be beneficial.

Chapter 13 introduces subterranean operations. It functions as a source bank for planners, summarizing best practices and system categories. It considers both military and criminal use of underground infrastructure, as well as civil response considerations, offering practical and conceptual guidance on planning and logistics.

Chapter 14 offers somber but constructive reflections on Ukraine's post-war urban recovery. Drawing on comparative historical cases, it underscores the importance of synergy, adaptation, and external support while emphasizing the need to mitigate insider threats.

Chapter 15 presents a grim but necessary examination of non-state actor capabilities and state response challenges. It focuses on the October 7, 2023 urban battles in Gaza, providing granular, hour-by-hour breakdowns. The analysis addresses situational awareness, interagency coordination, and public mobilization in response to sophisticated threats.

The final chapter closes the book with a clear overview of the legal frameworks guiding urban operations. It discusses civilian protection, proportionality, and strategy, reaffirming the book's human security orientation. The postscript expands on seven key hypotheses around info-kinetic operations, autonomy, urban maneuver, swarming, and decentralized systems. Taken as a whole, this book is a standout cross-disciplinary contribution. The case studies and analyses are thoughtful and relevant. Practitioners, scholars, and non-specialists alike will find value in *Urban Operations*, a work that is as accessible as it is insightful.

BOOK REVIEW

The Intoku Code: Delta Force's Intelligence Officer – Doing Good in Secret by Wade Ishimoto

ISIN 1636244696, Casemate, October 2024, 545 pages, $14.40 (Hardcover)

Reviewed by: **Nancy E. Blacker**, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., USA
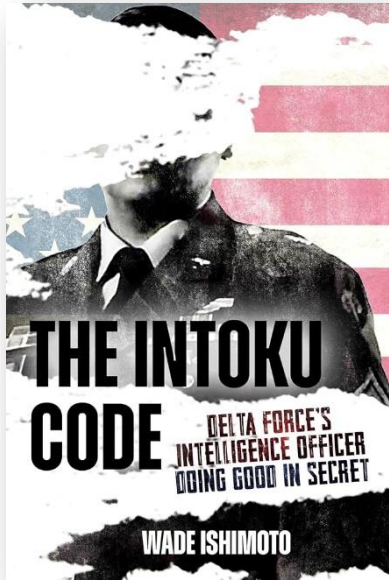
Wade Ishimoto's book, *The Intoku Code*, is chock-full of stories from his fascinating career of selfless service. The book shares his watchword, "Intoku," which he describes as "Japanese for doing good in secret." His main message shines through each chapter, illustrated by people who do—and do not—embody the Intoku code or spirit. After reading the book, you cannot help but recognize the Intoku Code and begin to see it in your own mentors. His storytelling has a clear purpose: to ensure that the spirit of this code lives on, and that these personal anecdotes serve as lessons to influence leaders of character.

I met Wade Ishimoto once at the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) during a temporary duty (TDY) trip to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. When I heard he was on our agenda, I eagerly awaited his talk to learn firsthand what happened at Desert One during Operation Eagle Claw—the failed rescue of U.S. hostages in Iran. Captain (at the time) Ishimoto mesmerized our group with his candid narrative. He made us feel as if we were there, observing the operation live. Based on that experience, I jumped at the opportunity to read his book. I wasn't familiar with the concept of *intoku* during his lecture, but after reading *The Intoku Code*, I can say with confidence that he embodies it.

The book lays out his upbringing and early influences before joining the military. His first chapter, titled "The Forging of a Warrior," tells you all you need to know about how he views his childhood and how he honors his elders—a quality I find admirable. Anyone who has been stationed in Hawaii and experienced its beauty and culture will recognize those elements in Ishimoto's early years. The first part of the book is filled with youthful adventures, each rounded out with a resounding "so what" that imparts a lesson. He speaks of learning humility by hearing relatives' stories of their impoverished upbringing, while also recognizing the value of hard work and kindness. For example, he recalls stories of his grandmother bleaching rice bags and sewing them into shirts for his father, and how his grandfather saved a neighbor's home from burning during the attack on Pearl Harbor—acts of courage and selfless service.

Growing up in a tight-knit family instilled in him the values of honor, teamwork, high standards, and tradition.

His accounts of joining the Army follow typical training escapades and convey his pride in being part of the institution. Whether in Vietnam, joining Special Forces, or helping to stand up Delta Force, Ishimoto consistently reinforces the mantra that leaders should take care of others. These chapters are filled with engaging anecdotes—some humorous, some tragic. Soldiers who've had similar experiences will no doubt recognize parts of themselves or their teammates in these stories. One of the most relatable leadership lessons he shares involves walking into a unit with low morale. He found highly trained Special Forces soldiers doing trivial work. After reflecting and observing, he and his master sergeant overhauled the team's workload, making it more meaningful and productive, which significantly improved morale and self-esteem. This may sound like Leadership 101, but it's not always the order of the day. Those who embody the Intoku Code find ways to bring purpose and discipline to their teams. Embedded within these stories are fascinating insights into the origins of special operations as a recognized force under President Kennedy, and later the formation of Delta Force under then-Captain Charlie A. Beckwith and General Robert C. Kingston. Other names surface as the Delta concept matured, and Ishimoto's remarkable memory pays homage to many of those who helped bring the organization from idea to full operational capability (1962–1977), underscoring the importance of perseverance. He emphasizes the value of relationship-building and interagency partnerships. Ishimoto notes, "Initial efforts to establish partnerships and relationships with the FBI, CIA, FAA, Secret Service, Army INSCOM, DOE, and DARPA proved to be beneficial as Delta developed into a mature organization." He goes on to state that these were not the only organizations Delta engaged with as it found its footing. The chapter gives readers an honest view of the challenges involved in creating a new organization, testing new concepts, and implementing them in high-risk scenarios. Once again, Intoku principles permeate these examples.

The middle of the book provides a detailed account of Operation Eagle Claw. Ishimoto walks through the planning process, the tragic execution, and the aftermath, including an investigation and the Holloway Commission's congressional report. One striking detail I had never heard elsewhere: upon returning to base after the loss of eight operators, some British allies had crafted a handwritten sign that read, "[T]hanks for the guts to try." Other friends shared words only warriors can offer one another—words Ishimoto recognized as embodying Intoku.

After the turmoil of Eagle Claw, Ishimoto goes "back to business," as Chapter 15 is titled. He offers captivating insights into domestic incidents (e.g., the Branch Davidians) and international ones (e.g., the Khobar Towers bombing). He also lent his expertise to senior civilian leaders at the Pentagon and in the corporate sector. By the time readers finish this book, they will feel fortunate to have learned from Ishimoto's deep well of expertise, knowledge, and warrior ethos.

If I have one critique, it's that the book may include too many names and details of people and places. While it is accessible to a general audience, readers who have served in the military or grown up in a military environment may find deeper resonance with its stories. Impatient readers might find the density of references overwhelming. That said, this is a fascinating, insightful, and important account of history as it happened. More than that, it offers a code to live by—and what could be better than that?

BOOK REVIEW

Project Mind Control: Sidney Gottlieb, the CIA, and the Tragedy of MKULTRA by John Lisle

ISBN 978-1250338747, St. Martin's Press, 2025, 304 pages, $30 (Hardcover)

Reviewed by: **David Hadley**, National Defense University, Ft. McNair, Washington D.C., USA
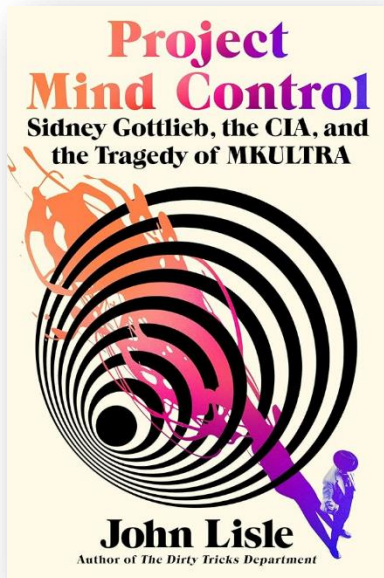
MKULTRA, the Central Intelligence Agency's infamous program that experimented with methods to control or alter human behavior, represents a significant challenge in intelligence studies. Its legacy looms large in the popular consciousness, but much of the documentation related to the program was destroyed in 1973. In its wake remains a fragmentary documentary record and a host of bizarre stories, making the task of discerning fact from sensationalism a daunting challenge for any researcher. Given these difficulties, it is no surprise that MKULTRA has often not received the serious scholarly attention it merits—leaving the field to accounts of varying reliability and quality, which has only further complicated efforts to separate fact from fiction. As John Lisle notes in his new history, *Project Mind Control: Sidney Gottlieb, the CIA, and the Tragedy of MKULTRA* (2025), "Perhaps the most important consequence of MKULTRA was the inspiration that it gave to conspiracy theorists."

Lisle, a professor of the history of science at the University of Texas and author of a previous work on the scientific programs of the American intelligence community, *The Dirty Tricks Department* (2023), has produced a highly readable, narratively focused, and generally well-grounded work that dispels some of the mysteries surrounding MKULTRA. The "tragedy" in his subtitle reflects his core theme: as sinister as MKULTRA often was, it was the product of a particular bureaucratic culture during the early Cold War, carried out by flawed individuals—most notably Sidney Gottlieb. A member of the CIA's Technical Services Division, Gottlieb and other intelligence leaders "feared that the Soviets, Chinese, and potentially other Communist powers possessed methods of mind control. The United States therefore needed its own mind control project to compete in what could become the next arms race." (203) As strange as the program now seems, the logic that set MKULTRA into motion was intelligible within the broader Cold War paradigm that prioritized countering Communist expansion on all fronts. The program continued despite its readily apparent flaws, Lisle argues, because of three systemic challenges to oversight within the CIA:

"compartmentalization, bad recordkeeping practices, and the impotence of the CIA inspector general."

This theme of an essentially unsupervised, bureaucratic process growing with little forethought provides a useful structure as Lisle recounts the often confounding and unethical behaviors that occurred over the course of MKULTRA. Many of the details he provides have been covered in earlier works. Particularly well-known is the case of Army researcher Frank Olson, who was unwittingly dosed with LSD prior to his apparent suicide. However, Lisle's use of recently discovered court records offers new insight into the CIA's role—and Gottlieb's in particular. While attempting to minimize his own culpability, Gottlieb was remarkably candid about the program's logic and rationale. As Lisle notes, "From the defense's perspective, Gottlieb's depositions were a disaster. From the historian's perspective, they're a gold mine."

What emerges is that MKULTRA was fundamentally a failure. Experiments conducted by the CIA's Technical Services Division, its subcontractors, and private institutions funded through CIA front organizations consistently demonstrated that, while human subjects could suffer dramatic ill effects from efforts to change their behavior, there was no reliable way to exercise "mind control." The program endured due to a combination of geopolitical anxiety, bureaucratic inertia, and profound medical arrogance.

Lisle's treatment of Ewen Cameron's work at the Allen Memorial Institute in Montreal is especially instructive. Cameron's experiments with "psychic driving," designed to break down a patient's psyche and rebuild it free from psychological maladies, succeeded only in the breaking—not the rebuilding. Lisle's inclusion of Gottlieb's comments on Cameron, drawn from court documents, adds crucial context: the CIA provided funding but virtually no oversight. As Lisle persuasively argues, "The CIA didn't instigate every wicked act that occurred under the MKULTRA umbrella. It did, however, aid and abet the perpetrators." He also underscores the irony that the fears driving MKULTRA—triggered in part by "confessions" obtained by Communist regimes—were soon recognized by experts to stem not from new mind control techniques but from ancient, brutal methods: hunger, beatings, stress positions, and sleep deprivation.

Lisle adopts a journalistic approach, weaving his argument into an engaging narrative. His work will be valuable to scholars of intelligence studies as a touchpoint on a well-known but poorly understood program. *Project Mind Control* will be of particular interest to those examining the propagation of conspiracy theories; MKULTRA, and the many myths that surround it, make for a compelling case study in how real but shocking events become the basis for even more extreme and wide-ranging conspiratorial narratives. The transgressions of MKULTRA, serious as they were, became fuel for tales of mind-controlled assassins, societal manipulation by secret cabals, and other outlandish claims. On a more grounded level, the book is useful to those studying oversight challenges in covert activity. The failures Lisle highlights are not unique to MKULTRA but reflect a broader pattern—what Loch K. Johnson famously termed the "Shock Theory" of intelligence oversight, in which scandal, rather than design, prompts reform.

Despite the overall sobriety of Lisle's account, there are moments where he appears to extend beyond what the evidentiary record can support. Most notably, his discussion of psychiatrist Louis Jolyon West's evaluation of USAF member Jimmy Shaver—following Shaver's assault and murder of a child—fails to convincingly link the case to MKULTRA.

The evidence here comes largely from questionable secondary sources, and Lisle's speculations about West's motives are not well substantiated. His reliance on such sources for details that are not supported by his otherwise solid use of primary material risks reinforcing some of the very myths he seeks to dispel. More detailed endnotes would have been especially useful, given the complexity and murkiness of MKULTRA's historiography. Despite these limitations, Lisle's book is a welcome contribution to the literature on MKULTRA. It is a necessary step toward understanding a troubling and often misunderstood chapter in U.S. intelligence history. The narratives that MKULTRA has generated—and the hard lessons it offers—remain deeply relevant for scholars and practitioners of intelligence and national security today.

BOOK REVIEW

The Melting Point: High Command and War in the 21ˢᵗ Century by General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr. USMC (Ret.)

ISBN 978-1682474485, Naval Institute Press, 2024, $34.95

Reviewed by: **Harry J. Brodeen,** Assistant Professor of Homeland Security, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, Florida, USA
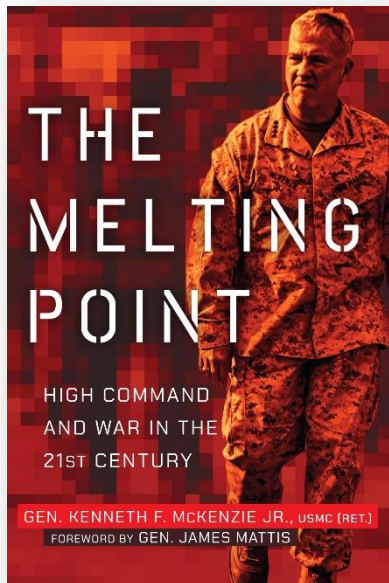
In *The Melting Point: High Command and War in the 21st Century*, General (Ret.) Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. offers a rare and candid examination of the complexities of American military leadership at the highest levels. Drawing on his experience as Commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and a distinguished 42-year career in the United States Marine Corps, McKenzie delivers an indispensable guide for military officers and policymakers alike. His insights are steeped not only in extensive operational experience but also in his acute understanding of the evolving relationship between military and civilian leaders in modern America.

Having had the privilege of working for General McKenzie in 2012, during his tenure as the Director for Strategy, Plans, and Policy (J-5), I found this book particularly resonant. Even then, his strategic clarity, respect for civilian authority, and ability to navigate complex political environments were evident. *The Melting Point* captures these traits while offering an unvarnished look at the realities of command at the national level.

At its core, *The Melting Point* studies leadership under pressure. McKenzie discusses major decisions made during his time at CENTCOM, covering a broad spectrum of challenges ranging from the resurgence of ISIS to Iranian aggression to the final withdrawal from Afghanistan. His treatment of these topics is both meticulous and forthright. Readers expecting a sanitized recounting will be surprised by his willingness to respectfully critique the civilian leadership across three administrations while maintaining a tone that is neither vindictive nor partisan.

A particularly notable critique is McKenzie's analysis of the Obama Administration's Global Posture Review, an initiative heavily influenced by then–Vice President Joe Biden. McKenzie persuasively argues that the shift in focus toward China, while understandable in the context of emerging great-power competition, inadvertently weakened U.S. influence and operational effectiveness in the CENTCOM region. He links these strategic recalibrations to the withdrawal from Iraq and the subsequent collapse of the Afghan government, drawing prophetic parallels that underscore the consequences of premature disengagement.

McKenzie underscores the critical role of professional competence and the use of precise language in maintaining clarity and effectiveness in military and policy decision-making. He expresses concern over the decline in precise terminology across successive presidential administrations. He notes that the move away from traditional military terms such as "seize," "destroy," and "neutralize" contributed to a broader confusion of objectives. As he states in Chapter 10: "Human talent available for service at the civilian appointee level was neither of the highest order nor very deep." This observation reflects frustration with the caliber of civilian oversight and a deep concern for long-term policy effectiveness.

A significant portion of the book is dedicated to the concept of accountability, which is a cornerstone of military leadership. McKenzie does not shy away from describing the emotional and professional toll of appearing before Congress in the aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Alongside Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley, McKenzie testified before both the Senate and House Armed Services Committees in September 2021. While no stranger to the rigors of congressional testimony, McKenzie notes that this experience was markedly different. The hearings were, in his words, "rife with partisanship and personal attacks," reflecting a shift in tone that he found disheartening. He observed that "the personal vitriol was exceptional," suggesting a growing disconnect between the military's role in executing policy and the political environment responsible for shaping it.

Instead of shifting blame, McKenzie directly confronts responsibility. He acknowledges the burden of command and the imperative of public accountability. Yet he also questions whether the structure of these hearings—dominated by political theater rather than substantive inquiry—serves the public or the military effectively. This is a sobering reminder that even the most experienced leaders are not immune to the corrosive effects of partisan polarization.

Throughout the book, General McKenzie reflects candidly on the consequences of high-stakes decisions, including those that resulted in the loss of life. He acknowledges the limitations of intelligence, the constraints of the operating environment, and the difficult trade-offs commanders must often make under pressure. He does not hide behind ambiguity or seek absolution but instead affirms the weight of command and the obligation to be accountable, even when outcomes are shaped by forces beyond his control. These reflections elevate the book beyond a memoir or strategic analysis. They offer a powerful meditation on duty, sacrifice, and the moral burden carried by those in senior leadership.

The title *The Melting Point* is well chosen. It suggests both the intense pressure commanders face and the point at which structures and assumptions can break down if not carefully managed. McKenzie's candid accounts of decision-making during crisis moments, such as the strike against Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, reveal the enormous stakes and moral weight that accompany the highest levels of command. These passages are particularly compelling, offering the reader an intimate view into the confluence of political, strategic, and operational factors that shape American national security.

In addition to his expertise as a battlefield commander, General McKenzie demonstrates an exceptional ability to serve as a soldier-diplomat, a critical skill for modern military leaders operating at the highest levels. Throughout *The Melting Point*, he recounts numerous engagements with foreign leaders, coalition partners, and senior U.S. diplomats, where his strategic acumen and interpersonal skills were as important as military strength. His ability to build trust, manage competing interests, and advance U.S. objectives without sacrificing long-term relationships reflects a sophisticated understanding of both hard and soft power. These

accounts reveal a leader who recognizes that victory in today's complex security environment often hinges as much on diplomacy as it does on firepower.

Stylistically, McKenzie's writing is direct, organized, and accessible, making complex military and governmental processes understandable without sacrificing depth. His use of vignettes from his career—many of which are little known to the public—serves to humanize the often abstract world of national strategy. His reflections balance humility with authority, making it clear that he writes not to settle scores, but to share hard-earned lessons for those who will follow.

For current and aspiring military officers, *The Melting Point* should be considered required reading. It offers invaluable lessons in strategic thinking, the realities of operating within the U.S. interagency system, and the enduring challenges of balancing military advice with political directives. Civilian policymakers and diplomats would also benefit from McKenzie's honest exploration of where and how gaps between military execution and political direction emerge—and the costs those gaps can impose.

In summary, *The Melting Point* is a powerful, thoughtful, and sometimes sobering look at the demands of command in the 21st century. General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr.'s experience, intellect, and integrity shine through on every page. As someone who has witnessed his leadership firsthand, I can attest that the values he espouses in this book—respect for civilian authority, commitment to mission, and intellectual rigor—are not just theoretical ideals but principles he has consistently lived by. This work is a significant contribution to the study of American military leadership and a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the pressures and responsibilities of high command.

BOOK REVIEW

Unmasking AI: My Mission to Protect What Is Human in a World of Machines by Joy Buolamwini

Reviewed by: **Nalonie Tyrrell**, National Defense University, College of Information and Cyberspace, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., USA
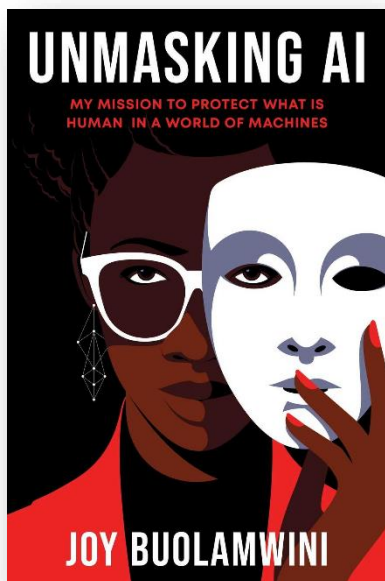
In *Unmasking AI*, Joy Buolamwini accomplishes something few authors in the increasingly saturated field of artificial intelligence manage: she bridges the gap between the technical and the human, the empirical and the poetic. She does so not with the detached posture of a systems engineer, but with the voice of a person for whom biased algorithms are not abstract harms but deeply personal affronts. This book is part memoir, part manifesto, and wholly necessary.

The narrative opens in an unlikely place—at the intersection of loneliness and doctoral research. Buolamwini recounts her efforts to design a mirror that would change the image of your body and track your movements. She called it the "Aspire Mirror." During development, she stumbled upon an alarming discovery: the facial recognition software she used failed to recognize her own face unless she donned a white mask. This was a societal metaphor come true. She was a Black woman forced to wear a white mask to be seen by a machine. The irony is equal parts devastating and real. Thus began the journey that would culminate in the now-famous Gender Shades project and the foundation of the Algorithmic Justice League.

Yet *Unmasking AI* is not merely a dramatized retelling of academic research. It is a broader exploration of how the technologies we build can replicate, amplify, and even ossify the very human prejudices we claim to escape through innovation. The "coded gaze"—a term Buolamwini coins to describe the embedded bias in machine vision—joins a growing lexicon of resistance to algorithmic injustice. She introduces terms like "algorithmic oppression" and reframes old ones—such as "neutrality"—only to reevaluate them.

Unmasking AI is not the cold, dry technical tome well known in this literary space. Buolamwini's prose is richly accentuated by her Ghanaian-American heritage, her early exposure to poetry, her artistic sensibilities, and her commitment to justice. Readers expecting equations and model architectures will find, instead, vignettes of failure and perseverance, framed with an eye for the personal and the political. The author's trajectory—from a child of scholarly immigrants (her father, Dr. John Buolamwini, was a scientist; her mother, Frema the

Akan, a multi-faceted artist) to a Fulbright scholar in Zambia to an MIT Media Lab researcher—offers a rare view into the human experiences that inform technological critique. The stakes of Joy Buolamwini's argument are critical and significant. She explores how facial recognition technology has been deployed in flawed ways, with real-world implications for policing, surveillance, immigration, and even warfare. When an algorithm misidentifies a person—or fails to recognize them altogether—it is not just a technical hiccup. It is a silent assault on personhood. This is particularly alarming in contexts where AI is given a mask of objectivity: in courtrooms, security systems, drone targeting, and hiring algorithms. One need only remember the early failures of image generation models—such as Gemini's inability to produce respectable images of non-white religious figures—to grasp the extent to which the training data behind AI reflects historical and cultural erasures.

Buolamwini's concern is not just with visual recognition but with language. She discusses how large language models (LLMs), trained on vast digital corpora, can associate words like "jihadist" or "offender" with Muslim or Black identities in ways that compound decades of racialized discourse. The implications for national security professionals are dire. If AI is to be a foundational tool for intelligence, policymaking, or defense strategy, then it must be trained, deployed, and audited with a far more robust ethical apparatus.

This is where *Unmasking AI* shines brightest: it does not simply diagnose a problem; it issues a call to action. Buolamwini insists we resist the tyranny of efficiency—the idea that faster computation is synonymous with better governance. In fields like national security, where split-second decisions can cost lives, the allure of automation must be tempered by a clear-eyed understanding of its limitations. Blind dependence on flawed systems will not lead to safer societies. It will lead to more imperceptible forms of injustice masked in code.

Alas, *Unmasking AI* is not all digital storm clouds. Joy Buolamwini envisions hope. She champions what she calls "algorithmic accountability"—a vision of a future where diverse teams build inclusive technologies and public policy plays a role in ensuring fairness. Her optimism is grounded in the belief that we can, and must, do better.

In short, *Unmasking AI* is a crucial text for anyone working at the intersection of technology and society. For national security professionals in particular, it is a cautionary tale about the perils of uncritical adoption. But more than that, it is a beautifully written argument for why fairness, transparency, and justice must be coded into the systems we create.