

# NATO and Population-centric COIN

## Distinguishing Historicity from Conventional Wisdom

by *Alessandro Roth*

### Resumé

I det pågående kriget i Afghanistan betonas konceptet Counter-Insurgency (COIN). Artikeln syftar till att belysa konceptet utifrån det dominerande synsättet att detta koncept är ett framgångsrikt sätt att genomföra insatser och segra i asymmetriska konflikter. Den Brittiska traditionen eller tankesättet, som avviker från andra nationers och baserat på faktorn återhållsamhet, lyfts ofta fram som ett framgångskoncept i kampen mot upprorsrörelser. Resultatet från insatserna i bl a Malaya skulle därmed i huvudsak kunna vara framgångskoncept också i Irak och Afghanistan. Den mänskligt centrerade ”hearts and minds modell” i samband med COIN insatser vilken beskrivs i bland annat USA:s respektive Natos doktrinpublikationer, FM 3-24 och AJP-3.4.4, har tilldelats status som doktrinellt överlägsen. Detta till trots för att det saknas beprövade historiska exempel som bevisar dessas effektivitet. Det existerar enbart blygsamma bevis på att de brittiska ledarna i Malaya, bortsett från några enstaka uttalande, gjorde några väsentliga försök att nyttja en teoretisk modell som liknar de som nämnda doktriner baseras på. Den grundläggande tesen i artikeln är att ”hearts and minds modellen” är baserad på en omstridd tolkning av historien.

NATO'S ENGAGEMENT IN Afghanistan has been one of the most challenging in Alliance history. With the end of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in December of 2014 and its prompt replacement by Operation Resolute Support, NATO's commitment to the Afghan theater shifted from involvement in stabilization (even combat) operations to a more limited “security force assistance” model centered on training and advisory functions. The incisiveness of this reorientation notwithstanding, the reverberations – political and strategic – of this Afghan experience have yet to subside. This, along with the remarkable duration of and Alliance investment into the Afghan conflict, warrants closer scrutiny of the proverbial “lessons learned”

regarding insurgencies; how they are conceptualized and, consequently, how they are to be combated.<sup>1</sup>

If compared to the Kosovo Force (KFOR), which was initiated in June 1999 and persists to this day, NATO's contingent in Afghanistan has faced a different array of challenges epitomized by the latter country's much larger size, over 650.000 square kilometers against Kosovo's mere 10.000,<sup>2</sup> and ISAF's comparatively shorter duration. Also, the ratio of deployed forces to surface area must be taken into account. Here, KFOR reached its peak in the very beginning with a 50.000 strong force, against ISAF's maximum strength of slightly over 130.000.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, critics may opine that the idiosyncrasies and uncertain outcomes of NATO's Afghan experience preclude the repetition of

a comparable long-term military engagement under similar conditions, and that NATO should therefore concentrate on entirely different matters, such as conventional deterrence. With the release of the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy, critics of the practice of counterinsurgency (COIN) – in any of its manifold and sometimes radically different implementations – would seem vindicated by the apparent return to prominence of great power rivalry and, potentially, symmetric warfare.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the assumption of some is that COIN and, beyond that, the study and practice of asymmetric warfare, are about to forfeit their relevance to international affairs.

Doing so, however, means underestimating the political, military, and social significance of the primary context for the application of COIN, namely intrastate conflict. Apart from its immanent capacity for national and even regional destabilization,<sup>5</sup> intrastate conflict has, over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, taken on increased prominence in the global landscape as a result of its increased duration and frequency.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, current global demographic trends point to the increasing relevance of large urban agglomerations in areas at risk of experiencing the more deleterious effects of climate change. These “megacities” and their geographic context bear the potential for the outbreak of large-scale armed conflict, and will thus likely confront current notions of conventional warfighting and COIN alike with exacting challenges.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, the potential for future asymmetric conflicts involving NATO justifies a closer look at how the Alliance has doctrinally processed counterinsurgency, and whether it has done so on the basis of sound empirical foundations.

Expectedly, the cumulative operational experiences gained in Afghanistan over the

period from 2001 to 2014 and beyond were, at least nominally, integrated into NATO's very own doctrinal document dealing with COIN operations, AJP-3.4.4.<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that the ideas presented therein did not develop in an intellectual vacuum. Rather, as we shall see, AJP-3.4.4 draws considerable, if unstated, inspiration from preceding national publications, especially those of the United States military, FM 3-24. The two doctrines thus share and are based on many of the same exemplary historical treatises dealing with the theoretical and practical aspects of an approach to COIN, commonly described as “population-centric” or “hearts and minds” on account of its emphasis on gaining the favor of the local population, while refraining from the wholesale application of force. Foremost among these are the highly influential writings of British and French practitioners who distilled their experiences of COIN in British Malaya and French Algeria from the 1950s to the early 1960s.

This paper is intended to highlight two circumstances in ascending order: Firstly, that AJP-3.4.4 derives much of its substance from FM 3-24. At heart, they are both proclamations of the primacy of population-centric COIN. Secondly, that the understanding of population-centric COIN presented therein can be traced to a peculiar reading of the history of COIN campaigns dating back more than half a century, namely the Malayan Emergency of 1948–1960 and U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the former being venerated by an entire school of thought as a rare instance of victory in COIN, one achieved despite – or by virtue of – the counterinsurgents' renouncement of wholesale and indiscriminate coercion and lethal force as exemplified by a cautious distinction between combatants and non-combatants.

The author argues that, while the main objective British forces set themselves in Malaya was indeed the physical separation of insurgents from the general population, the actual operational approach reflected a belief in the clear-cut subordination of popular acceptance and voluntary submission to coercion and firepower.

The first part of this illustration will consist of a textual comparison highlighting the significant similarities between FM 3-24 and AJP-3.4.4, and the population-centric conception of COIN that lies at the heart of both doctrines. With that in mind, the next and last section will determine whether there is historiographic soundness to the understanding of COIN presented in AJP-3.4.4.

To do so will also allow the reader to assess the suitability of this doctrine to the formidable challenges presented by insurgent warfare.

## The Sources of NATO's COIN Doctrine

Counterinsurgency has, under various semantic guises, probably been practiced for as long as insurgency itself, and the modalities of its implementation have varied widely. The U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24/U.S. Marine Corps MCWP 3-33.5 (hereinafter FM 3-24), first published in 2006 and revised in 2014,<sup>9</sup> is to be counted among the most significant recent publications of its kind, not least due to its function as a guiding reference point for an armed force that has arguably been conducting COIN operations longer and more extensively than any other over the past decade and a half.

The salience of FM 3-24 is further evidenced by the substantial influence it has exerted on NATO's own COIN doctrine in two regards. Firstly, AJP-3.4.4 has incorporated many of the former's notions

regarding the appropriate conduct of COIN operations. Secondly, and more indirectly, FM 3-24 (2006) has likely served as an important source of inspiration to AJP-3.4.4 by virtue of the fact that it formed the doctrinal basis for Petraeus' and McChrystal's operational guidance to ISAF troops.<sup>10</sup> These two documents were arguably the closest NATO came – at least nominally – to a codified, common understanding regarding the conduct of COIN operations until the publication of the first effective edition of AJP-3.4.4 in 2011. It is therefore worthwhile to review the most unambiguous similarities between FM 3-24 and AJP-3.4.4.

Both FM 3-24 (2006) and AJP-3.4.4 conceptualize COIN as an eminently political struggle, one where military force plays only a subordinate role, exemplified by the latter's contention that “every action in COIN should support a political resolution to the underlying causes of conflict”.<sup>11</sup> Insurgent and counterinsurgent forces alike compete for ultimate source of legitimacy, namely the acceptance and favor of the population at large, on which the ultimate outcome of the war effort depends.<sup>12</sup>

From the perspective of the counterinsurgent, this means to persuade the population to accept the authority of the Host Nation (HN) government as legitimate.<sup>13</sup> To reach this overarching goal, it is imperative that COIN operations be designed as an integrated civil-military endeavor.<sup>14</sup>

For the COIN forces, one fundamental task consists in providing the population with a level of security sufficient to shield it from insurgent attacks and intimidation.<sup>15</sup>

Subsequently, the counterinsurgent is expected, with an appropriate understanding of the “human environment” (local culture, customs, beliefs, etc.) to initiate an array of measures aimed at improving local govern-

ance and essential services, and facilitate economic development.<sup>16</sup>

As the counterinsurgent forces will not be able to extend their presence in the HN indefinitely, both doctrines recognize that the development and training of effective HN security forces are of critical importance to ensuring that they will take over primary responsibility for internal security.<sup>17</sup> In addition to its support role in the aforementioned initiatives, military forces have, in situations that require the application of firepower, to discriminate to the best of their abilities between insurgents and civilians, lest insurgents exploit popular anger resulting from civilian casualties.<sup>18</sup> In pursuance of the aforesaid activities, COIN forces are expected to act according to all relevant provisions of national, domestic, and international law.<sup>19</sup>

In short, both doctrines place primary importance on constructive engagement with the populace of the HN. Above all, counterinsurgent activities, whether military or civilian in character, should reflect an attitude of benevolence and understanding for the manifold needs of non-combatants. Coercion in all its forms is to be avoided if possible, as it may play into the insurgency's hands. In other words, FM 3-24 and AJP-3.4.4 envisage a counterinsurgent force capable of fulfilling a formidable variety of tasks derived from an equally wide selection of fields of human activity outside the military-operational realm. This, it may be said, sets an unrealistic standard of performance.<sup>20</sup>

Proponents of this population-centric approach insist that insurgent forces may only be conclusively defeated if their bonds with the populace are severed. From this perspective, the success of counterinsurgent efforts largely depends on the comprehensive implementation of concerted civil-military processes to undermine the legitimacy of insurgent forces in the eyes of the great ma-

ajority of the population, thereby depriving the former of its vital support structures. It thus confers the political dimension of COIN operations preeminence over kinetic military action. This has been stated quite explicitly by two successive ISAF/USFOR-A Commanders, namely McChrystal and Petraeus, in the operational guidance issued to the troops under their command.<sup>21</sup> In largely theoretical debates outside the confines of institutionally mandated approaches, such views are also reflected in Colonel Peter Mansoor's declaration that "power emanates from the people; without their support, neither the insurgent nor the counterinsurgent can win".<sup>22</sup>

This fundamental viewpoint, along with most of the above-mentioned guidelines, is reflected in other publications that have followed the publication of FM 3-24, such as the U.S. DoD's Joint Publication JP 3-24, the U.S. Government's interagency Counterinsurgency Guide, and the British MoD's JDP 3-40.<sup>23</sup> As such, it can be said that an intragovernmental, as well as international U.S.-U.K. consensus, has emerged around this variety of population-centric COIN.

It is important to note, however, that the fundamental assumptions of the nominally benevolent approach to population-centric COIN are hardly novel. Indeed, they may be found in the writings of a Spanish nobleman active during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Marques of Santa Cruz de Marcenado.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, FM 3-24 does not trace its intellectual lineage as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Many of the principles of population-centric COIN espoused in FM 3-24 and in AJP-3.4.4 are based on a conventional interpretation of the ostensibly successful British military campaign during the Malayan Emergency. That the choice fell on this case is not surprising. It is viewed as a virtually unique example of victorious COIN achieved

by comparatively humane means, while other widely known examples of COIN, such as the French campaign in the context of the Algerian War of Independence, have long been regarded both within and outside of academia as negative examples unworthy of emulation.

In FM 3-24, selected facets of the British campaign – the establishment of HN police forces and the tactical mobility afforded to counterinsurgent forces by their airpower assets – are extolled as prime examples of efficacious COIN procedures.<sup>25</sup>

Arguably, no single English author has contributed more to the emergence of this outlook than Robert Thompson, a high-ranking civil servant under two successive Commanders of British Forces in Malaya, Lieutenant General Harold Briggs and General Gerald Templer. This reading of the character of British efforts in Malaya, informed mainly by Thompson along with the written work of David Galula, a French military officer of similar persuasion to, and a contemporary of the former, has proved enduring and authoritative, as many of their views are reflected in FM 3-24 (2006) and its British counterpart.<sup>26</sup> Implicitly, then, most of the fundamental concepts contained in the U.S. field manual, and, by extension, in AJP-3.4.4, are derived from an optimistic reading of the British campaign in Malaya and related counterinsurgency treatises from the 1960's. In fact, the influence exerted by the writings of Galula and Thompson on the authors of FM 3-24 is displayed rather explicitly by the sheer number of direct quotations.<sup>27</sup>

The two books in question were published at a time when interest in COIN among military practitioners and academics had arguably reached new heights, principally due to rapidly increasing U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Their influence on the development of COIN theory to this day (to include, ex-

pectedly, FM 3-24) can be attributed to two circumstances. In the eyes of their followers, the two authors offered ostensibly plausible and comprehensible explanations for the failure to suppress and defeat the Vietnam National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) in South Vietnam. Instead of wholeheartedly adopting a population-centric approach to COIN, the U.S. chose to rely primarily on overwhelming firepower and a less than ideal implementation of population-control techniques. The purported lessons British and French COIN had to impart were instead thrust aside.<sup>28</sup>

Thompson wrote his 1966 book, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, to convey the practical lessons he derived from his experience fighting the insurgent Malayan Communist Party (MCP) during the early 1950s. In it, the author arranged complex sets of information in a simplified matrix consisting of five elementary principles of COIN.<sup>29</sup> At bottom, they seem like a foreshadowing of FM 3-24.

The first precept, on which the outcome of all further steps (including military operations) depends, states that the government, which is regarded as synonymous with the counterinsurgent, should restore its authority and administrative efficiency, and win back the trust and support of the population, not least through economic and infrastructural development programs.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, the counterinsurgent has to act within the law and enforce it equitably.<sup>31</sup> Thirdly, the COIN efforts have to reflect a well-coordinated plan that integrates and balances civil and military tasks.<sup>32</sup> Fourthly, in combating the insurgency, priority should be given to the dismantling of its political structures and their links to the civilian population, which are to be severed.<sup>33</sup> Lastly, the counterinsurgent should, in gaining territorial control, at first concentrate on the most important areas of the country in terms of

economic value, infrastructural development, and number of inhabitants. Once those are secured, the COIN effort may be expanded to other areas.<sup>34</sup>

David Galula's work on counterinsurgency bears a striking resemblance to Thompson's. A veteran of the Algerian War, he condensed the lessons he thought could be gleaned from the French COIN experience into a plainly written opus first published in English in 1964,

Galula boldly states that revolutionary war – that is, insurgency – is “20 per cent military action and 80 per cent political”.<sup>35</sup> It follows that the “first law” of counterinsurgency decrees that the counterinsurgent must gain the support of the population if he intends to subjugate the insurgency.<sup>36</sup> Much like Thompson, Galula believes that in an insurgency the overwhelming majority of the population is politically passive and susceptible to be co-opted by either active minorities that compose the insurgent and counterinsurgent sides.<sup>37</sup> This has been basically duplicated in FM 3-24.<sup>38</sup>

From the time of Galula, Thompson, and other theorists of similar conviction<sup>39</sup> to the publication of FM 3-24, this population-centric approach was, at least epistemologically, kept alive and well in academia.

A significant fraction of the pertinent historiography has accepted and promoted these maxims as fundamentally characteristic of British counterinsurgency in the post-Second World War period. Thomas Mockaitis, for instance, has embedded the population-centric paradigm into the context of institutional learning within the British army. According to Mockaitis, this institution carried out a profound reevaluation of the methods it had employed to quell civil unrest or suppress insurgent activity in several instances, chiefly the Second Boer War, the massacre of Amritsar of 1919, and the Irish War of Independence of 1919–1921.<sup>40</sup>

This process resulted in an entrenched belief in the necessity for a more benevolent approach, centered on the establishment of civil-military cooperation and on admonitions to minimize the use of force.<sup>41</sup> As a result, subsequent counterinsurgency campaigns in Malaya and Kenya were, apart from several episodes of excessive violence not sanctioned by the authorities, conducted in a relatively restrained manner.<sup>42</sup> British forces, writes Mockaitis, “generally avoided the trap of being provoked into retaliatory measures that strengthened the insurgents’ propaganda campaign. They have also not relied on the use of excessive firepower that so hurt the American cause in Vietnam.”<sup>43</sup>

While John Nagl's account is similar in its praise of British restraint, he also emphasizes that the British Army showed a remarkable capacity for institutional learning and adaptation to the operational environment, something the U.S. military in Vietnam was devoid of.<sup>44</sup> The latter's institutionally mandated fixation on conventional warfighting, Nagl reasons, prevented the U.S. from recognizing that the Vietnam War had to be approached in much the same way the U.K. had approached Malaya.<sup>45</sup> Another similar contention posits that the U.S. military chose to disregard the lessons offered by the Vietnam experience in spite of its ostensibly manifest relevance to other warfighting contexts the U.S. would find itself in.<sup>46</sup>

Therein lies a problematic contention. The insistence on applying operational and tactical concepts developed in one context – the Malayan Emergency – to a markedly different one – the U.S. intervention in Vietnam – implies a belief in the soundness of historical analogy as a useful tool in political and military decision-making processes. Analogical reasoning, by definition, factors out contextual specificities from its set of assumptions, even though they are argua-

bly the point of departure for any realistic solution.<sup>47</sup> This needs to be borne in mind when the problem is finding solutions to contemporary COIN engagements.

One additional, and perhaps more significant, problem is that the reality of British operations in Malaya and elsewhere contrasts with the image conveyed by Mockaitis, Nagl, and FM 3-24.

The coercive measures implemented by the colonial authorities to suppress the MCP-led insurgency were institutionally mandated, widespread and systematic, rather than unsanctioned, sporadic, and isolated.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, they were aimed mainly at large segments of the Chinese minority, which was likely the main source of support for the MCP and its paramilitary wing, the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA).<sup>49</sup>

Thompson's claim that, from the start of his tenure as High Commissioner for Malaya in 1952, Gerald Templer oversaw the successful execution of government programs, is anything but ascertained.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Karl Hack has, on the basis of archival materials from both sides of the Malayan Emergency, convincingly argued that the insurgency had entered a period of crisis largely as a result of the policies of Templer's predecessor, Harold Briggs.<sup>51</sup> Nor did Templer do away with the forceful practices that had likewise marked his predecessors' tenures.<sup>52</sup>

Counterinsurgent forces in Malaya implemented various direct forms of collective punishment, such as the burning or destruction of villages.<sup>53</sup> Emergency regulations stipulating restrictive measures designed to expand direct control over the population included detention without trial for up to two years, and later also included provisions for collective detention in makeshift as well as purpose-built camps, which from January 1949 to March 1953 affected over 10,000 people.<sup>54</sup> The penalties for those acting in

contravention to these ordinances could be severe, and included a mandatory death penalty for those found to have supplied the insurgents.<sup>55</sup> Population-control as a policy of COIN was not an entirely novel notion, and military planners in Malaya apparently drew inspiration from the methods used by the British Armed Forces to suppress the Burmese rebellion in the early 1930s.<sup>56</sup>

From 1948 to 1955, large-scale coercion also found expression in the repatriation to China of over 30,000 ethnic Chinese suspected of sympathy or collaboration with the insurgents.<sup>57</sup>

After succeeding his predecessor Briggs, Templer also continued what was arguably the former's most extensive undertaking, namely the eponymous plan for the forced resettlement of around half a million mostly Chinese rural dwellers in guarded and monitored settlements designated as "New Villages".<sup>58</sup> As part of the typical *modus operandi*, the security forces would strong-arm entire villages of Chinese squatters and relocate them to the designated New Villages, where they would be subjected to intense surveillance that extended to the rationing of food, lest the insurgents exploited opportunities for replenishment.<sup>59</sup> Fundamentally, British planners expected, rightly as it turned out, the vast resettlement program to ensure that the insurgent side would lose much of its political leverage over the contested population, and also their principal source of logistical sustenance.<sup>60</sup> It was in fact so effective that by August 1951, well before Templer's arrival, the MRLA privately conceded that the "Briggs Plan" could not be realistically countered.<sup>61</sup>

Forced resettlement on a grand scale and the other coercive techniques mentioned were not the only methods used to implement population control. Nevertheless, other practices have received scant, if any, mention even

in the revisionist literature on the Malayan Emergency. In fact, British forces also made extensive use of two then-recent technological innovations in air-to-surface warfare, namely napalm and chemical defoliants.<sup>62</sup> The latter were eventually dispersed by aircraft targeting undergrowth and suspected insurgent crops.<sup>63</sup> This approach proved influential, as in 1961 the then U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk referred to the British use of defoliants in Malaya as an example for the U.S. to follow in Vietnam.<sup>64</sup>

The deployment of these means in the rural areas of Malaya, where agricultural activity was the primary source of sustenance, sharply contradicts the narrative built upon the putative predilection for the “hearts and minds” approach.

In short, the employment of coercive methods was tantamount to being a leitmotif of British COIN efforts not only in Malaya, but also, and perhaps to an even greater extent, in Kenya during the 1950s.<sup>65</sup> It would nonetheless be rash to regard these instances as constituting a distinctly British school of COIN. Indeed, a comparison between these British campaigns and the Imperial Japanese occupation policies in Manchuria during the 1930s reveals several conspicuous similarities. Based on contemporary records from the Japanese authorities tasked with suppressing the local insurgency, a RAND Corporation memorandum found that, in Manchuria, the main operational approach consisted in the establishment, in the period from 1934 to 1937 alone, of over 10,000 hamlets in which, however precariously, 5.5 million people were held.<sup>66</sup> As in Malaya, the Manchurian resettlement was deemed necessary by the Japanese authorities for the purpose of physically separating the insurgents from the rest of the population as well as from the food supply, and as such was accompanied by episodes of heavy-handed-

ness and destruction.<sup>67</sup> As in Malaya, this operational principle proved effective and little remained of the rebellion by the end of the 1930s.<sup>68</sup>

The tendency to single out the Malayan Emergency as a positive example of COIN is further complicated by its noticeable parallels to two examples often used to contrast it with, namely the French wars in Indochina and Algeria. In both conflicts, French forces made liberal use of, amongst other implements, napalm.<sup>69</sup> The Algerian case further saw extensive forced population resettlement to cordoned off villages.<sup>70</sup>

Whatever practical impact any nominal insistence on the limited use of force might have had in Malaya was enfeebled by the British government's strenuous opposition to certain proposed provisions of international humanitarian law (IHL), as well as normative loopholes at the national level. The former aspect is exemplified by the UK's success in limiting, through an alternative legal interpretation, the extent to which the Common Article 3 of the four Geneva Conventions was applicable to internal conflicts in British overseas possessions.<sup>71</sup> British forces were thus *de facto* allowed to work partially outside the purview of IHL.<sup>72</sup>

At the national level, the British Army had formally institutionalized the concept of “minimum force” through its inclusion in military-educational curricula, yet it was clarified that such a concept did not apply equally to the United Kingdom and its colonies, and its interpretation in pertinent situations was largely left to the relevant commanders.<sup>73</sup> Nor did every soldier suspected of having committed serious offenses in the course of counterinsurgency operations need to fear legal consequences, as they were rarely pursued in practice.<sup>74</sup>

The predominant contemporary understanding of the proper conduct of COIN



operations – especially among U.S. and U.K. military circles – is thus largely based on an incomplete understanding of the historical realities of British COIN campaigns. The above-mentioned coercive facets of British COIN practice in Malaya go unmentioned, their widespread employment and apparent efficacy in suppressing insurgent activity notwithstanding.

Furthermore, the uncritical adoption of operational and tactical concepts of COIN from more than half a century ago is indicative of an insufficient understanding of the corresponding historical frame of reference. The aforementioned writings of Galula and Thompson were meant to formulate political and military responses to a rather specific form of insurgency pioneered by Mao Zedong in the 1930s and thereafter implemented, to varying qualitative and quantitative degrees, in several internal conflicts in Asia and in Latin America.<sup>75</sup> The two authors thus provide the reader with theoretical and practical considerations on how to effectively combat insurgent organizations who consciously apply the principles of Maoist people's war. This framework may not be applicable to contemporary and future asymmetric armed conflicts, where insurgents may not necessarily pursue political, social, and economic end-states envisioned by Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology.

Citing the presumed methods of COIN campaigns in places such as British Malaya as role models worthy of emulation furthermore means losing sight of fundamental contextual specificities. In their colonial possession of Malaya, British forces could rely on preexisting governance structures. In contrast, NATO and its partner forces in Afghanistan had to make significant investments into rebuilding the basic features of state order.

Furthermore, the assertion that state- or nation-building has historically been practiced to a significant extent by counterinsurgents and should thus be emulated in contemporary campaigns, is not borne out by the historical record. Rather than ensuring the continuation of established modes of communal living in accordance with traditional notions, extensive internments and other forms of population control suggest that colonial counterinsurgency aimed at, and arguably succeeded in, disaggregating social milieus that were regarded as fertile soil for armed resistance to state authority.

## Conclusions

It may be said that the presupposition of important differences between national approaches to COIN has served as the fundamental building block for a paradigm in which the population-centric conception of COIN has thrived and evolved. One cannot avoid the impression that, in the minds of the proponents of population-centric COIN, the British “tradition” or “school” is not only distinct from other purported national approaches mainly on account of its ostensible restraint, but also, as a consequence thereof, far more likely to be successful against insurgencies in almost every conceivable strategic context. The supposedly palmy results achieved in colonial Malaya and Kenya may just as well be replicated, with only minor adjustments, in Iraq or Afghanistan with comparable success.

Consequently, the population-centric, “hearts and minds” approach to COIN operations as described in FM 3-24, AJP-3.4.4, and elsewhere, has been accorded a status of doctrinal preeminence, when it effectively lacks unequivocally demonstrable historical antecedents attesting to its effectiveness. There is indeed little to suggest that British

authorities in Malaya – apart from occasional pronouncements – made any substantial effort to implement a theoretical model of COIN built on the quest for uncoerced consent on the part of the affected portions of the wider populace. The “hearts and minds” paradigm, in other words, is built upon a debatable interpretation of history. As Hew Strachan has put it rather incisively, “when we speak about ‘hearts and minds’, we are not talking about being nice to the natives, but about giving them the firm smack of government”.<sup>76</sup>

It may be conceded that this state-centric British campaign achieved its main short-term strategic goal of suppressing the Malayan Communist insurgency. However, the British government likely understood this victory merely as an enabling event to the long-term perpetuation of its colonial rule.<sup>77</sup> Shortly thereafter, however, London felt compelled to initiate the process of decolonization in its Malayan possessions, thereby revealing the dearth of consequentiality of its COIN victory. Therefore, the outcome of the Malayan Emergency as one of the very few genuine COIN successes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century should be put into perspective.

With regards to FM 3-24 and AJP-3.4.4, this entails the necessity to transcend the short-term, procedural aspects and recognize the importance of strategic concepts based on the long-term sustainability of COIN in foreign lands.

In the absence of past examples of successful COIN campaigns built on the notion of “hearts and minds”, and given the preponderance therein of extensive coercion, one might feel inclined to assert the primacy of the latter in the attainment of operational and, by extension, strategic success.

Nevertheless, care is to be taken by both the insurgent and the counterinsurgent not to relegate the issue of popular support to

secondary importance. It remains crucial to the ultimate outcome of armed conflict in general. Yet, even though the legitimating effect of efficient and equitable host nation governance has been recognized by the authors of AJP-3.4.4, the related elucidations remain in the descriptive realm. Very little prescriptive guidance is provided with regard to the establishment of proper administrative structures and the concurrent efforts to delegitimize parallel insurgent structures.

Perhaps more significantly, AJP-3.4.4 does not exhaustively address potential solutions to the problem of tangible support provided by external state actors to insurgents. In the absence of considerable local popular support, this may represent the latter's only substantial lifeline. State instability may not necessarily result from long-standing grievances among certain portions of the populace. Rather, foreign state actors may attempt to exacerbate internal political and social divisions until a flashpoint is reached.

Lastly, the notion according to which COIN is to be understood – as it is in AJP-3.4.4 and FM 3-24 – primarily as a political struggle for acquiescence by a majority of the population, necessarily entails the investment of long periods of time – years at best, decades otherwise – on the part of the counterinsurgent.<sup>78</sup> Such patience cannot be invariably expected from public opinion at home, a key metric for the political leadership.

The recognition of the political and economic costs of a protracted, large-scale presence in Afghanistan has contributed to the scaling back of troop commitments, thus leaving the Afghan National Security Forces, ANSF, as the primary implementer of COIN. Whether this will end in success for the Afghan state is yet to be seen. If the territorial gains of insurgent forces since the withdrawal of ISAF and US combat contingents at the end of 2014 offer any insight into the future

course of the conflict, the emerging picture does not seem to bode well for the future of the Afghan state in its current guise.

In closing, future editions of AJP-3.4.4 will have to address these issues to allow it to develop into a strategically and operationally promising reference work.

The author is currently responsible for Public Affairs and Outreach at the Asia-Pacific Security Innovation Summit Forum (APSI).

## Notes

1. For a pertinent case study, see Government of the Netherlands: *Final evaluation: Netherlands contribution to ISAF, 2006–2010*, 2011, [http://www.jallc.nato.int/products/docs/final\\_evaluat\\_on\\_netherlands\\_participation\\_in\\_isaf\\_2006-2010\\_tcm4-825602.pdf](http://www.jallc.nato.int/products/docs/final_evaluat_on_netherlands_participation_in_isaf_2006-2010_tcm4-825602.pdf).
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