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## **The New (and Old) Classics of Counterinsurgency**

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Two weapons today threaten freedom in our world. One—the 100-megaton hydrogen bomb—requires vast resources of technology, effort and money. It is an ultimate weapon of civilized and scientific man. The other—a nail and a piece of wood buried in a rice paddy—is deceptively simple, the weapon of a peasant.

—Lt. Col. T. N. Greene, *The Guerrilla and How to Fight Him* (1962)

Counterinsurgency is another word for brotherly love.

—attributed to Edward Lansdale

In the 1930s handbook for British imperial officers, *Imperial Policing*, Maj. Gen. Charles Gwynn, who had seen action in both West Africa and Sudan, writes:

When armed rebellion occurs, it presents a very different military problem from that of a deliberate small-war campaign. There is an absence of a definite objective, and the conditions are those of guerrilla warfare, in which elusive rebel bands must be hunted down and protective measures are needed to deprive them of opportunities. The admixture of rebels with a neutral or loyal element of the population adds to the difficulties of the task. Excessive severity may antagonize this element, add to the number of the rebels and leave a lasting feeling of resentment and bitterness. On the other hand, the power and resolution of the government forces must be displayed. Anything which can be interpreted as weakness encourages those who are sitting on the fence to keep on good terms with the rebels.

Gwynn distinguishes the policing role of occupying powers from conventional warfare and even from asymmetric “small wars” against irregulars, which he defines as “deliberate campaigns with a definite military objective, but undertaken with the ultimate object of establishing civil control” and in which “[no] limitations are placed on the amount of force which can be legitimately exercised, and the Army is free to employ all the weapons the nature of the terrain permits.”<sup>[1]</sup> Pitched closer to civil governance, policing occurs where the government expects to continue ruling a population after hostilities have ended and, as such, wishes to avoid antagonizing the civilians from whom nascent rebel groups can recruit members and receive logistical and moral support.

The precise calibration of lethal force advocated in *Imperial Policing* is embraced as the primary tactic of contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine in the United States, as most clearly set out in the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2006),<sup>[2]</sup> whose free Army-published online version has been downloaded by over 2 million people.<sup>[3]</sup> Since the *Manual's* dissemination, which roughly coincided with the 2007 “surge” in Iraq, counterinsurgency doctrine has become a cottage industry with numerous admirers in the press corps. A key achievement of counterinsurgency doctrine, in fact, has been to bring the

majority of American foreign and military affairs reporters back on board the careening bandwagon of Washington's post-September 11 wars.

### **The Soldier-Scholars**

Counterinsurgency doctrine is interpreted, expanded and sometimes challenged in the proliferation of publications and blogs dedicated to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. One widely read blog is known by its URL, *taches d'huile* (oil spots), named after the anti-guerrilla tactic invented by French general Joseph Gallieni in the late nineteenth century. Gallieni's idea was that, rather than pushing forward across a broad front, the occupying army would gradually and evenly expand its control outward from a central stronghold, as oil spreads on paper. Other prolific bloggers include Abu Muqawama (*nom de plume* of Andrew Exum, an ex-Army Ranger who is completing a doctoral thesis on Lebanese Hizballah) and former *Washington Post* journalist Tom Ricks. Among the authors of books and articles are a number of active and retired military officers who publish in a range of venues, from *Military Review* and *Small Wars Journal* to think tank occasional papers series and, increasingly, university and trade press monographs. Crucially for counterinsurgency doctrine's cachet, many of these authors are soldier-scholars. Among those brandishing doctorates are Brig. Gen. H. R. McMaster (North Carolina, history), retired Col. Conrad Crane (Stanford, history), retired Col. Peter Mansoor (Ohio State, military history), retired Lt. Col. John Nagl (Oxford, international relations), retired Col. Kalev Sepp (Harvard, history) and retired Lt. Col. David Kilcullen of the Australian army (New South Wales, politics). Then there is Gen. David Petraeus (Princeton, international relations), the motivating force behind the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, the only general of the post-September 11 wars whose name is bruited for the presidency.

Petraeus is in such favor because the surge is widely seen to have "worked," allowing the military and the media to shift their attention from Iraq to Afghanistan. The works of Kilcullen, Nagl and Sepp, along with Ricks, have been highly influential in establishing this metanarrative, and also in providing blueprints for soldiers, commanders and civilian officials on how to fight asymmetric wars against non-uniformed guerrillas now and in the future. Significantly, the admiration for counterinsurgency doctrine crosses partisan lines and is touted as progressive by many liberal interventionists in Europe and North America.<sup>[4]</sup> Sarah Sewall, former director of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University, was involved in drafting the *Manual* and wrote the introduction to the press edition. Such humanitarian types focus on counterinsurgency's emphasis (now a cliché) on "winning hearts and minds," as well as its "restraint" and even "political correctness."

What makes the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* and its cohort an ostensible repository of progressive intent is related to what distinguishes counterinsurgency from conventional warfare. In conventional warfare, as T. E. Lawrence ("of Arabia") wrote, opposing armies are each "striving into touch to avoid tactical surprise." Guerrillas, by contrast, "might be a vapour." Their weapons are not firepower but "speed and time."<sup>[5]</sup> To wit, they can move faster than large armies and they can hold out longer. It is not surprising that Mao, perhaps the greatest theoretician of guerrilla warfare, stressed "protracted war" or that the Pentagon speaks of today's overseas missions as "the long war." In such wars, Mao went on, guerrilla leaders must strengthen "the relationship that should exist between the people and the troops. The former may be likened to water, the latter to the fish that inhabit it."<sup>[6]</sup>

The US military now makes a further distinction between "enemy-centric" and "population-centric" counterinsurgencies. The former, what Gwynn called "small wars," is the attempt to defeat the guerrilla by killing him and using punitive measures to deter the civilian population from supporting him. Such a campaign was waged in the "Sunni triangle" of Iraq in 2003-2004, succeeding mostly in multiplying the number of insurgents. The latter, as promulgated by the *Manual*, is about persuading the civilians that the counterinsurgent army can best shield them from hardship. This approach, beloved of liberals for its emphasis on "protection," is of course aimed primarily at defeating the guerrilla, by literally starving him of shelter, food and medical supplies.

### **"Armed Social Work"**

David Kilcullen argues precisely this point in his first and most widely read piece, "Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency," self-consciously modeled on Lawrence's advice for mobilizing Arabs in World War I but drawing as well on his own doctoral "fieldwork" as a serving officer in Indonesia. Some of Kilcullen's guidance for ground commanders has to do with inter-agency cooperation, knowledge of the locale or motivations for insurgency. The core of the article, however, is concerned with how the counterinsurgent should interact with civilians:

This is the true meaning of the phrase "hearts and minds," which comprises two separate components. "Hearts" means persuading people their best interests are served by your success; "minds" means convincing them that you can protect them and that resisting you is pointless. Note that neither concept has to do with whether people like you. Calculated self-interest, not emotion, is what counts.

The article emphasizes the importance of building relations with community leaders, local NGOs and police. Counterinsurgency is "armed social work," and depends not only on the fighting abilities of the occupying military, but also on performing for local and international audiences, presenting a "unified narrative" that can counter nationalist sentiments and "coopting neutral or friendly women, through targeted social and economic programs."[\[7\]](#)

Kilcullen's heralded volume *The Accidental Guerrilla* expands on these ideas. He presents a series of cases—Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia and even Europe—through which he contends that insurgents' strategies aim to provoke their opponents, intimidate the locals and prolong the conflict in order to "exhaust their opponents' resources." He identifies a "pathology" whereby infection, contagion, intervention and rejection form a cycle named "the accidental guerrilla syndrome." The accidental guerrillas are the ostensibly neutral civilians who wind up "fighting alongside extremist forces not because they support *takfiri* ideology but because they oppose outside interference in their affairs."[\[8\]](#) Some of this statement rings true—native populations do tend to resist foreign occupiers. But it is another point that has become the counterinsurgency truism. In his analysis of the Afghan counterinsurgency, Kilcullen says:

Counterinsurgency theory, as well as field observation, suggests that a minority of the population will support the government come what may, and another minority will back the Taliban under any circumstance, but the majority of Afghans simply want security, peace and prosperity and will swing to support the side that appears most likely to prevail and to meet these needs, and that most closely aligns with their primary group identity.[\[9\]](#)

Kilcullen is rephrasing a “basic tenet of the exercise of political power” put forward by French counterinsurgency expert David Galula, a veteran of colonial Algeria’s wars who is regularly and vociferously declared to be the forefather of US counterinsurgency effort today. Galula writes: “In any situation, whatever the cause, there will be an active minority for the cause, a neutral majority, and an active minority against the cause. The technique of power consists in relying on the favorable minority in order to rally the neutral majority and to neutralize or eliminate the hostile minority.”<sup>[10]</sup> Aside from the fact that Kilcullen minimizes the latter portion of the formula, his entire book seems to pivot on this Machiavellian understanding of politics.

### “Be Polite”

The Galula/Kilcullen thesis finds its academic counterpart in Stathis Kalyvas’ vaunted *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Interestingly, rather than calling a counterinsurgency operation by that name, Kalyvas uses the conceptual framework of civil war, thus obscuring the most important element of counterinsurgency: the asymmetry of power between occupying forces and guerrilla groups. In this sophisticated, extensively sourced book, the central case is the Greek state’s suppression of the Communist insurgency in the 1940s. In order to emphasize the “civil war” element, Kalyvas neglects to mention that the US provided Greece with \$467 million in military aid, a “flood of arms and equipment” and a corps of military advisers under the auspices of the Truman Doctrine.<sup>[11]</sup>

Like Galula and Kilcullen, Kalyvas sees two methods that can win over a neutral population: deterrence through intimidation or persuasion through protection. His main argument is that civilian support for one of the sides is neither ideological nor political. In asymmetric warfare, civilians can be detached from such considerations through domination of the battlespace, though their allegiances may remain in flux throughout the period of fighting. In Kalyvas’ words, “control is increasingly likely to shape collaboration because political actors who enjoy substantial territorial control can protect civilians who live in that territory.”<sup>[12]</sup> Although convincing as regards the transformative effects of violence, Kalyvas transforms violence into the *raison d’être* of conflict. There is no power ascribed to memory, history or ideals of justice, except in so far as one side or another can use these things instrumentally.

The process by which the “protection” of a population can work is complex and, Kilcullen suggests, requires a root-and-branch transformation of both military and political practice. The *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* lays out the steps taken in the field, including integration of civilian and military activities, judicious use of intelligence and “information operations,” population control, provision of essential services and economic development, and training of local police. Kilcullen’s proposals are more strategic in nature. He suggests developing a new disciplinary approach to this form of conflict—not international relations, but anthropology, which he defines as “the study of social roles, groups, status, institutions and relations within human population groups, often in non-elite, non-state-based frameworks.” He further posits that US grand strategy has to choose between containment and intervention and between military and non-military spending, to decide what the acceptable costs are “in resources and lives,” and to determine which geographic areas are high-priority. Kilcullen wants the imbalance between US military and non-military capabilities remedied and US “soft power” reinforced. In a sense, he would like to see sovereign power (defined by Foucault as “the power over life and death”) give way to a panoply of disciplinary capacities, including “cultural and ethnographic intelligence, social systems

analysis, information operations, early-entry or high-threat humanitarian or governance teams, field negotiation and mediation teams, biometric reconnaissance and a variety of other strategically useful capabilities."[\[13\]](#) But sovereign power is to be kept in reserve. Or, as fellow warrior-solon John Nagl half-jokingly said on *The Daily Show*, counterinsurgency means, "Be polite, be professional, be prepared to kill."

### **Of Boers and Boy Scout Troops**

Counterinsurgency doctrine gets reverent treatment from the media, in part because it seems to originate in the uniformed military's sprawling network of war colleges and institutes of specialized study rather than universities or think tanks. Nagl and his colleagues cannot be derided, as the neo-conservative intellectuals were, as "chicken hawks." But counterinsurgency doctrine is firmly ensconced in civilian Washington, and its American Enterprise Institute is the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), of which Nagl is now president. The chief executive officer is Nathaniel Fick, a veteran of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars whose book *One Bullet Away* (2005) is reportedly required reading for Marine cadets. Andrew Exum and Tom Ricks have offices at CNAS; Kilcullen is a non-resident senior fellow. CNAS was founded in 2007 by Kurt Campbell and Michele Flournoy, who now serve in the Obama State and Defense Departments, respectively. It is not coincidental to counterinsurgency doctrine's ascendancy that it is linked to the right wing of the Democratic Party, the paladins of the status quo who, because the American media dubs them "centrist" and "middle-of-the-road," are thought to be non-ideological. ("I could go there without being branded," one journalist with a temporary perch at CNAS told *The Nation*.[\[14\]](#))

The CNAS president, Nagl, has also done a great deal to lend a scholarly sheen to the concept of population-centric counterinsurgency. He has, for instance, helped to spread what has become an unquestioned verity among his peers, that the suppression of Communist guerrilla warfare in British Malaya (1948-1960) is proof that great power wars against irregulars need not be quagmires.[\[15\]](#) In Malaya, the story goes, the guerrillas were vanquished, the civilian population was deterred from supporting them and the regime that replaced imperial British rule was decidedly friendly to British interests.

When the Communist guerrillas began their struggle, they were supported logistically and morally by "squatters"—landless workers of Chinese extraction in the rubber plantations and tin mines owned by the British—whose communities dotted the jungles. A state of emergency was declared, and British units from elsewhere, including British members of the Palestine Police who had lost their jobs with the establishment of the Israeli state, were flown into Malaya in large numbers. A three-pronged plan was put into action to suppress the revolt. In the cities, emergency regulations were used to silence critics (particularly of Chinese extraction) and to send potential "agitators" to detention camps; significant numbers of Chinese residents considered troublesome were also deported.[\[16\]](#) Military units, aided by contingents of trackers from other parts of the empire, were sent into the jungle to fight the guerrillas. Perhaps most significantly, the British moved to sever the connection between the civilians and the guerrillas. They engineered the resettlement of 500,000 squatters into "New Villages" and some 600,000 laborers into "controlled areas"—still near the tin mines and rubber plantations to ensure a steady supply of labor, but with these compounds surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers, accessible via military checkpoints and heavily monitored.[\[17\]](#) Food denial operations rationed the victuals of New Village and controlled area residents to ensure they passed none on to the guerrillas.[\[18\]](#) The areas from which the squatters had been evacuated

were declared “black areas,” free-fire zones in which the police and army were free to “shoot anything that moved.”<sup>[19]</sup> Conditions in the New Villages were dire; vegetables and other crops had been uprooted, old households burned down, animals slaughtered, and the new land could scarcely support agriculture because of extensive rubber farming. The guards manhandled the residents, and missionaries were invited only eventually to provide health care and education. Where electricity was introduced, it was to power the floodlights used for surveillance of the villages.<sup>[20]</sup> In effect, these procedures succeeded in depriving the guerrillas in the jungles of intelligence, information, support, food and medicine.

Alongside innovations in tactics and “psy-ops” (i.e., psychological operations, or what is now called information operations), Nagl attributes the success of Malayan counterinsurgency to this resettlement of civilians, which he credits to the “strategic directions” of British colonial officials. In addition, he sees the lessons of the Malayan counterinsurgency to be decentralization of anti-guerrilla military action, “protection” of civilians and extensive gathering of intelligence, all guaranteed by the British military’s flexibility and capacity for organizational learning. Extraordinarily, Nagl sees the New Villages as benign institutions, “more than concentration camps” hosting village cooperatives and “even Boy Scout Troops.” They are the emblem of population-centric counterinsurgency. Nagl admiringly cites Harold Briggs, the British Army’s director of operations in Malaya:

The problem of clearing Communist banditry from Malaya was similar to that of eradicating malaria from a country. Flit guns and mosquito nets, in the form of military and police, though some very local security if continuously maintained, effected no permanent cure. Such a permanent cure entails the closing of all breeding areas. In this case the breeding areas of the Communists were the isolated squatter areas.<sup>[21]</sup>

Setting aside whatever qualms one may have about the immediate violence done to those 1 million civilians, or their long-term traumas, Nagl’s celebration of “population control” is incoherent. After all, the New Villages are the direct descendants of the concentration camps the British set up for Boers and black Africans starting in 1900. In the Boer war, the language of protection and refuge was used to herd hundreds of thousands of civilians into barren compounds after their farms and houses were ordered torched by Lord Kitchener.<sup>[22]</sup> In counterinsurgency doctrine, however, Boer war tactics are held up as enemy-centric (with an odor of disapproval wafting from the term),<sup>[23]</sup> while the New Villages are considered sources of emulation for practitioners of humane, population-centric quashing of rebellion. In fact, in Kalev Sepp’s heavily cited “Best Practices in Counterinsurgency,” what he euphemizes as “electrified rural villages” are placed alongside mass citizenship and elevation of the role of women as basic determinants of the success of counterinsurgency.<sup>[24]</sup> It is noteworthy that Nagl, so enthusiastic about New Villages, barely touches on their direct descendants in Vietnam, the strategic hamlets. While recognizing the family connection of the two concepts, he simply attributes strategic hamlets’ failure to “overly enthusiastic implementation effort that created new hamlets before the old ones had been pacified.”<sup>[25]</sup> Instead, Nagl sees in local militias created by the CIA and the Marine Corps Combined Action Platoons (which wedded patrolling to “civic action”) routes to salvation not taken by a top brass infatuated with conventional, offensive warfare.<sup>[26]</sup>

The writings on Malaya or Vietnam rarely comment on the massive dislocation caused by the New Villages and strategic hamlets, or the intrusiveness of the population control measures and their systematic violation of human rights—not

to mention norms of justice. The British campaign was, in fact, an exercise in collective punishment that sought not to “protect,” but to divide and rule. At their most “civic,” US forces in Vietnam similarly attempted social engineering in the Vietnamese countryside through displacement on an immense scale.

### **Tribes Without Flags**

Indeed, it is an abiding interest in divisions of sect, ethnicity, tribe and clan, alongside the tactics of population control, that defines counterinsurgency practice as passed down from the twentieth century to the twenty-first. In a 1906 memo intended for British imperial officials, Lord Lugard, the chief theoretician of indirect rule, writes:

Since the Fulani Chiefs are aliens who won their position by conquest, it would not, of course, be surprising if the bulk of the people, seeing that the Fulani power has been broken by the British, were no longer to accord to the Chiefs the obedience and respect which they had hitherto exacted.... I am anxious in every possible way to counteract this tendency, and to support the authority of the Native Chiefs, though I consider that it is necessary to retain the means of enforcing order—viz., the Military and Police forces—solely under Government at present, and probably for some time to come.[\[27\]](#)

Bolstering the powers of local chieftains was profoundly important to the indirect rule, or “dual mandate,” methods employed by the British in so much of their empire. (*The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* was Lugard’s best-known tome.) Just as significant was the reduction of local (or native) political structures and relations to a mosaic of tribes (or communities) that could be bought off or manipulated to fit military and political exigencies. Classifying the inscrutable natives into tribes rendered them legible to colonial eyes.

It is instructive to compare two texts about the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan and Pakistan, one written at the end of the nineteenth century by a British colonel and the second at the beginning of the twenty-first century by an American major. Sometime in the 1880s, Col. R. J. Marker delivered a lecture on the Northwest Frontier, then part of British India, and now the locus in Pakistan of the various Pashtun militias of which the Taliban is one. Marker wrote that “the semi-independent Tribes” of this mountainous zone “have no common binding influence except that of the jihad or holy war, and in peaceful times spend the greater part of an uneventful existence in inter-tribal feuds or attempts to murder a fellow clansman with whom they have a blood quarrel. Should the cause of religion lead them to combine against a common infidel enemy, they could turn out not less than 200,000 of the finest guerrilla fighters and marksmen in the world, an increasing proportion of which number is daily becoming armed with weapons of precision and modern range, owing to the developments of the gun-running trade through Persia and Afghanistan.”[\[28\]](#) Marker suggests the use of an “irregular corps” of local fighters to subdue these tribes one by one. His essay includes a sort of proto-ethnography of the tribes, measuring the susceptibility of each kinship group to alliance with and obeisance to British imperial power.

Flash forward to 2009, when US veterans of the post-September 11 wars had begun to commit their own proto-ethnographies to paper. A latter-day Marker, Maj. Jim Gant of the Army’s Special Forces, describes the political landscape of Afghanistan as being

constituted of tribes. Not individuals, not Western-style citizens—but tribes and tribesmen.... Tribes understand protection. Tribes are organized and run to ensure

the security of the tribe. Not only physical security, but revenue and land protection. But most important of all is preservation of the tribal name and reputation.... When honor is at stake, tribal members stop at nothing to preserve their tribe's integrity and "face." [T]ribes understand power. How many guns do we have? How many warriors can I put in the field? Can I protect my tribe? Can I attack others who threaten my tribe? Can I back my words or decisions up with the ability to come down the valley and kill you? Can I keep you from killing me? Lastly, tribes understand projection. Tribes have no "strategic goals" in the Western sense. Their diplomatic, informational, military and economic priorities are almost without exception in reference to other tribes.[29]

US officials take Gant so seriously that this "Lawrence of Afghanistan" is being sent there to implement his vision of tribal control.[30] The same faith in the explanatory power of tribes also underpinned the US surge in Iraq, even if that policy came with considerably more window dressing about "hearts and minds." [31]

### **Back on Board**

While the surge has many champions, its master hagiographer is Tom Ricks, whose *The Gamble* is so complete in its advocacy of the new counterinsurgency orthodoxy that its cast of characters, narrative arc and subtle norms have passed into mainstream lore. In a way, *The Gamble* is meant to sear shut the wound to the US military's honor that was gouged by Ricks himself in his earlier account of the first phase of the Iraq war, *Fiasco*. In *Fiasco*, Ricks tells not only the familiar tale of bad faith on the part of the Bush White House, but also a narrative of incompetence and cruelty among the ranks of American soldiers, from the top generals on down. The problem, as Ricks sees it, was that US forces in Iraq were violating "at least three" of the four rules put forward by Charles Gwynn in *Imperial Policing*: "Civil power must be in charge, civilian and military authorities must cooperate relentlessly, action must be firm and timely, but when force is required it should be used minimally." [32] By contrast, *The Gamble*, which covers the years 2006-2008, is the story of how the US military in Iraq began to obey the rules of effective counterinsurgency.

In Ricks' account, two of the most significant early steps in the counterinsurgency effort were, first, to "recognize" Iraq's "tribal" character and, second, to prise open fissures in the hostile opposition's ranks. With regard to the former, he applauds the "insight" of a US general who idolized the British imperial officer, Gertrude Bell. The general asserted that "tribal society makes up the tectonic plates in Iraq on which everything rests." [33] As for the latter, Ricks writes of the commander of US military forces in Ramadi and his Arabic-speaking right-hand man, whose approach was to separate the "tribes" from the insurgents: "Together they tried to sort out who was a real sheik, with big *wasta*, or influence and who was a lightweight." [34] In turn, this tribal chieftain was paid and given some autonomy of action in order that he and his followers challenge insurgent groups. Here, the officers were following an edict of the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* to "remain alert for signs of divisions within an insurgent movement," since "rifts between insurgent leaders, if identified, can be exploited." [35]

Ricks also approvingly tells the story of the cooptation of civilians as advisers to senior military officers. Petraeus' adviser in Iraq was a Palestinian-American Arabic speaker and "schmooser," Sa'di 'Uthman, while Gen. Ray Odierno's adviser was an Arabic-speaking British humanitarian worker, Emma Sky, who has been compared to Bell herself. [36] In an eerie echo of British imperial policies, these

"native informants" and renegade civilians, ostensibly sympathetic to the locals but ultimately loyal to the empire, provided a pathway for local knowledge, a velvet glove of joviality and compassion for the mailed fist and, most importantly, a more disciplinary (rather than overtly coercive) form of governance.

Despite the adulatory tone of the book, Ricks is fully aware that the US presence in Iraq has persisted far longer than envisioned. Few advocates of counterinsurgency comment on how it has become the long-term replacement for policies of direct action, ostensibly handing over control to locals, reducing the number of US troops, and all the while polishing modes of indirect rule. Ricks has, indeed, been the main publicist of the omnipresent question attributed to Petraeus, "How does this end?" In *The Gamble*, Ricks writes that "the best answer" came from a Petraeus adviser who said, "I don't think [this counterinsurgency] does end.... We are going to be in this centrally located Arab state for a long time. There will be some US presence, and some relationship with Iraqis, for decades."[\[37\]](#) This answer is in line with the strategic vision of Gen. Jack Keane, the man credited with persuading Petraeus to back the surge. According to the consummate insider journalist Bob Woodward, Keane told Petraeus: "We're going to be here [in the greater Middle East] for 50 years minimum, most of the time hopefully preventing wars, and on occasion having to fight one, dealing with radical Islam, our economic interests in the region and trying to achieve stability.... We're going to do it anyway because we don't have a choice."[\[38\]](#) But geopolitics is not Ricks' concern. He promotes counterinsurgency as the difficult, but humane, path to governing conquered and occupied countries overseas. He does not question the underlying will to conquest.

Counterinsurgency is always an instrument of imperial rule, but its ardent proponents set this fact aside. To them, counterinsurgency is simply a mindset that commanders need to adopt or a toolkit that soldiers need to master in order to do their jobs properly. It is even a kinder, gentler means of rescuing a recalcitrant world; a way for the US to police a chaotic planet with a light avuncular touch rather than a firm paternal hand. It is a familiar maneuver. The prophets of counterinsurgency concentrate on everyday, commonsensical tasks in pursuit of unobjectionable goals such as "stability," "development," "nation-building" and "democracy." The progressive proponents see in it a humanitarian style of military intervention. Such aims seem devoid of political or ideological content; in fact, all of them have been seen to stand for the purported "end of ideology" brought about by US hegemony since the end of World War II.[\[39\]](#) But, at a deeper level, their celebratory projections of US managerial prowess—whether with "oil spots" or accounting ledgers—obscure the broader US ideology of domination.

Population-centric counterinsurgency has been a particularly capacious vessel for transmission of a new kind of rule from a distance: ostensibly humanitarian, much more reliant on pliant proxies (whether in political or security positions) than on gung-ho occupying forces, dependent on a scientific or ethnographic knowledge of the natives, and ultimately dismissing the political sentiments among the ruled. The effect of the hegemony of the counterinsurgency narratives is that the civilian populations are seen as malleable and calculating masses, subject to manipulation by the "terrorists" and the counterinsurgents alike, their acquiescence necessary for obtaining intelligence and tactical support in the first instance and maintaining "stability" in the last. Counterinsurgency is self-avowedly an update of "dual mandate" methods for our time or, in other words, a new managerial handbook of imperial rule.

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## Endnotes

- [1] Sir Charles Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (London: Macmillan, 1939), pp. 3-5.
- [2] US Army, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual: US Army Field Manual 3-24* and US Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
- [3] *Chicago Tribune*, September 8, 2007.
- [4] See Rachel Kleinfeld, "Petraeus the Progressive," *Democracy Journal* (Winter 2009), pp. 108-115.
- [5] T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (New York: Doubleday, 1935), p. 194.
- [6] Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 93.
- [7] David Kilcullen, "Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (May-June 2006), pp. 105-107.
- [8] David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (London: Hurst, 2009), pp. 30-2, 35, 38.
- [9] *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- [10] David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), p. 53.
- [11] Charles Shrader, *The Withered Vine: Logistics and the Communist Insurgency in Greece, 1945-1949* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), pp. 225, 254.
- [12] Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 12.
- [13] Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla*, pp. 296-299.
- [14] Nathan Hodge, "Coalition of the Shilling," *The Nation*, March 29, 2010.
- [15] John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- [16] Karl Hack, "The Malayan Emergency as Counter-Insurgency Paradigm," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32/3 (June 2009), p. 386.
- [17] Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya* (London: Frederick Muller, 1975), pp. 391-411.
- [18] *Ibid.*, pp. 375-379.
- [19] "A Survey of the New Villages in Malaya" (Singapore: Malayan Christian Council, 1958), p. 1.

- [20] Judith Strauch, *Chinese Village Politics in the Malaysian State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 63.
- [21] Nagl, pp. 71-76.
- [22] See S. B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1977).
- [23] See, for instance, Michael Lackman, "The British Boer War and the French Algerian Conflict: Counterinsurgency for Today," M.A. thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2006, p. 23.
- [24] Kalev Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (May-June 2005), p. 9.
- [25] Nagl, p. 130.
- [26] *Ibid.*, p. 128, 156-158.
- [27] F. D. Lugard, *Instructions to Political and Other Officers on Subjects Chiefly Political and Administrative* (London: Waterlow and Sons, 1906), p. 190.
- [28] Private papers of Colonel R. J. Marker (1867-1914), National Army Museum, London [6505-62-4], "Lecture on the North West Frontier Province of India," pp. 6-7.
- [29] Jim Gant, *One Tribe at a Time: A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan* (Los Angeles: Nine Sisters Imports, 2009), pp. 8-14.
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- [31] See Lin Todd et al, *Iraq Tribal Study—Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, The Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2006).
- [32] Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p. 266.
- [33] Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008* (London, Allen Lane, 2009), p. 219.
- [34] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- [35] *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, p. 33.
- [36] On the comparison between Sky and Bell, see *Times* (London), April 13, 2009.
- [37] Ricks, *The Gamble*, p. 325.
- [38] Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), p. 410.

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