

Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in 2011

Workshop co-sponsored by:

--Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO), Working Group on Microfoundations of Civil War (Jon Elster, Group Leader)

--MIT Security Studies Program (Roger Petersen, Workshop Coordinator)

November 18-19, 2011

MIT, Building E-40

Lucian Pye Room, Fourth Floor

Motivation for Workshop:

In February of 2011, Defense Secretary Robert Gates told an audience of West Point Cadets, “In my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or the Middle East or Africa should ‘have his head examined.’” Gates did go on to also state that the army and the government must build up and utilize capabilities that can “prevent festering problems from growing into full-blown crises which require costly—and controversial—large-scale American military intervention.” Gates comments bring up the possibility of a major shift away from the counterinsurgency model (COIN) embodied in the Army Field Manual 3-24, often referred to as “Clear, Hold, Build” or “oil-spot theory,” toward a counterterrorism model that heavily relies on special operations forces (SOF).

A brief summary of both models can serve to highlight their differences. FM 3-24 assumes that popular grievances cause small radicalized groups to take up arms against the government, and thus that the restoration of government legitimacy should redress these grievances. It represents the war as a triangular contest between government security forces and coalition partners, “a neutral or passive majority” of the population, and irreconcilable insurgents. COIN forces thus focus simultaneously on three tasks: first, they recruit and train professional indigenous military and police forces; second, they employ economic development and propaganda (“information operations”) to “win hearts and minds” in order to convert angry or resentful members of the population into passive supporters; third, they kill or capture insurgents using intelligence tips from the converted population and take great pains to minimize collateral damage. These three tasks are manpower intensive. Large force ratios are necessary but not sufficient: there must be sufficient “boots on the ground” long enough to “clear” populated areas of insurgents, “hold” them against relapse into violence, and “build” legitimate institutions. The primary focus is on the development of legitimate economic and political institutions. Success builds on success as the “oil spot” of stability spreads.

The counterterrorism or SOF model aims to go after insurgent organizations directly by enhancing the acuity and coverage of surveillance and the speed and precision of strike forces. Manhunts for notorious fugitives like Pablo Escobar, Che Guevara, or Osama bin Laden are examples of decapitation operations or targeted killings. When manhunts are coupled together such that intelligence from detainees and materials gathered from one raid provides leads for new raids, then decapitation efforts are often

called “counter-network operations” or simply “counterterrorism.” U.S. SOF describes this cyclic methodology as “find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze” (F3EA). Whereas “clear, hold, build” attempts to address grievance as the root cause of insurgency, F3EA aims to liquidate the clandestine organizations that insurgency requires, whatever its cause. Its goal is to kill or capture senior and mid-level insurgent commanders faster than they are able to regenerate in order to sow fear and confusion and ultimately to cause the network to collapse.

How well do either of these methods work? In Iraq and Afghanistan thus far they have been employed simultaneously: perhaps the former did most of the work while the latter provided an elaborate cover; perhaps SOF task forces actually depend on a large conventional footprint to flush out intelligence; the counterterrorism hammer and the development anvil could be truly synergistic; or more pessimistically, secretive and hyperactive SOF with an autonomous chain of command could have been impediments to the conventional COIN operations which were doing the real work. Can we tease out their relative effects enough to have confidence in either alone? Now there is increasing policy discussion of shifting toward counterterrorism more exclusively, which promises lower financial costs in an era of austerity, fewer military and civilian casualties, and possibly less political baggage. Whether such benefits might materialize depends on several factors, which are the basis of the panels for the workshop. These panels and their relationship to the COIN vs. SOF question are listed below.

We hope to have a good mix of practitioners and academics. We should be joined by several of the MIT Security Studies Program’s visiting Military Fellows, among others.

Agenda

November 18, 2011

9:00—9:15 Opening Comments

9:15-10:45

Panel 1: Discussion of Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Practice.

This panel will discuss the fundamentals of both models. It will discuss “Clear, Hold, Build” with examples from Iraq and Afghanistan, the Development of Special Operations, and discuss the relationship between COIN and SOF operations in practice.

- A. Roger Petersen, MIT Political Science Dept. and Member of PRIO Working Group, “Mechanisms of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency”
- B. Col. Joseph Felter, Stanford University, CISAC
- C. Col. Chris Connor

10:45-11:00: Coffee Break

11:00—12:30

Panel 2: Territory, Institution Building, and Economic Development

Clear, Hold, Build / “oil-spot theory” is centered on territorial control and the creation of functioning government institutions on secured territory, while SOF emphasize insurgent targeting and work “by, with, and through” local allies.

- A. Austin Long, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University
- B. Jacqueline Hazelton, Rochester University, Dept. of Political Science
- C. Carrie Lee, Stanford University, Dept. of Political Science

12:30—1:30: Lunch

1:30—3:00

Panel 3: Networks

How do insurgent and community social networks interact? Does decapitation work? What are the possibilities of employing networks for capacity-building?

- A. Alec Worsnop, MIT Political Science Department
- B. Jenna Jordan, University of Chicago
- C. Benjamin Hung (US Military Academy), Stephan Kowitz (Draper Laboratory), and Asuman Ozdaglar (MIT, Laboratory for Information and Decision Systems)

3:00—3:15: Coffee Break

3:15—5:00

Panel 4: Technology

Both SOF and COIN rely on technology for intelligence, mobility, and force-protection. SOF have more explicitly embraced a technology-intensive approach for finding and fixing targets while COIN practitioners have been more skeptical.

- A. Jon Lindsay, UC Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation
- B. Henry Marcil, MIT, Technology and Policy Program
- C. Jason Lyall, Yale University, Dept. of Political Science

5:00-6:00: Free time

6:00: Cocktail Hour at Faculty Club

7:00 Dinner at Faculty Club

November 19

9:00—9:15: Review of first day, general comments

9:15—10:45

Panel 5: The Creation of National and Local Security Forces

SOF and COIN both train local security forces, but for what ends and effects?

- A. Austin Long, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University
- B. Andrew Radin, MIT, Political Science Dept.

10:45—11:00: Coffee Break

11:00—12:30

Panel 6: State Formation and Alliances

- A. Jesse Driscoll, UCSD
- B. Fotini Christia, MIT Political Science Department
- C. Jeff Friedman, Harvard University

12:30—1:30: Lunch

1:30—3:00

Panel 7: Observations and Discussion of Trends, Moral, and Omitted Issues

- A. Stephen Holmes, NYU and Member of PRIO Working Group
- B. Barry Posen, MIT Political Science Department
- C. Jon Elster, Columbia University and Member of PRIO Working Group.