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**A Comparative Analysis of the Search for Security in Malaya, Northern
Ireland and Afghanistan (1945 - 2021)**

A thesis

Submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

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by

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Abstract

The peculiar evil of terrorism and insurgency is that not only do they cause great suffering, they also seek to deny a society choice in their political future. By using violent means to subvert democracy, insurgents have emerged throughout history under a variety of banners. States, bound to protect their citizens, have met insurgents in a battle for the support of the civilian population and to respond to the challenging of their legitimate monopoly over the use of violence. This study seeks to help states in their fight against terrorism by analysing three case studies in modern British history and determining what lessons may be learned.

The British campaigns in Malaya (1948-60), Northern Ireland (1969-1998) and Afghanistan (2001-2021) are used to expose key themes in counterinsurgency. This study uses a comparative analysis method and considers a mix of qualitative and quantitative sources. A thorough analysis of the strategies and policies employed, their effectiveness, and the nature and tactics of insurgent movements, are explored. Resulting from this analysis are a set of five principles conducive to success in the British approach which may inform future models in counterinsurgency.

Acknowledgements

In completing this work, I am particularly indebted to the stellar supervision of Drs Mark G. Rolls and Reuben Steff. Reuben has been a continued presence throughout the course of my tertiary studies, from teaching my first undergraduate paper, to seeing me through to the conclusion of my Masters. His encouragement has been an emboldening presence throughout my ongoing voyage in academia. Mark is a mentor in the truest meaning of the term, and I could not have completed this study without his help in sharpening its focus, or without the generous donation of his time – and books! It is a truly rare thing to find a scholar with such a kindred spirit and I am most grateful for Mark’s insights and support. I would also like to thank my patient parents, Mark and Hazel Woodhouse, for their endurance during productive, if unexpected conversations about terrorism at the dinner table which helped me refine my work. To my friends, colleagues and all others who so generously offered their advice and good humour throughout this journey, I offer my most sincere thanks. My grateful thanks are also due to the University of Waikato, for continuing to nurture my academic curiosity and development.

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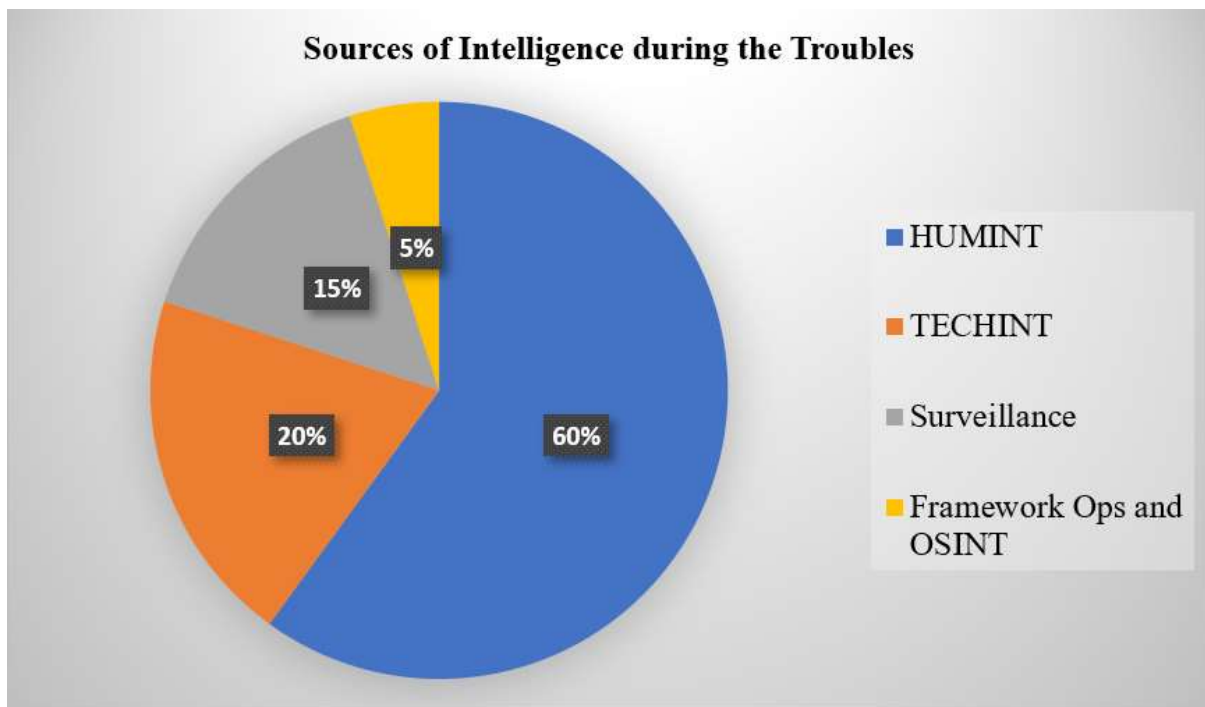


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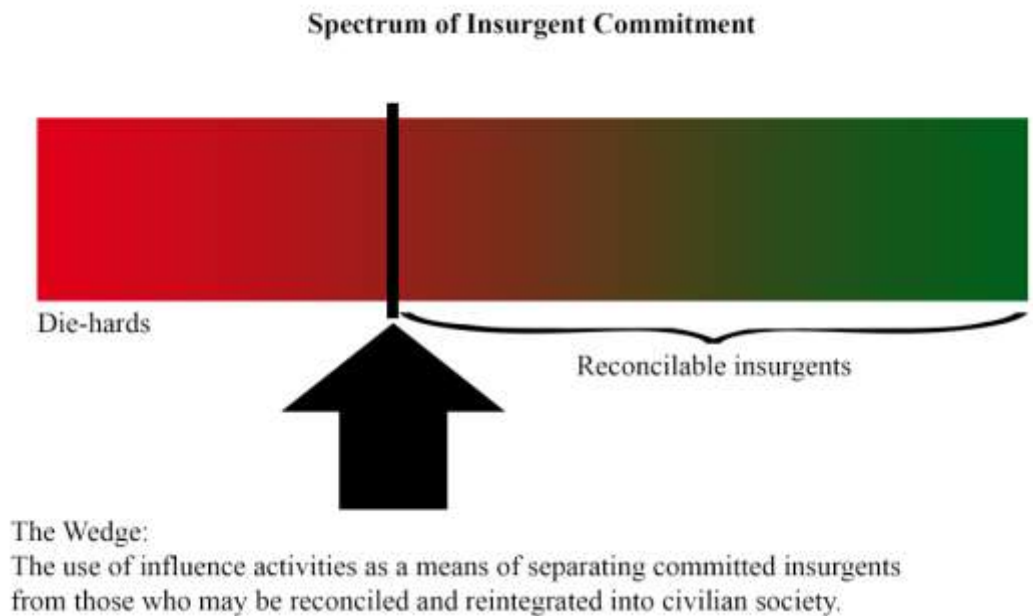


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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my Nana, Iris Priscilla Woodhouse, who always listened with enthusiasm to my impromptu lectures during my research. While she cannot be here to see it completed, I will be forever grateful for her faith in me to get the job done.

I Introduction

A Aim

In August 2021, the world watched in horror and disbelief as the Taliban swept aside the security forces and restored their barbaric theocracy in Afghanistan. Yet, a mere two years later, with the return of conventional warfare in Ukraine and mounting great power conflict, the desire to confront and evaluate how this tragic end to the ‘forever war’ came to pass is sorely lacking. This situation provides the impetus for the following study which seeks to ensure that the efforts of governments to confront the evils of terrorism are informed by a necessary examination of past successes and failures. The goal of this study is to examine efforts to defeat insurgency and propose a framework of principles conducive to success in this endeavour.

B The Case Studies

The goal is to be achieved by analysing three case studies in the history of British counterinsurgency (COIN) operations: the Malayan Emergency (1948-60), the Troubles in Northern Ireland (1969-1998) and the British involvement in the War in Afghanistan (2001-2021). The comparative analysis of the qualitative and quantitative research data emerging from the three case studies enables the development of the evaluative framework and the resulting principles outline the areas essential for success in defeating an insurgent crisis. These case studies were selected because of the great variation between them. While Afghanistan was a COIN effort as part of a foreign intervention, the Troubles transpired within Britain’s borders while the Malayan Emergency took place in a colony at the end of empire. The outcomes in each case study, ranging from resounding success in Malaya, defeat in Afghanistan and ambiguity in Northern Ireland, also informed their selection. If common themes and lessons can be drawn from these diverse contexts, then the reliability of the contributions of this study is further enhanced.

C Methodology

A mixed qualitative/quantitative analysis is carried out, with greater emphasis on the qualitative dimension. The data collection for this methodology draws on a wide range of academic, government, military, and primary sources. Each of the three case studies have a

large corpus of scholarship to draw upon. By employing comparative analysis and following a case-study method, connections may emerge and be commented on. The choice of three case studies was made to enable more thorough analysis of the complicated phenomena studied.¹ Insurgent crises and terrorism are complicated concepts involving a wide variety of perspectives in the fields of international relations, political science, history, and wider societal discourse. Thus, a smaller number of case studies is preferred to ensure closer attention is paid to the intricacies of each examined conflict.² The thesis thus fits within the ‘school of “comparative historical analysis” in which small numbers of countries are studied over long periods’ within the international relations discipline.³

A concern that ‘the capacity to adjudicate among the explanations through statistical comparison rapidly diminishes,’ may be relevant here.⁴ Yet, the use of statistics in this research is sparing and primarily serves to enhance qualitative analysis; mitigating this issue. The case-study sub-method provided the researcher – constrained by ‘modest time and resources’ – with the opportunity to perform ‘intensive examination of cases.’⁵ While it could be contended that studying fewer cases ‘contributes less to building theory than studies with more cases,’⁶ since the study does not seek to produce a ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution to insurgency, this is not an overriding concern. Despite their significant differences, the three case studies share enough in common to offset the smaller number of cases considered through the complexity of the comparisons made possible.⁷ The three insurgent conflicts were generally confined to small geographical regions – typically, the specified nation and its immediate neighbours. State security forces – sometimes with international aid – were tasked with defeating an enemy concealed within the civilian population. Likewise, the three insurgencies were all belied by ethnic and ideological tensions within states with poor security. Each context featured a British colonial history of some kind and, in each case, the British Army and other United Kingdom security forces were involved. As they share

¹ David Collier, ‘The Comparative Method’ in Ada W Finifter (ed), *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II* (American Political Science Association 1993) 105.

² Collier (n 1) 105.

³ Collier (n 1) 105.

⁴ Collier (n 1) 105.

⁵ Collier (n 1) 106.

⁶ Collier (n 1) 107.

⁷ Collier (n 1) 111.

fundamental similarities, these contexts are ripe for analytical comparison and thus the effects of other noticeably different variables may be more easily identified.

While Collier suggests that another solution for the issue posed by a limited number of cases, is to reduce the number of variables considered, this proposition is difficult to apply to this study.⁸ In order to develop a framework to evaluate the chances of success in counterinsurgency, a wide range of factors will need to be taken into consideration. Depending on the context, some factors may appear important, yet the goal of the study is to determine which elements must be present – in one form or another – to successfully resolve any such conflict.

D The Structure of this Study

Prior to engaging in the case study analysis, necessary theories, concepts, and definitions are outlined. The discussion in Chapter II includes defining the essential, yet contentious, terms used in the remainder of the study such as terrorism and insurgency. The essences of various approaches to COIN are compared followed by a brief examination of the literature on the notion of a ‘British way’ in counterinsurgency. An introduction to each case is provided followed by a subsequent in-depth analysis. The introductions to each case study establish the unique context, outline the make-up of the insurgencies and the structure of the security forces before summarising the outcomes.

The analysis chapters for each case cover the core themes emerging from the research which, in most cases, includes an analysis of the intelligence war the conduct of intelligence led operations and human intelligence (HUMINT) efforts; measures to separate civilians from the insurgency; and the important developments on the administrative level. Following the completion of the case study analyses, a synthesis of the observed themes and lessons is compiled into a set of principles which represent the primary contribution of this study.

⁸ Collier (n 1) 112.

II Concepts and Definitions

In the study of terrorism and insurgency there are many controversies and debates – chief among them, what is terrorism and insurgency? In order to ensure that the terms used in this study are employed consistently and to provide a theoretical basis for analysis, this chapter defines the essential concepts and definitions that frame future discussions. Some concepts are given more concise definitions than others as they are judged by the author to be less controversial than others which merit further interrogation. Finally, this chapter seeks to establish a workable understanding of what is meant by the British approach to counterinsurgency.

A Defining Terrorism

Given that this study explores security responses to insurgencies, and that terrorism is a common feature of insurgencies, it is necessary to establish what is meant by terrorism. Defining terrorism is a subject of great contention in academic discourse. Naturally, terrorism is a pejorative term and one is making a moral judgement when using it. This can make ‘the search for a definition precise enough to provide meaningful analytical purchase, yet general enough to obtain agreement from all participants ... extremely difficult.’⁹ As such, academics and analysts caution that we pay attention to who is using the term. If a state ascribes its principled opposition with the label of ‘terrorists,’ it may be able to justify unnecessarily repressive measures in the pursuit of preserving the regime’s security. However, this can also lead to assertions of moral equivalency from the other side of the coin; the “terrorist” of yesterday may change into the national hero of today.’¹⁰ This is unproductive from a scholarly perspective. The morally relativist conflation of terrorist and freedom fighter – as the adage goes – overlooks terrorism’s use as a strategy, whereas freedom fighting holds liberation as its objective. Wight provides a helpful synthesis: ‘[i]t is entirely possible that one can support the political aspirations of a group attempting to free themselves from oppression, yet not support the means (terrorism) that they use to achieve it.’¹¹

Implicit in Wight’s observation is also an important moral distinction that provides the antidote to the potentially damaging association of the evil of terrorism with a hypothetical

⁹ Colin Wight, *Rethinking Terrorism* (Palgrave 2015) 6.

¹⁰ Marcello Di Filippo, ‘The Definition(s) of Terrorism in International Law’, *Research handbook on international law and terrorism* (First edition, Edward Elgar Publishing 2020) 3.

¹¹ Wight (n 9) 7.

liberation struggle. One must have greater command over the essence of what terrorism is in order to challenge malicious accusations of it, yet also to identify and condemn genuine cases. By first considering some examples of definitions (see below) it is possible to identify trends in how individuals and organisations define terrorism.

(i) The Commonwealth of Independent States: ¹²

“Terrorism” - an illegal act punishable under criminal law committed for the purpose of undermining public safety, influencing decision-making by the authorities or terrorising the population, and taking the form of: Violence or the threat of violence against natural or juridical persons; Destroying (damaging) or threatening to destroy (damage) property and other material objects so as to endanger people's lives; Causing substantial harm to property or the occurrence of other consequences dangerous to society; Threatening the life of a statesman or public figure for the purpose of putting an end to his State or other public activity or in revenge for such activity; Attacking a representative of a foreign State or an internationally protected staff member of an international organisation, as well as the business premises or vehicles of internationally protected persons.

(ii) The League of Arab States: ¹³

Any act or threat of violence, whatever its motives or purposes, that occurs in the advancement of an individual or collective criminal agenda and seeking to sow panic among people, causing fear by harming them, or placing their lives, liberty or security in danger, or seeking to cause damage to the environment for private installations or property or to occupying or seizing them, [sic] or seeking jeopardise a national resources [sic].

(iii) The Canadian Armed Forces: ¹⁴

Terrorism is a tactic. Despite the attention that it receives, terrorism is a tactical level undertaking; however, one that is normally used to influence the situation at the operational and strategic levels. It may be used by individuals, groups or states as part of a larger operational objective and strategy to intimidate and coerce governments, societies or elements of each. Terrorist actions call attention to the perpetrators and their causes and may help them win support of potential sympathisers.

Terrorism is used to strike at civilian targets which normally have limited means of self-defence.

These definitions illustrate the difficulty in defining terrorism. For instance, the League of Arab State's definition captures everyday criminal conduct through its expansive terms. The

¹² Treaty on Cooperation among the States Members of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Combating Terrorism, 1999 (4 June 1999) art 1.

¹³ The Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism (April 1998) art 1.

¹⁴ Department of National Defence Canada, 'COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATIONS' (Land Force 2008) B-GL-323-004/FP-003 para 6.

Commonwealth of Independent State's definition is more precise in identifying the expressly political ambitions of the use of terrorism yet it provides the scope for the conflation of terrorism and revolutionary movements by noting that the practice of terrorism can involve the targeting of state actors. The importance of who is targeted by terrorism is not a matter of trifling semantics, it points to the context in which the politically oriented violence – usefully identified in definition (ii) – occurs. That such violence is political presupposes the existence of the state. If violence is directed towards members of the state, it is necessarily revolutionary according to Max Weber's persuasive location of the source of state authority in violence.¹⁵ As a consequence, the third definition from the Canadian Armed Forces is the most helpful thus far in that it locates terrorist violence firmly on the tactical level and logically identifies civilians as the targets. It likewise identifies the motivation of terrorism: 'to intimidate and coerce governments, societies or elements of each' and to 'call attention to the perpetrators and their causes.'¹⁶

Where this definition's logic fails though, is in enabling state attacks against civilians to be considered terrorism. If the state's authority is based on violence, then all activities of the state could be erroneously identified as terrorism. Furthermore the state's support for organisations engaged in terrorism within another state is better described through terms such as sponsorship and hybrid warfare – both means by which a state can undermine a rival outside of conventional warfare or politics. Attacks by states against another state's civilians, or perhaps their own, are better described as constituting repression, human rights violations, or in extreme cases, war crimes or crimes against humanity. While the Oxford English Dictionary notes that the term terrorism was previously used to describe the actions of oppressive governments, it has increasingly come to be used to describe the practices of 'clandestine or expatriate organisation[s]' using violent 'means of furthering [their] aims.'¹⁷ In a modern context and for the purposes of this study, terrorism will be viewed as being perpetrated by non-state actors alone, with other terms used to describe oppressive measures taken by states against civilians. Taking account of the analytical needs of this study, it is Collin Wight's theories on terrorism which will define the concept here.

¹⁵ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Taylor and Francis 2013) 77.

¹⁶ Department of National Defence Canada (n 14) para 6.

¹⁷ Oxford University Press, 'Terrorism, n.' (*OED Online*, June 2022).

Terrorism, in Wight's view, can only be understood in the context of the modern state because the use of violence by non-state actors challenges the state's monopoly over the legitimate exercise of violence. For Wight, terrorism is: 'the use, or threat, of violence by non-state actors against non-state actors to communicate a political message in pursuance of political ends.'¹⁸ The fundamental differences between Wight's and most other scholars' or organisations' definitions of terrorism, are that Wight suggests that terrorism pre-supposes the existence of the state and that it is a means and not an end. As such, Wight is cautious not to apply the label of terrorist to organisations as, typically, organisations have an end in mind when they use terrorism, they do not exist simply to commit terrorism. The advantages of Wight's novel definition of terrorism include how it avoids making moral or political judgements and thus may be applied more scientifically. This definition is minimal yet precise, lending itself in the manner of a legal test when applied to case studies. Likewise, Wight's definition is more in line with the modern common meaning of terrorism. Helpfully, Wight suggests we use other terms to describe attacks by non-state actors on the state, such as riot, insurgency, or revolution. This suggestion does not rob Wight's attempts to define terrorism of meaning, but rather serves to refine their use. Specificity is valuable when addressing such a morally charged issue as terrorism.

Furthermore, by using the term 'non state actors' rather than 'innocents,' Wight employs a more technical rather than moral distinction when describing the targets and participants in terrorism. Calling the victims of terrorism innocent, Wight recognises, is potentially controversial, given that democracies vote in their leaders. An attack against a citizenry by an organisation that has fallen victim to an elected government's policies, could be argued as legitimate, in the context of how those civilians vote for those policies and fund them via taxation. By Wight's reckoning, the targeted population 'is simply a cipher and has to suffer the violence so that the message can be transmitted to the secondary and most important audience:' the state.¹⁹ Terrorism serves as a form of political communication and is an attempt by 'someone to force another person or group to do something they would otherwise not do.'²⁰ This view of terrorist violence as a form of communication is shared by other

¹⁸ Wight (n 9) 12.

¹⁹ Wight (n 9) 116.

²⁰ Wight (n 9) 116.

scholars. Whittingham and Mitchell also suggest that ‘terrorist acts are not always solely directed at the targeted population but may also generate support for the cause from external audiences sympathetic to the terrorist organisation’s aims.’²¹ This is an important observation in the context of the case studies considered by this thesis.

B *Defining Insurgency*

An important distinction must be made early in this study: the difference between insurgency and terrorism. Taking account of Whittingham and Mitchell’s thoughts on counterinsurgency, it will be necessary to ‘avoid common (and largely useless) debates over whether a particular organisation or a particular conflict’ constitutes terrorism or insurgency, by characterising terrorism as ‘a tactic within a broad insurgency strategy.’²² The insurgency then, is the broader context of political struggle within which terrorism may – or may not necessarily occur. Unlike in defining terrorism, the assumed common meaning of insurgency is not helpful in establishing the boundaries for this analysis. The Oxford English Dictionary defines an insurgent as ‘one who rises in revolt against constituted authority; a rebel who is not recognised as a belligerent.’²³ Wight points out the unhelpfulness of this definition by noting that anyone engaged in a conflict could be considered a belligerent and that ‘a very limited, and restrictive, definition of war’ would be required to support this view of insurgency.²⁴ Wight notes that insurgency is a form of political protest with the state as its target and ‘occurs when groups within a state decide to take violent action against [it].’²⁵ This violence often takes ‘the form of attacks on state officials and property.’²⁶ Insurgencies aim ‘to take control of the state, or ... to secede from the state in order to form the[ir] ... own political community.’²⁷ Given that states are targeted and that the use of violence by non-state actors ‘is a direct and overt challenge to the authority of the state, ... it is not surprising that most states will refer to insurgent groups as terrorists.’²⁸ Yet, they need not be considered terrorists under the definition given above, unless they target non-state actors as part of their

²¹ Daniel Whittingham and Stuart Mitchell, *Counterinsurgency: Theory and Reality* (2020) <<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2458924>> accessed 12 August 2022.

²² Whittingham and Mitchell (n 21) 14.

²³ Oxford University Press, ‘Insurgent, Adj. and n’ (*OED Online*, June 2022) <<https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/view/Entry/97280>> accessed 3 September 2022.

²⁴ Wight (n 9) 110.

²⁵ Wight (n 9) 110.

²⁶ Wight (n 9) 110.

²⁷ Wight (n 9) 110.

²⁸ Wight (n 9) 110.

violent attempts to further their political ambitions. Insurgencies could target the state alone if they chose.

While Wight's reflections on insurgency are informative, the definition of this concept given by the United States Government has been selected for this study due to its comprehensiveness. In their 'Counterinsurgency Guide,' the U.S. Government defines insurgency as:²⁹

the organised use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify or challenge political control of a region. ... a political struggle, in which both sides use armed force to create space for their political, economic and influence activities to be effective. Insurgency is not always conducted by a single group with a centralised, military-style command structure, but may involve a complex matrix of different actors with various aims, loosely connected in dynamic and non-hierarchical networks.

This definition is supported by observations which are relevant to the insurgencies considered in the three case studies of this thesis. Insightfully, the U.S. Government points out that the intent of insurgents is not necessarily to win through strength of arms, but 'to protract the struggle, exhaust the government and win sufficient popular support to force capitulation or political accommodation.'³⁰ The conditions of success for insurgencies are identified by the Americans as requiring 'charismatic leadership, supporters, recruits, supplies, safe havens and funding (often from illicit activities).'³¹ Active supporters such as these are necessary yet are not the only essential factor as insurgencies often survive with few active members. In order to ensure their longevity, insurgents require 'the passive acquiescence of a large proportion of the contested population.'³² Accordingly, an insurgent movement will seek to gain 'appeal, manipulating religious, tribal or local identity to exploit common societal grievances or needs.' They may also employ 'a combination of persuasion, subversion and coercion while using guerrilla tactics to offset the strengths of ... security forces.'³³ Wight deepens this analysis of the 'winning over' element or the securing of the compliance of the population. He points out that '[a]ll insurgents attempt to mobilise support for their cause

²⁹ United States Government, 'U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide' (United States Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative 2009) 2.

³⁰ United States Government (n 29) 2.

³¹ United States Government (n 29) 2.

³² United States Government (n 29) 2.

³³ United States Government (n 29) 2.

amongst the wider population' competing with the state in a propaganda war by highlighting, 'the shortcomings of existing authority structures and explaining how ... once the insurgents gain power,' things will improve.'³⁴

Wight views force as a form of communication, though not the only form employed by insurgents: violence and perhaps 'terrorism might be' among 'the chosen methods through which [an insurgent movement] achieves its aims.'³⁵ Yet, in their use of violence, insurgents face a dilemma, especially when using terrorism. For a successful insurgency, 'the aim is not to terrorise the general population so much as terrorise the political elite.'³⁶ Insurgents need large-scale support and the acceptance of the general population' and should avoid violence that 'alienate[s] large sections of the community.'³⁷ If insurgents limit their attacks to 'government facilities, assassinat[ions] [of] ... politicians and officials, and sometimes ... specifically targeted people who aid the authorities' they can avoid the alienation of local communities that comes with the perception of indiscriminate violence.³⁸ Certainly, terrorist violence used by insurgents is indiscriminate. Yet, those attacks that are not terrorism, 'will typically select targets on the basis of their relationship to the state.'³⁹ This means that when insurgents seek to attack the state directly, they are discerning though that is not to say that 'insurgent attacks, as with standard military actions,' do not result in unintended casualties 'often referred to as "collateral damage."⁴⁰ Insurgents use of violence may also be intended as provocation, baiting the state into the use of 'disproportionate force' which could drive the population 'into the arms of the insurgents.'⁴¹ Consequently, insurgents may also be betting on the sympathy of international observers in response to perceptions of victimisation. Yet, the international audience and 'the local community' insurgents depend on is unlikely to support a group which has 'set about the bloody business of terrorism.'⁴²

³⁴ Wight (n 9) 111–112.

³⁵ Wight (n 9) 111.

³⁶ Wight (n 9) 111.

³⁷ Wight (n 9) 111.

³⁸ Wight (n 9) 111.

³⁹ Wight (n 9) 111.

⁴⁰ Wight (n 9) 111.

⁴¹ Wight (n 9) 112.

⁴² Wight (n 9) 111–112.

C Defining Political Violence

In defining this basic, foundational, term Wight is most succinct: '[a]t the most basic level, political violence is the use of physical force to achieve political ends.'⁴³ In the face of attempts within scholarship to re-define violence such as in the suggested notion of 'structural violence,' Wight felt he needed to define violence as 'behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage or kill someone or damage something.'⁴⁴ This is sufficient for use in this study.

D Defining Guerrilla/Unconventional Warfare

While '[i]nsurgents may ... in some cases, ... even choose to carry out conventional attacks with regular troop formations,'⁴⁵ they are much more likely to engage in irregular forms of warfare given their comparative disadvantage in 'stand-up' fights against better trained military forces. A variety of sources employed in this study use the term 'guerrilla warfare' to describe the tactical approach often taken by insurgents towards their state adversaries. Guerrilla warfare is described by Wight as 'a type of war typically fought in relatively small formations, against a stronger enemy' which is not 'restricted to non-military forces,' as '[g]uerrilla warfare can serve as an auxiliary tactic engaged in by military or non-military personnel, often operating behind enemy lines.'⁴⁶ The action of guerrilla warfare 'consists of hit-and-run attacks against police and military and the physical infrastructure that supports them.'⁴⁷

E Defining National Security

Insurgency, besides being a threat to the continuation of a state's government, is principally an issue of security. It is security that is the rallying cry of governments fighting insurgencies and it is security which they aim to uphold against the threat of terrorism. As such, it is important to establish a workable definition of security. Ranging from the arcane and broad to the narrow and inflexible, there are many competing definitions for what constitutes national security. However, the definition most useful to this thesis (and with applicability beyond the

⁴³ Wight (n 9) 106.

⁴⁴ Wight (n 9) 106.

⁴⁵ Bard O'Neill, 'Foreword' in Robert Taber, *War of the flea: the classic study of guerrilla warfare* (Brassey's 2002) ix.

⁴⁶ Wight (n 9) 110.

⁴⁷ O'Neill (n 45) ix.

Canadian experience) is provided by Major-General L.V. Johnson of the Canadian National Defence College:⁴⁸

National Security is the preservation of a way of life acceptable to the Canadian people and compatible with the needs and legitimate aspirations of others. It includes freedom from military attack or coercion, freedom from internal subversion, and freedom from the erosion of the political, economic, and social values which are essential to the quality of life in Canada.

Barry Buzan elaborates further by developing on some of the dimensions of security emerging from definitions, such as the one above. Buzan suggested security has having five components, military, political, economic, societal and environmental.⁴⁹ The military level pertains to the defensive and offensive capacity of a state and ‘states perceptions of each other’s intentions.’⁵⁰ Political security concerns the state’s ‘organisational stability,’ its institutions and ‘the ideologies that give them legitimacy.’⁵¹ Naturally, economic security pertains to the access to resources required by the state and the ability to engage in ‘markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power.’⁵² Societal security denotes the state’s capacity to maintain its national identity, values and customs through cultural reproduction.⁵³ Lastly, environmental security refers to the ‘maintenance of the local ... biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend.’⁵⁴ Buzan contends these dimensions are all interwoven and affect one another and taken together, they form the matrix of national security. Throughout the course of this analysis, where relevant, these dimensions will be referred to as the security concerns posed by insurgency can reasonably be expected to impact most, if not all, of these dimensions. By employing Buzan’s framework, the national security of the case studies considered in this research can be evaluated.

⁴⁸ WD BGen (ret'd) Macnamara and Ann Fitz-Gerald, ‘A National Security Framework for Canada’ (2002) 3 Policy Matters 1 <<https://irpp.org/research-studies/policy-matters-vol3-no10/>>.

⁴⁹ Barry Buzan, *People, States & Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (2. ed, ECPR Press 2007) 38.

⁵⁰ Buzan (n 49) 38.

⁵¹ Buzan (n 49) 38.

⁵² Buzan (n 49) 38.

⁵³ Buzan (n 49) 38.

⁵⁴ Buzan (n 49) 38.

In the context of the case studies examined by this thesis, many of Britain's counterinsurgency (COIN) practices were devised in an environment characterised by poor national security. French describes how many of '[t]hose British colonial regimes that were confronted by insurgents were not failed states, but they were often fragile states.'⁵⁵ While they had a functioning civil power, insurgents degraded 'its capacity to protect and govern the civil population' and 'called into question its legitimacy,' notably by threatening states 'monopoly over the legitimate use of violence.'⁵⁶ In determining why this was typically the case in British colonial regions, the dimensions Buzan highlighted prove their relevance. Often, they were economically poor, administrated by a 'tiny [civil service] compared to the territory and the number of people that it governed,' and were militarily stretched with small 'police forces' that were 'usually badly trained, poorly housed, and inadequately equipped.'⁵⁷ French highlights also the role of intelligence in security and while it may not factor in a definition of security, intelligence clearly plays a role in facilitating it as often, British colonies had 'intelligence services [that] were frequently inadequate.'⁵⁸ While this is not a definitive description of the case studies explored in this study – particularly as these contexts progressed into their later stages – this description highlights challenges faced by comparable security environments before an active insurgency is factored in. Likewise, this description serves as an example in applying the above theories regarding security. A key element in any security response to an insurgency is the collection, assessment and use of intelligence.

F Defining Intelligence

Intelligence is 'the product resulting from the collection, processing, integration, analysis, evaluation and interpretation of information concerning foreign nations, hostile or potentially hostile forces or elements, or areas of actual or potential operations.'⁵⁹ Intelligence may be collected through a variety of methods, each lending their name to the means by which they are gathered, for example, human intelligence or signals intelligence – often abbreviated to

⁵⁵ David French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (Oxford University Press 2011) 11 <<https://academic.oup.com/book/5047>> accessed 12 August 2022.

⁵⁶ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 11.

⁵⁷ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 11.

⁵⁸ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 11.

⁵⁹ Nicholas Van der Bijl, *Sharing the Secret: The History of the Intelligence Corps, 1940 - 2010* (Pen & Sword Military 2013) 1.

HUMINT and SIGINT respectively. Newberry notes that '[i]ntelligence is a prerequisite for achieving and maintaining national and international security.'⁶⁰

In order to evaluate the use of intelligence in counterinsurgency contexts, the definition of a successful intelligence apparatus as provided by French will be used. By his assessment, '[a]n effective intelligence system' in the British COIN context performs five of the following functions.⁶¹ First, determining 'which targets should be the focus of intelligence activity.'⁶² Second, possessing 'personnel ... who [are] able to collect information about those targets.'⁶³ Third, having a structure 'in place to collate and analyse that information and turn it into' usable intelligence products.⁶⁴ These products must then be 'disseminated ... quickly enough' to those who require this information and can 'act upon it,' as part of the fourth function.⁶⁵ Lastly, a 'parallel organisation' must be established that can 'prevent the enemy from gathering intelligence about British activities.'⁶⁶ Typically, at the 'outset of most emergencies' there is a paucity of 'intelligence, not a superfluity of it, and that lack bedevilled some of them throughout their course.'⁶⁷ As such, maintaining the flow of information, the fuel of the intelligence war, is an essential part of a successful counterinsurgency campaign that can be identified from the outset.

G *Defining counterinsurgency*

The state's security response to insurgency is known as '[c]ounter-insurgency' and is a 'blend of comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously contain insurgency and address its root causes.'⁶⁸ The extent to which states favour the civil or martial elements in their response to insurgency depends on that nation's values. For Western security forces, a key difference between COIN and conventional warfare is that civil means of addressing the insurgency are given greater prominence, 'with military forces playing an enabling role.'⁶⁹ That is not to say that law enforcement and military action are not required for success in

⁶⁰ Samantha Newberry, *Interrogation, intelligence and security controversial British techniques* (Manchester University Press 2016) 3.

⁶¹ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 19.

⁶² French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 19.

⁶³ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 19.

⁶⁴ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 19.

⁶⁵ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 19.

⁶⁶ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 19–20.

⁶⁷ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55).

⁶⁸ United States Government (n 29) 2.

⁶⁹ United States Government (n 29) 2.

COIN, but that destroying the enemy is not the ultimate goal of a counterinsurgency. Instead, ‘the overall objective’ is ‘enabling the affected government to establish control,’ gradually scaling back the use of military forces.⁷⁰ However, there are different approaches to achieving this end goal of returning to civil means of control.

1 Approaches to COIN

(a) American approach (liberal)

The American approach is clearly informed by liberal values. It employs security forces in support of various other projects aimed at ‘providing a framework of political reconciliation.’⁷¹ An economic function of their strategy ‘seeks to provide essential services and stimulate long term economic growth, thereby generating confidence in the government [and] ... reducing the pool of frustrated, unemployed young men and women’ who may be recruited into insurgencies.⁷² Likewise, attempts are made to gain intelligence as part of an information function which may be used to identify and apprehend insurgents but also informs an ‘influence campaign’ seeking to win over the population.⁷³ Elements of this American approach appear inspired by the British experiences covered in the following section and throughout this study. The American approach is certainly more complex than the following Russian example, yet it has seemingly proved unsuccessful in Afghanistan and Iraq. The question of whether it was the theory or the implementation which was at fault plagues analysis of American COIN techniques. Perhaps the case studies considered by this thesis may shed some light on where this approach may have stumbled.

(b) Russian approach (authoritarian)

At the other end of the spectrum, is the illiberal approach. Russia provides a good example of this methodology. In their second Chechnya campaign, the Russian security forces employed a three-step strategy as described by David Ucko. The initial phase was the ‘clearing’ of the

⁷⁰ United States Government (n 29) 26.

⁷¹ United States Government (n 29) 3.

⁷² United States Government (n 29) 3.

⁷³ United States Government (n 29) 3.

insurgency.⁷⁴ This involved the imposition of harsh measures including the prohibition of dissent,⁷⁵ large deployment of military forces and the use of indiscriminate violence against insurgents and those perceived to be supporting them.⁷⁶ In order to sustain this initial, painful phase, Putin's government sought to mobilise the masses in support of the campaign.⁷⁷ Once the resistance of the Chechen separatists had been quelled, the second phase could begin. This involved holding the gains that had been made and consisted of a continued occupation by military forces.⁷⁸ With the threat of insurgency stamped out, the final phase of re-development was initiated. In the Chechen case, this involved the supplying of a local leader, sympathetic to the government, with a great amount of wealth and initiating re-development projects that keep the region's welfare dependent on the state.⁷⁹ Reconstruction in Chechnya occurs in tandem with continued repressive measures against dissent; the 'normalisation' of the region remains a dubious prospect.⁸⁰ Yuri Zhukov insightfully concludes that '[i]t is not immediately clear whether Russia's successes have been achieved due to this systematic brutality, or in spite of it. On this point, the main insight from the Russian example might be, 'repression works, but not in moderation.'⁸¹

These examples denote differing approaches to COIN though it should be noted that there is 'no simple dichotomy between a democratic and an authoritarian approach to counterinsurgency.'⁸² In any example, there will likely be elements of both strategies employed. This is a relevant consideration when exploring the proposed 'British approach' to counterinsurgency.

⁷⁴ David H Ucko, "'The People Are Revolting': An Anatomy of Authoritarian Counterinsurgency' (2016) 39 *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, 45 <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2015.1094390>> accessed 5 September 2022.

⁷⁵ Ucko (n 74) 37.

⁷⁶ Ucko (n 74) 41 & 45.

⁷⁷ Ucko (n 74) 39.

⁷⁸ Ucko (n 74) 45.

⁷⁹ Ucko (n 74) 51–52.

⁸⁰ Ucko (n 74) 52.

⁸¹ Yuri M Zhukov, 'Counterinsurgency in a Non-Democratic State: The Russian Example' in Paul B Rich and Isabelle Duyvesteyn (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* (1st edn, Routledge 2012) 293.

⁸² Ucko (n 74) 55.

H Defining the British approach to Counterinsurgency:

As this study compares various British efforts in counterinsurgency, it is necessary to address perceptions of a 'British way' in responding to insurgent crises. By Col. I.A. Rigden's analysis, since 1945 the British have been involved in seventeen insurgent conflicts. Of these seventeen, 'seven can claim to be successes, one is generally regarded as a draw, five are acknowledged failures, three are limited campaigns and difficult to quantify, and two are still in progress.'⁸³ The two ongoing insurgencies at Rigden's time of writing were in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is because of this extensive record, perhaps, that there is a perception among some scholars and military academics 'that Britain was more successful at ... counterinsurgency than France and other imperial powers.'⁸⁴ More successful than the Americans, reliant 'on overwhelming firepower' yet defeated in Vietnam and more strategically advanced than a French approach, which 'embraced torture to obtain intelligence ... and terror to cow civilian populations.'⁸⁵ As a consequence, the British approach has been viewed as potentially superior given that it succeeded where others failed. Ironically, the characterisation of a 'British way' in COIN appears to originate primarily from American military academics' readings of Malaya. In learning from the British experience, American military scholars identify several aspects deemed instrumental in the success of the British way. Among the common indicators they identify are the position of the military in support of civil power, the primacy of intelligence in leading security responses and efforts made to separate the population from the insurgents, either by psychological operations (PSYOPs) or by meeting the population's needs.⁸⁶ This approach has been described as one that seeks to secure the 'hearts and minds' of the population and is the primary explanation offered by commentators seeking to distinguish British COIN practices from those of other nations.

⁸³ IA Rigden OBE, 'The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: Myths, Realities, and Strategic Challenges' in Harry R Yarger (ed), *Short of general war: perspectives on the use of military power in the 21st century* (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College 2010) 207 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12050.19>> accessed 10 September 2022.

⁸⁴ Brian Drohan, *Brutality in an Age of Human Rights: Activism and Counterinsurgency at the End of the British Empire* (Cornell University Press 2017) 1.

⁸⁵ Drohan (n 84) 1.

⁸⁶ Kalev I Sepp, 'Best Practices in Counterinsurgency' [2005] *MILITARY REVIEW* 8, 10 <<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/COIN-Reader-1/Sepp-MJ-2005/>>; Pennell J Hickey, 'Counterinsurgency Operations in Malaya, 1948 - 1960: The Role of Regular Forces' (Army War College 1971) Research paper AD-772 610; Lt Col Steven C Marsman, 'Malaya: A Successful Counterinsurgency Operation' (The Air Command and Staff College 2005) ACSC Quick-Look 05-14 <<https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA430897>>.

Other explanations of why Britain was successful exist but are difficult to apply to other contexts. For example, the notion that ‘history has given [the British] the kind of military establishment and colonial administrative experience necessary to defeat revolutionary movements,’ is while a possible explanation, not a productive one.⁸⁷ Firstly, this experience cannot be transferred or emulated by other nations and from a British perspective, breeds complacency by suggesting that the ‘British armed forces have nothing to learn.’⁸⁸ However, because Britain was not universally successful in defeating every insurgency by virtue of her martial heritage alone, this study will consider more the policies and strategic elements involved in security forces’ responses to insurgents. A further complication is that British approaches to COIN were not consistent or employed in directly comparable contexts. Drohan suggests that ‘British counterinsurgency techniques were remarkably similar even though the racial contexts of the conflicts in Aden, Cyprus, and Northern Ireland differed greatly from one another.’⁸⁹ However, this is not the case. For example, while internment was successful in Malaya and Kenya⁹⁰ and even led to improvements in Aden⁹¹ – viewed as a failure in the history of British counterinsurgency – in Northern Ireland, internment was abandoned as it was wildly unpopular and aided the insurgents. The influence of cultural and operational pressures led to necessarily differing approaches from British security forces in various insurgent scenarios.

It is from the British experience in Southeast Asia that the oft used phrase ‘hearts and minds’ emerged as a feature in the ‘marketing’ of counterinsurgency. General Sir Gerald Templer’s adage: ‘The answer lies not in pouring more soldiers into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the Malayan people,’ has continued to inspire COIN strategists by advising them that ‘[t]he shooting side of this business is only 25 percent of the trouble and the other 75 lies in getting the people of this country behind us.’⁹² The issue with the idea of ‘hearts and minds’ conceptually, is that it is difficult to interpret its meaning or extent practically. As Paul

⁸⁷ Thomas R Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency 1919-1960* (St Martin’s Press 1990) 180.

⁸⁸ Col I.A. Rigden OBE, ‘THE BRITISH APPROACH TO COUNTERINSURGENCY: MYTHS, REALITIES, AND STRATEGIC CHALLENGES’ in Harry R Yarger (ed), *Short of general war: perspectives on the use of military power in the 21st century* (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College 2010) 208 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12050.19>> accessed 10 September 2022.

⁸⁹ Drohan (n 84) 13.

⁹⁰ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55).

⁹¹ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55).

⁹² General Sir Gerald Templer, ‘Malayan Emergency’ (*National Army Museum*, 1952) <<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/malayan-emergency>> accessed 9 September 2022.

Dixon notes of the phrase, it ‘undermines the theory as a guide to operations because it can be interpreted in such divergent ways.’⁹³ Dixon defines ‘hearts and minds’ as the use of ‘less coercive tactics against insurgents ... [aimed at] securing the support of the people,’ and is ‘contrasted with the use of more violent, conventional warfare tactics’ employing ‘overwhelming force’ and being more ‘willing to accept civilian casualties.’⁹⁴ Yet, even this more developed definition does not guide security forces on how much they should be attempting to win over local populations, how best to achieve this and what forceful measures are still justifiable. As such, the term ‘minimum force’ is proposed as a guide to the use of violence by British security forces. It is suggested that ‘it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the principle of minimum force to British counterinsurgency,’ by orthodox sources, such as Mockaitis.⁹⁵ This perspective asserts that the British were successful by establishing legitimacy through the use of ‘methods that aligned with liberal democratic values,’ and ‘using the minimum amount of force necessary against insurgents.’⁹⁶ However, this view of British COIN is no longer the dominant narrative in academic circles some, like Bruno Reis, even suggest it is ‘fundamentally wrong.’⁹⁷

Dixon, Drohan, Reis and many other contemporary, revisionist academic sources, seek to dispel the notion of a ‘moderate’ British approach to COIN. They suggest that Britain was instead ‘extremely violent and repressive.’⁹⁸ In fact, Drohan suggests that the British approaches to counterinsurgency were not unique at all, that ‘[t]actics used by British security forces—such as collective punishments, forced relocation, an emphasis on intelligence collection, mass detention, and torture—were common techniques ... employed by other counterinsurgents such as the French in Algeria and the Americans in Vietnam.’⁹⁹ Certainly, forced resettlement and the controlling of food distribution do not sound like people pleasing policies, yet they doubtlessly contributed greatly to the demise of the insurgent Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA). The issue then becomes the extent to which a COIN

⁹³ Paul Dixon, “‘Hearts and Minds’? British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq’ (2009) 32 *Journal of Strategic Studies* 353, 355 <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390902928172>> accessed 9 September 2022.

⁹⁴ Dixon (n 93) 354.

⁹⁵ Mockaitis (n 87) 213.

⁹⁶ Drohan (n 84) 1–2.

⁹⁷ Bruno C Reis, ‘The Myth of British Minimum Force in Counterinsurgency Campaigns during Decolonisation (1945–1970)’ (2011) 34 *Journal of Strategic Studies* 245, 246 <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2011.559028>> accessed 13 September 2022.

⁹⁸ Drohan (n 84) 8.

⁹⁹ Drohan (n 84) 189.

strategy needs to target the hearts and minds of the population to be considered less forceful. In answer to this, revisionists are reticent to provide a model of how counterinsurgency could be conducted successfully while in concert with their moral objections to certain policies which are regarded by others as moderate. For example, it is easy to distinguish in the context of previous descriptions of the American and Russian approaches to COIN which has been influenced most by the British approach. Yet, the point remains that the British succeeded in COIN from Cyprus to Kenya to Malaya and by suggesting an equivalency between the British, French, and American approach in Vietnam, Drohan has robbed himself of the power to explain why a supposedly similar strategy failed. Furthermore, by condemning the British approach in such powerful terms, revisionists are left with insufficient language to condemn security responses which make no attempt whatsoever in achieving harmony with the civilian population.

In seeking to understand the issue of the use of force in COIN, it is also important to consider why a state may use force to respond to the coercive attempts of insurgents to dictate policy. Those who have chosen violence to further their political ambitions against the state may not be receptive to attempts at negotiation which may be perceived as weakness. Furthermore, such a state may be viewed as forsaking its moral obligation to protect the civilian population from the evils of terrorism and the violent attempts of political minorities to determine the destiny of the wider population. While it may have become fashionable among academics, to assert Malaya as a false idol and anything but a moderate response to insurgency, forsaking the use of force entirely would constitute defeat for a state which derives its authority from its monopoly over the legitimate exercise of violence. General Templer's words may instead serve as both an aspirational and cautionary message. While the insurgents must be separated from the population they emanate from, the point of a bayonet should not be the only way this is accomplished.

The position of this thesis is not to resolve the moral debate between condemners of British COIN strategies like Drohan and the view that force of varying magnitudes is sometimes necessary. Instead, it is the objective of this work to examine which measures were most effective and to determine what lessons may inform future encounters with insurgent conflict.

With key concepts and theories outlined and important terms defined, it is now possible to explore the first example employed by this study: the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960).

III Overview of the Malayan Case Study

A Introduction

This section lays the groundwork for analysis of the counterinsurgency effort mounted during the Malayan Emergency. It briefly explains the historical context out of which the communist uprising unfolded, provides an overview of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) and its armed wing, the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA), details evolutions in the security response to the insurgency and finally, summarises the outcome. The Malayan Emergency case study differs from the other examples considered by this thesis, in that it occurred in a British colonial context.

B Historical Context

It is often said, as David French invokes, that ‘British colonial government was a confidence trick.’¹⁰⁰ By maintaining an air of invincibility and enlisting ‘the support of large numbers of local collaborators,’ a small group of British colonial administrators governed the far reaches of Empire in otherwise perilous circumstances, in states with otherwise poor security prospects.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the British ‘work[ed] with the grain of local society and through local elites,’ ensuring the indigenous population’s interests were intertwined with the administration’s.¹⁰² This approach was employed in the governing of peninsular Malaya and had proved to be a durable strategy. However, it relied on maintaining the local élites’ confidence in the British and, in turn, the general population’s support for those élites. This confidence dissipated in spectacular fashion when the British were defeated in the Far East during the Second World War: indeed, they were forced to abandon Malaya’s élite and ordinary classes alike.

The British colony of Malaya was finally conquered by Imperial Japan in January 1942. This fundamentally changed the dynamic which had ensured stability in colonial rule over Malaya. The CPM – a previously proscribed organisation – albeit led by former French, then British

¹⁰⁰ David French, ‘The Colonial State’ in David French (ed), *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (Oxford University Press 2011) 15 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199587964.003.0002>> accessed 11 July 2022.

¹⁰¹ French, ‘The Colonial State’ (n 100) 15.

¹⁰² French, ‘The Colonial State’ (n 100) 15.

agent, Lai Tek – was looked to as a desperate ally at this time of crisis. Communist recruits were trained by the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and Lieut. Col. John Dalley, later head of the Malayan Security Service (MSS). While the battle for the Malay Peninsula was ultimately lost, Britain did not give up on the territory and despatched the SOE's famed Force 136 to surreptitiously train an irregular resistance to fight the Japanese occupation. The Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) was formed by the CPM and began an insurgency with participation primarily coming from the peninsula's Chinese communists. The Japanese had some success against the CPM, dealing them a crippling blow in the Batu Caves massacre: an attack set up following Lai Tek's betrayal, subsequent to his capture and torture at the hands of the *kempeitai* (Imperial Japan's military and secret police). As a result of the arrests and killings, younger members of the CPM began to assume the more senior positions in the party, among them, Chin Peng, who would later become general secretary and overall leader.

Together with the British, the guerrillas fought an irregular campaign over the peninsula until the Japanese withdrawal. Chin Peng was even appointed OBE. While they had defeated the Japanese and paraded together in celebration of Malaya's liberation from Japanese control, the MPAJA's predominantly Chinese communist membership naturally viewed the resumption of British administration with contempt. In the aftermath of the Second World War, there were steps taken to enhance public participation in the governance of Malaya. In particular, emphasis was placed on involving the Indian and Chinese populations, who made up roughly half of the population, yet lacked representation in the Malay sultanates. However, this attempt by the British was quickly abandoned due to outcry from the majority Malay population.

The Malays opposed policies which gave the immigrant Chinese and Indian populations equal citizenship and diminished the power of their sultans in favour of centralised government. With these radical administrative reforms rendered 'unworkable,' the Malay states were administered as British protectorates to ensure the cooperation of at least the majority ethnic group.¹⁰³ In keeping with a traditional suzerainty style of imperial

¹⁰³ French, 'The Colonial State' (n 100) 13.

governance, the British Government controlled foreign policy and defence matters within each state only, deferring to local authorities in other cases. While this succeeded in placating the Malay population, the British had deepened the divide between the state and the Chinese community by ‘offering and then withdrawing political concessions.’¹⁰⁴ As French observes, this predisposed the Chinese to support the communist insurgency. The British had also provided for high levels of Malay political autonomy, meaning that under ‘the new constitution’ the British lacked ‘the kind of powerful, centralised government that might have been able to act decisively to coordinate the counter-insurgency campaign from the outset.’¹⁰⁵

This inability to reach a political settlement that satisfied the interests of Malaya’s three main ethnic groups, resulted in increased support for the CPM. It was even more unfortunate for the British that many of the members of the MPAJA, whom they had trained and armed, would go on to establish the CPM’s armed wing: the MNLA. Whether making good on offers of citizenship and political participation for the Chinese population would have prevented the following communist uprising is not clear, though it may have empowered moderate political forces among the Chinese. The presence of the Kuomintang and the Malayan Chinese Association in Malaya – who cooperated with the British authorities – indicates that the Chinese population overall was not inherently predisposed to the communists. It is possible that political reforms could have divided Chinese opinion further than in the resulting conflict. However, the CPM easily made use of the disenfranchisement of the Chinese as a rallying cry and, by 1947, the communist threat was becoming increasingly apparent.

Raids by what were then termed bandits, but came to be known as Communist Terrorists (CTs), resulted in a mounting number of deaths among both the Malayan Police and the civilian population. The CPM began targeting the economic infrastructure of the colony by directing its violence towards rubber plantation and tin mine administrators, along with Asians deemed to be supporting the British, odiously termed the ‘running dogs.’ In 1948, over the course of three weeks marking the start of the insurgency, the communists were responsible for the murders of 12 rubber estate managers and foremen.¹⁰⁶ In a particularly

¹⁰⁴ French, ‘The Colonial State’ (n 100) 13.

¹⁰⁵ French, ‘The Colonial State’ (n 100) 13.

¹⁰⁶ Leon Comber, *Malaya’s Secret Police, 1945-60: The Role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency* (Monash Asia Institute ; Institute of Southeast Asian Studies 2008) 36.

barbaric incident, communists armed with Sten guns tied Ah Fung, a Chinese rubber estate headman, to a tree and cut off both his arms, placing a message above him: ““Death to the Running Dogs.””¹⁰⁷ The Malayan Police also recovered a great number of firearms and ammunition from CTs roughly 9 miles from Kuala Lumpur, this seizure only emphasised the threat the communists posed.¹⁰⁸ Amidst concerted attempts by the communists to take control of the trade union movements, the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions called a general strike in April 1948 and disseminated communist propaganda ‘inciting workers to “bloodshed and violence.”’¹⁰⁹ By June of 1948, ‘the overall security situation in peninsular Malaya had deteriorated’ not only were ‘there were numerous reports of determined attempts by armed gangs of communists to intimidate and control labourers,’ the communists even captured a Johore rubber plantation and held it for a month.¹¹⁰

There was criticism of both the MSS and the colonial government for not responding to the developing crisis sooner (a point which will be explored further in section D). The Straits Times bid Governor Sir Edward Gent to ““Govern or Get Out.””¹¹¹ In response to the escalating violence, 600 CPM members were detained in June of 1948 and as communist related killings mounted in parts of Perak and Johore, a state of emergency was declared in the most dangerous parts of these states.¹¹² It soon became apparent that these states were at risk and the emergency was extended – amidst escalating tensions – on the 18th of June to cover the whole Federation. Correspondingly, the Malayan government issued the Emergency Regulations which transformed the colony into a security state. Those unlawfully possessing firearms, explosives or ammunition could face the death penalty; the writ of habeas corpus was suspended; ‘[a]uthorised police officers were conferred with wide powers of arrest;’ and license to implement ‘curfews, the seizure of any article that could be used as an offensive weapon, and the requisition of buildings, vehicles and boats’ was granted.¹¹³ As the insurgency progressed, the security response would also incorporate significant restrictions on the movement of supplies and food and the population was to carry an identity card. The

¹⁰⁷ Noel Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs: How Malaya Defeated the Communist Guerrillas, 1948-60* (Arrow 1989) 29.

¹⁰⁸ Comber (n 106) 35.

¹⁰⁹ Comber (n 106) 36.

¹¹⁰ Comber (n 106) 36.

¹¹¹ Barber (n 107) 30.

¹¹² Comber (n 106) 37.

¹¹³ Comber (n 106) 38.

Malayan Emergency had begun and with it, perhaps the preeminent chapter in the history of counterinsurgency.

C Overview of the Insurgency: the CPM and MNLA

While communism was a unifying ideology of the CPM's insurgency, many were drawn to the cause out of nationalist motivations. Indeed, the CPM had hopes of attracting members of the Malay and Indian populations to fight for independence from the British – with the three non-British Malayan races represented by the three stars on the MNLA's cap badges. In this, they were largely unsuccessful in attracting support from Indian workers and the Malay members of the MNLA were greatly outnumbered by their Chinese comrades. Broadly, the Malays seemed to be content with British rule and appeared largely 'impervious to communist efforts to recruit them.'¹¹⁴ Despite their opposition to the 'British imperialists,' the CPM had a rather dim view of the other races even while trying to secure their cooperation.¹¹⁵ It is ironic that the CPM faced the inverse problem to the British who were in desperate need of Chinese recruits!

The CPM had a rather conventional communist administrative structure overseen by a central committee with Chin Peng serving as its general secretary. There were roughly 11-15 other members of the central committee who were closely integrated with the military side of the communist hierarchy.¹¹⁶ Reporting to the central committee were three regional bureaux which covered the north, south and central areas of the Federation.¹¹⁷ These bureaux necessarily had a significant degree of autonomy given the communists' slow communication network of 'dead drops' and jungle couriers. Below the regional bureaux were state committees who managed the activities of the MNLA units under their command in their respective states. State committee members often personally commanded MNLA regiments.

¹¹⁴ Henry John Coates, 'An Operational Analysis of the Emergency in Malaya 1948 - 1954' (Australian National University 1976) 3 <<https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/111073>> accessed 18 November 2022.

¹¹⁵ Henry John Coates (n 114) 4.

¹¹⁶ Comber (n 106) 92.

¹¹⁷ Comber (n 106) 92.

The communists' primary fighting force was the MNLA which followed a regimental structure based mostly on region. The make-up of the structure was changed several times, particularly towards the end of the insurgency, due to attrition. Predominantly, the members of this organisation came from the Chinese population. Among the Chinese, the communists relied mainly on the large number of rural squatters, given that Malaya's industrial workers provided too small a recruitment pool. The MNLA operated from the jungle with support coming to them on its fringes from the rural Chinese population, some of whom participated in the communist work force, the *Min Yuen*. There was some Malay participation in the insurgency, particularly in the MNLA's Malay 10th regiment.¹¹⁸ The MNLA also received both willing and coerced help from some among Malaya's aboriginal population, the *Orang Asli*. According to the former head of the MSS, John Dalley, at the start of the emergency he provided an estimated total of 5,000 members of the armed component of the communist insurgency, supported by around 250,000 members of the *Min Yuen* and other communist groups.¹¹⁹ However, the provision of these figures is controversial and will be explored further in section D.

Nevertheless, there was an overall dearth of useful intelligence about the communists at the beginning of their insurgency, a gap the Special Branch would go on to fill. When the Special Branch took over from the MSS, they were tasked with compiling an 'order of battle' detailing the strength and distribution of the MNLA. According to Comber, the Special Branch estimated that the MNLA could call on around 10,000 fighters at the height of the fighting between 1951 and 52.¹²⁰ However, due to the enforcement of food and resource control measures, it is uncertain how many of the MNLA's fighters were available for combat duties, as many had been tasked with cultivating the nutrition necessary for the insurgency. Chin Peng was forced to direct the MNLA to cease larger-scale operations due to the implementation of the Briggs Plan which denied his forces essential food and supplies.¹²¹ When compared with the Malayan Police alone over the same period – 16,814 regulars and 43,475 specials in 1951, rising to 22,187 regulars and 44,875 specials in 1952 – the

¹¹⁸ Comber (n 106) 90.

¹¹⁹ Comber (n 106) 45.

¹²⁰ Comber (n 106) 70.

¹²¹ Comber (n 106) 147.

communists were certainly outnumbered.¹²² Throughout the whole Emergency, the CPM's need for international support was dire and Chin Peng 'undoubtedly hoped that if he could hold out long enough, the People's Republic of China (PRC) would come to his aid.'¹²³ However, it does not appear that communist China was able to supply the CPM with anything other than ideological support during their first uprising. Certainly, during the second insurgency (1968-1978) in post-independence Malaysia – emanating from southern Thailand – Red China's aid to the CPM was a contested issue in PRC/Malaysian relations, yet this is beyond the scope of this study. What may be considered terrorism is of principle relevance.

Tellingly, the British terminology for the insurgents was 'Communist Terrorists,' and was based on a legal definition that included anyone:¹²⁴

[W]ho by use of any firearm, explosive or ammunition acts in a manner prejudicial to public safety or the maintenance of public order, incites to violence, or counsels disobedience to the law; carries possesses or controls any firearm, explosive or ammunition without lawful authority; or demands, collects, or receives any supplies for the use of any person who is about to act or has recently acted in a manner prejudicial to public safety or the maintenance of public order.

While this definition is expansive enough to encompass non-politically motivated forms of armed criminality and exclude political violence with weapons other than firearms, the CPM and MNLA's actions certainly meet the threshold for terrorism as applied within this study. This is due to the CPM and MNLA being non-state actors who used violence against other non-state actors in order to communicate a political message to the state. The attacks on members of Malaya's tin and rubber industries attest to the MNLA's use of terrorism. While their revolutionary nationalist and communist ambitions would presumably see them taking aim primarily at the state, the use of terrorism by the MNLA targeted those they saw as aiding the state, either through their labour or role in Malayan society. For example, the grenade attacks against non-state actors such as those targeting the Malayan Chinese Association for

¹²² Karl Hack, *The Malayan Emergency: Revolution and Counterinsurgency at the End of Empire* (1st edn, Cambridge University Press 2021) app 1
<<https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781139942515/type/book>> accessed 18 November 2022.

¹²³ Comber (n 106) 16.

¹²⁴ Internal Security Act 1960 (Laws of Malaya) 12.

their perceived association with the British – particularly in the Ipoh area in Perak between 1949 and 1951.¹²⁵

D Security Forces, Administrative and Strategic Policy

The security forces in Malaya went through a series of organisational transitions in order to adapt to the demands of managing the counterinsurgency effort. At the start of the Malayan Emergency, High Commissioner Edward Gent was criticised for his slow response to the developing situation. Gent, in turn, blamed the MSS for not providing enough intelligence, though as adverted to earlier, Dalley, the head of the MSS, alleged he had provided these assessments in May of 1948, a month before the emergency was declared. Yet, as covered in section C, Dalley's claimed provision of these figures is controversial because it comes from letters Dalley wrote in the mid-1960s, not from any documents from the time before the emergency commenced.¹²⁶ Likewise, Gent was killed in a plane crash while on his way back to London to explain why there had not been more warning about the uprising. Gent's successor as High Commissioner was Henry Gurney, who did not arrive until 1949, yet immediately identified the lack of intelligence informing the state's security response.

The uprising had undoubtedly caught the British off-guard. Not only did Malaya want for a new High Commissioner, but she had no Police Commissioner and a series of junior officers were filling important roles such as the Attorney-General and Financial Secretary in an acting capacity. In order to develop a coherent response to the insurgency, this lack of leadership needed to be addressed. Furthermore, the deficit of intelligence had to be remedied. The first step in this process was the decision to have the Special Branch take over from the MSS, absorbing many of its members. Perhaps predictably, the Special Branch then faced many of the same problems. A small presence on the ground and an overwhelming amount of documents coming in; all compounded by a dire shortage of translators. The burden the Special Branch was being asked to shoulder was only growing. Gurney identified this issue and reported it to the Colonial Office, yet despite these early difficulties, the High Commissioner was nonetheless confident that 'in the final analysis, the communist insurrection would not be subdued by the sheer weight of the security forces arrayed against

¹²⁵ Comber (n 106) 226.

¹²⁶ Comber (n 106) 45.

it, but by reliable operational intelligence provided by the Special Branch on which successful military operations could be mounted.¹²⁷ There was also an initial internal debate over whether the insurgency was to be a civil or military issue though by 1950, this had been resolved with Gurney favouring military force in support of, and accountable to, the civil power.

The police were also facing internal problems, chief of which was a shortage of manpower. In order to address this, in 1948, 400 ex-Palestine police among other British officers arrived in Malaya under the leadership of the new Police Commissioner (also ex-Palestine Police), Lieut. Col. W.N. Gray. The influx of new officers, however, failed to address the existing paucity of Chinese-speaking members of the police force. Corresponding with its ‘rapid expansion’ and the deployment of officers from afar, from 1948 to 1950, the Malayan Police was ‘inexperienced, inadequately trained’ and lacked the trust and confidence of the civilian population.¹²⁸ Likewise, the Police force was comprised of a majority of Malay rank-and-file officers, an aggravating factor in a conflict largely involving the Chinese population. A rift even opened between the British ex-Palestine Police brought in as reinforcements and pre-war Malayan Police. Broadly, there was also a lack of Asians (Indians, Chinese and Malays) among the cadre of higher-ranking gazetted officers. Before the Emergency began, it was recorded that only one of the MSS’s Local Security Officers (a regional administrative role), Selangor’s I.S. Wylie, spoke Chinese.¹²⁹ Across the entire force, only 3.6% of 333 total gazetted officers in peninsular Malaya could hold simple conversations in Chinese,¹³⁰ many of whom appear to have been recently recruited Asian constables or promoted Asian inspectors.¹³¹

These problems – among others – were identified in a review of the police which led to the appointment of Sir William Jenkin as the first overall Director of Intelligence in Malaya. While Jenkin had irreconcilable differences with Police Commissioner Gray, he made many improvements to Malaya’s intelligence gathering architecture. In particular, Jenkin made

¹²⁷ Comber (n 106) 71.

¹²⁸ French, ‘The Colonial State’ (n 100) 18.

¹²⁹ Comber (n 106) 34.

¹³⁰ Comber (n 106) 34.

¹³¹ Federation of Malaya, *Annual Report on the Federation of Malaya 1949* (Government Press 1950) 143 <https://archive.org/stream/b31833767/b31833767_djvu.txt> accessed 18 November 2022.

some important improvements in the network of intelligence sharing between Police, Army and Special Branch. The Special Branch also grew under his leadership with the establishment of new training facilities and the recruitment of Chinese officers. Critically, Jenkin's reforms broadened the Special Branch's purview to include detention facilities and the Malay-Thai border areas, both of which proved to be pivotal appointments. Where the disagreements occurred was over Jenkin's plan to separate the Special Branch from the Police's Criminal Investigations Department, establishing a direct line between them and the High Commissioner. This Gray refused to approve, and the High Commissioner did not resolve.¹³² While on his way back to his official residence on Fraser's Hill from a meeting with the MCA (in which he discussed ways of increasing Chinese participation in the police force), High Commissioner Gurney was killed in a chance ambush by communists. This would mark the end of the beginning phase of the Emergency. While important strides had been made, tensions behind the scenes compounded by the assassination of Gurney and low levels of engagement with the Chinese population appeared to point to a long road ahead. The tide at this critical moment in the insurgency, however, was about to turn.

Lt. Gen. Harold Briggs was brought out of retirement and despatched to Malaya in 1950, bringing with him a new perspective on responding to colonial conflict. Briggs was appointed to the new role of Director of Operations and promptly began touring the Federation to establish what was holding up the security response. The result of his appraisals was a comprehensive plan detailing how the insurgency was to be defeated, which came into effect on the 1st of June 1950. Unfortunately, Briggs lacked the authority and time to implement many of his ideas, though they would be fully implemented by his successor. The Briggs Plan, as it was known, established a series of radical reforms in the security forces' response. It provided for the creation of 'New Villages' and the forcible relocation of around 500,000 of Malaya's rural Chinese squatter population into them.¹³³ It established strict resource and food control measures to deny the communists supplies and directed the Police and Army to engage the insurgents on their own terms, with the benefit of intelligence.

¹³² Comber (n 106) 113.

¹³³ Comber (n 106) 147.

The Briggs Plan empowered the Special Branch even further and established a framework for the future clearing of the Federation, state-by-state with a view to gradually loosening the security measures in communist-free ‘White Areas’ – providing the people with incentives for aiding the Government.¹³⁴ The people were also directly involved in the COIN effort through registration in the Home Guard established under the Briggs Plan. The Home Guard was formed by instructing each village and resettlement area to train and arm a force of civilians at the district level. While they were administrated by a separate Civil Defence organisation, Home Guard activities were overseen by local police.¹³⁵ Briggs also hoped that the Special Branch would cultivate an intelligence network in the New Villages as the rest of his plan hinged on the strength of their intelligence. This intelligence would contribute to the success of a further development, as Briggs had the security forces also expand their efforts in psychological warfare.¹³⁶ It is largely the measures Briggs conceived after his tour of Malaya, that are held up as the legacy of the Malayan Emergency in the study of counterinsurgency. Not without reason either, as these reforms had very direct manifestations in the conduct of both the security forces and even the MNLA themselves.

Upon the completion of Briggs’s term as Director of Operations and following Gray and Jenkins’ resignations, it was time for new administrators to assume the mantles managing Malaya’s crisis. Enter MI5’s JP Morton as Director of Intelligence, Colonel Arthur Young as Commissioner of Police and most famous of all, General Sir Gerald Templer, occupying the seemingly cursed position of High Commissioner and Director of Operations. Accompanying Templer was (later Sir) Donald Charles MacGillvray, Malaya’s first Deputy High Commissioner and responsible for the routine running of the colony, enabling Templer to focus on the insurgency. Templer’s appointment was an inspired choice given his extensive background in military intelligence and the near complete powers of authority concentrated in him, which enabled Templer to implement Briggs’s brilliant plan. Indeed, most of the Briggs Plan’s more radical directives were brought in by General Templer.¹³⁷ Young fulfilled Jenkin’s ambition of establishing the Special Branch as a separate police department, while launching Operation Service which aimed to improve public relations. Young’s administrative

¹³⁴ Comber (n 106) 149.

¹³⁵ Henry John Coates (n 114) 106.

¹³⁶ Comber (n 106) 158.

¹³⁷ Kumar Ramakrishna, “‘Transmogrifying’ Malaya: The Impact of Sir Gerald Templer (1952-54)’ (2001) 32 *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 79, 87.

reforms also eased the burden caused by Gray's dramatic expansion of the Police. Indeed, by 1951-2, 40,000 troops, more than 67,000 police,¹³⁸ and the combined Home Guard force of around 210,000 by 1953,¹³⁹ stood against the MNLA.

Morton – as part of his role as Director of Intelligence – kept in constant contact with Templer, apprising him of developments. In a decision that enabled him to truly embody his title, Morton established a Federal Intelligence Committee which brought together all of the relevant officials from the various law enforcement and military branches who could contribute to the intelligence war under his chairmanship. 'It was the machine by which the Director of Intelligence, who had no executive authority, was enabled to coordinate.'¹⁴⁰ Indeed, it was this consolidation of Malaya's intelligence machinery that would prove instrumental in success during the conflict and influential thereafter.¹⁴¹ By further establishing closer links with Singapore's Special Branch, Morton also addressed concerns regarding the movement of communists between the peninsula and Britain's thriving island colony. Templer also understood the challenge posed by the *Orang Asli's* sharing of the jungle with the communists. To attempt to break the link between the two groups, he appointed Richard Noone as Protector of Aborigines and tasked him with gaining the support of the *Orang Asli* against the CPM.¹⁴² As part of this, Noone formed an aboriginal unit named the *Senoi Pra'aq* in 1956 and commissioned the Army's 22nd Special Air Service (SAS) Regiment to train them. The Government also established eleven jungle forts which were jointly garrisoned by the Malayan Police Field Force and the Police Aboriginal Guard.¹⁴³ These jungle installations kept in constant contact with the Special Branch.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Comber (n 106) 70.

¹³⁹ Federation of Malaya, *Federation of Malaya Annual Report 1953* (Government Press 1954) 346 <<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/cbmb659c/items>> accessed 13 November 2022.

¹⁴⁰ French, 'The Colonial State' (n 100) 28.

¹⁴¹ Georgina Sinclair, "'The Sharp End of the Intelligence Machine": The Rise of the Malayan Police Special Branch 1948–1955' (2011) 26 *Intelligence and National Security* 460 <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02684527.2011.580601>> accessed 18 November 2022.

¹⁴² Roy Davis Linville Jumper, *Death Waits in the 'Dark': The Senoi Praaq, Malaysia's Killer Elite* (Greenwood Press 2001) 153.

¹⁴³ Comber (n 106) 189.

¹⁴⁴ John Leary, *The Importance of the Orang Asli in the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960* (Monash University, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies 1989) 19.

As a result of these highly effective security policies, the MNLA were steadily declining. Mass surrenders occurred in Perak and Johore and losses in engagements with the security forces had further decreased the communists' numbers, by the end of 1958, the MNLA's 8th, 10th and 12th regiments had withdrawn to southern Thailand with the CPM adopting a 'furling the flags and muffling the drums policy' in 1959.¹⁴⁵ As a consequence of mounting victories and a growing number of 'White Areas,' Templer had already begun to relax some of the Emergency Regulations, even abolishing some of the more extreme provisions.¹⁴⁶ Templer issued a new directive to dictate operations in what would become the closing phase of the Emergency. Irrespective of how the CPM continued to operate, Templer required an intelligence network monitoring them to be kept alive. Templer's fear was that as the MNLA began to disintegrate, the CPM would send small cells of operatives to carry on their struggle through lesser scale attacks.¹⁴⁷ In responding to this, the long-term maintenance of Special Branch intelligence was viewed as the solution.¹⁴⁸ Besides the appointments of Guy C Madoc and MacGillivray, replacing Morton and Templer respectively, the Emergency thereafter was managed in much the same way up until Malayan independence in 1957 and the eventual declaring of the end of the emergency in 1960 – when the CPM had fully withdrawn to southern Thailand.

E Summary of Outcome

Over the course of twelve years, the security forces ultimately succeeded in expelling the insurgents from Malaya. As victory edged closer with security measures being progressively lowered throughout the Federation, the British established a new independent, democratic regime, which addressed many Malaysians desires for political reform and independence. While the methods used in the Malayan Emergency would go on to be inspirational, the long period of internecine violence, totalling 21,022 terrorist incidents and 8,714¹⁴⁹ contacts with the enemy initiated by the security forces,¹⁵⁰ amounted to a bloody first chapter in Malaysia's nascent history. A total of 6,711 CTs were killed, 2,704 surrendered (either by being induced

¹⁴⁵ Comber (n 106) 253 & 270.

¹⁴⁶ Ramakrishna (n 137) 88.

¹⁴⁷ Comber (n 106) 205.

¹⁴⁸ Comber (n 106) 205.

¹⁴⁹ Comber (n 106) 70.

¹⁵⁰ Malaya Command Headquarters, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya* (1954) Definitions p. xvii <<https://archive.org/details/1954-uk-conductof-opsin-malaya/page/n1/mode/2up>> accessed 18 November 2022.

to give in or giving themselves up freely) and 1,289 were captured.¹⁵¹ The Malayan Police suffered 1,346 killed and 1,601 while the Army, called in to support the civil authorities, suffered 519 killed and 959 wounded.¹⁵² The counterinsurgency effort was judged to have cost around \$M 5,150 million.¹⁵³ These figures show that even in what was to become the textbook example of it, defeating terrorism and insurgency is not a cheap or easy preoccupation.

¹⁵¹ Comber (n 106) 70.

¹⁵² Comber (n 106) 70.

¹⁵³ Comber (n 106) 70.

IV Malayan Case Study Analysis

A Introduction

With the context of Malaya established in the previous chapter, it is now possible to analyse the key features of the security forces' response to the communist insurgency. This is accomplished by first providing an in-depth study of the COIN effort and its characteristic intelligence war. Lessons drawn from the Malayan Emergency, such as the security policy which successfully separated the insurgents from the civilian population, are explored. However, Malaya's most significant contribution to the understanding of success in counterinsurgency, remains the primacy of the intelligence dimension.

B The Intelligence War and methods used in counterinsurgency

1 Intelligence-led operations

The centrality of intelligence to the security forces' success in Malaya is best summarised by Col. Richard Clutterbuck who described intelligence as 'no doubt the soundest (and in the end, the cheapest) investment against ... insurgency,' especially when 'backed up by the funds to offer rewards.'¹⁵⁴ In military terms, intelligence exists for use on different levels of application; the immediate, tactical level, the operational level and the higher-level strategic or political level. Even before the Emergency in Malaya was declared, the centrality of intelligence in addressing the communist problem was well understood. While the general dearth of intelligence was initially why it was prominent on the agenda, as these difficulties were overcome, intelligence collection came to be viewed as the key to winning the war. Indeed, the principal difficulty faced by the security forces in the opening chapter of the Malayan Emergency was a dire shortage of translators and, consequently, a dangerous lack of understanding of the enemy.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (Praeger 1966) 100.

As Karl Hack and P Chin observe, ‘the dictum that you should know your enemy and speak their language remains true.’¹⁵⁵ The impact this had on counterinsurgent operations is best described by Richard Catling, a Senior Assistant Commissioner of the Malayan Police: ‘[i]f I were asked to sum up our main difficulty in one word I would say “language,” without this essential skill, the ‘British Officer in the field was ineffective.’¹⁵⁶ There is no shortage of remarks from key figures during the conflict to support the importance of intelligence in successful counterinsurgent operations. For example, Sir Henry Gurney stated that it would not be the combined weight of numbers the security forces could bring to bear that would end the insurgency, but ‘reliable operational intelligence provided by the Special Branch on which successful military operations can be mounted.’¹⁵⁷ Likewise, many scholars have also stressed the importance of the intelligence war in victory in Malaya. Peter Edwards, an Australian historian, acknowledged the ‘most important weapon in counterinsurgency was intelligence.’¹⁵⁸

However, the importance of intelligence in general is obvious. Where the Malayan case study becomes particularly instructive is in revealing what form of intelligence was most effective in contributing to the defeat of the CPM. Returning to Gurney’s statement above, it is clear from his remarks that he is referring to the use of intelligence on the operational or tactical level, not broadly on the overall political or strategic plane. This is an important distinction as it reveals that the greatest gains in tackling the insurgency, were made on the tactical level.

The nature of the insurgents’ approach to combat played no small part in enshrining operational intelligence as the key to the Malayan Emergency. The ‘[b]asic CT tactics,’ as described by *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya (ATOM)*, like ‘immediate action drills, siting of ambush and defensive positions, the use of Bren, Rifle and Reconnaissance groups, resemble our own’ due to the CPM’s many experienced former

¹⁵⁵ CC. Chin, *Dialogues with Chin Peng: New Light on the Malayan Communist Party* (Karl Hack ed, Singapore University Press 2004) 21.

¹⁵⁶ Sir Richard Catling, ‘The Catling Memoirs, IV. Retrospect’ Royal Malaysia Police Former Officers’ Association of the United Kingdom, *Newsletter* Issue 11, August 2001 5 in Comber (n 106) 115.

¹⁵⁷ CO171/178. Confidential Inward Telegram No 215, 14 February 1949, from Sir Henry Gurney to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in Comber (n 106) 71.

¹⁵⁸ Peter Edwards, ‘The Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) as a Case Study in Low Density Conflict’ in Barry Carr and Elaine McKay (eds), *Low Intensity Conflict: Theory and Practice in Central America and South-East Asia* (La Trobe University Institute of Latin American Studies 1989) 45.

MPAJA personnel, 'who were trained by Force 136 officers.'¹⁵⁹ As a consequence of fighting the Japanese and receiving training from British special forces during the Second World War, the MNLA developed a refined and effective approach to jungle warfare. Combined with the inherent advantage associated with staging an insurgency, that being the ability to choose when and where to attack and swiftly withdraw, the need for the security force's response to be guided by timely intelligence is clearly illustrated. Indeed, by countering the insurgents' attempts to make their presence felt at the lowest levels across a broad front, the whole of the uprising is revealed to be but the sum of its parts and thus, with each successful contact or surrender, the insurgency was continually diminished. Lieutenant Colonel Nelson explained that 'it is low level intelligence gleaned by IOs [Intelligence Officers] on unit level which counts as much as, if not more than, the high-level stuff in Formation Intelligence Summaries.'¹⁶⁰ Time spent getting to know the local inhabitants is never wasted. Lieutenant Colonel Birkbeck further emphasised the role of '[a]ll ranks' in 'becom[ing] intelligence-minded' and that '[t]he best type of intelligence [is that which] has an immediate bearing on the current local situation.'¹⁶¹ However, in ensuring that such intelligence can be employed, there must be a close link between the traditional police forces, the intelligence services and the Army – one that was effectively established in Malaya.

In Malaya, troops were rotated in a similar tour system to Northern Ireland or Afghanistan. As a consequence, fresh troops had to be quickly acclimatised and taught the necessary skills that outgoing forces had mastered during the course of their tour. This difficulty was mitigated by the constant presence of the Special Branch and Malayan Police, with the military forces' role being clearly established in supporting the civil power. What made this arrangement profitable was that military forces were discouraged from pursuing short term goals in their limited time in country and were instead employed in helping the intelligence and police services achieve longer term objectives. With the Special Branch serving as the dominant intelligence organisation, competition was minimised, and information was shared

¹⁵⁹ Malaya Command Headquarters, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya* (Second Edition, Government Press 1954) ch II p15 <<https://vickersmg.blog/manual/other-official-publications/>>.

¹⁶⁰ 'General Lessons from Palestine, 1945-1948' collated by General Stockwell, 1948 in Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency: Case Studies from Ireland, Malaya and the Empire' (2011) 156 *The RUSI Journal* 72, 75 <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071847.2011.559987>> accessed 19 December 2022.

¹⁶¹ Grob-Fitzgibbon (n 160) 75.

across the committees connecting the Director of Intelligence to the armed forces, police and local administrators.

During his tenure as Police Commissioner, Lt.Col. Gray, guided by his prior experience in Palestine, identified the need for the army to have ‘better access to police intelligence.’¹⁶² This was achieved in Malaya by ‘post[ing] [army] intelligence liaison officers to each level of police headquarters to pass back to the army information of use to them.’¹⁶³ While it had taken longer than expected, ‘[b]y 1954 the Malayan Special Branch was providing troops on the ground with information, ... that enabled them to make increasing numbers of successful ambushes.’¹⁶⁴ This is what it means for operations to be led by intelligence.

An example of the powerful impact of the intelligence-led approach is provided by Comber in his account of the Special Branch’s impact on communist activity in the Bentong region. Initially, the Special Branch sought to gain access to and disrupt the local CPM’s support network in the area. This required the ‘penetrat[ion] [of] the Min Yuen,’ and was achieved by threatening to detain its members under the Emergency Regulations or through offering rewards.¹⁶⁵ The remainder of these units were successfully eliminated thereafter. This had the effect of depriving the MNLA and CPM members of the support of the Min Yuen: a useful source of food and intelligence. Intelligence collection played a key role in clearing Bentong of communist influence. The military intelligence officers (MIOs) seconded to the Special Branch under the liaison scheme, proved their worth in this example, gathering a great deal of research about the structure of the communist organisation in the area – while the Special Branch compiled dossiers on the individual members.¹⁶⁶ Thereafter, it fell to the Special Branch to observe the local businesses which offered services to CTs. By employing the Emergency Regulations, such establishments were closed with any remaining shops being operated by the Special Branch. With the aid of only two ‘turned’ CTs, the Special Branch gained access into the communist’s dead-drop communication network. For some time, this system was allowed to continue with the Special Branch monitoring the communists’

¹⁶² French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 29.

¹⁶³ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 29.

¹⁶⁴ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55).

¹⁶⁵ Comber (n 106) 206.

¹⁶⁶ Comber (n 106) 207.

communications. Finally, a mass arrest of 100 communist suspects was hatched, including the informers to protect them from suspicion. While most of those detained were released, the communists' numbers shrank from 70 to 22, ensuring the CPM's continued presence in Bentong was untenable.¹⁶⁷ Soon after, Bentong was declared a 'White Area,' free of communist influence.

As the Malayan Emergency 'was, in essence, an infantry subaltern's or a police jungle squad commander's war ... the war had to be fought on the ground ... and the fighting between the two sides was internecine.'¹⁶⁸ The only light in the darkness of Malaya's jungles was that which was provided by intelligence gained from surrendered enemy personnel (SEPs), captured enemy personnel (CEPs), or documents. While in 'both the First and Second Indo-China Wars,' it was thought that best way to cast light on the enemy concealed beneath the canopy was by means of 'offensive air power,' Coates handily summarises that this 'was neither the match winner nor even the equaliser in breaking the insurgents will to fight.'¹⁶⁹ The government could scarcely bomb the Chinese schools producing recruits for the CPM as Gurney feared, nor the villages which harboured or fed them. The effect of airstrikes could be counterproductive. Robert Thompson, a Chinese Affairs Officer and an intelligence coordinator in the Government Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur, successfully argued that methods which could result in the broader population being inadvertently targeted should be avoided. Given that only a small percentage of the Chinese were active insurgents, '[o]ne stray bomb that killed one innocent child could make a thousand enemies,' thus Thompson 'urged that it was better to police villages than destroy them.'¹⁷⁰ The sorts of random carpet-bombing and larger scale screening operations commonplace in Vietnam and elsewhere, rarely brought success in Malaya. Even small gains were not often made by increasing the number of airstrikes or bombs per mission.¹⁷¹ Indeed, where air or artillery power was successful, 'it was achieved by precise information.'¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Comber (n 106) 206–208.

¹⁶⁸ Comber (n 106) 70.

¹⁶⁹ Henry John Coates (n 114) 188.

¹⁷⁰ Barber (n 107) 75.

¹⁷¹ Henry John Coates (n 114) 188.

¹⁷² Henry John Coates (n 114) 188.

A good example of this was the killing of the CT, Goh Peng Tun, and his unit in the jungles near Kluang in Johore. Goh was a particularly dangerous CT who had carried out a number of deadly ambushes.¹⁷³ The terrorist's demise was achieved following a remarkably intricate Special Branch operation, whereby, Goh's location was eventually found.¹⁷⁴ Once located, the camp's position was targeted by Lincoln and Canberra bombers, which dropped 90,000lbs of bombs over a rectangular area of 700 by 400 yards: Goh was convincingly eliminated.¹⁷⁵ The complexity of the Special Branch operation preceding this air raid reveals the lengths that were required to make attack aircraft effective against insurgents in the jungle environment, yet also demonstrates the importance of intelligence in air as well as ground-based COIN operations. Ironically, the most impactful uses of aircraft were in dropping things other than bombs, such as supplies for remote troops, propaganda leaflets or by acting as Voice Aircraft by broadcasting recorded messages via loudspeaker.¹⁷⁶ The introduction of helicopters as a staple in COIN operations proved useful in Malaya for the movement of troops and supplies.

While airborne operations were limited in Malaya, the advent of helicopters made the movement of troops in and out of deep jungle a less hazardous affair.¹⁷⁷ While it was found that short-take-off-and-landing aircraft were more efficient for supplying jungle forts, helicopters were well suited for inserting SAS troopers in pursuit of CTs hiding among the *Orang Asli* and evacuating casualties.¹⁷⁸ Their use only grew from there, throughout 1954, 848 Naval Helicopter Squadron airlifted more than 10,000 troops, whose swift arrival potentially outpaced the CTs' screening network.¹⁷⁹ As a consequence, the number of available helicopters was significantly increased by Templer's request.¹⁸⁰

It is important to explore the reasons why the intelligence services were so effective in Malaya. Comber identified 'professional training,' 'familiarity with and knowledge of the main local languages ... and cultures,' the development of a 'wanted list' of key communist

¹⁷³ Barber (n 107) 281.

¹⁷⁴ Barber (n 107) 289–290.

¹⁷⁵ Barber (n 107) 294.

¹⁷⁶ Henry John Coates (n 114) 188.

¹⁷⁷ Hickey (n 86) 51.

¹⁷⁸ Henry John Coates (n 114) 186.

¹⁷⁹ Henry John Coates (n 114) 184.

¹⁸⁰ Henry John Coates (n 114) 184.

leaders and the provision of a regularly updated ‘order of battle’ regarding the MNLA, as key informational functions performed by the Special Branch.¹⁸¹ While these functions aided the security forces in mounting of intelligence-led operations, it was the Special Branch’s mastery of human intelligence (HUMINT), that led to the defeat of communist terrorism in Malaya. The secret to the Special Branch’s success in HUMINT, was ‘establishing an empathy with the local population,’ which ‘enabled [the security services] to organise an efficient human intelligence network.’¹⁸²

Establishing empathy meant not only understanding the insurgents’ language, but the capacity to leverage their fears and desires in order to ensure their cooperation. An example of this was the reward system which enabled surrendered and sometimes captured CTs to profit from helping to end the Emergency by eliminating their compatriots – skilfully using ‘CTs to fight CTs.’¹⁸³ It was also important to use captured or surrendered CT’s knowledge of their former comrades against them. In doing so the Special Branch’s approach to COIN at times appeared not dissimilar from ordinary policework, with suspect interviews forming a key component in the Special Branch’s mastery of the HUMINT plane. Keith Jeffrey also noted the importance of immediate and thorough interrogations of enemy personnel – the key source of operational intelligence – as needing to be obtained and acted on swiftly to bear fruit.¹⁸⁴

The value of a thorough interrogation is revealed in senior Special Branch officer Jack Barlow’s account, in his letters to author and former Special Branch colleague, Leon Comber. Barlow described an occasion, when a captured CT mentioned ‘well over 600 names’ of CPM members to his interrogators, which despite seeming too good to be true, was vindicated with documents recovered ‘from a major terrorist HQ.’¹⁸⁵ When tracking communist leaders, the Special Branch endeavoured to build ‘as comprehensive record of them as possible.’¹⁸⁶ No doubt, the individual files that the Special Branch kept on known CTs were instrumental in ensuring that the captured or surrendered CTs were willing to cooperate. By Barlow’s

¹⁸¹ Comber (n 106) 285.

¹⁸² Comber (n 106) 285.

¹⁸³ Comber (n 106) 285.

¹⁸⁴ Keith Jeffery, ‘Intelligence and Counter-insurgency Operations: Some Reflections on the British Experience’ (1987) 2 *Intelligence and National Security* 118
<<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02684528708431879>> accessed 8 January 2023.

¹⁸⁵ Comber (n 106) 161.

¹⁸⁶ Comber (n 106) 162.

reckoning, ‘the task of the interrogator was greatly simplified when, on identifying a SEP or CEP, he was able to produce a highly informative file of his subject. The psychological effect on the subject was considerable.’¹⁸⁷ The intricacy and accuracy of the files compiled by the Special Branch, point to the detail of the compound picture they were able to construct of the insurgency.

The security forces’ intelligence war greatly benefited from the Briggs Plan, which resulted in around half a million Chinese squatters being relocated from the jungle fringes into New Villages.¹⁸⁸ The New Villages played host to Special Branch personnel, separated the population from the terrorists and created a human intelligence opportunity that was easily exploited by the Malayan Police. This arrangement indicates the value of administrative policies in ensuring the efficiency of intelligence-related COIN activities.

This system contributed to victory in Malaya by ensuring that ‘top priority [was given] to obtaining human and operational intelligence,’ which was disseminated efficiently, enabling the ‘army [to] mount successful operations against the communist insurgents.’¹⁸⁹ The level of integration within the security forces via the state and district committees ensured that policy leaders, military and law enforcement personnel all received up-to-date intelligence through a dynamic network. While HUMINT sources represented most of the information currency traded during the Emergency, the general lack of signals intelligence sources says more about the deficiencies of the CPM’s operations rather than the effectiveness of the security forces.

One example of SIGINT operations during the Emergency involved surreptitiously installing transmitters in commercial radios. Radio was a popular source of entertainment and information across much of the Malayan Federation. As such, homing devices fitted to competitively priced radios – sold at Chinese shops – provided a SIGINT opportunity for the security forces. These devices would broadcast when the radio was switched on and could alert aircraft to the locations of communist camps when detected in the jungle.¹⁹⁰ However,

¹⁸⁷ Comber (n 106) 161.

¹⁸⁸ Comber (n 106) 285.

¹⁸⁹ Comber (n 106) 285.

¹⁹⁰ Comber (n 106) 86.

the CPM's lack of wireless equipment ensured that SIGINT opportunities during the Emergency were limited. According to Chin Peng himself, the CPM was in possession of only three wireless transmitters and receivers at the start of the Emergency, left by the SOE's Force 136 during the Second World War.¹⁹¹ However, they could not use these unwieldy devices and the only communist capable of training new operators and operating them herself, Lee Jhen, was killed early in the conflict by a Gurkha patrol.¹⁹² Chin Peng was able to acquire additional transmitters by 1952, yet he did not say how they were used and it is doubtful they improved the communists communications system at that time.¹⁹³

During the Malayan Emergency, the 'Achilles Heel' of the communists was undoubtedly their communications network.¹⁹⁴ Jungle couriers and dead drops which enabled the passage of physical messages were the only means by which the Central Committee was kept informed and could command the insurgents' campaign. Facilitating this was an 800 km network stretching from Bentong to Singapore.¹⁹⁵ The best example of how this undermined the communists' efforts is in how the CPM's October 1951 resolution, which amounted to an important change in strategy, took almost a year to be fully promulgated throughout the organisation.¹⁹⁶ Besides this delay, once the British located couriers, the network could be penetrated or severed either by targeting the dead drop messages or the messengers themselves. The intelligence services also formed a double act with the information services in the mounting of psychological operations against the insurgents.

2 Psychological operations

Much like the intelligence war, the psychological front of the Emergency had a slow start. During 'the first two years of the Emergency there was no information service or co-ordinated anti-guerrilla information campaign.'¹⁹⁷ While the communists did not appear to mount a successful counterintelligence effort, they engaged the government ably in the propaganda war and initially ran unopposed. The communists established an information

¹⁹¹ Comber (n 106) 221.

¹⁹² Comber (n 106) 221.

¹⁹³ Comber (n 106) 221–222.

¹⁹⁴ Comber (n 106) 219.

¹⁹⁵ Comber (n 106) 222.

¹⁹⁶ Comber (n 106) 224.

¹⁹⁷ Comber (n 106) 155.

service of their own and besides posters, the communists distributed newspapers and publications throughout the federation. The content of the CPM information sources was rather predictable: ‘[a]s a secret government report put it ... “[t]heir content is similar and is largely devoted to accounts of CT successes, the elimination of traitors, and accounts of rape, murder and theft by Security Forces.’”¹⁹⁸ However, analysis by the security forces determined that most of the communist propaganda had been ‘printed under a central Bureau directive since the format seldom varie[d].’”¹⁹⁹ This is an interesting observation considering that the security forces would soon do the same.

Unlike their predecessors, Templer and Briggs, ‘rated psychological warfare “on par” with intelligence,’ and thus a concerted effort was made to address the shortcomings in the government’s messaging to the insurgents and broader population.²⁰⁰ Carleton Greene was brought out to Malaya from the BBC to run the Malayan State Emergency Information Services under Briggs. Greene started at a disadvantage for ‘[i]t was said at the time that communist leaflets and posters were a more common sight than the thousands of copies of government leaflets ... that had been printed.’²⁰¹ The content of the propaganda also missed the mark by choosing to threaten the CTs rather than appeal to their desires and undermine their reasons for fighting. For example, Ramakrishna cites the coercive ‘leaflet No. 367 issued in Selangor in May 1950’ which includes language more likely to incite ideologically motivated terrorism against the government, than pacify it through fear: “‘If you want to save yourselves ... leave the jungle ... [the] government will use more troops and bombs ... Your doom will be certain. COME OUT QUICKLY SAVE YOUR LIVES’” (in the original emphasis).²⁰² These messages, alongside what Ramakrishna calls the ‘RAF’s persistent faith in the “insidious moral effect” of air bombardment,’ were ‘costly propaganda-wise’ and could even sway the population toward supporting the insurgents.²⁰³ Indeed, when accidents occurred in the pursuit of CTs, such as when a Lincoln bomber accidentally targeted a rubber

¹⁹⁸ Barber (n 107) 250.

¹⁹⁹ Barber (n 107) 250.

²⁰⁰ Comber (n 106) 155.

²⁰¹ Comber (n 106) 155–157.

²⁰² Kumar Ramakrishna, *Emergency Propaganda: The Winning of Malayan Hearts and Minds, 1948-1958* (1st publ, Curzon 2002) 81.

²⁰³ Ramakrishna (n 202) 102.

estate in 1950, leading to the deaths of a dozen workers, there is little question as to why the government was losing the propaganda war.²⁰⁴

Greene turned this around with a new approach. His vision was set out in Directive 16 which aimed to:²⁰⁵

- a) raise the morale of the civilian populations and encourage confidence in the government and resistance to the communists with a view to increasing the flow of intelligence to the Special Branch.
- b) to attack the morale of members of the MNLA, the Min Yuen and their supporters, and drive a wedge between their leaders and the rank-and-file, with a view to encouraging defection ...
- c) to create an awareness of the values of the democratic way of life which were threatened by international communism.

The result of this was a less coercive yet more precise approach to both the wider population and the insurgents. Greene recognised that intelligence and psychological operations benefitted from one another and ‘he gave instructions that the extensive information that the Special Branch had accumulated about the guerrillas ... should be studied and made greater use of for propaganda purposes.’²⁰⁶ With an inspired new direction, the government sought to gain the support and confidence of the Malayan population in their fight against the insurgents.

Entertainment was one such way that the information services reached the public. Cinema was a popular form of entertainment and ‘a range of films and entertainment products’ were created to serve as ‘a “jam” to “coat the pill” of propaganda.’²⁰⁷ Likewise, radio ownership was widespread in Malaya and the government increased Radio Malaya’s transmission range and added an additional three hours of Chinese language programming. Tactfully, radios were also provided in the New Villages.²⁰⁸ In a transformative move, Greene withdrew simplistic propaganda which either threatened the CTs or showed photographs of killed terrorists, preferring instead to provide evidence of surrendered CTs living happily. Threatening propaganda may have only served to embolden the resistance in areas where the CTs’

²⁰⁴ Ramakrishna (n 202) 102.

²⁰⁵ Director of Operations, Secret, Directive No 16 in Comber (n 106) 158.

²⁰⁶ Comber (n 106) 158.

²⁰⁷ Ramakrishna (n 202) 111.

²⁰⁸ Ramakrishna (n 202) 111.

confidence remained high, yet by showing surrendered CTs reintegrating into society, the information services ‘quashed Central’s claims that SEPs were executed once [the] Government had no longer any use for them.’²⁰⁹

In broadcasting to the terrorists directly, the change in strategy led the information services to adopt a complicated approach based on incentives, claims of accountability, and appeals to the CTs’ sense of courage. Regarding the latter point, an effort was made to convince the rank-and-file communists that surrender was less capitulation and more a form of escape.²¹⁰ Life in the jungle was no doubt arduous for the CTs, especially as the security forces victories mounted and food and supplies became tightly controlled. It was thought that perhaps an insurgent may not have surrendered simply because they were not sure how to go about it. Leaflets were dropped into the jungle with safe conduct passes on the back, signed by the High Commissioner, whilst detailing to the reader practical advice about how to surrender.²¹¹ For example, CTs were suggested to try to surrender when near roads where pick-up convoys might apprehend them. The signature of the High Commissioner and the photos of surrendered CTs that were sometimes published were among the ways in which the government sought to increase the confidence of the CTs in the accountability of the authorities.

Another example was enabled by Voice Aircraft, planes mounted with speakers which broadcast messages over the jungle. One broadcast related Templer’s personal guarantee to CTs that if they surrendered, they would be treated fairly. This appeared to be successful in convincing some insurgents; in one ‘instance, an SEP who had heard a Voice Aircraft broadcast in Mandarin by Templar,’ which assured him ‘that it was “safe to surrender,” duly emerged claiming that “all jungle men knew they could trust General Sir Gerald Templer.”’²¹² Indeed, Voice Aircraft proved to be a very effective psychological warfare tool and the Malayan authorities continued to evaluate their impact and develop better ways to employ them.

²⁰⁹ Ramakrishna (n 202) 115.

²¹⁰ Ramakrishna (n 202) 153.

²¹¹ Ramakrishna (n 202) 153.

²¹² Ramakrishna (n 202) 154.

In Malaya, the tactical use of voice aircraft was refined to a fine art. One example was how differing forms of aircraft and message were tested in order to ensure messages were audible. Likewise, differing narrators, speaker systems and operating altitudes were assessed. A fruit of the close cooperation between the information and intelligence services was that it became possible to use the voices of surrendered terrorists in broadcasts, for example, ‘District Committee member Wei Keiong gave himself up and on 9 November, he broadcast to the same areas that he had surrendered and urged others to give up.’²¹³ This tactical use of the Voice Aircraft enabled the Security Forces to capture what Ramakrishna called ‘the psychological moment’ – surrounding recent Security Forces victories or high-profile CT surrenders – to gain the initiative.²¹⁴ The aforementioned CT, Wei Keiong, also provided the insight that Voice Aircraft were a “fundamental advance” in psychological warfare’ because CTs could expect to face harsh punishment from their commanders if they were caught in possession of government leaflets.²¹⁵ Voice Aircraft could also provide an unwelcome reminder of ‘the comforts of home life, with particular stress on women, food and cigarettes,’ all the while, even the toughest CT commander could not be sure whether or not his men were listening.²¹⁶ Another of the government’s most powerful psychological weapons against the CTs lay in understanding their human nature.

Greene had great confidence in a strategy that appealed to communism’s greatest and all too human hamartia: greed. Far better than seeking to intimidate the terrorists into abandoning their struggle, Greene thought, “the only human emotion” which could be “expected to be stronger than fear among a terrorised population with very little civic consciousness” was “greed.”²¹⁷ While bounties had existed prior to his arrival, Greene’s influence saw the money offered increase for information leading to terrorists being captured or killed. The incentives scaled up with the significance of the associated quarry, Chin Peng was worth 80,000 alive; 65,000 for living politburo members and 2,500 for the most ordinary of CTs (all figures given are contemporary Straits dollars).²¹⁸ Greene not only hoped that the rewards might result in

²¹³ Ramakrishna (n 202) 157.

²¹⁴ Ramakrishna (n 202) 158.

²¹⁵ Ramakrishna (n 202) 157–158.

²¹⁶ Barber (n 107).

²¹⁷ Ramakrishna (n 202) 117.

²¹⁸ Ramakrishna (n 202) 117.

some of the more dangerous architects of the insurgency being apprehended or killed, but he worked to drive a wedge between the CPM's command structure and the rank-and-file. While the rewards offered to the public were greater, CTs were eligible to collect large sums of money commensurate with a successful bounty. Both members of the public and insurgents were also eligible for rewards if they were to turn over weapons to the authorities. This system drew in a fair number of participants, in the first half of 1951, the '[g]overnment paid out \$500,000.'²¹⁹ By the end of the year 'psychological warfare had been worked in "as an integral part at the planning stage" of major operations, and was increasingly appreciated by both the Police and the military.'²²⁰

The government also paid close attention to indications of the effectiveness of the information service. In a far cry from when Greene first arrived, by '1953, about 54 million strategic leaflets and 23 million tactical leaflets were distributed,' resulting in, out of a sample of 28 SEPs from April 1953, 'only two [having] never seen a Government leaflet.'²²¹ Of that number, '22 SEPs felt that leaflets had both reached them and provided sufficient information to have been a source of surrender.'²²² Meanwhile, of another sample of 50 SEPs from Malacca, Pahang and Selangor, 80 percent had seen Government leaflets.'²²³ That both sides sought to use the printed word against each other presupposed a fairly high literacy rate among the general population of Malaya and extended beyond posters and pamphlets.

In another display of the rewarding collaboration between the Special Branch and the information services, some gifted SEPs actually came to assist Greene with his work.²²⁴ Foremost among them was Lam Swee. Lam's collaboration with the authorities included an inspired publication in which he was helped by Too Chee Choo. Lam Swee had vocal disagreements with the Central Committee of the CPM and was punished for this with the loss of his standing in the party. Fearing for his life, he managed to escape the jungle and surrender; 'there is little doubt that if he had not escaped he would have been executed.'²²⁵

²¹⁹ Ramakrishna (n 202) 117.

²²⁰ Ramakrishna (n 202) 117.

²²¹ Ramakrishna (n 202) 153.

²²² Ramakrishna (n 202) 153.

²²³ Ramakrishna (n 202) 153.

²²⁴ Comber (n 106) 158.

²²⁵ Comber (n 106) 159.

Such an important defector with little reason left to support the insurgency due to his personal break with it, was not only a valuable source of intelligence, but a powerful and persuasive means of undermining the CPM leadership in the eyes of its fighters. Lam Swee and Too's publication was, *'My Accusation'*, which was a striking indictment of the communist leadership.²²⁶ Subsequently, around '100,000 copies ... were printed by the government ... and dropped by air in the jungle throughout the country.'²²⁷ Within the CPM, this 'created a furore,' with all the CPM's many efforts 'to discredit it' ultimately 'serv[ing] to bring [Lam Swee's] case to the attention of his comrades ... throughout the country.'²²⁸

Finally, the dissemination of rumours proved to be another effective strategy. Weaponised gossip does not seem like a traditional tool in counterinsurgency, yet it had the effect of discrediting its source and sowing mistrust in the CPM. The Special Branch provided information which detailed the 'public and private lives and activities of the leading communist guerrillas,' in order to create 'black' propaganda.²²⁹ Based on these details, it was possible to devise 'convincingly authentic but disreputable stories ... circulated by means of leaflets dropped by aircraft into the jungle.'²³⁰ These leaflets held enough truth to potentially 'bring the leaders into disrepute in the eyes of the communist rank and file.'²³¹ The insurgents' poor communications network made them particularly vulnerable to '[m]isleading and false information' especially when it was 'planted with the Min Yuen,' upon whom the MNLA often relied.²³² When falsehoods were 'passed on to the guerrillas as genuine by the Min Yuen,' this would discredit 'the Min Yuen as a source of information.'²³³

As has been mentioned throughout the previous two sections, there have been a number of instances in which insurgents have played an ironic, yet impactful, role in helping to end the insurgency. Indeed, the 'turning' of insurgents proved to be one of the defining features of the security forces' response.

²²⁶ Comber (n 106) 159.

²²⁷ Comber (n 106) 159.

²²⁸ Comber (n 106) 159.

²²⁹ Comber (n 106) 160.

²³⁰ Comber (n 106) 160.

²³¹ Comber (n 106) 160.

²³² Comber (n 106) 160.

²³³ Comber (n 106) 160.

3 The focus on ‘turning’ and re-integrating insurgents into society

The success of the security forces in the intelligence war was the deciding factor in the end of the insurgency. By ‘turning’ or inducing the surrender of CTs, a snowball effect mounted, culminating in ‘the mass defections that led ultimately to the collapse of the communist uprising.’²³⁴ The Special Branch’s efforts to win over members of the insurgency included notably, bribery, ‘Q’ operations and coercion under the Emergency Regulations. ‘Q’ operations featured the use of surrendered senior CTs who would return to the jungle – with a disguised escort – and convince still active insurgents to surrender. These ‘Q’ operations – which had the potential to induce ‘entire communist units to ... surrender under the government’s Merdeka amnesty terms’ – came to be among the most effective means the government had to take CTs out of action.²³⁵ While one may rightly contend that the trustworthiness of former enemy combatants and commanders could be a dubious prospect, it turned out that most SEPs which had not been induced to surrender via ‘Q’ operations, were quite dependable. Lastly, the example of Operation GINGER serves as an instructive case study. In understanding the ‘turning’ of CTs, it is important to have an appreciation for their circumstances.

Near the start of the Emergency, the CTs had the advantage and ‘[w]hen the CT realises he has the upper hand’ in dealing with defenceless civilians or in planning ambushes ‘he is utterly ruthless and cruel.’²³⁶ However, as the Briggs Plan began to take effect and the Special Branch began to take hold in the area, a CT might be more susceptible to government propaganda; more receptive to promises of fair treatment on their surrender; and, perhaps, more cognisant of any differences they may have with the Central Committee. When one is faced with an untenable position – as many MNLAs increasingly found themselves in into the late fifties – ‘[o]nly the most fanatical elements amongst the CT [would] put up determined resistance when cornered.’²³⁷ While there were certainly die-hards among the CPM’s ranks, not all were in agreement with the policies of the Central Committee. Notable CTs defected because of their ideological differences; the aforementioned Lam Swee is a

²³⁴ Comber (n 106) 8.

²³⁵ Comber (n 106) 285.

²³⁶ Malaya Command Headquarters (n 159) ch II p13.

²³⁷ Malaya Command Headquarters (n 159) ch II p12.

good example, so too was William Chow Young Bin, former commander of the MPAJA's 1st Regiment.²³⁸ Of course, defection was not risk-free and the MNLA targeted disillusioned communist leaders to prevent further outbreaks of dissent. One example was Wong Lin Hong (Chang Choong), a key member of the Malayan Rubber Workers Union, who fell out with the CPM's leadership for ideological reasons and was killed by them following his defection.²³⁹ The Central Committee were right to fear treachery because some of the Special Branch's most effective allies were former CTs. Besides Lam Swee, a team of defectors helped to create more defectors by serving as 'experts in "turning operations"' and aided in 'translating difficult communist documents.'²⁴⁰ It must have been quite a surprise for SEPs and CEPs questioned by Goh Chin Kim, 'a notable Special Branch interrogator' and former communist.²⁴¹

Yet, how could the Special Branch depend on its former enemies to remain loyal to the government following their leaving the jungle and reintegration with Malayan society? As Comber reasonably warned, '[i]n many instances, the CTs who surrendered would not have agreed to do so if they had not been tricked or misled by their leader' during 'Q' operations.²⁴² However, these were not the types of guerrillas who tended to assist in Special Branch operations. As CTs apprehended by the security forces were classified as either SEPs or CEPs, it was possible to distinguish between those willing to cooperate and those who had only disarmed themselves because they were defeated. During the latter stages of the Emergency, when 'Q' operations escalated, the distinction between induced surrenders and regular ones was introduced to identify SEPs who could still be loyal to the CPM. Those terrorists who had freely surrendered, often displayed, as Harry Miller, observed, 'utter single-mindedness about tracking and killing their former comrades,' when asked if they would lead a jungle patrol in exchange for a reward.²⁴³

²³⁸ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 87.

²³⁹ Comber (n 106) 87.

²⁴⁰ Comber (n 106) 87.

²⁴¹ Comber (n 106) 88.

²⁴² Comber (n 106) 165.

²⁴³ Harry Miller, *Jungle War in Malaya: The Campaign against Communism, 1948-60* (Barker 1972) 107–108.

Likewise, their attitudes reportedly changed considerably soon after their surrenders according to Professor Lucien Pye. In order to better fit ‘their new role’ they:²⁴⁴

quickly adopted what amounted to an entirely new political vocabulary, rapidly repeated government propaganda views while trying to drop all traces of community terminology. They were not only generally prepared to cooperate ... but usually eager to lead patrols back into the jungle to attack their former comrades. Even when this meant killing people with whom they had lived and worked for many years

Pye suggests this was due to the CTs having achieved a personal break with the CPM.²⁴⁵ Thus, by filtering out CTs who may have maintained party allegiances and incentivising those willing to cooperate with rewards and the offer of a clean record, the Special Branch was able to augment the government’s COIN efforts with former enemy personnel. Where higher ranking communists agreed to participate, a particularly powerful strategy could be carried out.

While one of the key reasons individual CTs surrendered, or ‘turned,’ was ‘threatening to detain them under the Emergency regulations unless they agreed to co-operate, ‘Q’ operations had the opportunity to take out entire communist units without a shot being fired.’²⁴⁶

Operation GINGER stands out as an example of the influence of intelligence in convincing insurgents to abandon their struggle. GINGER featured a great number of ‘Q’ operations as well as significant infiltration and ‘turning’ of members of the Min Yuen. An impressive consequence of the pressure that the surrenders and infiltrations impressed upon the communists – in the formerly explosive Perak region – was the CPM leader being killed by his own men while on the run. That communist leader was the CPM’s state secretary for Perak, Siu Mah, who carried a bounty of M\$150,000 reward on his head as he had commanded the ambush which killed High Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney.²⁴⁷ Siu Mah’s bodyguards delivered that head to claim the reward, ending their part in the Emergency with a profit.²⁴⁸ However, Perak’s ‘Q’ operations were just the beginning.

²⁴⁴ LW Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya* (Princeton University Press 1956) 338.

²⁴⁵ Pye (n 244) 337.

²⁴⁶ Comber (n 106) 81–82.

²⁴⁷ Comber (n 106) 280.

²⁴⁸ Comber (n 106) 281.

An ideal study in ‘Q’ operations is found in the surrender of Hor Lung and his subsequent cooperation with the Special Branch. Hor Lung commanded the MNLA’s forces in Johore and his reasons for defecting are of great importance in understanding an effective COIN approach. A Central Committee member, Hor Lung was motivated to surrender by the sum of many pressures acting on him, the security forces having influence over many of them. The Briggs Plan played a role in ensuring Hor Lung’s men were denied access to food and supplies such as money. The success of the government in the intelligence war as demonstrated by ‘the intensive Special Branch activities in the area in which he operated,’ ensured Hor Lung could not use his units to conduct meaningful operations whilst extensive psychological efforts also ‘stressed the flagging morale of the guerrillas.’²⁴⁹ Lastly, there was an ‘enormous financial reward.’²⁵⁰ In exchange for what is generally accepted as a huge sum of money, Hor Lung agreed to participate in ‘Q’ operations, personally persuading his men to surrender. He did not do this alone and was protected by Chinese Special Branch officers and Gurkhas in disguise, while the news of his surrender was delayed enabling the deception.²⁵¹ ‘Q’ operations are a prime example of the communists’ poor communications network as Hor Lung was able to take advantage of them, in combination with his senior position, to misinform his men that the CPM had decided to end its struggle. By the end of his involvement, Hor Lung was successful in persuading no less than 160 CTs to leave the jungle and the CPM behind them, these efforts represented a new high score in the history of ‘Q’ operations.²⁵² The effect on the insurgency was terminal: ‘[b]y the end of 1958, a total of 500 guerrillas had surrendered and major guerrilla incidents had been reduced to an average of one a month.’²⁵³ What remained was little more than a few hundred hardened guerrillas near the Thai frontier along with a handful of survivors in Pahang and Penang.²⁵⁴

Paying Hor Lung for his services in rounding up a great many insurgents was not without controversy. However, upon the facilitation of Malaya’s independence the Tunku defended the large reward given to Hor Lung as he had brought about ‘the effective collapse of the entire communist movement in Southern Malaya, without any loss of life on the part of the

²⁴⁹ Comber (n 106) 164.

²⁵⁰ Comber (n 106) 164.

²⁵¹ Comber (n 106) 165.

²⁵² Comber (n 106) 164.

²⁵³ Comber (n 106) 166.

²⁵⁴ Peng Chin, Ian Ward and Norma O Miraflor, *My Side of History* (Media Masters 2003) 403.

security forces.’²⁵⁵ While he had commanded those same terrorists while leading the insurgency in Johore, and many among them had committed horrific crimes, (for which the Tunku said ‘Hor Lung should be hanged’) it was ultimately more important for the Emergency to be brought to an end; the state could not ‘stick strongly to principles.’²⁵⁶ ‘Q’ operations had worked better than any among the security forces dared dream. With this account of the effective strategies employed during the intelligence war in the Malayan Emergency, it is now possible to see how this analysis of the Malayan experience may be applied more broadly to further understanding in the field of counterinsurgency.

C Contributions to the Understanding of Counterinsurgency

1 Importance of the administrative level

Despite a less than illustrious start, the administration of the Malayan Emergency holds many lessons for the study of counterinsurgency, both in those early stumbles and in the solutions developed thereafter. Principally, the Malayan Emergency reveals the essential qualities of a clear hierarchy in command with a specific and unified overall policy direction, as well as a high level of integration between the police, intelligence services, administrators and the military in the pursuit of area focused operations.

(a) Clear hierarchy and overall policy direction

Naturally, the police and military have different approaches given their usually distinct identities and roles. Yet, in counterinsurgency operations, the lines between their previously isolated functions become blurred. As a consequence of their divergent organisational cultures, it is important to ensure that the military desire to pursue short-term objectives, particularly when it comes to acting on intelligence, does not undermine long-term police or intelligence service endeavours – which typically have the potential to make more of a lasting difference. As Tim Hatton, a Special Branch officer explained, ‘it was important to explain to the Military Intelligence officers that short-term results, important for battalion “scores,” would sometimes have to give way to more important and productive long-term projects.’²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Comber (n 106) 164.

²⁵⁶ Barber (n 107) 319.

²⁵⁷ Tim Hatton, *Tock Tock Birds* (Illustrated, Book Guild 2004) 180.

A similar observation would again be made with regard to military forces serving in Northern Ireland. This was overcome in Malaya by ensuring that the intelligence collected by both military and police was shared and by establishing the Special Branch as the paramount intelligence authority. It did, however, take some time to establish coherency in the administrative structure of the security forces, particularly amidst changes or absences in leadership.

Under High Commissioner Gent, the security forces response to the insurgency was unfocused and lacked clarity of purpose. However, Malaya was more fortunate with her successive High Commissioners and Directors of Operations. Templer for example, 'spent little time in Kuala Lumpur' in order 'to keep his judgement sharp and realistic by visiting the firing line.'²⁵⁸ While he was effectively responsible for the entire Federation, Templer's attention was captured almost entirely by the Emergency with the 'day to day administration' being left 'to his two deputies, Sir Donald MacGillvary, the deputy High Commissioner on the government side and General Lockhart on the military.'²⁵⁹ In short, he was relentless. He visited all the New Villages at least once and even dropped in on infantry commanders, plantation owners and local administrators. In terms of his authority, Templer's position in Malaya was that of a 'supremo' presenting an ironic picture as he was foremost a soldier, yet he oversaw an arrangement which insisted the military served the civil power. The power conferred by Templer's dual High Commissioner/Director of Operations role enabled his decisive form of leadership which demanded action and dispensed with inefficiencies and left no room for controversy. This was refreshing as adverted to in the previous chapter, personalities did sometimes clash over security policy and stall the greater effort. Likewise, Templer was able to tailor the doctrine of the security forces to respond to the unique environment in which the insurgency took place.

Thanks to Templer's insistence, the Malayan government developed and promulgated a manual detailing the first principles of the state's response to violent communism. The Conduct of Anti-Terror Operations in Malaya or 'ATOM' not only standardised the procedures for operational troops and police units, drew on the experience of experts in

²⁵⁸ Henry John Coates (n 114) 123.

²⁵⁹ Henry John Coates (n 114) 123.

jungle warfare and enabled a greater breadth of understanding across all branches of service, it ensured that even down to the NCO level the objectives of the Security Force's response were well understood.²⁶⁰ This included practical guidance concerning relations with civilians and questions to ask captured or surrendered enemy personnel, permeating the importance of intelligence. The ongoing influence of the document is owed to how it establishes comprehensively even a freshly arrived officer's understanding of the problem he is there to address. It is not without good reason this book was called the 'tactical bible of the Security Forces.'²⁶¹

While it would, as Coates rightly observed, be too much to ascribe credit for all of the improvements in the Security Forces' response to General Templer, 'where his personal freedom of action was greatest, and where he had inherited a good deal of muddle and not a little despair, he succeeded beyond anyone's expectation.'²⁶² This has as much to do with the quality of Templer's leadership and his appreciation of the realities of the insurgency, as the scope and efficiency of his power to resolve them. No doubt creating a similar role for managing another hypothetical COIN effort could have a similar effect, yet it could equally undermine such an effort if the leader is not to be equal to the task. Nevertheless, the principal advantage of the role occupied by the Director of Operations in Malaya was his ability to remain dynamic in responding to the changing circumstances of the insurgency. This was achieved by issuing Emergency Directives which refocused the state's response when necessary. These edicts were 'virtually a masterplan for fighting the war against the communist terrorists.'²⁶³ From these directives emerged one of the greatest strengths of the Malayan government's response to the MNLA insurgents: Directive No.1, the 'formation of a new Federal Joint Intelligence Advisory Committee.'²⁶⁴ This committee was tasked with ensuring intelligence was analysed and distributed for the purposes of conducting operations before it could be overtaken by events. This centralisation of the intelligence machinery was, among a number of other policies of integration, essential to the counterinsurgency effort.

²⁶⁰ Malaya Command Headquarters (n 159).

²⁶¹ Henry John Coates (n 114) 126.

²⁶² Henry John Coates (n 114) 143.

²⁶³ Comber (n 106) 153.

²⁶⁴ Comber (n 106) 153.

(b) Integration and area operations

A range of mechanisms for integration were pioneered in Malaya. In what came to be called ‘Morning Prayers,’ daily meetings were organised between the civilian authorities, the local police chief and the local military commander at both the state and district level. These were called State War Executive Committees (SWECs) and District War Executive Committees (DWECS) respectively. Occasionally, such meetings would involve the input of the newly formed Home Guard forces or specialists in the fields of intelligence or psychological warfare. The administrative perspective implicit in these committees amounted to an ‘area operations’ approach to the conflict as identified by Hickey.²⁶⁵ Perhaps inspired by his experience serving under Field Marshal Montgomery, Templer employed liaison officers from each of the core administrative branches (civilian, military and police) and empowered them to visit operational areas including the SWECs and DWECS, where they could make ‘decisions or accept action on the Director of Operation’s behalf.’²⁶⁶ This ensured that the whole apparatus could respond efficiently to emerging threats and work cohesively to deliver government policies such as those under the Briggs Plan. From the intelligence perspective, integration was also of great importance.

Sir William Jenkin had established what Comber called ‘[t]he nerve centres of counterinsurgency operations at state and district levels,’ the ‘joint police-military operations intelligence rooms.’²⁶⁷ The Special Branch, the regular police forces and the army ‘fed the joint intelligence rooms with information,’ while the Special Branch ensured that the information, ‘including the order of battle for the local MNLAs units, was updated and disbursed.’²⁶⁸ Such was the intricacy of the intelligence architecture in Malaya, the Special Branch even provided ‘a card index of individual communist guerrillas.’²⁶⁹ In order to ensure that COIN operations were conducted on the basis of good intelligence, ‘[j]oint operations intelligence room staff briefed police and army operations patrols before they left on operations and debriefed them on their return.’²⁷⁰ Integration also meant including members

²⁶⁵ Hickey (n 86) 26.

²⁶⁶ Henry John Coates (n 114) 123–124.

²⁶⁷ Comber (n 106) 153.

²⁶⁸ Comber (n 106) 153.

²⁶⁹ Comber (n 106) 153.

²⁷⁰ Comber (n 106) 153.

of the general population into the COIN effort, particularly the communities from which the terrorists emerged.

Robert Thompson and General Bourne were tasked with attempting to increase Chinese participation in the security force response which they did this by giving Chinese leaders – who did not necessarily view the Emergency as their war – responsibility in fighting it. ‘Malay and Chinese leaders were asked to sit on the war executive committee at all levels,’ in order to invest the local community in the government’s efforts to disrupt insurgent activities.²⁷¹ After all, the CTs depended on the Malayan general public for supplies, information and support. It was thereby imperative to rally communal leaders in shaping the outcome of the insurgency, especially ahead of a transition to independence. This move in 1954, as Barber describes it, made the Malayan races feel ‘they “were part of the war;” that they were being trusted with its prosecution’ and were ‘being asked to help.’²⁷² This policy demonstrated the local focus of the security forces’ approach and this thinking also translated into the military dimension.

The Malayan Emergency is often contrasted with the Vietnam War where large scale demonstrations of military might were the prevailing means of counterinsurgency. However, this tactic proved ineffective in Malaya (and in Vietnam), not least because of its potential for collateral damage, but also due to the fact that ‘when large forces attack small groups the jungle is not neutral, [and] can be very friendly to those who know how to use it.’²⁷³ As such, in Malaya, it became necessary to base operations on intelligence and until this approach came to be regarded as the way forward, success was elusive. Of course, the insurgency continued on as long as it did because some CTs held out even then, necessitating the use of special forces in the most difficult jungle and the large deployment of forces to tackle even small concentrations of terrorists. For example, Segamat in Johore played host to only around thirty insurgents yet, as part of Operation COBBLE, ‘500 police and 1,200 soldiers’ worked ‘over many months’ to finally defeat them.²⁷⁴ While this may seem a contradictory observation, the lesson these examples demonstrate is that while large scale offensive

²⁷¹ Barber (n 107) 247.

²⁷² Barber (n 107) 247.

²⁷³ Barber (n 107) 77.

²⁷⁴ Henry John Coates (n 114) 169.

operations are unproductive, a large amount of forces is still necessary even when they engage in smaller, intelligence-led efforts.²⁷⁵

Indeed, when deploying forces to counter insurgents operating within a locality, Coates observed the efficacy of employing small unit tactics against the insurgents' own use of similar strategies. In particular, he cites the success of the 1st Battalion, The Green Howards on the occasions in which it was allowed to remain in an area for a prolonged period with its own Company Commanders running operations. Previously, the battalion had been engaged in large scale screening operations which resulted in few successful contacts. Yet, by remaining in locations for longer and running smaller-scale patrols, the troops built up a better understanding of the human and topographical geography and a fruitful working relationship with the local Police and civilian population.²⁷⁶ Correspondingly, the battalion killed more insurgents. Through fifteen months of operations in Tampin, 1 Green Howards killed or captured 66 CTs.²⁷⁷ By establishing a presence and remaining in the area, military forces could begin to defeat the insurgents through their superior training and firepower, meanwhile, the police and civil authorities would work to deny the insurgents essential supplies.²⁷⁸ All the while, the Special Branch – with the help of the information services – worked to 'turn' CTs, infiltrate their camps and convince them to surrender or locate their positions for the Army or RAF to destroy.

2 Separating the insurgency from its support network

(a) Internment, the Briggs Plan and their consequences

Internment has long been entrenched as a counterinsurgency policy. While it is not the only means of separating insurgent from citizen, it was used to great effect in the New Villages of Malaya where half a million Chinese were resettled from regions where they lived close to the communists.²⁷⁹ The intention behind resettlement under the Briggs Plan was to deny supplies to the insurgents and was necessarily twinned with far-reaching restrictions on food

²⁷⁵ Henry John Coates (n 114) 168–169.

²⁷⁶ Henry John Coates (n 114) 170.

²⁷⁷ Henry John Coates (n 114) 170.

²⁷⁸ Barber (n 107) 248.

²⁷⁹ Comber (n 106) 147.

and resources and accompanied by a largely successful identity card scheme. These measures all conspired to prevent insurgents from moving among the population. While cutting off the insurgents from supplies was the primary intention, the New Villages also provided a great intelligence gathering opportunity. The Special Branch had agents in the New Villages who observed those villagers who were 'in contact with the guerrillas' and, accordingly, set traps for CTs seeking to smuggle supplies from behind the fences.²⁸⁰ Indeed, as 'the Emergency progressed an increasing number of ambushes were laid based on Special Branch information,' particularly when vulnerable CTs 'approached ... the New Villages ... to obtain food and other supplies' from supporters inside.²⁸¹ While resettlement programmes always court controversy, in Malaya, most commentators recognised their effectiveness against the insurgents, foremost among them Chin Peng himself.

While operating in Bentong, Chin Peng and his closest guerrillas 'relied on two villages for support. Then, one after another, there occurred a string of disturbing police swoops ... suddenly, we found ourselves without food supplies.'²⁸² The effect of severing the connection between the insurgents and their supporters among the civilian population was profound. They 'had to take emergency measures,' break 'down into small units,' to reduce the supply burden and yet even when reduced to his core cadres and the CPM's politburo, amounting to around 80 men, 'we were unable to supply ourselves with enough food.'²⁸³ As a consequence of a mounting 'food crisis' the communists had to resort to eating 'grass-like reeds' which turned out to be poisonous.²⁸⁴ According to Chin Peng, the hard core of the communist fighting force was able to at times '[persist] this way for months,' but such measures demonstrated that, in Chin Peng's own words, '[t]he Briggs plan was working.'²⁸⁵ Ching Peng was forced to admit that the survival of his movement was threatened by 'the sheer necessity of having to obtain food' and thus he had 'to give instructions for all large scale terrorist attacks to be scaled back and for the guerrillas to break up into smaller groups in search of food.'²⁸⁶

²⁸⁰ Comber (n 106) 82.

²⁸¹ Comber (n 106) 154.

²⁸² Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 272.

²⁸³ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 272.

²⁸⁴ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 272–273.

²⁸⁵ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 272–273.

²⁸⁶ Comber (n 106) 147.

This was emblematic of the ‘soul searching’ that the CTs had to engage in following the government’s driving of a wedge between them and their support network. By 1951, a change in strategy was required. It was a remarkable achievement of government policy – albeit extreme measures – that the security forces in Malaya had succeeded in influencing the way in which the insurgents thought about the nature of their struggle and how they related to the civilian population. The communists even found it necessary to ‘demonstrate greater support and sympathy with the masses’ as they found that the government was beginning to become more successful in contesting a rival claim to the people’s support.²⁸⁷ ‘A reflection of the undeniably successful Briggs plan implementation and the difficulties it was imposing on us,’ according to Chin Peng, was a reevaluation of the CTs military tactics including what were now viewed as ‘mistakes which had jeopardise[d] our close relationship with the people,’ such as destroying rubber trees, identity cards and attacks on public transport.²⁸⁸ In hindsight, Chin Peng theorised that instead of ‘get[ting] mired in the propaganda politics’ the CPM should have resumed ‘classic guerrilla raids on targets of choice’²⁸⁹ and matched the difficulties imposed by the Briggs plan with ‘more dramatic and determined ... small unit military responses.’²⁹⁰ Chin Peng rightly identified the October 1951 resolution as costing the communists the initiative because it informed the British of the extent of the Briggs Plan’s success and mentioned no plans for insurgent military action.²⁹¹ If the CPM had gone on the offensive in response, they may have been able to undermine the implementation of the Plan. Its extreme impositions on the local population would have been rendered odious for not delivering a promised decline in terrorist violence. This, however, was not the case. The Briggs Plan succeeded, albeit with some caveats.

(b) Problems with the New Villages system

While essential to the security forces’ success, the New Villages were ‘not the panacea for everything,’ they ‘tip[ped] the tactical balance by making the guerrillas come to defended areas for food and supplies,’ and even contributed politically or strategically by helping to

²⁸⁷ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 280.

²⁸⁸ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 280.

²⁸⁹ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 284.

²⁹⁰ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 284.

²⁹¹ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 284.

‘integrate the Chinese squatter into the greater Malayan community.’²⁹² However, resettlement should not be regarded as an unqualified success. First, it failed dramatically in separating the aboriginal *Orang Asli* populations from the insurgents. A great many *Orang Asli* died in the attempt to relocate them due to these isolated communities’ unique vulnerability to disease.²⁹³ As a consequence of the failure to resettle the *Orang Asli*, the insurgents could continue to exploit them for intelligence and supplies though, as mentioned in the previous chapter, jungle forts used as patrol bases by the SAS, *Senoi Pra’aq* and the Police Aboriginal Guard gradually became a barrier to this by winning over and even recruiting aboriginals.²⁹⁴ By 1954, the MNLAs were only able to control an estimated 3,000-4,000 aborigines from a total population of around 100,000.²⁹⁵ Secondly, as Ramakrishna observed, success among the New Villages varied according to their differing levels of economic security.

Specifically, New Villages located near economically viable mines, plantations or secondary industries, could remain somewhat secure. Some ‘New Villages in Selangor, Perak, Johore, Kedah and Pahang,’ which maintained high levels of CT activity, ‘suffered from economic insecurity arising from a lack of employment opportunities.’²⁹⁶ The communists could exploit these New Villagers’ travails to their propaganda advantage.²⁹⁷ Likewise, the success of the New Villages in mobilising the rural Chinese population to contribute to defence and local elections, as well as fostering a sense of community against the communists, was mixed. In some areas, appointing local leaders through elections was supported by the New Villagers. In ‘Sungei Dua New Village in Pahang, for example, 94 percent of eligible voters turned out for the elections,’ yet in another ‘only 41 percent of eligible voters bothered to cast their vote in the 1956 Council election.’²⁹⁸ In terms of defence, the government had succeeded in rallying the Malay population to form what was considered to be an effective Home Guard force, whereas ‘the Chinese Home Guard, which by September 1954 had assumed responsibility for the defence of 129 New Villages, was generally seen as unreliable.’²⁹⁹ This

²⁹² Hickey (n 86) 30.

²⁹³ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 181.

²⁹⁴ Hickey (n 86) 50.

²⁹⁵ Hickey (n 86) 50.

²⁹⁶ Ramakrishna (n 202) 168.

²⁹⁷ Ramakrishna (n 202) 168.

²⁹⁸ Ramakrishna (n 202) 168.

²⁹⁹ Ramakrishna (n 202) 168.

was particularly concerning considering the Home Guard were armed and ‘some Chinese Home Guards were prone to losing arms to the terrorists’ even after attempts to improve their training, ‘their reliability after these reforms was apparently no more certain than before.’³⁰⁰ Thankfully, the Malayan government did not have to rely entirely on the Chinese Home Guard and, as will be discussed further in sub-section 3 below, the Chinese population was reached another way.

(c) Other means of separating the insurgents from the population

Another factor, which neither the insurgents nor the government had influence over, came to aid the security forces in splitting the insurgents from the wider population. Malaya experienced an economic boom due to the Korean War boosting tin and rubber prices. Ironically, the communists became wealthier along with the broader population, ‘small landholders among the Min Yuen prospered,’ and ‘[d]onations to the party similarly soared to the point that, as a movement, we became financially wealthy.’³⁰¹ Yet the Briggs Plan would ensure that the CPM, for all its mounting wealth, would continue to go hungry. While they had money, they could not spend it nor could supporters be enlisted to spend it for them due to resource restrictions and, with increased prosperity, the communists had fewer grievances to exploit in the propaganda war.³⁰² Increased affluence among the population ensured that recruiting insurgents became difficult; communist philosophy was less appealing and few ‘could be convinced of the glory of laying their lives on the line for a cause.’³⁰³ A similar effect permeated the White Areas system and other such policies which underpinned the Malayan government’s famous ‘hearts and minds’ approach.

3 ‘Hearts and minds’

Much has been made of the ‘hearts and minds’ strategy employed in Malaya and a great many interpretations of what is meant by the phrase, and how well this vision translated into practice, exist. This section argues that the government sought the cooperation of the Malayan public against the insurgents and fostered it by creating policy which provided positive and negative incentives for both the civilian population and insurgents to help end

³⁰⁰ Ramakrishna (n 202) 168–169.

³⁰¹ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 278.

³⁰² Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 278.

³⁰³ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 278.

the insurgency. Essential to its success in this endeavour was an understanding of the political underpinnings that motivated the insurgency and its supporters. This is perhaps a more reasonable explanation of the substance of a ‘hearts and minds’ approach in that it presents the government’s policy as neither being minimum force nor the concept of hearts and minds itself as some form of illusory propaganda. In achieving the cooperation and support of the Malayan public, the insurgents presented themselves as a liberation movement seeking to free the peninsula from the imperialist colonisers and institute a revolutionary communist government. The security forces and the government appealed to the people by promising them a relaxing of the Emergency Regulations, prosperity and stability and, when the time came, full independence.

(a) Creating incentives for citizens and insurgents to end the conflict

In an ironic twist, history saw fit for the British in Malaya to adopt a strategy from their former foes to use against their former allies during the Emergency. The Japanese had designated areas cleared of partisan activity as ‘Model Peace Zones’ during their own counterinsurgency effort against the MPAJA. When the British found themselves fighting the MNLA, a similar idea: the ‘White Area,’ was conceived to describe zones ‘where the security situation had improved to such an extent that restrictions ... such as curfews and food control measures, could be safely lifted.’³⁰⁴ The beauty of this system was that it demonstrated the power the civilian population had in hastening the end of the insurgency thus involving them in the national security effort. An example of the efficacy of the White Area policy was illustrated in Malacca.

Templer, despite his avowed desire to win the people’s hearts and minds, decided to make ‘life absolute hell for them’ there.³⁰⁵ He did this because he wished to be certain that the people would refuse entry to the communists after Malacca went white. Therefore, before the restrictions were lifted, the book was thrown at the ‘bewildered inhabitants, knowing nothing of their planned “liberation.”’³⁰⁶ They ‘were subjected to every legal indignity’ that could be inflicted on them and the people of Malacca were soon ‘among the most miserable in Malaya

³⁰⁴ Comber (n 106) 152.

³⁰⁵ Barber (n 107) 235.

³⁰⁶ Barber (n 107) 235.

– which was exactly what Templer wanted.³⁰⁷ Templer’s planned draconian intervention meant that when Malacca became a White Area, ‘the people would be so overjoyed that every man and woman would be an intelligence agent for the government,’ and should any of the CTs return, they would be outed by ‘people horrified at the thought of reverting to a life of restrictions.’³⁰⁸ The impact of Malacca finally being declared a White Area was, according to Brigadier Mark Henniker, Royal Engineers, ‘electrical;’ ‘people demonstrated their joy with happy faces and Union Jacks.’³⁰⁹ Yet, now that they had earned their freedom, they understood that they had to ensure the communists did not return in order to keep it. This effective policy demonstrates that the business of ‘hearts and minds’ need not be characterised by charity alone and that forceful means can also be used to help secure the aid of the wider population.

The previously mentioned ‘defer[ence] to the Special Branch’s more subtle methods of fighting the war,’ rather than ineffective large-scale screening or carpet-bombing operations, indicates another way in which Malayan hearts and minds were courted by the state.³¹⁰ Likewise, mention has already been made of the rewards system relating to informers and insurgent bounties. This proved to be a relatively popular system, attracting enough cooperation from the people during ‘the six months from the end of 1950 to the beginning of June 1951,’ to require that ‘M\$500,000 [be] disbursed.’³¹¹ The following year, the figure climbed dramatically with M\$918,455 paid; largely to surrendered guerrillas engaging in ‘Q’ operations or leading jungle patrols.³¹² Even if the guerrillas had not given up communism, as Brooke feared, at least they had ‘been persuaded to give up the military struggle.’³¹³ The true art of the British COIN strategy in Malaya was the way in that, by the end of the conflict, there was a system in place that provided both negative and positive incentives for the insurgents themselves to end the conflict.

³⁰⁷ Barber (n 107) 235.

³⁰⁸ Barber (n 107) 235.

³⁰⁹ Barber (n 107) 235–236.

³¹⁰ Comber (n 106) 283.

³¹¹ Comber (n 106) 155.

³¹² Comber (n 106) 154.

³¹³ Comber (n 106) 278.

Interestingly, even older scholarly sources such as Hickey, had moral objections to the use of a bounty system for CTs, calling it ‘a somewhat morally repugnant system of rewards for information leading to the capture or killing of guerrillas.’³¹⁴ This observation is, in the context of subsequent revisionist historians’ even greater energy in condemning forceful policies in Malaya, part of a persistent effort to ‘debunk’ the hearts and minds school of thought. Perhaps these commentators’ own moral proclivities prevent them from recognising how these policies did influence hearts and minds. The lesson behind this prevalent phrase does not appear to serve as an encouragement to treat terrorism and its supporters softly. Instead, it refers to the need that many strategies be employed by the security forces to gain the participation of the community in the counterinsurgency effort – monetary incentives being simply one of a number of tools employed. While it would be wrong to say the British bribed away the strength of the MNLA, the existence of these incentives no doubt complicated the cost/benefit analysis occurring (perhaps even subconsciously) in every participant in the conflict’s mind. Indeed, the route to the hearts and minds of some of the people was through their wallets, others may have had ideological motivations but overall ensuring stability was essential in securing the support of the general public.

(b) Guaranteeing stability

The guarantee of stability is what enables the government to make such heavy impositions on the citizenry as are required to defeat an insurgency. The security forces could insist upon compliance with radical policy demands like the Briggs Plan only while they proved effective. Using force to implement them alone would have prompted a fierce backlash and resulted in the government engaging in the same intimidation tactics typically associated with the insurgents. As Barber poetically put it, during an insurgency ‘normal workaday government had to function ... had to be *seen* to function; otherwise there would be no hope for the millions of bemused, bewildered bystanders caught up in the turmoil of a war of terror’ [original emphasis].³¹⁵ Had this population lost its hope and ‘belief in government, the only alternative would be Communism.’³¹⁶ In keeping with this, the government ‘discovered that success bred success, and that people were more likely to give them information if they believed that the security forces were winning’ not least because it indicated they could be

³¹⁴ Hickey (n 86) 32.

³¹⁵ Barber (n 107) 77.

³¹⁶ Barber (n 107) 77.

protected from the CT's retribution.³¹⁷ The substance of stability again is not an exercise in patronising the population with development projects – though such projects were engaged in. As Professor Strachan has explained, 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.'³¹⁸ Strachan expands on this by establishing that 'hearts and minds' denoted authority, not appeasement.³¹⁹ Reis suggests this points to an essential flexibility in British COIN practices. While opposing claims cast such practices in the light of a 'minimum force approach,' the British were instead able to employ measures which included attraction but also methods of control and coercion.³²⁰

Despite this, Strachan observes that some of the Malayan Emergency policies would now face moral condemnation due to their, 'readiness to use levels of force which would now be deemed unacceptable.'³²¹ He cites the detention of 34,000 suspects without trial for over twenty-eight days over the course of the emergency and the execution of 226 communists as examples.³²² Such policies, however, were enacted by a civilian led government, 'martial law had not been declared, and the armed forces were in support of the civil power.'³²³ Execution remains lawful in many states today and the security forces were constantly engaged in life or death gun fights with terrorists who themselves killed civilians in often barbaric fashion – thus moral objections to the use of force betray a lack of perspective. Violence on the part of the state is both a regular facet of governance and an essential part of a counterinsurgency effort where the state's monopoly over its legitimate exercise is openly challenged. Likewise, the interest in defeating terrorist violence remains. Leaving such a need unfulfilled by failing to implement such methods that may be necessary is perhaps the greater evil. This is not to say that the government should exercise violence without limitations, however, Malaya demonstrates that insurgencies require government to, by law, make demands of the civilian population and employ violence normally unnecessary in peace-time. Execution, deportation, or detention of those CTs unwilling to reintegrate or assist the authorities, often in return for

³¹⁷ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55).

³¹⁸ Hew Strachan, 'British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq' (2007) 152 *The RUSI Journal* 8, 8 <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071840701863018>> accessed 15 December 2022.

³¹⁹ Strachan (n 318) 8.

³²⁰ Reis (n 97) 274.

³²¹ Strachan (n 318) 10.

³²² Strachan (n 318) 10.

³²³ Comber (n 106) 148.

generous rewards and guilty of sometimes heinous crimes, was legitimately undertaken in Malaya.

The government was not entirely unfeeling in its wielding of extreme policies. If they had gone too far, the insurgent ranks would have swelled. The Malayan authorities clearly understood the need for ‘political and social reform ... [to] accompany firm government.’³²⁴ Broadly, the Malayan public appeared to support the government as well. While, as previously mentioned, Chinese participation in the Home Guard and local elections was sometimes lacking, this did not necessarily mean they were against the government. According to W.J. Watts of the Chinese Affairs Department, ‘what the rural Chinese wanted ... ‘was not “political rights” but, rather,’ that their government ‘be “intelligent, scrupulously just and efficient.”’³²⁵ Watts emphasised that the former squatter ‘tended to ask “[w]hat value is it to me if I became a Federal citizen?”’³²⁶ Under the transition to independence, the offering of citizenship, title, and the forming of the Alliance government, they would come to find out that they were offered nationhood, freedom from intimidation and peace.

(c) The political underpinnings of the insurgency

As the Emergency began to enter its closing phase, the government had instilled in the people a desire to end the conflict. The support of the people had been secured through success in the counterinsurgency, the establishment of stability and the promise of political change. Laws addressing the key issues underpinning the insurgency had been passed: for example, those which set about ‘giving citizenship to more than a million Chinese; ... and open[ed] the Malayan Civil Service to include a portion of non-Malay Asians.’³²⁷ As part of building a new nation and defeating communism, education had also been radically reformed from a system where each race educated themselves separately and in their own language, which ‘inevitably worked against Templer’s dreams of a multi-racial society.’³²⁸ In preparation for independence, Templer took advantage of ‘the golden opportunity presented by the resettlement of squatters ... [to insist] that every New Village must have its *Malayan* school’

³²⁴ Strachan (n 318) 8.

³²⁵ Ramakrishna (n 202) 169.

³²⁶ Ramakrishna (n 202) 169.

³²⁷ Barber (n 107) 243.

³²⁸ Barber (n 107) 243.

[emphasis in the original].³²⁹ Thus, students were directed away from communism amid concerns that Chinese schools were a ‘source of support for the CTs.’³³⁰ Indeed, Britain had to ensure that the nation which emerged from the Malayan Emergency would not descend into ethnic conflict, making it vulnerable to communist subversion.³³¹

While steps were taken toward securing the future of post-independence Malaya, the insurgency raged on, ‘allow[ing] Britain to sometimes successfully present the violence of the insurgents as the main obstacle to self-rule, and frame successful counterinsurgency as the best way to secure independence.’³³² At last, the British had a persuasive challenge to counter the communists’ claim that ‘they were fighting for the freedom of the people from British colonial rule.’³³³

Indeed, the terrorists’ conduct throughout the insurgency made this claim run hollow; even Chin Peng admitted to this by describing the murders at Sungei Siput as setting the insurgency back and in the October 1951 resolution’s direction in the need to regain mass appeal.³³⁴ The lesson which may be drawn from this is that whoever can plausibly contend in an insurgency to be in opposition to the agents of chaos and destruction – the source of the unrest – has a substantial advantage in swaying the views of the civilian population. Both security and insurgent forces characterise each other as the source of the unrest and the often extreme violence of the CTs only helped the British portray them as the heart of the problem. Combined with the ‘White Area’ system delivering tangible rewards for the population as soon as the insurgents were expelled, the CTs had little success in winning back the hearts and minds of the people, particularly as large-scale screening and bombing operations were phased out. Negotiations between the insurgents and the government also offered the opportunity to demonise the other side in the insurgency in front of the population, rather than establish a workable compromise.

³²⁹ Barber (n 107) 243.

³³⁰ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (n 55) 183.

³³¹ Barber (n 107) 244.

³³² Reis (n 97) 274.

³³³ Comber (n 106) 7.

³³⁴ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 222.

Critically, in 1955 the government was represented in negotiations with the CPM by Tunku Abdul Rahman, with the Tunku leading an alliance of the associations representing the various racial groups of Malaya and with the support of the British government. Chin Peng refused to accept the surrender terms he was offered and threatened a return to violence, but the Tunku held steadfast. He could be so forthright with Chin Peng because he 'was an elected national leader who commanded popular support ... and was on the verge of leaving for London to get independence.'³³⁵ Rather than frustrating the public, the Tunku's rejection of Chin Peng's offer of a compromise conferred 'a tremendous boost to public confidence.'³³⁶ This was an incredible opportunity for the forthcoming, independent Federation of Malaya, as she demonstrated from her inception that she had the fortitude to reject a poisoned chalice offered by the now moribund CPM. The communists sought to use the negotiations to ransom peace for an opportunity to regroup and hold the threat of a return to violence over the new government. The security forces' triumph was guaranteed when the incoming government felt strong enough to reject a peace offer from the insurgents and was even congratulated for doing so by the people.

Part of the reason this was possible, as the Tunku pointed out, was because:³³⁷

[d]uring the last three years of the war, more roads were built, more jungle cleared, bridges and water systems constructed, schools and hospitals started, than have been done in the last three generations.' We were not fighting the Communist terrorists with arms alone. We went a long way to win the hearts and minds of our people. We gave people more than the Communists could ever hope to give.

However, it is important not to draw an erroneous lesson from the Tunku's statements. The number of schools and utilities constructed does not essentially correspond to the number of hearts and minds won. The reason development worked in Malaya was because the people wanted it and because it countered the communists' claims regarding the British government. In Afghanistan, as will be shown, development projects did not have the same influence. In Malaya, the incoming government had a firm foundation among the people and persuasively offered them a better vision for the future than the insurgents.

³³⁵ Comber (n 106) 284.

³³⁶ Comber (n 106) 284.

³³⁷ Barber (n 107) 320.

D Conclusion

Despite its tempestuous beginnings, the security forces' response to the insurgency in Malaya came to demonstrate a mastery of human intelligence, psychological warfare and the precise allocation of military forces to intelligence-led operations. Likewise, the state was informed by a clear and integrated administrative structure and a developed response to the general population's political aspirations, backed by the guarantee of stability. It was because of these qualities that the Malayan government was able to separate the civilian from the insurgent and guarantee the cooperation of the people in the national security effort. On the political side, while Chin Peng rationalised the legacy of his insurgency as expediting Malaya's journey to independence,³³⁸ it was ultimately the government's provision of an alternative, democratic, pathway to independence which undermined the CPM's cause. The writing was on the wall and decolonisation was assured. The CPM's struggle only guaranteed that among the British Empire's legacies was a united and independent Federation of Malaya, with a developed internal security infrastructure – ready to again defeat the insurgents in the Second Emergency. In the following chapter, a strikingly different context will provide an example of a British security response to a terrorist campaign in a place where a British withdrawal was anything but assured and where some strategies inherited from Malaya would fail.

³³⁸ Chin, Ward and Mirafior (n 254) 10.

V Overview of the Northern Irish Case Study

A Introduction

In this case study, the British security response during ‘the Troubles’ – the most recent period of insurgent republican activity in Northern Ireland – between 1969 and 1998 is examined. By first establishing the relevant historical context, this chapter enables discussion of the evolution of the insurgent, Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA or IRA) and the measures employed by security forces to counter their activity. Measures which, while sometimes successful, ultimately failed to defeat the insurgents outright. The Troubles differs from the other case studies principally because it took place within the context of the United Kingdom itself.

B Historical Context

The history of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland is as long as it is bitter, however, for the purposes of this study, much of the historical context is not strictly relevant to the period examined here: 1969 to 1998. Following the Battle of the Bogside, a riot born of tensions between local unionist authorities and the Catholic majority in Londonderry, the British Army was deployed in 1969 to the province to support the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) maintain order. The Army’s role, however, soon shifted to conducting counterinsurgency and counterterrorist operations as the Provisional Irish Republican Army – the leading Northern Irish republican paramilitary group – began its so-called ‘armed struggle’ against the British state. PIRA broke away from the Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA -predominantly administrated in Southern Ireland) and emanated from Northern Ireland’s large Catholic minority, who resented the unionist authority in Stormont and wished for Northern Ireland to be absorbed into the Irish Republic. However, the IRA also wished to establish their version of an Irish Republic on the basis of socialism, drawing them into conflict with the existing Irish government in the south.³³⁹

³³⁹ ‘CAIN: Events: Text of Irish Republican Army (IRA) “Green Book” (Book I and II)’ <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira_green_book.htm> accessed 20 February 2023.

As unrest mounted, a counterinsurgency staple from Malaya was implemented in Northern Ireland: internment. Operation DEMETRIUS was carried out by the RUC and its Special Branch with assistance from the Army and it proved remarkably unsuccessful.³⁴⁰ Not only was the policy despised by the Catholic population it targeted, but arrests were based on out-of-date intelligence mostly pertaining to the OIRA – who were not largely the cause of emerging tensions.³⁴¹ The internment policy failed and was abandoned in 1975 with public outcry surrounding the use of the ‘five techniques’ of interrogation used on some suspected terrorists during this period.³⁴² However, when internment was ended as part of the ceasefire in 1975, IRA sources suggested that this boosted their ranks considerably as imprisoned volunteers returned to carrying out attacks.³⁴³ Nevertheless, the fact these methods were used at all pointed to a similar dearth of intelligence at the beginning of the Troubles, as was felt at the start of the Malayan Emergency.

No doubt, the British Army would have had greater success against the paramilitaries if they had been able to maintain the cooperation of the Catholic population. This would have enabled the flow of intelligence to the security forces. Yet, the so-called ‘honeymoon’ period at the start of the Army’s deployment was short lived. Many nationalists had welcomed the British Army as they feared attacks from the loyalist population and viewed the RUC as anything but impartial. Indeed, the report for Operation BANNER – the name given to the Army’s involvement in Northern Ireland – reflects that this was no honeymoon, but the most important stage of the conflict. The British had an early window of opportunity to win over the population before the IRA emerged as an effective insurgency.³⁴⁴ However, this was also the stage in which serious mistakes were made by security forces.

The British government’s Northern Ireland policy was shaped by what Aldrich and Cormac suggest was the Edward Heath government’s ‘obsess[ion] with subversion’ by ‘domestic

³⁴⁰ RJ Arascain, *Intelligence Services in Northern Ireland, 1969-80* (Broxholm Books 2014) 3.

³⁴¹ Arascain (n 340) 3.

³⁴² Lord Parker of Waddington, ‘Report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors Appointed to Consider Authorised Procedures of Persons Suspected of Terrorism’ (Privy Counsel 1972) 323284.

³⁴³ Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (2nd ed, Penguin 2007) 188.

³⁴⁴ Ministry of Defence, ‘Operation BANNER – An Analysis of Military Operations in Northern Ireland’ (British Army 2006) Army Code 71842 para 807.

enemies' such as the trade unions or the IRA.³⁴⁵ As a consequence, Westminster stalled reforms and maintained unionist-majority rule, turning the Catholic population against the British state. Due to the frequency of political violence, and the magnitude of the unrest, the Army employed increasingly indiscriminate methods, largely against the republican community. The Falls Road curfew and the searches of Catholic households, Operation BANNER explains, 'probably contributed significantly to the alienation of the catholic population in the early years of the campaign.'³⁴⁶ Amidst growing tensions, nationalists began to depart the political structures they felt were stacked against them and, as the non-violent, nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) pulled out of Stormont, 'the activities of the IRA increased.'³⁴⁷

Britain's initial military strategy 'focused on defeating the IRA before 1972.'³⁴⁸ Yet, without the cooperation of the community from which they emanated and with the apparent restriction of non-violent, political outlets for their causes, republicans became increasingly supportive of the IRA. By March 1972, it was conceded that 'the IRA could not be militarily defeated. Instead ... the aim switched to producing "an acceptable level of violence."³⁴⁹ Operation BANNER defined the circumstances of an 'acceptable level of violence' as those under which 'normal social, political and economic activities can take place without intimidation,' where the local population can accept the state of affairs and where the local police can maintain it.³⁵⁰ Reaching this state was the primary goal of the armed forces from 1972 onwards. The intention was to reach a stage where the insurgency chose to express itself through political rather than violent means.

The reason for this shift in policy was the apparent impact the beginning of the Troubles was having on Northern Irish society. An MoD assessment in March 1972 stated that: "the commercial life of [Derry] City is being rapidly and visibly [reduced] ... businessmen are cutting their losses and leaving.'³⁵¹ The government sought to gain the support of the

³⁴⁵ Richard J Aldrich and Rory Cormac, *Behind The Black Door: Secret Intelligence And 10 Downing Street* (William Collins 2016) 392.

³⁴⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 514.

³⁴⁷ Thomas Leahy, *The Intelligence War against the IRA* (Cambridge University Press 2020) 17.

³⁴⁸ Leahy (n 347) 17.

³⁴⁹ Leahy (n 347) 17.

³⁵⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 809.

³⁵¹ Leahy (n 347) 36.

population by ensuring a relative return to order and by attempting to prevent the onset of economic ruin. Yet, by then, republican paramilitaries were in positions of strength with growing numbers of recruits and stockpiles of weapons.³⁵² There was little chance of life in Ulster's urban centres returning to an 'acceptable level of violence.' By March of 1972, Operation BANNER more or less admits that the initiative had been lost to the IRA.³⁵³

The next serious blow to the security forces' image came soon after. Londonderry had been the site of numerous clashes between the IRA and security forces, with a large part of the city quickly becoming a 'no-go' zone where the republican paramilitaries enjoyed the support of local nationalist civilians. The Northern Irish Government, with the support of Westminster, had banned marches and protests in the region, but the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association – dedicated to opposing policies it viewed as discrimination against Catholics – decided to defy the ban on the 30th of January 1972. What followed became known as 'Bloody Sunday.' The march devolved into rioting when it came upon the Army barriers along its route. While proportionate force was used in some areas, soldiers from 1 PARA (1st Battalion, the Parachute Regiment) in the Glenfada Park North, Abbey Park and Rossville Street area fired their weapons at civilians unjustifiably resulting in the deaths of fourteen civilians and the injury of a similar number by Army gunfire.³⁵⁴ The consequences of this event contributed to alienation of the Catholic population and an increase in IRA violence by June that year.³⁵⁵

In response, the IRA mounted a large bombing campaign in Belfast which came to be known as 'Bloody Friday.' The 21st of July 1972 saw the IRA detonate twenty explosive devices which killed nine and injured 130 people.³⁵⁶ However, 'Bloody Friday' was a propaganda disaster for the IRA and ushered in a swift British security response.³⁵⁷ A day later, Operation MOTORMAN was launched: a massive reinforcement to deployed troop numbers preceded the swamping of the 'no-go' zones and barricades established by the paramilitaries.

³⁵² Leahy (n 347) 36.

³⁵³ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 226.

³⁵⁴ Mark Oliver Saville, William L Hoyt and John Toohey, *Principal Conclusions and Overall Assessment of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry* (Stationery Office 2010) para 3.06-3.41.

³⁵⁵ Leahy (n 347) 39.

³⁵⁶ Leahy (n 347) 64.

³⁵⁷ Leahy (n 347) 64.

By breaking this deadlock with the deployment of an additional 28,000 soldiers and bulldozer fitted Centurion tanks, the British regained control of the streets.³⁵⁸

MOTORMAN proved to be a resounding success; it opened the playing field for intelligence gathering, resulted in the arrests and deaths of insurgents and proved that the security forces could reimpose order. In the months following MOTORMAN, and throughout the beginning of 1973, nearly 2,000 PIRA members were arrested – among them, eight battalion commanders – leaving a whole company of the insurgent’s ranks disbanded.³⁵⁹

MOTORMAN was a success, albeit one that may not have been necessary if not for earlier setbacks. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw, had chosen not to partake in the secret backchannel negotiations with the IRA that had been arranged by the security services, seeking to establish a political settlement between moderates that isolated both forms of extremists. It was a second attempt at self-government, called the Sunningdale Agreement, which was to form a cross border, power-sharing agreement between republicans and unionists. However, the agreement failed in 1974 due to unionist fears it would funnel them into the Irish Republic and amidst continued paramilitary activity.³⁶⁰

Spurned by the Conservatives, the IRA met with then leader of the opposition, Harold Wilson, demonstrating how much they hoped to achieve through secret dialogues.³⁶¹ Upon their ascension to government, Wilson’s Labour party displayed a willingness to negotiate resulting in the 1975 ceasefires. Rather than establishing the path to peace, the ceasefires demonstrated why the conflict could not be resolved at that point. Thomas Leahy suggests this is partly because the British ‘never outlined for the IRA, the boundaries of political settlement’ and delayed the politicisation of the IRA by upholding their criminalisation of its political wing, Sinn Féin.³⁶² However, blame also rests on the IRA. They maintained ‘sizeable support levels in working-class nationalist areas,’ yet had no legitimate political mandate through which they could further their cause non-violently.³⁶³ Reputedly, the IRA

³⁵⁸ Leahy (n 347) 64.

³⁵⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 229.

³⁶⁰ Drohan (n 84) 176.

³⁶¹ Leahy (n 347) 49.

³⁶² Leahy (n 347) 49.

³⁶³ Leahy (n 347) 49.

also made ‘unrealistic demands for immediate British withdrawal,’³⁶⁴ and may have simply been buying time as their presence in Belfast was flagging by the mid-1970s. Operation BANNER speculates that, during this period, the IRA may have been defeated before it became a professional terrorist organisation.³⁶⁵ Leahy cites IRA member Tommy McKearney’s assessment that, ‘by 1975: “[t]he Belfast brigade ... had suffered ... serious losses,”’ a critical development as the “IRA... was made-up of 50 percent Belfast and 50 per cent the rest.”³⁶⁶

Before they could be defeated, however, the IRA made a structural change that would ensure their longevity. While cutting the number of members in an insurgency may seem counterintuitive, the IRA set about restructuring itself and ‘trimming the fat’ of the many volunteers it had acquired since the start of the Troubles. The result was what has become recognisable as the conventional terrorist cell structure. By dividing its forces into Active Service Units (ASUs or cells) comprised of unrelated volunteers from various areas, the IRA was able to become more resistant to infiltration.³⁶⁷ As a result of their dramatic cuts in membership, IRA activities reduced considerably. The initial intense, violent phase of the conflict was beginning to change into a longitudinal yet sustainable series of tragedies, wherein IRA killings of intended targets reduced to a maximum of no more than eighteen per year.³⁶⁸

IRA activities spread to the rural and cross-border areas of Northern Ireland and even the UK mainland by this point, as the IRA moved from intensive to extensive activity. The increase in IRA activities across Northern Ireland was perhaps a worse situation for the security forces than the previously intense activity in Ulster’s urban centres. To make matters worse, rural units were often able to escape across the border to the Irish Republic where the British could not pursue them.³⁶⁹ The conflict against rural IRA units, such as the South Armagh IRA, was uniquely bitter and explosive. In these more isolated regions, the IRA enjoyed the support of the local population and operated openly in relative safety. They also employed the

³⁶⁴ Leahy (n 347) 53.

³⁶⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 848.

³⁶⁶ Leahy (n 347) 82.

³⁶⁷ Leahy (n 347) 89.

³⁶⁸ Leahy (n 347) 89.

³⁶⁹ Leahy (n 347) 102.

use of more dangerous weapons, including significantly more powerful roadside bombs and anti-materiel rifles, given the decreased risk of collateral damage in the countryside.³⁷⁰ The IRA also sent their more efficient ASUs to engage in terrorist attacks in England in the hopes of putting ‘extra pressure’ on the British government to withdraw from Northern Ireland.³⁷¹

As Britain entered the 1980s, the conflict’s most resolute British government entered power. Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government began with the policy that negotiation was unlikely to achieve much in resolving the conflict given the IRA’s commitment to violence. As a consequence, backchannel negotiations were absent throughout much of the 1980s.³⁷² The government encouraged the SDLP not to engage with Sinn Féin and warned Ministers and civil servants not to meet with republican representatives. Mrs Thatcher sought to reduce the republican influence in Northern Irish affairs by introducing an oath of nonviolence for Northern Ireland councillors and a sweeping broadcasting ban.³⁷³ However, she encountered some resistance in establishing this hard-line against republicanism.

Thatcher’s hard-line toward the IRA was frustrated by the Maze prison hunger strikes which resulted in the suicides of ten of the imprisoned IRA members conducting them. This event radicalised some republicans and led to an increase in IRA activity and recruitment. The IRA also attempted to take personal revenge against Thatcher by bombing the Conservative party conference at the Brighton Grand Hotel.³⁷⁴ This did nothing to dissuade Thatcher’s commitment to fighting the IRA and refusal to negotiate with republicans while they committed political violence. As such, the IRA settled into a long-war stance. The 1980s were a continuation of the conflict with no real end in sight.

As Britain entered the 1990s, and despite continued tensions, there were some promising developments for an increasingly politicised IRA. Sinn Féin introduced what has been termed its ‘Armalite and ballot-box strategy’ whereby the IRA’s armed struggle was understood as

³⁷⁰ Leahy (n 347) 153.

³⁷¹ Leahy (n 347) 102–103.

³⁷² Leahy (n 347) 133.

³⁷³ Robert J Savage, ‘The Broadcasting Ban’ in Robert J Savage, *Northern Ireland, the BBC, and Censorship in Thatcher’s Britain* (Oxford University Press 2022) <<https://academic.oup.com/book/41374/chapter/352650508>> accessed 27 February 2023.

³⁷⁴ John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher* (Jonathan Cape 2000) 208.

but one means of achieving republican ambitions.³⁷⁵ The response from the Northern Irish electorate was around a 10% show of support for Sinn Féin.³⁷⁶ This change in direction from the IRA was arguably the result of the secret meetings between John Hume, leader of the SDLP, and Sinn Féin and IRA leader, Gerry Adams in 1988.³⁷⁷ Sinn Féin activity began to become more important on the republican agenda than IRA activity. Changes within the IRA began to reflect this as the leadership came to realise that electoral losses for Sinn Féin amounted to pressure to reduce or end their terrorist campaign.³⁷⁸

The secret backchannel negotiations were opened again under Prime Minister John Major, despite his public refusal to negotiate with a violent IRA.³⁷⁹ Indeed Major believed the IRA ‘would never give [violence] up voluntarily.’³⁸⁰ As a consequence, an old policy interrupted by Thatcher, returned: negotiate while maintaining the use of intelligence to defeat the IRA on the streets and in the fields. The dual response aimed to ‘squeez[e] out terrorism by every means, persuasive as well as military,’ because Major did not trust the IRA’s commitment to peace – especially after they attempted to blow him up in an audacious mortar attack on 10 Downing Street.³⁸¹ While unthinkable under Thatcher, it had become an accepted reality by the mid-1990s, that a political settlement had to include the IRA as – even after 25 years of counterinsurgency – it could not be militarily defeated.³⁸²

This is not to say that by the mid-1990s, the intelligence war was not successful. In fact, the government’s response had reached its most refined stage thanks, in part, to some well-placed agents and informers.³⁸³ While the IRA remained operational, some of its leaders had realised they were no closer to reaching their goals by the mid-1990s than they had been a decade earlier. The IRA’s socialist politics had also suffered from the fall of the Soviet Union.³⁸⁴

³⁷⁵ Ian McAllister, “‘The Armalite and the Ballot Box’: Sinn Féin’s Electoral Strategy in Northern Ireland” (2004) 23 *Electoral Studies* 123, 124.

³⁷⁶ Bernadette C Hayes and Ian McAllister, ‘Who Voted for Peace? Public Support for the 1998 Northern Ireland Agreement’ (2001) 16 *Irish Political Studies* 73, 74
<<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07907180108406633>> accessed 31 May 2022.

³⁷⁷ Hayes and McAllister (n 376) 74.

³⁷⁸ Moloney (n 343) 246.

³⁷⁹ Leahy (n 347) 136.

³⁸⁰ John Major, *John Major: The Autobiography* (HarperCollins 1999) 432.

³⁸¹ Major (n 380) 433.

³⁸² Leahy (n 347) 136.

³⁸³ Leahy (n 347) 143.

³⁸⁴ Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (Pan 2008) 303.

Republicans viewed American president Bill Clinton's granting of a visa to Gerry Adams, and his intervention in the peace process, as an endorsement of the political side of their campaign.³⁸⁵ Leahy suggests that the IRA leadership's concern for international opinion saw the organisation shy away from bombings likely to jeopardise American support.³⁸⁶ Sinn Féin sought to project an image of itself as a legitimate party as it struggled to gain electoral support in the Irish Republic;³⁸⁷ potentially explaining the decrease in attacks.³⁸⁸

The IRA's focus now shifted to targeting commercial infrastructure in England in order to pressure the British government to commit to negotiations. As their influence in Northern Ireland's urban centres waned, the IRA's campaign on the mainland escalated.³⁸⁹ In rural areas, such as South Armagh, the local IRA units also remained operational.³⁹⁰ The ceasefire beginning in 1994 lasted only 17 months before a series of attacks were staged in England by covert ASUs. This did not sway Tony Blair's New Labour government, however, from continuing negotiations as it had previous governments. Talks between the IRA and the British government set the stage for the 1998 Belfast or Good Friday Agreement. As this study focuses on counterinsurgency, the peace process will not be explored in detail here though it is worth noting that it caused a splintering in the IRA's ranks with the 'Real IRA' staging further attacks in opposition to the peace.³⁹¹

C Overview of the Insurgency: the IRA

Throughout the course of their armed struggle, the Provisionals demonstrated a remarkable capacity to evolve so as to avoid defeat. Broadly speaking, the IRA moved from a large organisation imitating a conventional military force – like the MNLA – to a series of cell structures preserving their operational security. Finally, when confronted with how little the organisation had achieved over the course of many years of violence, the organisation splintered into pro-peace and pro-terrorism factions.

³⁸⁵ English (n 384) 305.

³⁸⁶ Leahy (n 347) 153.

³⁸⁷ Leahy (n 347) 215.

³⁸⁸ Leahy (n 347) 153.

³⁸⁹ Christopher M Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (Allen Lane 2009) 794–797.

³⁹⁰ Leahy (n 347) 193.

³⁹¹ Chris Thornton, 'Omagh: The Edge of Darkness' *Belfast Telegraph* (Belfast, 15 August 2008) <<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/omagh-the-edge-of-darkness-28443663.html>>.

In the early 1970s, the Belfast and Derry City IRA followed the brigade, battalion and company structures. The Belfast Brigade, for example, had three battalions with each committed to a different region.³⁹² Leahy suggests that while this structure allowed the IRA to claim to represent local people, it also made the organisation vulnerable to infiltration – just as it did the MNLA.³⁹³ The PIRA was at its largest in the first few years of the Troubles. In July 1971 there were an estimated 500 members,³⁹⁴ but by May 1972, numbers had soared to approximately 1700 members in the republican paramilitaries with a predicted 600 having been interned.³⁹⁵ Operation BANNER estimates that between 1969 and 1972, the IRA had around 10,000 people involved in it.³⁹⁶ IRA companies typically ranged from between 10 to 30 volunteers.³⁹⁷ The increase in support for the IRA, while allowing for an escalation in their violence, also made it difficult to determine who among their many new recruits were agents or informers – not to mention the significant logistical challenge the membership boom posed for republicans.³⁹⁸

Overall, the IRA was led by an Army Council comprised of seven members which served as an executive body with a similar function to the CPM's Central Committee.³⁹⁹ The members of the Army Council carried out different functions: for example, the IRA's chief of staff was responsible for the everyday activities of the insurgency.⁴⁰⁰ When planning terrorist incidents in England and Wales, the IRA Army Council was directly involved in choosing the volunteers and approving the attacks.⁴⁰¹ Interestingly, it was only after 1975 that IRA Army Council members were prevented from participating in operations directly to ensure their security.⁴⁰² This pivotal measure kept the most senior terrorists, according to an MI5 legal counsel, 'effectively beyond the reach of law.'⁴⁰³

³⁹² Leahy (n 347) 34.

³⁹³ Leahy (n 347) 34.

³⁹⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 303.

³⁹⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 303.

³⁹⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 303.

³⁹⁷ Leahy (n 347) 34.

³⁹⁸ Leahy (n 347) 34–35.

³⁹⁹ Moloney (n 343) 373.

⁴⁰⁰ Moloney (n 343) 371.

⁴⁰¹ Leahy (n 347) 191.

⁴⁰² Moloney (n 343) 375.

⁴⁰³ Andrew (n 389) 750.

The primary development in the IRA's insurgency was adopting the cell structure in late 1973. IRA attacks in Belfast or on the mainland would thereafter be performed largely by ASUs of between four to ten volunteers.⁴⁰⁴ Leahy mentions that in order to increase security, the men would be selected from different areas of Belfast and would be otherwise distant from one another.⁴⁰⁵ The knowledge of any given ASU member would be restricted to his own unit's activities alone as the broader organisation was kept separate in accordance with the terrorist cell structure. The cellular restructuring of the IRA was not total and centred primarily on Belfast and even then some remnants of the old brigade system remained because the units still required logistical support.⁴⁰⁶ Cells were not the only security enhancing change made by the IRA in Belfast. By the 1980s, IRA operations were vetted before being carried out in Belfast to ensure they did not compromise Sinn Féin's political progress. According to an IRA member cited by Leahy, up to 80% of planned attacks were called off.⁴⁰⁷ With the evolution of the insurgency established, it is now possible to consider the parallel developments among the security forces.

D The Security Forces

The historical context section above explored the policies of each incumbent government which determined the overall direction of the security forces in Northern Ireland; this section outlines the structure of the security forces. Various military and civil organisations contributed to the security response, particularly the intelligence war, yet a general command structure united their efforts.

1 The overall command structure

The overall authority in the Northern Ireland conflict was the British government; more specifically, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in Cabinet and the Prime Minister above him. In order to ensure that the government's policy was being carried out during the conflict, and to enable the coordination of intelligence during the Troubles, Northern Ireland

⁴⁰⁴ Leahy (n 347) 89.

⁴⁰⁵ Leahy (n 347) 89.

⁴⁰⁶ Moloney (n 343) 188.

⁴⁰⁷ Leahy (n 347) 151.

Secretary William Whitelaw created the Director and Coordinator of Intelligence (DCI). The DCI was tasked with improving cooperation between the intelligence gathering organisations in both the military and civil dimensions. In regular meetings with the RUC Chief Constable and Army General Officer Commanding (GOC), the DCI coordinated intelligence activity in Northern Ireland and ensured that the security force commanders were acting in accordance with the Secretary of State's priorities.⁴⁰⁸ The creation of this post emphasises the strong links between the British government's Northern Ireland policy and the intelligence war.

2 Civil dimensions

RUC Special Branch led the HUMINT effort in Northern Ireland through the recruitment of agents and informers. The primary difficulty facing the Special Branch and the RUC at large was that by 1969 'it was no longer welcome in working-class nationalist communities in Derry City or Belfast.'⁴⁰⁹ They were perceived by the Catholic population as being too Protestant and sectarian in nature. This was one of the reasons why many Catholics initially welcomed the Army. While this perception eventually changed, the Army had largely taken over the COIN effort in Ulster and to ensure they returned to principles of Military Assistance to Civil Authority (MACA), in 1976 the policy of Police Primacy emerged.⁴¹⁰ This provided the opportunity to deny the republicans the framing of their struggle as one against a military occupation and delegitimised their violence by responding to it as criminal action. The result of this policy was the establishment of the RUC Special Branch as the supreme intelligence gathering authority in Northern Ireland, as was the case in Malaya.

In a similar layout to Malaya, the RUC Special Branch worked on a regional basis with each of the three regions handling its own agents. The three regions included the broad areas of Belfast and the North and South of the province. Each region 'enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy.'⁴¹¹ This regional layout corresponded with the deployment of the Army's three brigades.⁴¹² RUC Special Branch recruited informers by promising to drop charges against detained individuals or by offering financial incentives, a capability that made them well-

⁴⁰⁸ Leahy (n 347) 140.

⁴⁰⁹ Leahy (n 347) 39.

⁴¹⁰ Arascain (n 340) 63.

⁴¹¹ Michael Morland, Valerie Strachan and Anthony Burden, *The Rosemary Nelson Inquiry Report* (TSO 2011) 137.

⁴¹² Arascain (n 340) 65.

suites to lead the intelligence war in Northern Ireland.⁴¹³ The RUC would share intelligence via liaison officers with the Army and through a series of coordinating committees which also connected the RUC to the British Security Services, MI5.

The British domestic security service, MI5, was brought into Northern Ireland as early as 1969 at the request of the RUC Inspector General.⁴¹⁴ MI5 set about installing electronic listening devices in locations designated by the Army's intelligence operators and the RUC Special Branch. The Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) collaborated with MI5 through a coordinating body called the Irish Joint Section.⁴¹⁵ MI6's primary contribution to the security response was through the establishment of backchannel contacts between the government and the IRA.⁴¹⁶ MI5 also operated a small number of agents and informers,⁴¹⁷ though the MI5 presence in Northern Ireland never exceeded 50 staff.⁴¹⁸ As the IRA began conducting terrorist attacks in mainland Britain, MI5 began to take over the security response there due to perceived failings on the part of the Metropolitan Police's Special Branch in 1992.⁴¹⁹

While barely a feature of the Malayan Emergency, signals intelligence (SIGINT) came to be of principal importance in defeating the IRA's radio-controlled bombs. This complicated task largely fell to the General Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the British government's signals intelligence agency. GCHQ also monitored communications going between Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic and mainland Britain by means of a series of towers in South Armagh, and at Capenhurst, Holyhead and Sutton Common near Macclesfield.⁴²⁰ The bugging of Sinn Féin politicians was also probably carried out by GCHQ.⁴²¹ Finally, GCHQ monitored mobile phones during the closing chapter of the Troubles (as the technology became popular) and were able to monitor, though not prevent, the events leading to the Real IRA's Omagh bombing.⁴²²

⁴¹³ Arascain (n 340) 67.

⁴¹⁴ Andrew (n 389) 603–604.

⁴¹⁵ Arascain (n 340) 53–55.

⁴¹⁶ Leahy (n 347) 76.

⁴¹⁷ Arascain (n 340) 58–59.

⁴¹⁸ 'MI5 In Northern Ireland' <<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/mi5-in-northern-ireland>> accessed 17 March 2023.

⁴¹⁹ Leahy (n 347) 140.

⁴²⁰ Richard J Aldrich, *GCHQ: The Uncensored Story of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency* (HarperPress 2010) 500.

⁴²¹ Aldrich (n 420) 500.

⁴²² Aldrich (n 420) 502.

3 The military dimension

One of the first military units to become involved in the intelligence war in Northern Ireland was the Military Reaction Force (MRF) which was formed by the GOC and Frank Kitson, a COIN expert who pioneered the idea of creating ‘counter-gangs’ to employ insurgent-style tactics against insurgencies.⁴²³ The MRF operated in plain clothes and conducted intelligence gathering in Belfast during the period in which the Army had largely lost control of the streets. During the entirety of its existence, the MRF probably numbered no more than 30 men and a few women – resembling an almost parallel structure to a few IRA units.⁴²⁴ MRF activities may have also included assassinating IRA members in attacks previously blamed on loyalist paramilitaries.⁴²⁵

Special operations forces performed a variety of roles in Northern Ireland ranging from their conventional use in attacking behind enemy lines to their modern counter-terrorism function and undercover surveillance. The primary military units within this category, following the dissolution of the MRF,⁴²⁶ were the SAS and 14 Intelligence Company (also called the Det or the Special Reconnaissance Unit, formed in 1973/4).⁴²⁷ The Det was formed to fill the gap left by the MRF and largely consisted of SAS members (though it attracted new members, including women).⁴²⁸ Their role was similar to the MRF: undercover surveillance in close proximity to the IRA achieved by blending in with the local population. The SAS were deployed to the province in 1976 and operated in what Leahy has described as ‘hard’ areas, particularly rural republican heartlands.⁴²⁹ They were employed in ambushing IRA members attempting to carry out attacks, particularly in East Tyrone.⁴³⁰ Famously, the SAS also deployed to Gibraltar to prevent an ASU from carrying out an IRA bomb threat.⁴³¹

⁴²³ Frank Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs* (Barrie and Rockliff 1960) 77–79.

⁴²⁴ Leahy (n 347) 31.

⁴²⁵ Moloney (n 343) 133–134.

⁴²⁶ The MRF and their activities became compromised when an informer was tortured by the IRA, they were disbanded as a result.

⁴²⁷ Arascain (n 340) 39.

⁴²⁸ Arascain (n 340) 41.

⁴²⁹ Leahy (n 347) 140.

⁴³⁰ Leahy (n 347) 183.

⁴³¹ Mark Urban, *Big Boys’ Rules: The Secret Struggle against the IRA* (Faber & Faber 2012) 14.

Throughout the whole of the Troubles, Mark Urban estimates that the combined SAS and Det presence did not exceed approximately 150 personnel.⁴³²

At the beginning of Operation BANNER, the British Army entered Northern Ireland ‘blind in intelligence terms.’⁴³³ Initially, the Army relied on the RUC Special Branch with whom they had a difficult relationship at times. The failure of internment due to the lack of intelligence is a good example of this.⁴³⁴ However, by the end of the Troubles, British Army intelligence was an extensive apparatus collecting information from a diverse range of sources including helicopter observation, foot patrols and even Army-handled agents. The Army’s intelligence structures were conventional with headquarters, brigade and battalion level intelligence sections. There were three Army brigades deployed in Northern Ireland until the conclusion of Operation BANNER: the 39th, 8th and 3rd Infantry Brigades – each with their own intelligence sections.

The Brigade Intelligence Officer, in charge of each section, compiled intelligence summaries and received information from MI5. Each brigade had a Military Intelligence Liaison Officer (MILO) attached to the RUC Special Branch – another idea carried over from Malaya – who bridged the gap between the Army and Police.⁴³⁵ All the intelligence gathered by the Army was passed up to Headquarters Northern Ireland (HQNI), where G02 branch of the General Staff oversaw the intelligence machinery for the whole province.⁴³⁶ Heading this department was the DCI, an MI5 officer. His role was to coordinate between the Security Service, the Army and the RUC Special Branch and produce intelligence summaries for the Ministry of Defence and the joint intelligence machinery in Cabinet.⁴³⁷

Supporting the regular Army in a similar fashion to the Malayan Home Guard regiments were willing members of the local community enrolled in the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR). By forming the UDR in 1970, with enthusiastic participation from loyalists, the security forces

⁴³² Urban (n 431) 339.

⁴³³ Leahy (n 347) 39.

⁴³⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 219.

⁴³⁵ Arascain (n 340) 15–16.

⁴³⁶ Arascain (n 340) 17–19.

⁴³⁷ Arascain (n 340) 20.

boosted their available manpower and gave local people a direct role in the COIN effort. Such was the popularity of the regiment, the UDR was the largest British Army regiment by the time it was disbanded.⁴³⁸ The UDR was a Territorial, part-time force meaning that volunteers were vulnerable to reprisals by the IRA as they would patrol during the day and return to their homes after. Initially, there were significant numbers of Catholics enlisting in the UDR, though these numbers fell from 18% in 1971 to a mere 3% by the end of 1972, and never rose again.⁴³⁹ This was likely due to both the IRA targeting Catholic members of the regiment and the disillusionment of Catholic soldiers following internment and the events of Bloody Sunday. As with the RUC, this led to the UDR being viewed as a sectarian force and there were some cases of collusion between its members and loyalist paramilitaries.⁴⁴⁰ Women were also encouraged to participate in the unit and became known as ‘greenfinches,’ they often operated radios and made up for the shortage of soldiers available to search female suspects. The number of women in the UDR rose to a steady figure of over 700.⁴⁴¹ The UDR was amalgamated into the Royal Irish Rangers in 1992 which also recruited from the Irish Republic, helping to ensure more Catholic participation.⁴⁴²

E Summary of Outcomes

The end of the Northern Ireland conflict was anything but certain. The core underlying tensions that gave rise to the Troubles have not been conclusively resolved, though a cessation of the IRA’s armed campaign has brought a watchful peace to the province. The process leading up to the signing of the Belfast, or Good Friday Agreement in 1998 – while beyond the scope of this study – marks the only truly negotiated conclusion to a COIN effort considered by this thesis. This makes the Northern Ireland conflict remarkable in that few can agree on why it ended – if it even has.

⁴³⁸ ‘Chequered History of Irish Regiment’ (1 August 2005)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4736301.stm> accessed 30 May 2023.

⁴³⁹ John Potter, *A Testimony to Courage: The Regimental History of the Ulster Defence Regiment* (Leo Cooper 2001) 29 & 375.

⁴⁴⁰ Chris Ryder, *The Ulster Defence Regiment: An Instrument of Peace?* (Methuen 1991) 150.

⁴⁴¹ Potter (n 439) 117.

⁴⁴² ‘The Ulster Defence Regiment | National Army Museum’ <<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/ulster-defence-regiment>> accessed 30 May 2023.

VI *Northern Irish Case Study Analysis*

A *Introduction*

With the Northern Ireland conflict and the security response now introduced, the methods employed to combat the IRA may be more closely examined. The following section explores how the counterinsurgency campaign was fought from the perspective of the intelligence war. Thereafter, lessons which may be drawn from the case study are proposed. Of primary importance in this regard is the failure to secure the support of the civilian population in the initial phase of the COIN effort. Despite the security forces' inability to separate insurgents from civilian populations, Northern Ireland served as a test bed for promising innovations in counterinsurgency – most prominently in the realm of intelligence.

B *The Intelligence War*

The circumstances the British government aimed to create in Northern Ireland between 1976 and 1989 were a state in which the IRA could not exert influence over Northern Ireland's economic and political future, thus warranting the abandonment of their campaign.⁴⁴³

Assessing that peace without the participation of the Provisionals was not possible, however, the goal of Britain's security policy shifted to establishing conditions under which the IRA would be encouraged to engage increasingly in conventional politics, rather than terrorism.⁴⁴⁴

Central to both approaches was the use of intelligence informed security measures to disrupt IRA activity and, at the heart of that effort, was the recruitment of agents and informers.

1 *Intelligence-led operations*

Most, if not all, of the security forces' activities in some way informed the state's intelligence machinery. From soldiers conducting patrols, to agents embedded in IRA cells, to cameras poked through riot shields, to helicopter or device-based surveillance – the Northern Ireland security apparatus was comprehensive. The leviathan of state security was comprised of many civil organisations and military units, each playing their part in the response. While

⁴⁴³ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, 'The Longest Negotiation: British Policy, IRA Strategy and the Making of the Northern Ireland Peace Settlement' (2015) 63 *Political Studies* 202, 7 <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9248.12091>> accessed 28 April 2023.

⁴⁴⁴ Leahy (n 347) 134.

there were tensions along the way, from the 1980s onward the integration of the security forces was ensured through a police-led, regional approach reminiscent of Malaya. Throughout the conflict, the focus of intelligence-led operations was directed by the Government: the first theme to be discussed below.

(a) The relationship between government and intelligence-led operations

Cabinet was integrated with the intelligence machinery of the state and directed the activities of the security forces. Government policy was thus informed by both the flow of information and each administration's varying goals in Northern Ireland. For example, under Harold Wilson, the intended direction of travel was towards an independent Northern Ireland.⁴⁴⁵ Throughout the majority of the Troubles – excluding Thatcher's premiership – the policy was a 'dual-approach' between negotiation and applying pressure on the IRA through intelligence-led operations. Arguably, it was the latter method – that sought to force the IRA into a ceasefire – that prevailed. Irrespective of the leadership's goals, the security forces were constantly engaged in combating the IRA and collecting intelligence. As Operation BANNER explains, '[t]he whole campaign rapidly became dominated by considerations of intelligence.'⁴⁴⁶ This was largely because, as Frank Kitson suggested in his book on COIN, 'the problem of defeating enemy armed groups and their supporters consists very largely of finding them,' emphasising the 'paramount importance of good information.'⁴⁴⁷ Such information also carried weight in determining each administration's approach to the political concerns belying the conflict. Thus, the security forces collated intelligence with significance at both the tactical and strategic levels. When considering the significance of intelligence-led operations in a security assessment in 1971, Kitson warned that "future success [against the IRA] will be increasingly hard to achieve ... unless we make our organisation very much more efficient."⁴⁴⁸ As such, it is important to consider the difficulties the British faced in obtaining intelligence – the currency of counterinsurgency – before considering how these difficulties were overcome.

⁴⁴⁵ Leahy (n 347) 113.

⁴⁴⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 501.

⁴⁴⁷ Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-Keeping* (Paperback ed, Faber and Faber 1991) 95.

⁴⁴⁸ Leahy (n 347) 29–30.

(b) Problems with intelligence-led operations

In practice, the security forces were not consistent in their success in reducing IRA activity across the United Kingdom. Put simply, some regions were better than others but, even then, not consistently. Leahy proposes that there are various explanations as to why the security forces struggled to contain the Belfast and Derry City IRA in the opening years of the Troubles, for example. Foremost among them was the ‘sense of alienation felt by the nationalist population towards the British state.’⁴⁴⁹ The lack of intelligence available was no doubt due to the legacy of those critical failures made early in the Army’s deployment and the widely held assumption among Catholics that the RUC was sectarian. The indiscriminate searches of nationalist areas and use of interment were both a cause and consequence of the unwillingness of the population to provide information, forming, as Leahy described it, a ‘vicious circle.’⁴⁵⁰

IRA barricades also decreased intelligence gathering opportunities for the British. Even worse, they provided the republicans with the opportunity to present themselves as protecting nationalist communities from both the Army and loyalist paramilitaries. There is also some evidence to suggest, though, that the security forces’ indiscriminate actions were spurred on not just by a lack of operational intelligence, but by the Heath government’s desire to gain ‘short-term advantages over the IRA,’ rather than to address ‘the political factors.’⁴⁵¹ As Omand suggests, the use of intelligence and security measures should ideally be used to buy ‘time for longer term measures addressing the roots of the current problems to take effect.’⁴⁵² Rather than trophy hunting, the use of intelligence-led operations was largely employed as a ‘stick’ to prompt the insurgents to negotiate. However, this can only be effective when the insurgents’ activities are meaningfully disrupted and in Northern Ireland, even when the IRA killed fewer people, their operations continued at a slow but consistent burn in many regions when compared with the inferno of 1971-1972. Applying pressure on the insurgents through security measures in the hopes they will acquiesce to a political solution seems to be unlikely to deliver a stable political solution or their definitive defeat, but this was how the conflict eventually ended.

⁴⁴⁹ Leahy (n 347) 36.

⁴⁵⁰ Leahy (n 347) 37.

⁴⁵¹ Leahy (n 347) 39.

⁴⁵² David Omand, *Securing the State* (Oxford University Press 2010) 261.

(c) Examples of how the intelligence machinery worked

As human and technical source intelligence will be addressed later, it is useful to examine the broader framework of the intelligence machine. As in Malaya, initial security measures were enabled by large and sweeping policies such as the Malaya-inspired implementation of personality cards used in identifying civilians. The early lack of intelligence began to give way to a clearer picture of events by September of 1972, when a total of 60,000 personality cards had been issued (containing basic biographical details) and the security forces had established the terrorists' order of battle.⁴⁵³ Personality cards were useful for the RUC and Army as they could be used to apprehend insurgents impersonating other civilians.⁴⁵⁴ An inventive method of intelligence gathering was photographing Sinn Féin and IRA attendees at republican 1916 commemorations.⁴⁵⁵ Of regular usefulness was the vehicle registration system which enabled the vehicles of known terrorists to be tracked as well as the potential insurgent threat posed by recently stolen vehicles. However, this system revealed limitations in the security effort as well.

Firstly, IRA traffic across the border with the Republic was considerable and included all the amenities needed to fuel the terrorists' campaign. Yet, as British jurisdiction ended at the border and collaboration with the Gardaí was inconsistent, cars carrying weapons or transporting terrorists could get through. The system also relied on the use of Army checkpoints which, by 1972, were used by the Army to search around 8400 vehicles per day. The IRA would also become aware of checkpoints and either avoid or target them for attacks.⁴⁵⁶ Where the Irish border proved prohibitive to British security efforts, the Derry City, South Armagh, East Tyrone and Fermanagh IRA would use it to flee pursuing police or soldiers.⁴⁵⁷ With IRA members sheltering or even living in the border regions of the Irish Republic, the usefulness of measures like personality cards waned.⁴⁵⁸ The system for checking vehicles was also hindered by the technology of the time. If a soldier needed to know the status and registration of a vehicle, a call would have to be made to the operators in

⁴⁵³ Leahy (n 347) 87–88.

⁴⁵⁴ Leahy (n 347) 88.

⁴⁵⁵ Leahy (n 347) 156.

⁴⁵⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 507.

⁴⁵⁷ Leahy (n 347) 44.

⁴⁵⁸ Leahy (n 347) 44.

Coleraine who would “physical[ly] [perform a] visual search of files.” This process meant that staff could only process about “10 requests an hour.”⁴⁵⁹ Likewise, not all of the cars in Belfast’s rush hour traffic could be screened. According to a security report from the time, they were generally selected at random meaning some IRA volunteers would be missed, allowing them to sneak bombs into town on the luck of the Irish.⁴⁶⁰ This issue was well understood at the time; in 1973, daily vehicle searches rose to 14,000 per day meaning cars were searched at a rate of around ten per minute.⁴⁶¹ The inefficiency of the manual system would be addressed however. Vehicle registration proved increasingly useful; first after Operation MOTORMAN prevented the IRA from hiding vehicles behind barricades and then again with the advent of computers.⁴⁶²

Computerisation undoubtedly revolutionised the intelligence sharing capabilities of the security forces as it enabled swift access to information. For example, when journalist Robert Fisk accompanied an Army patrol in 1974 in Belfast, he was asked by one of the sergeants to pick a house number on the street at random. The sergeant assured Fisk he could tell him the colour of the sofa inside. Via radio, the patrol asked an operator of the electronic database to relay the information to them for immediate use and, as Fisk recalls, ‘within 30 seconds the sergeant brought me the information that the sofa was brown. It was.’⁴⁶³ Fisk realised the potential for the system to catch out insurgents impersonating others or lying to security forces, but also the extent to which society was becoming dominated by the security concerns of the state.⁴⁶⁴ The advent of computerisation and the collection of information on as many citizens as possible provided the security forces with another means to solve what Kitson identified as the central problem of COIN: finding insurgents. Albeit, the price for this was a system that held an increasing amount of information on private citizens and that was allegedly first trialled in England without public knowledge.⁴⁶⁵ Developments were also made in Northern Ireland regarding the use of special forces.

⁴⁵⁹ Leahy (n 347) 90.

⁴⁶⁰ Leahy (n 347) 90.

⁴⁶¹ Leahy (n 347) 90.

⁴⁶² Leahy (n 347) 87.

⁴⁶³ Robert Fisk, ‘Army’s Computer Has Data on Half the Population in Ulster’ *The Times* (London, 5 December 1974) 1.

⁴⁶⁴ Leahy (n 347) 87–88.

⁴⁶⁵ Fisk (n 463) 1.

(d) How Special Operations Forces Contributed to Intelligence-led operations

The use of special operations forces has now become a widely accepted part of intelligence-led operations, but it was in Northern Ireland where this practice matured. As in Malaya, special forces were deployed to the most difficult to reach and inhospitable environments, where their unique training was best exploited. However, in Northern Ireland, special forces also became closely integrated into the intelligence war. For example, the MRF's close surveillance operations were an initially promising infiltration of security forces into the community. They were, however, an ultimately misguided panacea to the general dearth of intelligence. By being compromised and allegedly carrying out attacks previously blamed on loyalists, the MRF went from an inventive source of intelligence to a liability.⁴⁶⁶ The Det had greater success in filling their close surveillance role and were better supported by other elements of the security forces. They could rely, for instance, on the Army Air Corps to provide helicopter reconnaissance and worked alongside the RUC and SAS as part of the Tasking and Coordinating Groups (TCGs). These developments allowed the Det to become a more enduring part of the security response. Their close surveillance capabilities were effective enough to allow, as one former operator claims, Gerry Adams to sit unknowingly on the bonnet of a military vehicle at a Sinn Féin event.⁴⁶⁷ The SAS again filled a role similar to their service in Malaya. They were deployed in the most dangerous parts of the province. However, unlike in Malaya, they were not tasked with winning over locals while they hunted insurgents, rather, their primary contribution was in setting up ambushes or arrests with the assistance of the RUC.⁴⁶⁸ In East Tyrone in particular, SAS ambushes killed many insurgents and arguably instigated the decline of the IRA in the region. These activities were coordinated through the TCGs which enabled the Army and RUC to avoid rivalry and collaboratively conduct operations based on shared intelligence.

(e) How Intelligence-led operations were organised and conducted by the Army

At the battalion level, intelligence was gathered by interpreting information from green army (non-special forces) patrols which included conversations with the locals. It also involved the use of covert observation posts and photography (particularly of people at republican funerals and riots) and the interpretation of open intelligence sources such as republican pamphlets.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁶ Arascain (n 340) 38.

⁴⁶⁷ Urban (n 431) 155.

⁴⁶⁸ Arascain (n 340) 76–78.

⁴⁶⁹ Arascain (n 340) 9.

Another source of information were the battalions' reconnaissance platoons which would set up concealed observation posts (OPs) around locations of interest including sites of illegal border crossings. Later, these platoons would also provide 'close observation troops' with some of the more ambitious units operating in plain clothes, observing republicans from inside their communities.⁴⁷⁰ An example of this was a soldier who, in the guise of a tramp, set up an OP in the loft of an abandoned chip shop.⁴⁷¹ Soldiers from D Company, 1PARA also operated in plain clothes in 1971 in order to help the RUC prevent bus hijackings in Belfast.⁴⁷² The battalion's intelligence section would collate and analyse information from these sources and try to establish who in their area had IRA links. The intelligence officer then passed this information up the chain to the brigade in weekly reports, then back down again when briefing the soldiers before their patrols.⁴⁷³ With the introduction of the computer system – called 'Vengeful' – at battalion headquarters, the swift distribution of intelligence products was enhanced. By the late 1970s, the Army also began to run agents of its own. Technological development also favoured the use of helicopter reconnaissance.

(f) The use of helicopters

Continuing a theme from Malaya, the use of helicopters and other aircraft was developed further in Northern Ireland. Specifically, the role of helicopters was to provide aerial reconnaissance and to transport troops and supplies. When vehicle patrols were stopped in South Armagh due to the danger posed by roadside bombs, the use of helicopters became an essential part of the logistics framework in the region commonly referred to as 'bandit country.' Helicopters were thus targeted by the IRA on many occasions and while they were often fired upon and occasionally damaged in flight, the terrorists were largely unable to deny their use.⁴⁷⁴ As an observation tool, helicopters were an exceptionally useful asset in both urban and rural settings. Technological developments in optics, such as thermal imaging, proved invaluable. The Lynx helicopter's optics were reputedly capable of observing a front door from a horizontal distance of 8km and an altitude of 8,000 feet, where the helicopter

⁴⁷⁰ Arascain (n 340) 10.

⁴⁷¹ Arascain (n 340) 11.

⁴⁷² Arascain (n 340) 33.

⁴⁷³ Arascain (n 340) 25–26.

⁴⁷⁴ *THE BRITS IN SOUTH ARMAGH PART 1* (Directed by dan breen, 2011) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lgwwbuVf4M>> accessed 30 April 2023.

itself would be invisible and inaudible to the tracked target.⁴⁷⁵ The mere presence of a helicopter was sufficient to deter some IRA operations in Belfast according to Gerry Bradley, an IRA member.⁴⁷⁶ Unlike in Malaya, technical intelligence too was a solid fixture of the security landscape in Northern Ireland.

(g) The role of technical source intelligence

GCHQ, MI5 and RUC Special Branch all cooperated on the technical side of the intelligence war. GCHQ flooded the province with radio signals on IRA bomb command frequencies, leading to the premature detonation of some devices. With the IRA attempting to adapt their bombmaking methods to avoid this, a ‘scientific war’ ensued between them and GCHQ.⁴⁷⁷ The use of listening devices was also an important TECHINT feature, particularly in the 1980s as it had the advantage of providing an uncertain origin for information used by the security forces. This no doubt heightened IRA paranoia regarding informers. Technical source intelligence was a developing strength of the security forces and, when combined with human sources and the Vengeful computer record system, the IRA faced increased challenges from a diverse array of sources by the 1980s, particularly in Belfast.

(h) Strategic considerations

Intelligence on the strategic – as opposed to the tactical – level was a relevant consideration in Northern Ireland where the outcome of the conflict would be decided by politics. Also on the strategic level, it was a conflict-level revelation when the security forces learned of the Belfast IRA’s developing cell structure in 1977.⁴⁷⁸ Frank Steele from MI6 learned of this from IRA member, Brendan Duddy, concluding that ‘[t]here was now a small but taut organisation with adequate supplies of arms and explosives which could efficiently mount attacks against us indefinitely.’⁴⁷⁹ Ultimately, it was this capacity to continue mounting attacks that prevented the defeat of the IRA. Bugging Sinn Féin politicians during negotiations was also an example of the use of intelligence on the strategic level. During the

⁴⁷⁵ James Rennie, *The Operators: On the Street with Britain’s Most Secret Service* (Pen and Sword 2014) 283–284.

⁴⁷⁶ Gerry Bradley and Brian Feeney, *Insider: Gerry Bradley’s Life in the IRA* (The O’Brien Press 2011) 202–207.

⁴⁷⁷ Aldrich (n 420) 499.

⁴⁷⁸ Leahy (n 347) 88.

⁴⁷⁹ Leahy (n 347) 89.

negotiations for the peace process, the IRA became aware of this surveillance, however, when then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, demonstrated her knowledge of matters she could only be aware of through clandestine sources.⁴⁸⁰ Earlier, the Wilson government also sought to employ intelligence to find the means of political compromise.⁴⁸¹ It is also speculated that the IRA may have also passed on information to the British regarding troublesome units. As IRA member Brendan Hughes alleges, ‘senior Republicans “threw caution to the wind” ... by deliberately damaging strong IRA units to prevent them from opposing the ceasefire.’⁴⁸² It is also alleged that the IRA and HMG exchanged information regarding ‘on the run’ members of the IRA during the peace process, demonstrating the utility of political intelligence in ending the armed component of the Northern Ireland conflict.⁴⁸³

2 Human intelligence Northern Ireland

Human intelligence, Frank Kitson has suggested, was viewed by the security forces as the key to resolving many aspects of the conflict.⁴⁸⁴ This is no coincidence as Kitson commanded the 39th Infantry Brigade responsible for Belfast between 1970 and 1972.⁴⁸⁵ Indeed, the primary benefit of intelligence was that it enabled security responses to target only those involved directly with the IRA, without aggravating the wider community. Human intelligence was also able to focus on more specific targets than technical source information such as recording devices stashed in vacant buildings. The process for obtaining human sources of intelligence was surprisingly straight forward. Members of the public or IRA were recruited by agent-handlers, primarily from within the RUC Special Branch but also the Army’s FRU and, more rarely, MI5. The source would be approached by the recruiters through a variety of means to avoid drawing suspicion. Prompts enabling undercover personnel to speak to people of interest in the community would be contrived, such as picking them up while hitchhiking, bumping into them in minor traffic collisions or delivering them letters telling them to collect a prize.⁴⁸⁶ If they were perceived as reliable, sources would be

⁴⁸⁰ Aldrich (n 420) 500.

⁴⁸¹ Aldrich and Cormac (n 345) 308–311.

⁴⁸² Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men’s War in Ireland* (1st ed, Public Affairs 2010) 277.

⁴⁸³ Greg McKeivitt, ‘On the Runs - Key Questions and Inquiry Findings’ *BBC News* (24 March 2015) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-26359906>> accessed 1 June 2022.

⁴⁸⁴ Leahy (n 347) 30.

⁴⁸⁵ Arascain (n 340) 12.

⁴⁸⁶ Arascain (n 340) 47–49.

paid for any information they passed on to the security forces.⁴⁸⁷ The British human intelligence network was, throughout the entire conflict, the primary source of information for the security forces.

Other sources of intelligence, while increasingly significant in Northern Ireland, were – despite technological progress – of secondary importance. According to William Matchett of RUC Special Branch, HUMINT accounted for the majority of the intelligence collected during the Troubles. Matchett adds that the remainder was sourced from technical sources (telephone intercepts and eavesdropping on buildings/vehicles of known terrorists), surveillance and framework operations (routine police and army patrols that interacted with the public), as well as open sources including local newspapers and community stroke parish bulletins).⁴⁸⁸ Matchett’s description of the distribution of intelligence sources resembles the chart in Figure 1:⁴⁸⁹

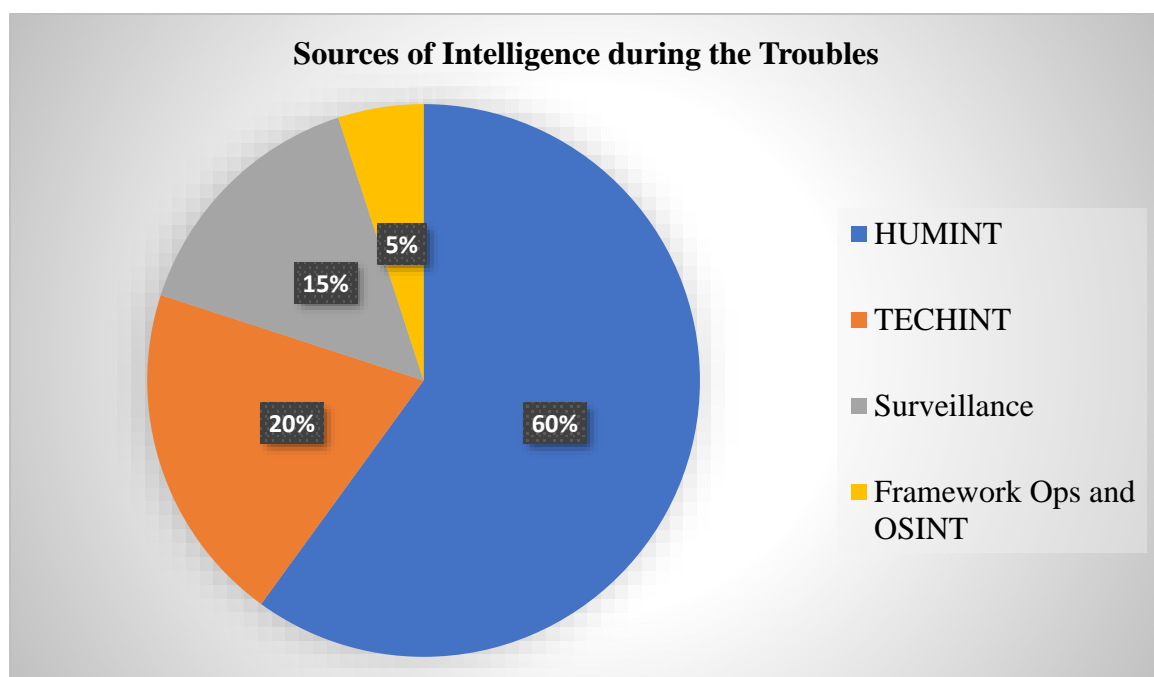


Figure 1: Sources of Intelligence during the Troubles

This emphasis on the human dimension was well placed, particularly as the IRA downsized and developed cells.

⁴⁸⁷ Leahy (n 347) 139.

⁴⁸⁸ Leahy (n 347) 9.

⁴⁸⁹ William Matchett, *Secret Victory: The Intelligence War That Beat the IRA* (International edition, William Matchett? 2016) 98–100.

(a) IRA Counterintelligence

Indeed, prior to adopting the cell format, among other counterintelligence strategies, the IRA were vulnerable to infiltration as IRA member Danny Morrison told Leahy: “‘it was fairly easy for the British to discover... who carried out an IRA operation,’ due to the locally recruited nature of their brigade format.⁴⁹⁰ Matchett also attests, from the RUC perspective, that due to Northern Ireland’s close-knit communities, one usually knew who was involved in IRA operations, but often lacked the evidence to prove it.⁴⁹¹ The IRA warned its recruits against alcohol-loosened talk in its ‘green book,’ the manifesto it promulgated to outline the organisation’s purpose and prepare members for resisting interrogation.⁴⁹² Such was the IRA’s fear of British infiltration that its newsletter *An Phoblacht* reported in 1974: ‘the greatest weapon England has is that of the informer. Without [them] ... the people of Ireland would have had full control over their country a long time ago.’⁴⁹³ A key part of the IRA’s counterintelligence strategy was observation; the IRA’s local knowledge of people and vehicles meant that security forces’ could be identified and potentially targeted.⁴⁹⁴ Central to the IRA’s organisational culture was the ‘need-to-know basis’ it kept volunteers on meaning those asking questions would fall under suspicion. As a consequence of their perhaps justified paranoia towards British intelligence, the IRA also developed an internal security department tasked with finding agents and informers. However, this presented a unique HUMINT opportunity for the British to gain an overall picture of the IRA’s structure and to protect informers. The security forces succeeded in placing an informer within this secretive group known as Stakeknife (to be discussed in subsection c). One of the IRA’s less successful counterintelligence tactics was questioning individuals following Police or Army screening operations, themselves among a number of HUMINT initiatives pursued by the security forces.

(b) Highlighted methods

Indeed, screening was highlighted by Operation BANNER as a useful cover for the recruitment of agents and informers as many people were rounded up, questioned and then

⁴⁹⁰ Leahy (n 347) 85.

⁴⁹¹ Matchett (n 489) 6.

⁴⁹² ‘CAIN: Events: Text of Irish Republican Army (IRA) “Green Book” (Book I and II)’ (n 339).

⁴⁹³ ‘Loose Talk Can Be Fatal’ *An Phoblacht* (Dublin, 25 January 1974).

⁴⁹⁴ Leahy (n 347) 161.

released. Screening also enabled the gathering of information from civilians as '[d]etaining individuals for a few hours' gave 'some individuals [who] were quite happy to pass on information in privacy,' an opportunity to do so.⁴⁹⁵ From the IRA's perspective, 'questioning individuals after informing did not prevent informing.' As IRA member Bradley suggests: '[m]ost people did talk ... and afterwards told the IRA they didn't.'⁴⁹⁶ Furthermore, the questioning did not always directly concern the insurgents meaning civilians might provide useful background information thus helping the security forces gain a more complete HUMINT picture.

MOTORMAN, and the destruction of the paramilitary barricades, greatly helped intelligence gathering in Belfast. Soldiers of the Royal Green Jackets were even asked to attempt to recruit HUMINT sources while on patrol in 1974 and were provided with a guide for doing so.⁴⁹⁷ Agents and informers were gradually recruited and some even volunteered. Without the access to the population that Operation MOTORMAN allowed, the security forces would have remained in the intelligence rut that characterised the early years of the conflict. Taking back the streets also prevented the IRA from conducting their own surveillance of those individuals they suspected of helping the authorities.

(c) How effective was the HUMINT apparatus?

There are different ways of assessing the effectiveness of the HUMINT apparatus and, indeed, the efficacy of the security response against the IRA as a whole. In terms of the actionable intelligence the security forces were receiving, the ability of the Police and Army to prevent IRA attacks varied on a regional basis. Broadly, Matchett suggests, around 85% of IRA attacks were foiled by agents, but the IRA still continued to strike.⁴⁹⁸ For example, '[t]he frequency of major operations in England during the 1990s indicates a lack of consistent infiltration of the IRA leadership.'⁴⁹⁹ However, in Belfast by the 1990s, there was evidence that the IRA were struggling to keep up their terrorist operations. After 1992, the IRA in

⁴⁹⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 504.

⁴⁹⁶ Bradley and Feeney (n 476) 103–104.

⁴⁹⁷ David A Charters, "'Have A Go': British Army/MI5 Agent-Running Operations in Northern Ireland, 1970–72' (2013) 28 *Intelligence and National Security* 202, 217
<<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02684527.2012.708217>> accessed 2 May 2023.

⁴⁹⁸ Matchett (n 489) 101.

⁴⁹⁹ Leahy (n 347) 191.

Belfast did not succeed in killing any further British soldiers in the city.⁵⁰⁰ Meanwhile, South Armagh had become, by 1997, ‘one of the most heavily monitored parts of the world’ yet the IRA continued to operate there.⁵⁰¹ In Londonderry, the IRA reputedly struggled with infiltration with some key local members becoming informers which resulted in many arrests and the confiscation of arms smuggled from Libya. The IRA responded by killing many of those whom they suspected of informing, but it seems unlikely that all those who were ‘disappeared,’ were agents or informers.⁵⁰² In all of these regional examples, the IRA could be said to have suffered varying degrees of infiltration. Due to enduring secrecy, it is uncertain what the precise scale of the impact of agents and informers was in each region, however, Matchett attests that over the course of the Troubles, 16,500 lives were saved by agents and informers.⁵⁰³

Despite the killing of informants occurring intermittently throughout the conflict, the British were potentially able to protect sources as they had compromised the IRA’s internal security department or ‘Nutting Squad.’ This secretive group had oversight over much of the IRA’s organisation including desirable targets such as the quartermasters and logistical structure. The agent codenamed Stakeknife succeeded in breaching the IRA’s internal security department where the significance of his being a ‘tout-finder general’ within the IRA enabled him to significantly disrupt IRA operations – potentially helping to bring Republicans to the negotiating table.⁵⁰⁴ Stakeknife is widely accepted to be Frank Scappaticci who died in April, 2023. Over the course of his involvement in the IRA’s ‘Nutting Squad,’ 35 people were reputedly killed by it,⁵⁰⁵ including Garda Special Branch informer, Tom Oliver – who may have been close to enabling Scappaticci’s arrest in the Republic. It is alleged by Ingram and Harkin that the FRU allowed Oliver’s execution by the Nutting Squad.⁵⁰⁶ It is uncertain what precise impact Stakeknife had on the IRA’s ability to conduct operations, nevertheless, his position within the IRA and the fact that he was not caught suggests he offered valuable intelligence to the British.

⁵⁰⁰ Leahy (n 347) 143.

⁵⁰¹ Toby Harnden, *‘Bandit Country’: The IRA and South Armagh* (Coronet 2000) 252–262.

⁵⁰² Leahy (n 347) 158–160.

⁵⁰³ Matchett (n 489) 100–101.

⁵⁰⁴ Greg Harkin and Martin Ingram, *Stakeknife: Britain’s Secret Agents in Ireland* (The O’Brien Press 2012) 73.

⁵⁰⁵ Harkin and Ingram (n 504) 89.

⁵⁰⁶ Harkin and Ingram (n 504) 120.

3 Separating the insurgents from their support network

Security theorist David Omand argues that ‘successful security policies require the state to only target paramilitaries,’ and that it is counterproductive to employ measures which ‘target the entire community from which the paramilitaries emanate.’⁵⁰⁷ In Northern Ireland, this rule of COIN was especially important as the insurgents relied on the local people. In particular, their silence was crucial. If the nationalist and republican civilian populations had not supported the IRA, it may have been possible to eradicate them.⁵⁰⁸ This section focuses on the reasons why, at times, the collaboration of the local people could not be obtained and the measures employed which sought to separate civilian from insurgent in Northern Ireland.

The key to gaining the support of the local community from which the terrorists emanate is understanding the concerns motivating them. Omand establishes that even if such communities cannot be marshalled to support the state – or convinced of the necessity of security policies – at the very least ‘[r]eassurance is needed that their community is not being stigmatised or discriminated against.’ Fostering this understanding in harmony with ‘effective intelligence led action’ is the bedrock of a successful counterinsurgency.⁵⁰⁹ As has already been established, the British initially failed to meet these standards, though the quality of intelligence did improve and worked to restrict IRA activity in certain regions as the conflict continued. This highlights the importance of understanding the regional level of analysis when considering efforts to separate civilian from insurgent.

The activities of the security forces – particularly in the early years of the Troubles – contributed to a rise in IRA violence in Belfast and Londonderry. This was largely due to the use of indiscriminate methods when seeking to gain intelligence and detain insurgents. Furthermore, the influence of the events of Bloody Sunday permeated throughout the conflict. In rural areas, the British contributed to a drive in IRA numbers by introducing internment and screening in these regions as well. Unintentionally, the British provided the

⁵⁰⁷ Omand (n 452) 265.

⁵⁰⁸ Shane Paul O’Doherty, *The Volunteer* (Strategic Book Group 2011) 98–99.

⁵⁰⁹ Omand (n 452) 265.

Tyrone IRA with what Leahy identified as a recruitment boom.⁵¹⁰ While these policies failed to separate citizen from insurgent, the security forces had to do something about the IRA. Where the British may have improved their counterinsurgency strategy in those early years of the Troubles, lay in the art of ‘reduc[ing] levels of terrorist activity... Without raising the political temperature in a way that could contribute to radicalisation.’⁵¹¹

The British began to make a difference in this area in the urban centres due to Operation MOTORMAN and with the arrests of notable republicans – such as Martin McGuinness – in late 1972. While it was too overconfident to state, as Sir Frank Cooper did, that the IRA were ‘battered in Belfast and at a standstill in Londonderry,’⁵¹² taking back control of the streets paid off. Besides opening the door for intelligence opportunities, the establishment of permanent Army checkpoints restricted the IRA’s ability to smuggle bombs and weapons into Belfast.⁵¹³ In Londonderry, the British had, in the words of Derry City IRA member O’Doherty, ‘effective control of the ghettos in Derry’ by August of 1972.⁵¹⁴ This did not halt IRA activity in that troubled city, however.

Londonderry shares a border with the Republic which was a persistent problem throughout the conflict. Luckily, this security concern was shared by Dublin which had begun to take more serious steps to combat the IRA by the mid-1970s. The Garda initiated a crackdown by 1975 following the killing of Fine Gael senator, Billy Fox, by the IRA in March 1974. The IRA were also performing robberies in Southern Ireland further prompting an Irish security response.⁵¹⁵ Cooperation between the RUC and Garda was, while patchy, occasionally productive. However, the Gardaí were always a much smaller and less well armed force that was not always able to respond to the challenge posed by what had become a formidable insurgent threat.⁵¹⁶ They relied on collaboration with the RUC and British intelligence to take action against the IRA, such as when the Gardaí seized 100 rifles and pistols along with

⁵¹⁰ Leahy (n 347) 48.

⁵¹¹ Frank Foley, *Countering Terrorism in Britain and France: Institutions, Norms, and the Shadow of the Past* (Cambridge University Press 2013) 317.

⁵¹² Leahy (n 347) 91.

⁵¹³ Leahy (n 347) 88.

⁵¹⁴ O’Doherty (n 508) 92–99.

⁵¹⁵ Patrick Mulroe, *Bombs, Bullets and the Border: Policing Ireland’s Frontier: Irish Security Policy, 1969-1978* (Irish Academic Press 2017) 101 & 186–187.

⁵¹⁶ Matchett (n 489) 12–14.

21,000 rounds of ammunition from a weapons cache sent to the IRA from Libya.⁵¹⁷ The information for this significant coup came to the Gardaí from the British authorities by way of FRU Agent 3018, Frank Hegarty, which cost him his life.⁵¹⁸ The British also had concerns that the Gardaí had been infiltrated by the IRA.⁵¹⁹

While the goal of the security forces in COIN is to separate the civilian population from the insurgents, it should also be recognised that the IRA's own actions sometimes worked to isolate them from their community. Through indiscriminate action, the insurgents are also capable of sabotaging their support among the civilian population, particularly through death or injury caused by their bombings and shootings. One example was the killing of Londonderry local and Catholic British soldier, Ranger William Best, by the OIRA. His murder caused such an outcry that it led to a 200 strong community march on the Officials' headquarters with an estimated 5,000 later attending his funeral.⁵²⁰ These events show the power of a community rejecting an insurgency as they likely initiated the OIRA's permanent ceasefire thereafter. The violence of the Provisionals also drove one woman to volunteer to become an agent for the FRU after she was disgusted by the killings of the corporals pulled from their car near Milltown cemetery in 1988.⁵²¹ The paranoia caused by potential infiltration of the IRA also prompted the insurgents to lash out against the community in search of informers. The IRA killed a number of civilians suspected of informing such as developmentally challenged fifteen-year-old Bernard Teggart, who told IRA members to leave a lorry driver they were hijacking alone. British soldiers arrested the IRA men soon after and thus Teggart, who had the mental age of an eight-year-old, was murdered by the IRA.⁵²² Indeed, there are a variety of reasons for insurgents, at times, to turn their violence on the community that supports them or, indeed, inward against their own ranks.⁵²³

Nationalist opinion began to turn against the IRA following their developing use of forced or proxy suicide bombings whereby a civilian was kidnapped and forced to drive a car bomb to

⁵¹⁷ Harkin and Ingram (n 504) 123.

⁵¹⁸ Harkin and Ingram (n 504) 125–126.

⁵¹⁹ Harkin and Ingram (n 504) 118.

⁵²⁰ David McKittrick (ed), *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women, and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Mainstream 1999) 189–190.

⁵²¹ Arascain (n 340) 48.

⁵²² McKittrick (n 520) 400–401.

⁵²³ Steve Hewitt, *Snitch! A History of the Modern Intelligence Informer* (Continuum 2010) 8–10 & 61.

a location.⁵²⁴ Even in the city where the government had done the most to be despised by the locals, the IRA's reputation was not entirely secure. For the civilian population, the disruption caused by insurgent violence can be as polarising as the intrusive measures employed by the security forces in response. In Londonderry, for example, Taylor noted 'only 20 out of 150 shops in the city centre were still trading' even by the early 1970s.⁵²⁵

Despite these setbacks for the IRA, the security forces were still broadly despised by the Catholic population. The power of the insurgent among the people who have chosen to support them is indeed a frightening prospect for the security forces.

Shane Paul O'Doherty, an IRA member, understood this power when describing the effectiveness of the IRA in Londonderry prior to the 1975 ceasefires: 'the most efficient and lethal IRA I had ever experienced ... we were running rings round the Army and Police.'⁵²⁶ The remedy to this viral outbreak of terrorist activity would have been intelligence, but there was not enough support for the security forces in Londonderry and thus a mixture of genuine support and fear enabled the IRA to continue operating. Derry City IRA member, Niall O'Dochartaigh, suspects his activities as part of the local insurgency were supported because of the legacy of Bloody Sunday, a general sectarian hatred toward the RUC and the disruptive impact of security measures enforced by the Army.⁵²⁷ From the perspective of the security forces, it should have been easy to find and arrest or kill the 'at most, forty to fifty active IRA volunteers in Derry City by the mid-1970s,' according to British Army intelligence estimates recalled by Bryan Webster – commander of the Eighth Infantry Brigade.⁵²⁸ The Garda had similar problems in Donegal. The cooperation of the community could have made a real difference here as the Derry City IRA was led by members hiding in this part of the Republic and its volunteers retreated across the border after their attacks.⁵²⁹

In Belfast, the IRA leveraged their support among middle-class republicans, who were less likely to be visited by the security forces, for paramilitary activity. One IRA leader, Gerry

⁵²⁴ McKittrick (n 520) 1215–1216.

⁵²⁵ Peter Taylor, *The Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (Bloomsbury Paperbacks 2014) 152–153.

⁵²⁶ O'Doherty (n 508) 166.

⁵²⁷ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of Irish Troubles* (2nd ed, Palgrave Macmillan 2005) 249–252.

⁵²⁸ Leahy (n 347) 94.

⁵²⁹ Leahy (n 347) 94.

Bradley remembers ‘stay[ing] with teachers and businessmen ... hospital consultants, dentists,’ outside the Unity Flats area after 1972.’⁵³⁰ Belfast, however, had been the centre of a great amount of violence by the IRA and this had aided the British in recruiting agents and informers who were sick of it.⁵³¹ In stark contrast, in South Armagh the British were effectively against a community united in support of the IRA.

It can be argued that it was perhaps futile to try to seek the support of South Armagh’s locals who were broadly radicalised, but ‘[e]ven if the security forces did not aim to win local support,’ the use of indiscriminate force ‘hindered the attainment of their objective’ in reducing IRA violence to acceptable levels because it encouraged reprisals.⁵³² The intelligence war’s overall effect on the South Armagh IRA was minimal.⁵³³ As in Londonderry, the IRA presence in the area was a relatively small number of volunteers compared with the resources of the security forces, although the IRA was well supported by the locals. A former commander in the Royal Marines posted to South Armagh in the 1970s, Julian Thompson, suggested that the South Armagh IRA were “[q]uite a small number, probably no more than about 30 ... but they were supported by a big infrastructure of willing helpers.’⁵³⁴ These locals provided the IRA with intelligence, instead of the authorities. The government of the time viewed South Armagh as in a state of ‘virtual anarchy’ as Merlyn Rees and Frank Cooper described it to their Irish counterparts at their London embassy. This unit of the IRA was also the source of many of the volunteers sent to engage in terrorism in England because of, as Rees explained, their ‘highly dangerous level of sophistication.’⁵³⁵ The government’s response to these problematic rural IRA units was the deployment, by 1976, of the SAS which proved effective in Tyrone, but did not similarly defeat the South Armagh IRA by attrition – as it was hoped.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁰ Moloney (n 482) 167–173.

⁵³¹ Harkin and Ingram (n 504) 55–56.

⁵³² Leahy (n 347) 169.

⁵³³ Leahy (n 347) 96.

⁵³⁴ Leahy (n 347) 171.

⁵³⁵ Harnden (n 501) 158–159.

⁵³⁶ Leahy (n 347) 102.

C Contributions to the Understanding of Counterinsurgency

1 Importance of the administrative level

Part of what makes the administrative level of analysis so important is not only how it coordinates a cohesive response to the security threat, but also the means by which it overcomes internal difficulties such as rivalries. As was the case in Malaya, the security forces in Northern Ireland struggled with rivalries which impeded the security response to the paramilitaries. Whereas in Malaya, these rivalries were largely on the personal or individual level, in Ulster it was between institutions. There was initially a lack of trust and confidence between the Army and RUC which critically restricted the sharing of intelligence between them. A series of policy and structural reforms would work to improve this.

In a good characterisation of the problem, RUC Special Branch team leader Ian Phoenix noted that in the prosecution of the intelligence war, ‘people [build up] little fiefdoms’ which competed and secreted, rather than cooperated and shared.⁵³⁷ This reticence to share intelligence certainly disrupted security efforts against the IRA, As Omand suggests, ‘successful intelligence efforts required government agencies to work in tandem towards agreed objectives. In Northern Ireland the intelligence structures were at times inefficient and ineffective because of interagency rivalries.’⁵³⁸ An example of how institutional rivalries affected the coordination of the security forces is provided by RUC Special Branch officer, George Clarke, who cites the same concern Comber noted in Malaya: namely, that ‘Army units had a four month stint... All they really wanted were kills or trophies.’⁵³⁹ Much of the Army – with the exception of the locally recruited and largely part-time soldiers of the Ulster Defence Regiment – had a short-term mindset. They would eventually leave and wanted to make the most of the time they had. Clarke also notes that he was not always willing to share intelligence with the Army lest they imperil his sources.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁷ Jack Holland and Susan Phoenix, *Phoenix: Policing the Shadows* (Coronet Books 1997) 189–190.

⁵³⁸ Omand (n 452) 13 & 175–179.

⁵³⁹ George Clarke, *Border Crossing: True Stories of the RUC Special Branch, the Garda Special Branch and the IRA Moles* (Gill & Macmillan 2009) 11–12 & 125.

⁵⁴⁰ Leahy (n 347) 40.

From the Army's perspective, the RUC Special Branch was viewed as undersized, 'overworked' and ineffective in the early 1970s.⁵⁴¹ The RUC's reluctance to provide the Army with intelligence, led it to view them as 'secretive and mistrustful of outsiders.'⁵⁴² The allegiances of the two main arms of the security forces were also split. The RUC was loyal to loyalist Stormont whereas the British Army and the security services (GCHQ, MI5, and MI6) answered to London. The fact that there were also disagreements between the leaderships of the various governments in Westminster and Stormont, particularly over the latter's opposition to reforms, did little to help increase coordination between the policeman and the soldier.

Various measures were employed to facilitate more effective collaboration between the RUC and the Army, many of which were inspired by the approach taken in Malaya. Principally, the move to Police primacy with the Army providing aid to civil authority was a critical development. As in Malaya, Military Intelligence Liaison Officers (MILOs) were selected from the British Army's intelligence apparatus and embedded with the RUC Special Branch. Their role was to ensure intelligence flowed both ways between the RUC and Army by operating between two Police divisions.⁵⁴³ As the relationship between the RUC and Army improved, the MILOs would presumably have had greater access to police intelligence, enabling coordinated activities such as searches or arrests. Another key component of the cooperation was access to the computer system when it had been developed. There was a British Army computer system based in Lyburn, Thiepval barracks, which developed over the course of the Troubles, enabling swift access to information on both vehicles and people.⁵⁴⁴ It was linked to others around Northern Ireland ensuring that the intelligence products could be used, and threats tracked, across police and Army districts. The danger of a leak was mitigated by controlling access, though there were calls to allow RUC officers to use the computers.⁵⁴⁵ While the system improved the cohesion of the security forces, there were still some cultural problems that persisted that may have affected cooperation: Clarke for example, says that some MILOs 'were upper-class twits, living in another world.'⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴¹ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 309.

⁵⁴² Ministry of Defence (n 344) paras 308 & 502.

⁵⁴³ Arascain (n 340) 15.

⁵⁴⁴ Arascain (n 340) 22–24.

⁵⁴⁵ Leahy (n 347) 96.

⁵⁴⁶ Clarke (n 539) 11–12.

As previously referred to, there was also a system of cooperation between special operations forces and the RUC. The TCGs involved members of the SAS, Det, FRU and RUC Special Branch with some participation from MI5. Their principal function was to avoid conflicts in undercover work where security concerns and secrecy were both intricate and delicate. The regional nature of the TCGs also reflected the move to Police primacy as each was led by the area's RUC Special Branch Superintendent. According to Matchett, the combined manpower of all those involved in the intelligence war was around 1500 personnel.⁵⁴⁷ Despite this, and Matchett's admirable assertions of the quality of their efforts, the intelligence war – while an essential part of the security response – did not pave the way to success in Northern Ireland.

2 Intelligence is the key to success

Whereas in Malaya it was possible to suggest that intelligence led to the security forces' success, it is not possible to claim that British intelligence's efforts were the key to ending the Northern Ireland conflict, if, indeed, it has actually ended. The central tensions underpinning both loyalism and republicanism persist, as do occurrences of paramilitary violence.⁵⁴⁸ The rise in paramilitary activity in the region led MI5 to raise the terrorism threat level for the province to severe in March of 2023.⁵⁴⁹ Secondly, while successes in the intelligence war put pressure on the IRA and saved lives, it was ultimately the republicans' decision to move toward a political strategy that led to the success of the peace process. With that in mind, this section will conclude by identifying areas where the intelligence war could have been improved to potentially allow it to have more of an impact.

Before doing so, however, it is essential to justify the claim that the security forces' intelligence war did not end the conflict as some commentators – a few among them, conflict participants – claim it did. Martyn Frampton, for example, argues that the IRA's 'capacity for

⁵⁴⁷ Matchett (n 489) 187.

⁵⁴⁸ 'Timeline of Dissident Republican Activity' *BBC News* (4 August 2010) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-10866072>> accessed 14 May 2023.

⁵⁴⁹ 'Terrorism and National Emergencies' (*GOV.UK*) <<https://www.gov.uk/terrorism-national-emergency>> accessed 14 May 2023.

“war” had been greatly curtailed’ and by 1993, they had suffered a ‘strategic defeat.’⁵⁵⁰ Frampton argues the IRA was ‘at best, locked in a bloody stalemate; at worst, in a position that was declining in real terms.’⁵⁵¹ Matchett even goes as far as to suggest that the security forces won the intelligence war and it was a sense of defeat that forced the IRA to consider peace.⁵⁵² However, it is readily apparent that by the 1990s the IRA was still operating in North and South Armagh, Londonderry, Belfast and the UK mainland. The IRA’s campaign of ‘spectacular’ bombings on landmark targets in London – designed more to generate headlines than dead soldiers – such as the attack on Canary Wharf, saw the IRA prophetically compare the audacity of their work to an attack on the World Trade Centre.⁵⁵³ With their ability to maintain their armed campaign demonstrated, it is difficult to argue the IRA had lost the intelligence war. That is not to say that the IRA did not face significant setbacks because of the security forces’ efforts, in Newry and, especially, in Tyrone, where the IRA was convincingly contained. Yet, in other regions, the IRA displayed persistence and the capability to continue its activities despite security forces’ successes, which ultimately forced the government to accept them at the negotiating table.⁵⁵⁴

The reasons for this survivability include the fact that the IRA’s overall leadership was largely insulated from infiltrations in the wider insurgency. Furthermore, the durability of the terrorists’ campaign varied depending on the region: South Armagh’s elusive IRA units, for instance, had significant local support and experience. The cell structure continued to keep elements of the Belfast and Derry City IRA out of the light, and the border remained an ever-present problem for the security forces.⁵⁵⁵ In fact, Operation BANNER even suggests that ‘[w]ith hindsight... the Border area was critical to the conduct of PIRA operations and therefore should have been the geographical focus of the campaign.’⁵⁵⁶ Lastly, that the Real IRA continued to operate as a splinter terrorist organisation attests to the continued capacity for republican terrorism.

⁵⁵⁰ Martyn Frampton, ‘Agents and Ambushes: Britain’s “Dirty War” in Northern Ireland’ in Samy Cohen (ed), *Democracies at War against Terrorism* (Palgrave Macmillan US 2008) 93–04 <http://link.springer.com/10.1057/9780230614727_5> accessed 14 May 2023.

⁵⁵¹ Martyn Frampton, *The Long March: The Political Strategy of Sinn Féin, 1981-2007* (Palgrave Macmillan 2008) 82–83.

⁵⁵² Matchett (n 489) 260.

⁵⁵³ Matchett (n 489) 251.

⁵⁵⁴ Leahy (n 347) 5.

⁵⁵⁵ Leahy (n 347) 5.

⁵⁵⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 414.

While deaths caused by the IRA had declined from 1972, this was more to do with the IRA's developing interest in their political wing and decision to downsize from 'brigades.' Richard English suggests that the more that the IRA's activities failed to break the British will in Northern Ireland, the less effective they became.⁵⁵⁷ Sinn Féin's failure to win seats in the Irish Parliament or gain an electoral majority on either side of the border, saw them increasingly consider the calls for peace.⁵⁵⁸ Nevertheless, most British governments eventually resolved to negotiate with the IRA, who, by 1994, had realised there was more to be gained through Sinn Féin rather than IRA activity.⁵⁵⁹ Ultimately, peace was won by politics, rather than policing.

Such a set of circumstances, however, is not desirable for the state as it had its legitimate monopoly over violence challenged and was forced to accept at least some of the demands of the terrorists. The ideal circumstances would have involved the complete destruction of the paramilitaries and a return to civil politics. The security forces in Northern Ireland may have been able to deliver this outcome if not for the support of the terrorists by members of the civilian population. The security forces failed to secure this support for themselves and may have made other gains against the IRA which could have proved fatal to the insurgents.

The failure to win the hearts and minds of these citizens was a great mistake of the security response in Northern Ireland. An even greater mistake was that upon realising this, to then do very little to change these circumstances. Compared with Malaya, there was a resounding lack of psychological operations conducted in Ulster. While an information service committee was set up and chaired by the GOC, nothing came of the idea beyond outlining its members.⁵⁶⁰ Likewise, development projects in Belfast and Londonderry quickly fell prey to racketeering and extortion by the paramilitaries.⁵⁶¹ Racketeering and other sources of funding in Northern Ireland for the paramilitaries should have been targeted more persistently and at

⁵⁵⁷ English (n 384) 339.

⁵⁵⁸ Leahy (n 347) 5–6.

⁵⁵⁹ English (n 384) 307.

⁵⁶⁰ Mark Oliver Saville, William L Hoyt and John Toohey, *Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry* (Stationery Office 2010) para 178.1-178.74 Chapter IX.

⁵⁶¹ 'Returning the Serve Documentary | Loyalists | The Troubles - YouTube' <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IkwJseoz3No>> accessed 11 May 2023.

an earlier stage in the conflict. Doing so would have reduced the visible impact of the paramilitaries on ordinary citizens' lives, inspiring confidence in the state. The terrorists' racket revenue stream was known to the RUC in the 1970s, yet legislative changes enabling a more effective response to the problem were only made in the late 1980s.⁵⁶² The exorbitant donations of American citizens to the IRA should have also been doggedly pursued, a minimum of USD \$2,347,705 between 1977 and 1990 (worth USD \$8,336,075 in 2015) was passed on to the IRA by American civilians.⁵⁶³ There was perhaps a role for MI6 in tracking IRA members dispatched to the United States to canvas Americans for funds.

The use of internment and other indiscriminate measures were, likewise, a terrible blow to the image of the security forces and led to the reliance of some communities on paramilitary protectors. Bloody Sunday also had an undeniable impact. Civilian casualties should obviously have been avoided, as should have the internment policy – which had insufficient discriminatory capacity due to a lack of current intelligence. Reimposing order on the streets, as occurred with Operation MOTORMAN, would have been a more productive first step in the security response. This would have assisted in preparing the population for a political solution to their problems as it was difficult for unionists to accept any form of compromise while the IRA was openly shooting at police on the streets and bombing public areas. Furthermore, the establishment of a political solution while the IRA was in a position of strength was a mistake that the Malayan authorities avoided in their context. When offered a chance for peace by a battered yet opportunistic CPM, the Malayan people refused to have their future ransomed by terrorists – the same approach should have been taken with the IRA.

D Conclusion

This chapter has analysed in detail the facets of the intelligence war waged against the IRA by the security forces and considered the merits and weaknesses of the measures employed. While it is clear that the campaign to contain the terrorists ultimately failed, the security forces saved lives and ensured the insurgents could not attain their goals through violent means. Northern Ireland's Troubles saw many technical achievements in counterinsurgency

⁵⁶² 'Tackling Terrorist Finance' (1992) 18 Commonwealth Law Bulletin 1482, 1483–1484.

⁵⁶³ Aaron Edwards and Maria Hadjiathanasiou, 'Brothers in Arms? How the IRA and EOKA Insurgencies Transcended the Local and Became Transnational' (2021) 32 Small Wars & Insurgencies 642, 652 <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592318.2021.1932105>> accessed 1 June 2022.

develop among many courageous efforts in the field of human intelligence. In parallel, the IRA's advancements in terrorism provided an example for other insurgents, possibly among them Al Qaeda, who realised the fated analogy made by the IRA by attacking the Twin Towers – beginning the intervention in Afghanistan and the next case study.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶⁴ Matchett (n 489) 251–253.

VII Overview of the Afghan Case Study

A Introduction

Despite continuing common themes in COIN, the western intervention in Afghanistan is in many ways a pole apart from the previously studied examples. Principally, in Afghanistan, the insurgents unambiguously succeeded in defeating the security forces and achieved their goals. It is therefore vital that the security response and the Taliban's campaign be considered in parallel, to determine what lessons may be learned and to establish how this outcome transpired. Analysing the war in Afghanistan poses challenges for this study; foremost among them is the recent nature of the conflict. Without the years of examination that previous case studies have benefitted from along with the release of new or declassified material, this study may lack information that subsequent revelations may present. The primary gap here is in the field of human intelligence in Afghanistan, particularly the use of any agents and informers. While some sources of human intelligence are discussed, potentially very useful information remains privileged likely due to the current nature of the threat against potential sources. Some of the essential problems at the heart of the COIN campaign in Afghanistan, however, may be understood via currently accessible information. Finally, the context for this COIN effort is focused primarily on the British involvement in Helmand province. This decision has been made in the interests of time and to keep the scope for this case study as comparable as possible with the previously ones.

B Historical Context

As with Northern Ireland, the history of insurgency in Afghanistan is extensive. However, for the purposes of this study, only the broad historical context to the 21st Century British involvement in Afghanistan will be established. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the civil war that ensued, the Taliban – an Islamic fundamentalist faction – seized control of most of Afghanistan. The Taliban dominated all but the northern regions under their 'First Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.' The remaining regions were united under the Northern Alliance led by Ahmad Shah Masood and Abdul Rashid Dostum who represented the predominantly Tajik and Uzbek ethnic make-up of the northern regions. The Taliban regime provided shelter for a jihadist organisation engaged in international terrorism called Al

Qaeda.⁵⁶⁵ Al Qaeda's leaders, including Dr Ayman Muhammad Rabi' al-Zawahiri and Osama Bin Laden, were wanted by the United States for a series of attacks on embassies and were committed to spreading their radical ideology of jihad or holy war against the *kuffar* (non-believers) throughout the world. The Taliban authorities refused to extradite Osama Bin Laden who on the 11th of September 2001, masterminded the most audacious attacks in the history of terrorism, striking the World Trade Centre and Pentagon in the United States with hijacked passenger aeroplanes. With nearly 3,000 people killed in the attacks, including those who overpowered the hijackers on a fourth plane, the United States declared a 'War on Terror.'⁵⁶⁶ With the Taliban unwilling to cooperate, the Americans decided to stage a full-scale invasion of Afghanistan under the auspices of self-defence as per the United Nations Charter.⁵⁶⁷ The US led the intervention, which they called Operation Enduring Freedom, beginning with limited strikes to locate and destroy Osama Bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders. To stabilise the country amidst this intervention, the UN established the 5,000 strength International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). ISAF was turned over to NATO control soon after as NATO invoked its collective defence clause under Article V, enabling further willing nations to contribute.⁵⁶⁸

While members of Al-Qaeda assassinated Masood, the Northern Alliance was emboldened by support from the United States following the attack on the World Trade Centre. Together, they conducted a successful offensive to capture Kabul and the other cities held by the Taliban.⁵⁶⁹ During the taking of the city of Kunduz in the North, the Northern Alliance forces led by Dostum and Mohammad Daud Daud, bore witness to the alleged airlift of the Taliban leadership out of Afghanistan by Pakistani forces.⁵⁷⁰ While the Taliban government was successfully ousted and replaced with a pro-Western regime led by Hamid Karzai, Al Qaeda's leaders survived. The US made the mistake of relying on local forces to contain Al Qaeda in

⁵⁶⁵ Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (Columbia University Press 2002) 41.

⁵⁶⁶ Clayton Thomas, 'Taliban Government in Afghanistan: Background and Issues for Congress' (Congressional Research Service 2021) R46955 2.

⁵⁶⁷ Noel Dempsey, 'Afghanistan Statistics: UK Deaths, Casualties, Mission Costs and Refugees' (House of Commons Library 2021) CBP 9298 <<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9298/>> accessed 20 March 2022.

⁵⁶⁸ Dempsey (n 567) 1.

⁵⁶⁹ Gunaratna (n 565) 40–44.

⁵⁷⁰ 'The "Airlift of Evil"' (*NBC News*, 10 December 2003) <<https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna3340165>> accessed 14 June 2023.

the mountain caves of Tora Bora, a theme that will be recurrent throughout this discussion.⁵⁷¹ Safe in Pakistan, Al Qaeda helped the ousted Taliban authority form an insurgency which aimed to expel the foreigners from Afghanistan and restore their theocratic control of the nation.⁵⁷² Meanwhile, the Taliban's leadership established itself in Quetta, Pakistan, where they directed their insurgency. The US installed the warlords of the Northern Alliance in positions of power and redirected their efforts to an illegal and ill-advised invasion of Iraq. The emplacement of members of the Northern Alliance in positions of prominence was, perhaps a costly error: the southern regions were predominantly of the Pashtun ethnic group who despised the Northern Alliance. Meanwhile, the war in Iraq further destabilised the region.⁵⁷³

British involvement in Afghanistan began in 2001 with both a stabilisation mission in Kabul (Operation FINGAL) and a counter terrorism force organised under Operation JACANA. As NATO took over administration of ISAF in 2003, the operations of the coalition forces spread to cover all of Afghanistan.⁵⁷⁴ By 2004, the British involvement in Afghanistan was directed under Operation HERRICK and pivoted from providing reconstruction efforts in the north of the country, to COIN operations in Helmand in 2006. Counterinsurgency in Helmand aimed to support the work of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and prevent the return of the Taliban. The PRT provided 150 staff and had a budget of (USD)\$45 million for aid projects in the region.⁵⁷⁵ In the following few years of controversial involvement in the region, the British forces were plagued by reports of dysfunctional command structures and attacks by an increasingly organised and determined Taliban on their isolated Forward Operating Bases (FOBs). According to the Operation HERRICK report, it was not until 2009 that the British found their feet in Afghanistan and began to organise a more effective response and stabilise the region.⁵⁷⁶ This coincided with the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq in the same year as well as the 'surge' deployment of 30,000 men of the US Marine Corps (USMC) to

⁵⁷¹ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond* (Third edition, Yale University Press 2022) 218–221.

⁵⁷² Gunaratna (n 565) 8–15.

⁵⁷³ Rashid (n 571) 222.

⁵⁷⁴ Dempsey (n 567) 2.

⁵⁷⁵ Carter Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan: A History* (Oxford University Press 2023) 244.

⁵⁷⁶ Directorate Land Warfare, *Operation HERRICK Campaign Study* (Ministry of Defence 2015) xxvii.

Helmand province.⁵⁷⁷ Also in 2009, came the implementation of an initiative called Operation ENTIRETY at the home base.

ENTIRETY was a response to what were perceived as previous attempts to bend the conditions to fit the Army, rather than adapting the Army to fit the conditions. It saw sweeping changes in pre-deployment training, the establishment of the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre for Afghanistan (LIFC), introduction of the Defence Cultural Specialist Unit (DCSU), formation of company intelligence support teams (COISTs) and a host of organisational changes for various units.⁵⁷⁸ In 2011, ISAF operations had reached their height with 132,000 personnel deployed to Afghanistan with 50 NATO and partner countries represented among them.⁵⁷⁹ With the British forced to adapt to the conditions in Afghanistan, it is fitting to examine the environment they deployed to in Helmand.

Helmand province differs greatly from the previously examined case studies. The region is approximately the size of the Republic of Ireland. While much of Helmand, such as Dashte, is arid, rocky terrain with high ridges and peaks, most COIN operations took place in the ‘Green Zone,’ the more verdant southern regions irrigated by the Helmand River. This vital geographic feature supported the region’s local agriculture and thus most of Helmand’s approximately 783,000 population lived near it.⁵⁸⁰ The nature of that local agriculture tended to be the growing of poppies to produce opium. In 2007, this production reached a height of 8,200 metric tons making Helmand the world’s largest single producer of opium.⁵⁸¹ Helmand also shares a border with Pakistan which had significant implications for the COIN effort, in a similar manner to that which South Armagh and Londonderry had in Northern Ireland. The duality in Helmand’s geographic environment constrained the options available to the security forces in certain areas. Heavier vehicles could not always be used in the less permissive environment of the Green Zone, though they were viable in more open terrain.

⁵⁷⁷ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) xxii.

⁵⁷⁸ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) xxxv–xiv.

⁵⁷⁹ Dempsey (n 567) 2.

⁵⁸⁰ Dr Daniel Marston, ‘British Operations in Helmand Afghanistan’ (*Small Wars Journal*, 13 September 2008) <<https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/british-operations-in-helmand-afghanistan>> accessed 10 June 2023.

⁵⁸¹ James Tharin Bradford, *Poppies, Politics, and Power: Afghanistan and the Global History of Drugs and Diplomacy* (Cornell University Press 2019) 180.

The Taliban created a still more hazardous operational environment by establishing screens of IEDs in locations where forces were bound by transport on roads.⁵⁸² This was particularly problematic in the earlier stages of the conflict before the arrival of the mine resistant Mastiff patrol vehicles.⁵⁸³ IEDs also restricted the conduct of operations by night where the security forces had a vast technological advantage.⁵⁸⁴ In the Green Zone, the wadis, irrigation ditches and compounds provided the Taliban with plenty of ambush opportunities and required British troops to prepare for engagements ranging from very distant to very close.⁵⁸⁵ Likewise, the hot climate required dismounted soldiers to carry provisions to sustain themselves alongside their weapons and armour. While advances in personal protection equipment had increased survivability, the combined equipment load of a soldier in Helmand's hot climate totalled around 57 kg – which undoubtedly decreased combat effectiveness.⁵⁸⁶ The dusty nature of the province also required the use of special desert engines for platforms such as the Apache Attack Helicopter.⁵⁸⁷ With the operational conditions outlined, the insurgents who successfully weathered both the environment and, ultimately, the security forces, may now be introduced.

C Overview of the Insurgency: the Taliban

The Taliban or the 'students,' were founded in 1994 by Muhammad Omar (given the title of a spiritual leader or *Mullah*), and were primarily a group of radical pupils of Afghanistan's madrasas (Islamic schools).⁵⁸⁸ Their guiding motivation has always been to install an Islamic regime based on traditional Sharia (Islamic law). The Taliban consists primarily of the Pashtun ethnic group which dominates most of southern Afghanistan and the border regions of Pakistan. The structure of the Taliban continues to rely on the leadership of one supreme leader with a Shura, or executive body, below him. Until 2013, that leader was Mullah Omar,

⁵⁸² Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) 2-1_18.

⁵⁸³ 'Mastiff Protects Engineer Team from Helmand IED Blast' (*GOV.UK*) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/mastiff-protects-engineer-team-from-helmand-ied-blast>> accessed 28 June 2023.

⁵⁸⁴ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) 2-1_21.

⁵⁸⁵ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) 2-1_23.

⁵⁸⁶ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) 2-1_25.

⁵⁸⁷ 'Keeping the Apache Ready to Take on the Taliban' (*GOV.UK*) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/keeping-the-apache-ready-to-take-on-the-taliban>> accessed 28 June 2023.

⁵⁸⁸ Hassan Abbas, *The Return of the Taliban: Afghanistan after the Americans Left* (Yale University Press 2023) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/jj.1640552>> accessed 14 June 2023.

thereafter it was Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, prior to his death and finally, Hibatullah Akhundzada, who led the Taliban to their conquest of Kabul and beyond.

The Shura has much in common with the Central Committee of the CPM, with both military and political appointments and a single leader in charge of both. Each of its members was either the equivalent of an opposition shadow minister or a leader of the Taliban's 'Army.'⁵⁸⁹ The Taliban leadership has not always been united and whilst there are certainly disagreements among them even today, 'disloyalty is not an option.'⁵⁹⁰ Differences among the Taliban's leadership appear to be on regional grounds or concerning how they should respond to surrounding nations' interests in Afghanistan.⁵⁹¹

As of 2022, the Taliban were estimated to be able to call upon 165,000 personnel from a pool of approximately 75,000 full time fighters and 90,000 local militia.⁵⁹² This easily makes them the largest insurgency considered by this study. Despite counterinsurgency sometimes being described as low-intensity operations, as a consequence of the Taliban's ability to attract so many members, the war in Afghanistan was particularly fierce.⁵⁹³ For the British forces in Helmand, the fighting was the most intense they had seen since the Korean War.⁵⁹⁴ In 2006, British troops in Helmand reported being attacked as many as eight times a day,⁵⁹⁵ engagements could last from first till last light and span multiple kilometres in open country.⁵⁹⁶ The vast numbers of insurgents and their penchant for ambush tactics made close air support essential. These factors combined to make the insurgency considered in this case study the deadliest.

The Taliban's vast force was funded primarily by Afghanistan's principal export: narcotics. The lucrative production of opium and heroin from poppies throughout Afghanistan's

⁵⁸⁹ Rashid (n 571) 252.

⁵⁹⁰ Abbas (n 588) 137.

⁵⁹¹ Abbas (n 588) 140–141.

⁵⁹² The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *Military Balance 2022*. (Routledge 2022) 247.

⁵⁹³ Peter Darman, *Blood, Sweat and Steel: Frontline Accounts from the Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq, [1990-2010]* (New Holland 2010) 196–197.

⁵⁹⁴ Darman (n 593) 185.

⁵⁹⁵ Darman (n 593) 187.

⁵⁹⁶ Darman (n 593) 202–204.

productive southern regions financed the Taliban. While the Western backed regime struggled with containing the spread of opium, the Taliban employed what Marx described as the figurative opium of the masses – religion – as the glue that bound the organisation together. The culture of the Taliban is that of a religious movement obsessed with salvation,⁵⁹⁷ with religious foundations and principles used to justify their actions and inspire their efforts. Not all of the Taliban’s members shared their leader’s – or Al Qaeda’s – thirst for global jihad and the Taliban remains closer to ‘a peasant army rather than an international terrorist organisation.’⁵⁹⁸ Yet, establishing a state based on traditional Islamist theology and removing Western influence from their homeland was the shared ambition of most Taliban fighters. Ethnic culture also played its role in unifying the Taliban with the ‘local Pashtun population bec[oming] indispensable to Al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban as both fighters and trainers.’⁵⁹⁹

Religious zeal provided the Taliban with a very real tactical advantage. Such was their fanaticism, the Taliban were willing to employ tactics that were not used by the other insurgent forces considered by this study. The use of suicide bombings by the Taliban demonstrates the dedication of their members. Suicide bombers were able to carry out attacks in locations patrolled by the security forces or amongst troop convoys. Otherwise, the Taliban’s tactics largely resembled that of other insurgent groups. The Taliban employed ambush tactics and a very well-developed use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and roadside bombs.⁶⁰⁰ In a similar manner to their use in Northern Ireland, roadside bombs served as a means of denying ground to the security forces, complicating logistics and inflicting casualties. The Taliban also engaged in a sophisticated information campaign which enabled the insurgents to draw support from the civilian population. Another key consideration is the international network of support for the Taliban.

From its inception, the Taliban has had strong ties to Pakistan, particularly Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) organisation.⁶⁰¹ When the Taliban began their attacks in 2003,

⁵⁹⁷ Abbas (n 588) 170–171.

⁵⁹⁸ Rashid (n 571) 236.

⁵⁹⁹ Rashid (n 571) 238.

⁶⁰⁰ Rashid (n 571) 228.

⁶⁰¹ ‘Abd al-Salām Zā‘īf, *My Life with the Taliban* (Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn eds, Reprinted, Hurst & Company 2012).

killing aid workers in the southern regions of Afghanistan, they did so near the border with Pakistan. They clashed with the limited presence of US troops in Afghanistan and surprised the Americans by continuing to fight rather than withdrawing. The Taliban had the confidence to do this because they had established a secure logistics network leading back into Pakistan, which ensured the Americans' successes were short-lived.⁶⁰² The connection between the Taliban and their supporters in Pakistan remained of great importance to the organisation throughout the course of the war. In a similar manner to the IRA Army Council's presence in the Irish Republic, Pakistan was the sanctuary for the Taliban's inner circle.⁶⁰³ Afghanistan's second president, Ashraf Ghani, said the Taliban had a 'deep relationship' with Pakistan and that 'Pakistan operates an organised system of support ... logistics ... finances ... and recruitment' for the Taliban.⁶⁰⁴ Of the foreign fighters attracted to the Taliban's cause, most came from Pakistan.⁶⁰⁵ There have also been a small number of westerners known to have joined the Taliban, though this was likely a small 'stream' of foreigners.⁶⁰⁶ While the Taliban's relationship with Pakistan was at times vital, there have been some complications between the two parties.

In the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan in 2007, a veritable consortium of tribal militias from across Pakistan and Kashmir joined to form the 'Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan' (TTP). This predominantly Pashtun group sought to institute 'a sharia state ruled by the Taliban' in Pakistan, but, it did not have a direct relationship with the Afghan Taliban as indicated by their attacks on Pakistani authorities.⁶⁰⁷ This may have strained relations between the Taliban and Pakistan at times. Furthermore, elements of the TTP pledged allegiance to ISIS's caliphate forming the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK) in 2015.⁶⁰⁸ ISK remains the principal security threat in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and there were clashes between the groups during the Taliban's insurgency. Iran, bordering Afghanistan and

⁶⁰² Rashid (n 571) 225.

⁶⁰³ Abbas (n 588) 87.

⁶⁰⁴ Susanne Koelbl, 'Interview with Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani: "I Know I Am Only One Bullet Away from Death"' *Der Spiegel* (14 May 2021) <<https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-with-afghanistan-president-ashraf-ghani-i-know-i-am-only-one-bullet-away-from-death-a-82dc3dd6-3c27-4f93-97c9-d6cddf0cd117>> accessed 20 June 2023.

⁶⁰⁵ Franz J Marty, 'The Taliban Say They Have No Foreign Fighters. Is That True?' <<https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/the-taliban-say-they-have-no-foreign-fighters-is-that-true/>> accessed 20 June 2023.

⁶⁰⁶ 'For Westerners, It's Not Easy to Join the Taliban' (*NBC News*, 15 December 2009) <<https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna34436155>> accessed 20 June 2023.

⁶⁰⁷ Rashid (n 571) 239.

⁶⁰⁸ Abbas (n 588) 200.

dependent on the Helmand River, also provided a ‘modicum’ of support to the Taliban, according to former ISAF commander General Petraeus.⁶⁰⁹ Finally, there were also interests in Saudi Arabia that were potential sources of funding for the Taliban.⁶¹⁰ With the character of the insurgents established, the counterinsurgency campaign against them may be now examined.

D *The Security Forces*

1 British Forces in Helmand Province

Over the course of their involvement in ISAF, the British Army sent 9,500 troops to Afghanistan,⁶¹¹ with units to Afghanistan deployed on a tour system of six months.⁶¹² This was a very similar system to the ones employed in both Malaya and Northern Ireland, with various regiments being rotated in and out throughout the course of the conflict. During phase 9 of Operation HERRICK in 2008/2009, for example, 3 Commando Brigade provided the principal fighting elements of Task Force Helmand. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion, The Rifles were allocated to Afghan National Army (ANA) mentoring at that time. Six months later however, 19 Light Brigade was the primary operational unit with ANA mentoring carried out by 2nd Battalion the Mercian Regiment.⁶¹³ The scope of the British deployment to Helmand included the Principal Manoeuvre Units, Theatre Reserve Battalion Deployed, units assigned to ANA mentoring and Afghan National Police (ANP) mentoring, and logistics. The PRT was led by a Brigadier who reported to his superiors including the commander of the British forces in Afghanistan. The commander had to ‘take into account the context of ... the UK civilian element intent (Foreign & Commonwealth Office lead) and their information strategy (messages, themes and audiences).’⁶¹⁴ Above the commander of the British forces was the

⁶⁰⁹ ‘Petraeus: Iran Assisting Taliban - UPI.Com’ (*UPI*)

<https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2010/08/25/Petraeus-Iran-assisting-Taliban/20911282763162/> accessed 28 July 2023.

⁶¹⁰ Declan Walsh, ‘WikiLeaks Cables Portray Saudi Arabia as a Cash Machine for Terrorists’ *The Guardian* (5 December 2010) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/05/wikileaks-cables-saudi-terrorist-funding>> accessed 20 June 2023.

⁶¹¹ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) 1-2_1.

⁶¹² Ministry of Defence, *British Army Field Manual Volume 1 Part 10 Countering Insurgency*, vol 1 (Ministry of Defence 2009) pt 3–39.

⁶¹³ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) xix.

⁶¹⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 6-D-2.

ISAF commander in the NATO hierarchy. The ISAF commander also rotated throughout the course of the conflict, but was always an American.⁶¹⁵

Despite the Americans' retaining overall control of the COIN effort in Afghanistan, the British regional commander was responsible for the conduct of operations in Helmand. As one brigade commander put it, "I was very clear on the Operational Design that I wished to put in place to conduct [sic] Counterinsurgency in Helmand. I wrote it within two weeks of arriving."⁶¹⁶ The provincial headquarters for the Helmand PRT and Task Force Helmand was Camp Bastion near Lashkargah. Comprising the headquarters were a number of key positions and departments. These were organised according to the traditional British military system which divided the headquarters into various cells with different roles. In Helmand, the British worked alongside other nations making each cell a joint effort, leading to the naming convention of 'J' followed by the cell number. The Deputy Military Commander and Interagency Plans was part of the J5 cell and was responsible for the military's long-term planning and coordinating efforts with civilian groups. The Chief of Staff and Military Plans and J3 branch were responsible for security operations. ISTAR, the intelligence centre of the headquarters, was positioned to support the other elements. The Chief of ISTAR briefed the commander and advised him on intelligence related matters. Finally, the J4 department and its administrating officer, the Deputy Chief of Staff was responsible for resourcing both the Task Force and indigenous forces.⁶¹⁷

The British fully understood that working as part of a coalition would create certain difficulties. For example, their partners sometimes had 'competing international agendas and differing domestic imperatives' or differing regional including conflicting views with the host nation's government.⁶¹⁸ Likewise, the coalition partners operated within their own countries' legal framework. Nevertheless, the input of coalition partners such as the Danes, Estonians, Dutch and Americans in Helmand was vital. In particular, the Danes deployed with a Leopard 2 platoon which filled a role no other platform deployed before 2009 could. The success of

⁶¹⁵ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) xviii–xx.

⁶¹⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 7–1.

⁶¹⁷ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 7-A-1.

⁶¹⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 7–5.

these tanks inspired the USMC to deploy with a company of their own Abrams Main Battle Tanks (MBTs) when they arrived. The Danes' successful use of tanks compensated for, but also highlighted, a deficiency in the British Armed Forces' operational deployment.⁶¹⁹ If the British had deployed with their own Challenger MBTs, they would not have had to wait for the Danes and Americans to provide this valuable capability.

2 The Afghan National Security forces (ANSF)

As part of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, indigenous security forces were trained and developed with coalition aid. ISAF called this programme Security Force Assistance (SFA) and it was intended that the ANSF would progressively take over responsibilities from ISAF, until they finally withdrew from the host country.⁶²⁰

Composed of the ANA, local and national police and the Afghan Air Force (AAF), the ANSF represented the culmination of years of training and funding from many coalition nations. In 2014, the number of ANSF personnel was around 382,000 across all branches.⁶²¹ These 2014 estimates were predicted to not change significantly by 2018. The largest elements of the ANSF were the ANA with around 86,100 combat troops and the ANP with around 166,000 officers at the national, border and local levels.⁶²² By 2021, the ANA was assessed as being able to marshal 171,500 soldiers for either combat or support duties across 5 regional commands.⁶²³ The ANA was primarily equipped with Cold War-era Soviet vehicles and weaponry. The AAF was a fledgling effort with only 7,800 personnel and it struggled to grow these numbers because of the difficulty involved in training pilots and support crew.⁶²⁴ At its height, the AAF operated 34 combat capable aircraft, mostly as part of its Special Mission Wing. Soviet-era attack Mi-35 *Hinds* and Mi-17 helicopters made up the bulk of this force, along with 42 American UH-60A *Black Hawks* for transport.⁶²⁵ Perhaps the greatest strength

⁶¹⁹ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) 2–1_12.

⁶²⁰ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) XXX.

⁶²¹ Jonathan Schroden and others, 'Summary of Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces' (Center for Naval Analyses 2014) 26.

⁶²² Schroden and others (n 621) 26.

⁶²³ James Hackett (ed), *The Military Balance 2021* (Routledge ; The International Institute for Strategic Studies 2021) 240.

⁶²⁴ Schroden and others (n 621) 26.

⁶²⁵ Hackett (n 623) 240–241.

of the ANSF were the ANA Special Operations Forces which had 11,900 members in 2014.⁶²⁶ The greatest weakness of the ANSF was poor logistics: an independent review of the Afghan forces concluded that they could stand to lose combat battalions in order to enable an expansion of the logistics sector.⁶²⁷

The ANSF faced constant problems with morale, drug use and corruption. When the responsibility for the COIN campaign was transferred to the indigenous' leadership, these issues were exacerbated. By 2019, the ANA had a 22% personnel shortage amidst rampant desertions.⁶²⁸ The ANA SOF were stretched thin and did most of the offensive action conducted by the ANSF over the course of the war. Meanwhile, the majority of the ANA and ANP remained on a defensive footing as the Taliban continued to wear them down. By the fall of the American-backed regime in 2021, the ANSF were still dependent on foreign aid for training, air support (offensive, logistical and medical) and intelligence related functions.⁶²⁹

E Summary of Outcomes

While the COIN campaign against the Taliban continued, in 2011 the first of the coalition nations began to withdraw their troops.⁶³⁰ Political pressure to bring troops home in various nations and the intention from the outset to enable the indigenous security forces to take over, led to drawdowns in troop numbers. By 2014, most Western troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan with the remaining forces providing further training or air and intelligence support to the ANA: a form of support is described as the 'overwatch' phase outlined in the British COIN manual.⁶³¹ For the British in Helmand, all forces were redeployed from the province by 2014 and ground combat operations ceased.⁶³² This is taken as the end of the case study examined in this thesis. However, an evaluation of the ANSF's subsequent performance requires this summary to include mention of the conflict's overall outcome. The ANSF were responsible for all COIN operations across Afghanistan and continued to carry out this function till 2020, when the tide began to turn.

⁶²⁶ Schroden and others (n 621) 26.

⁶²⁷ Schroden and others (n 621) 26.

⁶²⁸ Hackett (n 623) 240.

⁶²⁹ Hackett (n 623) 240.

⁶³⁰ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) xxiv.

⁶³¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 4–32.

⁶³² Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) xxvii.

With the Americans seeking to fully withdraw from Afghanistan, they agreed with the Qatari government to allow the Taliban to establish a diplomatic presence in Doha. Between the Americans and the Taliban (with a parallel agreement formed with the Afghan Government), the Doha Agreement was signed in 2020 to establish an understanding between the parties and make way for the Americans to leave. The Americans stressed through the agreement their desire that Afghanistan not be used as a hub for international terrorism. In return, the Americans promised to reduce troop numbers in preparation for a settlement between the Afghan Government and the Taliban that never came. The release of insurgent prisoners was, as it had been in Northern Ireland, again used as bargaining chip in a peace process. As many as 5,000 captured Taliban members were pledged to be released by the 10th of March 2020.⁶³³ In perhaps an admission of defeat, the US also pledged to ‘refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Afghanistan or intervening in its domestic affairs.’⁶³⁴

In 2021, the US president Joe Biden, announced the full withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in August of that year.⁶³⁵ The Americans would be taking with them the advisors, intelligence and air support apparatus that had held the Taliban at bay. The Taliban began its decisive offensive in May of 2021. This effort was met largely with continued success and had captured most of the country by the end of July. Part of the reason for this dramatic momentum was the prevalence of local authorities cutting deals with the Taliban.⁶³⁶ The ANA continued to evaporate across most of Afghanistan with few units actively engaging the insurgents. Lashkargah, capital of Helmand Province, fell on the 13th of August.⁶³⁷ The Taliban had reached the gates of Kabul faster than analysts in the Western nations had

⁶³³ Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Which Is Not Recognized by the United States as a State and Is Known as the Taliban and the United States of America’ (United States and Taliban) (2020) art 1C.

⁶³⁴ United States and Taliban (n50) art 1F.

⁶³⁵ The White House, ‘Remarks by President Biden on the Drawdown of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan’ (*The White House*, 8 July 2021) <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/07/08/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-drawdown-of-u-s-forces-in-afghanistan/>> accessed 26 June 2023.

⁶³⁶ Susannah George, ‘Taliban on the Verge of Capturing Two of Afghanistan’s Largest Cities after Taking 11th Provincial Capital’ *Washington Post* (13 August 2021) <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/08/12/taliban-takes-ghazni-afghanistan/>> accessed 26 June 2023.

⁶³⁷ Reuters, ‘Taliban Capture Afghanistan’s Lashkar Gah, Capital of Helmand -Police Official’ *Reuters* (13 August 2021) <<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-capture-afghanistans-lashkar-gah-capital-helmand-police-official-2021-08-13/>> accessed 26 June 2023.

predicted. Finally, on the 15th of August, the Taliban entered Kabul and President Ashraf Ghani fled the country. By the following day, the Taliban again ruled Afghanistan.

Within just ten days, the Taliban routed the ANA and seized power in Kabul and most of the regional capitals before defeating what remained of the Northern Alliance in Panjshir Valley.⁶³⁸ The Taliban re-established their authority over the entirety of Afghanistan and while they have yet to be officially recognised, have become the de-facto regime. Afghanistan has suffered a major humanitarian crisis in the wake of the Taliban's return and continues to require international aid.⁶³⁹ Serious doubts remain about the Taliban's commitment to prevent the return of organisations engaged in international terrorism to Afghanistan, especially after the US assassinated Al Zawahiri, one of the leaders of Al Qaeda there in 2022.⁶⁴⁰ Afghanistan's swift fall to the Taliban marked the end of the 'forever wars,' yet it does not mark the end of counterinsurgency operations. It is likely that the impact of the insurgents' victory, and the necessary lessons to be learned from it, will be measured for decades to come.

⁶³⁸ 'Afghanistan: Taliban Claim to Have Taken Panjshir Valley' *BBC News* (6 September 2021) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58466647>> accessed 29 June 2023.

⁶³⁹ Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, 'UK Doubles Aid to Afghanistan' (*Gov.UK*, 19 August 2021) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-doubles-aid-to-afghanistan>> accessed 28 March 2022.

⁶⁴⁰ 'Ayman Al-Zawahiri: Al-Qaeda Leader Killed in US Drone Strike' *BBC News* (1 August 2022) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62387167>> accessed 29 June 2023.

VIII Afghan Case Study Analysis

A Introduction

Despite the disastrous outcome, in terms of integration, range of sources, technology and doctrine, the intelligence war in Afghanistan represented perhaps the most advanced yet in the history of COIN. In comparison with the other case studies, technological development had dramatically increased, opening new possibilities for the security forces with myriad new sources of intelligence and means of exploiting it. Likewise, the benefit of experience in both previous case studies and many more instances of COIN, equipped the British forces with an exhaustive lexicon on combatting insurgent movements.

B The Intelligence War

1 Intelligence-led operations

(a) How intelligence-led operations were understood in Helmand

In Afghanistan, the integration of intelligence in the planning of counterinsurgent operations was regarded as essential. Not only was the doctrine regarding intelligence-led operations informed by prior knowledge, but a thorough development in the understanding of the strategic implications of work done on the tactical level was established. In accordance with the British COIN manual, intelligence operations in Helmand were conducted on the basis of the following principles:⁶⁴¹

1. Primacy of political purpose.
2. Unity of effort.
3. Understand the human terrain.
4. Secure the population.

⁶⁴¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 1–1. Note that ‘pt’ refers to paragraph numbers used in the manual, otherwise, page numbers are given. Page numbers in the manual include the chapter so do not denote the citing of multiple pages.

5. Neutralise the insurgent.
6. Gain and maintain popular support.
7. Operate in accordance with the law.
8. Integrate intelligence.
9. Prepare for the long term.
10. Learn and adapt.

These principles will be invoked again through this chapter as they become relevant. To further expand on this sequence, the COIN manual clearly sets out that ‘the best intelligence comes directly from the population,’ especially when it can be authenticated with technical-source intelligence.⁶⁴² The conduct of COIN operations greatly influences the availability of this intelligence, demonstrating the importance of maintaining popular support and highlighting how disruptive activities by the security forces can impact upon it. Where the security forces’ presence and victories are many, the population need not fear reprisal when passing on information. Where civilian confidence is high, and the security forces’ have achieved a level of consent among the population a ‘virtuous circle’ is formed. Intelligence-led operations lead to future security force successes by creating more opportunities to gather ‘[g]ood intelligence,’ which then leads to ‘increasingly effective action.’⁶⁴³ This snowball effect was clearly observable in the closing act of the Malayan Emergency and can be identified as a standard or test by which to establish if the security forces are prevailing.

A key learning identified in British doctrine was that in COIN operations, more than in other forms of conflict, the tactical level of analysis is where the key losses or gains are had. As part of the continued feedback loop of the intelligence cycle, the British operating in Helmand were both ‘simultaneously intelligence producers and consumers.’⁶⁴⁴ This is why the British COIN manual identifies ‘the intelligence picture [as coming] from the bottom up,’ placing tactical-level commanders at the forefront of the campaign.⁶⁴⁵ Likewise, British doctrine identifies continuity as an important focus; a similar observation was made in

⁶⁴² Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 3–37.

⁶⁴³ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 3–37.

⁶⁴⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 5–30.

⁶⁴⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 5–30.

Malaya concerning the greater effectiveness of units who lingered in areas for longer. Ensuring continuity in deployment of forces allows for the knowledge gained by personnel to be retained and enables them to detect disturbances in the '[p]attern of life' in their area of operations. Furthermore, they are able – through patrols and framework operations – to remain in continued contact with locals.⁶⁴⁶

The British COIN manual treats framework operations (including cordons, checkpoints, searches and patrols) as 'primarily intended to secure and reassure the population, to deter terrorist activity, and to assist in the development of intelligence.'⁶⁴⁷ In accordance with the above principles, framework operations served a political purpose and secured the population, while providing security forces stationed there with the chance to better understand the human terrain. It is also acknowledged in the British COIN manual that framework operations are manpower intensive. In order to facilitate these essential, basic functions of counterinsurgency, and ensure continuity in interactions with local people, the British manual advocates using small 'patrol houses' from which both indigenous and NATO troops 'can interact with the population ... [and] "dwell" ... amongst the people.'⁶⁴⁸ It is unclear if this idea was ever put into practise. Certainly, the security risks associated with remaining among the local populace and, presumably, in the midst of potential insurgents, would be great. However, risk-averse western forces penned up in their FOBs, would hardly have engendered much confidence in the people they deployed to protect.

The increased level of responsibility and agency given to lower rungs on the chain of command permeated much of the British COIN effort because it was perceived to make the security forces more adaptable. As such, junior commanders were made aware of operational and even strategic level objectives. This ensured that when responding to emerging circumstances in the field, these key personnel had a firm grasp on the intent of the security forces at large and could respond accordingly. This approach preferred simple and clear planning that could respond to change over complicated strategies. When 'appropriately

⁶⁴⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 3–34.

⁶⁴⁷ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 8–16.

⁶⁴⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 8–16.

empowered,' junior commanders can react to tactical developments and ensure their response meets broader more strategic objectives.⁶⁴⁹

As a part of the empowerment of the tactical level, intelligence personnel were embedded with units closer to the direct duties of COIN than perhaps ever before. It was prioritised that tactical commanders received 'their own trained, integral specialist intelligence staff with which to distil, archive and pass information and to integrate the intelligence provided from higher-level sources.'⁶⁵⁰ This integration is discussed in greater detail in section C, 1.

(b) Problems faced in intelligence-led operations

The problem of the tour system continued to plague the conduct of intelligence-led operations. Despite this understanding being recorded in doctrine, six-month tours remained constant for 'formation HQs and units' leading to the predictable concerns from Malaya and Northern Ireland re-emerging in the 'desire to demonstrate progress during each deployment.'⁶⁵¹ It is unclear if the suggestion made in the COIN manual, to mitigate this problem by 'tying tactical intelligence staffs to particular locations rather than parent units,' was ever implemented.⁶⁵² A further problem with this system was the brain drain associated with the redeployment at the end of the tour: one commander of an infantry battalion said '[w]e compiled a lot of information and handed it over when we left. It was not particularly sophisticated.'⁶⁵³ As such, the incoming rotation would have to integrate the intelligence their predecessors passed on to them, determine what was relevant and then begin their own process of understanding the human terrain – all while battling the same constraints their predecessors had from square one.

The varying levels of the military hierarchy also had different encounters with the local population. The 'Brigade was dealing predominantly with the upper end ... people who were relatively educated and supportive; but [those] at Battlegroup level ... [encountered] a

⁶⁴⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 8-B-2.

⁶⁵⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 3–43.

⁶⁵¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 3–39.

⁶⁵² Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 3–35.

⁶⁵³ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 5–4.

population who were anything but,’ people ‘who had the most to fear and the most to lose.’⁶⁵⁴ A further problem with intelligence-led operations that has not been overcome – even despite great leaps in technological progress – is the high manpower requirement. According to British doctrine, the ‘accepted rule of thumb is 20 security personnel (soldiers, police, paramilitaries and auxiliaries) for every 1000 people in the area of operation.’⁶⁵⁵

Finally, the greatest threat posed to intelligence-led operations was presented by the enemy. The Taliban had become adept in the manufacture and swift deployment of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) which provided them with a cheap, plentiful and demoralising means of delaying counterinsurgent action against them. As they could spring up practically overnight, IEDs screens around areas of tactical importance had a profound impact on the planning and execution of COIN in Afghanistan. One of the more significant adaptations in the British approach to the Helmand campaign was instructing planners to take account of the swiftly deployable IED and ambush threat. When going on offensive operations, ‘EOD, counter-mine and Conventional Munition Disposal (CMD) teams, supported by responsive firepower to push through ambushes,’ became a regular requirement.⁶⁵⁶ A further adaptation when attempting to neutralise the insurgent was, despite the risk, extracting forces from operations the same way they were inserted, as ‘experience has shown that it is better to hold and secure one route in and out when the threat of IEDs is high.’⁶⁵⁷ The Taliban continued to wield this influence over the security forces throughout the war in Afghanistan, despite delayed panaceas arriving like the deployment of mine-resistant vehicles.

(c) How the intelligence machinery worked

Intelligence gathering and review was an integral part of operational planning in Helmand. Dissemination of relevant intelligence products, ‘including aerial pictures, site diagrams and maps where possible,’ were closely analysed. In urban environments, ‘a good aerial photograph overlaid with grid and other reference points’ was often employed, demonstrating the usefulness of aerial surveillance platforms, particularly for ‘short notice operations’ where

⁶⁵⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 5–10.

⁶⁵⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 1–3. It was not possible to verify if this ratio of security forces was achieved or sufficient in Afghanistan.

⁶⁵⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 8-B-3.

⁶⁵⁷ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 8-B-5.

a clear ‘intent, scheme of manoeuvre and grid reference graphic may be all that is required.’⁶⁵⁸

Specifically, when it came to HUMINT, the intelligence gathering for operations was apparently performed by a ‘number of agencies other than the strike force.’ The use of a Government Communications Officer is mentioned in relation to providing advice for SIGINT capabilities, meaning it is possible HUMINT specialists were similarly drawn from civilian circles.⁶⁵⁹ In a demonstration of the technological development which preceded the war in Afghanistan, full motion, live video surveillance was available to feed into the intelligence cycle. These live assets ‘enhance[d] the commander’s warning of insurgent reactions.’⁶⁶⁰ A big part of the conduct of the intelligence machinery was the use of intelligence fusion centres. It was found that ‘intelligence obtained through air and space platforms works best when it is quickly and efficiently routed to a joint intelligence centre that can fuse HUMINT information with that collected by other intelligence disciplines.’⁶⁶¹ The reason that this combination of available sources was stressed in British doctrine was the understanding that while technical source intelligence and aerial reconnaissance may also determine that people are leaving a village, ‘they cannot explain why the people are leaving.’⁶⁶²

(d) The use of Air Power

Bombing, airlifting and helicopter surveillance were examples of the uses of aircraft previously examined in this study. Yet, the use of air power in Afghanistan demonstrates that these steps were only the beginning. In the skies over Helmand, the use of strike aircraft including jets and attack helicopters were accompanied by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), observation balloons and fleets of logistical supply helicopters and planes. The sky was no longer the limit as space-based platforms provided satellite surveillance. Air power in Afghanistan had reached its zenith and was a significant asset to the security forces that the insurgents had little success in countering.

⁶⁵⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 8-B-3.

⁶⁵⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 5–8.

⁶⁶⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 8-B-3.

⁶⁶¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–11.

⁶⁶² Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–11.

While modern aircraft were invaluable, they were also expensive, as such there was also a place for lower tech flying machines equipped with advanced optics. Unmanned helium balloons were a simple and inexpensive means of monitoring remote villages.⁶⁶³ Civilian aircraft, while slow, were another cheap reconnaissance tool. These assets could be used to watch or ‘patrol border areas and main roads to report suspected ambushes to deter insurgent attacks.’⁶⁶⁴ UAVs were a game-changer with the ability to place ‘an entire region under constant surveillance,’ while deploying precise, guided munitions ‘against time-sensitive targets.’⁶⁶⁵ UAVs such as the Predator, Reaper and Watchman could also loiter above areas of interest for extended durations. Personnel responsible for coordinating the use of air assets were formed into Tactical Air Control Parties (TACP), which provided commanders with ‘full motion video receivers (such as Rover and Britannia),’ able to be integrated with other assets like aircraft targeting pods. These computers could then enable guided munitions to accurately ‘destroy insurgent targets under adverse conditions,’ targets that were previously identified through other forms of aerial surveillance, SIGINT or HUMINT sources.⁶⁶⁶ This demonstrates why integration of intelligence was stressed in the British doctrine because when it is employed effectively, it enables the use of deadly and precise weapons which the insurgents could largely not anticipate or defeat.

Another aerial platform which has developed over the course of the case studies considered by this thesis, are helicopters. The primary contribution of helicopters was ‘providing overwatch, fire support, alternate communications and aeromedical evacuation.’⁶⁶⁷ In Afghanistan, they performed this function on a constant basis. Despite their utility, in the earlier phase of the conflict, it did appear that there were difficulties at times in directing helicopter-based fire support on to specific targets. This was especially the case when targeting compounds, or buildings garrisoned by enemy personnel as these structures looked

⁶⁶³ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–3.

⁶⁶⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–8.

⁶⁶⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–2.

⁶⁶⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–2.

⁶⁶⁷ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–10.

very similar from the air and could at times be mistaken with those occupied by friendly forces or civilians.⁶⁶⁸

(e) The role of TECHINT

The gathering of intelligence from a diverse array of technical sources in Afghanistan was considerably more developed than in the previous case studies. As such, TECHINT was able to play a much broader role in the COIN effort, sometimes making up for deficiencies in the flow of information from other sources. For example, where the local population is hostile or dominated by the insurgency, SIGINT will be relied upon. However, limitations on this source existed, such as the potentially lacking sophistication of Taliban communications technology or operation security efforts made by the insurgents. In some cases, troops actively engaging the Taliban would even receive word from intelligence specialists of what the insurgents were saying to each other.⁶⁶⁹ Sometimes this was helpful information, yet when the insurgents were aware of the monitoring of their transmissions, they would send messages as a ‘means for deception.’⁶⁷⁰ In light of this, the previous emphasis given in the British doctrine regarding the integration of many different forms of intelligence through fusion centres becomes understandable. If collected intelligence is potentially misleading, analysing adjacent sources on the same subject could reveal the deception. One such example which benefited from the advanced technology deployed by NATO was geospatial intelligence (GEOINT).

GEOINT was aided by the use of aerial and space-based platforms and worked to gather information concerning ‘physical features and geographically referenced activities.’⁶⁷¹ Changes in the environment caused by insurgent activity could be monitored and responded to. Besides this reactionary potential, GEOINT units contributed valuable material for planning operations including, ‘accurate mapping’ and ‘sophisticated briefing products.’⁶⁷² In this regard, GEOINT is very similar to imagery intelligence (IMINT) which focuses on the analysis of surveillance imagery. In British experiences in ‘Northern Ireland, Iraq and

⁶⁶⁸ *Inside Afghanistan 1 of 2 - VICE News* (Directed by VICE, 2011)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_yOI_WVGdY> accessed 29 May 2023.

⁶⁶⁹ Russell Lewis, *Company Commander* (Ebury 2012) 161.

⁶⁷⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 5–8.

⁶⁷¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 5–9.

⁶⁷² Ministry of Defence (n 612) 5–9.

Afghanistan,' IMINT was found 'to be a valuable force multiplier' because it revealed the locations of enemy personnel, enabled the identification and prioritisation of targets and equipped commanders in the planning of operations.⁶⁷³ Ensuring that IMINT is used quickly is paramount as static images, perhaps more than other forms of intelligence, may be overtaken by events. As such, the British COIN manual warns that in order for the use of IMINT to be 'accurate and timely,' a 'liaison officer from the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre (JARIC) may be forward based with the intelligence staff.'⁶⁷⁴ This allocation speaks again to the well-placed emphasis on integration employed by the Helmand PRT.

One of the problems faced in the pursuit of integration, however, was that with the greatly expanded horizons of technical source intelligence, command and control issues emerged and 'providing a product in the right format to the right person in an appropriate timescale,' was difficult.⁶⁷⁵ Indeed, with liaison officers and specialists in various forms of intelligence posted ever nearer to the tactical level, problems emerged in overseeing the tasking of these individual officers and the releasability of the classified intelligence products they created to the units they worked with. These concerns reputedly frustrated the 'prioritisation of assets' and made it difficult for timely and relevant decisions sometimes to be made.⁶⁷⁶

Finally, analysis of enemy weapons and equipment was another source of intelligence – particularly when it came to the manufacturing of IEDs. Understanding insurgent capabilities enables the planning of operations to adapt to emerging requirements and may also reveal sources of support for the enemy. A Weapons Intelligence Unit was responsible for this task and had a forensic-like function. Exploiting the intelligence-gathering opportunities offered by 'captured weapons and explosive devices and post-incident fragments,' was also accomplished with the advice of a group of deployed Scientific Advisors (SCIAD).⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷³ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 5–9.

⁶⁷⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 5–9.

⁶⁷⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 9–6.

⁶⁷⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–10.

⁶⁷⁷ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 5–9.

(f) How Special Operations Forces Contributed to Intelligence-led operations

In describing the role that Special Operations Forces play in intelligence-led operations, the British COIN manual indicated that ‘[s]pecial Forces and specialist agencies have an important role to play in intelligence gathering, strike operations, high value key leader engagements and training ... within the host nation’s security forces.’⁶⁷⁸ This list of tasks is similar to those performed by the SAS in Malaya who engaged with and trained members of the aboriginal population and hunted communist targets. Indeed, the capabilities of SOF to operate in inhospitable environments were also emphasised in the British COIN manual.⁶⁷⁹ While SOF operations were usually ‘self-contained’ the British COIN manual foresaw that SOF would need to ‘co-ordinate their plans with and sometimes draw support from the unit or formation in whose area of operations they are to operate.’⁶⁸⁰ These functions of Special Forces do not sound dissimilar to the duties they performed in previous case studies, yet, Afghanistan differs in that SOF activities were viewed as occurring on the strategic level.

The use of SOF in training local security forces is described in political terms as ‘enabl[ing] the UK Government to gain significant influence in other countries’ and playing an ‘important role in foreign and defence policy.’⁶⁸¹ While the deployment of the SAS in Ulster had caused some political outrage, their use in the province was still to achieve operational-level objectives. The British thinking regarding the use of SOF in pursuit of strategic ends was perhaps influenced by the United States’ earlier deployment of SOF to Afghanistan, to assist the Northern Alliance and track down Osama Bin Laden. Nevertheless, that SOF can train ‘military, police or other civilian law enforcement agencies in permissive or non-permissive environments,’ was a capability that was exploited in Afghanistan and in Helmand specifically.⁶⁸² Section C, 4 explores this use in greater detail. The British manual also emphasises the contribution SOF can make to strategic planning as they may be in possession of intelligence prior to other sources, which can influence the development of subsequent actions.⁶⁸³

⁶⁷⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 4–19.

⁶⁷⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 9–2.

⁶⁸⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 4–19.

⁶⁸¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–15.

⁶⁸² Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–13.

⁶⁸³ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 9–3.

(g) Strategic considerations

The strategic level was likewise well understood by the British forces deployed to Helmand. It was instilled in them through doctrine that '[c]ounterinsurgency is about gaining and securing the support of the people both in the theatre of operations and at home.'⁶⁸⁴ It is a critical observation that the support of both the civilian population in Helmand and at home needed to be secured. A lack of domestic support – particularly in the US – may have wielded the deciding influence over the outcome of the campaign. Information warfare and psychological considerations became paramount. The British COIN manual described the importance of influence activity in strategic terms with COIN positioned as being as much a 'battle of perceptions as it is about military operations.'⁶⁸⁵ Indeed, one of the critical perceptions to shape was the idea of progress.

Establishing a sense of success was among the most difficult components of the British effort as commanders struggled in 'managing the tension between the reality of slow (and expensive) progress, and the domestic political urgency to speed that progress up.'⁶⁸⁶ As a Brigade Commander is quoted as saying in the COIN manual, the desire to expedite the conflict can 'drive the hunt for quick fixes,' such as investing power and weapons in local leaders or forces which may be 'high-risk if not downright counter-productive.'⁶⁸⁷ The result of this imperative for progress is the same short term thinking derided in observations about the six-month tour length. Without this sense of progression, public opinion could turn on the campaign and '[o]ne outcome may be a foreshortening of a national contribution.'⁶⁸⁸ In the course of the war in Afghanistan, maintaining control over the narrative on progress was a constant challenge with far-reaching strategic implications. Ultimately, it is perhaps because the security forces failed in this task, that calls for withdrawal became louder and more difficult to ignore. This point raises the broader strategic consideration of how progress is measured and understood.

⁶⁸⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 1–3.

⁶⁸⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 1–3.

⁶⁸⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 3–17.

⁶⁸⁷ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 3–38.

⁶⁸⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 1–42.

The British means of measuring progress was by categorising the various activities of the security forces under the procedural maxim of shape, secure, develop. Once the security forces are no longer actively shaping the region by combatting insurgents and attempting to win over the population, they transition to holding the gains which have been made before gradually stepping back to assist in locally led developments. The end state for the security forces is characterised as the: ‘Transition to Host Nation Primacy.’⁶⁸⁹ Progress would therefore be any steps made toward handing over responsibilities to the ANSF. The security forces were anxious to reach this point lest they develop a ‘sense of a permanent presence,’ which would be viewed ‘by allies or partners [as] ... likely to be exploited by insurgents and critics both at home and abroad.’⁶⁹⁰ As such, it appears the American-led policy of transitioning to supporting the ANSF in their pursuit was motivated by a desire to deny the insurgent a propaganda win by promising to withdraw and to avoid uncomfortable associations with imperialism at home or in the wider international community. Pragmatically, it was also important to tap into the manpower of the local population ‘[a]s it [was] unlikely that any contemporary coalition [could] deploy and sustain such numbers’ as are required to maintain a large-scale COIN campaign.⁶⁹¹

2 Human intelligence in Afghanistan

As mentioned in the chapter introduction, analysing the HUMINT dimension of the intelligence war in Afghanistan has limitations at this time. Much of the necessary information for critically evaluating HUMINT efforts remains classified due to the current nature of the threat to the lives of potential assets in the troubled country. However, what information this study was able to consider is presented here.

HUMINT was an area identified as in need of ‘resourcing’ further in Afghanistan. Comments from an infantry battalion commander in 2009 were recorded in the British COIN manual and suggest that HUMINT was perhaps not given the attention it deserved. A demand was identified for HUMINT experts and not simply ‘a Brit in a dishdash smoking a fag on a street corner, but a proper HUMINT-trained operative and agent handler deployed forward.’⁶⁹² The

⁶⁸⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 1–25.

⁶⁹⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 1–25.

⁶⁹¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 1–29.

⁶⁹² Ministry of Defence (n 612) 5–8.

unnamed commander noted that in 2009 ‘our HUMINT world thinks ... [its] role is merely a liaison function, but it is not.’ The commander concluded that not possessing this important facet of the operational planning process was ‘the difference between conducting an intelligence-led operation or an advance to ambush.’⁶⁹³

As for the purpose of HUMINT sources in Afghanistan, the British understood their use doctrinally as aiding in target identification. HUMINT could provide ‘optimum strike times, detailed descriptions of the surrounding area, and the presence of sensitive sites like hospitals, churches and mosques.’⁶⁹⁴ This could provide commanders with an awareness of collateral damage and potential targets for operations. Following an operation, HUMINT sources again had a role to play. Via ‘a mobile phone, radio or camera,’ sources could provide assessments of the success of the preceding operation and the ‘psychological effects achieved on the target which can be used to assess re-attack options.’⁶⁹⁵ Several examples of this happening took place at a British FOB in Helmand, where walk-in civilian sources informed a company of British paratroopers about the number of casualties they had inflicted on the Taliban in previous attacks.⁶⁹⁶

HUMINT considerations also appeared in relation to working alongside local forces and dealing with prisoners. Where insurgents were detained, it was understood that ‘[p]lans should be in place for their immediate extraction and transport back to a secure location’ and the use of ‘appropriate restraints and means to deny them information’ made available. However, where ANSF personnel were present, it was sometimes possible to employ their language and cultural skills to ‘facilitate immediate tactical questioning’ which could provide an opportunity for ‘immediate follow-up operations.’⁶⁹⁷ This is an advantage of working with local forces that should not go unnoticed among the many drawbacks identified in this study. Yet, suspicion regarding indigenous troops reputedly also led to HUMINT sources being placed in the ANSF. Allegedly, NATO planted agents or ‘guardian angels’ among the ANSF

⁶⁹³ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 5–8.

⁶⁹⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–12.

⁶⁹⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–12.

⁶⁹⁶ Lewis (n 669) 228.

⁶⁹⁷ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 8-B-2.

ranks to ensure the safety of coalition forces by detecting and preventing possible insider attacks.⁶⁹⁸

3 Separating insurgents from their support network

(a) The information war

As in the previous case studies, British forces in Helmand understood they were in a battle not just to defeat the Taliban but to win the support of the local population in that effort. In order to separate the insurgents from their support network among the civilian population, the British set about implementing the ‘secure’ stage of their three-step plan (shape, secure, develop): it was understood that to gain the support of the population it must first be insulated from the insurgents lest those taking the opportunity to cooperate fear retribution from the Taliban. If this could be achieved, the insurgents can be isolated, and the security forces will start to build confidence among the population – which was viewed as more important than conducting strike operations. The British expected that establishing this security system would provoke the insurgents to seek to regain their hold over the civilian population.⁶⁹⁹ In the COIN manual, the British forces are warned of ‘a fierce backlash’ that would follow their securing of the local populace; for this reason, ‘numbers and presence matters for security forces.’⁷⁰⁰ To achieve the desired presence, it later became apparent (when forces were freed from the invasion of Iraq) that a large additional deployment was necessary. This came in the form of a ‘surge’ deployment and will be addressed later in this section. Another key part of the secure phase was the information war against the Taliban.

(i) The security forces’ approach

The British correctly understood that any kinetic (violent military) operation they took against the Taliban needed to be fortified with a corresponding information or psychological operation. This was for two reasons. Firstly, no action taken as part of the counterinsurgency campaign should ‘be conducted in isolation from the wider campaign objectives,’ and it was

⁶⁹⁸ Javid Ahmad, ‘Dress Like Allies, Kill Like Enemies An Analysis of “Insider Attacks” in Afghanistan’ (Modern War Institute 2017) 23 <<https://mwi.westpoint.edu/analysis-insider-attacks-afghanistan-mwi-report/>>.

⁶⁹⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 4–38.

⁷⁰⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 3–26.

necessary to explain ‘the rationale for the activity’ to the civilian population.⁷⁰¹ Ideally, this rationale would be explained ‘through credible local voices,’ as part of the key leader engagement strategy which saw the British trying to communicate to villages through their chiefs or elders.⁷⁰² How successful this was, in particular when forces had to explain why they had bombed or attacked villages and potentially injured civilians, is not certain.

Direct information warfare strategies included PRT funded and operated radio stations and leaflet drops by aircraft (as in Malaya). These leaflets were typically brightly coloured and written in local languages. They often targeted the Taliban and sought to demoralise them by threatening their deaths.⁷⁰³ Leaflets also advertised local PRT radio stations which played music (banned under the Taliban) and broadcasted news. The leaflets often took inspiration from Islam in attempts to promote the Afghan government, but, on one occasion this proved unwise. A leaflet depicted the Taliban flag on a dog, which as the flag contains a verse from the Quran, was viewed as deeply offensive even by Afghans not affiliated with the insurgents.⁷⁰⁴ The coalition ended up apologising for this misstep. British information warfare even inflicted collateral damage when a leaflet drop in Helmand failed to deploy and killed a young Afghan girl.⁷⁰⁵ Another means the British used to influence local perceptions was ‘key leader engagement,’ usually meetings with village elders. This practise required a great deal of training and language experience.⁷⁰⁶ This failed to make lasting impacts with leaders convinced things would return to normal when the Western forces left.⁷⁰⁷ Broadly, it appears that the explicit information war strategies employed in Afghanistan by ISAF were clumsy and unappealing to locals, though another aspect of information warfare, integrated into the conduct of kinetic operations, was more successful.

⁷⁰¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 8-B-1.

⁷⁰² Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 6–3.

⁷⁰³ ‘Army Sets up New Brigade “for Information Age”’ *BBC News* (31 January 2015) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-31070114>> accessed 3 August 2023.

⁷⁰⁴ Shawn Snow, ‘US Officials in Afghanistan Apologize for “highly Offensive” Leaflets’ (*Army Times*, 6 September 2017) <<https://www.armytimes.com/flashpoints/2017/09/06/us-officials-in-afghanistan-apologize-for-highly-offensive-leaflets/>> accessed 24 May 2023.

⁷⁰⁵ ‘Afghan Girl Killed by British Leaflet Drop’ *Reuters* (30 September 2009) <<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-afghan-girl-idUKTRE58T25120090930>> accessed 3 August 2023.

⁷⁰⁶ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 8-A-1.

⁷⁰⁷ *This Is What Winning Looks Like (Full Length)* (Directed by VICE, 2013) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ja5Q75hf6QI>> accessed 29 May 2023.

The British COIN manual gives a very good analysis of developing a message for various target audiences within the civil population. However, while it is cognisant of how a message may need to be delivered in different ways to different audiences, the manual does not indicate what those engaged in COIN should do if the population is not receptive to the message they are being communicated; irrespective of how it is communicated.⁷⁰⁸ In addressing the insurgent component of the population, Major APL Watkins (RM), a commander operating in Helmand in 2009, explains the rationale:⁷⁰⁹

The spectrum of the insurgency can be described as existing from the so called irreconcilables down to the ‘ten dollar Taliban.’ Our campaign is all about driving the wedge between the two. What we must identify is how these groups ... [can be] targeted and where exactly on the spectrum to place the wedge.

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the approach Watkins described, helping to illustrate this crucial idea further.

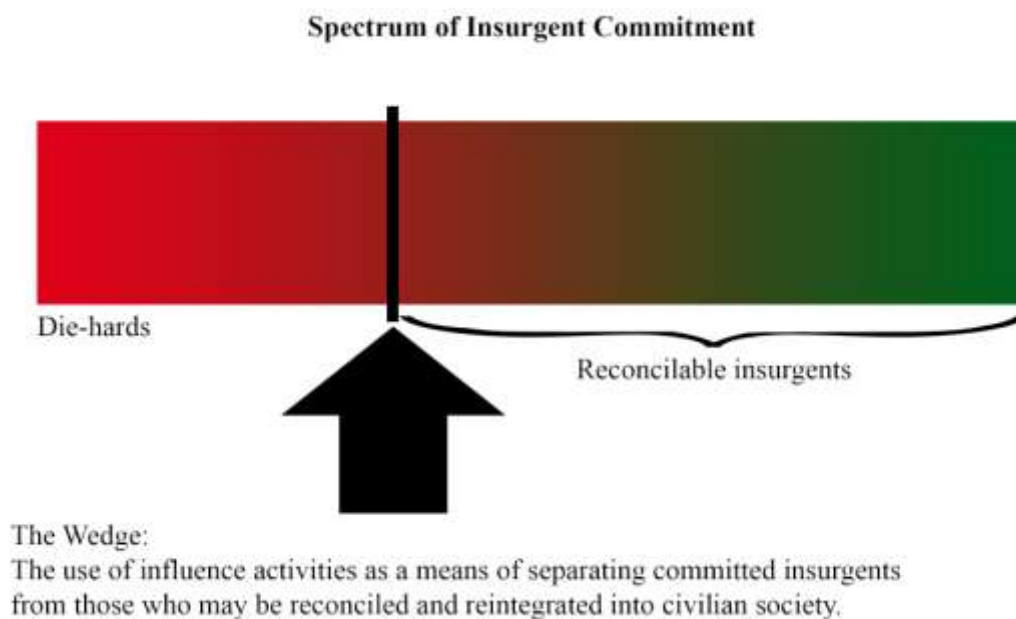


Figure 2: Spectrum of Insurgent Commitment

This approach is, of course, informed by the British experience in Malaya. The die-hards among the CPM’s ranks would be less susceptible to the messaging of the security forces, however, over time, insurgents could move up or down the spectrum that Major Watkins

⁷⁰⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 8-A-4.

⁷⁰⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 3–10.

refers to. Understanding and exploiting this model in the information war could be the key to breaking up insurgent cells and securing areas, piece-by-piece.

Major Watkins provides an example of identifying the difference between the motivated foreign fighters' operation in Garmsir and Nawa and the local insurgents. Watkins identified that local insurgents had a particularly swift response time to patrols probing their locations, because they were operating out of safe houses in their local community. These safe houses were protected by IED screens and used by foreign and 'Out of Area' fighters which he described as the 'backbone' of the insurgent presence. Watkins's Afghan troops were reticent to attack the local Taliban forces because they understood these were local boys (perhaps like themselves) who had 'an allegiance to whichever bully was hardest or most influential.'⁷¹⁰ As such, the local insurgents could be appealed to 'in the shuras we held after contacts,' as fighting them was counterproductive. Killing local people who have joined the insurgency potentially through intimidation, imperils the consent the security forces must win from the civilian population. Far better to remove the insurgent ideologues and reconcile the locals. The manual explains that 'when kinetic activity is likely to achieve the right effect on the insurgent but will undoubtedly alienate the people; a close judgement call is required.'⁷¹¹

This fascinating example shows just how hand-in-hand psychological and kinetic operations were. Furthermore, it demonstrated the utility of being able to identify those insurgents who may be more receptive to information operations and could be persuaded to eventually return to civilian life. After all, 'some had a degree of education and training, but most were someone's son, brother, father in that village and the coalition had killed them for being in, what amounted to them, a neighbourhood watch.'⁷¹² Watkins offers a critical analysis of his own activities before coming to this realisation, which he suggested took around four months – by which time he was near the end of his deployment and had 'created more insurgents and IED emplacers for our successors in Garmsir to deal with.'⁷¹³ Again, this highlights the problem of six month tours. While it may be a lot to ask troops to continue to operate in harsh circumstances, the value of the lessons Major Watkins learned may not have been fully

⁷¹⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 3–10.

⁷¹¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 6–3.

⁷¹² Ministry of Defence (n 612) 3–10.

⁷¹³ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 3–10.

understood by his replacement. Nevertheless, his understandings provide an important model both for information and intelligence-led operations.

(ii) The Taliban approach

As Al Qaeda commander Ayman al Zawahri said:⁷¹⁴

We are in a battle and that more than half of this battle is taking place in

the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle for the hearts and minds of our Umma.

The insurgents appreciated the importance of the information war from the outset. The Taliban dedicated great resources to it and, ultimately, won it. The British doctrine identified the Taliban's 'most effective weapon ... [a]s the influence that they can extend through the media' and clearly an effort was made to counter it.⁷¹⁵ The Taliban's information war was so effective because it spoke to the predominantly Pashtun population in their own terms and through media that was familiar to them. As regards their information war strategy, the Taliban again demonstrate a significant evolution over the previously considered insurgencies. The use of FM Radio, interviews, internet and social media communications and a range of published sources by the Taliban, enabled them to spread their message in an effective manner that was easily received by their target audiences. The substance, or master narratives, of the Taliban's message were that their victory was inevitable as Afghanistan has a long tradition of defeating invaders. God was on their side and the Taliban were defending Islam and the Pashtun culture from Western invaders and their Afghan puppets who sought to destroy them; thus, Afghans had a duty to support the Taliban.⁷¹⁶

The Taliban's primary area of focus for their information war was at the village level and was largely led by clerics.⁷¹⁷ These religious leaders would gauge the level of support in the village and either drum up support or practise intimidation. Their messaging often exploited instances of collateral damage and furthered the message that the West targeted all Afghans, and the Taliban were necessary protectors. Through DVDs, graffiti, radio broadcasts,

⁷¹⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 6–1.

⁷¹⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 1–1.

⁷¹⁶ Thomas Johnson, *Taliban Narratives: The Use and Power of Stories in the Afghanistan Conflict* (1st edn, Oxford University Press 2018) 22 <<https://academic.oup.com/book/11413>> accessed 14 June 2023.

⁷¹⁷ Johnson (n 716) 35.

sermons, religious texts and online activity, the Taliban made deft use of local folklore and allusions to tradition to galvanise support. An example of the Taliban's use of local traditions was the publishing of night letters or *Shabnamah*.⁷¹⁸ These letters were typically used during periods of occupation to warn of attacks or share political or religious messages. Likewise, Afghanistan – regarded as a nation of poets – had a vibrant oral tradition that the Taliban could exploit. As religion was omnipresent in the Taliban's information war strategy, it is unsurprising that the majority of poetry produced by supporters of the Taliban and shared at the village level, lauded martyrs and spoke of a religious war against the western 'crusaders.'⁷¹⁹ A line from a Taliban poem illustrates this: 'Till the homeland becomes free. All the betrayers will be suppressed I'll go to ... war with great courage ... I'll ascend to the sky with great honour.'⁷²⁰ Despite their dedication to these traditional forms of communication, the Taliban also broadcasted online and on radio.

The Taliban's website, *Alemarah*, was used to both communicate with journalists and those in the wealthier parts of Afghanistan. It often shared anti-Western cartoons and communicated messages in a variety of languages including Pashto, Arabic, Urdu and Dari, to try to reach a greater community of supporters.⁷²¹ Notable also, was the limited use of English pages which presented photographs from the war and news updates.⁷²² The Taliban began to use English language communication to address the Western world. This effort peaked with their presence on social media platform, Twitter. In using this platform, the Taliban primarily sought to project strength and demoralise westerners while their other sources were focused more on gaining the support of local communities or other Islamic nations. The legitimate government of Afghanistan lagged behind the Taliban in its online media presence and had effectively ceded this ground to the insurgent. Evading bans through the spreading of messages by many separate online accounts or by abiding by platforms' terms of service, the Taliban enthusiastically expanded their online presence.⁷²³ By employing dedicated spokesmen who

⁷¹⁸ Johnson (n 716) 55.

⁷¹⁹ Johnson (n 716) 107–109.

⁷²⁰ Johnson (n 716) 114.

⁷²¹ Johnson (n 716) 86.

⁷²² Johnson (n 716) 87.

⁷²³ Johnson (n 716) 89–92.

reported directly to the Shura, the Taliban also had remarkable control over the messages they were sending.⁷²⁴

Radio was an excellent form of communication for the Taliban as many among the Afghan rural population are illiterate. Some PRTs established pro-Western radio stations and ISAF even supplied free radios to some villages, though these could easily be tuned to pick up Taliban transmissions as well.⁷²⁵ As a consequence, the use of radio programmes dedicated to spreading Taliban messages, was common. It is believed these messages were broadcast from vehicle-borne transmitters which could be moved to boost the signal and avoid detection by security forces.⁷²⁶

(b) Drugs as a support network

Trade in narcotics was the backbone of the Taliban's finances. The primary concern for the British was how to deal with crops of drugs that troops encountered. Destroying these products was not authorised in Helmand.⁷²⁷ This is understandable as rightly or wrongly, cultivating narcotics (mainly poppies) was the primary source of income for the local population as well as the insurgents. As they operated in the primary cultivation region for drugs in Afghanistan, the British 'had been appointed as the lead nation by the Western alliance to deal with counternarcotics.'⁷²⁸ A concern mentioned in the previous chapter haunted this appointment. The nations involved in the coalition operated under different legal frameworks and there was no internationally agreed upon strategy for counternarcotics.⁷²⁹ Having acquired responsibility for the world's leading supplier of opium-based narcotics, the British could not decide if 'troops should destroy the crops ... or wait and ... intercept convoys ... in order to catch the big drug traffickers.'⁷³⁰ This disfunction at the strategic level had sweeping effects on the COIN campaign. The Bush administration 'refused to

⁷²⁴ Johnson (n 716) 98.

⁷²⁵ Johnson (n 716) 101.

⁷²⁶ Johnson (n 716) 99.

⁷²⁷ Declan Walsh, 'British Military Sanctions Afghan Poppy Cultivation' *The Guardian* (27 April 2007) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/27/afghanistan.declanwalsh>> accessed 9 August 2023.

⁷²⁸ Rashid (n 571) 226.

⁷²⁹ Rashid (n 571) 226.

⁷³⁰ Rashid (n 571) 226.

acknowledge that drugs were helping fuel the insurgency,' despite this being manifestly obvious.⁷³¹ As a consequence, the Taliban prospered.

The Taliban's influence saw opium production in Helmand reach the heights of 6,100 metric tonnes in 2006 and 8,200 in 2007.⁷³² Yet, this export fed the country as much as it fuelled the insurgency; the opium accounted for 'some 50 per cent of Afghanistan's gross domestic product (estimated at US\$6.7 billion in 2006).'⁷³³ A host of other problems emerged from the lucrative trade in narcotics in Helmand. It delayed the harvest of food crops as poppies had to be planted prior. When the Taliban ordered its members not to help in the harvest in favour of fighting the British, local people became dependent on Western aid – though this did create a propaganda opportunity for the PRT.⁷³⁴ The influence of the money the narcotics trade generated was to corrupt 'the government, the police and the judicial system.'⁷³⁵ Local people also did not largely support the burning of poppy fields, with 66% of Afghans interviewed in International Council on Security and Development study opposed.⁷³⁶ Narcotics likewise dramatically influenced the fighting effectiveness of the ANSF who were often on drugs.⁷³⁷ If the coalition had been more insistent and clear in their opposition to the drug trade, they may have been able to influence Afghanistan's first post-intervention President, Hamid Karzai, who in the absence of – or in opposition to any Western influence – made 'no attempt to stop the wholesale involvement of senior politicians and warlords in the drug trade,' which provided 'jobs, income and security that the state was unable to give.'⁷³⁸ Despite the impact of the drug trade on and in fuelling the insurgency, the security forces largely failed to address it.

⁷³¹ Rashid (n 571) 226.

⁷³² Rashid (n 571) 227.

⁷³³ Rashid (n 571) 227.

⁷³⁴ Lewis (n 669) 65.

⁷³⁵ Rashid (n 571) 227.

⁷³⁶ The International Council on Security and Development, 'Operation Moshtarak: Lessons Learned' (The International Council on Security and Development 2010) 2
<<https://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/moshtarak1.pdf>>.

⁷³⁷ *INSIDE AFGHANISTAN PART 2 / VICE NEWS / VICE* (Directed by VICE, 2011)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1JNuFPiTbs>> accessed 29 May 2023.

⁷³⁸ Rashid (n 571) 227.

(c) Internment and surge operations

While a significant factor in the previous case studies, internment was not widely used in Afghanistan despite the fact that it was viewed as an ‘essential means of separating the insurgent from the population.’⁷³⁹ The Northern Ireland case study demonstrated, internment operations have limitations and if they are not performed on the back of solid intelligence, can be counterproductive. Interestingly, the British COIN manual viewed internment as a possible temporary measure that could be employed and then dissolved prior to the end of the COIN campaign. This appears to be something of a compromise from the Malayan approach which lasted the duration of the Emergency and the Northern Irish approach which was swiftly abandoned when it became obvious it was not working. The primary reason given for this shift was that intelligence may be used to identify insurgents, but it cannot be used to prosecute them legitimately as it may not be fully disclosed; as such, ‘[i]nternment, if authorised, is unlikely to remain an option for the duration of a counterinsurgency campaign.’⁷⁴⁰ Internment was simply not practicable under the framework the British operated under. While sufficient intelligence could have enabled an internment campaign, there was more than likely insufficient evidence to successfully prosecute internees.⁷⁴¹ It would then be necessary to release internees, potentially before the nation is stable enough to cope with a surge in the insurgents’ ranks from released prisoners. While releasing prisoners at the end of an internment campaign would give a sudden shot of adrenaline to an insurgency, ‘surge deployments’ were intended to do much the same thing for the security forces.

The deployment of the 30,000 US Marines to Helmand in 2009 was part of a policy by the Obama administration to ‘surge’ into the province and force the Taliban out of the communities which they still controlled. Its primary objective was to break the perceptions of Taliban strength in the region.⁷⁴² A definition given for surge operations is that they are when ‘security forces and all supporting activities are concentrated to exploit opportunities in a specific area for a specific period of time.’⁷⁴³ Typical activities associated with surge operations are large scale search operations and intensive public order operations. This

⁷³⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 8–19.

⁷⁴⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 12–24.

⁷⁴¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 12–24.

⁷⁴² Malkasian (n 575) 241.

⁷⁴³ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 8–17.

definition would identify Operation MOTORMAN in Northern Ireland as a surge operation as well as, potentially the sudden influx of ex-Palestine Police officers in Malaya.

MOTORMAN was very successful in restoring order and there are some indications that the deployment of the USMC to Helmand achieved at least some successes as well. Preceding the arrival of the USMC, the British, along with their attached Danish and Afghan forces, launched a 3,000 strong offensive which succeeded in gaining ground albeit at the cost of heavy casualties.⁷⁴⁴ After the Americans arrived and the offensive escalated, the coalition forces were able to achieve a new level of control and relative peace in the province's districts. The reopening of schools and shops in Sangin, a key area of focus for the US surge, and coalition forces patrolling the streets without coming under fire, were indications that a degree of normality was enabled by it.⁷⁴⁵ The troops were also accompanied by an injection of humanitarian relief, with USAID bringing US\$470 million to the region.⁷⁴⁶

The Taliban also had to change their tactics in reaction to the surge. The intensity of the attacks they had previously been able to throw at the British (sometimes in excess of 500 fighters) had to be reduced to ambushes involving small groups and IEDs to minimise losses.⁷⁴⁷ It is arguable that this change in tactics constituted a diminishing in the perceived strength of the Taliban. The surge, however, was negatively received by the population in the areas it affected. A study by the International Council on Security and Development reported that 61% of locals interviewed felt more negatively about ISAF than before, and 95% believed more young people had joined the Taliban as a result.⁷⁴⁸ Likewise, the increased military activity displaced many more people leading to increased movement of refugees. Most concerning of all responses was the 71% of those interviewed who wanted the NATO forces to leave.⁷⁴⁹ Despite these strong objections, the Afghans interviewed in the study largely did not want the Taliban to return and wanted a return to normality with the opening

⁷⁴⁴ Malkasian (n 575) 246.

⁷⁴⁵ N, P and R, 'How The Fall Troop Surge Changed Afghanistan' *NPR* (14 April 2011) <<https://www.npr.org/2011/04/14/135412691/how-the-fall-troop-surge-changed-afghanistan>> accessed 2 August 2023.

⁷⁴⁶ Malkasian (n 575) 246.

⁷⁴⁷ Malkasian (n 575) 245.

⁷⁴⁸ The International Council on Security and Development (n 736) 2.

⁷⁴⁹ The International Council on Security and Development (n 736) 2.

of roads and other services.⁷⁵⁰ Irrespective of the reception to the surge and whether or not it achieved the desired outcome, the fact it was followed by continued and escalating drawdowns in US forces undermined any lasting success it could have achieved. Finally, through framework operations, new steps were being taken to separate civilian from insurgent.

In previous case studies, the use of identification papers has been an essential part of this separation. A promising development of this useful but flawed practise was the collection of biometric data. While identification cards can be confiscated by insurgents, burned, or forged, undermining their effectiveness, one cannot falsify DNA or fingerprint data. With the use of electronic means, biometric screenings of villages could be used to determine who is local to the area and who is not. This could enable the driving of a wedge between the more determined out of area fighters Major Watkins identified, while enabling a general capacity to distinguish the insurgents from the local population. A further use for this data is in a forensic approach to combat in COIN. Any DNA evidence recovered from IEDs, gunfights or known insurgent caches could be used to identify people involved in terrorist activity.⁷⁵¹

C Contributions to the Understanding of Counterinsurgency

1 Importance of the administrative level

Early failures in Helmand on the operational level were due to the strategy employed by 16 Air Assault Brigade (deployed April -September 2006).⁷⁵² Low numbers of British forces were locked into defending small areas (the Platoon House strategy), where they would be overwhelmed by the Taliban's numerical superiority in planned attacks.⁷⁵³ The deployment of 3 Commando Brigade in the following tour (October 2006 to April 2007) sought to change this by adapting to a more mobile strategy.⁷⁵⁴ The Royal Marines prepared 200 strong Mobile Operations Groups (MOGs) to pursue the Taliban across open ground in lightly armoured

⁷⁵⁰ The International Council on Security and Development (n 736) 3.

⁷⁵¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 8–16.

⁷⁵² Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) xviii.

⁷⁵³ Robert Egnell, 'Lessons from Helmand, Afghanistan: What Now for British Counterinsurgency?' (2011) 87 International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 297, 304

<<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/20869661>> accessed 2 August 2023.

⁷⁵⁴ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) xviii.

vehicles (Vikings, Pinzgauers and Jackals).⁷⁵⁵ However, this plan also played into the Taliban's hands by resulting in MOGs advancing to ambush, rather than seizing the initiative. With the next tour, by 12 Mechanised Brigade (April to October 2007), a strategy change saw large-scale clearing operations enabled by lightly armoured vehicles becoming the norm.⁷⁵⁶ Yet, with the limited manpower available to them, the Brigade could not hold the ground they gained leaving the British to feel that they were merely 'mowing the lawn.'⁷⁵⁷ That is to say, the British forces in Helmand had become increasingly more effective at the 'clear' phase of the ubiquitous 'clear, hold, build' philosophy, but it was not until after the deployment of the 30,000 Americans that success in holding ground became possible.⁷⁵⁸ While it was ultimately the political level which determined the outcome in Afghanistan, the movement of more complicated functions to the tactical level was a defining innovation made by the British in Helmand.

The deployment of 52 Infantry Brigade saw an increased interest in moving more complex non-kinetic aspects of counterinsurgency down to ever smaller unit and sub-unit levels. This meant that even company level formations and perhaps smaller groups yet, would have dedicated intelligence and influence duties and advisors. This drive to the tactical level included a range of functions that were judged to be of near equal importance to fighting units and continued in subsequent tour deployments. While initially focusing on psychological warfare, the perceived need to involve a growing range of specialists – sometimes civilians – on the tactical-level expanded into a range of skills organised into 'non-kinetic effects teams.' Indeed, civilians were valued as part of this initiative because they could remain in the area for a longer duration than the tour system allowed military personnel to operate. Again, this administrative concern reared its head because it is specifically at the sub-unit level where accumulated knowledge and 'continuity of relationships' is valued.⁷⁵⁹ The primary functions of these non-kinetic effects teams included:⁷⁶⁰

- PSYOPS advice to sub-unit commanders.

⁷⁵⁵ Egnell (n 753).

⁷⁵⁶ Directorate Land Warfare (n 576) xviii.

⁷⁵⁷ Stephen Grey, *Operation Snakebite: The Explosive Story of an Afghan Desert Siege* (Viking 2009) 61–65.

⁷⁵⁸ Egnell (n 753) 310.

⁷⁵⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 6–22.

⁷⁶⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 6–22.

- Face-to-face PSYOPS activity such as talking with the local population, loudspeaker broadcasts and handbill dissemination.
- Gathering and assessment of information on target audiences and the effectiveness of friendly PSYOPS activity.
- Feedback on local atmospherics.
- Small project management.
- A mechanism for dealing with compensation claims.

Company intelligence support teams (CoISTs) were another similar innovation along similar lines. The company level is often the most appropriate strata to focus on in COIN. Officers at this level had command of key assets including 81mm mortars, sniper teams and the primary fire and manoeuvre elements. Giving these company formations greater intelligence integration meant they could be responsive to threats and targets of opportunity which they had the capability to destroy. The use of Intelligence Corps sergeants (leading small teams of analysts) as advisors to company commanders, enabled a similar ritual to the ‘morning prayers’ observed in Malaya, with intelligence briefings before and, crucially, during operations. In several cases detailed by one company commander, Major Russell Lewis, intelligence was passed on to him while he led patrols, enabling him to react to opportunities and threats.⁷⁶¹ Lewis also mentioned how his intelligence advisors were involved in the planning process for patrols and other framework operations.⁷⁶² As company sized elements often operated FOBs, the allocation of intelligence specialists at this level meant they could encounter walk-ins by civilians willing to provide intelligence or speak to the population directly.⁷⁶³ While the allocation of these capabilities to smaller formations undoubtedly made them more effective, defining progress and success was an ongoing problem in Afghanistan.

The effectiveness of operations was assessed by a Tactical Conflict Assessment Framework (TCAF). The framework urged soldiers to speak to locals and ask them questions relevant to

⁷⁶¹ Lewis (n 669) 35 & 52.

⁷⁶² Lewis (n 669) 67.

⁷⁶³ Lewis (n 669) 65.

their village, including has the population changed, why and what the village's most important problems are, and who can solve them.⁷⁶⁴ The TCAF however, was discontinued.⁷⁶⁵ The primary issues with this framework was that an armed soldier asking these questions of a civilian in an operational zone, was likely to provoke a response where he would be told what the villager thought he wanted to hear. As such, the main indication the British had of how well they were doing in the eyes of the local population whom they sought to influence was through key leader engagement.⁷⁶⁶ This outlet for feedback also has the obvious concern that those attending executive shuras (meetings) may not be representative of broader concerns among the people, or that the British might ignore or misinterpret them.

Finally, the administrative feature that proved to be effective in Northern Ireland, the Tasking and Coordination Groups (TCGs) returned in Afghanistan. While it appears that their activities were similar in sharing intelligence and conducting operations, insufficient information is publicly available to make any further observations.⁷⁶⁷

2 Hearts and Minds

The British approach to hearts and minds in Helmand was largely built around concepts they shared with the Americans. Three-word maxims were used to describe the general approach at different stages of the campaign including, 'clear hold built,' 'shape, secure, develop' and, in response to the insurgency, 'disrupt, interdict, defeat.'⁷⁶⁸ These terms and the strategy to be followed at each stage is explained in the British COIN manual. The general spirit of these adages was to gain the support of the civilian. Development projects were viewed as a key part of attaining the local population's support long term.

Shaping hearts and minds focused on various activities that aimed to 'influence and inform the perceptions, allegiances, attitudes, actions, and behaviours' both within the Area of

⁷⁶⁴ David Wilson and Gareth E Conway, 'The Tactical Conflict Assessment Framework: A Short-Lived Panacea' (2009) 154 *The RUSI Journal* 10, 11

<<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071840902818548>> accessed 4 August 2023.

⁷⁶⁵ Wilson and Conway (n 764) 10.

⁷⁶⁶ Wilson and Conway (n 764) 13–15.

⁷⁶⁷ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 5–6.

⁷⁶⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 4–33.

Operation (AO) and internationally.⁷⁶⁹ The primary activity which the security forces engaged in was providing security to enable local people to go about their business, free from violence and intimidation. Security was identified at a meeting of local leaders in Sangin as the primary issue of concern for the community.⁷⁷⁰ However, by actively engaging the insurgents who hid amongst the population, the security forces necessarily at times brought violence to the local people. In this regard, the security forces were at a significant disadvantage as one Brigade commander noted in 2008: the ‘Taliban rely on 90% psychology and 10% force whereas we rely on 90% force and 10% psychology,’ making it easy for the security forces to be presented by the insurgents as the problem.⁷⁷¹ As the commander put it, Afghanistan is ‘an environment where perception is reality, memories are very long and enemies easily made.’⁷⁷² This problem is referred to as the ‘half-life’ of the counterinsurgent forces. As observed in Northern Ireland, the British Army were initially viewed favourably yet, ‘as time goes on, they are increasingly portrayed as occupiers,’ a concern compounded by civilian casualties and an overall problem with creating a sense of progress.⁷⁷³

Progress is always a difficult notion in COIN campaigns given how long and violent they may be. At the core of the state’s message is a vision for the future and progress is determined by how believable it is that the security forces can deliver that future to the population. In parallel, the insurgents also offer the civilian population a rival vision and thus a choice must be made. ISAF’s ‘clear, hold, build’ strategy relied on the Afghan government having a plan ‘which addresses root causes as well as symptoms of the insurgency.’⁷⁷⁴ That plan seemed to rely on providing development projects to the local population and neutralising the Taliban.

The problem with development projects is that they are long term efforts and require continuous stability to be successful; it was not until 2010 that the Helmand PRT could begin to truly facilitate this. Four years later, they left. In that short period of time, it was necessary to instil in the local population the sense that they were deriving ‘tangible benefits’ in their

⁷⁶⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 4–10.

⁷⁷⁰ *This Is What Winning Looks Like (Full Length)* (n 707).

⁷⁷¹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 3–25.

⁷⁷² Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 3–25.

⁷⁷³ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 1–39.

⁷⁷⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 4–35.

lives, that ‘justif[ied] the costs associated with security operations.’⁷⁷⁵ The British government’s development programme in Afghanistan cost £3.5 Billion between 2002 and 2021.⁷⁷⁶ It provided humanitarian aid and funding for schools with an emphasis on advancing female education. A great deal of money was also spent on agriculture in an attempt to provide farmers with alternatives to poppy growing. Funds also worked to clear mines, establish local political structures, aid in elections as well as funding urban and rural development.⁷⁷⁷ This included ‘renovating schools and health clinics, and employing local workers.’⁷⁷⁸ Funds and training were also allocated to developing local political systems and policing.⁷⁷⁹ Despite this great expense, it appears that these development projects did not generate consent and thus support for the COIN effort.⁷⁸⁰

One of the main concerns for Afghans was employment and broadly, the work of the PRT was viewed critically because it failed to deliver large industry projects and create many jobs. This could have been an opportunity to prevent some young men from joining the insurgency if it was possible to provide the security necessary to fund larger projects such as factories or irrigation infrastructure.⁷⁸¹ The development projects which had been undertaken faced criticisms of corruption from some Afghans because they sometimes favoured certain tribal groups, leaving others disaffected. Afghans in Helmand were also angry that the COIN campaign was imposing a personal cost upon them and their families while delivering little in return. Meanwhile, the Taliban had returned, and ISAF were viewed negatively for failing to defeat them while causing collateral damage to lives and property.⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 4–25.

⁷⁷⁶ Philip Loft and Claire Mills, ‘Afghanistan: Development, UK Aid, and the Future’ (House of Commons Library 2021) CBP 9276 5.

⁷⁷⁷ Loft and Mills (n 776) 15.

⁷⁷⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 1) pt 4–25.

⁷⁷⁹ Yaseen Zazai, ‘Effectiveness of the UK and Other Aid in Afghanistan: A Recipient’s Perspective’ (Center for Global Development 2023) 18 <<https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/effectiveness-uk-aid-afghanistan.pdf>> accessed 4 August 2023.

⁷⁸⁰ Stuart Gordon, ‘Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan’s Helmand Province’ (Feinstein International Center 2011) 4–5 <<https://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/winning-hearts-and-minds/>> accessed 4 August 2023.

⁷⁸¹ Gordon (n 780) 5.

⁷⁸² Gordon (n 780) 6.

It may have been more profitable in terms of securing civilian support to have dedicated more resources to defeating the Taliban than development projects.⁷⁸³ In order to truly secure the population's support against the insurgency, NATO needed to convince them that they would not be abandoned to the Taliban.⁷⁸⁴ This was where the security forces made a critical error. The policy had always been eventual withdrawal in favour of the ANA leading COIN operations; however, this was rightly viewed by the civilian population as amounting to an admission of defeat.⁷⁸⁵ Failing confidence in the government's vision for the future, one way to gain support was to buy it.

Money was a valuable resource for purchasing a community's support and denying the insurgents access to the deep recruiting pool of unemployed military-aged males. There is also a long tradition of Helmandi patronage through payment, though the allocation of funds did create a perception of winners and losers and provided the Taliban with opportunities to exploit tribal rivalries.⁷⁸⁶ Employment of local people and paying them for aiding in labour-intensive, short-term efforts is a useful way of disrupting insurgent recruiting.⁷⁸⁷ However, it is not necessarily a panacea for all the grievances that populations may have against the security forces as, perhaps, it was hoped.

3 The indigenous security forces

This section considers what turned out to be the most important feature of the COIN campaign in Afghanistan, the development of the ANSF and the plan to transition to an indigenous-led security response. The considerable expense which this incurred – and the subsequent effectiveness and implications for the local forces will also be explored – culminating in an evaluation of the policy to phase out the western forces in favour of the ANSF.

⁷⁸³ Gordon (n 780) 7.

⁷⁸⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 4–15.

⁷⁸⁵ *This Is What Winning Looks Like (Full Length)* (n 707).

⁷⁸⁶ Gordon (n 780) 8.

⁷⁸⁷ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 8–7.

The procedure for developing local forces that the British committed to follow in Helmand was summarised as follows: ‘Lead, partner, overwatch, tactical overwatch, operational overwatch, strategic overwatch.’⁷⁸⁸ This meant the British forces would transition from doing the business of COIN for the indigenous, to doing it alongside them, and then gradually supporting an indigenous-led campaign. The American COIN manual for Afghanistan details a similar process.⁷⁸⁹ Likewise, ISAF wound up in 2014 in accordance with a framework established at the NATO meeting in Lisbon in 2010.⁷⁹⁰ This decision established that, while offensive combat operations would no longer be led by coalition troops, continued NATO support would be provided to the ANSF. Around 15,000 coalition forces remained in Afghanistan as part of what the Americans called Operation Freedom’s Sentinel; their continued support to the ANSF post-2014 in their fight against the Taliban and IS-K.⁷⁹¹ As part of this policy of transition, a significant amount of money and time was dedicated toward developing the ANSF.

Training of the ANSF was undertaken on many levels by the coalition partners. This presented a challenge in that, as Lord Houghton pointed out, ‘multinational training programmes ... delivered by mixed national groupings [sometimes] in a second language’ were taught to students with limited language skills and ‘by instructors of wildly differing competences.’⁷⁹² Inconsistency was inevitable as each coalition partner trained the ANSF personnel they supervised in accordance with their own standards: ‘there was no NATO approved syllabus.’⁷⁹³ The leading British contribution – besides the training carried out by the Helmand PRT – was in officer training at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA) in Qargha, the so-called ‘Sandhurst in the Sand.’⁷⁹⁴ This establishment was reported to be effective, although, the British COIN manual suggested that: ‘[a] useful rule of thumb is to assume that it will take four times as long to train indigenous soldiers as it might

⁷⁸⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 4–32.

⁷⁸⁹ United States Army Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (FM 3-24/MCWP 3-335, Headquarters, Department of the Army 2014) 9–8 & 9–9.

⁷⁹⁰ ‘Remarks by the President at ISAF Meeting on Afghanistan’ (*whitehouse.gov*, 21 May 2012) <<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/21/remarks-president-isaf-meeting-afghanistan>> accessed 13 July 2023.

⁷⁹¹ ‘Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Report-In-Brief | Office of Inspector General’ <<https://oig.usaid.gov/node/4002>> accessed 13 July 2023.

⁷⁹² Select Committee on and International Relations and Defence, ‘The UK and Afghanistan’ (House of Lords 2021) HL Paper 208 para 424.

⁷⁹³ Select Committee on and International Relations and Defence (n 792) para 424.

⁷⁹⁴ Select Committee on and International Relations and Defence (n 792) para 427.

take to train a UK soldier.⁷⁹⁵ This startling observation is made all the more remarkable when considering that '[t]he US provide[d] about \$4.5 billion annually to the ANSF; other NATO countries provide[d] about \$0.5 billion.'⁷⁹⁶ No doubt, it was hoped that these efforts at great expense would be justified in the effectiveness of the forces trained by ISAF – only, for the most part, it was not.

(a) Effectiveness of ANSF

Sources vary wildly on the operational effectiveness of the ANSF, especially considering that it was made up of constituent parts of differing levels of training and ability. As such, each element of the ANSF will be addressed individually, beginning with the Afghan local and national police (including border and other police forces) collectively referred to here as the ANP.

(i) ANP

The most heavily criticised component of the ANSF, the Afghan Police were found to be rife with corruption according to a House of Lords report. This was along factional or tribal lines and often involved 'patronage ties' which allocated promotions on 'the basis of political allegiance and connections' which sometimes led to police officials obeying their patrons rather than 'their official superiors.'⁷⁹⁷ The British COIN manual also warned that indigenous security forces may not be capable of 'objective selection criteria and rely instead on non-military factors such as ethnicity, social or family ties, wealth and religion,' a problem potentially present within the ANA as well.⁷⁹⁸ Corruption also involved policemen taking money and supplies they were issued for themselves and selling them along with even the shell casings from engagements they fought, as scrap metal at local bazaars.⁷⁹⁹ On one occasion, a police unit in Helmand even sold the security barricade they were tasked with manning as scrap.⁸⁰⁰ This behaviour can likely be attributed to low pay. As a consequence of this, it appears that the coalition forces had incredible difficulty in motivating the ANSF to

⁷⁹⁵ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 10:48.

⁷⁹⁶ Select Committee on and International Relations and Defence (n 792) para 446.

⁷⁹⁷ Select Committee on and International Relations and Defence (n 792) para 442.

⁷⁹⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 10–12.

⁷⁹⁹ *This Is What Winning Looks Like (Full Length)* (n 707).

⁸⁰⁰ *This Is What Winning Looks Like (Full Length)* (n 707).

complete even the simplest tasks such as filling sandbags.⁸⁰¹ Not properly remunerating officers is a dangerous prospect as they could be persuaded by the insurgents to sell information or weapons.

Indeed, the Afghan Local Police (ALP) formed in 2010, who were paid US\$150 a month to perform militia duties and were largely illiterate, were the primary part of the security force infiltrated by the Taliban or co-opted by local strongmen as enforcers.⁸⁰² On one occasion in 2016, a whole ALP unit of thirty men joined the Taliban, bringing with them their weapons. These men were perhaps persuaded by the Taliban's extensive online information warfare campaign which featured videos of other defectors serving happily in its ranks.⁸⁰³ Ethnic conflict was also an ever-present concern. An independent review of the ANSF (including both the ANA and ANP) suggested that if a non-Pashtun were to win the 2014 election, there would potentially be defections among the security forces which could bolster the insurgency.⁸⁰⁴ While this did not come to pass as Ashraf Ghani, a Pashtun, was elected – that this was considered a possibility speaks volumes about the dependability of the ANSF's rank-and-file.

The ANP also struggled to perform regular policing functions because of its role in the COIN effort and as such, 'few resources have gone into police training, support or management.'⁸⁰⁵ Worst of all, were the accounts of sexual misconduct involving children. In Sangin, three children were shot by Police commanders for attempting to flee sexual slavery.⁸⁰⁶ Illiteracy rates were high and a general lack of understanding of the laws of war or human rights considerations further undermined the ANP's legitimacy.⁸⁰⁷ Despite their many problems, an independent review of the ANSF suggested a great increase in the deployment of police officers to Afghanistan's troubled eastern and southern border regions.⁸⁰⁸

⁸⁰¹ *This Is What Winning Looks Like (Full Length)* (n 707).

⁸⁰² Ahmad (n 698) 12–13.

⁸⁰³ Ahmad (n 698) 13–15.

⁸⁰⁴ Schroden and others (n 621) 7.

⁸⁰⁵ Select Committee on and International Relations and Defence (n 792) para 439.

⁸⁰⁶ 'Afghan Police Accused of Corruption and Child Abuse' *BBC News* (22 February 2013) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-21547542>> accessed 17 July 2023.

⁸⁰⁷ *This Is What Winning Looks Like (Full Length)* (n 707).

⁸⁰⁸ Schroden and others (n 621) 27.

(ii) ANA

There is a gulf between the commentary regarding the ANA in official sources and that of observers on the ground. For example, the British COIN manual provides commentary from American officers stating that ‘the people responded well to the ANA because of their professionalism and fairness. The local people were amazed to see all the ethnicities that were working well together.’⁸⁰⁹ Other sources, however, note the predominance of the Northern Pashtun among the ANA, which led to mistrust in the south, as some members of the ANA had served warlords who had left a poor impression there in recent memory.⁸¹⁰ Likewise, there is an abundance of footage showing members of the ANA conducting themselves inappropriately or incompetently, including taking drugs in combat.⁸¹¹ Despite their training, an unknown number of Afghan soldiers were also killed annually in crossfire incidents.⁸¹² Low morale among the ANA was likely the reason why some units evaporated during the Taliban’s decisive offensive in 2021. What most sources can agree on, however, is that the ANA were poorly resourced which was perhaps the root of many of their other issues. One British commander noted in 2008 that the ANA did not need much operational mentoring, even commenting there was ‘a standing joke as to who was mentoring who,’ but they were ‘hugely constrained’ by their lacking logistics.⁸¹³ A big part of logistics is pay and the same officer noted that the ANA faced morale problems when ‘they did not get their pay or their CO ran out of enough money to buy rations.’⁸¹⁴ The ANA were, though, found to be capable of holding the more secure northern and western regions of Afghanistan with an independent review suggesting they could do this with fewer, more mobile forces.⁸¹⁵ Yet, this success in the safer regions of the country did not seemingly enable the ANA to free up forces for securing troublesome eastern and southern provinces such as Helmand.

(iii) ANSOF

The Special Operations Forces of the ANA and the Afghan Ministry of the Interior – collectively referred to here as the Afghan National Special Operations Forces (ANSOF) –

⁸⁰⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 10–60.

⁸¹⁰ *This Is What Winning Looks Like (Full Length)* (n 707).

⁸¹¹ *INSIDE AFGHANISTAN PART 2 / VICE NEWS / VICE* (n 737).

⁸¹² Ahmad (n 698) 16.

⁸¹³ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 10–61.

⁸¹⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 10–61.

⁸¹⁵ Schroden and others (n 621) 28.

‘were considered to be particularly capable’ in a British review of their efforts.⁸¹⁶ Perhaps most importantly, they usually operated offensively against the insurgents as opposed to much of the wider ANA’s more defensive posture. The ANSOF could ‘routinely conduct successful, independent operations against the Taliban’ as well as IS-K.’⁸¹⁷ The Afghan SOF unit based in Helmand, the Afghan Territorial Force (ATF) 444, and the Logar-based Afghan Commando Force (CF) 333 were mentored by British special forces, while the Crisis Response Unit (CRU) was partnered with Norwegian special forces. The British instructors for the ATF 444 noted that their role for nine years comprised primarily of training and that they might have been better placed mentoring the Afghan operators alongside them.⁸¹⁸ Gradually, the Western special forces moved to providing secret overwatch nearby the Afghan operators as they conducted operations independently. However, the timeline for withdrawal constrained the ANSOF operations and the units reduced in size. This decrease in size is likely due to the additional pay the Afghan operators received that, along with their intelligence support, could not be sustained by the Afghan government without Western assistance.⁸¹⁹ In anticipation of the NATO withdrawal, coalition support (notably, UAV reconnaissance, as it was uncertain if the NATO was going to provide the ANSF with drones) was held back to force the ANSOF to make operations work without a technologically enabled solution.⁸²⁰ Ultimately, the ANSOF suffered from a dependency on Western logistical and intelligence support that was never replaced. Growing the Afghan special forces was judged to have been impossible without the arrival of additional international instructors. Yet, even if their numbers grew, the lack of domestic air mobility and intelligence support would have remained a persistent problem.⁸²¹

(iv) AAF

The Afghan Air Force was, while a small element of the ANSF, one of its more effective arms. The AAF with the introduction of Resolute Support, was ‘able to provide close air support,’ ‘conduct deliberate and dynamic targeting’ as well as train its own personnel and

⁸¹⁶ Select Committee on and International Relations and Defence (n 792) para 437.

⁸¹⁷ Select Committee on and International Relations and Defence (n 792) para 437.

⁸¹⁸ Austin G Long and others, *Building Special Operations Partnerships in Afghanistan and beyond: Challenges and Best Practices from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Colombia* (RAND 2015) 9.

⁸¹⁹ Long and others (n 818) 10–11.

⁸²⁰ Long and others (n 818) 11.

⁸²¹ Schroden and others (n 621) 28.

maintain its own aircraft, but it did rely on NATO to ‘manage logistics.’⁸²² The training of new pilots and crew, though, was found to take time and the pool of qualified recruits was shallow. As such, the AAF could not offer more support to ground-based COIN operations than they had provided pre-Resolute Support, nor was the level of support that they could provide sufficient to meet the threat posed by the insurgency.⁸²³

(v) Evaluation and lessons to be learned

Before concluding analysis on the ANSF, and evaluating their effectiveness and the policy surrounding them, it is essential that a note be made regarding the ‘insider threat’ which emerged from within their ranks. The insider threat refers to violent attacks by members of the ANSF against the coalition forces, accomplished by the assailants from a position of trust or ‘inside the wire.’ This is sometimes called a green on blue scenario though this could also include attacks by insurgents impersonating ANSF members.⁸²⁴ During the course of the War in Afghanistan, this threat claimed the lives of at least 157 NATO personnel and injured 205 more, around 557 ANSF members were also killed in insider attacks.⁸²⁵ An American article in 2011 described the motivations identified for 34 insider attacks in the preceding five years. The motivations included, in 40% of cases, personal disagreements between the offending ANSF member and ISAF personnel. In 35% of cases, insufficient evidence was available to establish a motive. Blackmail, threats or bribery against the co-opted ANSF member accounted for 15% with finally, infiltration by Taliban members making up 10% of the attacks.⁸²⁶ The emergence of this threat saw the introduction of more thorough vetting of ANSF applicants and the collection of biometric data on them.⁸²⁷ These attacks created further mistrust between the ANSF and coalition forces, whilst providing the Taliban with a boost to their information war campaign.

⁸²² Select Committee on and International Relations and Defence (n 792) para 438.

⁸²³ Schroden and others (n 621) 28.

⁸²⁴ Krystian Frącik, ‘Insider Attacks as One of the Main Threats to Resolute Support Personnel in Afghanistan’ (2016) 12 *Security and Defence Quarterly* 3, 6–8 <<https://securityanddefence.pl/Insider-attacks-as-one-of-the-main-threats-to-resolute-support-personnel-in-Afghanistan,103234,0,2.html>> accessed 12 June 2023.

⁸²⁵ Ahmad (n 698) 1 & 7.

⁸²⁶ David H Pendleton, ‘Insider Threat Handbook’ (2011) 2 *Red Diamond* 1.

⁸²⁷ Pendleton (n 826) 2.

Insider attacks ‘targeted two weaknesses in the US civil-military apparatus: a deep aversion to casualties and the need to believe in benevolent narratives about why Americans fight.’⁸²⁸ These weaknesses likely applied to many of the NATO forces deployed to Afghanistan alongside the US. A study was conducted to discern sources of possible grievances between ISAF and the ANSF with quite a long list emerging. Common grievances included collateral damage among the civilian and ANSF populations resulting from ISAF offensive actions, cultural complaints related to swearing and not respecting the privacy of Afghan women, to security measures – such as searches – which demeaned the ANSF in the eyes of the population.⁸²⁹ Indeed, an American report on insider attacks attributed dual significance to cultural misunderstandings as a motivation for the attacks and increased Taliban infiltration of the ANSF post-2011 (particularly as the transition toward ANSF-led COIN proceeded). Insider attacks jumped from accounting for less than 1% of NATO casualties in 2007, to 12.5% of them by 2016. In total, there were 102 attacks between 2007 and 2017.⁸³⁰ The southern and eastern regions (including Helmand) saw most of the insider threat.⁸³¹ Helmand had the highest number of attacks at 21 by 2017, culminating in 34 dead and 39 injured.⁸³² With the scale of the problems associated with the ANSF, it seems remarkable they were entrusted with the future of the COIN campaign.

An independent review of the ANSF concluded that if NATO support was significantly decreased, areas of ‘enduring conflict are likely to be exacerbated,’ thus, ‘international enabler support—to include advisors—will be essential to ANSF success through at least 2018.’⁸³³ The fact that this weakness was understood before the full withdrawal in 2021, makes it even more confounding. A British report from January of that year concluded: ‘[r]ealistically ... Afghanistan will remain reliant on the international community to fund its forces ... It will be years before the Afghan economy ... [can] finance a peacetime force.’⁸³⁴ Thus, it seems the ANSF were allowed to fail which is perhaps why the coalition largely

⁸²⁸ Ahmad (n 698) 3.

⁸²⁹ Pendleton (n 826) 2.

⁸³⁰ Ahmad (n 698) 5.

⁸³¹ Ahmad (n 698) 7.

⁸³² Ahmad (n 698) 9.

⁸³³ Schroden and others (n 621) 4–7.

⁸³⁴ Select Committee on and International Relations and Defence (n 792) para 448.

supplied them with older equipment due to memories of the difficulties in retrieving the equipment supplied to the Mujahedeen.⁸³⁵

The failure of the ANSF was largely due to strategic decisions on the political level. The British manuals noted the difficulty involved with motivating indigenous forces and reflected the view that '[w]orking with the host nation is both a necessity and a constraint.'⁸³⁶ Yet, this constraint was accepted without a critical evaluation of the policy to transition to an Afghan-led COIN campaign. As the British COIN manual sagely predicted, 'if the members of an indigenous force feel that they have nothing to gain from interaction it will be difficult to both influence them to accept development efforts and support UK military aims.'⁸³⁷ In the final analysis, with NATO withdrawing, this was exactly what happened to vast swathes of the ANSF. They had little investment in the distant and corrupt regime in Kabul, little interest in Western development goals in light of the coalition leaving, and thus turned inward to consider the danger posed to their families. In 2021, much of the ANA made what was likely a sensible cost/benefit analysis. The impression journalist Ben Anderson recorded of the ANA while operating in Helmand in 2013 presaged this. Anderson noted that the ANA would not last 'when they are on their own' and that 'half will join the Taliban and the other half will just vanish.'⁸³⁸

D Conclusion

Uncertainty at the political level about the objectives of the intervention was the primary reason the COIN effort in Afghanistan failed. The West lost because they chose to leave and while leaders in most nations involved in the coalition say they achieved their mission, defeated terrorism, and honoured their NATO commitments, this does not account for why billions of dollars were spent on development. Likewise, the oft-repeated line that the intervention achieved its objectives in preventing the use of Afghanistan as a hub for international terrorism rings hollow considering the continued presence of IS-K in the region, the smuggling of arms out of Afghanistan and into other conflicts, the significance of the region in drug-smuggling and organised crime, and the presence of members of Al Qaeda

⁸³⁵ *This Is What Winning Looks Like (Full Length)* (n 707).

⁸³⁶ Patrick M Cronin, 'Irregular Warfare: New Challenges for Civil-Military Relations' 234 *Strategic Forum* 10.

⁸³⁷ Ministry of Defence (n 1) pt 10–9.

⁸³⁸ *This Is What Winning Looks Like (Full Length)* (n 707).

near the Taliban authorities. Despite these strategic failings, the tactical innovations, use of technology and conduct of intelligence-led operations in Afghanistan are among perhaps the best in history. These learnings among those from other case studies will now be considered and principles for success in COIN will be suggested.

IX Synthesis

A Introduction

With the analysis of the three case studies complete, it is now possible to draw on the lessons learned from each and form a framework of principles conducive to success in the British approach to counterinsurgency. This study provides five principles, rather than a model, as differences in time, place, and context make a one-size-fits-all solution impossible. While the principles operate on an intentionally abstract level, the common themes underpinning them are grounded in the analysis of the three case studies. This ensures that they remain as applicable as possible to any given COIN scenario by not offering specific advice that may be unworkable due to differences in local conditions. The principles include presence, integration, influence, conviction and reflection and adaptation. The final principle of reflection and adaptation is the capacity to evaluate the qualities of the other principles in a given COIN campaign and respond to successes or failures. Running through each of these principles is the lifeblood of counterinsurgency: intelligence.

B Principles for Success in British COIN

The basic mechanics of COIN, as exemplified by the British and American maxim from Afghanistan, ‘clear, hold, build,’ appear to be a constant. This is even true of the Russian approach (used as a comparison in Chapter II), which featured a similar clear, hold, build process, albeit through more repressive measures.⁸³⁹ While the fundamental mechanics of COIN may be constant, irrespective of whether a liberal or illiberal approach is taken, the practices employed therein are informed by principles which have a determining factor in the likelihood of success. These principles may not be applicable in a more illiberal approach to COIN as they are drawn from the British experiences explored here. They are not listed in order of importance as all are critical foundations.

⁸³⁹ Ucko (n 74) 30.

(a) Size

The first principle is perhaps the most obvious, yet, in each of the three case studies, there were times when the size of the security forces' presence was too low, typically, early in an insurgency. Presence entails that enough properly trained personnel are available to conduct the COIN campaign effectively. COIN is a manpower heavy task: British doctrine for Afghanistan suggested 20 security personnel per every 1000 people in the area of operation.⁸⁴⁰ While it is perhaps unwise to put a specific number on the required ratio, given the likely variation between contexts, it is obvious when security forces fail to achieve the necessary concentration. Without the numbers to hold down an area and conduct basic functions like framework operations, the security forces are reduced to 'mowing the lawn,'⁸⁴¹ as the British found in Afghanistan, or losing control of the streets to the paramilitaries and their barricades in Northern Ireland. A higher level of presence may help in a less permissive environment with lower levels of civilian consent; particularly where there is a lower number of insurgents in an area. The South Armagh IRA, however, demonstrated that a small number of insurgents can hold out if they have the support of the population.⁸⁴² To increase the numbers of the security forces, it is often necessary to recruit local forces to bolster the government presence. This occurred in all three contexts. The greatest levels of success occurred when the least trustworthy or effective units were used in defensive roles, freeing up professional forces to go on the offensive, or when small highly motivated groups of local forces were trained by special forces such as the *Senoi Pra'aq* and ANSOF. Care that a particular ethnic group does not come to dominate its ranks must be taken when establishing a local forces component. Where discipline is low, this can lead to collusion and breed mistrust. Examples of the perils of this are found in the UDR's lacking Catholic participation post Bloody Sunday,⁸⁴³ and the ANA's northern majority.⁸⁴⁴

⁸⁴⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 1–3.

⁸⁴¹ Grey (n 757) 61–65.

⁸⁴² Leahy (n 347) 171.

⁸⁴³ Potter (n 439) 29 & 375.

⁸⁴⁴ Schroden and others (n 621) 27.

(b) Duration

Another component of presence is the duration of it. One of the recurring themes in the three case studies was the differences between the military and law enforcement components of the security forces and how the armed forces tended to have a short-term outlook. The length of Army deployment tours in Malaya, Northern Ireland and Afghanistan were all around six months, giving these forces an incentive to maximise their 'scores' against the enemy while in theatre.⁸⁴⁵ While successful counterinsurgency relies on the timely use of intelligence, it was found in Malaya and Northern Ireland that the longer term objectives pursued by the police were more likely to deal lasting damage to the insurgents.⁸⁴⁶ As forces remain present in an area, they establish relations with locals and leverage a developed understanding of the conditions and pattern of life to be more effective. In Malaya, it was noted that the Green Howards, when allowed to remain in a single locality for longer, became much better at defeating the MNLA.⁸⁴⁷ The risk of this experience being lost was noted by Major Watkins after he gained some important understandings late in his tour of Afghanistan, before being rotated out.⁸⁴⁸ However, it is also worth noting that there is a danger in establishing a long-term presence that security forces can be viewed as an occupying force.⁸⁴⁹ As such, shaping perceptions and justifying the presence with a sense of progress is essential. This is explored further under the third principle of influence.

(c) Framework operations

Finally, presence enables the conduct of framework operations which are the bread and butter of COIN. Framework operations such as patrols, screening operations, establishing checkpoints or curfews, and searching areas, are of great value. They result in the gathering of intelligence, the killing or capture of insurgents and project a sense of control by the government. For civilian populations concerned with security and returning to normal life, this is key. People were sick of the violence in Northern Ireland and initially welcomed the Army as the conflict resulted in the disruption of local businesses and daily life.⁸⁵⁰ Security was also one of the primary concerns those Afghan civilians who were interviewed had as

⁸⁴⁵ Hatton (n 257) 180.

⁸⁴⁶ Omand (n 452) 261.

⁸⁴⁷ Henry John Coates (n 114) 170.

⁸⁴⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 3–10.

⁸⁴⁹ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 1–39.

⁸⁵⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 344) para 807.

well.⁸⁵¹ By gathering information at checkpoints, or on patrols, the security forces are increasingly able to separate civilian from insurgent. Be this by gathering information that can be used in questioning, as was done in Northern Ireland,⁸⁵² or even by collecting biometric data, as was reputedly done in Afghanistan and has great potential for further use.⁸⁵³ Screening operations also offer the chance for civilians to provide information or be recruited as agents without the community knowing. Simply being in the area allows the opportunity for walk-in intelligence sources such as those outraged by insurgent violence in Northern Ireland.⁸⁵⁴ All of these opportunities mount to provide the security forces with a means of separating civilian from insurgent and conducting successful intelligence-led operations. Collectively, these activities improve security satisfying local populations. Despite this, it should be noted that framework operations can antagonise the population, but the removal of these restrictions can become a useful incentive for influence activities.

2 Integration

(a) Integration of intelligence

Ensuring that the various elements of the security forces' response work together and share information is a clear benefit, yet organising this process on the administrative level can be challenging. As such, integration is an important principle in staging a successful response to insurgency. Largely, the British succeeded in achieving a high-level of integration in the three case studies. Intelligence sharing mechanisms were developed to enable the use of intelligence products in joint operations. The posting of Military Intelligence Liaison Officers in Northern Ireland⁸⁵⁵ and Malaya – which bridged the gap between the Special Branches and Army intelligence – enabled the development of a close working relationship in intelligence-led operations between security forces.⁸⁵⁶ In the pursuit of often complicated and necessarily secretive agent-running and intelligence-led operations involving special forces, the Tasking and Coordinating Groups employed in Northern Ireland enabled a significant curtailing of the

⁸⁵¹ Gordon (n 780) 5–7.

⁸⁵² Fisk (n 463).

⁸⁵³ Pendleton (n 826) 2.

⁸⁵⁴ Arascain (n 340) 48.

⁸⁵⁵ Arascain (n 340) 15.

⁸⁵⁶ David French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (Oxford University Press 2011) 29 <<https://academic.oup.com/book/5047>> accessed 7 November 2022.

IRA's capability in some regions.⁸⁵⁷ Afghanistan saw the integration of intelligence sources, air power and ground forces in the pursuit of intelligence-led operations; the British forces practised this to a fine art. Integrating intelligence between coalition partners, and employing SIGINT sources to help verify HUMINT assessments, further increased reliability and enabled the use of precision-guided weaponry.⁸⁵⁸ The Malayan joint intelligence rooms and the District and State War Executive Committees integrated civil, military and executive personnel.⁸⁵⁹ In some areas, this union of Special Branch, military, police, and civil representatives, led to a dramatic increase in the effective use of intelligence.⁸⁶⁰ This was particularly inspired as all dimensions of the state and the civilian population were working in concert to defeat the insurgent.

(b) Understanding of objectives and realities at lower and higher levels

Ensuring that strategic objectives are understood on the tactical level was a major innovation in doctrine made during the war in Afghanistan. Delegating increased authority to more junior officers who, apprised of the strategic considerations, could react to developments on the ground increased adaptability. After all, COIN campaigns are often referred to as a 'subaltern's war,'⁸⁶¹ and the increased proximity of junior commanders to the people, conditions and enemy enables them to exploit intelligence or influence opportunities.⁸⁶² Conversely, it is also key that those operating on the strategic or political level have an appreciation for the practical realities on the operational or even tactical levels. While this was certainly lacking in Afghanistan, in Malaya a concerted effort was made by Templer, as Director of Operations, to understand the finer details of the security response. Described as relentless, Templer would drop in on units in the field and the New Villages in a concerted effort to retain a clear and unfiltered view of each part of the security forces' experience of the campaign.⁸⁶³ Where necessary, Templer could make immediate adjustments to improve efficiency. One of the inefficiencies Templer overcame was the rivalries present among the security forces.

⁸⁵⁷ Arascain (n 340) 76–78.

⁸⁵⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) pt 9–11.

⁸⁵⁹ Comber (n 106) 153.

⁸⁶⁰ Henry John Coates (n 114) 135.

⁸⁶¹ Comber (n 106) 70.

⁸⁶² Ministry of Defence (n 612) 8-B-2.

⁸⁶³ Henry John Coates (n 114) 123.

(c) Preventing rivalries

A highly integrated COIN response will seek to eliminate rivalries as institutional or organisational cultural differences and mismatches in objectives impede the security forces' ability to address an insurgent crisis. In Northern Ireland and Malaya, this was gradually overcome through a clear hierarchy. Ideally, this should be under the framework of police primacy due to the longer-term presence of the police and their ability to pursue ultimately more impactful goals. It is also in the interests of liberal principles that the armed forces follow the police's lead in COIN efforts. Mistrust in Northern Ireland between RUC and Army, and personal rivalries between administrators in Malaya, certainly had a negative impact on their respective campaigns.⁸⁶⁴

3 Influence

Understood as the ability to shape the perceptions and practices of both the civilian population and the insurgents, influence is a key component of a successful COIN campaign.

(a) Winning the consent and support of the civil population:

The civilian population must actively choose to support the security forces or they will support the insurgents, willingly or otherwise. Government can gain the support of civilians by understanding their general desires, separate of the insurgency's goals, and demonstrating success in the COIN campaign. In Malaya, the basic desires of the civilian populations favoured independence and prosperity, not generally the communism advocated by the insurgents. The promise of fair and equal treatment for Catholics and a return to normality in Northern Ireland, perhaps, would have prevented civilians from supporting the IRA's republican ambitions. Afghans were primarily concerned with the need for employment opportunities and security, both of which were threatened by the violent conflict taking place between insurgent and security forces. The government must present a vision of the future through the information services which meets the ambitions of the civilian population. To secure the support of the people, the government needs to be viewed as succeeding and

⁸⁶⁴ Ministry of Defence (n 344) paras 308 & 502.

progressing towards the goal. Development projects may be useful in this regard if the people see the benefits of them.

More than this, however, the citizens need to feel part of the national security effort and be invested in the struggle.⁸⁶⁵ If the people think that the Government's success is likely, their support is more forthcoming. To secure the support of the population, a range of both positive and negative incentives are necessary. On the negative front, civilians must be aware that activity supporting the insurgency will be met, by law, with a harsh response. Likewise, restrictive and irritating framework operations and security practices will take a toll on civilian life. Intensifying their use in areas of high insurgent activity, with the promise of relaxing restrictions as the insurgents are defeated, provides a positive incentive. Noel Barber described an example from Malacca, where this proved to be an effective means of gaining the support of the civilian population and driving out the CPM.⁸⁶⁶ A system of rewards for actions that undermine insurgents by the civilian population provides a positive incentive. The popular system of bounties for information or weapons in Malaya was an excellent means of involving the citizenry in the COIN effort.⁸⁶⁷ As the security forces demonstrate the capacity to protect sources, and especially when they appear to be winning, HUMINT opportunities such as 'walk-ins' – voluntary agents and informers – will be more forthcoming. With every new thread in the HUMINT web, the mounting of successful intelligence-led operations becomes more frequent and a snowball effect ensues, with yet more sources emerging and enabling further insurgent defeats.

(b) Influencing the insurgents

Psychological or influence operations against the insurgency are an essential practice in COIN. However, while attempting to influence the insurgents, some key themes were revealed in this study. Most notable was the spectrum of commitment that exists amongst the insurgents identified by Major Watkins in Afghanistan. The implication of this concept is that the security forces, through intelligence, should determine where to place a wedge between the insurgent ranks. This is likely to be somewhere between the die-hard irreconcilables and

⁸⁶⁵ Barber (n 107) 247.

⁸⁶⁶ Barber (n 107) 235.

⁸⁶⁷ Comber (n 106) 155.

those who could reintegrate.⁸⁶⁸ In Malaya, this was achieved via bounties which led some opportunistic insurgents to kill their leaders for a reward.⁸⁶⁹ Black propaganda, or ideological attacks, designed to discredit insurgent leaders and sow discord were also highly influential on the insurgents in Malaya. The most developed effort was high-ranking CPM defector Lam Swee's book, *My Accusation*, which criticised the communist leadership. With around 100,000 copies of it being airdropped over the jungle, it certainly caused internal conflict among the CTs.⁸⁷⁰ Likewise, where the insurgents experience ethnic tension, or have a divide between local and out of area fighters, the security forces can attempt to sow distrust. Once this has been achieved, some insurgents may seek to abandon the struggle, particularly as security measures and intelligence-led operations close in on them. Informing insurgents how they can surrender, what treatment or terms they can expect and showing them evidence of insurgents being happily reintegrated, was a powerful tool used in Malaya. It was also delivered by both leaflets and Voice Aircraft, suggesting that the successful wielding of influence over the insurgents requires the Government's message to be unavoidable.⁸⁷¹ Resisting the urge to threaten insurgents via leaflets was something that the security forces rectified in Malaya but failed to in Afghanistan. It was found that threats stiffened resistance, while making the prospect of surrender sound like a courageous escape from dangerous insurgent leaders, was more persuasive.⁸⁷²

Influencing the insurgents also means implementing policies or using strategies which directly force the insurgents to change their tactics. Government should always be looking for opportunities to force the insurgents to behave differently and to put them in a defensive posture. In Afghanistan, the surge deployment forced the Taliban to deploy less forces.⁸⁷³ MOTORMAN, and successive intelligence coups in Northern Ireland, forced the IRA to change their tactics, denied them the shelter of their barricades and separated them from their communities by prompting the creation of the secretive ASUs. The gold standard in influencing insurgent strategy was the implementation of the Briggs Plan in Malaya, specifically the food and resource control measures and the resettlement of the rural Chinese.

⁸⁶⁸ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 3–10.

⁸⁶⁹ Comber (n 106) 281.

⁸⁷⁰ Comber (n 106) 159.

⁸⁷¹ Ramakrishna (n 202) 157–158.

⁸⁷² Ramakrishna (n 202) 153.

⁸⁷³ Malkasian (n 575) 245.

The CPM was forced to dedicate many of its forces to cultivation work, denying the insurgency the chance to stage larger style guerrilla attacks which would have undermined civilian confidence in the government.⁸⁷⁴ Seizing the momentum created by successes against the insurgents can culminate in a ‘psychological moment’ whereby the security forces may capitalise on their influence activities further to convince insurgents to surrender and reassure civilians that they are winning.⁸⁷⁵ No finer example of this exists than the use of recorded messages from surrendered communist leaders played by Voice Aircraft in Malaya and ‘Q’ operations.

4 Conviction

(a) Acting in accordance with the law

Within the scope of the British approach to COIN, adherence to English liberal concepts of law and order are essential. Conviction is the upholding of these moral norms. By establishing clear rules, the state guarantees that both civilian and insurgent will receive fair treatment, even where it may be harsh. The reason this philosophical point is relevant is because insurgents attack the foundations of liberal democratic society by challenging the state’s monopoly over the legitimate exercise of violence. Unlike the insurgent, the state has a legitimate recourse to violence because it exercises it in accordance with the law.⁸⁷⁶ This understanding may be what has previously been conflated into the idea of ‘minimum force.’ Sir Robert Thompson describes the need for the state to resist the temptation to act outside of the law in responding to an insurgent crisis, but acknowledges that tough measures may be required.⁸⁷⁷ However, so long as they were effective, fairly applied and could be challenged in court, the people would remain confident in the government’s contractual obligation to them as citizens. Or more simply, the limitations of the law positioned the state as the ‘cops’ to the terrorists’ ‘robbers.’⁸⁷⁸ This moral authority on the part of the state, even in Malaya where a democratic tradition had not long existed, won some insurgents over on the believable promise of fair treatment.⁸⁷⁹ That strict measures must be effective is also a key

⁸⁷⁴ Chin, Ward and Miraflor (n 254) 272–273.

⁸⁷⁵ Ramakrishna (n 202) 158.

⁸⁷⁶ Wight (n 9).

⁸⁷⁷ Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (6th edn, Chatto & Windus 1974) 52.

⁸⁷⁸ Thompson (n 877) 52–54.

⁸⁷⁹ Ramakrishna (n 202) 154.

point raised by Thompson: if harsh policies do not decrease insurgent attacks and civilian casualties, the civilian population may become resentful and influenced by the insurgency. The purpose of such policies must also be clear.

(b) Clarity of purpose

It is rare that states choose to engage in a COIN effort; more often than not, an insurgent crisis is forced upon them. However, in either case, there must be complete clarity about why the security forces are present and what they hope to achieve. For Thompson, in devising his set of principles for defeating communist insurgency, the government having a ‘clear political aim’ to ‘establish’ an ‘independent state which is politically and economically stable,’ was essential.⁸⁸⁰ So too was having an overall plan to defeat the insurgents.⁸⁸¹ Where this aim is not clear, the practitioners of a COIN effort will be limited in how they can respond to the threat. Afghanistan, with its unclear strategic objectives and the seemingly flagging convictions of the various coalition leaders as the war wore on, is a perfect example. In particular, the incoherency of the British counternarcotic policy greatly aided the insurgents.⁸⁸² Worse still, the desire to hand off the management of the conflict to local forces who were clearly not ready, speaks to why states must have a clarity of purpose when conducting COIN, particularly during an intervention. COIN is expensive in terms of lives and material and, if a state is not specific in the goals it seeks to achieve by engaging in it, it is unlikely to be able to galvanise the necessary local support to succeed.

(c) Resisting the ransoming of peace and addressing subversion

Finally, a strong sense of conviction enables the understanding that compromise with those who seek to continue to use violence to subvert democracy is not essential. The ransoming of peace by insurgent groups is a common tactic. Resisting the poisoned chalice of negotiation offered by the CPM enabled the Tunku to establish an independent government that inspired the people by overcoming intimidation.⁸⁸³ Settling for peace before an insurgent has been defeated is an endorsement of the tactic of terrorism and the subversion of democracy by violent means. The ambiguity of the peace in Northern Ireland is a testament to the dangers

⁸⁸⁰ Thompson (n 877) 50–51.

⁸⁸¹ Thompson (n 877) 55.

⁸⁸² Rashid (n 571) 226.

⁸⁸³ Comber (n 106) 284.

of reaching a negotiated agreement with insurgents. Not only did the government lie to the people and negotiate with the terrorists in secret, but it also rewarded their use of violence by enabling them to take part in power sharing agreements.⁸⁸⁴ The threat of a return to violence has thus been allowed to persist. Likewise, such attempts by insurgents to achieve through negotiation what they could not take by force, come with little guarantee that the enemy is not using the opportunity to reconsolidate. Where conviction and moral principle are weak in government, subversion may thrive. In this regard, counterinsurgency itself may be regarded as a failure to contain subversion of domestic politics and democratic values prior to the terrorists taking up arms. For example, in Malaya, communism spread through the trade unions before the MRLA began its attacks on national industries. Republican groups have existed for centuries in Northern Ireland but, when the Troubles began, British intelligence was outdated and failed to respond to the PIRA/OIRA split.⁸⁸⁵ How insurgencies can be prevented before they emerge is certainly an area that merits further research.

5 Reflection and adaptation

(a) Identifying and responding to failure

The ability to understand what is working and what is not, and to decisively respond if strategies are failing, constitutes the principle of reflection and adaptation. As John Nagl suggests, the British have been successful in maintain their adaptability with their security forces persisting as learning institutions. Nagl places great emphasis on the organisational culture of the British Army for its capacity to reflect on challenges and take successful measures to overcome them.⁸⁸⁶ Examples of changing strategies included the ways in which British forces were used in Afghanistan throughout the Army's four cycles.⁸⁸⁷ Various changes were made in the tactics used in subsequent deployments. Whilst improvements were made, it was also necessary to identify the greater strategic problem in the lack of presence. The basic clear, hold, build mechanics of COIN were not operating prior to the deployment of the American marines and this should have been addressed by the British.

⁸⁸⁴ Paul Dixon, 'The "Real" and "Dirty" Politics of the Northern Ireland Peace Process: A Constructivist Realist Critique of Idealism and Conservative Realism' in Timothy Jerome White (ed), *Theories of international relations and Northern Ireland* (Manchester University Press) 19.

⁸⁸⁵ Arascain (n 340) 3.

⁸⁸⁶ John A Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons From Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Praeger 2002) 216–220.

⁸⁸⁷ Egnell (n 753) 304.

Reflection in Northern Ireland about the loss of control of the streets to the paramilitaries led to an increasing the security force's previously lacking presence during MOTORMAN. In this regard, the principle of reflection and adaptation governs the other principles by ensuring that they are incorporated into the model developed by a state engaged in counterinsurgency.

(b) Necessity of creative thinking and evaluating success

Creative and extraordinary measures are sometimes necessary in COIN. The Briggs Plan proposed many ambitious ideas that, because of Briggs's personal effort to tour the country and understand Malaya's problems, addressed them effectively. However, the subsequent Directors of Operations who implemented the Plan did not shy away from making necessary evolutions or adjustments: for example, Templer ensured the maintenance of intelligence networks lest the CPM's forces pursue a limited terrorist campaign.⁸⁸⁸ This example shows that even when succeeding, it is necessary to continue to reflect on and evaluate potential adaptations in one's approach. Success in COIN cannot be taken for granted. Each of the case studies have shown that the insurgent possesses a remarkable capability to adapt and reconfigure his approach to cope with the pressures of government policy. A long-term perspective, sources of strategic intelligence (such as bugging Sinn Féin politicians and intercepting the CPM's October 1951 resolution) and an ability to anticipate how the insurgency may evolve, are required to maintain success. Various frameworks may also be used to evaluate state progress in insurgency.

(c) Evaluative frameworks

A potentially useful tool in giving full effect to this principle is the use of an evaluative framework. While it was ultimately not particularly helpful, the development of the TCAF framework in Afghanistan was a step in the right direction to develop a sustainable process of reflection throughout the conflict.⁸⁸⁹ The British also included an outline of the failures of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in their doctrine although they either lacked the awareness or were politically unable to detect many of the same faults in the Western approach. The British COIN manual identified the Soviets' lack of understanding of the Afghan culture's resistance to foreign domination, insufficient efforts to dismantle the Mujahideen's extensive

⁸⁸⁸ Comber (n 106) 205.

⁸⁸⁹ Wilson and Conway (n 764) 11.

external support network, and the unpopularity of their unstable government in Kabul. Most ironic of all was the British assessment that Soviet numerical superiority was lacking;⁸⁹⁰ a deficiency they were coming up against while the doctrine was being written. While the failings of the Soviet approach were well assessed, a strength in the USSR's deployment of tanks ought to have inspired the British, especially after their Danish and American allies proved how potent they were when they arrived. A deficiency of conviction could have also been assessed in Afghanistan. While it would likely have been politically difficult to do so, those involved in strategic decision-making ought to have asked the questions: Why are we here? What do we hope to achieve? And how do we want to leave? By reflecting on these questions, necessary adaptations could have been made in the British approach in Helmand.

C Conclusion

This chapter has established a framework of five principles arising from the analysis of the case studies in this thesis. Rather than performing an exhaustive summary of them, the previous case analysis chapters are relied upon to provide the foundations for these principles. Reference has also been made to seminal COIN theorists' frameworks to provide further evidence. While it is not possible to defeat all possible insurgencies with a single model, with the benefit of the experiences the British had in these three distinct and complicated conflicts, common principles revealed themselves. Either by their absence or through their modelling by the security forces in Malaya, Northern Ireland or Afghanistan, these principles guide the development of a successful response to a pernicious and enduring feature of man's political history: insurgency.

⁸⁹⁰ Ministry of Defence (n 612) 3–20.

X Conclusion

A Results

This study has explored three case studies in the British approach to counterinsurgency. In each case study, a thorough analysis has been performed which revealed key themes that spanned each context. These included the importance of separating civilian from insurgent, the administrative level, intelligence-led operations, and the key role played by human intelligence.

Over the course of the case studies, technological advancements and developments in doctrine have also been traced. Specific attention was given to the developments in signals intelligence and the use of aircraft in pursuit of COIN-related ends. The significance of these developments has been outlined along with the effectiveness of strategies employed. Likewise, the unique role played by special forces in each context was explored and contrasted. It was found that while some functions remained the same, there were significant developments in the use of SOF in Northern Ireland and Afghanistan. Northern Ireland saw advances in integration of SOF with other elements of the security forces and Afghanistan saw the philosophy regarding their use change to view deployment of SOF to be in pursuit of strategic level objectives.

Very distinct approaches in psychological operations were identified in each case study too. While largely absent in Northern Ireland, in Malaya and Afghanistan, a variety of psychological warfare techniques were used, and their effectiveness and general approach differed greatly. The Malayan method in information warfare was significantly more successful than those of the other contexts and played a pivotal role alongside the intelligence war. In particular, the use of 'Q' operations, bounties, and other means of 'turning' insurgents and using CTs to fight CTs, were of devastating effectiveness. The visualisation of the spectrum of commitment in the Taliban (Figure 2), described by Major Watkins, was a useful framing in general for understanding that security forces must place a wedge between insurgent cadres.

Resulting from this study is also an in-depth analysis of three insurgent movements. The deadliest of the three being the Taliban, who possessed a remarkable information war capability and considerable endurance. A key theme across all the insurgent movements was the external support they received and the way in which they used nearby borders to evade the security forces. While in Malaya and Northern Ireland, steps were taken to address the permeability of the border regions and to collaborate with authorities in the next state, the security forces in in all three case studies ultimately failed to stop the insurgents from prospering in the borderlands. Hierarchies and command structures in insurgent movements have also been explored with mention of the varying tactics they employ, particularly terrorism. The adaptability of insurgencies and their capacity to reform and alter their organisation has also been explored with specific reference to the cell structure model.

B Contributions

Besides consolidating more current sources on the three case studies, exploring each in detail and providing comparisons, the primary contribution of this study is the framework of five principles which emerged from analysis of the case studies. These principles were:

1. Presence
2. Integration
3. Influence
4. Conviction
5. Reflection and Adaptation

Proposing this framework was done in preference to producing a model based on the approaches employed in the three case studies. This was to increase the reliability of the result since a composite model informed by three very distinct contexts could potentially be inapplicable in other scenarios or cultural environments. In this regard, the study enters into the tradition set by COIN theorists such as Sir Robert Thompson who suggest principles that may be used to inform the development of a specific plan or model, but do not outline one themselves. The framework proposed differs somewhat from Thompson's seminal work, however. Thompson drew on two case studies (Malaya and Vietnam) and his work was consulted after the development of the principles in this study So as to ensure that Thompson's principles did not influence the creation of this framework and to determine if similar conclusions were reached in isolation.

Interestingly, while both Thompson's and this study's framework arrived at five principles, there was only overlap between principles four and five from this study and Thompson's first three principles. Thompson's first three principles concerned the government having a clear political aim to establish a free and stable nation, a clear plan and acting in accordance with the law.⁸⁹¹ These ideas were reflected in the principles of conviction and reflection and adaptation. Where the framework proposed here differs from Thompson's work, is in establishing the principles of influence, presence, and integration: Thompson's remaining principles concerned tackling subversion and the practical advice of securing cities first, before expanding into rural areas.⁸⁹²

C Limitations

Given that COIN efforts rely on the activities of intelligence services, agents and informers, the veil of classification has no doubt limited the analysis possible in this study: specifically, though understandably, in analysing the HUMINT dimension in Afghanistan. This prevented a thorough comparison with the HUMINT efforts of the other case studies and will date this study as potential future revelations arrive: as was no doubt the case for earlier writers studying Northern Ireland. While fortunately for the purposes of this study, much information has been released regarding the intelligence war and backchannel negotiations, it is possible that some details remain undisclosed. The death of Freddie Scappaticci (suspected of being Stakeknife) during the research process may prompt further developments.⁸⁹³ Likewise, Troubles-related cases continue to go before the courts. While much of the material related to Malaya has been declassified, it is also possible that there remains useful content behind a layer of secrecy. Time has also been a significant limitation on this study. The addition of further case studies would have ensured greater reliability, but could not be analysed as deeply within the time available. Furthermore, the study did not consider case studies outside of the British approach and thus may not propose a general framework applicable to all examples.

⁸⁹¹ Thompson (n 877) 50–55.

⁸⁹² Thompson (n 877) 55–57.

⁸⁹³ 'Freddie Scappaticci: Even in Death, the IRA Double Agent Commands "a Wall of Silence"' (*The Irish Times*) <<https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2023/08/12/freddie-scappaticci-even-in-death-the-ira-double-agent-commands-a-wall-of-silence/>> accessed 21 August 2023.

D Significance and Implications

The primary significance of this study is to further advance understanding of the British approach in counterinsurgency and to suggest those principles which enable it to be successful. Naturally, these principles were not always in full effect during the case studies, however, where they were lacking, then the security forces encountered difficulties. As such, the principles provided offer an evaluative framework that may be applied to other British COIN case studies. This study also characterises the British approach throughout the case studies and, addressed in Chapter II, some of the arguments suggested by more revisionist theorists that the British approach did not differ significantly from other approaches. In establishing the set of principles and identifying key aspects of the approach, this study has delineated the British way and therefore invites further comparison with other approaches that may be informed by differing moral foundations.

E Potential for Further Research

A specific comparison could be made between the British method (through the principles underpinning it revealed here) and a more illiberal approach to COIN. In determining what principles underpin a more illiberal approach, the framework here may be useful as a point of comparison and the effectiveness of both liberal and illiberal COIN strategies could be compared. Applying the five principles to other British COIN efforts could likewise provide potential for further research.

Regarding more specific lines of inquiry for further research, the capacity to prevent insurgency from arising in the first place by addressing subversion by potential future insurgents warrants exploration. When considering the difficulty the security forces had with cross-border insurgencies in each case study, further research into how this enduring feature in COIN can be addressed – either through security policy or international relations – would be well-placed. Finally, the use of biometric data as a means of separating civilian from insurgent deserves further consideration.

F Concluding remarks

This study set out to explore the role of counterinsurgency in the search for security in Malaya, Northern Ireland, and Afghanistan. It has achieved this by performing a thorough analysis of the various intelligence wars, security policies and insurgent movements present in each case study. Recognising insurgency and its use of terrorism as a peculiar evil that inflicts suffering and robs societies of the opportunity to determine their destinies, free of intimidation, this study sought to gain an understanding of the phenomena to inform strategies for defeating it. By proposing a framework of five essential principles, it provides a justified analysis of key foundations for the British approach to COIN and may equip policymakers with insights useful in addressing insurgent crises in that manner. While some may be tempted by the failure in Afghanistan, and the return of great power competition in the current age, to view counterinsurgency as an outmoded tradition, it is important to remember that an increasingly unstable world only makes the emergence of insurgent threats more likely.

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