

# VICTORY AMONG PEOPLE

Lessons from Countering Insurgency and  
Stabilising Fragile States

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# CONTENTS

<i>Acronyms and Abbreviations</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
Forewords	xi
<i>Stanley McChrystal</i>	
<i>Juan Manuel Santos</i>	
<i>John A Kufuor</i>	
<i>Søren Pind</i>	
Introduction: Contemporary Insurgency	1
<i>Greg Mills and David Richards</i>	
A Soldier's Perspective on Countering Insurgency	15
<i>David Richards</i>	
Countering Insurgencies by Preventing Insurgencies	35
<i>Paula G Thornhill</i>	
From Insurgency to Stability to Development: In Afghanistan as Africa	53
<i>Anthony Arnott and Greg Mills</i>	
Special Operations and Instability: A Military Investment Strategy	87
<i>Michael A Lewis</i>	
Intelligence in Low-Intensity Conflicts: Lessons from Afghanistan	107
<i>Adam Cobb</i>	
The Role of Media Operations	127
<i>Christopher Vernon</i>	
Failure to Communicate: 'Producing' the War in Afghanistan	139
<i>David Betz</i>	

Ethiopia and Eritrea: The Failure of Counter-Insurgency <i>Christopher Clapham</i>	157
Peace-Building in Practice: A Personal Perspective on Liberia and the DRC <i>Alan Doss</i>	177
The Military Role in Political Victory: South Africa, Namibia and Apartheid <i>Greg Mills and David Williams</i>	203
Who Dares, Loses? The Relevance of Rhodesia-Zimbabwe <i>Greg Mills and Grahame Wilson</i>	219
Rwanda: Putting the Insurgency Boot on the Other Foot <i>Greg Mills</i>	241
Sierra Leone: 'Pregnant with Lessons' <i>David Richards</i>	259
Somalia: Insurgency and Legitimacy in the Context of State Collapse <i>J Peter Pham</i>	277
The Campaign against the LRA: Old Wine in New Bottles <i>Sandrine Perrot</i>	295
Countering the Terrorist Insurgency in Bangladesh <i>A N M Muniruzzaman</i>	313
Countering Instability in Kashmir <i>Ved Prakash Malik</i>	329
The Southern Thailand Insurgency <i>Alastair Leithead</i>	349
The Lessons from Northern Ireland: Comparisons with Iraq and Afghanistan <i>Chris Brown</i>	367
Coke Isn't It: Changing a Culture and Image of Violence in Colombia <i>Greg Mills</i>	383
El Salvador: When the Insurgents (Finally) Take Over <i>Greg Mills</i>	413
<i>Notes and References</i>	435
<i>About the Authors</i>	473

# INTRODUCTION: CONTEMPORARY INSURGENCY

Greg Mills and David Richards

Conventional war is a thing of the past. Such is one lesson from Afghanistan and Iraq. This appears true even for those countries that possess a considerable array of conventional weaponry. Why should they risk everything in a conventional attack, if they can instead achieve their aims through the use of proxies, or through economic subterfuge and cyber-warfare?

Lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq are contained in the experiences, a decade earlier, of the ill-fated international intervention into Somalia. The dusty, bloody and chaotic streets and markets of Mogadishu taught that considerable advantages in technology and military firepower are by themselves not enough, and can be countered by relatively rudimentary 'Kalashnikov' weaponry. It also showed, again, that the military cannot by itself win the battle, but only hold the ring enabling the local actors to make the right decisions about their future. If they do not want to – *or cannot* – make these, then the military's role is largely superfluous. Insurgencies are beaten by local actors and local governments, not foreigners, and victory requires at least as much political will as it does military might.

Such assertions raise two issues for states of the Western alliance. The first concerns their force posture, training and equipment over the next generation. The threat of proxy warfare suggests that land forces and equipment to counter asymmetric warfare – mine-proof vehicles, helicopters and other transports, intelligence, and special

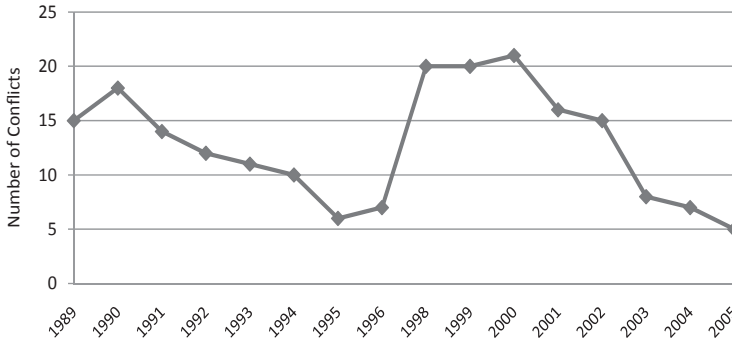
forces – will be at a premium. And whilst it is a long-term guarantee against the unthinkable, it is uncertain what the tactical value of nuclear deterrent is against an irrational and nihilistic foe.

The second is a more pressing, yet ongoing point: how to repair those states that serve both as flashpoints of conflict and harbours for terrorist activities. This is as much a long-term issue as it is an immediate challenge in countries in Africa, including Somalia and Guinea, but especially in Afghanistan. To this Afghan dilemma, a choice has been advanced as a solution: get in deeper in working out a political and development solution; or get out by focusing on the security aspect alone, turning Afghanistan into a counter-terrorist operation. The answer to this dilemma holds solutions for countries elsewhere on the path from fragility and conflict to sustainable development, just as it points to the nature of future war on which this compendium is focused.

### **On Future War and Warfare<sup>1</sup>**

To ensure the fundamental safety of any nation, it is necessary to establish what it *needs* before establishing what can be afforded. If, as is likely, there is a gap, this should be recognised as a risk that a government is – *or is not* – prepared to carry. This need, of course, depends on the threat assessment.

From the end of the Cold War to 2005, the number of armed conflicts fell by 40 per cent. The number of major conflicts (involving battle deaths of more than 1,000 people) dropped even more significantly, by 80 per cent. Wars between countries fell to just 5 per cent of all conflicts. Most conflict now occurs in the poorest countries of the world, and as income rises, the risk of conflict declines. Unsurprisingly, most conflict now takes place in Africa, though that too is in decline (see Figure 1). By the end of the 1990s, more people were being killed in sub-Saharan Africa than the rest of the world combined.<sup>2</sup> In this, indirect deaths, including disease and malnutrition, are estimated to account for more than 90 per cent of all war-related fatalities.

**Figure 1:** Incidence of Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1989–2005.

Correspondingly, the period since 1946 is the longest for hundreds of years of there being no war between the major powers. Colin Gray may be right in contending that the basics have not changed much, and that war will still be with us, driven by interests, personalities and politics today as ever before.<sup>3</sup> Though diminished, the threat of conventional wars still remains: most notably in Asia, not least given the resource needs and ambitions of China, Japan and India; and especially on the Korean peninsula, given unresolved issues of nationalism and ideological struggle.

But, as is advanced above, if the last twenty years is anything to go by, most conflicts are likely to be so-called ‘small’ wars, between ill-defined often non-state opponents, fighting for complex sets of causes ranging from greed to deeply entrenched grievances, fought at a low intensity employing mostly small arms and simple but deadly bombs. These are most likely to be fought not over territory but over ideas and symbols, among rather than between peoples.<sup>4</sup> For the last twenty years, with the notable exception of Iraq (1991 and 2003) and possibly the Ethiopian-Eritrean border conflict, wars involving conventionally equipped massive armies have virtually become a thing of the past. Warfare today has gone back to being a task of the light infantry and modern cavalry, where numbers (and getting them there)

are the important enabling aspect, along with other critical assets of intelligence, surveillance, local knowledge, and a suite of niche skills and resources aimed at meeting the basic needs of the people amongst whom the conflict plays out. Even state-on-state war is likely to look like something that the West is trying to do in Afghanistan, rather than some hot version of the Cold War. Belligerent states – unless the employment of mass manoeuvre becomes an asymmetric attraction to them because their opponents have done away with ‘traditional’ combat power available to alliances – will likely use proxies, guerrillas, terrorists, cyber-warfare *et al* to achieve their aims rather than mass air, sea and land operations.

The British armed forces’ Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC) recognises the primacy of the modern insurgency in its mapping of global strategic trends to 2040. A combination of exclusion from the benefits of globalisation, climate change, political fragility and a burgeoning population will create, the DCDC has highlighted, a volatile mix in parts of the developing world which will constitute around 85 per cent of the global population in 2040 (Europe will shrink to just 6 per cent), and especially in Africa. Whereas the global population will increase from 6.9 billion (2010) to almost 8.8 billion (2040), creating all sorts of social and resource pressures, in some areas these trends will be exacerbated by shifting demographics. For example, the median age in sub Saharan Africa will be approximately twenty-four, whereas in Europe it will be around forty-seven. Such stresses are compounded by competition for resources driven by both external requirements (for minerals and hydrocarbons) and internal demand (for food, water, and energy). Nearly 70 per cent of the world’s population will, by 2040, be located in areas of environmental stress, notably in sub-Saharan Africa, and South, Central and East Asia. Nearly 30 per cent of the world will face water scarcity in these areas.

Resource scarcity, the DCDC observes,<sup>5</sup> will stunt development, and lead to poverty, instability and conflict. Coupled with effects of

climate change, there will be humanitarian crises and increasingly uncontrollable internal and external migration. Many of these stresses will occur in the pressure-cooker of African and other developing-world cities. By 2025, more than 50 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa's people, by then numbering around 1 billion, will be living its cities, up from just 15 per cent in 1950. According to a 2010 UN-Habitat report, the number of people living in African cities will triple over the next forty years. Already 200 million sub-Saharan Africans live in slums, the highest number world-wide.<sup>6</sup> The fastest-growing city, Kinshasha, is forecast to increase by nearly 50 per cent over the next decade. The waves of Congolese already, today, walking to and from their capital each day in search of work reinforces this point. With people moving to the cities in search of a better life, escaping grinding rural poverty, a combination of overcrowding, poor services and dashed expectations could, if not adequately addressed, prove a hugely destabilising cocktail.

Critically, perceptions of inequality and associated grievances could, the DCDC notes, result in increased instability and societal tension. Of the twenty most unequal countries measured in terms of the Global Peace Index's Gini figures (Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Afghanistan, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Sudan, Belize, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Myanmar, Qatar, Bahrain, Libya, Bhutan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and North Korea),<sup>7</sup> seven are in sub-Saharan Africa. Afghanistan is the third most unequal, just ahead of Angola and Equatorial Guinea. It is not poverty *per se* that is apparently problematic, but rather when dearth lives cheek by jowl with excess.

The 2040 DCDC report concludes that the incidence of armed conflict is likely to increase, underpinned by an unstable transition to a multipolar world, widespread global inequality heightening grievances, population increases, resource scarcity and the adverse consequences of climate change. While future conflict will remain unpredictable and violent, its character will continue to evolve and

present new challenges. In an environment where the differences between state, state-sponsored and non-state adversaries *will* blur, while technology will remain important, people, the report argues, are likely to provide the asymmetric edge when responding to both expected and unexpected challenges.

As Afghanistan illustrates, and wars from the Congo to Liberia confirm, the modern insurgency is fought among the people even if it may be supported without. The choice of weapons is determined by availability and practicality: ammonium nitrate bombs, AK-47s, rocket propelled grenades, mobile phones and the Internet. Thus defence should respond to the new strategic, and indeed economic, environment by ensuring much more ruthlessly that our armed forces are appropriate and relevant to the context in which they will operate rather than the one they might have expected to fight in previous eras. Too much emphasis is still placed on what the US Defense Secretary Robert Gates has described as 'exquisite' and hugely expensive equipment.

Yet many defence establishments have not yet fully adapted to the security realities of the post-Cold War world and this complex and dangerous new century. Operating among, understanding and effectively influencing people requires mass – *numbers* – whether this is 'boots on the ground', riverine and high-speed littoral warships, or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), transport aircraft and helicopters. Investing in intelligence and strike capacity through special forces provides critical assets and force enablers in any counter-insurgency. It may be even more central to a counter-terrorist operation, stood further off. But they have to be used judiciously, not as an end in themselves: tools shaping the political context. We will also need to focus more activity on reinvigorating 'traditional' special forces (so-called 'white' special forces), in focusing on civic defence and socioeconomic aspects of communities.

And while the military will have to be able to fight and win battles in such complex and hostile environments, this is insufficient for success.

### **Beyond Equipment**

While it undoubtedly has a kinetic dimension, as is intimated above, dealing with the modern insurgency is a profoundly political and developmental task. It is as much about governance as guns, and providing jobs and economic security as military activity. It is also critically about getting the ‘information operations’ or, more plainly put, marketing and public affairs dimension of the campaign correct – something that the Taliban, amongst other, have wittingly or not played to maximum advantage through the global media.

Modern war is to be fought as much in the fourth estate as on the battlefield. As John Mackinlay contends, ‘Rather than confronting the dissident narrative head on by challenging it in the same networks and news propagation systems ... future operations will have to engage disaffection on the ground at a very local level. The emerging theme would be that local beats global.’<sup>8</sup> This emphasises a range of actions beyond military and stability operations to ensuring longer-term development needs in undergirding a modern society.

In charting actions across this virtual battle space, ‘the news footage and the endless refrain of occupation ... has turned individual members of migrant communities in Europe from spectators to activists.’<sup>9</sup> ‘Engaging and animating’ populations in ways that are not easily militarily countered is a strategy of the insurgent in asymmetric warfare, one that demands the management of external expectations, guarding against and preparing for insurgent ‘spectaculars’ (so-called ‘propaganda of the deed’), and sensitively both carrying out and portraying counter-insurgent actions. It is much more than about attack and defence, of guns and rockets; but about the aspirations, fears and faces of people.

Managing the softer side of an insurgency through development efforts and diplomacy, along with defence, is critical. Yet development through donor assistance is something that has proven very difficult to get right, especially (but not only) in fragile states. Although the period of recovery of fragile states is generally at least as long as the

period of decline (and mostly much longer, up to thirty years in cases<sup>10</sup>), donor constituency concentration spans are usually much shorter.

The comparative success of the Marshall Plan in Europe proves the value of large-scale assistance, but only among those countries that want peace and which possess the inner trappings of successful societies and economies – an educated workforce with knowledge of how to operate and use modern infrastructure and all its software and hardware. Fundamentally, they have to want to develop – which makes local ownership not just critical, but absolutely fundamental to the success of any mission.

Certainly, improved development spending and its close co-ordination with military activity – expedited through institutions such as the Afghan Policy Action Group established in 2006 to enable focus on Afghan Development Zones – should help. In this there is a constant need for foreign actors to guard against choosing local favourites – local actors who are both amenable and believed to be able to deliver the country from chaos. Favouring personalities over process inevitably stakes too much on individuals and their political fortunes. And their status as the darling of the foreigners may expose and ultimately undermine them more than it assists in countering insecurity.

Development, like politics, is primarily local. And it is often rooted in socioeconomic injustice and inequality as much as it is ideological in nature. Yet satisfying local grievances is at best only partly a job for external development and military effort. While it can blunt the edge of short-term economic collapse or humanitarian disasters, donor assistance has never proven a way to develop any country in the longer term.

Indeed, the most important lesson learnt over and over again in stabilisation and counter-insurgency operations is for the political deal to be right: the international, regional and local compacts which the tools of defence, diplomacy and development can support. Where

the political deal is unrealistic or badly conceived, then only trouble, failure and costly disappointment is likely to follow. One of many lessons of Afghanistan is that political relationships have often been clumsily handled.

Further lessons relearned again and again in COIN operations have concerned the establishment of local forces and the manner in which they have integrated their actions with international counterparts. The creation of local capacity does not end there. Embedding international support in critical areas of state organisation is also important in getting the country functioning and reinstating the traditional drivers of growth in the economy and fixing key infrastructure.

For all of the assets – from highly impressive people to money and technology available to international forces – it is remarkable how difficult the international community has found just getting the basics right: reinstating electricity (and keeping ahead of demand), fixing roads and railways, and stabilising the economy. Again, local ownership and the setting of priorities are key to success. If they are only recalcitrant reformers, foreigners have to learn to hold them to task while ensuring always the carrot of long-term partnership if they deliver – and not abandoning them when they actually do so.

### **Back to the Future**

Britain's then-Foreign Secretary David Miliband noted in September 2009 that Afghanistan represented 'the laboratory of so much that we will be doing in the future.'<sup>11</sup> No doubt the spectre of conventional conflict will always remain, but if defence planning is about assessing likelihoods and making hard choices, the future is about countering instability and insurgencies in poverty-stricken environments. The laboratory of Afghanistan is, in military terms, more the Boer than the Cold War. It is about dealing with an insurgency amidst continuous international scrutiny against a poorly armed yet resourceful foe, always playing to their strengths of local character against foreigners, and underdog status. It is back to the future.

If Afghanistan is the laboratory of conflict, of meeting the interlocking challenges of state-collapse, radicalisation, population growth, social inequality and hopelessness, then that future has to be met with a different posture than the armed forces possess today. It is one less about hi-tech than troop densities and logistics; knowledge rather than high-altitude intelligence and information; and small-steps rather than strategic sweeps. It is fundamentally about putting people, not technology, first.

Recalling Churchill's dictum that 'The further backward you look, the further forward you can see', by scrutinising contemporary insurgencies and stability operations, this volume's purpose is to offer short-hand case-studies but, more importantly, lessons to be followed and avoided by the range of actors involved; whether militaries, donors or multilateral agencies. Our contributors have been given considerable latitude to draw on the experiences (often their own) of those countering as well as those employing insurgency.

The thematic contributions to this book examine the role of information operations, intelligence and special forces, as well as the all-important governance dimension to counter-insurgency. The selection of regional case-studies is rich and diverse, and includes current African conflicts, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Somalia, as well as countries that are in a post-conflict stability phase, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone; intractable struggles in Asia, such as Kashmir, Afghanistan and Southern Thailand; and other conflict environments that do not fit neatly into any hard and fast categories, such as Colombia and Bangladesh.

Such is the diversity of experience and perspective our contributors bring to bear in their analyses, it was inevitable that we might differ on some of the arguments and conclusions made here. Instead of trying to force an artificial consensus on what is a

highly contentious subject, we have sought to encourage vigorous debate and even constructive disagreement in order to further our understanding of what is required to stabilise fragile states.

In the end, and despite their varied origins and distinct characteristics, the case studies examined in this volume did generate several common themes.

#### *The Primacy of Politics*

As insurgencies are profoundly political in nature, so too must be the process of countering them. Where counter-insurgency campaigns succeed or fail will be primarily down to the quality of the political processes, ranging from the arguments that inspired intervention to the local and regional political situations.

#### *The Military and Stabilisation*

The military has a role in not only pressing the insurgent to cooperate, but in establishing the conditions in which development can take root. But there is a need to guard against confusing short-term actions with the requirements for longer-term stability.

#### *Stabilisation and Development*

The development dimension to post-conflict recovery is the core of state sustainability. Yet this aspect has been most problematic, with very limited returns on vast expenditure. Execution has lagged well behind planning, and it has typically been very difficult not only to meet basic services, but also instil the governance conditions necessary for development. Better measurement of the effects of aid expenditure – and the activities of NGOs – is necessary not only to ensure that money is prudently spent, but that there is an overt governance and development aspect to such expenditure, which goes beyond narrow fiduciary controls.

*Unintended Consequences*

Care must be taken to avoid (or at least manage) the unintended consequences of international engagement, such as the impact of donor spending on local power-brokers.

*Risks and Rewards*

Accepting an element of risk can bring success – not just in military actions (including the manner in which local parties are engaged), but also with development actors.

*Regional Diplomacy*

The regional diplomatic component is similarly critical to the campaign, from Rwanda/Congo to Colombia/Venezuela, Pakistan/Afghanistan/India, Sierra Leone/Liberia, Iraq/Iran, Sudan/Uganda/Congo, to Thailand/Burma. The limited attention span of contemporary political actors coupled with a failure to appreciate this dimension has delivered sub-par results in most cases.

*Messaging and the Fourth Estate*

The message of the international community – of partnership with the choices made by local actors – has to be clear, co-ordinated and consistent, as is the setting of clear ‘red lines’ for the locals at a higher, strategic level. These should make clear the extent to which the international community is willing to go – and be pushed.

*Knowledge, Culture and Incentives*

While knowledge of local conditions and cultural mores is crucial in understanding constraints and opportunities, care should be taken not to overstate this ‘cultural’ aspect in favour of hard intelligence and to realise that local actions are intrinsically shaped by incentives and disincentives. Knowledge of operating conditions has to include the nexus between criminal and political groups, and of the overall local ‘operating system’ of politics, personalities, tribe, religion, power and money.

*Duration and Co-ordination*

External assistance has often proven fragmentary, duplicative, unco-ordinated and very short-termist. Yet local knowledge of the permanence of foreign commitment and local government presence – from schools to police-stations – has improved security.

*Local Ownership*

Success fundamentally demands the host population's *ownership* of the campaign.

Countering contemporary insurgencies has, all too often, been delegated to the military as the only agency capable of operating in these environments. But this cannot – and will not – achieve success. Victory among people<sup>12</sup> is instead down to managed co-operation between all arms of government over a sustained long-term timeframe with politics at the forefront at all times.

# A SOLDIER'S PERSPECTIVE ON COUNTERING INSURGENCY

David Richards\*

There was a time when the word 'COIN' in British military circles conjured up images of soldiers in the Malayan jungle, or in Aden's dusty souks, or on the streets of Northern Ireland. For years these campaigns provided the backbone for the study of counter-insurgency (COIN) at the army's Staff College. However, the most recent campaigns in Iraq and in Afghanistan's Helmand Province have challenged any notion that COIN is 'low intensity' or something other than war. These campaigns have shown that dealing with irregular adversaries can be every bit as intense as combat in warfare in the conventional sense.

Intensity is not, however, the central issue. At the heart of COIN is the inherent asymmetry between a government and all the measures at its disposal on the one hand, and the insurgent on the other. Insurgency and COIN are two sides of a very complex form of warfare in which a group or groups have resorted to violence by taking up arms to solve their grievances and achieve their political objectives. There are some insurgencies that want to replace an existing government, others to secure their position and the status quo, and, more recently, a combination of these where we have seen groups emerge to challenge nascent post-conflict governments and to

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\* The author wishes to acknowledge the key role played by Colonel Alexander Alderson in the writing of this chapter.

fight those trying to establish order. For the state concerned and the international community supporting it, and without fully-fledged political processes or the necessary capacity for effective governance and security, dealing with the challenge of violent insurgency is particularly difficult.

Today, what we refer to as hybrid threats – what Frank Hoffman describes as any simultaneous and adaptive employment of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behaviour in the same space to obtain political objectives<sup>1</sup> – are seeking to exploit what they see as the vulnerabilities of governments and their armed forces. There is no indication that this form of challenge will abate. Terrorism and subversion are the obvious methods of attack, made more difficult to counter because insurgent groups hide behind and blend into the very population security forces seek to protect. The use of terrorist attacks on the population provides the focus through which such groups can exploit their most effective weapon: the influence that they can extend through mass communications. As General Sir Frank Kitson, one of the most important figures of British COIN, once observed, the ‘main characteristic which distinguishes campaigns of insurgency from other forms of war is that they are *primarily concerned with the struggle for men’s minds*’.<sup>2</sup>

Although the insurgency in Afghanistan is now the principal focus of attention, it is not the only insurgency under way around the world and we should not forget that insurgency is an attractive way to challenge authority. The bloody Naxalite insurgency spreading across parts of India is an example of an insurgency that has a sense of hopelessness and economic envy at its core. These are powerful instincts that today can be inflamed and communicated to other similarly dispossessed groups across the world at the touch of a button. This is the aspect of COIN that makes winning the battle of ideology, or ‘hearts and minds’ – the term famously coined by General Sir Gerald Templer in Malaya – so important. Templer believed that ‘the answer lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in

the hearts and minds of the people'.<sup>3</sup> While the term 'hearts and minds' has been somewhat discredited, we should be clear that only genuine improvements in the lot of the dispossessed and viscerally envious – what I referred to as an upward trajectory of progress when I commanded ISAF in 2006 – will prevent such conflicts eventually affecting our own lives.

COIN is warfare. It is distinctly political, not primarily military, and it involves the people, the government and the security forces. These include the police, the armed forces, paramilitary forces and auxiliaries. The latter category is an important part of the overall solution because it gives local people, through locally raised forces, a role to play in their own security. In overall terms, the strength of the relationship between these three groups – people, government and the security forces – generally determines the outcome of the campaign. If the population gets behind the government, the government tends to win. This relationship of people, government and the security forces was famously coined by Clausewitz, the famous Prussian theorist of war, and it provides a useful framework against which we can examine several closely related questions: what have we learnt from recent operations, and have these lessons changed over the past fifty years? What does this mean for strategy, and for tactics, and how should we approach future operations?

### **The Security Dimension: Adjusting to Wars for the People**

The last ten years have seen some remarkable developments in military capabilities. British armed forces, like many of our European and American allies, now field some of the most sophisticated equipment ever developed. Our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines are trained to an unprecedented standard and technology has radically altered our intelligence-gathering and surveillance capabilities. Our people are linked today in a way simply not possible in previous generations which means decision-making and the exchange of intelligence and information can be lightning fast. Although this can have its

drawbacks, armed forces are now able to generate and benefit from greatly increased tempo in military operations. Commanders, both on the ground and far removed from the theatre of operations, have access to a great deal of information to help them make split-second decisions.

These developments are important and our armed forces are now so much more capable than the Cold War forces that we sent to enforce and then support peace in the Balkans. And yet it is important to recognise that these changes have not in themselves proved decisive in either of the two major wars in this century in which British forces have been engaged. We may have benefited from the products of the technological revolution of the 1990s, but the levels of *military* success envisaged then, and embodied for example in terms such as ‘Shock and Awe’, ‘Network-Centric Warfare’, and ‘Rapid Decisive Operations’, have not materialised.

One stark reason is that the context in which advanced military capabilities are now employed – with the exception of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 – is very different from that for which they were originally intended. First, today’s campaigns are almost unavoidably operations among the population.<sup>4</sup> De facto, these are wars for the population, and they are complicated because those who threaten society live, hide and operate within it. This means that understanding what the population is, and what its norms, values, concerns and expectations are, has value beyond being able to locate, identify and track a conventional enemy’s tanks and aircraft. Secondly, today’s armed forces now operate in a complex, combined, joint, inter-agency and multinational environment. This is where success is measured by how confident the population is that it is secure, not how much of the enemy’s combat power has been destroyed; where progress is measured in terms of sustained political and economic development, not how many insurgents have been killed or detained.

Operating among and for the population has been a feature of COIN since the end of the Second World War, when the spread of

Communism challenged existing orders. During the Cold War, the population *per se* was a factor that was all too easy to forget in what was a very Industrial Age approach to war. In the last four years, however, the emphasis has shifted away from an enemy-centric approach to one that recognises the central role the population plays in COIN. To use General David Petraeus's phrase, the population is the prize and it must be protected. While confronting and neutralising insurgents is an important aspect of the campaign – after all, the insurgent cannot be given a free hand – it is not the only part of the campaign. Making this transition was an important step in Iraq in late 2006, and then in Afghanistan in 2009 when General Stanley McChrystal gave the campaign its population-centric focus.

### **What Have We Learnt?**

If we needed reminding, the major UK interventions in the first decade of the twenty-first century have reinforced the simple truth: the principal task for security forces in COIN is to secure the population from violence. Without security, the political process will be unable to function and the likelihood of conflict resolution is slim. Bernard Fall said of the Viet Cong insurgency in the late 1950s that a government which is losing to an insurgency 'is not being outfought; it is being out-administered'.<sup>5</sup> As the 'surge' in Baghdad in 2007 and then Iraqi-led operations in Basra in 2008 showed so clearly, effective security operations are needed to create the 'political space' for governance to be re-established, and for the government to then out-administer the insurgents.

From this central task of securing the population, several key elements are now recognised in British circles as essential. The latest doctrine captures them to emphasise their importance. They are: the need for presence and with it the need for mass; the need for intelligence; the need for continuity in approach and the maintenance of understanding; the value of partnering with local forces to build their capacity and capability; and the need to educate forces so that

they understand not just conventional approaches but those best-suited to the complexity of the COIN problem. None of these would be a surprise to any successful counter-insurgent from the past, but the importance of each has been borne out by operations in Basra and Helmand. In both cases, it is clear that risks taken with some of them brought challenges that proved difficult but not impossible to overcome as campaigns developed.

Effective security measures need a permanent security presence. Security forces have to live and work among the population, which means that they cannot 'commute to work'. In Iraq this approach – adopted by necessity because of troop levels – failed in part because, until late 2006, the Iraqi security forces were not in a position to assume security responsibilities themselves. They were unable to contain the insurgents and terrorists intent on destabilising the country. Despite this, the intention remained for coalition forces, including the UK contribution, to pull back to large central operating bases, to lower their profile and to hand over security responsibilities to Iraqi forces as they stood up. The move from small patrol bases, spread out among the population centres, to large, isolated main bases meant the security forces had to travel to their areas of operation. This provided the insurgents with greater opportunities to use their favoured tactics of ambushes and the weapon of choice: improvised explosive devices (IED).

To compound the problem, security forces became isolated from the very population their primary task was to protect, so once a patrol had moved on, the population was left open to insurgent intimidation and violence. This produced a counterproductive spiral of action-counter-action, where measures we introduced to protect our forces – for example more heavily armoured vehicles, or tactics that limited time on the ground to reduce the chances of being ambushed – further isolated forces from the population. Insurgents were free to dominate normal life and public confidence in security operations dropped. In turn, this further limited the opportunity security forces

had to gain information and intelligence from the population about the insurgents and local needs, and this then limited opportunities to make concrete advances in confronting the insurgent and improving conditions generally for the population as a whole.

The way to avoid these problems is to establish a continuous security presence. However, the trouble comes when security forces have moved in to re-establish control of an area. Insurgents can be relied on to fight hard for control of the population. This was evident in Baghdad in 2007 when US and Iraqi forces moved into insurgent-controlled neighbourhoods. There was a vicious spike in violence which subsequently dropped as security measures started to have an effect, and the people realised that they were not going to be abandoned again. From a UK perspective, we saw this in Basra in March 2008 when Iraqi forces, supported by the US and UK, moved to regain control of the city in Operation *Charge of the Knights*. After some days of fierce fighting, security was established and Baswaris soon started to identify insurgents, arms caches and IEDs, and general confidence started to improve after a very difficult few months.

Clearly, the ideal is not to cede control to the insurgent in the first place. This is easier said than done, particularly if we accept that one reason for the emergence of an insurgency is the inability of a government to extend its authority over the country as a whole. The key factor is the government's determination to re-establish control, and for it to make clear that protecting the population is of primary concern and that its security forces are there to stay. This means mass (numbers) and in the early stages of establishing security, many more policemen and troops are generally required than are needed to maintain 'normal' security. But what does this mean in practical terms? Today in Helmand Province, the British task force operates alongside two US Marine Corps task forces, and it benefits from levels of combat power well beyond the scale the UK can provide. Higher ISAF troop numbers, much stronger Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and increasing political momentum at district and

provincial level are now having an effect that was not possible even as late as 2009. Armed with a comprehensive campaign plan, one galvanised by General Petraeus, and with the requisite resources now in place, the situation is hopeful.

Good intelligence, on which all sound military operations are built, is essential in any form of warfare but especially so in COIN. Insurgents try not to stand out, so they have to be identified and separated from the population, and the population safeguarded from military operations to neutralise insurgents. This needs accurate and timely intelligence because without it security operations risk being blunt, blundering and indiscriminate. This was the case in the early years in Malaya and Northern Ireland, and we saw the difficulties of operating without good intelligence in Iraq. The difference comes, however, when the population starts to gain confidence in the security forces and the government those forces represent.

Building up the intelligence picture depends as much on the very low-level, local pattern of life as it does on intelligence from the intelligence agencies and the most sophisticated technical methods. This ties in very closely with the idea of continuity, where units build up a detailed understanding of their area and can start to recognise what is unusual, or still better, when the local population has the confidence to offer up information. It goes without saying that this requires soldiers from an international force, and civilians working with them, to have a sound working knowledge of the local culture and language, so that they can actively build relationships with the population and have some understanding of what is going on. Besides gaining basic information, one of today's challenges is sharing intelligence, particularly on multinational operations where national legislation may place limits on doing so. Nevertheless, these issues have to be overcome because experience has shown us many times before that intelligence must be integrated at every level of command, and across and between agencies engaged in COIN.

For much of the British Army's history, its soldiers have trained and then fought alongside local forces. The need for capable local forces which can maintain effective security has not changed. They remain central to the plan in Afghanistan, and were so in Iraq. In both cases considerable effort and resources have been needed to give them the capability to maintain the longer-term security for their own countries. This requires a very 'hands on' approach. Building effective forces is much more than simply teaching soldiers what to do and then expecting them to go out and confront violent and often fanatical adversaries. In Iraq, we formed small Military Transition Teams, responsible for training and advising the Iraqi Army. In Afghanistan, as part of General McChrystal's plan to build the ANSF, we have moved beyond training and mentoring towards a full partnership with our Afghan counterparts. Forging a trust-based relationship has proved to be a crucial part of the development process. Having British soldiers and marines training and fighting alongside first their Iraqi allies and now the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police provides a clear statement of intent: that our forces are prepared to take exactly the same risks, and face the same dangers, as those fighting for their own country.

Both partners benefit from this approach. British forces provide expertise and the many enabling capabilities such as medical support, firepower and intelligence, which the ANSF are still developing. Their British partners benefit from what they learn from their Iraqi and Afghan counterparts, and the improved local knowledge and greater understanding of an area and its people that comes with effective partnering. Embedding our soldiers in this way is not, however, risk-free. They have to operate independently from the main body of their battalion or regiment, and their day-to-day safety depends on that all-important bond of mutual trust between local forces and British troops. This can, and indeed has, broken down with tragic results, but this is very much the exception. However, the British soldier can be relied on to get on with people, and the approach of working

closely with local forces is proven and continues to pay dividends. After all, training and developing the host nation's security forces and partnering and mentoring them on operations are essential parts of ensuring that the host nation can sustain long-term security without recourse to foreign assistance.

Everything we have learnt again about COIN confirms that it is a complex, challenging business; one, experience has shown, best not learnt on the job. Education and training are necessary to attune the approach of those who have to counter insurgency to the problems and more effective ways of dealing with them. After all, it is the practitioners who need to have the knowledge and confidence to adapt doctrine and the tactics they have been taught to meet the challenges they face; the education and training system requires keeping up with developments in the outside world.

Over thirty years of security operations in Northern Ireland equipped the British Army with a very responsive, highly adaptive training organisation that has the agility to respond quickly – often within twenty-four hours – to emerging trends in the theatre of operations. This approach served UK forces well while they were in Iraq and has been outstanding as the campaign in Afghanistan has evolved. The battle to neutralise the threat from the IED, for example, has focused the attention of military trainers, scientists and intelligence analysts, but it has been the agility imbued by our approach to training that has been important. It has inculcated the flexibility and pragmatism needed to adjust doctrine and drills quickly to match, or better still get ahead of, the insurgent. This is one way we can prevent doctrine from becoming dogma, as J F C Fuller so colourfully described:<sup>6</sup>

To be seized upon by mental emasculates who lack virility of judgment, and who are only too grateful to rest assured that their actions, however inept, find justification in a book, which, if they think at all, is in their opinion, written in order to exonerate them from doing so.

### **Implications for Strategy and Tactics**

We cannot ignore the fact that strategy and tactics must be derived from political objectives. Is the campaign in question in the national interest? Sir Robert Thompson, writing based on his extensive experience in Malaya during The Emergency and on his time advising the US in Vietnam in the early 1960s, made clear that the first requirement of government was to have a clear political aim. This was 'to establish and maintain a free, independent and united country which is politically and economically stable and viable'.<sup>7</sup> While he conceded that this aim might be too broad to be immediately achievable, his next point remains highly relevant to today:<sup>8</sup>

In newly independent or underdeveloped territories it is essential to recognize that an insurgent movement is only one of the problems with which such governments are faced ... It would be futile to succeed in defeating the insurgency, especially by military means alone ... if the end result is a country which is not politically and economically viable, and which might therefore fall to the [insurgents] at any moment in the future, perhaps without a shot being fired.

The approach to COIN has to be broad-based enough to provide for the security and the political and economic viability of the country in question.

We cannot separate tactics from the strategy required for the campaign as a whole. One should follow from the other and a strategy that matches means and ways to objectives will keep the approach balanced. Balance is important, particularly since military tactics alone will not create the conditions for success, though effective military operations are needed to establish and maintain security. The key – and the central challenge – is to develop and then resource a comprehensive plan that addresses security, governance and development in equal measure. This is not new. There are several notable examples where plans have been developed that address

the steps required in a comprehensive way: the 1950 Briggs Plan for Malaya; the plan which underpinned the Omani campaign in Dhofar in 1970; and more recently the 2007 Crocker-Petraeus Joint Campaign Plan in Iraq. Now the ISAF plan for Afghanistan reflects the concurrent requirements to improve the three strands of governance, security and development.

Keeping the campaign's plan and resources in balance, experience shows, helps avoid one aspect of the campaign from being unduly pressured beyond a level we can reasonably expect. Security operations, for example, are difficult and soldiers can expect to have to deal with a myriad of problems for which there may be no obvious or straightforward answers. Get the force levels right, and many of those challenges can be avoided. In future people-centric conflicts, delivering success will often need mass, whether it is the right number of troops and support helicopters, sufficient intelligence sensors or sufficient small ships. As we found in Iraq, forces that are designed primarily to conduct short conventional warfighting operations tend to compensate for what historically would be viewed as a shortage of troops with huge firepower. The bias of the equipment programme towards these capabilities over the last sixty years bears this out. But in wars among the people, when counter-insurgents resort to using a lot of firepower – often delivered from the air *in extremis* as a result of insufficient manpower – they are almost certainly losing. It is important, therefore, to have enough troops to retain the tactical initiative and to provide the enduring routine security without which, as I have emphasised, the population will not have the confidence to reject the insurgent or spoiler. Whether they are the host nation's forces – the ideal – or allies, enough soldiers are needed in the first place to train local forces quickly and efficiently.

With the right force levels in place, it is much more straightforward to use the right balance of tactics without recourse to firepower *in extremis*. ISAF operations in Afghanistan have highlighted the difficult balance to be struck between pursuing the insurgent, on the

one hand, and safeguarding the population on the other. In April 2010, ISAF introduced guidance to reduce civilian casualties while still enabling ISAF to use force when necessary. It was needed because ISAF's use of force was causing civilian casualties and this threatened the mission. The challenge was to make soldiers think about what should be done, not just what could be done. They had the rules of engagement to use lethal force; the question they had to answer was should they use them as a situation developed or was there another way to bring things under control?

This opens up the need to be generally manoeuvrist in COIN, not just in pure military terms but in focusing on the intellectual and psychological aspects of the campaign, not just the physical; people and ideas are more important than holding ground or hunting the insurgent. The aim should be to create the conditions for government success using less force and more subtlety, and not just through COIN's classic tactics of cordons, searches, patrols, ambushes and surveillance work. Again, this is easier said than done, as the Taliban's IED campaign in central Helmand showed all too painfully. The proliferation of cheap, readily made, often highly sophisticated IEDs became a major challenge for several years. However, the fielding of an impressive range of counter-IED technologies and the combination of outstanding soldiering from the UK task force and special forces, careful intelligence work, and the essential work by the Provincial Reconstruction Team gradually turned the situation around. By mid-2010, once the balance was right in terms of forces, tactics, intelligence and political and developmental support at provincial and district level, it was possible to make clear, if still fragile, gains.

### **Approaching Future Operations**

A pragmatist might answer the question of how to approach future operations 'with care'. Much depends on the first principle of COIN which is 'Political Purpose has Primacy'. If governments decide it is in the national interest to undertake a future COIN campaign, or

one perhaps characterised in terms of a more general stabilisation operation, then Iraq and Afghanistan provide several prompts that if followed should help avoid some of the painful challenges those involved faced.

The first point to recognise is that countering insurgency takes time: time to restore security; time to get political processes back on track; time to address the root causes of whatever real or perceived grievance prompted the insurgency; and time to change the perceptions of those involved, in the theatre of operations, regionally, internationally and at home. Time is one of the many resources that COIN requires – the overall bill may be less if one prepares properly and acts in a timely manner – yet the time available to politicians may well be less than that which is needed to restore security and to resolve the problem. Heavy domestic media and public opinion are also factors that serve to foreshorten political timelines.

One important challenge for any future campaign to overcome is the historical propensity to struggle in the early stages. Most campaigns have not got off to the most promising start, and that inevitably takes time to resolve. The most notable exception is the Omani campaign in Dhofar between 1970 and 1976, where the plan was written using the doctrine available at the time and coloured by a great deal of experience from past campaigns. As Major General Tony Jeapes, one of the main protagonists, later noted:<sup>9</sup>

The Dhofar War was a classic of its type, in which every principle of counter-insurgency operations built up over the previous fifty years in campaigns around the world by the British and other armies, often by trial and error, was employed. It was probably only the third campaign after Greece in the 1940s and Malaya in the 1950s and early 1960s to be won against a Communist armed insurrection.

Jeapes's point about principles opens up the wider issue of the utility of doctrine. Until David Petraeus introduced his new Field Manual

into the US COIN debate in 2006, it was difficult to see whether doctrine had any influence on campaign design or conduct in Iraq. By late 2010, doctrine was featuring strongly both in discussion and in shaping the approach in Afghanistan, and a great deal of effort continued to be applied to getting the thinking about COIN right before defaulting to developing military tactics and action. Doctrine is not, however, just about producing books. Doctrine has to be taught to keep the ideas it contains alive. We cannot expect commanders and their staff to be immediately comfortable with what can be, as experience has shown, a most challenging form of warfare if we do not attune their minds to its theory and its pitfalls.

Revising courses at the Joint Services Command and Staff College and our service arms schools is one response, but much effort has gone into ensuring that our forces have a broader intellectual preparation for COIN and stabilisation operations. This has included, for example, developing a small cadre of officers and non-commissioned officers familiar with the language, history and culture of Afghanistan and its region, who provide skilled advice to our commanders in the field. Conscious that the British Army needed a focal point for stabilisation and COIN, it established its own Afghan COIN Centre in 2009 to develop new doctrine and tactics and to educate soldiers and their civilian counterparts in current thinking. Once again, the idea of such a centre is not new; one was set up in the Malayan Emergency in 1949, another in Kenya, and the US military established one in Iraq in November 2005. The British COIN Centre has had a remarkable effect on our understanding and our approach. It has focused our thinking about COIN and it has made extensive use of our own recent and historical experience, and that of our allies, to develop very relevant and often much-needed responses to problems as they have emerged in Afghanistan, or in terms of more general strategic and operational issues at home. These have been articulated in a wide range of pamphlets, lectures, lessons and multimedia products tailored for each specific audience.

The theory contained in doctrine is, as all good theories are, relatively straightforward. The challenge is that the context continues to evolve. The legal and administrative frameworks in which operations now take place is constantly changing; the accelerated effect of globalised communications and media has to be addressed actively to reflect the myriad interests in the myriad of audiences both at home and in the theatre of operations; and insurgents continue to develop their networks, tactics, use of mass media and fundraising. This last point brings in the complex and challenging issue of the presence and often close interaction of organised, highly sophisticated criminal activity with major insurgency. Crime thrives in unstable environments where governments struggle to maintain order, and sophisticated insurgent groups need funding to pay their fighters and to fund their recruiting, training and equipment programmes. This nexus of crime and insurgency means that, if we needed to be reminded, military measures alone are not enough, and developing the host nation's police force to impose security needs to be in parallel with developing its law enforcement capability.

Against this backdrop of change, which most now recognise as becoming increasingly complex, the British Army's latest doctrine lays out principles which reflect not just contemporary challenges but longstanding ideas based on a great deal of experience. The challenge for our doctrine writers remains that of providing a framework of principles that is robust enough to absorb change so that it remains relevant. Accepting that every insurgency is *sui generis*, the doctrine provides just such a framework: recognise the political dimension; employ co-ordinated government action; integrate intelligence from a wide range of sources; develop and maintain an understanding of the cultural, social and political situation, not just the military; secure the population; neutralise the insurgent, physically and psychologically; gain and secure popular support; operate in accordance with the law and use minimum force; prepare for the longer term; and learn and adapt.

In 1969, the British Army published *Counter-Revolutionary Operations*,<sup>10</sup> which established a broad-based approach to military operations in the face of an insurgent or revolutionary threat. It built on Sir Robert Thompson's experience in Malaya and Vietnam, in that it introduced principles for government not just military action. The doctrine was very clear that 'the outstanding lesson from past revolutionary wars is that no single programme – political, military, psychological, social or economic – is sufficient by itself to counter a determined revolutionary movement'. The first requirement was, therefore, for a national – not just a military – plan. Such a plan would in all probability require emergency legislation to be passed to support the campaign; and a wide range of political, social and economic measures to be implemented to 'gain popular support and counter or surpass anything offered by the insurgents'. This needed an effective organisation to be set up to co-ordinate civil, police and military action at all levels; an integrated national intelligence service to be established; the police and armed forces built up to establish and maintain security; and imposing whatever control measures were necessary 'to isolate the insurgents from popular support'.<sup>11</sup> All this should sound very familiar because little has happened to challenge the efficacy of such a model, and we can see the elements it contains in ISAF's approach in Afghanistan.

The institutional challenge we face, however, is that the model laid out in military doctrine since 1969, and in due course embodied in campaign plans in Iraq and Afghanistan, is that it is really doctrine for a government response. It is a model for a politically led, whole-of-government approach of which the military contribution is one part. Military doctrine may address the needs of the military planner and the military practitioner, but all contributing parties should be familiar with the tenets of COIN if practice is to match the theory. Political primacy and co-ordinated government machinery are central to effective COIN, certainly if concepts such as the 'Comprehensive Approach' are to have any campaign effect at all. Lord Ashdown

spoke in 2008 of the need for such co-ordination in the context of Afghanistan:<sup>12</sup>

First we have to agree a strategy. Even the wrong one would be better than what we have at present, which is none. Second we have to give whoever it is in charge of the international effort, the authority to bash heads together and co-ordinate action, especially when it comes to international aid. Third, we have to co-ordinate military action with our political aims. Lastly, we have to have priorities, and the ability to concentrate on them.

Much has changed since then but the need remains to address the priorities he noted. In the period of withdrawal from empire, British colonial administrations could call on civil servants who themselves had served in the armed forces. The world has moved on and today's challenge is to institutionalise a whole-of-government approach, if necessary with doctrine, that not just the military espouse, but the political and inter-agency communities understand and support as well. The response required is one that efficiently orchestrates all of the military, civilian, multinational and host nation elements of the Comprehensive Approach. We established the Policy Action Group in 2006 in order to bring greater co-ordination to Afghan and international efforts. Chaired by President Hamid Karzai, the Group provided the forum in which the key issues could be debated and the strategy or way ahead agreed. Co-ordinating the international effort in a campaign as complex as Afghanistan is a huge task, but one that cannot be carried out in a vacuum. Experience shows that the work of the host government and its allies benefits from the appointment of a high-profile and authoritative individual with responsibility for co-ordinating the international effort in its support.

### **Difficult, But Not Impossible**

Writers on COIN have pointed out consistently that establishing or

re-establishing security is important but it is only one part of the overall task. General Sir Frank Kitson summed it up neatly when he said, 'There can be no such thing as a purely military solution because insurgency is not primarily a military activity'.<sup>13</sup> However, what Kitson said, along with that other influential COIN practitioner-turned-theorist, Sir Robert Thompson, was that effective security operations enabled the necessary political activity needed to resolve the problems that had caused the insurgency. Without effective security, there could be no hope that the insurgency would be countered. This has not changed, and there are no shortcuts to achieving it. While other means continue, a government's first responsibility is to establish effective security for its people.

The British armed forces continue to adapt to the challenges of war in Afghanistan. Self-critically however, this 'transformation in contact' is still too localised and not yet fully in our bloodstream. While certainly a great deal of work is under way, the population-focused, often subtle and certainly hi-tech ways of fighting that we now take for granted in places like Helmand are still to be taken into the core of the armed forces, as we train and equip for generic operations. Understanding the vital role of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force in such conflict is taking too long. Our US allies, by contrast, have made a great deal of progress. Having only six years ago abjured nation-building and counter-insurgency as things 'real' armies did not stoop to do, they now give stabilisation operations the same doctrinal weighting as those related to conventional offensive and defensive operations. In many ways, Afghanistan is a signpost to the future: it is a testing ground for us and our enemies. How we deal with the threat posed by violent extremism more generally, often embedded in dangerously radicalised states, is an issue that will dominate politicians and military officers for the foreseeable future. However, our armed forces cannot focus exclusively on a single version of conflict; traditional forms of state-on-state warfare cannot be discounted. The lesson from the last ten years is that armed forces will still have to be able to contribute to important stabilising activity

in fragile and failed states. Building that capability is best not done on the job.

If there is one thing we have to keep reminding ourselves, it is that countering insurgency may be difficult but it is not impossible. The fact remains that it is complicated. There is no escape from that because it is a complex, intractable mix of factors of which security is but one, and where political, social and economic factors may well be far more important in the longer term. However without security they will be difficult to improve. The costs of all these countermeasures go well beyond the many more policemen, soldiers and auxiliaries needed to restore security. Security forces and those they are there to safeguard have to face a wide range of often indiscriminate and hugely destructive threats and attacks. This is the case until security and the normal political process are restored, lives improved and, to paraphrase General Sherman, the legitimate object of a more perfect peace is achieved.<sup>14</sup>

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