



Chapter Title: Introduction

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Introduction

Insurgency is one of the oldest forms of conflict. Records of ancient regimes show that their rulers were frequently faced with revolts and insurrection. The mighty legions of Rome spent more time suppressing insurgency within the Empire's borders than they did attempting to expand the limits of Rome's control. The reality that insurgency is a continual problem has persisted into the modern era. The U.S. Army spent literally decades conducting what was, essentially, a counterinsurgency effort in the American West during the period after the Civil War. The U.S. Marine Corps' primary mission in the decades before and after World War I was the protection of American interests and suppression of insurgency in various Caribbean nations. The British army was faced with multiple insurgencies during the period of Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the colonial era came to an end in the post-World War II period, Western militaries—especially their armies—continued to face this challenge. Whether in Malaya or Kenya, Algeria, or Vietnam, the problem of combating insurgencies loomed large for the armed forces of the United Kingdom, the United States, France, and many other nations.¹

¹ For a good overview of U.S. counterinsurgency campaigns from the earliest years of the Republic up to Iraq and Afghanistan, see Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, New York: Basic Books, 2002.

The Focus on Conventional Operations

Despite insurgency's long history, the preference of most Western militaries has been to focus on conventional combat operations against the armed forces of another nation state. Indeed, the "corporate culture" of most Western armies, navies, and air forces is strongly biased toward preparation for major combat operations. That is certainly reflected in the spending patterns of the NATO nations today. Compared with the money devoted to new systems for high-intensity combat—whether aircraft carriers, fighters, armored fighting vehicles, or sensors intended primarily to locate and identify the platforms of an opponent—the amount invested in the preparation for "low-intensity combat," "irregular warfare," "counterinsurgency," or whatever term one wishes to use, pales in comparison. Of course, quality does not equal quantity and a strict resource metric does not necessarily gauge emphasis. However, when we couple money spent with the relative ability of nations to conduct conventional and counterinsurgency operations, it is clear that the emphasis is on conventional forces.

The Hard Lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan

What is the reality that faces the Western militaries today? Take Iraq, for example. Whereas the major combat operations phase in Iraq lasted some 23 days (from the time U.S. and UK forces crossed the border from Kuwait into Iraq to the last major battle in Baghdad on April 10, 2003) the counterinsurgency period has lasted 1,700 days as of this writing. This is consistent with the norm of post-World War II insurgencies. Of some 90 insurgencies in that period, the average length is about 13 years, with some, such as the long-standing conflict in Angola, lasting up to three decades. This is significant: The Iraq experience clearly shows that the patience of U.S. and European nations is finite and not open-ended—yet these conflicts, by their very nature, are lengthy struggles fought out in both the military and political arenas. Additionally, it may be difficult to determine when—or if—an insurgency has ended. For example, when severely threatened by govern-

ment forces, insurgents may temporarily cease their activities and wait for a more opportune time to restart their campaign.

Although Iraq and Afghanistan will probably reduce the appetite of Western nations to engage in similar events without vigorous domestic debate, a strong case can be made that the Western militaries simply cannot turn their back on counterinsurgency in a manner similar to the way the U.S. military turned its back on the study of low-intensity operations after the unfortunate experience in Vietnam. The struggle against radical Islamists will simply not go away in the near term, whatever the outcome in Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore, the Western militaries should make appropriate moves toward improving their ability to conduct counterinsurgency operations, rather than considering Iraq and Afghanistan as aberrations and one-offs. A major part of enhancing our ability to conduct counterinsurgency is improving our ability to analyze how insurgencies get started, the different nature of each individual insurgency, and the actions required by the security forces that are attempting to counter the movement.

About This Monograph

We first examine how insurgencies evolve over time and the changing role of government security forces (police, intelligence, and military) during the various stages of an insurgency. This depiction of how insurgencies grow sets the stage for the subsequent discussion of how the analytical needs of the counterinsurgent forces changes over time. Importantly, throughout the monograph we stress the need for high-quality intelligence in the counterinsurgency (COIN) effort, and the similarity of COIN to police work.

