Agents for Stability or Chaos: Conceptualizing Intelligence “Relevance” in Counterinsurgency

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Recent discussions among U.S. officials about how the intelligence community can demonstrate its “relevance” to counterinsurgency have been dominated by an ideology that presupposes large-scale military intervention, and in which the role of intelligence is limited to improving analysis in support of current military activities, with little debate of future requirements. This article will highlight a number of alternative conceptions of intelligence “relevance” to counterinsurgency, based on a study of several historical and contemporary U.S. and non-U.S. cases, and by applying a wider definition of counterinsurgency that includes cases where the military plays a subordinate role relative to the intelligence services.

It is usually taken as a given in the study of insurgencies that no two insurgencies are alike, and therefore no two counterinsurgencies are alike either. This principle also naturally applies to the role of intelligence in counterinsurgency. But it is here that a considerable problem arises. In recent U.S. attempts to codify historic best practices of counterinsurgency into doctrine, such as the U.S. Army/Marine Corps Field Manual 3–24, the approach taken to the subject of intelligence has been dominated by a military mindset that views the subject in very narrow terms. Two features dominate this mindset. First, that counterinsurgency consists of large-scale military intervention. Second, that it is the military that sets the agenda, with the role of non-military agencies, including the CIA, a subordinate one. It is this highly militarized approach that dominates contemporary mainstream professional and academic discourse on the subject.

Among the chief consequences of this dominant U.S. discourse of counterinsurgency from a theoretical perspective has been to marginalize the study of cases in which the military plays a more limited role relative to that played by other non-military agencies, and specifically that of the CIA. In terms of counterinsurgency doctrine, this has meant the meaning of intelligence has been framed in a particular way, with its subsequent application reflected in contemporary U.S. strategy, operations and tactics in Iraq and Afghanistan. Given the exhorbitant costs of both large-scale counterinsurgencies, which for various structural reasons are highly unlikely to be repeated elsewhere for a considerable period of time, the question arises whether alternative options exist to achieve the same national ends.

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in a more cost-effective manner. When looking beyond the three post–World War II cases of large-scale U.S. counterinsurgency (Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan), a notable feature of the small-scale cases (such as the Philippines in the 1950s or El Salvador in the 1980s) is the important role played by the CIA relative to the U.S. military. Indeed, in many of these cases, it was the CIA that was being supported by the military, often with Special Forces. Such a conception of the CIA’s role is the norm, rather than the exception, in cases where the U.S. government has sought to bolster the stability of a friendly government that is facing an insurgency. In the vast majority of these cases, various structural constraints have ensured a limited military role, and these constraints have been evident for years, particularly in such recent cases as Pakistan and Yemen. Similarly, in cases where Washington has sought to put pressure on another government, or even to induce a “regime change,” but for some reason wishes to avoid direct U.S. military intervention, it often turns to the CIA to take the lead in supporting an insurgency within that country.

The purpose of this article is not only to highlight the differences between conceptions of the intelligence function in the large-scale cases of counterinsurgency versus the small-scale cases from a cost-benefit standpoint, but also to demonstrate how many of the “lessons” from the small-scale cases may have “relevance” for the large-scale cases. It will also provide several alternative conceptions of intelligence from historic cases of large-scale counterinsurgency as a means of putting the current conception into perspective. To this end, the article is divided into three sections in which it will examine some alternative and much less militarized versions of counterinsurgency, to include those in which the CIA is being supported by the military. First though, it will outline the broad features of the current U.S. conception of intelligence in counterinsurgency as it is being applied in the case of Afghanistan. Secondly, it will highlight a number of alternative conceptions, to include both U.S. and non-U.S. cases. Lastly, it will examine the role of intelligence in the transition from occupation to post-occupation. In terms of typology, the cases being studied are mostly limited to an outside power assisting a host nation government to defeat an insurgency, including by large-scale military occupation, but will also look at some colonial cases in order to highlight the experiences of Britain and France.

Defining “Relevance” in the Contemporary Mainstream COIN Discourse

Where does “intelligence” fit into the current mainstream U.S. discourse on counterinsurgency (COIN)? A good starting place to understanding this relationship, particularly in the context of the “population-centric” counterinsurgency approach advocated by General Stanley McChrystal, is to examine the report written by the head of U.S./International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) intelligence in Afghanistan, Major General Michael Flynn. His unclassified report, published in January 2010, is entitled “Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan,” and was immediately endorsed by Defense Secretary Gates. This section will highlight the main conclusions of the Flynn report, discuss some notable assumptions about the definition of intelligence underlying the conclusions, and highlight why the views expressed in the report represent the mainstream notion of intelligence in counterinsurgency to the exclusion of alternative ideas.

The report begins by quite bluntly stating, “Eight years into the war in Afghanistan, the US intelligence community is only marginally relevant to the overall strategy.” It is important to note the emphasis here on “US intelligence community” as a whole, rather than simply military intelligence, or a functional component such as intelligence analysis. The report goes on to discuss how the U.S. intelligence community has “overemphasized detailed information about the enemy at the expense of the political, economic, and cultural environment.” The problem Flynn outlines in great detail is that there is too much analytical
focus on the enemy, and since McChrystal’s stated counterinsurgency strategy is population-centric rather than enemy-centric, that the analytical focus should be on the population. This approach to the problem is also clearly evident in the proposed solutions that he advocates. For instance, Flynn wants intelligence analysis to incorporate a much broader spectrum of data, and wants the analysts themselves to have more interaction with collectors. With regards to collecting more information on the population, the report specifically highlights

census data and patrol debriefs; minutes from shuras with local farmers and tribal leaders; after-action reports from civil affairs officers and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs); polling data and atmospherics reports from psychological operations and female engagement teams; and translated summaries of radio broadcasts that influence local farmers, not to mention the field observations of Afghan soldiers, United Nations officials, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). 7

The report’s emphasis on improving analysis down to the company level is also consistent with more wide-ranging efforts to improve tactical military performance in U.S. counterinsurgency operations. To institutionalize the sharing of intelligence, which Flynn views as another key problem, he has ordered the building of new Stability Operations Information Centers, in order to make all-source intelligence more available to intelligence consumers. 8 In sum, Flynn’s solution to making the U.S. intelligence community more “relevant” is to improve the quality and dissemination of intelligence analysis. Additional evidence that the views expressed by Flynn in his public report are the same as those he expresses internally can be found in his requests for intelligence support, which have emphasized technical collection, such as more satellites and drones, as well as more analysts for his staff. 9

The main assumption underlying Flynn’s charge that the U.S. intelligence community “is only marginally relevant to the overall strategy,” which is that the problem is one primarily of analysis, neglects any reference to other aspects of intelligence that have traditionally played important parts in both U.S. and non-U.S. counterinsurgency campaigns. Nevertheless, it may be premature to suggest that these other aspects of intelligence are not being addressed by the U.S. and ISAF intelligence community in Afghanistan (such as the recruiting of informers, penetration of the Taliban and Haqqani network, building up of the local security services, spying on the Afghan government, covert diplomacy, etc.) and perhaps are absent from Flynn’s report because of concerns about the more highly sensitive nature of these operations compared with intelligence analysis, or because they are being run by the CIA, which is outside of Flynn’s purview. In all likelihood, activities of this nature can at least be assumed to exist. Yet even if it is the case that these other aspects of intelligence are occurring, they would nevertheless be peripheral within the context of the military-dominated population-centric strategy. In any event, they are not only absent from the mainstream discourse on counterinsurgency, including in high-level strategy discussions that have stressed military primacy and higher force levels, but there is no reference to such intelligence activities in FM 3–24. 10 In other words, Flynn’s analysis is consistent with both the U.S. military’s counterinsurgency doctrine, and with the general approach outlined by McChrystal, which itself reflects a military strategy supported by intelligence rather than an intelligence strategy supported by the military. 11 Indeed, the reforms Flynn suggests to improve analysis and dissemination presupposes a large military presence that would be the beneficiary of these improvements. There is additional evidence that Flynn’s analysis of intelligence shortcomings is the dominant view. For instance, the report claims to be based on “discussions with hundreds of people inside and outside the intelligence
community,” so includes a wide-ranging survey of opinion. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest an alternative view challenging the U.S. military’s primacy in Afghanistan has gained significant traction, much less become the dominant view.

To briefly summarize, Major General Flynn’s report on intelligence shortcomings in Afghanistan, which reflect the mainstream discourse on counterinsurgency, is based on the underlying assumptions of intelligence subordination to the military, and the centrality of analytical support relative to other intelligence activities. As will be shown in the following section, these assumptions do not represent the only view of the relationship between intelligence and counterinsurgency; indeed from both a U.S. and non-U.S. current and historical perspective, they represent a minority view.

**Alternative Conceptions of Intelligence in COIN**

In contrast to the mainstream view of intelligence outlined earlier, this section will present alternative conceptions, not only as a means of highlighting fundamental differences in the definition and nature of intelligence, but also as a means of demonstrating the relevance of these alternative conceptions for contemporary policy. To begin, this section will propose an alternative relationship of intelligence to counterinsurgency than that expressed in the mainstream discourse. It will then examine the role of the U.S. intelligence community in a number of Cold War–era counterinsurgency campaigns, as well as those that have occurred post-9/11 as part of the “Global War on Terrorism.” Finally, to place the U.S. experience in perspective, it will also provide brief examples of how the Soviet, Israeli, British, and French governments have employed their intelligence services during counterinsurgencies. To be clear, these examples are not intended to suggest such methods are necessarily appropriate for employment in the current conflict. Instead, they are merely intended to serve as a means of contextualizing the current mainstream discourse on intelligence and counterinsurgency, particularly in relation to notions of what constitutes “relevance.”

As noted earlier, the definition of intelligence employed in the mainstream U.S. discourse on this issue is one that is essentially limited to one of providing analysis to policymakers and war-fighters. In this definition, intelligence is mostly a passive function, designed to inform others. Such a definition neglects any reference to what may possibly be characterized as equally if not more important aspects of intelligence in counterinsurgency, namely those in which intelligence agencies play an active part in shaping the environment. Interestingly, even though not a part of the contemporary discourse on counterinsurgency, this alternative conception of intelligence services playing an active role is more often the norm than the exception, particularly in the cases involving the U.S. government.

To demonstrate the prevalence of the alternative conception from an historical perspective, the period of the 1960s provides a useful example. During this period, the one large-scale case of U.S. counterinsurgency was Vietnam. In the course of this counterinsurgency, both civilian and military intelligence agencies devoted a good deal of attention to analyzing in great detail the conflict environment in which the U.S. military was heavily engaged, in a not too dissimilar manner from that which is described in the Flynn report. In other words, these agencies played an important passive function in analyzing numerous aspects of the conflict, which subsequently were used to inform decision makers. However, to describe the role of U.S. intelligence during this period in such limited terms would be to mischaracterize the broader nature and understanding of the intelligence role in counterinsurgency.

It should be pointed out that as of 1962 for instance, the United States was engaged in counterinsurgency activities not only in Vietnam, but also in Thailand, Laos, Colombia, and
many other countries that U.S. officials had deemed to be threatened by insurgency.\textsuperscript{15} Even in Vietnam, the U.S. government’s approach to the problem of counterinsurgency, since at least the aftermath of Dien Bien Phu, was one in which the CIA and other civilian agencies played a prominent role. There was good reason for the emphasis on the CIA during this period, perhaps the most important of which was that when conceptualizing how to respond to perceived Soviet-inspired “wars of national liberation,” the U.S. government did not have the resources to be heavily engaged militarily in a dozen different countries at once, not to mention being able to do conventional deterrence in Europe and support a large nuclear deterrent. Simply as a matter of having to contend with finite resources, other non-military and paramilitary means had to be employed to achieve the same political aim of bolstering the stability of friendly governments as might otherwise be undertaken with military forces.\textsuperscript{16} Since the U.S. government was interested in supporting a number of governments in their counterinsurgency efforts during this period, and since the U.S. military had only engaged in one large-scale intervention, the question arises as to what the relationship of these other agencies were to the counterinsurgency effort.

An examination of U.S. counterinsurgency efforts during this period showcase the prominent parts played by the State Department, the Agency for International Development, the U.S. Information Service, and the CIA, with the military role being limited to supply and advisory duties.\textsuperscript{17} Under this conception of counterinsurgency, supporting local security forces, especially the police and intelligence services, was viewed as a top priority. Even though an ad hoc non-military approach to counterinsurgency existed under Eisenhower, it became formal U.S. government doctrine under Kennedy, and was encapsulated in the 1962 U.S. Overseas Internal Defense Policy. The role of the CIA during this period was not limited to analysis, but mainly about supporting local police and intelligence programs, political action, and paramilitary and psychological operations. One of the most prominent American practitioner-theorists of this period was Edward Lansdale, who gained his initial experience during the Huk insurgency in the Philippines in the early 1950s. He later moved to Vietnam where he played a very prominent role in developing the counterinsurgency program in that country as well, which heavily emphasized psychological operations. Lansdale was very much opposed to a large-scale U.S. military occupation, preferring instead an indirect approach in which the CIA played a leading part.\textsuperscript{18}

In stark contrast to the idea of a large-scale military intervention as a means of “saving” South Vietnam, an alternative conception of counterinsurgency, in which the military played a subordinate role, was evident at the CIA. In May 1964, two senior CIA officials prepared a memo outlining a “massive counterinsurgency” program that required only 5,000 additional personnel (vice the hundreds of thousands that were advocated by the military). Arguing for a “substantial change in the nature of the counterinsurgency program,” they proposed “intense psychological warfare pressures,” including against North Vietnam, putting the South Vietnamese government on a “war footing,” expanding local self-defense initiatives on a “large scale,” developing local political and paramilitary forces, placing “100 specially trained and indoctrinated US troops” in each province that would report to a “counterinsurgency command center” based in Saigon, and establishing a civilian-led counterinsurgency command for Southeast Asia. While Special Forces would be integral to this program, the regular U.S. military’s role would be mainly limited to the development of “more organized and orthodox national forces,” as well as limited air support missions.\textsuperscript{19} Although this plan was never adopted, nor to have entered into the discourse of senior policymakers who debated the Vietnam options that led to the large-scale escalation in 1965, it does nevertheless provide evidence of an alternative conception of counterinsurgency from a CIA perspective, and one in which the CIA would have played a prominent role.
Among the key programs the CIA was responsible for by the early 1960s, and supported by Special Forces, was the formation of what became known as the Civilian Irregular Defense Group, which consisted of training Montagnard tribesmen in the Central Highlands to defend their villages against the Viet Cong. According to William Colby, the CIA’s strategy “was to build strength in the rural communities from the bottom up, arming the local inhabitants so they could participate in their own defense and gradually extend the area of security.” However, by the early 1960s, there was a growing military advisory presence that gradually took control of the counterinsurgency program in Vietnam away from the CIA. Following the U.S. military buildup in 1965, the CIA was reduced to a second-rate player in bureaucratic terms, although from a counterinsurgency perspective they still played a very active role. For instance, throughout this whole period, the CIA was involved in efforts to bolster the image of the South Vietnamese government and undermine its political opponents. They also had a paramilitary role. Since 1964, the CIA was responsible for the sponsorship of “counter-terror teams,” which consisted of several thousand South Vietnamese by 1966. This program was later absorbed into the highly controversial Phoenix Program in 1968, which was designed to “neutralize” the Viet Cong infrastructure. The Agency itself admits that the Phoenix Program was responsible for the capturing, killing, or defection of more than 80,000 Viet Cong cadres during 1968–1972. Although the Phoenix Program was not necessarily a CIA program, it did include significant CIA participation and funding. Therefore, in terms of its counterinsurgency role in the South during this period, the CIA was not merely a passive player. It is interesting to note that FM 3–24’s highly favorable comments about the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support Program (CORDS), describing it as a “useful model,” makes no mention of the Phoenix Program, even though Phoenix was subordinate to it.

As far as Vietnam was concerned, even though the U.S. military gradually took the lead role inside the country, the CIA still played a prominent role outside of the country, specifically in Laos and Thailand, where the CIA was waging a secret war. In the case of Laos, the CIA was responsible for the arming and supplying of tens of thousands of Hmong tribesmen and Thai “volunteers,” who waged war against the North Vietnamese. Ted Shackley, who served as the chief of station in Laos from 1966–1968, and a keen advocate of covert action, noted that the great success of the CIA’s operation in Laos was that it served as a more cost-effective means of waging war than by having U.S. troops do the same job.

As has been shown, the CIA played a very active role in the Vietnam conflict, and was not limited to providing analysis. Not only did it have a central role prior to the U.S. military buildup in 1965, but it also played a very large role in the pacification efforts that occurred during the course of the large-scale U.S. military presence. In addition, it played an important role outside of Vietnam. Further afield, the CIA took the lead in other counterinsurgency efforts in the 1960s, such as those that occurred in Central and South America. As these examples highlight, instead of counterinsurgency being viewed purely from the perspective of large-scale military intervention, with the CIA playing a subordinate role, in the vast majority of cases, it was the military that was subordinate.

By the 1980s, a number of political constraints, notably the “Vietnam syndrome,” prevented the U.S. government from waging a large-scale military intervention to bolster friendly governments such as those of El Salvador and Honduras. Consequently, many contemporary counterinsurgency theorists, such as John Nagl, have discounted this period from their analysis. In their view, no important lessons can be learned since the United States was not doing counterinsurgency. For example, in his Foreword to FM 3–24, Nagl quotes approvingly the former U.S. Army Vice Chief of Staff General Jack Keane who said:
“After the Vietnam War, we purged ourselves of everything that had to do with irregular warfare or insurgency.”28 By contrast, if one takes a broader approach to the definition of counterinsurgency than one that is limited to large-scale military intervention, but also includes cases where the CIA and other non-military agencies have a prominent, if not the lead role, then this period actually has a great deal of relevance to current discussions about counterinsurgency. The U.S. government’s solution to the problem of how to wage a counterinsurgency with only a token military presence became known as the doctrine of Low Intensity Conflict. This doctrine was put into practice in the 1980s, with the CIA often in the lead and Special Forces and other military assets playing a supporting role.29

In the aftermath of 9/11, and with the onset of the so-called Global War on Terrorism, or what others such as David Kilcullen prefer to call a “global counterinsurgency,” only two cases of military-dominated large-scale counterinsurgency have occurred, namely in Iraq and Afghanistan.30 By contrast, the United States has assisted numerous governments to counter insurgencies, such as Pakistan, the Philippines, Yemen, and in the Horn of Africa. In each of these small-scale counterinsurgencies, the intelligence function is viewed in very different terms than that which is described by General Flynn in relation to Afghanistan. The U.S. government conceived of these small-scale conflicts as limited to the deployment of the CIA and Special Forces, the provision of aid money, and so forth, rather than large-scale military action. Similar to the 1950s–1960s or 1980s cases already mentioned, a key feature of the current U.S. programs is to support the internal security forces of the countries facing an insurgency, with the CIA playing a prominent part in these efforts.

Given the vast number of cases where the United States has employed the small-scale counterinsurgency model of using one’s intelligence services to strengthen a friendly government against an insurgency, rather than employing a large military force, it is fair to say such a strategy represents the norm of U.S. counterinsurgency practice. Curiously, the mainstream U.S. discourse on counterinsurgency avoids significant discussion of the small-scale cases, even though important lessons could presumably be learned. However, beyond pure self-reflection, to place the current U.S. discourse in perspective, it is worthwhile briefly examining the way in which other occupying powers have employed their intelligence services to suppress an insurgency.

One of the most relevant cases to this discussion is that of the Soviet approach to intelligence during their occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, especially as it sharply contrasts with the current conception. The highly respected French counterinsurgency theorist, David Galula noted in 1962 that: “insurgency in the Iron Curtain countries, with their strongly established police forces, is unthinkable today.”31 In many respects, Galula quite accurately described the Soviet “cure” to insurgency, which was its reliance on the local security service. This is reflected in the Afghan case with the top priority given by the KGB to building up the Afghan intelligence service.32 Beginning in 1980, the Afghan intelligence service had some 700 staff, but by 1982 this had increased to more than 16,000, and by 1988 had a total strength of 35,000, which included its own paramilitary forces.33 From this perspective alone, a significant difference is observable between the Coalition’s current approach to intelligence in Afghanistan and that of the Soviets. To put it slightly differently, whereas the current discourse utilizes the quantitative formula of troop-to-population ratios, and emphasizes building up the Afghan army and police force, the Soviet approach perhaps could be more accurately characterized as an informant-to-population ratio, in which building up a large security apparatus, similar in many respects to the KGB in the U.S.S.R., was viewed as a key means of defeating the insurgency. Incidentally, when looking at the Soviet approach, it is noteworthy that the population of Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation was about half its present size.
The KGB was responsible for organizing and building up the Afghan intelligence service, which included training its officers (including thousands in the Soviet Union itself), advising at the local level and in the prisons, and providing the finance. Moreover, each Afghan province had some 10–15 KGB advisers attached to the local Afghan intelligence headquarters. Apart from running a very large network of informers, the Afghan intelligence service performed many other functions as well, including: pseudo-operations, turning tribe against tribe, running its own covert operations in Pakistan and Iran, and it also had a broader responsibility in terms of social engineering and population control. For example, Afghan intelligence played an important part in the education system, kept the clergy on the government payroll, and ran networks of informers within the military to ensure their loyalty.\(^{34}\)

To reiterate, in the Soviet conception of the function of intelligence in counterinsurgency, building up the local intelligence service, ranked very high in their list of priorities. By comparison, in General McChrystal’s 66-page initial assessment of Afghanistan, the emphasis is placed squarely on building up the Afghan National Army and police force, with no mention at all of building up the Afghan intelligence service, nor is there any mention of it in General Flynn’s report either. Furthermore, in stark contrast to the current emphasis on improving analysis, there is no evidence the Soviet approach to counterinsurgency considered this to be a high priority.

Alternative conceptions of intelligence in counterinsurgency are also evident among other powers occupying foreign territory, including colonial powers. These cases showcase the crucial role of intelligence agencies during an occupation, relative to the role played by the military. Interestingly, these cases are also notable in their absence of spy satellites, drones, and Information Centers, but rather are ones that demonstrate the success of less technological means. This point is highly relevant to the current debate about the nature of intelligence in counterinsurgencies, and specifically to the relative effectiveness of the types of resources available to the intelligence services involved and the way in which they are deployed as part of a broader strategy.

The case of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the period of 1967–1973 provides an important example not only of the utility of employing intelligence services, as opposed to the military, when dealing with insurgencies, but also how low-tech methods can prove highly effective. Once Israel had acquired these territories in the aftermath of the Six Day War, the job of ensuring stability was given to the Israeli security service Shin Bet, rather than to the Israeli Army.\(^{35}\) During this period, Israel encountered a good deal of Palestinian resistance, but due to the part played by Shin Bet in developing large numbers of informers and running many highly successful intelligence operations, the insurgency inside the Territories was defeated within a few years.\(^{36}\) A somewhat similar case from this region can be found in the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, in the course of which Syrian military intelligence deployed as many as 5,000 personnel. During their occupation, the intelligence service was viewed as the chief means Damascus had of influencing Lebanese political and economic life, and was highly effective at countering opposition to their rule. One notable characteristic of the Syrian approach was that the army played the supporting role, with the head of Syrian military intelligence acting as Syria’s primary “manager” of the occupation.\(^{37}\)

There are also the numerous cases of insurgency against colonial powers such as Britain and France in which the intelligence services, and specifically police intelligence, were key to the counterinsurgency campaigns. When Sir Robert Thompson was advising the United States in the early 1960s on Vietnam, he emphasized the importance of building up the police force of South Vietnam rather than its military; a view that starkly contrasted with the preference of U.S. generals who emphasized building up the South Vietnamese military.\(^{38}\)
In many of the British cases, such as Malaya, it was the police, notably Special Branch, that played a crucial role, with the British military presence, although significant, largely operating in support.\textsuperscript{39} In the Cyprus case, the somewhat lackluster British performance has been attributed in large part to the deficiencies of the local police force, thereby providing additional evidence of their perceived importance in the counterinsurgency effort relative to that of the military.\textsuperscript{40} However, given the reduction in the size of the British forces throughout the period of decolonization, the ability to deploy and sustain a large military force became a less viable option, and therefore Britain had to rely on other methods of counterinsurgency. In the case of Dhofar, due to large military commitments elsewhere, notably in West Germany and Northern Ireland, the British government did not have the costly option of sending in the British Army, but instead relied on a cheaper method quite similar to that of the United States, which consisted of a small-scale counterinsurgency effort run by the Special Air Service, the Secret Intelligence Service, and other British military advisors, while letting the Omani security forces take the lead.\textsuperscript{41}

The case of the French counterinsurgency effort in Algeria, and their approach to intelligence, also illustrates a different conceptual approach than is currently in evidence. In the French conception, the primary purpose of intelligence was to shape the environment rather than to understand it, and this was reflected in their highly integrated military and intelligence strategies designed to separate the insurgents from the population. One aspect of the French in Algeria that is noteworthy in this regard was their ability to use a wartime legal structure as a means of gathering intelligence. From the French perspective population control and intelligence gathering were viewed as two sides of the same coin. During the “Battle of Algiers,” the French forces under General Massu operated in an environment of martial law. The French created temporary prisons in advance knowing they would need to process large numbers of detainees for the purpose of interrogation and recruiting informers. Other methods of population control, such as a census and the issuing of identification cards, also allowed for more effective intelligence gathering. As is well known, torture and executions were regular features of French counterinsurgency during this period, with the intelligence services playing an integral part in these activities. The French Intelligence Service (SDECE), rather than the French army, also played the lead role in countering the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) outside the country.\textsuperscript{42}

As both the U.S. and non-U.S. cases demonstrate, the part played by the intelligence services in counterinsurgency can be a very active one. In some of the cases, such as that of the Soviets, the KGB played a role quite separate to that of the large Soviet Army presence, whereas in the case of France in Algeria, they played a much more integral role. In other cases such as that of Britain, it was the police who played a more prominent role than the military, and similarly for Israel, its intelligence service, rather than the military, took the lead. The types of operations conducted by the intelligence services of these countries showcase a number of stark contrasts with the recent cases of Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, by examining the total number of U.S. cases in which Washington was supporting another government against an insurgency, rather than limiting the analysis to the three large-scale cases of military intervention, a very different conception of intelligence emerges.

\textbf{Occupation to Post-Occupation}

This section will highlight the role played by intelligence services in the transition from occupation to post-occupation. The role of intelligence during this transition period can be
a highly varied one, because it could be the case that the governing authorities are losing and the foreign power has chosen to abandon its military occupation, it could be a stalemate in which the government and the insurgent organization have agreed to some sort of fragile truce or reconciliation, or the insurgency may have been completely wiped out or on its last legs. In each of these scenarios, the occupying power, and specifically its intelligence service has a number of strategies it can pursue.

In the worst-case scenario from the perspective of the occupying power, in which there is an inability or unwillingness to continue supporting a large-scale military occupation indefinitely, and where the local administration is weak and the insurgency is strong, the foreign power may choose to abandon its direct occupation, although they can also employ their intelligence services to continue fighting the war indefinitely. For instance, after the Soviets withdrew their military forces from Afghanistan in 1989, some 200 Soviet military and intelligence advisers remained until 1992, and it was with continued Soviet support that the Afghan government under Najibullah survived for more than two years. In this case, the foreign power retained its influence by using its intelligence service to continue to contest the battle space indefinitely, and had it not been for the Soviet collapse, Najibullah’s government may have lasted much longer.

In the middle scenario, in which the foreign power seeks to leave after achieving a fragile truce or reconciliation, a useful case to examine is that of U.S. intelligence in Vietnam from 1973–1975. The U.S. military, having not thought through the problem of intelligence requirements prior to the American military withdrawal, were forced to create an entirely new intelligence organization from scratch. Interestingly, whereas in 1956, the CIA had planned for the fall of South Vietnam and created stay-behind networks, they failed to do so in the early 1970s, so that when the North Vietnamese launched their final offensive in 1975, there was no organization to continue fighting or to pass on intelligence. Any prospect of a clandestine resistance had to be completely abandoned since the CIA had not destroyed the files of its informants, which fell into the hands of the North Vietnamese. By contrast, in alternative scenarios, in which an area being occupied by the United States or its allies was expected to be overrun, the standard procedure, both in Western Europe and elsewhere, had been for the CIA to create stay-behind networks to carry on the fight and provide intelligence.

In a best-case scenario, the foreign power seeks to leave behind a stable situation in which the governing authorities remain on friendly terms and are competent enough to manage their security affairs with minimal outside assistance. A key element here is the development of strong local security forces. Therefore, attempting to achieve this end-state relates to a broader problem; namely, when a foreign power occupies a country, what sort of local intelligence organization should they sponsor, especially if they are facing an insurgency, or even in the more general task of nation-(re)building? This issue is not a peripheral one. To quote from Sir Robert Thompson, “within the government the intelligence organization is of paramount importance. In fact I would go so far as to say that no government can hope to defeat a communist insurgent movement unless it gives top priority to, and is successful in, building up such an organization.”

The Iraq and Afghanistan cases provide a useful means of examining this problem. One question that arises immediately is whether the outside powers should be promoting versions of their own intelligence and security services, or those of countries in the region such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Uzbekistan? In each of these countries, large secret police organizations have a very wide remit and ensure the absence of insurgency. Such organizations can potentially hold great appeal in order to reduce the prospect for a costly military occupation. Yet creating such intelligence services may run counter to the stated aim
of creating some form of democratic government, and raise the more fundamental question of whether stability trumps democracy. In addition, allegations of the use of torture by these agencies can prompt support for the occupation to decline. On the other hand, there are numerous cases in which large security forces can develop alongside democracy as long as there is sufficient oversight of their activities and that they operate within the law.

The case of Iraq highlights some important problems in relation to building up and sustaining a relationship with a local intelligence service. When the CIA created the Iraqi National Intelligence Service in 2004, it gradually developed into a service that now numbers about 6,000 personnel, the majority of whom are Sunni. Two problems arose though. First, the figure of 6,000 pales in comparison to the Saddam-era intelligence service that numbered about 50,000. Second, both because it was CIA-controlled, and because it consisted primarily of Sunnis, the Shi’ite government under Prime Minister Maliki distrusted it, sought to marginalize it, and decided to create a separate Shi’ite intelligence service that would report directly to him.

As this section has highlighted, an important function of the occupying power is to create a local intelligence capability, not only to assist with countering an insurgency, but also to maintain the stability necessary when transitioning into the post-occupation period. In less favorable circumstances in which the foreign power is losing, the creation of stay-behind networks may help to ensure that if the insurgency is successful, it will then have to contend with its own insurgency, but at the very least, these networks can continue the flow of intelligence. Although, in many cases, creating a strong local intelligence service is a crucial element in defeating an insurgency, it can also raise many problems, especially if it is known to engage in torture, or is distrusted by the local political leadership. Yet despite the difficulties, it is because a strong local intelligence service can serve as a more cost-effective alternative to a large military presence that their utility on the part of an occupying power will continue to be recognized and exploited.

Conclusion

In the course of President Obama’s Afghan strategy review during the Fall 2009, it became quite evident early on that the large-scale military approach would prevail. No serious consideration at all was given to approaches in which non-military agencies, specifically the intelligence agencies, would play a more prominent role. As this article has attempted to show, this inattention can be attributed in part to the highly militarized discourse on the role of intelligence in counterinsurgency that is currently dominant in policy discussions over Afghanistan. For example, these discussions contain virtually no reference to the importance of building up the Afghan intelligence service, compared to other aspects of the Afghan government, such as the army and police. Despite the numerous historical and contemporary cases of intelligence services playing a lead role in counterinsurgency, or at least of playing a much more active role than has been attributed to them in the recent Flynn report, in both the Iraq and Afghan cases, the dominance of the military in the counterinsurgency discourse, has ensured that alternative conceptions have remained well-hidden and are likely to for the duration of these two conflicts. However, as the recent case of Yemen demonstrates, in which large-scale military intervention was outside the spectrum of the policy debate, it was only the small-scale military and non-military options that were considered plausible, and it is almost certain such options will gain greater prominence in future debates as Western governments search for more cost-effective approaches to counterinsurgency than have been employed hitherto in Iraq and Afghanistan.
Notes

1. Despite the rhetoric of “intelligence-led operations,” which would presume that the military was subordinate to intelligence, this only holds true to a degree at the tactical, rather than strategic, level. In purely military terms, apart from exceptional cases, the notion of the J2 (Intelligence) being supported by, rather than supporting, the J3 (Operations), is a far-fetched one to say the least, although as will be shown, this was the case with Syria in Lebanon. From a broader whole-of-government perspective, an intelligence-led strategy would most likely be one in which the U.S. military was subordinate to the Central Intelligence Agency.

2. The costs of the Iraq War have received a good deal of attention, but perhaps the classic work in this area is: Joseph E. Stiglitz and Linda J. Bilmes, *The Three Trillion Dollar War-The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008). As of February 2010, President Obama was seeking about $100 billion for Afghanistan and Iraq, and was expecting to ask for a similar amount in fiscal 2011. See: Susan Cornwell, “Big War Spending Continues Under Obama,” *Reuters*, 1 February 2010. By contrast, Max Boot has noted the costs of U.S. counterinsurgency operations in the Philippines: “In Iraq there are 140,000 troops. In Afghanistan 35,000. In the Philippines 600. The Iraq war costs over $100 billion a year, Afghanistan over $30 billion. The Philippines costs $52 million a year.” See: Max Boot and Richard Bennett, “Treading Softly in the Philippines; Why a Low-Intensity Counterinsurgency Strategy Seems to be Working There,” *The Weekly Standard* 14(16) (2009).

3. For references to the CIA’s “Blue Sky” memo describing a plan to counter the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan without a large U.S. military intervention, see: George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), pp. 130–131, 143–144, 186. It was this plan that served as the basis for the U.S. intervention in 2001 in which the CIA initially took the lead by supporting the Northern Alliance. Interestingly, one of the key assumptions underpinning the “Blue Sky” memo was that the United States should not repeat perceived Soviet mistakes, and therefore a large-scale U.S. military intervention was to be avoided.


6. Despite later attempts by Defense Department (DoD) officials to note that the report was only intended to refer to those intelligence agencies run by the DoD, and therefore not a criticism of non-DoD agencies, such as the CIA (Entous, “Gates Backs Critique of Spy Agencies in Afghanistan.”), there are at least two reasons to be suspicious of this explanation. First, as noted, are the explicit references in the report to “US intelligence community,” nor do the authors seek to differentiate the intelligence units that are under McChrystal’s command from those that are not under his command. Moreover, several references are made throughout the document of senior political leaders in Washington, DC not getting the information they need to make crucial decisions, and also makes reference to intelligence analysts in the Washington, DC area beyond those in the Pentagon (p. 9). Second, as it is implicit in the report that the military-led “population-centric” approach is being supported by other agencies, it can be assumed that the approach to intelligence Flynn suggests would carryover to supporting agencies as well.


8. See for instance ibid., p. 13. Additional evidence of the focus on the tactical level of counterinsurgency can be found in discussions held at the 23 September 2009 U.S. Marine Corps University sponsored symposium “Counterinsurgency Leadership in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Beyond.” For transcript, see http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/Pages/Coin%20Symposium.aspx


13. The range of debate within Obama’s Afghan strategy review was essentially limited to maintaining the status quo, or to increase force levels by smaller or larger numbers. There was no significant opposition to the assumptions underlying the requirement to maintain a large U.S. military force. The only “dissident” argument, which was essentially dismissed out of hand, was that made by U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan General Karl Eickenberry, who suggested a greater emphasis on diplomacy and aid agencies relative to the military.

14. Two critical accounts of CIA analysis in Vietnam, both written by former CIA analysts, describe the bureaucratic politics associated with the production of intelligence analysis, and demonstrate the pressures analysts faced to provide positive analysis highlighting progress. Such practices negated the value of producing more analysis since the purpose of analysis became not to inform policymakers, but rather to validate their policies. See: Sam Adams, War of Numbers: An Intelligence Memoir (Vermont: Steerforth Press, 1994); Frank Snepp, Decent Interval: The American Debacle in Vietnam and the Fall of Saigon (New York: Penguin Books, 1980). For a more recent account written by a former Defense Intelligence Agency analyst detailing similar problems in the case of analysis of the Iraq insurgency, see: A. J. Rossmiller, Still Broken: A Recruit’s Inside Account of Intelligence Failures, From Baghdad to the Pentagon (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008).

15. As of 1962, the National Security Council’s Special Group (Counter-Insurgency) was monitoring eleven countries. According to one memo: “At the time of its establishment, the President assigned three countries (Viet-Nam, Laos, and Thailand) to the cognizance of the Special Group (CI). Subsequently, eight other countries (Burma, Cambodia, Cameroon, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Venezuela, and Iran) have been added because of the potential counterinsurgency situation within them.” See Memorandum From the President’s Military Representative (Maxwell Taylor) to President Kennedy, SUBJECT: Counterinsurgency Activities of the United States Government, 30 July 1962, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, Volume VIII, National Security Policy, Document 102. Within a few years, a number of other countries would receive counterinsurgency assistance, such as Bolivia and Peru.

16. This is not to say that the unwillingness to commit to a large-scale military intervention was simply due to finite resources. Other obvious structural limitations such as domestic and international public opinion no doubt also played an important role.


18. An account of Lansdale’s actions in the Philippines and his views on the importance of the CIA in waging the Cold War generally, and counterinsurgency specifically, can be found in: Cecil B. Currey, Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American (Washington DC: Brassey’s, 1998), pp. 78–133, 218–219, 259–282.


25. This sort of CIA-led operation outside the main operational theater can also be seen today in the case of AFPAK, where Afghanistan is a military-led operation, while operations in Pakistan are mainly CIA-led.


30. Although the term “Global War on Terrorism” has fallen out of favor since President Obama assumed office, the United States is still running a number of programs that continue to be referred to as either “counterterrorism” or “counterinsurgency.”


32. During this period, this service was known as “KHAD,” but its name was later changed to “WAD.” In the aftermath of the U.S. invasion in 2001, a new service was established, and is now called the National Directorate of Security, or NDS. To avoid confusion, this article will simply refer to “Afghan intelligence service.”


34. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), pp. 408–409; Lally Weymouth, “Inside Najibullah’s Regime: An Afghan Defector’s Tales of Intrigue and Deceive,” *Washington Post*, 12 November 1989; Mark Urban, *War in Afghanistan* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1990), pp. 112–113. The KGB also ran a number of its own operations, such as the KASKAD (Cascade) units that were “set up to locate, penetrate, and destabilize the mujahideen,” including by forming bogus mujahideen groups. In these efforts, the KGB were quite successful in turning a number of mujahideen toward the government side (Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, pp. 408–409).
35. At this time, the combined population of the Territories was approximately 1 million. The total strength of Shin Bet, whose main activity up to this point had been counterintelligence, was only 500.


38. Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, pp. 111–113. As Rosenau highlights, the emphasis on building up and funding the South Vietnamese military meant that the police force was not able to attract the highest quality recruits.


44. William E. LeGro, “Intelligence in Vietnam after the Cease-Fire,” *INSCOM Journal* 20(2) (1992). Colonel Legro notes that when he was ordered to set up a new intelligence organization, Military Assistance Command Vietnam was in the process of transitioning to the Defense Attaché Office of the U.S. embassy. According to Legro, there was no continuity with the earlier intelligence organization, nor had any thought been given as to what this new organization’s purpose would be. By 1973, the new organization consisted of only 12 officers and non-commissioned officers and 1,000 civilians.

45. Snepp, *Decent Interval*. The CIA had reduced its presence from 600 staff at its height in the late 1960s to about 300 by 1972, with declining numbers thereafter. A good deal of the CIA’s intelligence activities at this time were directed at the South Vietnamese government, rather than against North Vietnam, with significant effort placed on bolstering the image of President Thieu, while undermining his opponents. For information of U.S. efforts to develop stay-behind networks in 1956, see: Excerpts from memorandum from Brig. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale to Gen. Maxwell D.
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49. Apart from the case of France in Algeria mentioned earlier, there is also recent evidence of this phenomenon in relation to Afghanistan, where allegations of the Afghan NDS torturing suspects has caused a political storm in Canada. See: Julian Borger, “Canadian Diplomat Alleges Troops in Afghanistan were Complicit in Torture,” The Guardian, 20 November 2009.


51. See Endnote #10 for references.