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Winning at the Graduate Level of Warfare: Six Core Factors of a Successful Counterinsurgency Campaign and the Example of Sierra Leone

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Winning at the Graduate Level of Warfare:
Six Core Factors of a Successful Counterinsurgency Campaign and the Example of Sierra Leone

by

J.D. Rimann

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Abstract

The most common form of warfare so far in the 21st Century has been insurgencies and counterinsurgencies, types of warfare which are particularly challenging for industrialized Western nations to wage effectively. This paper identifies six factors of primary importance which form the key to a successful counterinsurgency campaign. These factors are legitimacy, clarity, beneficial geopolitical factors, restraint, intellectual understanding, and an enduring commitment. This paper argues that these factors must all be present for a counterinsurgency campaign to succeed, and argues that without these factors being accounted for a counterinsurgency will fail. The British humanitarian intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000 and their subsequent counterinsurgency campaign is here considered as a type case study to illustrate the importance of these factors in waging a successful counterinsurgency campaign.

Key Words: Sierra Leone, counterinsurgency, British, intervention, humanitarian

Dedication

Dr. Miles Doleac, Dr. Douglas Chambers, and Robyn Curtis;

You are among the best people USM has to offer, and I am incredibly thankful for your guidance, support, and encouragement, in both academia and life.

To my family and friends who have endured this process with me:

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FORWARD

My interest in Sierra Leone first arose when I lived in that country for five months while working for the humanitarian organization Mercy Ships when I was 19, from July – December 2011. I found the country and its people to be absolutely fascinating. The people of Sierra Leone are some of the kindest, warmest, and most welcoming found on the planet, yet an *okada* rider traversing downtown Freetown fifteen years after the end of the civil war will still see buildings pockmarked by bullets, roads where mines were once planted, and individuals with their hands or feet missing, victims of the cruel deprivations of the Revolutionary United Front, one of the most brutal insurgent groups to ever exist and the primary rebel faction throughout the decade of civil war.¹ Since I returned from that trip in mid-2012 I have stayed in touch with friends from sweet *Salone* (the name of the country in Krio, the dominant creole tongue) and focused much of my academic research on the area. Additionally, as someone who desires to go into policy making one day, I am keenly aware that a knowledge of both insurgency and counterinsurgency warfare is crucial to anyone who would one day be involved in nearly any aspect of the nation's foreign affairs in this age of Western interventions in overseas conflicts against less technologically equipped foes (the type of enemy who is thus predisposed to wage an insurgency). This project has allowed me to marry these two interests—as well as my background in both History and Political Science—and contribute to an increasingly important body of scholarly and practical knowledge with a conceptual framework which is both theoretical and practical.

¹ *Okada* is the Krio term for “motorcycle taxi.”

CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM OF COUNTERINSURGENCY

Counterinsurgency is as old as warfare itself. Alexander the Great excelled at it. Napoleon failed at it. It has been a dominant theme of warfare for three millennia. In recent years fierce debates have been waged in the halls of the power over just how conventional military powers should fight insurgencies and just what type of counterinsurgency strategies and tactics to implement. At a broader and more conceptual level there has been a discussion about what factors are most necessary or predicative of success in counterinsurgency campaigns.

One of the most successful and least remembered counterinsurgency operations of the last two decades was the British humanitarian intervention in Sierra Leone. Starting in May of 2000 the British government intervened in Sierra Leone first to evacuate their own citizens and then to enforce a peace agreement which the United Nations had been unsuccessfully trying to implement since it was signed by the warring factions in July 1999.²

Initially hailed as a successful example of the benefits a twenty-first century humanitarian intervention in the vein as advocated by Tony Blair and laid out by that British Prime Minister in his famous Chicago speech, the operation in Sierra Leone was soon forgotten in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, the start of the Global War on Terror, and the subsequent Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003.³ The questions raised by this operation and explored by this paper are important and pertinent in this day and age, a day and age in which counterinsurgency campaigns and nation building techniques have become points of emphasis for many Western militaries, and have been commonly executed in operations in developing nations around the globe.

² Crawford Young, *The Postcolonial State in Africa: Fifty Years of Independence, 1960-2010* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 257-258.

³ "Blair: The Inside Story." BBC News. February 22, 2007. Accessed April 11, 2016. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/6361771.stm>.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union there have been very few cases of conventional warfare either among Western powers or between them and other states. Instead the last decades of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century have seen a myriad of counterinsurgency campaigns, as soldiers of various Western powers—most notably France, the United States, and Great Britain—have been deployed to a variety of foreign locales to assist host governments doing battle with native insurgencies, with these operations generally being presented to the electorate as ethical and necessary humanitarian interventions.

These counterinsurgency campaigns have met with mixed success. In Iraq and Afghanistan the United States appears to have failed once more at counterinsurgency, though not quite as badly as in Vietnam. In different parts of Francophonie Africa the French have fared rather better, maintaining several successful humanitarian interventions which involved limited counterinsurgency campaigns in their former colonies. The British were quite successful in Sierra Leone but less so in Iraq, where they assisted the Americans in their doomed effort to effect regime change. It is the British humanitarian intervention and subsequent counterinsurgency/peacekeeping operation which this paper will be concerned with examining. These campaigns are the focus of this paper because they have been underexplored in American literature—especially in comparison with American counterinsurgency campaigns in places like Vietnam and the Philippines—and because the British and these operations in particular offer an excellent study for how to wage and win a counterinsurgency campaign. This paper aims to propose a simple list of factors whose presence must be there to determine whether or not a counterinsurgency campaign will or will not succeed.

With that in mind the British experience in Sierra Leone assuredly provides the perfect case study for these proposed factors. All of these factors were in place in this campaign and the

British did not experience much trouble in succeeding in a very tricky situation. Consequently this British case is used because of this perfection; it illustrates a best case scenario for a counterinsurgency campaign, and only through recognizing perfection can imperfection be revealed. Thus, the very fact that it is the best case scenario for a counterinsurgency campaign is what makes it such an excellent exemplar of how the presence of these factors can make or break a counterinsurgency/humanitarian intervention before it even begins.

Organization

This paper is organized into several parts. First is a section giving a series of definitions, which is followed by a review of the relevant literature, an examination of the six key factors which my research has led me to believe are necessary for a counterinsurgency to succeed and which were present for the British in Sierra Leone, and a brief historical overview of Sierra Leone to place the British intervention in context, including a discussion of the civil war which the British intervention halted and the domestic situation in Great Britain leading up to the British intervention. After this the body of the paper is concerned with an examination and analysis of the British counterinsurgency campaign in Sierra Leone using as its prism and tool of analysis the fulfillment of the six key factors listed, and finally some basic recommendations from the British campaign which future military leaders battling an insurgency would do well to keep in mind (which function as guidelines for future Western humanitarian interventions).

Definitions

Definitions are of crucial importance in any discussion of complex technical matters, and this is no certainly true for the study of military history. Indeed, it might be even truer in the field of counterinsurgency, an area of warfare which Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Fred Kaplan

has described as “A graduate course in warfare.”⁴ Below the definitions of some of the basic terms which are used consistently throughout the paper are given. Some I have coined myself and defined for clarity’s sake and others I have drawn from the appropriate literature, most commonly the official doctrines of the different branches of the United States military.

This paper is focused on Western powers deploying expeditionary forces abroad in counterinsurgency campaigns. Throughout this paper the term intervening state or intervening nation will be used to denote the nation sending troops into a different nation for purposes of waging a counterinsurgency campaign, while the term host nation or host government will be used for the state which is being intervened in and which is host to both the troops of the intervening nation and the native insurgency.

Any discussion of military matters should include a discussion of the concepts of strategy and tactics, as well as some emphasis on the differentiation between these two terms, which are often times mangled, jumbled, and used interchangeably by the layman. The United States Marine Corps has a published body of doctrine which provides an excellent definition of both of these terms. According to the influential *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1: Warfighting* “strategy focuses directly on policy objectives...[and] applies to peace as well as war.”⁵ This publication also distinguishes between *national strategy*, “which coordinates and focuses all the elements of national power to attain the policy objectives” and *military strategy*, “which is the application of military force to secure the policy objectives.”⁶ In other words, military strategy is a component of an overarching national strategy. An example of this might be that country A has a strategy involving controlling the oceans, which requires that country B be invaded. The

⁴ Fred M. Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 152. This quote was the inspiration for the title of my paper.

⁵ MCDP-1, 28.

⁶ MCDP-1, 28.

necessity of the invasion is national strategy; the plan to subdue country B is military strategy.

As *Warfighting* puts it:

Military strategy can be thought of as the art of winning wars and securing peace. Strategy involves establishing goals, assigning forces, providing assets, and imposing conditions on the use of force in theaters of war. Strategy derived from political and policy objectives must be clearly understood to be the sole authoritative basis for all operations.⁷

The importance of the strategic concept for the purposes of this paper is the understanding that counterinsurgency is not a national strategy, and though it can function as a core component (or perhaps even as *the* core component) of a military strategy, it is not a stand-alone military strategy, but a component, a piece of a larger and more complex puzzle

If strategy is the highest level of warfare, tactics is the lowest level. Again, definition provided by *Warfighting* is used:

Tactics refers to the concepts and methods used to accomplish a particular mission in either combat or other military operations... In war, tactics focuses on the application of combat power to defeat an enemy force in combat at a particular time and place. In noncombat situations, tactics may include the schemes and methods by which we perform other missions, such as enforcing order and maintaining security during peacekeeping operations. We normally think of tactics in terms of combat, and in this context tactics can be thought of as the art and science of winning engagements and battles. It includes the use of firepower and maneuver, the integration of different arms, and the immediate exploitation of success to defeat the enemy.⁸

There is a final level of war which links tactics and strategy, often referred to as the operational level of war. There is some controversy among military theorists regarding the actual usefulness or even existence of an operational level of warfare, but as the Marines include it and because in insurgency and counterinsurgency campaigns it is useful to use as a helpful visualization of thought, it will be included in this paper. The full definition of the operational level of warfare given in *Warfighting* is as follows:

⁷ MCDP-1, 28.

⁸ MCDP-1, 28-29.

The operational level of war links the strategic and tactical levels. It is the use of tactical results to attain strategic objectives. The operational level includes deciding when, where, and under what conditions to engage the enemy in battle—and when, where, and under what conditions to refuse battle in support of higher aims. Actions at this level imply a broader dimension of time and space than actions at the tactical level. As strategy deals with winning wars and tactics with winning battles and engagements, the operational level of war is the art and science of winning campaigns. Its means are tactical results, and its ends are the established strategic objectives.⁹

The Marine Corp manual does explicitly warn future commanders that “the distinctions between levels of war are rarely clearly delineated in practice...they are to some extent only a matter of scope and scale.”¹⁰ As will be seen throughout this paper nowhere is this more true than when it comes to insurgency and counterinsurgency campaigns.

In his book *The Insurgents*, chronicling the development of the American counterinsurgency doctrine in Iraq and Afghanistan, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Fred Kaplan provides a succinct summary syllogism taken from one of General David Petraeus’s close advisers, offering the opinion that “[Western powers] shouldn’t engage in counterinsurgency unless the government we’re helping is effective and legitimate; a government that needs foreign help to fight an insurgency generally isn’t effective or legitimate; therefore, we generally shouldn’t engage in counterinsurgency.”¹¹ This is something to be kept in mind when considering the strategic background behind counterinsurgency, because no matter how good a nation and its military are at counterinsurgency at the tactical or operational level if the underlying strategic factors are a net negative (and if the government being listed by the intervening nation lacks legitimacy then strategically victory is already nearly impossible) that tactical and operational skill will be for naught, because victory is already almost fundamentally impossible.

⁹ MCDP-1, 30.

¹⁰ MCDP-1, 30.

¹¹ Kaplan 2013, 290.

Introduction of Literature Review

This project draws from two primary disciplines, history and political science. Because of the nature of counterinsurgency itself, however, any true consideration of the subject demands an interdisciplinary approach. With that in mind, the literature drawn on for this project is quite diverse and varied. The majority of the material analyzed and literature read for this project can be grouped into four broad categories: Sierra Leone History and Background, the Civil War and British Intervention, Counterinsurgency Theory and Practice, and British Counterinsurgency Thought (separate from the second category because there was such a focus to show that the British do in fact have a distinct intellectual and practical theory of counterinsurgency). Listed below are the primary works of note considered most essential to this paper by the author.

Literature Review: Sierra Leone History and Background

David Harris's *Sierra Leone: A Political History* is the best single volume political history of Sierra Leone which I have ever had the pleasure of reading. Starting with before the British colonialization and working his way through the most recent elections Harris covers the entire spectrum of political historical evolution in Sierra Leone. He has an especially detailed couple of chapters on the civil war and several other chapters which do not directly mention the war but which cover the events of Sierra Leonean history in such detail that it is clear how they helped create the conditions which eventually did lead to open war in this state.

Sierra Leone: Inside the War: History and Narratives is both an academic history and a collection of oral histories by participants in the Sierra Leonean Civil War. It gives an excellent overview of the war at both the political and personal levels. It is similar in this way to the excellent *Black Man's Grave: Letters from Sierra Leone*, but contains more of a focus on the war

and the explicit effects of the war, as opposed merely to the experience of living in the country while the war was going on.

Black Man's Grave: Letters from Sierra Leone is an amazing yet haunting collection of letters and other information from Sierra Leone. Most of the letters are written between two former Peace Corps workers, Gary Stewart, who served in the northern Sierra Leonean village of Fadugu from 1968 to 1970 and John Amman, who served in Fadugu from 1979 to 1982, and their friends from the village. The book provides a fascinating first-hand look at the civil war and the initial invasion of the nation by the RUF (which occurred in the vicinity of Fadugu), as well as the events which lead up to the invasion. It is not written explicitly about the civil war, but does give an excellent account of what it was like to live in the country while the war was going on (only the first part of the war occurred where the authors were living).

The book *Does Peacekeeping Work?: Shaping Belligerents Choices after Civil War* by Dr. Virginia Page Fortna was helpful less for its core argument about peacekeeping as a viable strategic reality but rather because it uses Sierra Leone as a case study. This book affords some useful insights into the conflict as well as background information on the intervention by the British and contains some suggestions for future humanitarian interventions, but it does not delve too deeply into the practice of counterinsurgency. This, however, leads to another point: there is no one absolutely definitive historical account of the British intervention in Sierra Leone.

Another useful (if somewhat lacking in information regarding Sierra Leone specifically) primary source is the memoir of Tony Blair, the prime minister of the U.K. (1997-2007) during the intervention. Entitled *A Journey: My Political Life*, it is fairly vague—and as political as a political memoir can be—and Blair does not offer a critical appraisal of his own actions or the actions of his government. The book does show some of the thinking of the British government

during the build up to sending in British troops to a foreign country—such as when it details how the Bosnian operation came together—and functions an effective source of evidence for the thinking of the British politicians and policymakers at this time.

Additionally, *Taking Command*, the memoirs of General Sir David Richards, the former Chief of Staff of the British Army and the man who was actually the commander of the intervention effort in Sierra Leone, contains a significant amount of information on the British effort in Sierra Leone. Richards walks the reader through the invasion step-by-step, and even details his interactions with the media and how he more or less manipulated them in order to get his message that the British Army was going to be successful in Sierra Leone across in the most effective way possible.

Andrew Doran's *Blair's Successful War: British Military Intervention in Sierra Leone* is the most comprehensive historical chronicle of the initial intervention. The book traces the decision making process up until the British troops arrived and then goes over the course of the counterinsurgency campaign from there. In particular Doran highlights the importance of the planning and thought that went into the primary British intervention operation (Palliser) and he does an excellent job of situating the British decision to intervene in the historical context of New Labor foreign policy, positioning it as an outgrowth of the success in Bosnia and a harbinger of the strong support Prime Minister Blair would give to the American intervention in Iraq a few short years later.

Both *Corporate Wars: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* by P.W. Singer and *Mercenaries: The Scourge of the Third World* by Guy Arnold deal in large part with Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leonean Civil War. This is because the South African private military firm Executive Outcomes and the British private military firm Sandline International were both

heavily involved in the war, hired by the government of Sierra Leone to help supply the Sierra Leone Army with weapons and training and to directly do battle with the RUF. Consequently these two books provide an excellent academic examination of a large part of the Civil War and the events which occurred leading up to the British intervention, though by the time British Royal Marines and SAS Commandos are arriving in Freetown both firms had left the country.

Of note is the discussion in both of these works of the controversy surrounding Sandline International, its ties to the British government, and the ensuing scandal. In brief, the British government was implicated in assisting Sandline circumvent the arms embargo imposed on Sierra Leone by the United Nations and pushed for by the British. Normally such actions would decrease the legitimacy which a nation might be seen with prior to sending in troops to intervene in another nation and start a counterinsurgency campaign. However this actually became a rare case of such covert actions actually increasing the intervening state's legitimacy, as the British were able to portray their actions as completely upstanding and moral because they were trying to supply the forces battling the rebels, who of course had committed atrocities for several years at this point in the conflict.

Literature Review: Counterinsurgency Theory and Practice

The development of the six factors which I have determined are the most integral to determining the success or failure of a counterinsurgency has come after over a year of study of the subject in preparation for this thesis. Below are the most important of the texts which I have pursued over that time regarding both insurgency and counterinsurgency. This is by no means a complete list of the texts read, but merely the most important of them.

The most useful introductory text to modern warfare and military affairs in general which I have come across is *Understanding Modern Warfare*, a graduate level survey of the field

published by Cambridge University Press a few years ago. It provides a cursory introduction to counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare, but is not intended as an introduction to that more complex topic. Instead it is a text meant for someone who has little to no experience with military history/theory at all and needs a guide to understanding the terminology and ideas which are prominent in this most complex of fields.

The most useful introductory text to the field of counterinsurgency for the laymen is Robert Kaplan's *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War*. Kaplan, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, writes in a simple and direct manner about complex and nuanced theoretical underpinnings of counterinsurgency though and traces the intellectual development of the subject. Of note is the extensive access he had to David Petraeus, David Kilcullen, John Nagel, and other prominent military leaders and theorists whose names will be repeated below and who have been instrumental to the development of the current COIN theory dominant in Western military powers today.

The key text which has been read by all of those individuals mention in the preceding paragraph and incorporated into almost all the modern thinking on the subject of COIN is David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, first released in 1964. David Galula was a French colonel whose life almost perfectly prepared him to become one of the world's foremost experts on battling insurgencies. He spent time as a captive of Mao's guerillas in China, as a UN Observer of the Greek Civil War, as an observer of the Malayan Insurgency and the Indochina War, and finally as a French commander in the Algerian War. By the time he started at Harvard as a Fellow at the Center for International Affairs in 1963 and began his book, Galula

had already started developing what would become the most influential counterinsurgency theory in modern history.¹²

Galula is actually credited with coining the term counterinsurgency. His book systematically outlines the requisites for a successful insurgency first, defining the problem before proposing a solution. He has a set of case studies of counterinsurgencies which he examines before proposing a set of what he terms the “Laws of Counterinsurgency.” These laws are highly population-centric (they revolve around controlling/influencing the civilian population of a nation), a factor which would henceforth dominate counterinsurgency theory after 1964.

Galula’s four laws are that:

1. Support of the Population Is as Necessary for the Counterinsurgent as the Insurgent.
2. Support Is Gained Through an Active Minority.
3. Support from the Population Is Conditional.
4. Intensity of Efforts and Vastness of Means Are Essential.¹³

These laws would form the basis of American counterinsurgency theory as expressed in the recent U.S. Army and Marine Corps doctrine for counterinsurgency, *FM 3-24*

Counterinsurgency (discussed below) as well as in American application of counterinsurgency doctrine in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The clear-build-hold strategy advocated by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, for example, was directly distilled from Galula’s thought.¹⁴ Galula was flawed, however, because he did not advocate for restraint in dealing with civilian populations and captured insurgents (he advocated for torture and reprisals among other things) and because he focused so much on the population that he did not take other important factors into account, such as the legitimacy of the government.

¹² Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York: New Press, 2013) 26.

¹³ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1964), 55-59.

¹⁴ Gentile, 25.

As noted above, the U.S. Army and Marine Corps published a new doctrine for counterinsurgency entitled *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency* (the FM stands for Field Manual) in 2006. With contributions and chapters written by thinkers including David Petraeus, David Kilcullen, John Nagl, Michèle Flournoy, Conrad Crane, and Sara Sewell, the book was an anthology of the best and most relevant thinking on counterinsurgency in the United States. It is also probably too population-centric, and it does not provide as much tactical advice or even strategic advice to battlefield commanders. It is more a framework or conceptual model for thinking about how to wage a counterinsurgency in the 21st century than it is a practical manual. However, it is official doctrine of the United States military regarding counterinsurgency and is lightyears ahead of anything else the American government has produced in that regard.

One of the principle contributors to FM 3-24 was Colonel John Nagl. A West Point graduate and Rhodes Scholar who earned his doctorate while at Oxford, Nagl served in both Gulf Wars and later became the head of the Center for a New American Security. Nagl can be seen as the Ted Sorenson to David Petraeus's JFK, as an intellectual blood bank of sorts. His book *Learning How to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* is the single most influential book written on counterinsurgency in the 21st century. Drawing inspiration from Galula and T.E. Lawrence (from whose memoirs the title is derived), Nagl turns a keen academic eye to the British counterinsurgency operation in Malaya and then contrasts that successful British operation to the disaster experienced by America in Vietnam. Much of this project's discussion of British intellectual consideration of counterinsurgency theory and the development of a unique British theory of COIN draws on Nagl, but his influence goes well beyond just this academic examination of British theory, as he makes recommendations for future American campaigns in his book and then played such an integral role in American

operations in Iraq as both a tactical commander and later on as a senior adviser in the government.

Another individual who played a large role in the formulation of American counterinsurgency theory and its coming of age in Iraq and Afghanistan was Colonel David Kilcullen, who was quoted earlier in this paper. A member of the Australian Army, Kilcullen was influential in the American military during the conflict in both Afghanistan and Iraq. He was a major contributor to the COIN field manual and one to the key advisors to the American military and civilian command.¹⁵ Kilcullen dedicated his professional career to a study of insurgency and counterinsurgency and is a major figure in the modern development of counterinsurgency theory. He is widely published and I consulted the majority of his works for this project. However, the two works of his which played the largest role in this paper were his article “Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency,” which is actually derived from a 2006 lecture, and his book *The Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*.

The three pillars provided the original conceptual model which Kilcullen developed for counterinsurgency and which he revisited in *The Accidental Guerilla* three years later in a broader format (with case studies provided from modern insurgencies). The titular three pillars are Security, Political, and Economic, with a base in Information and all supporting the end goal of Control.¹⁶ He goes to lengths to make clear that this is, in his words, “a framework, not a template.”¹⁷ He succeeds in helping to conceptualize counterinsurgency—indeed he is probably equal to Nagl as far as influence on current counterinsurgency thought today is concerned—but

¹⁵ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 119-120.

¹⁶ David Kilcullen, “Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency.” Department of the Air Force. September 28, 2016. Accessed October 06, 2016. http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/uscoin/3pillars_of_counterinsurgency.pdf.

¹⁷ David Kilcullen, “Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency.” Department of the Air Force. September 28, 2016. Accessed October 06, 2016. http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/uscoin/3pillars_of_counterinsurgency.pdf.

his model does not do enough to do justice to other factors beyond those which are tactical in nature. That is where my six factors might be considered a correction to the work done by Kilcullen.

In his book Kilcullen provides a part-memoir/part-theoretical examination of his own experiences waging counterinsurgencies in the Muslim Middle East. In its opening pages Kilcullen makes the fascinating observation that “The local fighter is therefore often an accidental guerrilla—fighting us because we are in his space, not because he wishes to invade ours.”¹⁸ While this insight is more applicable for cases which will be touched on but are outside the scope of this project (namely Western interventions into the Middle East), it does have some applicability to the Sierra Leonean Civil War. The Kamajors who are touched on below (militia derived from traditional hunting organizations which arose in response to defend villages after the RUF invasion from Liberia) are an exemplar par excellence of an accidental guerilla. These rural villagers did not plan on fighting the RUF and only did so after their own space was encroached upon.

Kilcullen attempts to establish a conceptual framework for what he calls “the current pattern of conflict” in regards to insurgencies, as well as to identify what he considers the key variants in such conflicts to be. Kilcullen, as will be seen later on, is primarily dealing with conflicts in which the intervener lacks broad legitimacy and most of the campaigns in which he was involved in did not conform to my own six factor model.

The foundations of FM 3-24 were in large part those of Galula updated for the 21st century.¹⁹ The foundations of the most influential doctrinate publication in the United States military, *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1: Warfighting* (the series which this paper draws

¹⁸ Kilcullen 2009, xiv.

¹⁹ Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 26-27.

on to provide definitions of most military terms found in the text), were Sun Tzu and Clausewitz.²⁰ *On War* remains perhaps the most influential book written on the subject in the Western canon, and Clausewitz is also a significant figure in the field of counterinsurgency, though not as significant as he potentially could have been (his chapter on insurgency is incomplete due to his early death).²¹ He outlines some thoughts on insurgencies and fighting them, though he makes the interesting observation that “we consider a general insurrection as simply another means of war” and one which does not require too much special treatment.²²

The best critique of Galula and other “population-centric” counterinsurgent solutions which I have seen is actually based on Clausewitzian theory. Written by USMC Captain Brett Friedman and published in the peer-reviewed *Military Review* in 2014, “Creeping Death: Clausewitz and Comprehensive Counterinsurgency” does an excellent job of highlighting the major issues which the reader of *Counterinsurgency War: Theory and Practice* would encounter and the objections which that reader would likely raise. However that is just what makes this article useful, not what makes it fascinating. What makes it fascinating is that Captain Friedman critiques the entire academy by saying that in all of the theories out there regarding counterinsurgency, “[they] have indeed ignored the portions of the trinity and their interrelated nature. Each theory ignores two of the three aspects of the trinity and, furthermore, *assumes an arbitrary relationship between the enemy, the population, and the political goals of the insurgency as a whole that does not exist.*”²³ Theorists focus solely on their theory and dislike looking beyond it for critiques or improvements. This leads to a lack of efficiency. The six

²⁰ David Jordan, *Understanding Modern Warfare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 48.

²¹ Jordan, 276.

²² Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*. Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 479.

²³ Brett Friedman, “Creeping Death: Clausewitz and Comprehensive Counterinsurgency.” *Military Review*, January/February 2014, 82-89, 82. Emphasis mine.

factors outlined in this paper are intentionally meant to correct for this arbitrariness in modern counterinsurgency thought and theory. These factors are broad enough to cover many areas, specific enough to be used for actionable objectives, and interdisciplinary enough to address most problems (as opposed to focusing overwhelmingly and cripplingly on only one or two factors).

The development of my discussion of clarity owes its impetus to the works of Thomas Ricks, a former embedded *Washington Post* reporter in Iraq who was a contributor to the thought and work of both Petraeus and Nagl and who is now a Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security. He wrote two books on the American invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq. The first one, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* is one of the most important and influential books for my own thinking which I have ever read. Ricks outlines the lack of planning and thought that went into the United States invading Iraq and shows just how much the lack of thought in the opening days of the war negated the years of thought which would eventually go into trying to first win and later just get out of the war in Iraq. This point is expanded in Ricks' book *The Generals*, which examines the structure and hierarchy of American command from before the Second World War and up through the present day. A point which is made over and over again is that a lack of clarity and planning will inevitably lead to failure in a counterinsurgency campaign. Details which can be overlooked in a conventional war when a state is the most powerful on Earth can lead to defeat when it is an unconventional war that state is trying to win.

The second book Ricks wrote on the Iraq War, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008*, is a great look at the application of counterinsurgency theory in the 21st century and specifically during "the Surge" which occurred

in the waning days of the Bush Administration, when 20,000 more American troops were deployed to Iraq. Ricks does an excellent job of differentiating between tactical and strategic success in *The Gamble* when examining the U.S. counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq under General Petraeus. Again this speaks to the point developed in this paper regarding the six key factors of counterinsurgency, especially the factor of clarity: there must be a clear strategic and tactical purpose to every action taken in defeating an insurgency, but the strategic purpose must always come first. Too often strategic considerations are sacrificed for short term tactical successes, with predictably poor results over the long term.

The other book which really shaped my perception of the importance of clarity and commitment was General H.R. McMaster's *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam*. McMaster masterfully presents a story of infighting, deception, and general incoherence at the highest levels of civilian and military command during Vietnam. As even the most cursory student of history knows, the Vietnam War was a disaster for the United States, and America's lack of a willingness to commit to any strategy, and even worse the lack of any sort of clear strategy at all, are among the primary reasons Vietnam was such a disaster. This book is also relevant for background and importance of its author: it is an outgrowth of McMaster's PhD. dissertation at the University of North Carolina, but the academic also command a regiment in Iraq and today is one of the leading lights in the intellectual and strategic development of the United States Army. Like Nagl, Kilcullen, Galula, and Petraeus, McMaster is soldier-scholar who demonstrates the necessary combination of an aptitude for violence, a keen intelligence, and an ability to think critically demanded of a leader who would be successful in waging a counterinsurgency.

Historian Russell Weigley's groundbreaking *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* is also worth mentioning because it serves as an excellent baseline from which to examine not only American but more broadly all conventional thought in regards to guerilla warfare. The Americans in Vietnam and the Soviets in Afghanistan reacted in broadly similar ways to the guerrilla assaults, lacking restraint and pursuing self-defeating strategies. Weigley does a good job of showing where the United States has done an excellent job in waging war (overwhelming firepower and technology, preserving American lives) and not as good of a job (areas including tactical/strategic innovation and adaptation to asymmetrical foes).

The leader of the RUF, Foday Sankoh, was educated in guerilla warfare at camps in Libya, as was his biggest supporter, Charles Taylor. The works they would have encountered there would likely have been Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare* and Mao Tse-tung's essay "On Guerrilla Warfare" (and perhaps his less well-known "On Protracted War," a series of lectures given in 1938 outlining his proposal for Chinese resistance to the superior but conventional Japanese Army). Of course these works are more important than just for their direct connection to this project: they are arguably the most influential books on guerilla warfare ever published. To paraphrase Sunzi, know thy enemy and know thy self. Any study of a counterinsurgency should consider the thought of the insurgent and guerilla theory as well.

The focus of Che is on the guerilla as a 'social reformer.' To him every effort must be made to ally with the population. In Galula's population-centric model it is imperative that the counterinsurgent treat the population well; however if they do not they still have a chance at victory. For Che's guerrilla however, there is no chance of victory if the population is mistreated: without their support the guerrilla will not achieve anything other than defeat. Che outlines both

tactical and strategic considerations for the guerilla to consider, all drawn heavily from his experience in Cuba (when he was actually in Africa, it should be noted, Che did not fair nearly as well as he did in the Caribbean). Mao is similar in this regard. He places paramount importance on the interactions of the guerilla with the population. Tactics—hit-and-run assaults, supply-line ambushes, etc.—are important, but the focus must be on the (rural) population and ensuring that they stay loyal and on the side of the guerilla fighter.

It is interesting to note that while they followed much of the tactical advice given in these two books, the guerillas of the RUF blatantly disregarded what are arguably the more important directives of these two Communists: do everything in your power to help and not hurt the population. Both Che and Mao would have been horrified at the RUF's actions in regards to the population, not because they were averse to cruelty or violence but because these actions were strategically inexcusable and led to the alienation of the population, which in turn served to strengthen the legitimacy of the British when they arrived in the country. There were certainly legitimate grievances for the RUF to rebel against, but their actions undercut any legitimacy they might have had, and in an insurgency/counterinsurgency struggle legitimacy cuts both ways, and is crucial to both sides.

G.L. Lamborn is a retired CIA officer whose book *Arms of Little Value: The Challenge of Insurgency and Global Instability in the Twenty-First Century* is an overlooked gem of the growing field of counterinsurgency studies. Lamborn argues that the issue with COIN at the end of the day is a cultural one, and that American troops struggle with counterinsurgency because they are unable to understand the cultural and economic factors which lead to an insurgency in the first place. He argues that all of the fancy theoretical thinking in the world cannot help soldiers from the West defeat an insurgency if they do not make an effort to understand the

cultural background of those people whom they are fighting. Lamborn uses many of the classic examples of insurgency and counterinsurgency as case studies, but from a unique and intriguing cultural angle in pursuit of his argument. His argument is one which I am sympathetic too, but not quite convinced of. While it is certainly true that the basics of a culture need to be known, I do not think that true cultural understanding of the enemy is of particular relevance at the strategic level, as Lamborn maintains. However, the second argument of the book is something with which I wholeheartedly agree, which is that often in failing to understand the root causes of instability and insurgency in foreign lands Western powers act in ways which are not perceived as legitimate, critically undermining their ability to wage a successful insurgency from very beginning. This argument fits in perfectly with my own reasoning regarding the importance of legitimacy and my inclusion of legitimacy as one of the crucial six factors which will make or break the success of a counterinsurgency campaign.

P.W. Dixon's *The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Iraq and Afghanistan* is actually a collection of essays by experts in the field on the relevance of past British conflicts on their counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (where the British are widely perceived as having failed at effective counterinsurgency). Of particular note, some of the scholars in this book argue that there is no intrinsic British aptitude for counterinsurgency and that the existing British doctrine is not unique, an argument which challenges my own later point about the importance of having existing intellectual background with counterinsurgency. However, as I argue that the importance is not in having an exact doctrine (though that is of course important for purposes of clarity) but having learned experience and knowing that there are different demands placed on the counterinsurgent than on the conventional soldier.

John Newsinger is a British Marxist and ardent anti-imperialist whose chronicle of British counterinsurgency operations, aptly titled *British Counterinsurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland*, in many ways reflects that stance. That stance is also reflected in the driving argument of the work, which is that “British success...was dependent not on any supposed military process, but on the ability to establish a large enough political base among sections of the local inhabitants prepared to support and assist in the defeat of the insurgents.”²⁴ What Newsinger fails to realize with this argument is that he is not arguing anything strange to a counterinsurgent theorist: the population and the political base are major elements of any counterinsurgency theory. Even more so these things form the basis of British counterinsurgency theory more than any other comparable Western power’s counterinsurgency theory (though after Petraeus, Nagl, and Kilcullen American theory has shifted to being more population-centric than British theory). Thus in the end Newsinger is unknowingly arguing not against but actually for a distinct British method or theory of counterinsurgency.

The Counterinsurgency Myth: The British Experience of Irregular Warfare by Andrew Mumford takes the same tact. The author argues that while a unique British take on counterinsurgency doctrine may have existed in the past that doctrine completely failed to live up to expectations in Afghanistan and Iraq. I agree with him that a unique British doctrine and experience with counterinsurgency existed, but I would disagree that its existence or lack of applicability were to blame for defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead it was a combination of other factors which were to some extent outside the control of the British Army and political structure, as well as a lack of the other five factors discussed and argued for in this paper.

²⁴ John Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 2.

Military Leadership and Counterinsurgency: The British Army and Small War Strategy Since World War II by Victoria Nolan is an excellent examination of the British approach to counterinsurgency and a study of the experiences of the past affect the education and focus of the present and future. More than just a study of British counterinsurgency it goes on to examine the entire leadership and organizational culture of the British Army and how the British experience with counterinsurgency operations affected and shaped that culture. These things were important to success in Sierra Leone, where the unique training and experience of the British Army prepared them for a counterinsurgency in ways which other Western militaries would not have been.

The Media and International Security, is a collection of essays edited by Dr. Stephen Badsey, a professor of military history at the University of Wolverton in the United Kingdom. Arising from an academic conference at the British Military Academy at Sandhurst in September 1995, these essays represent the combined conclusions of British policy makers, media, military and scholarly types. In other words, this primary source documents much of the thinking about framing conflicts and dealing with the media during interventions by the policymakers and military officers who would actually be doing this a few years later in Sierra Leone, as well as the media people who would be reporting on the conflict itself. It contains multiple references throughout to the American experience in Somalia, and does suggest that there was a link between the experience of the United States with the media in Somalia and the actions taken by the British military and government in dealing with the media in Sierra Leone seven years later.

The Six Core Factors 'Model'

As I researched the group of military operations (Basilica, Palliser, Barras, Silkman, Maidenly, Keeling, Vosper, and Vela, and continuing into the Ebola crisis with Operation

Gritrock) which taken together constitute the British military intervention into Sierra Leone, I was also busy researching the various theories of counterinsurgency and the different factors which thinkers have maintained go into a successful counterinsurgency since antiquity.²⁵ In the course of my research I have come to the conclusion that there are six key factors which must be in place for a nation to wage a successful humanitarian intervention and counterinsurgency campaign. These six crucial factors are legitimacy, clarity, beneficial geopolitical factors, restraint, intellectual understanding, and an enduring commitment.

Legitimacy is a complex factor. This factor encompasses the legitimacy of the intervention force in the eyes of the international community, the citizens of both the host nation and the intervening nation, and the legitimacy of the host government. The host nation government and the host nation citizens are not synonymous. For example the Americans in Iraq were—*pro facie* at least—seen as legitimate by the Iraqi government, but not by large segments of the Iraqi people (nor by much of the international community).²⁶ Likewise, many Americans saw neither the Iraqi government nor the American-led expeditionary force as legitimate.²⁷ A lack of legitimacy in any of these areas can crucially hamstring a counterinsurgency campaign and doom it to failure almost from the start. The discussion of this concept in the paper will focus on how legitimacy was a key point of the British success in Sierra Leone and that the groundwork to demonstrate that this was a legitimate action was established before the first

²⁵ Michael Dobbs, "British Intervention in War-torn Sierra Leone, 1997-2015." West Africa Study Circle. January 1, 2015. Accessed July 8, 2016. [http://www.wasc.org.uk/NewFiles/BritishForces in Sierra Leone 1997-2015.pdf](http://www.wasc.org.uk/NewFiles/BritishForces%20in%20Sierra%20Leone%201997-2015.pdf).

²⁶ Matt Mines, "Establishing Governmental Legitimacy in Iraq: The Path to Protecting Human Rights." Topical Review Digest. January 1, 2013. Accessed September 27, 2016. <http://www.du.edu/korbel/hrhw/researchdigest/mena/>.

²⁷ Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2008) 200-201.

British paratroopers arrived in Freetown, and established on a local, national (in the U.K as well as Sierra Leone), and international level.

Clarity is the second factor, and it also encompasses multiple interlocking concepts. An intervention must be clear in its aims and objectives, the rules of engagement and the reason behind them must be clear to all members of the intervening force, and the purpose of the initial intervention and any subsequent military campaign must be made clear to the troops engaged in the campaign, the population back home, the citizens of the host nation, and the international community. The plan of engagement must be clear at all levels of policy and decision making for each step of the intervention, from the moment that the troops touch down to the moment that they leave, however many days, months, or years in the future that might be. A lack of clear planning is the quickest and easiest way to hamstring a humanitarian intervention and military campaign.

There two similar geopolitical factors which must be in place for a counterinsurgency operation to succeed. The first of these is that there cannot be any bordering regions which have governments friendly to the insurgents. If a bordering country does favor the insurgency that state must be brought to heel by whatever means are necessary, either militarily or otherwise. If there is a cross-border safe-haven for insurgents to retreat to and train in than it will be difficult to impossible to ever fully eradicate them, no matter how legitimate the counterinsurgent force is seen and how committed it is to eventual victory. Second and in the same manner there cannot be a porous border; even if a neighboring state is not friendly to the guerillas but is unable to secure its border and consequently implicitly enables a continuous flow of weapons, ammunition, volunteers, and funds to the insurgents it can drag out a counterinsurgency campaign to a point

where the insurgents can force a stalemate, and thus a victory. Borders must be closed to outside aid if an intervening counterinsurgent force is going to defeat a counterinsurgency.

Intellectual understanding refers to the necessity for these broad but core factors being understood by the warfighters at every level, as well as other more counterinsurgency specific techniques and tactics. Waging and winning a counterinsurgency campaign requires a level of intuitive and thinking which is neither possessed nor taught by many militaries around the globe. The British benefitted in this regard because they were already in possession of a large body of national counterinsurgency doctrine stemming from their centuries long experience of battling insurgents during the heyday of the British Empire and in the post-colonial world. This doctrine was in many ways able to act as, if not a guiding hand, at least a strong historical experience from which to draw upon and guide British actions in Sierra Leone; contrast this with the Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan (to say nothing of Vietnam) where a coherent counterinsurgency doctrine had to be built on the fly and almost from scratch.²⁸

Restraint of force flows from an intellectual understanding of the needs of counterinsurgent warfare. Restraint is called for because the population is often the center of gravity for both an insurgency and a counterinsurgency. To end an insurgency requires that the people actively support the counterinsurgents, and if those troops are killing the people that simply will not happen. Thus restraint is called for in every action taken by the troops fighting the insurgency. If the troops are attacked, they must be judicious to an extreme in returning fire. The last thing which is to be desired is civilian casualties, because they can turn an entire populace against a counter-insurgent force with rapacity unmatched. Likewise, all strikes against insurgents—even individual high value targets—must be carefully weighed against the

²⁸ Thomas E. Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 433, 437.

likelihood of collateral damage, and especially of civilian casualties. A drone strike might kill a regional commander and ten insurgents, but if it leads to another twenty volunteers joining up with the insurgency it has been a net negative to the cause of the counter-insurgent.

The final crucial factor to a successful counterinsurgency is commitment. Commitment might actually be the most important of the factors discussed here. A nation or a coalition of nations intervening in a region and waging a counterinsurgency must make it clear that they are there for the long haul. Insurgents do not have to win to achieve victory; they must merely fight the counterinsurgent to a stalemate, until that state and its people grow tired of war. Thus it is crucial that if the intervening nation is going to commit to a counterinsurgency campaign that they be prepared to be committed for at least ten to fifteen years, if not longer. The average successful counterinsurgency campaign lasts well over a decade, and as in Sierra Leone the campaign can easily continue for years even after the actual fighting has stopped.²⁹

These are the crucial factors which must be acknowledged and acted upon to achieve a successful outcome in a counterinsurgency campaign. As will be seen in this paper these factors were all in place in the British intervention and subsequent counterinsurgency campaign in Sierra Leone, which this thesis examines in some detail, showing how it was these six factors which led to the British triumph.

²⁹ Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2008), xii and Michael Dobbs, "British Intervention in War-torn Sierra Leone, 1997-2015." West Africa Study Circle. January 1, 2015. Accessed July 8, 2016. [http://www.wasc.org.uk/NewFiles/BritishForces in Sierra Leone 1997-2015.pdf](http://www.wasc.org.uk/NewFiles/BritishForces%20in%20Sierra%20Leone%201997-2015.pdf).

CHAPTER 2: SIERRA LEONE AND THE SIX CORE FACTORS

All of these thoughts and ideas discussed above have contributed to the advancement of the theory of what counterinsurgency warfare is, and what it is not. COIN is not a cure all, it is not a comprehensive strategy, or even a strategy at all. It is a tool in the strategist tool belt, and one which must be used with care. It is perhaps best said to be a comprehensive operational tool. It is strategic in one way because it requires patience and commitment from the highest-echelon of command to work. However, it is played out in the day-to-day minutiae of the soldier at the tactical level and requires adherence and discipline not only from generals and colonels, but also from privates and corporals. Below the counterinsurgency campaign waged by the British in Sierra Leone—a campaign in which the actual combat was relatively brief, but the actual commitment was not—is considered as a kind of case study, to show just how a successful counterinsurgency campaign can be waged as part of a larger strategic humanitarian intervention.

Historical Background

To understand the events of the Sierra Leonean insurgency and the subsequent British intervention some background is given below on the history of Sierra Leone as an independent nation, the lead up to the Sierra Leonean Civil War, the Civil War itself, and the start of the British intervention. Sierra Leone as a formally came into existence as an independent state on April 27, 1961, following several months of negotiations between the British Empire and leader of the movement for Sierra Leonean independence, Sir Milton Margai, the man who would become the first Prime Minister of the new nation.³⁰ As part of the famous “winds of change” sweeping across the African continent as Britain freed her former colonial holdings, Sierra Leone remained within the British Commonwealth, and the freshly-minted nation maintained close ties

³⁰ Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: From the Hopes of Freedom to the Heart of Despair: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 26.

with its former imperial overlord.³¹ The new nation was a parliamentary democracy, retaining the system of rule which had been used by the British themselves, and the first elections were held in May 1962. In a disturbing sign of things to come, however, these first few years of freedom and the early elections were marred by the imprisonment of several opposition party leaders on what were essentially trumped up and politically motivated charges as Margai's SLPP Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) cruised to several easy wins in both Parliament and the Executive Branch in the early years of the new republic.³²

Still, the first five years of the Republic of Sierra Leone would prove to be the most democratic and peaceful of its history. In 1964 Prime Minister Sir Milton Margai, the former leader of the independence movement and one of Africa's premier statesmen, died at home quite unexpectedly and with no plan of succession in place.³³ On his death his brother, Sir Albert Margai was elected to his position on the strength of his last name, but, unfortunately, Sir Albert did not possess the same political gifts his brother did. Riots broke out against Margai in 1967 as rumors of corruption and embezzlement arose in the local press. In response, Margai declared a state of emergency across the entire country and called out the military to effectively impose martial law to shut down the riots. Surprisingly, Margai himself did not use the opportunity to seize absolute power. His action did, however, set a precedent for the early resort to a use of military power and martial law in times of political unrest, a precedent which would be copied by future—and less scrupulous—national leaders. Elections were due to be held in 1967, and in spite of the rioting and military presence Margai allowed them to proceed.³⁴ Proceed they did,

³¹ David Harris, *Sierra Leone: A Political History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 33-34. The term itself comes from a speech by British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, and became something of a well-known term in the era of de-colonialization.

³² Harris, 46-48.

³³ Harris, 46.

³⁴ Harris, 57.

and Margai's SLPP was beaten out by the All People's Congress (APC) at the ballot box. The APC was led by an activist named Siaka Stevens, who had been one of the opposition leaders imprisoned by Margai in the first elections after independence.

Before Stevens could even assume the duties of Prime Minister, a coup was launched by several generals to prevent him from taking his rightfully-elected place. Stevens was placed under house arrest, only for a counter-coup to be launched days later. This counter-coup attempted to place Sierra Leone under the rule of an absolutist military junta, but, within a year, yet another coup was launched, which led to Stevens finally being made head of state of the less-and-less democratic looking Republic of Sierra Leone in 1968.³⁵ The ascendancy of Stevens in 1968 marked the functional end of democracy in Sierra Leone.

Stevens quickly set about turning Sierra Leone into a one-party state, consolidating authority around the Executive Branch and creating the extra-constitutional office of President, mostly in the name of fighting against coups both real and imagined.³⁶ By 1978 the APC was the only legal political organization within Sierra Leone, and Stevens would rule the nation with a totalitarian iron fist until he retired to his Freetown estate in 1985.³⁷ He would die peacefully in 1988, but his actions while in power would set the stage for one of the most vicious and violent wars in modern history, the Sierra Leonean Civil War. The causes of the war were both dizzyingly complex (when considered from a political standpoint) and frightfully simple (when considered from an economic standpoint).

Things deteriorated quickly upon Stevens's retirement. First, he was replaced by his hand-picked successor, a man more known for kowtowing to Stevens rather than for any great

³⁵ Harris, 63.

³⁶ Harris, 67.

³⁷ Meredith, 562.

skill or experience in governing a nation, one Major General Joseph Momoh.³⁸ Predictably, the results were negative. The Momoh Administration was characterized by a perceived—and likely real— increase in oppression and corruption by many Sierra Leoneans, and both the new President and his advisers were deeply unpopular. Mounting protests lead to Momoh sacking several of his cabinet ministers and launching a formal anti-corruption governmental initiative entitled the *Code of Conduct for Political Leaders and Public Servants*, but this had no practical effect either on corruption or on public disgust with their authoritarian leader.³⁹

Under mounting pressure from international actors and disillusioned citizens alike, Momoh attempted to tamp down on both groups by announcing in 1990 that Parliament and the APC were going to reappraise the 1978 constitution created by Stevens, which had formalized the one-party state arrangement which had existed in Sierra Leone for the previous twelve years. After some deliberation the APC Executive voted to redraw the constitution and allow for multi-party elections. However, international observers and citizens alike did not believe that Momoh and his APC were serious about true electoral and constitutional reform, and the situation in Sierra Leone continued to deteriorate. In 1991 the mounting tension and pressure came to a head and the situation erupted into a full-blown civil war.

But, this civil war was not as domestic as the designation “civil war” would lead one to believe. Sierra Leone had long been a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and ECOWAS had recently intervened in the neighboring Liberia, which was in the midst of its own civil war at the time. President Momoh had committed some troops to this intervention and also allowed ECOWAS forces to use Sierra Leonean territory as a staging ground from which to enter Liberia. In retaliation for this—and in an attempt to raise

³⁸ Meredith, 564.

³⁹ Harris, 77.

money for his armies, whose treasury had been running dry—the world’s most notorious warlord (and war criminal) at that time, Liberia’s Charles Taylor, helped arm and train a group of exiled Sierra Leoneans who desired to start a rebellion.⁴⁰ Calling themselves the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and led by Foday Sankoh, a former Sierra Leonean Army corporal who had trained with Taylor at a guerilla training camp in Gaddafi’s Libya during the Cold War, the rebels invaded Sierra Leone on March 23, 1991, kicking off one of the most vicious and brutal wars in modern history.⁴¹

The initial reaction of the Momoh government to this rebellion was sluggish, and the RUF made rapid gains across the countryside. They quickly overran large swathes of the eastern and southern portions of the country, capturing many of the famed diamond mines of Sierra Leone. However, the offense began to stall out due to a combination of military action by the Sierra Leonean Army and the distraction of Sankoh and the RUF High Command, as they started to focus on enriching themselves through the diamond mines rather than actually trying to overthrow the government. Indeed it would quickly become apparent to all watching that the RUF had no governing philosophy or even a legitimate grievance with the ruling APC, but instead existed primarily to enrich its leaders and send tribute money to Charles Taylor to support his continuing civil war in Liberia.

As the situation began to get worse and worse politically and strategically for the Momoh Administration, a group of young army officers determined that the time was right to engage in what was quickly becoming a cornerstone of Sierra Leonean politics: launching a coup. Citing mismanagement of the war as their primary reason for doing so, on April 29, 1992 they struck. Led by Captain Valentine Strasser, the plotters quickly ousted Momoh (who was sent into exile

⁴⁰ Adekeye Adebajo, *West Africa's Security Challenges: Building Peace in a Troubled Region* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 184.

⁴¹ Adebajo, 184.

in Guinea) and established themselves in office, claiming that they were fighting on the behalf of the people. This claim was quickly disproved by the establishment not of a democratic republic, the restoration of voting rights, or anything that could be characterized as being done on the behalf of the people, but instead of the installation of military junta christened the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) and headed up by Strasser, who would become the world's youngest head of state at the age of only 25.⁴²

Strasser would prove to be an ineffective leader. During his time in power little was done to stop the RUF, who continued their lethargic advance across the country. Strasser also was rather undemocratic as president and displayed little desire to reform the government or do anything to help the impoverished citizenry and the swelling population of refugees pouring into Freetown in an attempt to escape the cruelty of the RUF. Neither winning the war or helping the poor is a terrible combination for the head of state who desires to stay in office, especially during wartime, and Strasser was no exception. He was taken out of office as he had come into it, being overthrown in a coup by members of the NPRC in 1996, and subsequently exiled to Guinea just at Stevens and Momoh had been before him.⁴³

The leaders of this coup installed General Julius Bio as head of state. Bio, who had, amusingly enough, been recently promoted into his position by the now former President Strasser, surprised many by holding elections quickly after coming into power.⁴⁴ These elections led to the first non-military non-APC government coming into office in Sierra Leone since 1967, as the SLPP won most of the parliamentary seats as well as the Presidency, led by party leader

⁴² Wazir, Burhan. "Ousted Ruler May Face Sierra Leone War Crimes Court." *The Guardian*. November 25, 2000. Accessed April 15, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/nov/26/sierraleone>.

⁴³ Meredith, 566.

⁴⁴ Paul D. Williams, *War & Conflict in Africa* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 68-69.

Ahmad Tejan Kabbah.⁴⁵ Kabbah promised to end the war and opened up negotiations with the RUF and Sankoh. Things seemed like they might be looking up for Sierra Leone, even as the negotiations failed to produce anything substantive.

Then disaster struck again. A year after his election President Kabbah was disposed in a military coup and sent into exile in Guinea. The coup leader, Major General Johnny Paul Koroma, had no legitimate grievance and was not particularly concerned about the welfare of the nation, but merely desired to seize power, and so he did. Installing himself as the new head of state and forming the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) as the new governing body, Koroma would prove to be perhaps the most damaging leader in Sierra Leonean history. He immediately suspended the constitution, shut down all non-government radio stations, and instituted martial law. If the absolute suspension of democracy and human rights was not bad enough, Koroma also invited the RUF to join him as part of the government. Ostensibly as part of the peace talks, the AFRC-RUF proved to be nothing more than a murderous kleptocracy, enforcing no laws but instead presiding over a state which was primarily characterized by rape, robbery, and the accumulation of wealth for the respective leaders of the two former foes, united by their greed and appetite for destruction.⁴⁶

Faced with this growing regional threat to stability Nigeria sent troops into the nation under the banner of ECOMOG, and their force quickly ousted Koroma and the rebels from power. Another peace agreement was signed which brought the democratically elected President, Kabbah, back into office with Foday Sankoh as a member of his cabinet. This tense peace lasted for a year before Sankoh decided to make another play for power, kidnapping several Westerners

⁴⁵ Williams, 68-69.

⁴⁶ Williams, 69.

and ordering his RUF troops (which had not been disbanded as part of the peace treaty) to march on Freetown.

At this point things were in a state of disaster. Gangs of bandits roamed this territory, owing loyalty to no one except for their own pockets. The government did not function, and human rights abuses were rife. Aside from rape and murder—both of which happened at a brutally high level—Sierra Leone was known in the international community for two war crimes in particular: amputation of the limbs of their opponents and innocent bystanders alike, and the use of child soldiers. First pioneered in West Africa by Sankoh's old friend Charles Taylor in Liberia, the RUF in particular employed thousands of boys as young as six as soldiers for its forces. Kidnapped from their homes (often after being forced to execute their own family members), hopped up on drugs, and given a rifle, these gangs of children were hideously mistreated, abused and used as cannon fodder for the rebel advance.⁴⁷

This then was the atmosphere of Sierra Leone at the time which the British intervention occurred. The situation in Sierra Leone is, however, only half the story and only half of the reason that her former colonial overlord decided to send in troops. To gain a fuller picture of the context in which the British government decided to send the military into a West African country thousands of miles away from Britain, some background must also be given as to what was going on in British politics at the time. Britain was experiencing the dawn of the so-called "Liberal golden age," and the start of the long tenure of the polarizing Tony Blair as the British Prime Minister. Blair's personality and understanding of international affairs would largely shape the course of recent British history, most notably with regard to Iraq and the British

⁴⁷ Williams, 49.

support of America's massive intervention in the Middle East. It was Blair who greenlighted the Sierra Leonean intervention.⁴⁸

Tony Blair was first elected as Prime Minister in 1997 (and would serve in that capacity until he stepped down in 2007). He was the youngest prime minister in Britain since 1812.⁴⁹ Blair's platform contained a variety of different planks grouped under the heading "New Labour," and one of the most prominent of these planks was his championship of what he termed an "ethical foreign policy" or 'Doctrine of the International Community,' a doctrine most clearly outlined in the famous speech Blair gave to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs in 1999, which identified five principles of this new foreign policy, quickly dubbed the Blair Doctrine.⁵⁰ The hallmark of this foreign policy approach once Blair gained office was a willingness to order British troops into action around the world not for political or economic reasons but instead to right wrongs and enforce the correct moral actions that Blair and the British determined were necessary. Indeed, Blair's policy of ethical interventions and decision making helps historians account for the fact that he ordered British troops into action more times than any other prime minister in British history, before or since.⁵¹ His willingness to do so in order to end atrocities and support human rights was nowhere more evident than in Sierra Leone, which as seen above was a hotbed of brutal human rights violations.

⁴⁸ "Blair: The Inside Story." BBC News. February 22, 2007. Accessed April 11, 2016.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/6361771.stm>.

⁴⁹ "Blair: The Inside Story." BBC News. February 22, 2007. Accessed April 11, 2016.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/6361771.stm>.

⁵⁰ Tony Blair, *A Journey: My Political Life* (New York: Vintage, 2011), 84 and Rob Kaiser and Michael McGuire, "Blair Unveils Bold Intervention Doctrine." Chicago Tribune. April 23, 1999. Accessed September 04, 2016. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1999-04-23/news/9904230097_1_blair-third-world-debt-cold-war.

⁵¹ "Blair: The Inside Story." BBC News. February 22, 2007. Accessed April 11, 2016.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/6361771.stm>.

Introduction of Analysis

This was the situation when the British arrived in Sierra Leone. The country had a history of corruption and ineffective at best government, while the British government was looking to launch a new interventionist foreign policy for the 21st century. The counterinsurgency which the British waged is used as the exemplar for the six factors which I have identified as the key factors which need to be in place for a counterinsurgency campaign to be successful, each of which is listed below and will be examined and laid out, before being analyzed in the context of the British intervention into Sierra Leone.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is the first factor which will be examined. Legitimacy is crucial to waging a counterinsurgency. The citizens of the host country as well as the citizens of the intervening nation must view the counterinsurgency campaign as legitimate. If either of these groups of citizens do not view the counterinsurgency operation—or rather more broadly the war in which that campaign is a part—as being legitimate than support will erode and then vanish, leaving decision makers with the difficult choice between continuing an unpopular war or withdrawing altogether.

An excellent example of this is the United States in Vietnam. The original American intervention in South Vietnam and their advisory mission with the South Vietnamese forces waging a counterinsurgency against the Viet Cong was widely seen as legitimate by both Americans and South Vietnamese, and in particular enjoyed wide and broad support among the American public.⁵² However, a series of decisions were made by leaders at highest levels of American command, including sponsoring the coup which lead to the brutal assassination of

⁵² Andrew J. Polsky, *Elusive Victories: The American Presidency at War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 213.

South Vietnamese President Ngoc, and at the lowest levels, such as the My Lai Massacre, which led to citizens of both the Republic of South Vietnam and the United States to view the United States as an illegitimate actor in South Vietnam, a shift in opinion which undercut the support for the American counterinsurgency campaign in Vietnam both at home and abroad.⁵³ Compounding this was the unpopular draft at home and the lack of clarity (addressed further below) about just exactly what the United States was doing in Vietnam in the first place. This loss of legitimacy brutally damaged the American cause in Vietnam and inevitably led to the Americans withdraw.

As has hopefully been made clear from the litany of disasters, dictatorial rule, coups, counter-coups, and general discontent, the government of Sierra Leone was rarely seen as legitimate by its own people. Indeed, Sierra Leone was classified as a failed state by a majority of political scientist and several international organizations in the late 1990s prior to the British intervention.⁵⁴ However what is particularly interesting is that even before the invasion/rebellion and subsequent insurgency staged by the RUF there was a sense that Sierra Leone would become a failed state among Sierra Leonean academics and some Western political scientists.⁵⁵ There was such heavy corruption in the government which people were quite familiar with for many years, and which eroded its support and legitimacy both at home and abroad. As the fighting continued through the 1990s the succession of governments which existed at this time continued to be seen as illegitimate. This started to change after the Lomé Peace Accords were signed in 1999 and the democratically elected President Kabbah returned to Freetown.⁵⁶ This history of poor government helped to make the British, though a former colonial power still always a

⁵³ Polsky 239 and Ricks 2012, 330-331.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Sambanis, "A Review of Recent Advances and Future Directions in the Quantitative Literature on Civil War." *Defence and Peace Economics* 13, no. 3 (2002): 215-43, 219 and Robert I. Rotberg, "Failed States in a World of Terror." *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July/August 2002): 127-40, 128.

⁵⁵ Steve Riley and Max Sesay, "Sierra Leone: The Coming Anarchy?" *Review of African Political Economy* 22, no. 63 (March 1995): 121-26, 121-122.

⁵⁶ Gary Stewart and John Amman. *Black Man's Grave: Letters from Sierra Leone* (Berkeley Springs, WV: Cold Run Books, 2007), 140-141.

relatively good ally to Sierra Leone, appear to be even more legitimate in the eyes of many Sierra Leoneans.⁵⁷

Domestically, the British government under Prime Minister Tony Blair and Foreign Secretary Robin Cook had already set the stage when they came into government that they intended to use the military power of the nation in pursuit of an “ethical foreign policy,” which they immediately demonstrated by intervening in Bosnia and Serbia.⁵⁸ This was a successful intervention, which both reassured the British electorate that this type of moral foreign policy could be effective and demonstrated that there was no ulterior motive to these ethnical interventions but that they were done as altruistic adventures. It may also have helped that Tony Blair had actually spent time in Sierra Leone personally and had a familial connection to the former Crown Colony, as his father had spent time as a schoolteacher there in the 1970s.⁵⁹ Even today Tony Blair remains the most popular public figure in Sierra Leone and was hailed by the President of Sierra Leone as the savior of the nation.⁶⁰ This background helped to build legitimacy for the British interventionary policy among the British public, and made it significantly less controversial than the invasion of Iraq, which though led and supported by the same group of New Labor policymakers and politicians lacked the same amount of legitimacy in the eyes of the British public.

Internationally, the British built support for their intervention as well. They were involved in the UN arms embargo (though this would cause some embarrassment later, as

⁵⁷ Donna E. Arzt, "Views on the Ground: The Local Perception of Intentional Criminal Tribunals in the Former Yugoslavia and Sierra Leone." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 603 (2006), 231-232.

⁵⁸ "Blair: The Inside Story." BBC News. February 22, 2007. Accessed April 11, 2016. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/6361771.stm>.

⁵⁹ "Blair: The Inside Story." BBC News. February 22, 2007. Accessed April 11, 2016. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/6361771.stm>.

⁶⁰ David H. Ucko, "Can Limited Intervention Work? Lessons from Britain's Success Story in Sierra Leone." *Journal of Strategic Studies*, December 18, 2015, 1-31, 5.

discussed earlier) and condemned the atrocities being committed in Sierra Leone.⁶¹ They were also helped by the fact that the RUF was widely seen as being an illegitimate and criminal force both in-country and out-of-country, which meant that no one in the international community was inclined to speak out against the British intervening and sending in troops to put an end to them (unlike when Germany and Russia both spoke out against the United States sending in troops to Iraq for example, which undercut the legitimacy of that campaign from the very beginning).⁶²

In Sierra Leone the British actually had something of an advantage from being the former colonial overlords. While colonialism was not a pretty chapter in the history of Africa, the British in Sierra Leone had a generally solid reputation among the people. It was in Freetown that the British had placed the slaves they freed, and there had been much British support of the process of independence and little conflict of the type that characterized decolonization throughout other parts of the Empire in Sierra Leone.⁶³ This relatively positive past helped to increase British legitimacy in Sierra Leone as well.

It is practically impossible for an interventionary force to succeed at a counterinsurgency campaign if the host country government is not seen as legitimate. Fortunately in Sierra Leone by 2000 President Kabbah was seen as legitimate by much of the nation, a result of the relative fairness of the elections which brought him to power, his apparently sincere attempts to bring peace to the war weary nation, his own personal reputation as a decent individual who did not benefit as much as his predecessors from corruption, and the broad international support which he enjoyed.⁶⁴

⁶¹ P.W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 115.

⁶² Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work?: Shaping Belligerents' Choices after Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 60.

⁶³ Stewart and Amman, 20-21.

⁶⁴ Harris, 102-104.

In the United Kingdom there was a sense of support for the endeavor as well. The majority of British voters supported Blair's decision to send in troops to restore order and put a permanent end to the violence. There had been what was dubbed a "BBC effect" (a play on the so-called "CNN effect" which many speculated had led the United States into Somalia eight years earlier) and many people in Great Britain were outraged by the daily footage of the heinous crimes being committed in Sierra Leone.⁶⁵

This was a major success point of the relatively rapid British victory once they committed to a counterinsurgency campaign alongside the Sierra Leonean Army. There was support at home so the British government did not feel constrained by the political calculus which would have limited them if there had not been such strong support at home, while the support for the Sierra Leonean government and the British military in Sierra Leone both undercut any attempts by the rebels to extend the fighting and gave the British a freer hand in operating within the country.

On the other hand the rebels violated the maxims of Che and Mao by acting in a manner which undercut their legitimacy in the eyes of both the people of Sierra Leone and the international community. Internationally their continued violation of ceasefires meant that no one was inclined to take their claims or grievances seriously, or mount any opposition to the British intervention.⁶⁶ In Sierra Leone their cruel conduct towards the citizenry meant that they received little support from the people, who are supposed to be the lifeblood of any effective insurgency. Instead, their many atrocities made them incredibly unpopular in Sierra Leone, and by the end of the conflict they were reduced to kidnapping children to supply themselves with soldiers

⁶⁵ Harris, 110.

⁶⁶ Fortna, 68.

because no one would willingly fight for them.⁶⁷ This lack of legitimacy helped contribute to the RUF's rapid downfall once the British Army arrived on the scene.

Commitment

According to a study conducted by the RAND Corporation, the length of the average successful counterinsurgency is 14 years.⁶⁸ In a day and age that prioritizes instant gratification and which sees the public getting live updates from the scene of every car bombing, every IED, and every ambushed convey, expecting a general public to endure 14 years with troops fighting the most difficult type of conflict overseas is, potentially, not realistic. However, if a successful counterinsurgency campaign is to be conducted then that commitment to stay long-term must be made. If it is not then the insurgents know that they simply need to engage in a waiting game; they are on their home turf and have the advantage in that situation. After all, the insurgents do not have to win to win, but merely force a stalemate which sees the intervening counterinsurgent forces withdraw.

The lack of a solid long-term commitment also might shift the center-of-gravity of the intervening power to their public approval ratings, as happened in the Vietnam War, which for insurgents and guerillas opens up the thought that a mass casualty assault might not militarily help the insurgents, but will damage the approval ratings of the counterinsurgency and its political leaders to such a degree that the intervening power will withdraw rather than continue the campaign. Two classic examples of this happening are the Tet Offensive in Vietnam and the Black Hawk Down incident in Somalia.

During the Tet Offensive the Viet Cong were effectively destroyed as a functional fighting force. The insurgents who had been battling the Americans for over a decade leading up

⁶⁷ Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 24.

⁶⁸ Jones, xii.

to Tet were completely crushed by the offensive, and the Viet Cong would no longer be an effective fighting force moving forward.⁶⁹ In short, Tet was a resounding American victory on the battlefield.⁷⁰ However, the lack of an American stomach for a continued commitment in Vietnam combined with the lack of legitimacy enjoined by the war already in both the United States and Vietnam meant that even the relatively small amount of Americans casualties lead to the American victory being viewed as an American defeat on the home front, and so this crushing American tactical triumph actually hastened the withdraw of American forces from Vietnam, and in the end was a stinging strategic defeat.⁷¹

The Black Hawk Down incident is another example of this factor of commitment at work. In Somalia the Americans won a military victory (at least in terms of casualties inflicted on the enemy versus those suffered) but lost their aura of invincibility and were seen on television as having failed miserably. This perception of American defeat was more damaging than an actual defeat might have been, and was one of the core factors in the early American exit from the region under President Clinton.⁷² The fact that the Americans were so unwilling to commit to the area and to the operation, and immediately withdraw upon suffering casualties, went a long way towards undermining American's credibility in making commitments or threats.

On the other hand, the Columbian experience indicates that a long-term commitment to a counterinsurgency can eventually wear down the less well-equipped insurgents. In Columbia every President and significant political figure since 1964 has committed to crushing the FARC

⁶⁹ Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), 732.

⁷⁰ Ricks 2012, 289.

⁷¹ Fitzgerald, 111, 143.

⁷² "What A Downed Black Hawk In Somalia Taught America." NPR. October 5, 2013. Accessed September 9, 2016. <http://www.npr.org/2013/10/05/229561805/what-a-downed-black-hawk-in-somalia-taught-america>.

Marxist insurgency, and just recently they have been forced to the negotiating table.⁷³ Without that long-term commitment by the counterinsurgent leadership it is doubtful that this would have occurred. Without commitment, time is always on the side of the insurgent.

The British were significantly helped in Sierra Leone by the fact that the violent part of their counterinsurgency campaign was over within two years, and by 2002 much of the British military was able to withdraw. However, a deeper look at the record actually reveals an affirmation of the RAND Corporation's analysis. The British government has spent millions of pounds in Sierra Leone in the last decade, and they have maintained a continuous military presence in their former colony since troops originally arrived in 2000.⁷⁴

It is interesting to note the intention of the insurgent group West Side Boyz group to "do a Somalia" on the British and really test the commitment of Whitehall to Sierra Leone. Of course the Boyz were crushed in Operation: Barras, but the pitfalls of a lack of commitment are there to see. British commitment was not tested because of their swift victory, but in the years since British troops originally arrived the British have proven that they are committed to Sierra Leone and to ensuring that the peace achieved through the British counterinsurgency efforts remains in place. Even when Ebola broke out in Sierra Leone in 2015 it was the U.K. who were the first state to assist the Sierra Leoneans.⁷⁵

Commitment is a major factor in whether or not a counterinsurgency operation will succeed. If the counterinsurgents do not commit long-term to defeating the insurgency they potentially shift the center of gravity of the fickle public approval ratings of the war and

⁷³ Carlos A. Ospina, Thomas A. Marks, and David H. Ucko. "Colombia and the War-to-Peace Transition Cautionary Lessons from Other Cases." *Military Review*, July/August 2016, 40-52, 40.

⁷⁴ Michael Dobbs, "British Intervention in War-torn Sierra Leone, 1997-2015." West Africa Study Circle. January 1, 2015. Accessed July 8, 2016. [http://www.wasc.org.uk/NewFiles/BritishForces in Sierra Leone 1997-2015.pdf](http://www.wasc.org.uk/NewFiles/BritishForces%20in%20Sierra%20Leone%201997-2015.pdf).

⁷⁵ Michael Dobbs, "British Intervention in War-torn Sierra Leone, 1997-2015." West Africa Study Circle. January 1, 2015. Accessed July 8, 2016. [http://www.wasc.org.uk/NewFiles/BritishForces in Sierra Leone 1997-2015.pdf](http://www.wasc.org.uk/NewFiles/BritishForces%20in%20Sierra%20Leone%201997-2015.pdf).

acknowledge that if the insurgents just hang on long enough their insurgency will succeed, strengthening the resolve of their opponent and undermining the counterinsurgent forces.

Intellectual Understanding

As mentioned above, I fully embrace the notion that counterinsurgency is the graduate level of warfare. It is the thinking man's war, so to speak, and so it requires deep thought and intellectual understanding at every level to be effective and successful, from the foot soldier to the commander-in-chief. These six factors—Galula might call them the Six Laws—of counterinsurgency war are interrelated to a significant extent, but the triumvirate of restraint, clarity, and intellectual understanding are certainly the most interrelated of the bunch. This does not mean that a specific tactical doctrine must be adopted to succeed in counterinsurgency, but rather that a more general understanding that counterinsurgency both differs from conventional war but is still concerned with the art and science of warfare. If a state or military approaches counterinsurgency from either extreme and acts as if counterinsurgency is not at all unlike regular warfare, or that counterinsurgency is not at all a military affair but rather a civilian-political one, they will almost assuredly fail.

Dating back to the heyday of the British Empire, from the magnificent reign of Queen Victoria up through the Second World War, the British Army has generally been regarded as among the foremost practitioners of counterinsurgency in the world.⁷⁶ This is due, in large part, to necessity. The simple fact is that local revolts—typically coalescing into insurgencies and guerilla warfare—were guaranteed to happen with some frequency when a single empire covered a quarter of the globe, and they did. Whether it be fighting the Irish in one of a myriad of wars dating back to the days of Cromwell, subduing vast tracts of Western and Southern Africa during

⁷⁶ Newsinger, 1.

the Age of Empire, or in more recent times putting down revolts in Malaysia, Kenya, Cyprus, and the Arabian Peninsula, the British Army has a long history of counterinsurgency operations.

For example, one of the most well-known and most emulated counterinsurgency operations in modern history was the campaign waged by the British Army against communist guerrillas in Malaysia in the 1950s. For years after the successful conclusion of this war by the British, counterinsurgency experts in nearly every nation, from Israel to the United States and France, have tried to glean insight from the tactics and strategies used in the Emergency. In fact, the American military simply copied the British “strategic hamlet” program of relocating the population base to more easily policed villages in Vietnam, though ineffectively and simplistically, and consequently in a way that failed miserably.⁷⁷ The Malayan Emergency also brought into military lexicon the phrase “hearts and minds,” first uttered by the British commander for most of the conflict, General Sir Gerald Templar and also at some level imitated by the French in Algeria (unsuccessfully), the Americans in Afghanistan (conflict ongoing, but safe to say unsuccessfully) and which overall has generally become the standard motto counterinsurgency campaigns everywhere.⁷⁸

The Emergency began when Communist guerillas infiltrated Malaysia in 1948, kicking off what would become a long-term (twelve-year) British operational commitment.⁷⁹ The British developed highly-influential counterinsurgency concepts during this war, and the conflict is required study for anyone looking to understand future counter-insurgencies in the second half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century. The majority of the specific individual tactics are not what concern this thesis, but rather the fact that the British had an

⁷⁷ David Fitzgerald, *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 24-25.

⁷⁸ Newsinger, 53.

⁷⁹ Mark Moyar, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009),110.

overall understanding of the type of conflict they were fighting and a coherent intellectual blueprint for how they wanted to win it.

The Americans focused on the wrong implementations used by the British in this conflict, preferring to zero in on the individual tactics the British used (“hearts and minds,” strategic hamlets) instead of the bigger picture strategy and thought processes. Malaysia and the Emergency was an example of British doctrine at work for two reasons: unification of command and minimum use of force. Unification of command was shown in that Templar had absolute authority over all British operation in Malaysia and reported in a clear chain of command which stretched unbroken directly to the Prime Minister, instead of branching off to several different government ministers.⁸⁰ Minimum use of force was demonstrated by the intentional effort to use the least amount not only of British military personnel necessary for the operation to succeed, but the minimum amount of violence needed as well. These played out in various ways tactically and which were suited to the environment (both cultural and physical) in which the campaign was being conducted, but every action undertaken by the British flowed out of them.

In Sierra Leone the British intellectual familiarity with and past experience of counterinsurgency was evident from the start. The initial operation was initially envisioned as purely one of evacuation (as addressed more in the clarity section) and the decision to embark upon an expeditionary counterinsurgency operation was not made until the troops had arrived in Sierra Leone.⁸¹ It is a testament to this culture of counterinsurgency that the British were able to pivot so effectively into a counterinsurgency operation, and such an effective one at that. In contrast, prior to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan doing something like this would have been

⁸⁰ John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 87-89.

⁸¹ Ucko, 3.

well-beyond the capabilities of the United States Army. The British Army had experience in foreign internal defense—the technical term for conducting training for foreign armies—which allowed them to quickly build up the Sierra Leonean Army and retrain it, turning into a competent force which in a short time was able to operate independently of its British allies.⁸² Contrast that with the American attempts to train an Iraqi or Afghani army: while some Special Forces units were successful in bringing their counterparts up to snuff by and large the effort was an failure.⁸³

This intellectual understanding of the proper way to conduct a counterinsurgency can also be seen in the example of how the British commander, General David Richards, interacted with Sierra Leonean President Kabbah. He treated him with the respect and dignity afforded an ally, and in a way which reassured the flighty leader, not a way which offended or alienated him.⁸⁴ This might seem a small thing, but from Vietnam to Algeria one of the chief reasons that counterinsurgency operations are derailed is that the commanders of the intervening force fail to properly interact with their counterparts in the host nation, with predictably poor results. That General Richards did not make this mistake is in many ways a testament to the strong culture of counterinsurgency within the British military.

Finally, it should be noted what influence the operations conducted by the British Army in Sierra Leone influenced British thinking during their decision making process in the lead up to the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the hallmarks of the British intervention in Sierra Leone, of course, was the commitment of ground troops to the intervention, as opposed to just using air strikes. Indeed, this in large part was due to the experience of Blair in the intervention

⁸² Ucko, 9.

⁸³ Lawrence Korb, "Why the U.S. Military Can't Succeed in Training Foreign Armies." Reuters. October 5, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2016. <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2015/10/05/why-the-u-s-military-cant-succeed-in-training-foreign-armies/>.

⁸⁴ David Richards, *Taking Command* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2015),

in Kosovo by NATO, where the Prime Minister felt that the airstrikes had little effect and observed that the civil war and genocide occurring in the former Yugoslavia did not come to a close until the Western powers moved beyond airstrikes and actually committed ground forces to the operation.⁸⁵ Subsequently, when the commitment of ground forces in Sierra Leone led to such a dramatic success in such a short amount of time it was widely seen within the British political and military circles around the Prime Minister as proof of concept of his belief that the commitment of ground troops was not only effective, but also necessary for any humanitarian operation to succeed (of course the British did not have an event from the 1990s like the American Black Hawk Down incident in Somalia to temper these beliefs).⁸⁶ Consequently, when it came time to assist the Americans in their invasion of Iraq, Blair was confident not only in sending in British ground troops, but also in what the outcome would be due in large part to the influence on his thinking of the British success in Sierra Leone.⁸⁷

One of the most common criticisms of the British Army since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has been that these wars have proven that the intellectual knowledge and past experience of counterinsurgency campaigns have little to do with success in them. I disagree. The British and Americans in those two conflicts violated too many of these six factors to succeed regardless of how much understanding of counterinsurgency and how much practice in it that they might have had. In both countries the geographic factors were against the intervening nations, with the mountains of Afghanistan providing sanctuary to insurgents, and, more importantly, Iran and Pakistan providing insurgents with a fairly untouchable safe haven

⁸⁵ Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 551.

⁸⁶ Marr, 551.

⁸⁷ Tunde Zach-Williams, "The Road to Iraq: Tony Blair's Intervention in Sierra Leone." *Review of African Political Economy*. May 04, 2016. Accessed October 2, 2016. <http://roape.net/2016/08/04/road-iraq-tony-blairs-intervention-sierra-leone/> and "Chilcot Report: Key Points from the Iraq Inquiry." *The Guardian*. July 06, 2016. Accessed July 10, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jul/06/iraq-inquiry-key-points-from-the-chilcot-report>.

for training and rearming safe from allied airpower.⁸⁸ In both conflicts there was a distinct lack of clarity as to what the plan was once the initial invasion was accomplished, and obviously extreme doubts about legitimacy, especially in Iraq.⁸⁹ Finally, there was no real thought to a long-term commitment; instead the decade long occupation of Iraq appears to be a result not of planning but of inertia.⁹⁰ With those circumstances considered it is little wonder that the coalition forces failed to achieve victory in either Iraq or Afghanistan, regardless of the fact that the British Army had such a long and proud tradition of counterinsurgency experience and theory. Instead, they achieved the result that should be expected in a counterinsurgency campaign when these six factors are ignored: abject defeat.

The Americans do not lack an intellectual background in counterinsurgency so much as actively seek to obscure and ignore their counterinsurgency background. In the late 1990s the official term for counterinsurgency-like operations in the U.S. Army was MOOTWAH, or Military Operations Other Than War, often referred to as “moot-wah.” It was a less than popular concept within the American military. In the early 1990s the Chief of Staff of the Army summed up the feelings of many when he derisively declared that “Real men don’t do moot-wah.”⁹¹ This might be because recent American counterinsurgency record is especially dismal. From Vietnam to Afghanistan to Iraq, the United States has consistently failed to successfully combat insurgencies over a long period of time. The United States has also demonstrated a proclivity for being drawn in to fighting them, a fact that highlights the necessity for the U.S. to develop effective counterinsurgency initiatives and tactics. Even with the withdrawal from Iraq under President Barak Obama the potential for American involvement with a large scale insurgency in

⁸⁸ Poole, 101-102, 108 and Kaplan 2013, 342.

⁸⁹ John E. Owens and John Dumbrell, eds. *America's "War on Terrorism": New Dimensions in U.S. Government and National Security* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 126 and

⁹⁰ Ricks 2006, 175-181.

⁹¹ Kaplan 2013, 45.

the next ten years is high: the emergence of the Islamic State in the Middle East and Boko Haram in West Africa, as well as Russian-backed insurgencies in the Republic of Georgia and in the Ukraine, and the continuing deterioration of rule of law in places like Libya almost guarantee that the United States will be fighting another counterinsurgency campaign soon.

A strong intellectual background with counterinsurgency is crucial to ensuring that the entire framework of a campaign is designed correctly, that soldiers and commanders implementing the other factors which are their responsibility (namely restraint), and that legitimacy is maintained and that clarity is ensured.

Restraint

Last year one U.S. presidential candidate said that he would deal with an opponent in the Middle East in following manner: “We will carpet-bomb them into oblivion. I don’t know if sand can glow in the dark, but we’re going to find out!”⁹² That approach might work against a conventional massed force, but would represent a disaster when applied to a counterinsurgency campaign. As discussed earlier legitimacy is a crucial factor in waging a successful counterinsurgency effort and one of the quickest ways to undermine legitimacy is by killing civilians or appearing to act in a manner which is heavy-handed or indiscriminate. The phrase “collateral damage” is one which in an ideal setting would never appear in an insurgency. The writers of the U.S. Army’s latest counterinsurgency manual included a series of paradoxes in the original version of that document which do a good job of framing the proper mindset, with the proper reaction to the idea that collateral damage being described as “Sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction.”⁹³ The idea of hearts and minds is intrinsically related to this factor of restraint. As discussed in a previous chapter this phrase is oft-uttered by American military and

⁹² Katie Glueck, "Cruz Pledges Relentless Bombing to Destroy ISIL." Politico. May 12, 2015. Accessed October 1, 2016. <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/12/cruz-isil-bombing-216454>.

⁹³ Kaplan 2013, 217.

political leaders when referring to what is occurring in Iraq or to what the United States attempted to do in Vietnam, but they all too often misuse it and misunderstand it.

In counterinsurgency campaigns an economy of force should be used. In large part as a result of their colonial experience the British have almost always attempted to use the lowest amount of force necessary to achieve the desired result of their interventions and counterinsurgency campaigns, and rely as much as possible on friendly local governments and militaries. Referred to oftentimes as the ‘indirect approach,’ this has been the British technique dating back to the height of their imperium.⁹⁴ Things were no different in Sierra Leone, where the British Army relied heavily on both the Sierra Leonean Army and the Kamajor militias to conduct patrols and operations against the holdout RUF insurgents.

This reliance on foreign allies and focus on the economy of force, however, stands in some contrast to the basic tenets of the American way of war. The United States has possessed a technological and material advantage in every conflict which it has fought since the Second World War. This has lead America to possess a massive threat deterrence as well as an aversion to waging what Weigley refers to as “limited wars.”⁹⁵ This large-scale advantage has led to a culture of war which is uniquely American, as first discussed by historian Russell Weigley in his seminal work *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*. According to Weigley and borne out by other studies of American approaches to conflicts, the United States prefers to use its massive advantages in firepower, technology, and material to destroy an enemy in the most spectacular way possible while doing everything in its power to preserve American and civilian lives: thus the American preference for strategic

⁹⁴ Huw Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-insurgency in the Kenya Emergency* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 43.

⁹⁵ Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977), 413.

bombing in the Second World War (a preference continued into Vietnam and Iraq, and today against ISIS) rather than actually committing ground troops.⁹⁶ When ground troops are committed to an intervention this doctrine can easily lead to the build-up of bases and troops formations in country and an over-reliance on air power, two hallmarks of the major use of force which is indicative of a potentially failed counterinsurgency campaign. This is especially true for an American strategic model that takes the division (apx. 20,000 soldiers) as the building block of its planning and has a noted lack of flexibility in its thinking.⁹⁷ Instead, the United States and other would be intervening states needs to borrow from the British and, at least in counterinsurgency campaigns, get away from this approach of overwhelming force and inflexible thinking to embrace innovation, something which cannot exist if its existence and prior experience is not considered.

Counterinsurgent commanders and policymakers should use as little troops as possible and, try avoiding the buildup of massive infrastructure and bases like the Americans did in Saigon in Vietnam and Camp Bagram in Iraq, and stay away from a constant barrage of gunship assaults and drone strikes, instead focusing on utilizing the minimum force necessary to achieve the desired end-state, preferably with as much use of allied troops from the country the campaign is being conducted in as possible. Restraint flows from clarity, enhances legitimacy, and demands intellectual understanding.

Clarity

Political scientist Robert Jervis wrote a famous article entitled “War and Misperception” several decades ago in which he made a case that nearly all wars involve a strong element of

⁹⁶ Weigley, 359 and Robert M. Cassidy, *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror: Military Culture and Irregular War* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 122.

⁹⁷ Cassidy, 118.

misperception of capabilities, either about one's own nation or the opponent.⁹⁸ This could easily be whittled down a maxim that all failed counterinsurgencies involve a strong sense of misperception, typically a misperception that the counterinsurgency effort will not be necessary because an insurgency is unlikely to occur, and that therefore no planning should be done to account for one. Galula harps on the importance of having an accurate perception of both one's own forces and one's opponents and the importance of accurate intelligence in *Counterinsurgency: Theory and Practice*, as does Clausewitz in *On War*.⁹⁹

A textbook example of this kind of 'if we do not plan for an insurgency it will never happen' ostrich head-in-the-sand type of thinking can readily be found in the United States' plans for post-invasion/post-Saddam Iraq. As Kaplan reports, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld "didn't plan for the postwar because he didn't want a postwar...it wasn't an oversight; *it was deliberate*."¹⁰⁰

I entitled this factor clarity because at the most basic level it must be clear to all primary players that a plan for a counterinsurgency is necessary, and furthermore that plan must be fully clear to everyone who has a stake in its success. Indeed, the first thing that must be done is to acknowledge that a counterinsurgency campaign is likely to occur in the event of an intervention, and plan accordingly. This sounds painfully obvious, but it has been painfully illustrated time and again that it is not at all obvious. Both President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld ignored the warning signs that an insurgency could potentially develop in Iraq—and to a lesser extent in Afghanistan—and the price for this ignorance was paid in American blood.¹⁰¹ Strategists must realize from the outset that an insurgency will be fought, and from the moment the intervening

⁹⁸ Robert Jervis, "War and Misperception." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 675-700, 675.

⁹⁹ Galula 67, 71, 84 and Clausewitz 117-118.

¹⁰⁰ Kaplan 2013, 59. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰¹ Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 93.

nation's troops' boots hit the ground a clear plan must in place to start neutralizing the insurgency. In Sierra Leone this meant that as soon as the British forces arrived they were moving to facilitate Sierra Leonean pacification of the rebels and engaging in civil relations campaigns, instead of just focusing on direct military action as the Americans did in Iraq, where generals and policymakers blithely assumed that direct military action was all that would be required to conclude the conflict.¹⁰²

Likewise, if any counterinsurgency (or really an operation military or otherwise) is to be successful, a clear chain-of-command must be in place. Again this appears obvious, but is something which many counterinsurgents have failed at, as the Americans and French both did in Vietnam and Americans did in the first half of the intervention in Iraq. In British Malaysia full-command of both the civil and military operations was put in the hands of Sir Gerald Templar, allowing a cohesive and ordered vision to be imposed on the chaos which an insurgency invariably creates.¹⁰³ In Sierra Leone General David Richards possessed de facto *carte blanche* to execute a counterinsurgency operation while reporting directly to the highest levels of the British government, again giving the British troops involved a clear sense of objectives and goals and putting all stakeholders on the same page.¹⁰⁴ In Iraq, on the other hand, the American command structure was an absolute disaster. There was a general in charge of the military forces in the country and another general in charge of the overall theatre (Central Command), both who would issue orders and set goals in-country. This overlap of command led to political infighting and a lack of clarity among the commanding generals and their staffs, and it was further compounded by the fact that the military leaders were technically subservient to the convoluted

¹⁰² West, 5-6.

¹⁰³ Nagl, 87-89.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew M. Dorman *Blair's Successful War: British Military Intervention in Sierra Leone* (New York: Ashgate, 2009), 97.

civilian chain of command, which included the Ambassador to Iraq, the Secretary of State, and Vice President Cheney, all giving separate orders to the military commanders involved through separate channels.¹⁰⁵ In other words, it was a complicated mess that failed to ever produce a clear plan or vision for what a successful end-state in Iraq would look like or how to achieve that vision. Consequently, the British were successful where the Americans were not.

Finally, there must be a clear plan and goal to be in place for what the desired end-state of the intervention and counterinsurgency campaign is. The British in Malaysia, Kenya, and Sierra Leone had a clear sense of what they desired the country to look at after the intervention. The United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, on the other hand, never moved beyond buzzwords like ‘stable democracy’ without any measurable goals or objectives. This led to doubling down on the confusion caused by the lack of clarity in command and led to ineffective communication on the battlefield. If a counterinsurgency campaign is going to succeed, a clear end-state must be stated before the campaign is ever underway.

An example of this is trying to figure out how to deal with former insurgents when the conflict starts to turn against them, or if the government has been toppled in an earlier intervention how to incorporate members of the former ruling elite and military into the post-conflict society (if they are not incorporated an insurgency is very likely). Nearly every British counterinsurgency campaign, from Cyrus to Aden to Sierra Leone, had some sort of program in place to encourage insurgents to become either informants or leave the battlefield altogether.¹⁰⁶ There has to be real clarity in this area and a clear plan in place for turning insurgents into allies, or at least peaceful civilians. If there is no inducement for benefit for the insurgents to lay down their arms, why would they do so?

¹⁰⁵ Ricks 2006, 93.

¹⁰⁶ Nagl 93-94.

America has not been nearly so effective with these types of programs, largely due to a lack of clarity. The Phoenix Program existed to do something along these lines in Vietnam, but was run by the CIA, not the Army, was very secretive, and was not done nearly on a large enough scale to be truly effective anyway.¹⁰⁷ In Iraq one of the first moves the United States made after the capture of Baghdad was to disband both the ruling Ba'ath political party and the military, and to outlaw anyone who had been in either organization—and make no mistake, these two organizations formed the core institutions of Iraqi society—from ever serving in government positions again. The best part of this foolish order though was that even today no one is quite sure who issued it.¹⁰⁸ That is a lack of clarity at its finest. Not only did this blunder create a massive pool of readily available and motivated individuals for the insurgency which was about to break out, but it also disincentivized these individuals from ever working with or for the Americans, undercutting the American counterinsurgency operations and intelligence gathering apparatus before said apparatus was even created. In both Iraq and Afghanistan the Americans not only did a poor job of managing what the post-conflict environment would look like, they had “no overall strategy” for after their invasions at all.¹⁰⁹ Again in Afghanistan this lack of any clear plan would come back to bite the Americans, who were spread thin around the country and had not expected to triumph over the Taliban so quickly. Indeed the Americans barely realized that the Northern Alliance was in large-part an Iranian-backed organization and not all that aligned with American priorities.¹¹⁰ Thus the Americans were left scrambling after their victory and installed a President of Afghanistan in Hamid Karzai who even to this day has been a thorn in their side and an impediment to victory. They had no plan as to what they would do, so they

¹⁰⁷Sheehan, 817.

¹⁰⁸ Ricks 2006, 45.

¹⁰⁹ Kaplan 2013, 83.

¹¹⁰ H. John Poole *Expeditionary Eagles: Outmaneuvering the Taliban* (Emerald Island, NC: Posterity Press, 2010), xix, 91.

just did the first thing that seemed available (install the leader of their supposed allies the Northern Alliance as president) and went from there, with poor results.

Clarity is absolutely necessary for a successful counterinsurgency to be waged. All stakeholders from the privates in the trenches to the generals in the command centers and the diplomats in the embassies must be onboard and completely clear both on what is going on and what their role in the larger plan and goal is. Counterinsurgency, more so than even conventional warfare, requires a coordinated effort, and that is only possible if the crucial factor of clarity is emphasized appropriately.

Geographic and Geopolitical Factors

Geographic and geopolitical factors are out of control of most intervening forces control. However, they may be the number one indicator for whether or not a counterinsurgency campaign will be successful or is foreordained to doom from the start. In one of the foundational texts of current U.S. Army counterinsurgency doctrine, French Colonel David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, the author says that one of the perquisites for an insurgency to succeed is for there to be a neighboring state which offers the insurgents safe haven.¹¹¹ Conversely, one of the perquisites for a successful insurgency to be waged is to ensure that no such state is in place. In Afghanistan the Americans were constantly thwarted by Pakistan offering the Taliban and Al-Qaeda safe haven; in South Vietnam North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia all fulfilled the same function for the Viet Cong; in Rhodesia the insurgents could flee the Rhodesian commandos for the relative sanctuary of Mozambique.¹¹²

The British in Sierra Leone, conversely, had little to fear in this regard. Liberia had served this safe haven function for the RUF for quite some time, but Liberian President Charles

¹¹¹ Kaplan 2013, 342 and Galula 25-27.

¹¹² See Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present*. (New York: Liveright, 2013) for the best introductory overview of these conflicts.

Taylor, the longtime primary supporter of the RUF, was facing rebellion in Liberia as well as large amounts of external pressure to discontinue his support of the RUF, and by the time the British arrived in Sierra Leone Liberia was no longer fulfilling this function for the rebels. Even better for the British counterinsurgents was that the only other sovereign state which borders Sierra Leone, Guinea, was actively at war with the RUF and had defeated them in a series of battles already.¹¹³ Instead of finding aid across the borders the RUF was actually constrained by them, which put major pressure on the insurgents. If a counterinsurgent force can trap the insurgents within the limited geographical boundaries of the nation in which the campaign is being waged and cut them off from outside aid, the odds of success increase exponentially.

The other part of this factor of geography—and one that is somewhat less crucial, but still important—is physical geography. An insurgency can thrive in any terrain, but is especially helped by mountains (such as in Afghanistan), dense jungle (such as Vietnam), or even vast open deserts (Iraq). Urban insurgencies are also becoming more common, but the geographic enclosure that is the modern metropolis limits the effectiveness of the urban guerilla today.¹¹⁴ The geography of Sierra Leone is actually quite conducive to an insurgency. It is a thick jungle region located just above the equator, and would be a prime place to stage an insurgency in.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the RUF had done just that for the last several years, using jungle bases as staging grounds from which to invade different parts of the country, and launching ambush after ambush against government troops sent against them.¹¹⁶ If the British were not seen as legitimate and did not have the backing of the local government and military they would have been at much more

¹¹³ Fortna, 60.

¹¹⁴ Anthony James Joes, *Urban Guerrilla Warfare* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 4, 7.

¹¹⁵ Harry Cox, "Beyond Blood Diamonds: Descent of the Moa River, Sierra Leone." *Sidetracked Magazine*. January 1, 2016. Accessed October 5, 2016. <http://www.sidetracked.com/beyond-blood-diamonds-descent-of-the-moa-river-sierra-leone/>.

¹¹⁶ Singer, 112.

of a disadvantage due to this physical geography. However, they were and they did, and those fact alone helped to neutralize the disadvantage of the territory which they were operating in. Again, the geopolitical and physical geography of a host nation is of the utmost importance in determining whether or not a counterinsurgency will succeed. Both Clausewitz and Galula speak directly to primacy of this factor.¹¹⁷ This must be recognized from the outset, and if these factors are not conducive to success the intervening nation must truly consider the matter before deciding to commit troops, because like demography in politics geography in counterinsurgency is destiny. If the decision is made to commit troops anyway than it is of crucial importance that the host nation government be legitimate and have a force which can operate within the challenging geographic territory that the insurgent is utilizing as a stronghold, serving as guides and scouts for the typically more conventional intervening nation's forces. An excellent example of this is the use of Arab auxiliaries by T.E. Lawrence in his battles with the Turks, as well as the use of Hmong irregulars by the United States during the Vietnamese War, and the British alliance with the Kamajors in Sierra Leone.¹¹⁸ Additionally, if there are neighboring countries willing to provide aid to the insurgents than a state about to embark on a counterinsurgency must be prepared to interdict that aid by force, and if necessary to invade the neighboring state. If an intervening nation is not willing to take these steps it is better to not get involved at all, because it will be pointless to do battle with an insurgent group whose base can never be neutralized and who know that they can thus continue the struggle indefinitely.

¹¹⁷ Galula, 26-28 and Clausewitz, 348-351.

¹¹⁸ Geraint Hughes, *My Enemy's Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Politics* (Chicago, IL: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), 2, 11.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION

This paper has considered the six primary factors which must be in place for a counterinsurgency campaign to be successful, discussed and illustrated within the context of the British intervention into Sierra Leone. These six factors are legitimacy, clarity, geographic/geopolitical factors, restraint, intellectual understanding, and commitment. Legitimacy refers to the counterinsurgency campaign (and potential intervention by a foreign power into a host nation) being seen as legitimate by the citizens of the nation intervening as well as those of the host nation and the international community. Clarity refers to the goals and objectives of the intervention being clear to policymakers and military commanders (and hopefully to citizens) and the strategies and tactics which are to be used being clear to soldiers at every level. A clear plan must be in place and a single goal must be being worked toward. Geographic/Geopolitical factors primarily refers to the necessity of making sure that the insurgents are isolated on the world stage and do not have a friendly nation which they can use as a base and place to resupply and train, and secondarily to the physical geography of the location where the insurgency is taking place. Restraint refers to the need for the intervening/counterinsurgency forces to exercise strict self-control as they battle the insurgency. A priority must be placed on avoiding civilian casualties and the words ‘collateral damage’ cannot be uttered approvingly in any situation. Intellectual understanding involves organizational culture and understanding of the demanding nature of counterinsurgency warfare, and an understanding of the basic underpinnings of what constitutes a successful counterinsurgency campaign and the techniques and strategies therein. Finally, a successful counterinsurgency campaign demands that the counterinsurgents are committed for the long haul, and that they will not be dissuaded in their goal of defeating the insurgency. It takes over a decade on average to

defeat an insurgency, and if the counterinsurgents are unwilling to explicitly make this commitment and make it known to all that they have done so the insurgents will be emboldened and strengthened, secure in the knowledge that all they have to do to win is not lose.

Future Areas of Research

Future research in this area has several possibilities. One, and most obvious, is simply to consider that other factors might be more important than the ones that are identified here. Areas of disagreement might include whether certain political structures are better suited to waging a counterinsurgency, what economic or what role societal/cultural factors potentially play. Another area is to consider how militaries which might have never waged a counterinsurgent campaign before have fared in doing so. If they have fared at a comparable level to the British military especially it might be a sign that intellectual understanding and past counterinsurgency experience is not as important a factor as I initially have stated. One could also explore the importance of restraint, which I place primary importance on; some have argued that the opposite is needed and that the most successful counterinsurgency will instead be ‘scorched-earth’ in nature.

Final Statement

In this project I have attempted to draw upon extensive counterinsurgency literature and several historical cases to draw out the dominant and most crucial factors to the success or failure of a counterinsurgency campaign. The factors which I identified through my research are legitimacy, clarity, geographical and geopolitical factors, restraint, intellectual understanding and experience, and an enduring commitment. With these factors in place commanders and policymakers can fairly expect to, with time, defeat an insurgency and triumph in the most

challenging and demanding form of warfare humans engage in. Without these six factors in place counterinsurgency commanders can expect little more than defeat, disgrace, and abject failure.

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