



Marston, Daniel, and Carter Malkasian (eds.) *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare* (Oxford, Osprey, 2008) 304pp; £17.99.

This new work is a much-needed addition to the genre of modern counter-insurgency. This subject has been crying out for a current seminal primer to replace John Pimlott and Ian Beckett's *Armed Forces and Modern Counter-Insurgency*, published back in 1988, updating the latter's foundation analysis by incorporating the last seven year's worth of experiences, most notably in Afghanistan and Iraq. This excellent work will undoubtedly become this new primer, and one does have to wonder how Osprey, diversifying from their traditional publishing focus, have managed to steal such a march on their competitors; such a work as this ought to have been picked up with alacrity by one of the best academic presses.

The book comprises an introduction and then 13 historical case studies. The work focuses on the development of counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy and tactics in given case studies, rather than studying the development of COIN theory *per se*. The work examines how those conducting COIN developed their strategy and methods, through a complex combination of trial and error, learning from historical lessons, and by pragmatic responses to the local political, socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural environment. The book examines the extent to which these approaches were effective, looking at the factors that account for both success and the lack of it; change over time forms a key aspect of this analysis. Within this umbrella focus, the various case-study chapters hone in on common themes such as the difficulties of adapting effectively to the situation, the importance of understanding the political-cultural milieu, the need to address basic grievances that the insurgents exploit to mobilise support, and the importance of the domestic political climate of the COIN practitioner.

The brief introduction sets out in typical Marston fashion – short, sharp, to the point and forensic – the aims, approach and scope of the book; if anything the book would have benefited from greater depth here; this short essay sets out the bedrock of the book ably enough, but some greater depth would have helped frame more effectively what was to follow. Chapter One examined British aid to the civil power in Ireland and Palestine during 1916–48. This introduced the reader to several key aspects, such as the problem of retaining lessons learned from previous conflicts, the unforeseen ramifications of poorly-targeted heavy-handed military responses, and the crucial role of key experience-rich COIN leader figures. In Chapter Two, Professor Joes examines US COIN in the Philippines (1899–1902) and Philippine COIN versus “The Huks” (1946–54). This chapter identifies the importance of good intelligence and of addressing underlying grievances that the insurgents exploit to mobilise local support. In Chapter Three, Bruce Gudmundsson examines US Marine “Small Wars” in Nicaragua. While these US expeditionary operations have important overlaps with the doctrinal area of COIN/Stabilisation Operations, this contribution sat rather uneasily with the bulk of the book. The final pre-1945 chapter, is Dr Lieb's telling analysis of German anti-partisan operations on the Eastern Front during World War II. While this was an obviously well-researched and argued piece of analysis, the position presented that effectively the post-1945 insurgent replaced the Second World War partisan remains a little too simplistic. The key aspect that unifies most COIN campaigns is that they are a political response (with military aspects) to a problem which is essentially a political one with a military dimension to it. To this reviewer, anti-partisan warfare seems to be an essentially a military response (with political aspects to it) to an essentially military threat (with a political dimension to it) within



the wider context of general war. Thus while the two subjects have very strong overlap, the mere fact that an anti-partisan campaign has a supporting political dimension does not necessarily make it counter-insurgency *per se*, since the anti-partisan implementer can do things which would be much harder to justify in a non-general war situation. The addition of a few extra paragraphs in Dr Marston's introduction that explored the complex relationship between true COIN and anti-partisan warfare in general war would have gone a long way to bring Dr Lieb's otherwise excellent piece of analysis more fully into the fold of the majority of the book.

In Chapter Five, Professor Porch's analysis of French Imperial Warfare 1945–62, once again tellingly demonstrates how the domestic and international political environment can exert a profound influence on the success of COIN campaigns. The next chapter, by Dr Stubbs, examines the seminal British COIN experience, the Malayan Emergency (1948–60). This was a thoughtful and strongly analytical essay that reinforced several of the book's key themes by scrutinising how the British adapted by painful trial and error as well as through attempts to apply apparent lessons from past conflicts. Next, Lt-Col Nagl's chapter on Vietnam convincingly argued that the American forces largely failed to adapt to the situation because of their organizational culture, in that they focused on the "Big War". While undoubtedly true, this reviewer has always thought it extremely likely that any military force involved in a conventional war the size of Vietnam that overlapped inextricably with an intense insurgency-COIN contest would have struggled to wrest itself free from the "Big War" context to see how the crucial non-military aspects of COIN fitted in effectively with the more obvious warfighting aspects. Put another way, the presence of general war corrupted many of the basic mechanics of the insurgent-COIN struggle – the very mechanics upon which this book has focussed.

Chapter Eight, by Jonathan Walker, insightfully examines the largely disappointing British COIN experience in Aden during the 1960s. This chapter again demonstrates the crucial importance of the domestic political situation; in this case the lack of political will made it extremely difficult (if not impossible) for British COIN to achieve any real strategic success. Walker argues, however, that these strategic disappointments tend to conceal other tactical positives, not least that British forces gained vital experiences in urban operations that would subsequently be transferred to Northern Ireland after 1968. This latter case study is the subject of Colonel Iron's contribution, which came across as an accessible and convincingly compartmentalised analysis of British COIN methods. The author makes a particularly telling point here when he notes that when it became clear that the Provisional IRA leadership was genuinely interested in political dialogue, that the British COIN campaign had to make the difficult transition to bolstering the Republican leadership rather than seeking to destroy it. There then followed two interesting and workmanlike contributions: Dr Wood's chapter on Rhodesian COIN during 1962–80, and Dr Catignani's analysis of the Israeli Defence Forces' response to the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

The final two chapters – Daniel Marston's on Afghanistan and Carter Malkasian's on Iraq – represent the climax of the book, in that they bring the story of COIN strategy up to date. Marston's contribution is an excellent piece of cogent analysis, delivered in typically brusque and business-like fashion. The author highlights a number of key issues: the problem of America back in 2001 possessing no longer term plan beyond toppling the Taliban; the initial failure to understand the cultural and political environment, not least the Pashtun sense of



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marginalisation; the slow learning by trial and error between 2001 and 2007; the dangers of oversimplifying the enemy into a monolithic “Taliban” entity; and the growing recognition for the need for a holistic COIN effort that synchronised political, socio-economic, military and cultural efforts. Many of these themes also emerge from Malkasian’s equally penetrating analysis of America COIN in Iraq since 2003. As with Afghanistan, the Coalition’s efforts to create a centralised Western-style nation-state sat very uneasily with the cultural milieu in Iraq and ultimately these tensions led to an emergence of a virtual Sunni-Shia civil war by 2007. This led to a re-evaluation of COIN strategy, producing an effort that better reflected the local realities of political and social power. The chapter also correctly stressed the importance of codifying COIN best practice, in this case through the creation of the Taji COIN Academy.

The book ends rather abruptly here, which is a shame, as a decent conclusion would have made this excellent book even better still. This reviewer has no doubts that this work will become a seminal text for scholars and students of COIN in the Twenty-First Century. One reason for this will be that at £17.99 this volume is simply incredible value.

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