1 | *A Recurring Obstacle*

A critical error lies at the heart of American thinking about counter-insurgency (COIN): the assumption that the United States will share common goals and priorities with a local government it is assisting in COIN, which will make it relatively easy to convince that government to implement U.S. counterinsurgency prescriptions. In fact, the historical record suggests that maintaining power is frequently a competing priority for an incumbent regime, which means that many of the standard reform prescriptions for counterinsurgency – streamlining the military chain of command, ending patronage politics, engaging in economic reform, and embracing disaffected minority groups – can appear as threatening to a besieged government and its supporters as the insurgency itself.[1] Therefore, while the United States has provided its local partners with overwhelming amounts of money and materiel to support their counterinsurgency efforts, it has frequently had difficulty convincing them to abide by its counterinsurgency doctrine. This problem is particularly salient because after a decade of inconclusive war in Afghanistan and Iraq between 2003 and 2012, the United States has reoriented its approach to counterinsurgency. Instead of directly intervening in conflicts with American forces, the focus is on supporting local governments' counterinsurgency efforts with aid and advice.[2] If, as the *2009 U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* asserts, "any COIN campaign is only as good as the political strategy which the affected nation adopts," the ability to influence the choices of a partner government is essential to the success of future U.S. efforts to support counterinsurgency.[3]

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[1] For an example of such prescriptions, see David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 160.

[2] U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2012), p. 6.

[3] Department of State, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, January 2009), p. 29.

The mistaken assumption of a unanimity of interests with a local government was most notable in the 2006 U.S. Army/Marine Corps counterinsurgency field manual, FM 3–24, which shaped American thinking on civil wars for nearly a decade. The manual asserts that "the primary objective of any COIN operation is to foster development of effective governance by a legitimate government."[4] Toward that end, U.S. forces were enjoined to build trust with host-nation authorities and work closely with them to enhance their legitimacy by undertaking reform and responding to popular grievances. No suggestion is made that these goals might not be in the interest of the ruling government.[5]

In American experience since 2003, however, local partners in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan frequently appeared to actively subvert Washington's counterinsurgency ambitions. An inability to restrain Iraqi prime minister Nouri Maliki's sectarian agenda prevented the military gains from the 2007 surge from being translated into positive political outcomes and laid the foundation for the rise of the Islamic State.[6] In Afghanistan, President Hamid Karzai's use of patronage politics was seen by outsiders as a form of corruption, which undercut public support for the very government that U.S. and NATO forces were trying to assist. Washington's apparent inability to shape the behavior of what many observers believed was a dependent partner led one European diplomat to marvel that "never in history has any superpower spent so much money, sent so many troops to a country, and had so little influence over what its president says and does."[7] Across the border in Pakistan, the United States has supplied Islamabad with more than $30 billion in military and economic assistance since 2001, yet is unable to influence the Pakistani government to cease its support of militant groups that are undermining U.S. objectives in

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[4] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual (FM) 3–24 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2007), p. 37.

[5] Stephen Biddle, "The New U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual as Political Science and Political Praxis," *Perspectives on Politics*, 6, no. 2 (June 2008), p. 348.

[6] Peter Beinart, "The Surge Fallacy," *The Atlantic*, September 2015. On the military effects of the surge, see Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey Friedman, and Jacob Shapiro, "Testing the Surge, Why Did Violence Decline in Iraq in 2007?" *International Security* 37, no. 1 (Summer 2012), pp. 7–40.

[7] Rod Nordland et al., "Gulf Widens between U.S. and a More Volatile Karzai," *New York Times*, March 17, 2012.

Afghanistan – even as some of those same groups have turned against the Pakistani state.[8] FM 3–24's assumption of a unanimity of interests between patron and client was clearly misplaced.

Incorporating the experience gained in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 2014 edition of FM 3–24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*, briefly acknowledges that the local government's interests may not always coincide with those of the United States.[9] It does not, however, examine in any detail the difficulty of convincing a local government to adopt American counterinsurgency principles.[10] When a host-nation government believes that it is so important to Washington that it cannot be allowed to fail, it is inclined to resist any U.S.-backed reform effort that would challenge the domestic status quo. As a result, the United States has found itself in the paradoxical situation of supporting weak allies in danger of internal collapse, who were highly dependent on external support for their continued survival, yet over whom Washington had little control or influence.

Contrary to the assumptions of the aforementioned U.S. counter-insurgency manual – and much of the classic counterinsurgency litera-ture on which it is based – when supporting counterinsurgency, the relationship between Washington and its local partner is often far from harmonious. Although this has been clearly highlighted by recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan, the challenge of generating sufficient influence over a client state to shape its behavior has plagued American counterinsurgency assistance efforts for decades. Writing in 1963, before the "Americanization" of the Vietnam War, the senior U.S. advisor to the South Vietnamese I Corps presciently warned in his end-of-tour report that "the development of techniques and means to increase U.S. leverage in Vietnam is the single most important problem facing us there and it will be a fundamental problem in any future counterinsurgency effort in which we become involved."[11] Since then, a host of critics have pointed out that while the United States has

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8 Timothy D. Hoyt, "Pakistan, an Ally by Any Other Name," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 137/7/1,301 (July 2011); C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly, "An Unworthy Ally," *Foreign Affairs*, 94, no. 5 (September–October 2015), pp. 160–70.

9 FM 3–24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2014), pp. 1–8, 10–5.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 10–15.

11 Bryce Denno, Senior Officer Debriefing Reports: Vietnam War, 1962–1972, September 6, 1963, Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA (MHI), p. 7.

provided partner governments with extensive assistance to combat insurgents, an inability to convince them to adopt its counterinsurgency prescriptions or address what Washington sees as the political and economic "root causes" of an insurgency has repeatedly emerged as a major impediment to success.[12] In the absence of sufficient leverage to compel a client regime to address these shortcomings, significant external aid and support can actually reduce its incentives to address domestic discontent or govern inclusively, which can render a supported government less stable than it would have been without U.S. assistance.[13]

As the United States seeks to focus its efforts on supporting local governments' counterinsurgency operations, rather than directly intervening in conflicts, it will have to confront this question of influence head on. Without U.S. troops on the ground capable of independent action, success will depend on the policies and choices of the client government. In these circumstances, achieving desired outcomes can be particularly challenging because the U.S. advisors do not directly control the levers of governance in the host nation.[14] Instead, their role is limited to offering guidance and attempting to influence the local regime's behavior.

Despite the fact that the majority of America's experiences with counterinsurgency – both during the Cold War and today – involve assisting another government in combating an insurgency, the particular challenges of working with or through a partner nation are not widely discussed in the counterinsurgency literature. Indeed, a review of the literature on counterinsurgency, both theoretical and practical, reveals that it has largely failed to integrate issues of alliance behavior into the study of the dynamics of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary war.[15] Even when the role of supporting allies is discussed, the implicit

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[12] Important works in this vein are Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era* (New York: Free Press, 1977); D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Benjamin C. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1991); and William E. Odom, *On Internal War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992).

[13] Odom, *On Internal War*, p. 9.

[14] Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941–1960* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1985), p. 346.

[15] One notable exception to this neglect is Daniel L. Byman, "Friends Like These: Counterinsurgency and the War on Terrorism," *International Security*, 31, no. 2 (Fall 2006).

assumption is that the counterinsurgent forces are a unitary actor. This problem is compounded by the fact that contemporary counterinsurgency scholarship has drawn a significant number of its insights from the colonial era, particularly the experiences of the British in Malaya and the French in Algeria, which can blind scholars to the challenge of working through an autonomous local government, because in those cases the European power *was* the government.[16] Consequently, this literature frequently fails to recognize the local government's opposition to externally fostered reform and the limits on American leverage to bring about the reforms its doctrine calls for. Although scholars and analysts have spent much time and effort in recent years trying to divine the "key" to counterinsurgency, they have not given the same level of attention to understanding when a local government will be willing to follow American guidance. As Benjamin Schwarz sagely noted, "[I]t is one thing to have the key; it is entirely a different matter to force another to use it to unlock a door through which he does not wish to enter."[17]

Examining efforts to support a local government's counterinsurgency campaign with aid and advice, this book puts the focus on U.S. patron-client relations by asking how a patron can best influence a client state's counterinsurgency strategy and behavior? Finding structural explanations such as power differential, aid dependence, strategic utility, and selectorate theory unable to explain the patterns of influence observed in the interventions examined here, this study employs *agency theory* – which is concerned with the challenges of motivating one party (the agent) to act on behalf of another (the principal) – to examine the patron-client dynamics that arise when assisting counterinsurgency.[18] Drawing on the insights of agency theory, two

[16] For example, the work of John Nagl, which achieved prominence in the mid-2000s as the United States grappled with counterinsurgency in Iraq, draws its lessons from the British experience in Malaya and the writings of Robert Thompson. John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (London: Praeger, 2002). The writings of David Galula, a French infantry officer who served in the Algerian War, have also been influential in shaping contemporary American counterinsurgency doctrine. Indeed, the authors of the 2006 version of FM 3–24 write that "of the many books that were influential in the writing of [FM] 3–24, perhaps none was as important as David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*." FM 3–24, *Counterinsurgency*, p. xix.

[17] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine*, p. 77.

[18] For an overview of agency theory, see Joseph Stiglitz, "Principal and Agent (II)," in *A Dictionary of Economics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 185–90.

archetypical influence strategies are identified: *inducement*, which assumes that the unilateral provision of assistance to a client, coupled with strong public statements of support, will be reciprocated by compliance with a patron's preferred policies; and *conditionality*, which tries to shape the client's behavior by making delivery of assistance contingent on a client's prior implementation of a patron's preferred policies. The relative utility of these strategies is then tested in three historical case studies of the most significant U.S. counterinsurgency support efforts of the Cold War: the Philippines (1946–54), Vietnam (1955–63), and El Salvador (1979–91). By delving deeply into the archival records of these conflicts, this study demonstrates that there were important variations in the degree of influence achieved over the host nation's counterinsurgency policies which correlate with the influence strategy employed: the client government complied with U.S. preferences when the United States attached conditions on aid, but not when it provided inducements.[19]

The cases examined here are ones where the United States provided aid and support to another country's counterinsurgency effort short of the introduction of regular combat troops, what Mi Yung Yoon has termed "indirect military intervention."[20] The focus on the contested relations between the United States and its client states in this book mirrors developments in the "new" historiography of the Cold War which recognize that, far from being puppets, third-world leaders had great latitude to shape their own destinies and often were able to achieve their own policy goals at the expense of their great power patrons.[21]

This book makes several distinctive contributions to the scholarship on counterinsurgency. First, academic knowledge at the intersection of

[19]   The topic under examination is the relative utility of inducement and conditionality to influence the behavior of a client state in counterinsurgency. Why a patron chooses one particular influence approach over another and under which conditions these approaches would be more or less effective are extremely important questions for future research, but answering them is beyond the scope of the present research design.

[20]   Mi Yung Yoon, "Explaining U.S. Intervention in Third World Internal Wars, 1945–1989," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 41, no. 4 (1997).

[21]   See, e.g., John Lewis Gaddis, "On Starting All Over Again: A Naive Approach to the Study of the Cold War," in O.A. Westad, ed., *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 31; Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History*, 24, no. 4 (Fall 2000).

alliance behavior and counterinsurgency, which is currently under-theorized, is advanced by exploring the patron-client dynamics that occur in assisting counterinsurgency. Structural tensions in the patron-client relationship are identified as the "forgotten front" in the conflict that requires as much attention as the battle against the insurgents themselves. Second, this work demonstrates that providing significant amounts of aid will not generate the leverage necessary to affect a client's behavior; influence is more likely to flow from tight conditions on aid than from boundless generosity. In doing so, this book integrates findings from the field of economic development – where a parallel problem of divergent priorities between aid donors and recipients exists – to identify the role that conditioned foreign aid can play in generating interalliance leverage. Third, based on extensive archival research, the study adds to the historical knowledge of the three cases examined here by bringing to light a detailed understanding of the impact and degree of influence the United States had over the local governments' counterinsurgency operations, some of which has been overlooked or misunderstood by previous scholars.[22] Consequently, it identifies and corrects several important errors of causality in the historiography of these conflicts. Finally, this book offers five policy-relevant suggestions for generating influence over the behavior of client states in future interventions.

Studying Patron-Client Relations in Counterinsurgency

The primary research strategy employed in this book is the comparative historical case study.[23] This is the most appropriate method for exploring the causal mechanisms at play when a patron seeks to influence its client's counterinsurgency policies because the detailed studies allow an examination of the intervening steps whereby a presumptive cause

[22] For example, compare the findings reported here to Douglas Blaufarb and Michael Shafer's assessment of the degree of American influence exercised during the Huk Rebellion or Benjamin Schwarz' evaluation of the credibility of U.S. threats to withhold aid to the Salvadoran government. Blaufarb, *Counterinsurgency Era*, p. 38; Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms*, pp. 223–6; Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine*, p. vii.

[23] James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, "Comparative Historical Analysis: Achievements and Agendas," in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 10–15.

(patron influence strategy) leads to an observed outcome (client [in]action).[24] Although formal models can examine the deductive logic of specific hypotheses and econometric analysis can measure causal effects, both of these approaches require the use of case studies to substantiate the actual functioning of mechanisms that link a given cause to a particular outcome.[25] The comparative method allows us to examine U.S. support efforts in context, yet systematically analyze the individual cases to identify recurring patterns of behavior and the associated challenges in dealing with partner governments.

Case studies are particularly useful when dealing with concepts, such as influence, that are difficult to measure. Delving deeply into the historical record allow us to examine the sequences of interaction between the United States and its local ally as the United States attempted to positively shape the host nation's counterinsurgency strategy – recognizing the dynamic nature of this process with moves and countermoves by each party.[26] Since causality can be complicated to demonstrate in such instances, it is important to be explicit about how we will assess the role of the patron's use of rewards or pressure in shaping the client state's behavior. *Congruence*, a within-case tool of causal inference, is employed to assess the relative effectiveness of inducement and conditionality in influencing the degree to which the client state implemented specific political, military, or economic reform measures favored by the United States as part of its counterinsurgency strategy.[27] Across the three cases there were twenty-six discrete influence events.[28] Each of these episodes began with the host nation

[24] Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (London: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 205–32.

[25] David Collier and James Mahoney, "Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research," *World Politics*, 49, no. 1 (1996); George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, p. 23. For a detailed discussion of the complementarity of alternate research methods, see Henry Brady and David Collier, eds., *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

[26] This is similar to the approach taken by Byman and Waxman in their study of coercion. Daniel L. Byman and Matthew Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion: American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 37.

[27] George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, pp. 181–204.

[28] Thus, although containing three cases, the study is based on significantly more than just three observations. Gary King et al., *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 208–30.

actively opposing U.S. entreaties for reform, reorganization, or policy change, so it is clear that compliance was not their preferred course of action. This allows us to surmise that if any subsequent implementation of U.S.-backed measures did occur, the U.S. influence approach played a key role in shaping the client's decisions. To ensure that the observed congruence is not spurious, the studies employ process tracing, alert to any external shocks that could explain the client's changed behavior.[29]

With twenty-six observations, this project is a "medium-n" study, and its findings can be expected to have a reasonable degree of generalizability. At the same time, any theoretical proposition derived from or tested against a small universe of cases can run afoul of omitted variable bias or interaction effects. At a minimum, this analysis can provide circumstantial evidence of the responsiveness of client regimes to a patron's preferences under alternate influence strategies that allows, in David Waldner's phraseology, a "tentative commitment ... for which the reasons for belief outweigh the reasons for disbelief, relative to existing rival hypotheses and open to revision in the face of future challenges."[30]

The three U.S.-support efforts examined in this study are the Philippines during the Hukbalahap Rebellion (1946–54), Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem (1955–63), and El Salvador during that country's civil war (1979–91). In terms of their scope and duration, these three episodes were the most significant American counterinsurgency assistance efforts prior to the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, which makes them among the most challenging of interventions.

Although the cases are hardly identical in every respect, they do share a number of substantive attributes that are important for a controlled comparison. All three cases

1. Are examples of U.S. support to an indigenous government's counterinsurgency effort;
2. Are instances where the country in question was perceived to be strategically important;

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[29] John Gerring, "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review*, 98, no. 2 (May 2004), p. 348; George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, p. 183.

[30] David Waldner, *State Building and Late Development* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 235.

3. Feature governments that were highly dependent on U.S. support for their survival yet reluctant to implement the counterinsurgency plans proposed by the United States; and
4. Occur during the Cold War, ensuring that the interstate dynamics under review all operate in the same geopolitical context.

Importantly, the three cases present varying outcomes in terms of the ability of the United States to shape the behavior of the local government. Vietnam is a clear example of a failure; the Philippines is widely regarded as a success; while in El Salvador the results were mixed, with Washington having helped shepherd through some political and economic reforms yet having achieved less success in influencing the military aspects of the host nation's counterinsurgency approach. By choosing cases with successful, unsuccessful, and ambiguous influence outcomes, the problem of selection bias is minimized.

From a historical standpoint, the cases align themselves around the U.S. experience in Vietnam – which has strongly influenced contemporary American attitudes toward irregular warfare.[31] The Hukbalahap (Huk) Rebellion is an earlier success against a Communist insurgency in Asia, the perceived lessons of which influenced the initial U.S. approach to Vietnam. El Salvador is the successor to Vietnam that gave lie to the notion that the U.S. government was done with counterinsurgency when it left Southeast Asia in 1975.

The history recounted in this book draws on thousands of pages of primary materials from twenty-four different archives, making use of embassy cables, intelligence assessments, internal memoranda, meeting notes, and transcripts of conversations, some of which were declassified for this book and are being referenced for the first time. These sources are supplemented by personal papers, unpublished manuscripts, and oral-history interviews, as well as secondary sources by regional specialists and historians. A key advantage of exploiting multiple sources of evidence in this manner is that they allow a researcher to triangulate findings, thereby providing more convincing conclusions.[32]

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[31] Robert M. Cassidy, "Back to the Street without Joy: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam and Other Small Wars," *Parameters*, 34, no. 2 (Summer 2004), p. 74.

[32] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2003), p. 98.