

## CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

### Understanding Future Irregular Warfare Challenges

Prepared Statement of Colonel Robert Killebrew,  
USA (Ret.)



Center for a  
New American  
Security  
*Fifth Anniversary*

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### **Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities**

*Prepared Statement of Colonel Robert Killebrew, USA (Ret.)*

*Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Center for a New American Security*

Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this distinguished panel. The future of insurgency, and what we should do about it, is as vital a subject as there is in national defense these days, and I am pleased to have this chance to share my views with such a group as yours.

You have my biography; let me just say that, starting as a lieutenant in Army Special Forces in a long-ago war, the subject of insurgency and war has been my focus for over forty years. Although I have the honor to be a Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security, the views I present here are my own.

In its plainest form, “insurgency” is a rebellion against a government. Our nation began as an insurgency, and Thomas Jefferson would have approved of some, such as the recent uprising in Libya. But some are plainly dangerous to us and to what we believe about human dignity and freedom. These are the ones that we must defeat, or turn to our benefit.

Insurgencies have three characteristics that are useful to remember. One is that they are ultimately about politics, as all war is. Second, no two are ever the same, because political conditions are never the same. And finally, insurgencies follow a sort of “arc,” or sine curve, that begins with criminal acts, gathers force as it climbs, and then either peaks in success or, if counterinsurgency is successful, is driven back down the curve so that it ultimately becomes a matter for routine law enforcement once again. In a nutshell, successful counterinsurgency means driving the insurgency back down to common crime.

This relationship of crime to insurgency and its little brother, terrorism, is the dominant factor that is changing insurgency in the 21st century from what we knew in the 20th century. Other factors are the communications revolution, human migration, and arms trafficking among others. But there is so much illicit money out there – estimated to be one-fifth of the world’s GDP – that it is having an enormous political impact, and one such impact is to fund terrorist and insurgent groups. One way to look at the Taliban and its associated warlord supporters, for example, is as big smuggling operations – drugs, money, arms, you name it. The same is true of the Colombian FARC, or virtually any insurgency in the world today. In the 21st century, crime, terrorism, and insurgency are blending in new political and social combinations that will call for new approaches in counterinsurgency. Although some still deny the reality, one need look no further than the impact and reach of the Mexican criminal cartels – now called “Transnational Criminal Organizations” – to see the face of modern insurgency.

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Despite the hard work and sacrifice of operators in the field, and some notable successes, we – the United States government – are poorly organized to meet those challenges, in my opinion. Here are some suggestions on how we can best prepare.

First, we should recognize that we are entering a new post-Westphalian era of potentially constant, borderless conflict. Some states have become “criminal states.” Iran, for example, has attempted, and I think will attempt again, to hire criminals to conduct terrorist strikes inside the United States. This is a huge step, and indicates that our borders are no longer protection against other states, as well as criminals like the 9/11 gang. As a matter of some urgency, it should become the objective of the United States and its friends to find ways to force transnational conflict back into controllable, legal channels, or we will face a century without rules and without restraints.

Second, we have to have the right perspective on the counterinsurgency issue. Unless we’re fighting in Alabama, we’re *not* the “counterinsurgency” force. The real counterinsurgent is the host country, and we are third-party intruders in a family fight. Our whole aim, therefore – our strategy, our training, our equipment – should be designed to make our host as strong as possible against his insurgency. We urgently need to learn how to advise foreign armies and foreign governments with minimal presence where it counts, rather than muscling in with massive troop buildups and foreign aid that eclipses, and often alienates, the very people we are trying to help. I would be happy to expand on the training and role of military advisors, having been one myself.

As an example of successful U.S. assistance to a successful counterinsurgency, the subcommittee should look closely at the example of Colombia, which has rebounded from a lost cause a decade ago to the best – and only – currently successful example in this hemisphere. The Colombians have not only used their military and police forces together in an exemplary way, but they have also focused their entire government on reestablishing the rule of law, reclaiming their country, and on an extensive rehabilitation and retraining program that, frankly, we could learn a lot from. I should add that the Colombians are now helping the Mexicans and others in Latin America, and could be more effective with even a little more help than what we are currently giving them.

Third, we need to change our thinking and how we allocate resources. Old definitions of crime, terrorism, insurgency, irregular warfare and so forth often “stovepipe” our responses among government agencies and funding streams; worse, they cramp our mental responses and force them into irrelevant directions, while our enemies, unrestrained, simply adapt and carry on. This subcommittee could make no better contribution than try to un-stovepipe budget lines that split hairs in this regard and free field operators to better collaborate, and this goes across the whole government, not just DOD.

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The term “whole of government approach” has been used so often in recent years that it has become trite. But in fact, aiding another country to fight an insurgency, or terrorism, or widespread trans-national criminal networks supporting both, takes all the resources from our whole government, not just DOD. Other U.S. agencies have been instrumental in helping our allies – for example, the Drug Enforcement Agency’s “Trusted Officer” program assisted the Colombians – and others – to clean up their police forces. The DEA, FBI, USAID and others are often key below-the-line contributors to successful missions that aid our friends. I should not have to point out that the State Department plays a key role, and they are so severely underfunded that, I am told, they cannot now hire Foreign Service Officers at replacement rate.

Finally, we have long-term challenges here at home. I have argued that crime, terrorism, and insurgency are blending, and a result of that blend is politically-motivated conflict that spreads across borders in ways that would have been unthinkable – and impractical – just twenty years ago.

We can respond in a number of ways, and we have made great strides in homeland security and policing in the past decades. At the highest level, though, our best defense in a turbulent century is citizens who solidly support their government and their nation in a time of great change and stress. The present political gridlock in Washington, and the anti-government cant from some, is eating away at the trust our citizens must have in our government, over the long term, to stand against the disintegrative and destructive forces best exemplified by the Mexican cartels.

Our inability thus far to enact comprehensive and humane immigration reform is a national security Achilles Heel. It not only denies us the services and taxes of perhaps ten million or so potentially patriotic citizens, but also risks creating a fearful, embittered, and alienated minority in this country that is already becoming the unwilling – and I stress unwilling -- host for transnational crime. The crimes of 9/11 and the current insurgencies in the world are only the beginning of challenges we will face in the 21st century. The most important counterinsurgency strategy we can adopt – and the most essential – is a unified and committed country. That must be our highest priority.

## Biography

### Colonel Robert Killebrew, USA (Ret.) Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Center for a New American Security



Colonel Robert Killebrew, USA (Ret.) writes and consults on national defense issues as a Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security. Prior to his retirement from active duty he served for thirty years in a variety of Special Forces, infantry and staff duties. His assignments ranged included duty in Vietnam with MACVSOG, the Vietnamese Airborne Division, command in mechanized, air assault and airborne units, and staff positions in the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, as director of plans, XVIII Airborne Corps, special assistant to the Chief of Staff of the Army, command of a deployed joint task force and as an instructor in strategy and policy at the Army War College.

Since retirement, COL Killebrew has served as a consultant to a variety of Defense Department and defense-related organizations, including the Department of Defense, US Army and Air Force, the Defense Research Projects Agency, US Joint Forces Command, the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, the Project for a New American Century, Toffler Associates and as a consultant for a number of defense industries and public television. In 1999 he was appointed to the staff of the Hart-Rudman Commission on American defense needs for the 21st Century. In addition to consulting on strategic and operational matters, COL Killebrew as also directed or written a number of defense-related studies, including the State/DOD Study *The Country Team in American Strategy* and *The Left-Hand Side of the Spectrum* for the Center for a New American Security. Most recent writings include *The Crossover of Urban Gang Warfare and Terrorism* (National Strategy Forum, Fall 2008) and *Terror at the Border* for Armed Forces Journal, December, 2008. With Jennifer Bernal he authored the CNAS study *Crime Wars; Gangs, Cartels and U.S. National Security*, published in 2010. He is currently working with Matthew Irvine on U.S. – Colombian security policy.

COL Killebrew is a graduate of The Citadel and holds masters' degrees in history and international relations. While on active duty, he served as American Defense Fellow at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. He is the author of a book on the relationship of nuclear and non-nuclear warfare, and has provided expert witness testimony before Congressional committees and other governmental agencies.

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He has also served as a paid consultant to National Public Radio and advises and comments on national security issues for other public media. He and his first trophy wife, Pixie, live in Newport News, Virginia.