

# Revising COIN: The Stakeholder Centric Approach

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# **Revising COIN: The Stakeholder Centric Approach**

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## Introduction

With the apparent lack of progress and success in Afghanistan, counter-insurgency (COIN), both as a theory and practice, is falling out of favor within the political and military establishment in the US. This comes at a time when the US is redirecting its geopolitical focus away from global instability towards the Asia-Pacific and the ‘New Great Power Game’.

The 2012 US Defense Strategic Guidance clearly states that the US forces ‘no longer will be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations’ like the ones in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead, they will ‘emphasize non-military means and military-to-military cooperation to address instability and reduce the demand for significant U.S. force commitments to stability operations.’ It goes on to explain that they will be ready to conduct limited COIN operations if required, but emphasize that this will mostly be done by operating alongside coalition forces, meaning that ‘helping others defend themselves’ will be the new *mantra* for reducing instability around the world.<sup>1</sup> In essence, the 2012 Strategic Guidance calls for an end to COIN operations. In addition to this, the operations in Afghanistan have taken on a new phase that focus primarily on capture/kill operations and Foreign Internal Defense (FID), so-called ‘COIN-lite’, rather than population security, good governance and nation-building.

Although this points to the demise of COIN as policy and military practice, the US military is currently re-writing its COIN doctrine and the Defense Strategic Guidance points to the need to ‘retain and continue to refine the lessons learned, expertise and specialized capabilities that have been developed’<sup>2</sup> over the past decade in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While counterinsurgency seems to have fallen out of grace due to the apparent lack of success in Afghanistan and Iraq, one should maybe not be as quick to throw the baby out with the bath water. COIN theory in itself may not be at fault for the lack of results. Regardless of the desire not to engage in lengthy, large-scale stability operations, history tells us that, expertise and specialized capabilities to conduct such operations will be needed in the future.

Through analyzing and comparing COIN as theory and COIN in practice this article seeks to understand what can be drawn from existing

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense (2012), *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defence*, January 2012, Washington DC, January 2012, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense (2012), p. 6.

theory and from its critics in order to inform how COIN can be revised to guide future stability and counter-insurgency operations. While this article will not offer any panaceas for counter-insurgency operations, it will be argued that a focus on stakeholders in the conflict rather than on the population or the enemy is a better approach for countering insurgencies and ensuring long-term stability in war-torn states.

### COIN in Theory<sup>3</sup>

When what started as a conventional war turned irregular in late 2003 after the invasion of Iraq there were no updated doctrine available to turn to when faced with a growing insurgency. The US Army and Marine Corps were organized, trained and equipped for fighting conventional wars against regular enemies. From fighting its preferred wars against formed units in the open the US now were faced with individual enemies fighting in and from the shadows. This deficit had to be remedied quickly and the work caught momentum when Lieutenant-General David Petraeus returned from his second tour of duty in Iraq in October 2005 to take command of the Combined Arms Center (CAC) in Fort Leavenworth. He soon collected a group of competent personnel to start working on a revised COIN doctrine<sup>4</sup> and at the same time built a strong rapport with his US Marines counterpart Lieutenant-General James Mattis.<sup>5</sup> In December 2006, the new doctrine was published as a combined US Army and US Marines product, and it immediately had an impact on the conduct of operations in Iraq as well as on education and training in the US Army. This article takes as a point of departure COIN theory as it is presented in the U.S. doctrine FM 3-24.

The role of doctrines varies from country to country. In an ideal world, doctrines would drive decisions on how the armed forces of a country should be organized, what missions it should train to accomplish, and what equipment it needs.<sup>6</sup> This in turn points towards a prescriptive role of doctrines. In the US military in general and in the US Army in particular, doctrines are very important and come close to this ideal especially since the establishment of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) in 1973 and the pursuit of the famous Air Land Battle doctrine of 1982. In other countries, like Norway, doctrines do not have the same tradition and roles. The Nor-

<sup>3</sup> In the following the acronym COIN will refer to the doctrine (FM 3-24) and its theory, recommendations and principles. The term counter-insurgency will refer to the phenomenon of countering an insurgency in general.

<sup>4</sup> An interim COIN doctrine was issued in October 2004 as Field Manual (Interim) 3-07.22.

<sup>5</sup> John Nagl, 'The Evolution and Importance of the Army/ Marine Corps Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency', U.S. Army and Marine Corps, Foreword, pp., xv-xvi, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24/MCWP (Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Foreword, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24/MCWP, p. xiv.

wegian Joint Doctrine leans more to the descriptive side of a descriptive-prescriptive scale. Within the Norwegian Armed Forces, doctrine is not something you bring with you to the battlefield or conflict area but something you use in your education and preparation for deployment. Doctrine is not about how to conduct war and military operations but how to think about war and operations and only to a very limited degree guides equipment procurement. The US doctrines have however, tended to be more like guidelines to help the commanders at all levels in their actual conduct of operations as well as guiding the structuring and training of the Force – thus more on the prescriptive side. The FM 3-24 appears to have taken a step towards the descriptive side compared to previous US doctrines. But, the impact the doctrine have had on the organization, training and hardware of the US Army still points towards a strong prescriptive role. A central imperative of COIN as presented in FM 3-24 is to learn and adapt.<sup>7</sup> ‘In COIN, the side that learns faster and adapts more rapidly – the better learning organization – usually wins’.<sup>8</sup> It would seem that a doctrine that is too prescriptive in its guidance to the actual conduct of operations would inhibit learning and adapting while a more descriptive one better allows for this. In this chapter we will analyze COIN theory and FM 3-24 against recent practice as prescriptive theory rather than descriptive.

### **What is an Insurgency?**

An insurgency is first and foremost a struggle for the political power over the allegiance of the population in a given territory. It is a method employed by a non-state actor to challenge the existing political authority. According to FM 3-24 an insurgency is about the overthrow of a government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.<sup>9</sup> This is a narrow definition that excludes armed conflicts like the Tamil Tigers’ fight against the Sri Lankan Government for a separate state. Actually the FM 3-24 is somewhat ambivalent in its description of what an insurgency is, as it also states: ‘an insurgency is an organized, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control’.<sup>10</sup> If to weaken the control and legitimacy of the government is included as the aim of insurgents, it would significantly expand the scope of cases that can be included in the insurgency category.

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7 U.S. Army and Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24/MCWP (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2007), p. 46.

8 FM 3-24, p. ix.

9 FM 3-24, p. 2.

10 FM 3-24, p. 2.

What separates insurgents from criminals is primarily the political aim of the insurgents and it is their means and ways what separates them from terrorists. Organized crime is purely parasitic, their only aim is self-aggrandizement, and they do not serve a constituency other than themselves.<sup>11</sup> Although insurgents and terrorists sometimes employ similar methods (for example suicide bombings), the main difference lies in their size and organization. Both groups are fighting a political struggle but the insurgent's main method of armed struggle is through guerilla warfare primarily against enemy military forces. A terrorist group on the other hand is normally numerically too small to wage a guerilla war. They seldom operate as more than a handful in each action and their targets are primarily civilian. Unlike an insurgent group they are neither able nor willing to seize and hold territory and to exercise some form of control over a defined territory.<sup>12</sup>

### What is COIN?

There is no generally agreed upon definition of counter-insurgency. FM 3-24 states that 'Counterinsurgency is military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency'.<sup>13</sup> As such it is simply 'an umbrella term that describes the complete range of measures that governments take to defeat insurgencies.'<sup>14</sup>

All insurgencies are *sui generis* – of its own kind – and there are numerous ways to defeat them. In order to find the most appropriate way of conducting a specific counter-insurgency operation, one must understand each particular conflict with reference to three defining factors; the nature of the insurgency being countered, the nature of the government being supported, and the environment – especially the human environment – in which the conflict takes place.<sup>15</sup>

This article focuses on counter-insurgency waged by external forces in support of a Host Nation (HN) government. There is a clear distinction between a counter-insurgency waged by a local government against domestic insurgents and counter-insurgency mainly fought by external, foreign forces supporting a Host Nation Government. The struggle for legitimacy, a centerpiece in FM 3-24, is considerably more difficult for foreigners, particularly if they are of a different ethnicity, religion or culture. The challenge for external forces is that

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11 Harald Håvoll, *COIN Revisited: Lessons of the Classical Literature on Counter-Insurgency and its applicability to the Afghan Hybrid Insurgency*, Oslo, NUPI, 2008, *Security in Practice* no 13, p. 6.

12 Bruce, Hoffman, 'Terrorism Defined', in R. Howard & R. Sawyer (eds.), *Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (place of publication: name of publisher 2002), p. 22.

13 FM 3-24, p. 2.

14 David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (London: Hurst & Company, 2010), p. 1.

15 Kilcullen (2010) p. 2.



counter-insurgency is a protracted struggle and what might have been a positive attitude among the local populace at the outset may wear thin with time especially if no apparent progress is produced. Eventually their legitimacy may crumble and what was once seen as liberators may be regarded as occupiers.

‘Victory’ in COIN is an elusive concept. It is very difficult to define what constitutes success and how to know when an end state has been reached. Some would claim that annihilation of the insurgents is the goal, while others assert that success is when the insurgency has become ‘manageable’ by the government. Yet, others would hold that the best we can hope for is to change an old process into a new one.<sup>16</sup> According to FM 3-24 victory is achieved ‘when the populace consents to the government’s legitimacy and stops actively and passively supporting the insurgency.’<sup>17</sup>

Success depends on the goals set by the politicians, but the field manual suggests that to ‘defeat’ an insurgency, the purpose is to address the underlying conditions for the insurgency. This is to be done through reforming and strengthening the existing political order so it will be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the population. The ability of a political authority to deliver public goods thus becomes an integral part of the strategic objective to make the Host Nation capable of govern and secure itself. This refers to the need for reforming the Host Nation, something that requires the coordinated efforts of the whole range of political tools available to the counter-insurgents.

For an intervening force the purpose necessarily includes national interests. They share the goal of a sustainable stability by a Host Nation government able to govern and secure itself, but the purpose of this stability for an external actor is to prevent local and regional instability and to ensure future threats to its interests do not emanate from that state, something that will allow them to exit.

The field manual defines legitimacy as the primary objective of any COIN operation. ‘A COIN effort cannot achieve lasting success without the HN government achieving legitimacy’.<sup>18</sup> Long-term success ‘depends on the people taking charge of their own affairs and consenting to the government’s rule’.<sup>19</sup> As such, COIN puts the population at the center of its strategy in order to achieve its end state of a legitimate Host Nation government able to govern and secure itself. The manual

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<sup>16</sup> Robert B. Polk (2007), ‘Interagency Reform: An Idea Whose Time Has Come’, in Joseph R. Cerami, and Jay W. Boggs (eds.) (2007), *The Interagency and Counterinsurgency Warfare: Stability, Security, Transition and Reconstruction Roles*, (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College), December 2007, p. 319.

<sup>17</sup> FM 3-24, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> FM 3-24, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> FM 3-24, p. 2.

thus frames counter-insurgencies as contests for legitimacy between the insurgents and the counter-insurgents. ‘At its core, COIN is a struggle for the population’s support’.<sup>20</sup> ‘Political power is the central issue in insurgencies and counter-insurgencies; each side aims to get the people to accept its governance or authority as legitimate’.<sup>21</sup>

Though legitimacy is not directly defined in the manual, it describes legitimate governments as those that rule with consent of the governed while illegitimate ones rely mainly on coercion to keep control of its population.<sup>22</sup> The emphasis on legitimacy as the main objective of any COIN operation is based on the idea that legitimate governance is inherently stable as ‘the societal support it engenders allows them to adequately manage internal problems, change, and conflict that affect individual and collective well-being.’ This is contrasted to illegitimate states that are seen as inherently unstable and unable to regulate society or can only do so by applying overwhelming coercion.<sup>23</sup> In essence, COIN theory focuses on the underlying factors of bad governance as the source of instability and root cause of the insurgency.

Building or restoring legitimacy thus becomes the way to achieve one’s desired ends. Legitimacy, according to the field manual, is to be achieved through a balanced application of both military and nonmilitary means. This is because military means alone can only address the symptoms of a loss of legitimacy and not restore or enhance the legitimacy necessary to achieve durable peace. The field manual lists six possible indicators of legitimacy that can be used to analyze threats to stability:<sup>24</sup>

(i) Ability to provide security for the populace (ii) Selection of leaders that are considered just and fair by a substantial majority of the populace (iii) High level of popular participation in or support for political processes (iv) Culturally acceptable level of corruption (v) Culturally acceptable level and rate of political, economic and social development (vi) High level of regime acceptance by major social institutions

These indicators are deemed important to achieve the support of a sufficient majority of the population. Although different societies and cultures may put different emphasis on the various indicators, these indicators point to the need for security, elections and welfare for the population and consequently also reform of governance. As such, COIN is as much about state-building and social re-engineering as it is about fighting the enemy. ‘Counter-insurgents aim to enable a country

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<sup>20</sup> FM 3-24, p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> FM 3-24, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> FM 3-24, p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> FM 3-24, pp. 37-8.

<sup>24</sup> FM 3-24, p. 38.

or regime to provide the security and rule of law that allow establishment of social services and growth of economic activity'.<sup>25</sup>

Since 'the primary objective of any COIN operation is to foster development of effective governance by a legitimate government',<sup>26</sup> the focus in COIN is not control of territory or purely the destruction on the enemy's capacity to fight, but for the 'minds' of the population. Thus the activities of the foreign intervening forces must serve to alter the population's perception of the government through reforming its governance capacity. This means that the relationship between the intervening forces, the government, and the population in large part will determine how legitimacy is perceived. In this sense, it is vital that the intervening forces communicate and interact with the Host Nation population in order to determine what they define as effective and legitimate governance and that all commanders must consider how operations contribute to strengthening Host Nation's legitimacy. If the demands of the population, be it security, welfare or elections, are met by the government, legitimate control can be achieved, if not, legitimacy is at risk. 'In the end, [the population] determine the ultimate victor'.<sup>27</sup>

The field manual's approach to countering an insurgency – often termed population-centric COIN for its focus on the population – uses military force to foster the conditions for long-term economic development and good governance in order to make the central government of a Host Nation legitimate in the eyes of the general population.

Population-centric COIN is often conducted through what the field manual call a clear-hold-build operation that has three objectives; create a secure physical and psychological environment by clearing out the insurgents, establish firm government control over the populace and area by holding territory (preferably by Host Nation government security forces) and gain the populace's support by building up support for the Host Nation government through delivering essential services. This approach aims at developing a long-term effective Host Nation government framework that secures the people and their basic needs which will thus reinforce the government's legitimacy.<sup>28</sup> By controlling key areas, security and influence will then spread out into other areas.<sup>29</sup> 'Clear-hold-build objectives require lots of resources and time. The US and HN commanders should prepare for a long-term effort.'<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> FM 3-24, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> FM 3-24, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> FM 3-24, p. 38.

<sup>28</sup> FM 3-24, pp. 174-84.

<sup>29</sup> This is sometimes referred to as the 'ink-spot strategy'.

<sup>30</sup> FM 3-24, p. 175.

COIN is a political-military struggle, and although military efforts are necessary and important to COIN it is only effective when integrated into a shared strategy with the other elements of national power, making unity of effort an essential element.<sup>31</sup> While COIN is not primarily a military fight ‘controlling the level of violence is a key aspect of the struggle’, as a ‘more benign security environment allows civilian agencies greater opportunity to provide their resources and expertise’.<sup>32</sup> This makes the military an enabling factor in COIN – not a solution in its own right – as without security few other lines of operation can be initiated or sustained. David Galula’s ‘formula’ of 20% military and 80% civilian effort in COIN is not to be taken literally but rather as an indication of the resources and efforts needed over time to produce a sustainable stability.<sup>33</sup> At certain times and in certain areas the military effort will be the main one with civilian efforts in support. In other areas and at different times the opposite will be the situation. FM 3-24 states that the military effort is a combination of offensive, defensive and stability operations and that the weight of each type of operation is at the commander’s discretion dependent on the situation and the mission.<sup>34</sup> The purpose of the use of military force in COIN according to FM 3-24 is not to defeat the insurgency by killing as many insurgents as possible but to create legitimacy through protection of the population and to enable development and rule of law. As such, the ‘counter-insurgents take upon themselves responsibility for the people’s well-being’.<sup>35</sup> The underlying logic can be represented by a metaphor: ‘If you have a mosquito problem the solution lies in the swamp – not in swapping as many mosquitoes as possible’. As Bernard Fall argued almost 50 years ago, ‘*when a country is being subverted it is not being outfought; it is being out-administered*’.<sup>36</sup> This means that the fight is really a competition over government and not about who can outfought the other.

According to FM 3-24 military forces contribute to the legitimacy of the Host Nation government by providing security to the population.<sup>37</sup> The most cost effective way of achieving this is by securing the main population centres. In order to build legitimacy the use of force must be constrained, proportionate and discriminate. The idea is that collateral damage has a more negative impact on legitimacy than the posi-

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<sup>31</sup> FM 3-24, p. 39.

<sup>32</sup> FM 3-24, p. 54.

<sup>33</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (1964, reprint, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006), p. 63.

<sup>34</sup> FM 3-24, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> FM 3-24, p. 55.

<sup>36</sup> Bernard B. Fall, ‘The Theory and Practice of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency’, *Naval War College Review* (Winter 1998, reprinted from April 1965 issue), Vol. 1, No. 1, pp.53-54. (emphasis in original)

<sup>37</sup> FM 3-24, p. 38.

tive effect the impression of strength has. In order to achieve precise effect by military force, timely and correct intelligence is paramount. In order to get to such information the analysts must understand the local context – in particular the so-called ‘human terrain’. This collection of actionable intelligence in turn requires the forces to interact with the local population thus increasing the risk to the troops. The close interaction with the people also enhances the legitimacy of the COIN forces as the COIN forces’ safety becomes the people’s safety – and vice versa.

In addition to this, the field manual ascribes stability operations – civil security, civil control, essential services, governance, and economic and infrastructure development – as a vital part of the COIN effort in order to gain legitimacy for the Host Nation government. Although these are mainly civilian tasks it is expected that military forces contribute either in support or when civilian expert not available to undertake many of these tasks, themselves. As such, the field manual states that ‘Soldiers and Marines are expected to be nation builders as well as warriors’.<sup>38</sup>

### **COIN and its Critics**

Although COIN as the guiding principle for the operation was not implemented until the arrival of General Stanley McChrystal in June 2009,<sup>39</sup> COIN has been widely criticised after the limited success in Afghanistan. The apparent failure to provide victory or basic security in the country after a decade of fighting indicates a significant fault, but whether it is the implementation of the COIN doctrine or the doctrine itself which is at fault in Afghanistan is a moot question. While it is commonly understood that many aspects of the implementation has been flawed, due to limited resources, coalition-related caveats, resistance to the doctrine etc., several critics have also concluded that the doctrine and the entire COIN theory has been proven wrong.

Some of the critique of the doctrine has been aimed at the limited scope of historical cases it is based on, and that both older and newer conflicts not presently included should inform a revision of the doctrine. The COIN theory adopted by FM 3-24 is primarily based on case-studies from the Cold War – in particular Malaya, Algeria and Vietnam as presented through the seminal works of David Galula, Roger Trinquier, Frank Kitson, John Nagl and others. This critique of the background and production of the doctrine have some merit. The cases referred to are too homogenous as the sole basis of a general

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<sup>38</sup> FM 3-24, Foreword.

<sup>39</sup> For General Stanley McChrystal’s COIN approach to the war in Afghanistan see for instance Stanley McChrystal, COMISAF USFOR-A Counterinsurgency Training Guidance, Headquarters USFOR-A/ISAF, Kabul, Afghanistan, Memorandum 10 November 2009.

theory of COIN. They all took place within the same limited time frame (1950s to 1975), within the same geo-political setting (the Cold War) and within similar local political settings (an insurgency against a colonial or puppet rule countered by external forces). The dilemma for the writers of doctrine is however, that the more specific the doctrine is the more it is relevant only to a limited spectrum of scenarios. The more wide-encompassing and general the doctrine the more it risks being relevant to none. Sebastian L.v. Gorka and David Kilcullen simply states that this dilemma cannot be solved within one unified doctrine: ‘(...) it becomes evident that a single unified counter-insurgency doctrine is not possible, that there can be no universal set of best practices evolved over time that can cover such diverse starting points, end-states, and local context’.<sup>40</sup>

The critics of the doctrine’s recommendations can be roughly divided into two groups. On one hand, there are the ones that agree with the overall tenets of population-centric COIN as described in the field-manual, but see flaws in the theory and argue for revising the manual, especially with regards to new empirical evidence from Iraq and Afghanistan and other historical case-studies. On the other hand are those arguing for a so-called enemy-centric approach who argues that the population-centric COIN approach is flawed and that the focus should be on the insurgents, not the insurgency.

In the following section we will discuss some of the critique of the COIN-theory based primarily on the Afghanistan experience, and the alternative approaches that are being launched. It is not a discussion of all the things that have gone wrong in Afghanistan, but on those aspects the critics emphasise to conclude that COIN has proven wrong.

### **Revising Population-Centric COIN**

The first type of critique can be roughly divided into two parts. Firstly, it is claimed that the concept of legitimacy is too Western centric, founded on what the West view as universal norms, based on the rights of the individual over the community as a form of social contract between the ruler and the ruled. Rather than being based on universal values and norms, the critics claim, the foundation of legitimacy is found in the specific culture of the society in question.<sup>41</sup>

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40 Sebastian L.v. Gorka and David Kilcullen, ‘An Actor-centric Theory of War: Understanding the difference between *COIN* and *Counterinsurgency*’, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 60, 1st Quarter 2011, p.16

41 See for instance Robert Egnell, ‘Winning “Hearts and Minds”? A Critical Analysis of Counter-Insurgency Operations in Afghanistan’, *Civil Wars*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2010), pp. 282-303

This critique can be illustrated by the six indicators of legitimacy in the field manual mentioned above. Concepts such as popular selection of leaders and ‘high level of participation in political processes’ are typically based on Western liberal democratic ideas. They are relatively irrelevant in most of the places in which Western militaries have fought insurgencies over the past decades. Although the manual mentions different forms of legitimacy, this is not sufficiently being covered as it only spends a paragraph on explaining different forms of legitimacy. If different cultures and societies have different forms of legitimacy and subsequently a different way of achieving legitimacy, this is of paramount importance to the manual as it places legitimacy as the primary objective in COIN. In addition, imposing Western norms and values on societies may not only be difficult in practice, but may in fact be counter-productive as it can offend the locals and thus serve to delegitimize the counter-insurgents or upset traditional power balances that can lead to more instability.

Moreover, the field manual assumes that the population will accept the form of central authority as legitimate as long as it provides the population with what they deem are their needs. In this way, the FM only offers benefits to the society as a method of gaining legitimacy. This rational social contract model, where the state buys legitimacy by providing services, ignores the host of other mechanism through which legitimacy is built and maintained in most societies. Furthermore, such a form of legitimacy may only work as long as the external forces are present and able to meet local expectations. It can thus be seen as an artificial form of legitimacy that may prove unstable when the external involvement eventually comes to an end. If legitimacy is purely built on providing benefits in a conflict situation, a new legitimacy system based on traditional norms and values may resurface when violence fade. Another problem is the way the military forces have gone about building this legitimacy. There are many examples of cases where winning ‘hearts and minds’ have meant handing out toys to kids or conducting Quick Impact (QIP) programmes, aimed at short-term popularity-booster and force protection, but which simultaneously have undermined long-term development programmes.<sup>42</sup> It is also unlikely that it has contributed in any way to the standing of local authorities among the population.

Another problem with the focus on legitimacy is the problem it creates for the intervening forces to actually enhance or create legitimacy for the HN government or the local people. The perceived legitimacy of

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<sup>42</sup> Andrew Wilder and Gordon Stuart, ‘Money Can’t Buy America Love’, *Foreign Policy* (December 1, 2009), Available at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/12/01/money\\_cant\\_buy\\_america\\_love?hidecomments=yes](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/12/01/money_cant_buy_america_love?hidecomments=yes), Accessed 25.07.2012

the intervening force – a function of the intervening force’s conduct, identity and ability to meet local expectations – is thus vital to COIN.<sup>43</sup> If the external forces that are supposed to gain legitimacy for the HN government are seen as illegitimate in the eyes of the population, the whole task may prove to be futile. Furthermore, time is rarely on the intervening actors’ side. Eventual popular support from the local populace tends to be reduced over time even in the most permissive environments. If this is the case, building legitimacy for a third part may be extremely challenging. If the HN government is seen as working with the illegitimate intervening forces, they will also be deemed illegitimate and thus the only way to achieve some sort of order will be through the use of overwhelming coercion which the field manual explicitly consider to be unstable.

Secondly, it is claimed that the field manual is too reliant on a central state as basis for governing the society.<sup>44</sup> In relation to Afghanistan, a country in which legitimacy rarely have been centralized, the critics claim that the government centric idea of legitimacy is entirely flawed. Instead, legitimacy flows from religion, ethnicity, clan and tribe and other forms of local allegiance, something that has largely been ignored in the field manual. Hence, it is claimed that a bottom-up approach focused on local governance rather than the central government have greater chance of succeeding. This approach agrees with the field manual that legitimacy should be the main objective, but rather than focusing on building legitimacy for the central government in the eyes of the population, the focus should be on getting the population on your side by providing them with local level governance that are deemed acceptable to them. To the proponents of this approach, COIN can work in the absence of a legitimate HN central government as long as the local authorities are deemed legitimate. In Afghanistan for instance, the central government is seen as corrupt and incapable of providing the population with security and essential services on the local level, making it impossible to gain the legitimacy needed for success according to the field manual.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to this, the general population may be largely irrelevant in order to achieve stability as a result of legitimacy. ‘If counterinsurgency is, in the final analysis, about which side has the greatest legitimacy, then we cannot simply measure that legitimacy as a function of political recognition by the majority of the population’.<sup>46</sup> In

<sup>43</sup> Mats Berdal, *Building Peace after War* (London: IISS, Routledge, 2009), p. 98.

<sup>44</sup> See for instance William Rosenau, (2009), ‘Counterinsurgency: Lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan’, *Harvard International Review*, vol. 31, no.1 (Spring 2009), pp.52-56

<sup>45</sup> David C.Ellis, and James Sisco, ‘Implementing COIN Doctrine in the Absence of a Legitimate State’, *Small Wars Journal*, 13 October, 2010, Available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/implementing-coin-doctrine-in-the-absence-of-a-legitimate-state>, Accessed on 25.07.2012

<sup>46</sup> Gorka and Kilcullen (2011), p. 17.



societies where the central government has based its rule on coercion or there have been no central government, allegiances to leaders of a tribe, clan, ethnicity or religion are likely to be a much stronger foundation of legitimacy. If legitimacy flows from other allegiances, this has to be taken into account and different approaches to achieving this must be examined.

### **Enemy-Centric Approach to COIN**

In general, the enemy-centric group is critical of COIN due to what they see as an overambitious strategy to build states and re-engineer entire societies to achieve the political objectives. US Army Colonel Gian P. Gentile, for instance, argues that COIN has become such a dominant way of thinking in the American military that they do not see any other more limited ways of dealing with instability and insurgencies, leading the US Army into never-ending campaigns of nation-building and attempts to change entire societies to achieve the loyalty of populations.<sup>47</sup> This, the critics claim, is too costly in both blood and treasure and has achieved very little success over the past decade. Moreover, they attack what they see as a very narrow and flawed understanding of war and warfare claiming that the field manual's view of insurgencies as caused by bad governance is not necessarily accurate and may indeed not be the cause of many insurgencies. Limiting the understanding of causes of insurgencies to bad governance runs the risk of neglecting that the conflict may be a result of other factors such as, ethnic antagonisms, ideological disputes, old-fashioned power struggles or simple greed and that it may be that the real challenge comes from the adversary and not from inability to provide the population with certain services. Indeed, if history is an indicator, successful counter-insurgency campaigns have rarely been won by 'out-administer' the insurgents, but by outfighting them.<sup>48</sup>

The proponents of enemy-centric COIN argue for a more narrow approach that focuses on the insurgents rather than the insurgency, the enemy rather than the population. This they claim is not only the most cost-effective way of doing a counter-insurgency operation, but also the one that is most likely to bring success. For them, legitimacy is thus not a way to stability as the population-centrists would argue, but rather a bi-product or consequence of killing the insurgents in the first place. Also, unless the government can demonstrate the ability to secure and control its population, well-meaning efforts to appear legitimate are likely to fail as security is of primary concern to the popula-

<sup>47</sup> Gian P. Gentile, 'A Strategy of Tactics: Population-centric COIN and the Army', *Parameters*, (Autumn 2009), pp.5-17

<sup>48</sup> Bernard Finel, 'A Substitute for Victory', *Foreign Affairs*, (8 April 2010), Available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66189/bernard-finel/a-substitute-for-victory>, Accessed on 25.07.2012

tion. As such, stability does not flow from legitimacy, but the other way around. A focus on the causes of violence rather than the causes of the insurgency allows the enemy-centric approach to argue for a more limited end-state. Thus stability become and end in itself, rather than a way to an end and subsequently that reform of governance and societal re-engineering should be processes separate from COIN.

To be fair, the FM 3-24 gives consideration to the idea that the ability of the state to provide security to population can give it enough legitimacy to govern in the people's eyes. However, the field manual explicitly state that coercive states are inherently unstable in the long run and thus stability based on coercion may only be short-lived.

### **Critique of the Use of Military Force in COIN**

In his seminal book *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Stathis Kalyvas, argues that people, irrespective of their pre-war sympathies 'prefer to collaborate with the political actor that best guarantees their survival rather than defect by helping the rival actor'. In war-torn societies where the population's primary concern is security, control is likely to shape collaboration because political actors who enjoy substantial territorial control can protect civilians in that territory giving survival oriented civilians a strong incentive of collaboration irrespective of their initial preferences. As such, military resources generally trump pre-war political and social support in spawning control. This means that collaboration is largely endogenous of control and that the two are self-reinforcing as more collaboration leads to greater control and so on. Through control, political actors try to shape popular support and deter collaboration with their rivals.<sup>49</sup> However, if collaboration is endogenous of control, the question of how to gain control in the first place arises.

Kalyvas insight that support follows strength is important for both proponents and critics of COIN.<sup>50</sup> Kilcullen for instance uses this idea to argue for a theory of competitive control – 'whoever does better at establishing a resilient system of control, that gives people order and a sense of security where they sleep, is likely to gain their support and ultimately win the competition for government.'<sup>51</sup> By protecting the population under rule of law, one will increase collaboration and deter defection and ultimately win the competition for governing the people. However, Kalyvas argues, 'the military resources that are necessary

<sup>49</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 12-3.

<sup>50</sup> For an enemy-centric view see William F. Owen, 'Killing Your Way to Control', *The British Army Review*, no. 151 (Spring 2011), pp.34-37. For a more population-centric view, see Kilcullen (2010), pp. 152-54

<sup>51</sup> Kilcullen (2010), p. 152.

for the imposition of control are staggering and, hence usually lacking, (...) and rival actors are therefore left with little choice but to use violence as a means to shape collaboration.<sup>52</sup> This argument is often used by the proponents of the enemy-centric approach arguing that even if we had the resources, or more importantly the political will to use the resources required to protect the population in a counter-insurgency operation, this would be too costly, and should be avoided. Thus, we should not conduct these operations by focusing on passively protecting the population to increase collaboration, but rather actively focus on the insurgents, ‘killing your way to control’. As William F. Owen argues, protecting the population ‘should not be the activity, but should be the benefit from destroying the enemy’.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the arguments goes, going after the enemy will showcase the strength of our forces to the population and thereby gain collaboration as the population understand that we can best guarantee their survival.

Earlier studies have shown that targeting the insurgency or a terrorist organization’s leadership through kill or capture missions have little or even negative effect. However, more recent studies seems to contradict this, and shows that removing insurgent leaders increases governments’ chances of defeating insurgencies because they increase the mortality rates of the insurgent groups when experienced commanders are lost, leading to reduced insurgent attacks, and diminishing overall levels of violence.<sup>54</sup> These arguments have some merit particularly when targeting the military leaders of the insurgency. It takes years of combat experience to produce an effective military commander but it takes only limited training for a foot soldier to do simple insurgency work. Led by an experienced commander these foot soldiers can operate as a fairly competent combat unit while they might have close to no combat effectiveness with an inexperienced one. In addition to the effect of diminished combat effectiveness there is also the possible effect of ‘support following strength’. When the population see that the counter-insurgency forces are able to eliminate core insurgent commanders and thereby reduce the overall levels of violence some individuals will be inclined to collaborate with the counter-insurgents, rather than the insurgents.

The problem with this enemy-centric approach however, as Kalyvas points out, is that the effective use of violence to establish control is highly dependent on applying force selectively. ‘Indiscriminate violence is of limited value since it decreases the opportunity costs of collaboration with the rival actor’,<sup>55</sup> thereby providing an intent for the

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<sup>52</sup> Kalyvas (2005), p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> Owen (2011), p. 151.

<sup>54</sup> B. Price, ‘Targeting Top Terrorists’, *International Security*, vol. 36, no. 4 (Spring 2012), pp. 9–46.

<sup>55</sup> Kalyvas (2005), p. 144.

population to passively or actively support the other side. The so-called 'Night-raids' in Afghanistan are illustrative of the unintended effects of kill and capture operations. Despite their obvious success in hunting down and killing or capturing insurgents (about 1,500 insurgents killed or captured by early 2011 and 80% of the night raids were conducted without firing a shot), the raids enraged neighbours and locals.<sup>56</sup> According to the Pashtun social code, the *Pasthunwali*, one who intrudes on a man's property uninvited is doing so either to rob or to dishonour the person, and Pashtuns are obliged to come to his assistance. On some occasions neighbours rushing to the scene to help have been shot by the SOFs because they were suspected of being fellow Taliban. The embarrassment and perceived humiliation has probably driven several locals into the Taliban camp. This negative effect of the night-raids may have been the trigger behind the spring 2012 agreement between the Karzai Government and the US that all night-raids in the future should either be led or approved by Afghan authorities.

The dilemma is that selective violence is dependent on information from the populace in order to capture or kill the insurgents, something that is difficult to obtain if one does not have control. Individuals only want to provide information when it is safe for them to do so as they are trying to maximize their chances of survival. The paradox is that political actors do not need to use violence in areas where they have control, and cannot use selective violence in areas of no control, having no or limited access to information.<sup>57</sup> This dilemma makes the enemy-centric approach difficult to operationalize.

Although both the proponents and critics of COIN agree that control is vital, they do not agree on how to achieve this. A compromise of the two approaches, and one that gains increasingly support within the US establishment, is what has been dubbed 'COIN lite'.<sup>58</sup> This approach to counter-insurgency is more limited as its focus is on stability and does not have state-building component within it. Within such a hybrid approach the focus is on offensive operations by Special Operation Forces (SOF) against insurgents and with regular forces primarily doing Foreign Internal Defence (FID), training and mentoring of Host Nation's own security forces. The idea is to let the Host Nation government be responsible for the protection of its population while more

56 Jonathan Smith, 'We own the night', *Small Wars Journal*, 22 Feb. 2012, Available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/we-own-the-night>, Accessed on 25.07.2012

57 Kalyvas (2005), p. 13.

58 Crispin Burke, 'Like It or Not, Small Wars Will Always Be Around' *World Politics Review*, 24 January 2012, Available at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/11238/like-it-or-not-small-wars-will-always-be-around>, Accessed on 25.07.2012 and O. Manea and J. Nagl, 'COIN is not Dead', *Small Wars Journal*, 6 February 2012, Available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/coin-is-not-dead>, Accessed on 25.07.2012

competent SOFs do the hunting and capturing/killing of insurgents. This, they argue, will provide Host Nation with more visibility and ownership of the struggle and reduce the negative effect of foreign troops seen as ‘occupiers’. It also significantly reduces the required force levels by external forces making the engagement more palatable for the external force’s domestic audience (politicians and population in general), a point that has largely been neglected in the COIN field manual. In addition, it reduces the risk to the regular external forces thus making it easier for the political leadership in the troop-contributing countries to stay the course.

The problem with this approach is that it takes very long time to do FID and can thus only work if one is extremely proactive towards the insurgency and acts before it is able to gain the momentum. This could work if one is able to muster enough political support for early involvement in conflicts, but this is challenging. If a full-fledged insurgency is underway, a ‘COIN-lite’ approach is less likely to succeed as one would not necessarily be able to fend off the insurgents risking the need to escalate and thereby be dragged into the conflict with a much larger presence. This is much like what happened in Vietnam.

The polarizing debate between the population-centrists and the enemy-centrists is may be a result of arguing from two different analytical perspectives. As Kalyvas notes, ‘asking what causes a civil war is not the same as asking what causes violence within a civil war.’<sup>59</sup> While the population-centric group focuses on the causes of the insurgency, and thereby views the solution to the insurgency as reform and strengthening of governance, the enemy-centric advocates focuses on the causes of the violence, the insurgents, and thus argues for a narrower end-state, stability. The different starting points for arguing their case, leads to different end states and the ways and means of achieving these. Clearing up this confusion may be a way to bring the two groups closer and reinvigorate the debate about COIN.

### **Towards a Revised COIN Theory: A Stakeholder-Centric Approach**

The population-centric versus enemy-centric debate is deeply polarizing and has led to a stalemate that is hampering any intellectual progress on how to counter insurgencies. While the enemy-centric promoters have raised a lot of good arguments about the problems with the field manual and COIN theory in general, relying primarily on going after the enemy is a very narrow approach that favours short-term gains over long-term efforts to secure a durable peace that is necessary for long-term stability.

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<sup>59</sup> Kalyvas (2005), p. 392.

If the aim of all wars should be a ‘better peace’, it means, as Beatrice Heuser argues, that a Clausewitzian brutal imposition of ones will upon the enemy is ‘unlikely to lead to a lasting peace, unless the enemy is annihilated (...) A peace with which the defeated side cannot live in the long term will necessarily engender a new war to reverse the situation’.<sup>60</sup> Since annihilation of the enemy is not a realistic option for Western governments, due to moral considerations, a negotiated peace that all the belligerents can live with is, in most cases, the best solution one can get out of a COIN operation. Gorka and Kilcullen support this view in their study of numerous different insurgencies, noting that a government usually wins if they are eventually prepared to negotiate with its non-state enemy.<sup>61</sup> An intervening force needs to consider the social cohesion of a state and what can plausibly be constructed from the old order. The more sweeping the destruction of the existing order (short of total annihilation of one side) and the more fragmented a society grows, the more difficult establishment of domestic order is likely to be. Although a negotiated solution with insurgents and others may not be in line with the norms and values of Western liberal democracies, such an outcome is most likely to benefit the population as it may end the violence quicker than a legitimacy or war fighting contest.

If the populations-centric approach is too ambitious and the enemy-centric approach unsustainable, what would then be the solution for future COIN operations? How can we find a middle ground which does not require unrealistically high political investments in resources for military forces, development aid and long-term state-building efforts, while simultaneously recognises that a security and peace requires a certain degree of political legitimacy to be sustainable?

While both the proponents and critics of COIN have their merits, they do not disentangle the difficult question on how to build peace after war, which should be of paramount importance in any counterinsurgency. In other words, what is it that keeps the weapons silent also after the secession of hostilities?

To answer this, we may turn to the peace-building/state-building literature. Insights from these studies have tended to be neglected in the counter-insurgency literature, but it draws on experiences from many conflicts and may offer some relevant clues, even if not explicitly addressing counter-insurgencies. The question on how to build peace

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<sup>60</sup> Beatrice Heuser, ‘Ends, Ways, Means: Clausewitz and Other Prophets’, *Infinity Journal Special Edition, Clausewitz and Contemporary Conflict*, February 2012, p. 18. Available at [http://www.infinityjournal.com/article/48/Ends\\_Ways\\_Means\\_Clausewitz\\_and\\_Other\\_Prophets](http://www.infinityjournal.com/article/48/Ends_Ways_Means_Clausewitz_and_Other_Prophets), accessed on 25.01.2012.

<sup>61</sup> Gorka and Kilcullen (2011), p. 17.

after war is after all a key component in any kind of warfare. Just as in COIN, state-building is regarded as a key element for success. This has emerged over the last decades so that state-building has become an integral part of peace-building. When the UN revised its approach to peace-keeping and peace-building in 2001, Kofi Annan, then Secretary General of the UN, stated that peace becomes sustainable ‘not when all conflicts are removed from society, but when the natural conflicts of society can be resolved peacefully through the exercise of state sovereignty and, generally, participatory governance.’<sup>62</sup> In the academic literature state-building is considered to be a particular approach to peace-building, ‘premised on the recognition that achieving security and development in societies emerging from civil war partly depends on the existence of capable, autonomous and legitimate government institutions’.<sup>63</sup> This is often labelled as ‘liberal-peace’, in other words that a liberal economy and political system are preconditions for lasting peace. Simply put, through representative institutions and a free economy, conflicts are expected to be resolved peacefully. Building these institutions thus becomes a central tenet of peace-building.

However, the literature is critical to the merits of much of the liberal state-building efforts, due to mixed results, tendencies to create ‘neo-imperial’ relationships and ‘cultures of dependencies’, as well as inclinations to ‘one size fits all’ and Western-based ‘templates’ to good governance and institution building.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, while democracy may be regarded as the most stable way of governance, the process of democratization has often turned out to destabilize fragile peace agreements instead of cementing them.<sup>65</sup>

This is a vast literature, but in the following we will primarily draw on two texts which are relevant for the current discussion, Mats Berdal’s *Building Peace after War* and Alex de Waal’s *Mission without end? Peacekeeping in the African political marketplace*.<sup>66</sup> To begin with, one can note that there are often clear similarities between the critique leveraged against COIN and critique against peace-building, such as

<sup>62</sup> ‘No exit without strategy: Security Council decision-making and the closure or transition of United Nations peacekeeping operations’, Report of the Secretary General, UN S/2001/391, New York, 20 April 2001, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk, ‘Introduction. Understanding the contradictions of postwar state building’, in Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk, *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations* (London: Routledge 2009), pp. 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> Paris and Sisk, ‘Introduction. Understanding the contradictions of postwar state building’, in Paris and Sisk, *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*, pp. 11-14. See also Oliver Richmond and Jason Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions: Between Statebuilding and Peacebuilding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper and Mandy Turner, *Whose Peace? Critical Perspectives on the Political Economy of Peacebuilding* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>65</sup> Roland Paris, *At War’s End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> Berdal (2009) and Alex de Waal (2009), ‘Mission without end? Peacekeeping in the African Political Marketplace’, *International Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 1 (2009), pp. 99–113.

the Western state-template which is being promoted. Berdal argues that approaches to peace-building have:

... displayed a marked tendency to abstract the task of peace-building from their political, cultural and historical context ... The result has been an ahistorical and static view of the challenges posed to outside intervention in war-torn societies and a consequent failure to take account of the variety of ways in which the past constraints, shapes and imposes limits on what outsiders can realistically achieve. This tendency has encouraged a social-engineering approach to the concept of peace-building. External actors have failed to gauge the extent to which their own actions, policies and historical baggage necessarily contribute to shaping the 'post-conflict environment', whether through the stirring of nationalisms or through the legitimisation or delegitimisation of indigenous power structures, or by empowering or disempowering what are, for better or worse, key local actors.<sup>67</sup>

By switching the word peace-building with COIN and placing this text in the context of Afghanistan, one gets a pretty good picture of what has gone wrong in our efforts to stabilize and bring peace to the country.

Furthermore, Berdal presents three priority tasks for an outside intervening force – a secure environment, stabilization of governance structures and the provision of basic services – all of which are very similar to those advocated in the counter-insurgency field manual. Additionally, Berdal argues, the driving factor behind these activities should always be with the building of legitimacy, both for the intervening forces and for the administrative and governance structures on which a durable peace depends. However, it is the lack of an understanding of the local context mentioned above, that has 'too often doomed peace-building endeavours to ineffectiveness.'<sup>68</sup>

According to Berdal, if there is one overarching lesson from the post-conflict interventions in the 1990's it is that stability cannot be imposed on war-torn societies from the outside. This is recognised in the COIN field manual as well, stating that 'in the end, the host nation has to win on its own.'<sup>69</sup> This is mainly due two factors; the limited political will of intervening forces for an open-ended commitment any attempt to impose durable peace would require and more importantly, limits to what can be imposed from the outside. Stability, Berdal argues, has to be elicited, and the key to this lies in the notion of legitimacy.<sup>70</sup> For Berdal, it is vital that the governance structures put in place and promoted by the external forces command legitimacy in the eyes of the local parties, neighbouring states and the wider interna-

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<sup>67</sup> Berdal (2009), p. 19.

<sup>68</sup> Berdal (2009), p. 25.

<sup>69</sup> FM 3-24, p. 47.

<sup>70</sup> Berdal (2009), p. 97.



tional community.<sup>71</sup> Of these, local and regional legitimacy is of primary importance. The international community's tendency to focus on central governments, creating power-sharing mechanisms in the capitals combined with a 'social engineering' approach, has at times ignored local power structures, tensions and overlooked potential alternative paths to peace. Institutional and governmental models that may appear legitimate and just from the outside may not be regarded so by those impacted by it. As pointed out by many analysts of peace-building, domestic legitimacy is crucial.<sup>72</sup> Another aspect Berdal points to is that interveners often conclude that absence of (central) government implies absence of governance. However, local forms of governance may very well be in place, notwithstanding the presence of formal government institutions.<sup>73</sup> The very notion of a 'failed state', as it is often referred to in Western media and academia, presupposes a 'state-template' or a 'functioning state' to contrast it with. This is usually defined as a state with a potent central government, basic services and institutions and monopoly of the use of force, in other words a Western-style Weberian state.<sup>74</sup> The question is if intervening state-builders or counter-insurgency fighters sufficiently take these local governing structures into account when looking for political end-states. Political structures which emerge from existing forms of governance rather than being imposed from outside, are more likely to be regarded as legitimate and thereby last longer.

This is Alex de Waal's starting point when he criticises the very idea of functioning state institutions as the core of peace-building. He questions if state-building in the Weberian sense is the right remedy for war-torn societies with limited historical experience with centralised states. He points out that 'many of the world's most difficult conflicts occur in countries where any such state institutions are subordinate to social affinities and patronage networks, and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future'.<sup>75</sup> Wars in these places are not between hierarchically organized armies or groups, but loosely connected groups, held together through systems of loyalties and trade-offs. Neither rebels nor the government are not likely to be very disciplined or coordinated, but rather to 'operate in the same way: using kinship and patronage, and licensing proxies'.<sup>76</sup> The key for any political solution to the conflicts lies in these various relationships and their fluctuating evolution. De Waal describes this as a 'patrimonial marketplace', governed by socio-cultural rules:

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<sup>71</sup> Berdal (2009), pp. 98-100.

<sup>72</sup> Oliver Richmond and Jason Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions: Between State-building and Peace-building* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> Berdal (2009), pp. 123-24.

<sup>74</sup> See for example the 'Failed State Index', of the US Fund for Peace, <http://www.fundforpeace.org>

<sup>75</sup> de Waal (2009), p. 99.

<sup>76</sup> de Waal (2009), p. 101.

In the patrimonial political marketplace, the only semi-stable outcome is an inclusive buy-in of all elites by the best-resourced actor in the marketplace. Military victories are rarely decisive. More often, members of the losing side quickly negotiate a lower price for their loyalty. The best outcome falls short of stability because all loyalties are provisional pending shifts in the value of allegiances in the political marketplace. It follows that a successful international peace engagement will be one that supports the most inclusive and robust buy-in—one that is sufficiently well grounded in the relative value of the parties to survive the withdrawal of its international sponsors.

The term marketplace thus turns politics into a trade, where loyalty and legitimacy is fragile and resting on various forms of balance of power and rational interests. This model applies both between regional leaders and ‘their’ population and between regional leaders and the central authorities.<sup>77</sup> ‘Political life can be described as an auction of loyalties in which provincial elites seek to extract from one or other metropolitan centre the best price for their allegiance.’<sup>78</sup> In this model legitimacy is vested in the relevant stakeholders or power brokers, not every individual citizen of the state. There are no notions of popular support of a central government, or loyalty emerging out of the provisions of government services, as in the COIN field manual. On the contrary, de Waal argues that ‘in a weakly institutionalized country in which patrimony rules, any attempts to address supposed root causes such as injustice, lack of liberal democracy and unequal development may not help – or may even hinder – the achievement of more modest but realizable goals based on elite bargains’.<sup>79</sup>

According to de Waal, the basic rules of political bargaining are simple: ‘Provincial elite members seek to maximize the price they can obtain for their loyalty from metropolitan elites (mostly governments)... using the tools at their disposal, which include votes, extending or withdrawing economic cooperation, and the use of violence’.<sup>80</sup> Using examples from, among others, Tanzania, Nigeria, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, de Waal argues that such bargaining is the most common way of resolving conflict in these societies. Since the political environment is so fluid in a marketplace stability cannot rest on formal institutions or justice systems. Loyalties shift so ‘peace must be made and kept on a retail basis’.<sup>81</sup>

A crucial insight from these cases is that foreign-brokered peace accords may be less durable than a purely domestic one: ‘In a purely domestic bargaining exercise, the parties will approximate their true

<sup>77</sup> de Waal (2009), focuses on the relationship between central authorities and local power brokers, but similar relationships are also present at the lower level. Any regional leader will face challengers and competitors he needs to relate to in a similar way as with the central authorities and other regional leaders.

<sup>78</sup> de Waal (2009), p. 103.

<sup>79</sup> de Waal (2009), p. 110.

<sup>80</sup> de Waal (2009), pp. 103-04.

<sup>81</sup> de Waal (2009), p. 110.

respective values and agree a price which reflects that'.<sup>82</sup> This is not a 'give war a chance' kind of argument, that wars should be allowed to conclude by themselves and the subsequent fatigue and exhaustion will be the best platform for sustainable peace.<sup>83</sup> De Waal argues in favour of political solutions based on a trade-offs and legitimacy, not merely war-exhaustion. However, the presence and engagement by outsiders will always alter the local power-balance and distort the local political marketplace. As a result, the exit of the foreigners – or the expectation thereof – will create waves of re-positioning and bargaining. Less is therefore more when it comes to foreign engagement, and for the armed forces it is a good argument for keeping distance to local politics – but never ignoring it or being unaware of it. The mere presence of foreign troops will impact on the market place, and the troops need to be aware of how, but that does not entail explicit engagement in local brokering. As Kalyvas argues, 'reducing violence requires as much local action as action at the centre. At least in the short and medium term, tinkering with local control could be a more efficient way to achieve peace and stability than investing in mass attitudinal shift.... The allocation of troops and, especially, administrative resources should be based on a clear understanding of the local balance of control'.<sup>84</sup>

Recognizing that military victories are unlikely to be decisive in such societies, de Waal provides us with an approach which retains the crucial element of legitimacy recognized by COIN. However, instead of seeking to build legitimacy of the political system from every single individual ('the population'), he focuses on the relevant stakeholders in the marketplace. And instead of building legitimacy through government structures and provision of services, he emphasizes the power-relationships between the stakeholders in the political marketplace.

## Conclusion

By analysing COIN and its critics this article has sought to develop a revised theory of COIN in order to better inform future stability and counter-insurgency operations. In order to overcome the polarizing debate between the population-centric approach and the enemy-centric approach, this article has aimed at staking out a middle-ground between them. Through the insights offered from the peace-building literature we argue that a focus on stakeholders rather than the population or the enemy in a counter-insurgency operation is more likely to succeed in bringing long-term peace and stability to war-torn countries. It shares with the populations-centric approach the recognition of

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<sup>82</sup> de Waal (2009), p. 109.

<sup>83</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, 'Give War a Chance', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 4 (1999), pp. 36-44.

<sup>84</sup> Kalyvas (2005), p. 391.

political legitimacy for sustainable peace, but not that it should stem from the wider population. Furthermore, it shares with the enemy-centric approach that intervening forces primary focus should be on the insurgents and not the insurgency, but that this is not a narrow focus on defeating the enemy, but rather on the use of military force in order to create the conditions that allow for a stable political order. Although the intervening forces should primarily play a military role and not be state-builders we argue that conclusive results cannot be achieved through military means alone, and that a negotiated solution to bring stability is the best way to ensure a durable peace. This means that the focus of all counter-insurgency operations should be on what comes after the end of violence. Although this approach offers no panaceas on how to go about countering insurgencies, some key insights have been developed.

Of primary importance is the need to understand that all insurgencies are *sui generis* – of its own kind – and that each one is filled with different incentives and disincentives for the continuation of violence. This means that there can be no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to counterinsurgencies and that a focus on both the causes of the insurgency and the drivers of the insurgents are vital for understanding the nature of the insurgency. Such an understanding is paramount to inform the counter-insurgents on how to create the conditions that will allow for a peace process.

Understanding the nature of the insurgency and providing a solution to countering an insurgency is dependent upon what questions one asks. To paraphrase Kalyvas; asking what causes an insurgency is not the same as asking what causes violence within an insurgency. Whether one focuses on the causes of an insurgency or what causes the violence, one will get two very different answers that lead to different end-states and the ways and means of achieving this. The lack of a common starting point for debating COIN has, in many respects, led to stalemate in furthering our understanding on how to counter an insurgency. Clarifying what can reasonably be expected to be achieved with the available resources is in many respects a good start.

While agreeing with the enemy-centric approach that the proposed end-state of the population-centric approach is too ambitious, their narrow focus of defeating the enemy to achieve the limited end-state of stability will most likely not produce a lasting-peace. However, we agree that the focus of a counter-insurgency operation should be to facilitate a lasting stability and not a legitimate Host Nation government able to secure and govern itself. As such, this article proposes an end-state as; a political agreement between the main stakeholders in the conflict that is regarded as legitimate and ensures stability that is

acceptable to all.<sup>85</sup> The goal is to enable a political process that leads to an agreement between the main stakeholders that will allow the external forces to withdraw. Although this may seem like a very limited objective only focusing on ending hostilities and not aiming at reforming the governance of society, it is paramount for an intervening force to consider the social cohesion of a state and what can plausibly be constructed from the old order. The more sweeping the destruction of the existing order, the more likely there is that the society will become fragmented and subsequently, the more difficult establishment of domestic order is likely to be. Thus, this approach to counter-insurgency is aimed at consolidating the different factions in the conflict rather than an extensive re-engineering of the society. A counter-insurgency operation should therefore be stakeholder-centric, meaning that the focus of the effort should be on all the relevant military, political, social, religious etc. stakeholders in the society that may impact on a future political agreement. This will help shoring up legitimacy of the political agreement while it does not require a full-scale COIN operation aimed at protecting the population and reforming governance.

Building legitimacy through a political process is thus the way to achieve the ends in a stakeholder-centric approach. In this sense, legitimacy has to be thought of as what the stakeholders would most likely support or accept based on their standing in that particular society. Basing the political process on de Waal's local political marketplace rather than a top-down imposed negotiation from the centre allows this process to be more legitimate and thus have a greater chance of bringing stability over the long-term.

In stakeholder-centric COIN, the military objective is not limited to protecting the population or defeating the enemy but to facilitate a political process, adapted to the local political marketplace, that is deemed legitimate to all parties in the conflict. This means that the intervening forces military objective is to stop violent conflict and create the conditions for a political process. This is based on the argument that an intervening force can neither protect the population nor achieve unconditional surrender from the warring parties. Thus, a negotiated solution is the best one can hope for.

Following on from Kalyvas, we argue that military force is instrumental in influencing the decision-making calculus of the different stakeholders in order to compel them to enter into negotiation and eventually compromise. Compellence is military speak for uses of threats, or some degree of direct action to induce the opponent into giving up

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<sup>85</sup> While the term all depends on the context in which the counter-insurgency takes place, it necessarily includes the local, regional and international actors that have a stake in the conflict.

what is desired,<sup>86</sup> and create a desirable action. While deterrence, the other of the two sides of coercion, is concerned with maintaining the status quo and prevent change, compellence is more or less the opposite, as it desires a change in the status quo or the return to the previously disrupted status quo. Because one is confronted with forces that already have changed the status quo, this is why compellence and not deterrence should be the main idea for the use of force in a stakeholder-centric approach to countering insurgencies. In this sense, military force becomes instrumental in changing the balance of power on the battlefield and induce action that is desirable to the peace process. This change in turn have to be followed up by a concrete plan of negotiation that have to acknowledge the need to offer the stakeholders more than just an opportunity to disarm. Insights from the peacebuilding literature and especially de Waals concept of the local political marketplace, makes it possible to argue that such an approach should be the basis of any counter-insurgency operation.

The problem here is that the balance of power is fragile. This means that an initial response to the insurgency will have to consider its actions carefully. As all belligerents in a conflict should be regarded as stakeholders, only supporting the Host Nation government against armed opposition would seriously hamper any later efforts at consolidating peace through negotiations. The more you support one side, the less the chance of success. If one goes too far, the Host Nation government is likely to push for more compromises than the insurgent leaders would have been willing to accept had the situation on the ground been different. If a negotiated solution is made on these terms, it may not be lasting as it will not be accepted as legitimate by the stakeholders. The negotiated solution would have to be something all parties can live with in order for it to be sustainable and survive the withdrawal of external forces. As such, one need to take into account that the Host Nation government is part of the Host Nation stakeholders and that the more you support one side the less chance of success. Also, as an external intervention into any conflict is based on national interests and one has to understand where one's own objective overlaps with the Host Nation stakeholders and where not. A carefully thought out strategy on how to achieve one's own objectives according to one's interests is crucial at the start of the involvement.

A stakeholder-centric approach can only work if the intervening forces are able to overcome what Berdal argued was a lack of understanding of the local context. If one is to influence and compel local stakeholders in a conflict to engage in a peace process, a careful analysis, and especially the incentives and disincentives for violence of all the

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<sup>86</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 79.

stakeholders must be in place. Without a proper appreciation of the political and socio-cultural context in which military force are being applied, this approach will be doomed to ineffectiveness.

The lack of a clear strategy from the beginning of the American interventions in both Afghanistan and Iraq has encouraged a number of scathing critiques. The American Way of War has been critiqued for its ‘tactical and apolitical orientation’ as well as neglecting ‘the political and socio-cultural context’ in which military force was used.<sup>87</sup> In relation to what Antulio J. Echevarria II views as a narrow focus on defeating the enemy over achieving political goals, he argues that:

... the new American way of war considers... post-conflict operations not as a part of war itself, but something belonging to its aftermath. This unhelpful distinction obscures the fact that the principal condition for strategic success in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq was the establishment of a political (and to a certain extent an economic) order favourable to the United States. Failure to see the purpose for which a war is fought as part of war itself amounts to treating battle as an end rather than a means.<sup>88</sup>

The failure of not having a clear strategy for consolidating the initial military success into political success in the two interventions contributed to the growing problem of insurgencies in both countries. The COIN field manual – that grew out of the chaos in Afghanistan and especially Iraq – can be seen as a reaction to the failure to see post-conflict operations as part of war itself, and subsequently as an effort to amend some of this narrow focus by including stability operations and state-building as part of COIN. However, as the wars have dragged on, the field manual and its implementation have increasingly come under attack for being too ambitious and too costly. Instead, critics have increasingly turned back to the narrow approach of defeating the enemy, once again neglecting the post-war phase and overlooking wars purpose – the creation of a ‘better peace’.

Although strategy is difficult to do well,<sup>89</sup> it remains crucial as it is the cornerstone for connecting political goals with military means. Thus the essence of operational art – translating the political and strategic aims into operational and tactical objectives – in any counter-insurgency operation must be to create the conditions favourable to political order. This means that one must appreciate that the establishment of order is central for a strategic victory and must be viewed as part of war itself and that any use of force must be applied to attain political goals rather than tactical military aims. In a stakeholder-

<sup>87</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, ‘Re-Assessing the American Way of War’, *Orbis* (Summer 2011), p. 525.

<sup>88</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Toward an American Way of War* (place of publication: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004).

<sup>89</sup> Colin S. Gray, (1999), ‘Why Strategy Is Difficult’, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 22, Summer 1999, pp. 80-86

centric approach this means that a good strategy must account for a dynamic political context that can easily change when force is applied and an opponent with own options and goals, whose own behaviour are shaped by local political social and cultural norms.