



Robert M. Cassidy. *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror: Military Culture and Irregular War.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008. 224 pp. \$23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-5966-3.



Reviewed by John Reed

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Commissioned by Janet G. Valentine (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College - Dept of Mil Hist)

The Usual Suspects, the Standard Indictment

Three interrelated arguments structure Robert M. Cassidy's *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror: Military Culture and Irregular War*. First, Cassidy finds that the U.S. military is doctrinally ill-equipped to resolve the paradoxes of asymmetric conflict against global Islamic insurgencies in the post-9/11 world. Secondly, he conducts post mortems on a selection of twentieth-century counterinsurgency campaigns and traces their failed outcomes to defects in the counterinsurgent power's military culture and preferred paradigm of war. And finally, he distills from these struggles the operational principle most essential to success in counterinsurgency: leveraging partners and local forces to fight a protracted war (p.127), anticipating General David H. Petraeus's 2007 embrace of the Sunni Awakening in Iraq's Anbar governorate. Cassidy's study is an excellent review of the operational history of twentieth-century counterinsurgency based on a greater diversity of case studies than either John Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (2002, reissued 2005) or Marc Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and*

Practice (1964, reissued 2006).

Cassidy gives the Russian and U.S. armies low marks in counterinsurgency while praising the British for empirically distilling the principles now enshrined in Army Field Manual 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* (December 15, 2006). Before 2003, however, the U.S. Army's senior leadership focused on force structures and doctrine, appropriate to high-intensity maneuver warfare to the exclusion of all forms of unconventional conflict. Cassidy identifies the usual suspects and arraigns them under the now standard indictment issued by Andrew F. Krepinevich in his 1986 *The Army and Vietnam*. Harry Summers, Caspar Weinburger, Colin Powell, their contemporaries and successors said never again to guerrilla warfare and transformed the army under AirLand Battle doctrine to enable it to defeat the Soviet army short of the Rhine without the use of theater nuclear weapons in a war that never occurred.

However, Cassidy's thirty-year extension of Krepinevich's indictment entails two fundamental anachro-

nisms. First, before 1991 the Group of Soviet Forces Germany posed a greater threat to national security than any combination of insurgent groups in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. And secondly, no one in the U.S. Army's senior leadership could have anticipated receiving the mission to conquer, occupy, and administer Iraq in 2003 without the essential supporting elements of non-kinetic national power. Thus, no conceivable reallocation of resources within Training and Doctrine Command could have prepared the army for the *specific* nonlinear environment it encountered in Iraq as a result of profound failures at the strategic level that deprived the army of coherent strategic direction, nonpoliticized intelligence, in-country interagency cooperation, and sufficient stabilization assets. In the aftermath of this crippling strategic failure, we have been presented with a succession of counterinsurgency techniques in search of achievable war aims no less troubling than the Vietnam War's "strategy of tactics."

This highlights a central limitation of security studies that discuss the strategic and operational levels of the Long War in isolation from each other. The impression one receives from Cassidy's text is that any counterinsurgency can be defeated through environmentally adaptive doctrinal innovations *alone*, which somehow "trickle up" to constitute strategic success. He dismisses Clausewitzian categories as mechanical and linear, irrelevant to the "age of information dominance and global insurgents" (p.150), revealing his unfamiliarity with Clausewitz's anticipation of nonlinearity, a concept essential to understanding the relationship between cause and effect in the global war on terror.[1] One of Clausewitz's key insights was that grave errors at the strategic level cannot be corrected by operational and tactical virtuosity, but must instead force the national leadership to modify or abandon its initial war aims. Thus, however adeptly the *army* institutionalizes lessons learned from the Philippines, Nicaragua, Malaya, Algeria, Vietnam, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, the *nation* will con-

tinue to risk failure in the future whenever it franchises out to its military the effort to achieve a political end state which cannot be achieved *operationally* through application or non-application of state violence, the army's professional core competence. Cassidy criticizes the Vietnam era obsession with firepower and military technology, but he has reified counterinsurgency *technique* in its place.

Cassidy has written an otherwise useful survey that implies that the army, operating autonomously at the operational level, can compensate for flawed, contradictory, or nonexistent strategic direction in the Long War. However, expanding the counterinsurgency playbook and criticizing previous generations of army leadership (safe enough when they're retired), no longer qualifies as "thinking outside the box." While officers in the field must try one thing after another until something works, security intellectuals (who are not dodging explosively formed penetrators and do not receive officer evaluation reports) must address all elements of the struggle that bear on national success or failure, to include the current reversal of the correct hierarchical relationship between civilian strategic direction and theater command. *That* would assist the army out of its current morass. *Then* we can begin a discussion critical to the post-Iraq "get well" period. For the present, the army will continue to "go after the bad guys" with predator drones or soccer balls, as situationally appropriate. However, in the near future it needs to learn how to protect itself, the nation it serves, and the Anglo-American tradition of civilian control, while simultaneously pushing back against war aims determined by domestic political considerations and chimerical "new realities."

Note

[1]. Alan Beyerchen, "Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War," *International Security* 17 (1992-1993): 59-90.

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