



**A. J. Birtle.** *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976.* Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 2006. xv + 570 pp. \$49.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-16-072959-1; \$52.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-16-072960-7.



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## Counterinsurgency and Stability Doctrine *Déjà vu*

Anyone who wants to understand the background of how the U.S. Army adapted its doctrine to better conduct operations in Iraq and Afghanistan should read this book. Not only will the reader learn about counterinsurgency theory and doctrinal development from the Second World War through the end of the Vietnam conflict, they will gain a broad, yet nuanced, understanding of this complex and dynamic form of warfare, and how it was, and is being, fought. This book is an outstanding follow-on to A.J. Birtle's *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860-1941* published in 2003. Both of these volumes are part of the curriculum at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Between 1942 and 1975, occupation duty and military government; dealing with Wars of National Liberation; understanding Mao's People's War methodology; and fighting numerous low intensity conflicts dominated military operations for the U.S. Army. Although the nuclear arms race, the Korean War, and the conventional force standoff in Europe are the more often studied Cold

War events, counterinsurgency and contingency operations are more representative of what the military actually did during this period. Birtle, very successfully and very clearly, explains how the army adapted to and met the nation's need to conduct counterinsurgency and limited peacetime contingency operations. Readers will find themselves frustrated as they learn of a bureaucracy fighting necessary change, but also hopeful as they read of the people and processes that designed and implemented systematic change in a very large and diverse organization.

After an excellent stage-setting introduction the book is arranged chronologically. Birtle then describes the operations conducted during a specific period, assesses lessons learned or observed, and discusses how new doctrine was either written or adapted as the conflicts and missions progressed. Chapters 2 through 4 look at four advisory efforts (China, Greece, the Philippines, and Indochina) and at counterinsurgency operations in Korea to offer an analysis of the state of army doctrine on the eve of the Vietnam period. Chapter 5 highlights contingency

operations and Cold War era interventions in Lebanon, Thailand, and the Dominican Republic. In perhaps the most interesting and enlightening chapter in the book, chapter 6 ("The Counterinsurgency Ferment, 1961-65"), Birtle paints a picture of an army in turmoil, trying to come to grips with a form of conflict it was not trained, organized, or prepared to fight on the scale demanded by the national leadership. This period is also highlighted in chapter 1 ("Brushfires on a Cold Dawn") and chapter 2 ("The Revolution That Failed") in Andrew Krepinevich's book, *The Army in Vietnam* (1986).

It is not hard to make comparisons of this period with the army's struggle to develop counterinsurgency and stability operations doctrine for the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan after the successful initial operations. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy issued National Security Action Memorandum 131, directing counterinsurgency education and training for the appropriate government agencies. Similarly, President George W. Bush issued National Security Presidential Directive 44 in December of 2005, directing very similar tasks and actions. Then, as now, both the army and the nation struggled to provide a comprehensive and consistent civilian-military approach to these complex political-military operations. Chapter 7, which looks at the military advisory efforts in Latin America and Asia from 1955-75, is also extremely relevant to ongoing operations. In June 2008, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates (in his National Defense Strategy document) discussed the critical importance of training and advising host nation military forces. The military is reconsidering doctrine, education, and training for U.S. forces as U.S. military advisors on various transition teams, deployed with both Iraqi and Afghani security forces, are taking on a more significant role.

The last three chapters delve into the Vietnam conflict, and how doctrine was written, applied, revised, and reapplied; they also examine changes that were made in training and educating the Army. Birtle rightly highlights the critical role played by the Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson, who from 1964 to 1967, personally directed the research, writing, and updating of counterinsurgency and stability operations doctrine to

insure a workable and consistent approach to this type of warfare. Once again, the comparisons to recent efforts to update and write new doctrine stand out. Linda Robinson's recently published book *Tell Me How This Ends: General Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (2008) details David H. Petraeus's leading role. While General Petraeus commanded Fort Leavenworth—home of the U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center, and its Command and General Staff College—the army published Field Manual 3-24 *Counterinsurgency Operations* (December 2006), arguably the first comprehensive counterinsurgency manual since the Vietnam War era. In addition, the army recently published Field Manual 3-07 *Stability Operations* (October 2008), updating a manual first published under General Johnson's guidance in 1967.

In his final chapter, *The Counterinsurgency Legacy* Birtle concludes with the insight that the core of Army counterinsurgency and stability operations doctrine, although revised and refined, was "essentially unchanged" (p. 468). Looking at the long sweep of counterinsurgency and contingency doctrinal development from 1860 to 1970 detailed in Birtle's two books, we see evolution and revision, but no revolution, in military thought about this complex form of warfare, and the conduct of military operations in such an operational environment. If Birtle writes a third volume covering 1976 to 2008 the conclusion would probably be much the same—adaptation and evolutionary change. If our army has conducted so much of this type of warfare and our doctrine has really changed so little, why do we constantly have to relearn old lessons? Sadly, one has to ask the question: why is it that the army will not study its own history and read its own doctrine? Birtle has provided two excellent and well-documented volumes of history and analysis of counterinsurgency, and contingency doctrine and operations. This second volume, covering the period 1942 to 1975, is a must read for every military officer, student of military history, and citizen concerned about how the military is going to deal with terrorism, insurgency, and failed states in an era of persistent conflict, as well as for all those interested in studying change in large organizations.

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