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ISSN 2474-8552 (print); ISSN 2474-8560 (online)
GEORGETOWN SECURITY STUDIES REVIEW

Published by the Center for Security Studies at Georgetown University’s Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service

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Letter from the Editor

This January, we are pleased to present the Georgetown Security Studies Review Volume 7, Issue 1.

Our peer review process, once again, yielded articles of exemplary scholarship that touch on the myriad of security issues facing us today. You will find that the selected essays complement each other taking a candid look at Great Power threats, NATO membership, and also insightful analyses on counterinsurgency applications. Thank you to our authors who so diligently suffered through the editing process.

Excitingly, this past autumn marked the creation of our inaugural Faculty Advisory Board. We would like to extend our deepest thanks to Dr. Keir Lieber who supported us greatly throughout this process.

I am proud to introduce the members of the Georgetown Security Studies Review Faculty Advisory Board:

Susan Bryant  Paula Doyle  Rebecca Patterson
Ben Buchanan  Keir Lieber  Elizabeth Stanley
Daniel Byman  Michael Mazarr  Albert Willner

Looking ahead, we are energized to make more strategic advancements with the support of our Advisory Board. This past year notably saw an increase in GSSR staff and readership of our Forum.

The GSSR would like to thank the following for their help and contributions to the Review to make that possible:

Annie Kraft, Security Studies Program
Meg Oakley, Georgetown University Library
Integrated Books International

Thank you for reading our signature publication. I hope the ideas within the Review allow you as a scholar or practitioner to better make sense of the very real challenges of the day.

My best wishes,

Rebekah H. Kennel
Editor-in-Chief, January 2019
Georgetown, Washington D.C.
The Ideal Tool of Nations: War Control in Chinese Military Thought

Howard Wang

The concept of war control (zhànzhēng kòngzhì 战争控制) occupies significant space in Chinese strategic thought. The concept attempts to inform when and how the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) should use force to initiate or escalate an armed conflict and reveals concerning Chinese strategic beliefs, including the notion that combat intensity can be consistently and precisely adjusted. War control in current PLA literature is narrowly constructed as the capacity to control and adjust warfighting intensity by controlling warfare techniques, the pace of battle, and the method of war termination; additionally, successful employment of war control creates windows of opportunity to accomplish political objectives even without, or at the expense of, conventional operational success. War control does not have a ready Western equivalent and, as a result, may facilitate lethal misperceptions if employed in combat. This article examines war control as defined in the 2013 Science of Military Strategy (zhànlüè xué 战略学) and proposes a model for understanding how Chinese strategists use principles of war control to frame their wartime operational and political objectives. This model is then used to understand the role of war control in Chinese warfighting experiences in the Korean War, the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis, and a hypothetical forced Taiwan reunification campaign.

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping has presented a vision of Chinese rejuvenation1 in which the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is recognized as a powerful nation capable of leading an Asian system of security cooperation that excludes the United States.2 Growing PRC influence in the Asia-Pacific3 increases the likelihood that Chinese forces may be employed to address regional crises, including a possible conflict with the United States.4 Yet how the modern People’s Liberation Army (PLA) fights is not well understood. The concept of war control has a significant presence in Chinese strategic documents published since 2000 and may define when and how the PRC decides to start, escalate, and end armed conflict. However, war control has not been a static concept in PLA writings, and it is essential to analyze how the concept has evolved in PLA thought.

The PLA concept of war control has evolved from its first extensive treatment in the 2001 edition of the PRC Academy of Military Science (AMS)-published Science of Military Strategy (zhànlüè xué 战略学), from here on written as SMS, to its more abbreviated treatment in the most recent 2013 edition. Much American scholarship on war control has drawn holistically from both editions of the SMS as well as various other PLA documents informed by either edition; however, changing Chinese threat perceptions between the publication of each edition have produced in the 2013 SMS a concept of war control narrower in scope and more operationally-focused than the more theoretically-predicated definition in the 2001 edition. This paper explores the 2013 definition of war control and elaborates on existing models for understanding war control’s operationalization.

This paper is divided into six sections. The first section introduces war control as it is expressed in the 2001 SMS and reviews past U.S. scholarship on the text. The second section defines war control as it is constructed in the 2013 SMS and examines the changing strategic perceptions underpinning the updated definition as well as any incompatibilities the new definition has with the 2001 definition. Section two also covers Chinese ideational factors
which enable and constrain the application of war control as currently understood.

The third section elaborates on aspects of Lonnie Henley’s 2006 model to identify defining attributes of war control operations and how the PLA anticipates using war control to achieve PRC political goals. The fourth section uses this updated model to examine the relative success of early war control efforts when employed in the Korean War and the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis. The fifth section uses this model to propose how PLA war control might shape the nature of conflict in a hypothetical forced reunification campaign in Taiwan. In the sixth and final section, I outline the relative weaknesses involved with this analysis.

**Persistence of the 2001 Definition of War Control**

American scholars have typically studied PLA thought on war control as a component of escalation control entailing both crisis and conflict management should the former fail and necessitate the latter. Such analyses draw heavily from the 2001 *SMS*, which dedicates a full chapter to war control and its objective: to “prevent the occurrence of war, and once the war is inevitable . . . to control its vertical and horizontal escalation . . . to reduce the negative consequences or to gain a major victory at minor cost.” In a 2006 analysis, Lonnie Henley describes war control as a still-evolving concept of crisis management meant to employ “all elements of comprehensive national power (CNP) to shape the international environment and make war less likely,” and to further manage military options once combat has started.

Alison Kaufman and Daniel Hartnett affirmed Henley’s analysis in a 2016 report by examining war control as a stage of crisis control, which manages “the unfolding of events so that the speed and intensity of the situation do not exceed one’s ability to shape the outcome in a way that furthers one’s own interests.” In 2004, then CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao announced an updated mission set commonly referred to as the “New Historic Missions,” which called for improving PLA capabilities across the continuum of conflict; Kaufman and Hartnett used the New Historic Mission as a framework for understanding war control, which they interpreted as the operational imperative to manage “the full spectrum of conflict, from peacetime to crisis to escalation to full-on warfare.” They argue that war control is a “holistic term that encompasses all activities related to crisis and conflict control across a range of domains and over an extended period of time,” and suggest this definition is consistent with “Western analyses presented in the mid-2000s,” including Henley’s. By affirming analyses of war control produced prior to the 2013 *SMS*’s publication, Kaufman and Hartnett embrace the war control concept provided in the 2001 *SMS* and Western analyses referencing it.

Burgess Laird presented a similarly expansive understanding of war control in his 2017 analysis, which also depended on the definition provided in the 2001 *SMS*. In his 2017 analysis, Burgess Laird argued that “the control of war” in PLA writings “comes down to the issue of limiting the political, economic, and military goals of war as well as its scope, scale, tempo, and means, all while striving to obtain a favorable outcome at the smallest possible cost.” Laird interprets war control as a fundamentally political concept and emphasizes not the relative scope of PLA capabilities to exert control over battlefield situations but rather the alignment between CCP political ambitions and PLA military capabilities to realize those ambitions at minimal cost. The essence of war control under this construction is to exercise political restraint: Laird highlights passages in the 2013 *SMS* which he argues “warn against a ‘blind expansion’ of political goals when military operations are succeeding and ‘inappropriate recklessness’ when ‘it is no longer possible to achieve the fixed military goals.’”
Much of the American scholarship examining the Chinese concept of war control continues to affirm the validity of, and draws upon, the 2001 SMS to understand war control. However, the 2013 SMS reflects significant changes in PLA strategic outlook that undermines the relevance of the 2001 SMS.

Modern War Control Defined

In 2006, Henley argued that the PLA was far from “the full implementation of [war control] concepts in the operational force” and anticipated further conceptual evolution from what was presented in the 2001 SMS. Although Kaufman, Hartnett, and Laird offer plausible arguments that the 2001 definition remains authoritative, the 2013 SMS supports Henley’s prediction of conceptual evolution and expresses a strategic outlook, emphasis, and definition of war control largely incompatible with those presented in the 2001 edition.

One key indicator suggesting the definition of war control evolved between the two volumes. Peng Guangqian, the editor-in-chief of the 2001 volume, claimed to have invented the concept of war control and dedicated a full chapter to the subject. By doing so, Peng elevated the importance of war control to other subjects with full chapters in the 2001 SMS, such as war preparation, strategic deterrence, and the “general laws of war and conduct of war.”

That war control had no such prominence before the 2001 SMS and indeed may have originated with the volume suggests that edition’s definition is Peng’s personal project and may not reflect other PLA strategists’ thinking.

Peng did not lead the writing of the 2013 SMS, however, and the contrast makes clear his impact in the 2001 edition. Shou Xiaosong led composition of the 2013 SMS and reduces Peng’s entire chapter on war control to a single reference to the concept, noting its increasing prominence in the military strategies of great powers.

Further, the substance of war control in the two SMS editions are incompatible. As discussed above, Peng’s 2001 definition of war control was expansive: it was intended to prevent war, control vertical and horizontal escalation when war initiates, and maximize strategic gains at minimal cost. In contrast, war control in the 2013 SMS is defined by the capacity to control and adjust warfighting intensity (可调控武力), which the PLA argues constitutes the ideal tool for a nation to affect its policy objectives (实现国家政策的理想工具) within the strategic opportunity that exists between total war and total peace (全面战争与全面和平之间增加新的战略选择). For war control to exist between total war and total peace runs counter to arguments that PLA strategists intend war control to prevent war, as Peng claimed. Rather, war control as presented in the 2013 SMS reflects the careful modulation of warfighting intensity once total peace has been ruptured. It is a strictly tactical tool which does not connote any of the political or strategic imperatives of the 2001 volume, least of all that wars should be prevented or de-escalation pursued. That the 2013 SMS describes a theater in which peace is ruptured as presenting a strategic opportunity and war control as the ideal tool to affect its policy objectives suggests it is a tool to ensure the CCP will not have to compromise its political ambitions due to limited military capabilities.

The 2013 concept’s narrowed scope and proclivity for using conflict rather than preventing it is consistent with new Chinese threat perceptions in a changing security environment as exhibited in the 2013 SMS. Compared to the 2001 volume, the 2013 SMS more frequently and more explicitly identifies the United States as the PRC’s chief adversary (对手) and accuses the U.S. of facilitating a hostile security environment by attempting to strategically encircle (全面围堵).
China and deny the PRC pursuit of its national interests. The newer volume also discusses at length potential conflicts the PLA may face in this new hostile security environment, “including not only a large-scale invasion of China or a war with Taiwan, but also conflicts over disputed territories or instability in neighboring states.” Where the 2001 edition conceptualized a theoretical framework of military strategy, the 2013 edition “stresses the nature of the threats and wars that China will face,” particularly as they relate to perceived American aggression or posturing.14

With this updated security paradigm, grand notions of shaping the security environment and managing escalation to avoid conflict are moot; the United States is already a hostile power whose antagonism predicates a problematic security environment for the PRC, and the PLA’s imminent concern is developing tools necessary to win once peace is ruptured.

**War Control as an Ideal Tool**

The concept of war control in the 2013 SMS offers no hints toward any general imperative to prevent war. Nor does it involve any crisis management to prevent war from occurring. Kaufman and Hartnett’s analysis, which treats war control as a component of escalation control covering the full spectrum of conflict from total peace to total war, better captures the separate concept of effective control (yǒuxiào kòngzhì 有效控制), which largely describes how the PRC “seeks to change the means by which strategic goals may be achieved short of war.”15 As explained above, 2013 SMS specifies that war control is used within the opportunity between total war and total peace. The outbreak of war is a condition which makes war control possible. Preventing war is not among its imperatives.

The 2013 SMS notably supports Laird’s analysis of war control as a concept that aligns political ambition with military capability; however, while Laird’s analysis argues war control emphasizes exercising restraint against excessive expansion of political goals, the description of war control as an ideal tool to realize state policy demonstrates that the PLA seeks to align ambition with capability by empowering the latter rather than tempering the former.

Laird rightly highlights, though misinterprets, that “Chinese military commanders are urged to differentiate between political goals and military goals and, recognizing that the latter serve the former, ‘appropriately adjust the military goals when necessary.’”16 While mindless aggrandizement of political objectives is a universally recognized detriment, the emphasis in Laird’s quotation is on adjusting military goals to ensure political success even in the absence of operational success or at great operational cost, not modulating political objectives to fit operational successes.

That a tool employing precise control over warfighting intensity is proposed as necessary for aligning CCP ambition and PLA capability, constitutes a tacit acknowledgement that CCP political ambitions demand more than a conventional understanding of what PLA operational capabilities can deliver. War control may become the ideal tool of nations insofar as it can be employed to achieve strategic success from a position of weakness or otherwise un-ideal conditions. As will be detailed below, these efforts to employ available strategic resources to extract maximum political benefit may include rupturing peace in order to initiate, perpetuate, or resolve a war on favorable terms.

As such, war control is a decidedly different concept than any ideas which prescribe or are predicated upon peaceful conditions. War control is not the mitigation effort Yan Xuetong calls “conflict control” under which “armed conflict should be averted at all costs.”17 Additionally, because deterrence and crisis management preclude ongoing armed conflict, war control cannot be equated with effective control, though it is arguably a factor within such.18

The better informing concept is quánbiàn (权变), a principle of “weighing
the situation and responding to [advantageous] change. It is an axiom asserting absolute flexibility; any limits on acceptable actions are primarily political, not normative.’ Quanbian is the Chinese answer to a dynamic world, insisting a strategist must be free of “political, military, or moral limits” and free to adapt to change insofar as “constant change is the key characteristic of conflict situations.” Quanbian is demonstrably a key factor informing war control, which as of the 2013 SMS is no longer intended to “effectively manage crises and prevent unintended escalation,” only to manage conflict in the event of war. Rather, by precisely controlling warfighting intensity, war control is intended to ensure flexibility in military options so the CCP can realize its political ambitions and affect its desired policy without compromise, even when opposed by a militarily superior opponent. The 2013 SMS describes war control as an ideal tool for succeeding in un-ideal circumstances.

*Binding Imperatives: Limited War and Strategic Offense*

Chinese strategists take as given that the advent of nuclear weapons means “the era of unlimited warfare is over,” which to them seems to mean that the world is “safe for war.” According to the 2013 SMS, the unlimited destructive power of nuclear weapons compels nations to curb the political goals of war and the means with which they wage it such that wars are limited. Rather, PLA strategists argue total war will not be reached as long as the means employed “do not threaten national survival, do not cause fundamental harm to the national economic entities, and do not threaten the realization of the strategic objectives of national development.” So long as the PRC believes these constraints are inviolable and so no threat it issues will be seen as existential, PLA strategists appear to believe the world is safe for conventional escalation and war. In this way, war control possibilities exist in the strategic space between total war and total peace: war control is possible in limited war.

It is consistent with Chinese strategic culture to treat this perceived safety as license for aggression: “China’s strategic behavior exhibits a preference for offensive uses of force, mediated by a keen sensitivity to relative capabilities.” The 2013 SMS celebrates a robust will to fight (gànyú yìngzhàn 敢于应战) as critical for what it considers early military victories. This preference for offensive force is reinforced in the document’s description of forward defense (qiányán fángwèi 前沿防御), a concept it asserts must become the “foundational concept of China’s military strategy,” and which integrates offensive and defensive capabilities by employing strategic offense as a mode of active defense. This preference for offense is not a Maoist development: pre-Qin Chinese political theorists encouraged the use of offensive force against “those who resisted the all-unifying prerogatives of virtue.” As part of a strategic culture, the Chinese proclivity for using offensive force likely informs CCP political goals and creates an inclination toward achieving those goals by means of attack. By carefully controlling warfighting intensity to escalate only at opportune moments, war control is the tool employed so this politico-cultural proclivity can be strategically expressed.

*Operationalizing War Control Techniques*

Though the substance of war control in the 2013 and 2001 SMS differ, there are also important consistencies. The objective of war control still includes “striving to minimize the war’s consequences or to achieve the greatest victory for the smallest price,” and the essential outcome of successful war control is demonstrated by the accomplishment of political objectives in un-ideal operational conditions. This section briefly examines essential factors which constitute the operational and political success of war control and concludes with a model describing conditions
in which war control was successfully employed.

Henley highlighted three operational factors of warfighting intensity which remain descriptive of war control as a tool for quanbian: 1) control of warfare techniques (zhànzhēng shǒuduàn 战争手段), 2) control of the pace, rhythm, and intensity of the conflict, and 3) control of the war’s end. Henley also noted the importance of “seizing the political and military initiative (zhǔ dòng 主动),” which empowers the PRC to restrict opponents’ freedom of action and set the conflict’s agenda.29

Control of Warfare Techniques

This control is typically employed to modulate the nature of war given “the increased killing power of modern weapons and the increased transparency of the battlefield,” which may generate significant blowback should expedient means harden an opponent’s resolve to fight.30 While such control does not mean extreme techniques are prohibited, any such decision must be carefully weighed for relative contribution to accomplishing a political end.

Among warfare techniques, the vertical escalation from conventional to nuclear weapons demands the highest level of control. Not only do nuclear weapons pose existential threats and invite responses in kind but the employment of nuclear weapons by any party shatters the expectation of limited war upon which war control is predicated. If a conflict is not certain to be fought with limited means to limited ends, the PRC risks losing its ideal tool to accomplish political victory in un-ideal conditions.

Control of the Pace, Rhythm, and Intensity of Conflict

This manner of control is a broad-based effort to “shape the course of the war in order to better serve larger political and foreign policy objectives,” particularly in managing advantages: “the side that holds the initiative can press the offensive and bring the conflict to a resolution while that advantage still holds; the side that is on the defensive can slow and drag out the conflict while it seeks an opportunity to reverse the situation.”31

In order to press the offensive, PLA writings emphasize creating operational windows of opportunity by “conducting offensive operations at the beginning of a campaign in order to seize the initiative,” often by striking first;32 this often requires “immediate deployment of sizeable forces as early as possible,” beginning war operations with a surge.33 These PLA writers argue that seizing the initiative acts as strategic deterrence. The 2013 SMS describes the components of strategic deterrence as preparatory work (yì jī jí bèizhàn 以积极备战), a robust will to fight (gān yú yìngzhàn 敢于应战), and, less explicitly, willingness to escalate conflict in early stages of combat in order to prevent further escalation to total war (yù fáng shēngjí 预防升级).34 The 2013 SMS points to the Korean War, Sino-Indian War, and Sino-Vietnamese War as proof of this concept.35

Control of the War’s End

PLA analysts are particularly concerned with the threat of protracted wars burdening PRC economic development or prolonging a conflict past the point it serves the national interest. These analysts consider terminating conflict before this point a “particular strength of the Chinese strategic perspective.” However, as discussed below, the escalatory means by which China has historically ended conflicts presents a mixed view of PLA war termination efforts.36

PLA writings also describe seizing the initiative to induce ceasefire or surrender when ending wars, “possibly entailing rapid commitment of additional elite forces in the final stages of the war, as well as a great degree of flexibility and precise control of military operations.”37 Dr. Oriana Skylar Mastro’s research has found that CCP leaders reliably employed escalation to end wars, demonstrating a confidence “that they could escalate to rapidly
impose peace against stronger and weaker opponents.”

Seizing the Initiative

As discussed above, while control over warfare techniques is an exercise in restraint, PLA writings prescribe particular means to seize the initiative when controlling conflict pace, rhythm, and intensity or when controlling the events of war termination. To seize the initiative is to identify and take advantage of windows of opportunity which enable a commander to dictate battlefield conditions. Given the political nature of war control, these windows of opportunity must be understood not as means to accomplish military goals, but rather means to accomplish political goals by military means; seizing the initiative is thus the locus at which successful war control operations become politicized military operations.

Whether the initiative is seized is the essential link between war control operational factors and the realization of political goals. In the face of un-ideal conditions, Henley’s operational factors are only successful if they are employed at opportune moments and ultimately contribute to realizing CCP political objectives.

A Model for Successful War Control

The degree to which the PLA successfully employed war control techniques can be determined by assessing whether the PLA’s operations met the below conditions. Conditions 1–3 are Henley’s operational factors, condition 4 determines whether the operation employing conditions 1–3 took place within a window of opportunity, and condition 5 expresses whether the CCP’s political goals for the conflict at large were ultimately achieved.

Conditions for Successful Use of War Control:

1. Control of Warfare Techniques. The PLA demonstrates control over warfare techniques it employs in the conflict, to include strategic vertical escalations and de-escalations and prevent nuclear attacks.

2. Control of Pace, Rhythm, and Intensity. The PLA demonstrates control over the pace, rhythm, and intensity of the conflict, to include strategic horizontal and vertical escalations and de-escalations in a timely fashion.

3. Control of the War’s End. The PLA demonstrates control over the timing, nature, and outcomes of the conflict termination process.

4. Seizing the Initiative. Where a window of opportunity for the PLA to demonstrate such control as in conditions 1–3 arises, the PLA successfully seizes the initiative to do so.

5. Political Success. Employment of conditions 1–3 is successful when simultaneously achieving condition 4, constituting the operation’s or campaign’s political success.

War Control in Recent Chinese Military History

Whether modern concepts of war control are in fact employed or operationalized by the PLA remains uncertain; the SMS is a product of PLA strategists and their views but does not describe “China’s official military strategy or its military strategic guidelines (军事战略方针), nor does it contain a detailed discussion of the PLA’s current operational doctrine.” However, one can inform a broader understanding of war control by looking for aspects of its successful use in the PRC’s military history.

Recent research into Chinese military escalation, particularly as a prerequisite to war termination, offers a particularly salient history for identifying Chinese war control operations. Such escalations, if strategically timed and executed, seize the initiative to achieve CCP-designated political goals and express China’s offensive
strategic culture. This section will examine how PLA operations met the five conditions for successful use of war control in the Korean War and 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis.

**Korean War**

*Pace, Rhythm, and Intensity*

Under the orders of then-CCP Chairman Mao Zedong, the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army (PVA) successfully seized the initiative when controlling pace, rhythm, and intensity throughout Chinese involvement in the Korean War. The PVA’s entry to the Korean War was a particularly cogent example of seizing battlefield initiative. In an effort to avoid a war of attrition in Korea, the PRC in October 1950 committed a “massive” force upon entering the war in an effort to quickly resolve the conflict. Consistent with Chinese strategic culture, the PRC’s “strategy in Korea was offensive and required the ability to deliver a knockout blow to U.S. forces.” Though no such knockout blow materialized, the PVA successfully seized the initiative, demonstrated by “[United Nations] battlefield defeats and the general impression that the communists had the upper hand in December 1950 and early January 1951.”

After early military successes gave way to logistical failure and Soviet military assistance proved inadequate to Mao’s expectations, the CCP Chairman re-evaluated, then abandoned the prospect of forced Korean reunification. This political shift created room for diplomatic openings with UN forces with which Mao aligned larger offensives: Mao “[tripled] the number of Chinese troops in Korea from 271,000 in July 1951 to 947,000 in July 1952” once the Soviet Union, at Mao’s request, called for negotiations to end hostilities. Mao anticipated that such escalations maximized his diplomatic leverage and maintained throughout the rest of the conflict a warfighting intensity which imposed significant costs on all parties: “due to continued [Chinese] escalation, more than a quarter of the casualties occurred during the last two months of the war.”

**Warfare Techniques**

The PVA benefited from the effects of controlling warfare techniques and preventing massive U.S. escalation, though only by accident and misperception. General Douglas MacArthur, leading the UN command in the Korean War and seeking to bomb targets within PRC borders, asserted the PRC had abandoned limited war concepts and instead used “the maximum of her force” only to be rebuffed by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Omar Bradley, who argued that the absence of Chinese airpower against “our front line troops, against our lines of communication in Korea, our ports; [that] they have not used air against our bases in Japan or against our naval air forces,” evidenced a Chinese commitment to limited operations and convinced American lawmakers not to escalate operations beyond Korea.

Bradley’s claim that restraint underpinned the PVA use of airpower, however, was erroneous. PRC air capabilities were dependent on Soviet provisions of “fighter planes and fighter training,” and the relative absence of airpower against UN forces was largely a product of “the Soviets’ unwillingness or inability to provide prompt air cover for Chinese troops” at the start of the conflict and poor Sino-Soviet coordination on air training and support thereafter. Poor alliance cohesion and limited air capabilities, rather than finely tuned war control, avoided provoking the U.S. into escalating the conflict. It was only by luck and misperception, not by effective war control, that American escalation was avoided.

**War’s End**

After early victories in the Korean War, Beijing pressed its advantage and attempted to drive the conflict to a negotiated conclusion to follow through on Mao’s attempted knockout blow. The PVA selected targets by determining “which
part of the UN was more against talks—and then China would direct the majority of its efforts against the reluctant party to facilitate wartime talks.” Yet even when negotiations between the communists and the UN forces were open, Mao did not order the PVA to de-escalate. Following Soviet proposals for armistice negotiations, “Washington ordered an end to offensive action” to improve the atmosphere for negotiations. The PVA response was switching “to a limited strategy of attrition, still believing China could compel a US retreat through increased military pressure.” The PVA used the pause in fighting to entrench itself in “nearly impregnable positions across forbidding and mountainous terrain,” ending the process by which it “was being ground down by American technical and material superiority” and minimizing the risk that resumed hostilities could pose. Mao and other CCP leaders miscalculated in their assertion that the United States “lacked the resolve to sustain heavy losses,” and designed a strategy around this miscalculation. Still, they effectively pursued their strategic objective of imposing costs on UN forces by accepting a momentary reduction of the intensity of conflict during the pause to prepare for a later escalation intended to increase American casualties during armistice negotiations in excess of American casualties during the prior period of full-scale war. Because the PRC was not burdened by moral or alliance pressures and had the flexibility of quanbian, Chinese forces had greater freedom to approach the pause in bad faith and prepare its casualty-imposition strategy. Recall quanbian is an axiom of absolute flexibility which calls for the strategist to be free of political, military, or moral pressures, giving the PRC forces greater freedom to approach the pause in bad faith and prepare a casualty-imposition strategy.

**Political Success in the Korean War**

The PRC employed war control to limited operational success in the Korean War; the PRC controlled the tempo of war for only the brief period following its entry, and its greatest success in modulating combat intensity came only as a response to changing political circumstances that the PRC did not dictate. However, once Mao abandoned the initial goal of militarily reunifying Korea, modulating the PVA’s warfighting intensity proved highly successful for achieving Mao’s subsequent objectives. Mao’s greatest political objectives in the Korean War were arguably those of prestige and resourcing: he “did not want to be viewed internationally as short on internationalism or international fervor” and required “economic and military assistance and training from the Soviet Union” for a planned Taiwan reunification campaign. On the second count, Mao’s demands were only partially met: Mao requested that the Soviet Union arm and outfit sixteen PVA divisions within one year, yet Stalin refused to outfit more than ten, which nonetheless constituted significant military assistance for the PRC.

The more significant political success came in international prestige. By the PVA’s participation in the Korean War, “Mao had certainly proven himself a true member of the movement to Stalin and his successors.” Moreover, “despite its substantial material inferiority, China had managed a stalemate with the American superpower through a combination of military and diplomatic maneuvers.” This is the very essence of what war control as an ideal tool promises to accomplish: in spite of less-than-expected support from the Soviet Union and at great human cost, the PVA won significant early victories and forced a stalemate through attrition with effective modulation of warfighting intensity. The conflict did not involve the threat of nuclear weapons or aerial bombing of targets within Chinese borders, though this was more by luck than intention. And though the PVA suffered numerous operational failures, suffered significant casualties, and could not deliver a “knockout
blow” to compel a U.S. retreat, they were never forced to retreat past the 38th parallel while hostilities persisted.

By any measure, these accomplishments came at enormous cost, albeit those Mao was ready for China to pay: Mao reported to Stalin in 1951, “In the last four offenses, we have sustained 100,000 casualties among combatants and non-combatants of the People’s Volunteer Army, and we are about to replenish the troops with 120,000 soldiers. We are prepared for another 300,000 casualties in the next two years, and we will furnish another 300,000 troops.”

1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis

Pace, Rhythm, and Intensity

Mao used war control techniques to greater effect in the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, beginning hostilities with initiative-seizing artillery strikes on the Taiwan-based, Kuomintang (KMT)-controlled Kinmen islands in the Taiwan Strait in August 1958. The island group, which garrisoned six infantry divisions and two tank battalions with 300 heavy artillery pieces and 150 anti-aircraft guns, was dependent on receiving daily supplies from Taiwan and so could be captured through blockade if the island were isolated “through superiority in artillery, air, and naval power.”

Throughout the conflict, PLA operations remained flexible under Mao’s strategy to “take one step first, and look carefully before taking another step,” always examining KMT and U.S. responses before deciding on any subsequent courses of action. The PLA shelled Kinmen in pulses, pausing for several days on September 3 to gauge the American response and again on October 6. These pauses helped ensure that the PLA never fired on American warships, which began escorting KMT supply ships to Kinmen on September 7, and thus complicated any American justification for direct military intervention in the conflict.

Warfare Techniques

To maintain the argument that the shelling was an internal Chinese affair and avoid U.S. military intervention, Mao established strict parameters for the conflict: “no landing on Jinmen, no conflict with the United States, and no killing of Americans,” thus also dismissing any PLA plans for vertical escalation that included amphibious assault or aerial bombardment. To avoid engaging the U.S. Air Force, Mao also “instructed that PLA airplanes not cross beyond the air space of Jinmen” in pursuit of KMT planes.

Though Mao did not want to provoke a direct U.S. military response, he intended to tempt one. Mao’s relative restraint in the 1958 crisis was informed by his experience in the 1954–1955 Taiwan Strait Crisis, in which a PLA amphibious assault on ROC-controlled islands drew American rebuke; U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles publicly threatened to execute plans which “called for nuclear strikes deep into China” to defend the ROC’s claims. By re-igniting conflict in the Strait in 1958 but eschewing the amphibious offensive which invited nuclear threats in the first crisis, Mao practiced his own form of nuclear brinkmanship in hopes of harnessing and redirecting the threat; “no one in the West suspected his true goal: to force the USA to threaten a nuclear war in order to scare his own ally [the Soviet Union]—a ruse unique in the annals of statecraft”—into providing technological support for nuclear weapons and delivery systems.

Mao successfully coerced the USSR into further developing the PRC’s nuclear weapons program while avoiding nuclear annihilation, though more by luck than prudence. The international community and much of American public opinion had shifted since the 1954–1955 Crisis and no longer thought defending KMT “possession of a few tiny, barren islands which most people believed rightly belonged to China, which possessed no strategic
value from the U.S. point of view, and the [KMT] possession of which was the major destabilizing factor in the region” justified a nuclear war.\(^6\)

**War’s End**

When U.S. warship escorts and American-supplied air-to-air missiles on KMT fighters made a total blockade of Kinmen unenforceable, the CCP Central Military Commission (CMC) decided to turn the island they could not capture into a lever with which to apply pressure on the United States to deter future conflicts. Mao described the effort as the “noose strategy” whereby, though the PLA would not be able to prevail in a conflict with the U.S. military over Kinmen, the U.S. was required to expend additional resources in Taiwan’s defense and would be susceptible to pressure from immediate and immediately controllable kinetic threats should Mao decide to resume, intensify, or cease bombardments on Kinmen.\(^6\)

To facilitate the transition from blockade to the “noose strategy,” the PLA eased its bombardment of Kinmen but perpetuated a reminder of Kinmen’s vulnerability via continued small-scale shelling. This partial easing of tensions preceded the October 6 weeklong ceasefire and further pressured the U.S. against resolving the conflict with nuclear weapons.\(^6\)

**Political Success in the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis**

Mao did not appear to have a coherent long-term strategy throughout the 1958 Crisis; he changed the political objectives of the operations he ordered across and within the First and Second Taiwan Strait Crises and reversed his own orders out of apparent indecision or fear.\(^6\) However, the operations of the 1958 Crisis hewed to guanbian, maximized flexibility, and empowered Mao to successfully coerce both the United States and the Soviet Union at great risk but minimal cost.

Setting aside the initial goals of defeating the KMT garrison and reasserting PRC rule over Kinmen, Mao had two political goals for the 1958 crisis: 1) To institutionalize a geopolitical arrangement in which the PRC can easily and immediately exert pressure on the United States, and 2) to pressure the Soviet Union for additional support in developing nuclear weapons and delivery systems.

The “noose strategy,” buoyed by shifting American and global public opinion against nuclear conflict in the Taiwan Strait, successfully accomplished the first goal, though it progressed in unpredicted ways still beneficial to the PRC. Rather than accept Kinmen as a “noose around the U.S.’s neck” and maintain a defense obligation over a KMT island garrison vulnerable to a sudden escalation of artillery bombardment two miles off the Chinese coast, Dulles and Eisenhower proposed a long-term resolution satisfying the U.S. and the PRC at Taiwan’s expense. Dulles scaled back U.S. operations supporting the KMT in the Strait and pressured Taiwanese leader Chiang Kai-Shek to begin drawing down the island’s garrison and publicly abandon the prospect of Kinmen as a springboard by which the KMT might invade the Chinese mainland.\(^6\)

By carefully controlling the warfare techniques and pace of conflict, the PLA avoided a direct American commitment, defending the KMT, enabling Mao to drive a wedge in the U.S.-ROC relationship, and ultimately if unintentionally removing from play a means by which Chiang may have threatened PRC security on the mainland.\(^6\) While Mao was unable to forcibly reunify Taiwan under CCP rule and did not long keep the strategic noose with which he could pressure the U.S., Mao also secured significant security benefits from the U.S., which muzzled Chiang from future provocations and removed from the PRC’s security environment a threatening and heavily defended KMT base.

Mao’s second political objective was significantly more dangerous and required leveraging asymmetric perceptions.
This involved ordering PLA operations provocative enough that the Soviet Union would believe that the U.S. might launch a nuclear strike on the PRC yet restrained enough that the U.S. was not compelled to do so. The Soviet Union up until 1958 provided “China with technical nuclear help but not with finished weapons or the facilities for producing them,” a fact Mao attempted to change by leveraging the expectation of USSR-PRC mutual defense in a nuclear confrontation with the U.S. and then proceeding to risk such a confrontation. To accomplish this objective, no pause in Kinmen’s shelling could be permanent, and peace could not be made with either the KMT or the U.S. until the USSR agreed to supply the nuclear weapons and facilities Mao wanted.

Mao balanced the U.S.’s and USSR’s competing perceptions by resisting vertical escalation operations, including amphibious assaults and aerial bombings which provoked a direct U.S. nuclear threat in the 1954–1955 Crisis, while continuing to bombard Kinmen enough to “hamper communication and transport” but not “totally bottle up the enemy on the island”; the PRC notably communicated its resolve to persist in the strikes by ending the October 6 ceasefire on October 22, when Dulles was in Taiwan, and by bombarding Kinmen consistently until his departure. Mao was able to secure Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s promise of additional technological support for nuclear armaments by implying a nuclear war with the U.S. over the Taiwan Strait Crisis was likely and offering to “take the full consequences of this war ourselves . . . we will not drag the Soviet Union into this war” so long as Khrushchev equipped the PLA with nuclear weapons.

PLA war control in 1958 created opportunities for Chinese coercive diplomacy. By carefully modulating warfighting intensity and maintaining control over all three operational factors of war control, Mao was able to apply political pressure to co-opt an adversarial nuclear superpower’s influence, restrain the KMT, and convince another nuclear superpower to equip the PLA with nuclear weapons. Mao used war control to extract political success from unideal situations. Though the PLA had few meaningful tactical successes in the 1958 Crisis, Mao was able by luck and by skill to create and capitalize on political opportunity using the ideal tool of nations.

**War Control in a Modern Taiwan Contingency**

A hypothetical modern PLA campaign to force Taiwan reunification offers ample opportunity to leverage possible war control operations beyond those demonstrated during the Cold War. The possibility of effective, rapid escalation of warfighting intensity afforded by current military technology, including the threat of horizontal escalation across vast distances to new targets, gives the PRC significant flexibility consistent with quanbian. This hypothetical has geopolitical significance: Taiwan’s reunification predicates both CCP legitimacy and the PRC’s self-perceived rejuvenation as a great power. This hypothetical is also plausible; at least one leading China analyst has predicted Xi Jinping will attempt such a campaign in 2020.

This section explores the possible role of war control in a hypothetical Taiwan reunification campaign. Because war control, as an ideal tool, is meant to bridge the gap between operational capabilities and political objectives to overcome unideal situations, this section explores some technical components of current PLA capabilities to determine opportunities where the PLA may leverage war control to modulate operations and achieve political objectives. This hypothetical is only a preliminary discussion of how a modern PLA might employ war control techniques and should not be taken as a prediction of how a genuine reunification campaign would be fought or by whom. In order to emphasize most clearly possible war control operations, electronic, cyber, space, and network warfare operations are not included.
As in the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis, the greatest obstacle the PRC faces in a Taiwan reunification campaign is if the United States intervenes on Taiwan’s behalf. While the PRC’s sacred mission of reunification has significant potential to incite a Sino-American war, U.S. interference should not be taken as a foregone conclusion. The U.S. does not recognize the ROC as a sovereign state and as such is not Taiwan’s treaty ally; the relationship instead is defined by its pattern of alignment expressed through arms sales, official statements of support, and the prospect of joint military exercises. Formal U.S.-ROC relations are defined by the U.S. Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), which stipulates the President and Congress should “consult on possible action if there is ‘any threat to the security or the social or economic system of the people on Taiwan and any danger to the interests of the United States arising therefrom.’” No policymaker can be certain under which, if any, scenarios the U.S. would, having consulted, elect to not involve itself in defense of Taiwan and which, if any, of those scenarios the PRC can influence. Even so, the PLA may be able to employ war control techniques to dictate battlefield conditions sufficient to deter U.S. intercession.

Political Objectives
In a Taiwan reunification campaign, the PRC will have one primary political objective and one sub-objective, both of which must be met to ensure the campaign’s success.

Primary Objective: Secure, by coercion or other means, a commitment from the Government of the ROC that it will:

• Acknowledge that the mainland and Taiwan belong to one and the same China, unsplit in sovereignty or territorial integrity;
• Develop and implement an actionable plan to transition the administration of government services to an authority designated by the CCP; and
• Dissolve following completion of the first two points.

Sub-Objective: To the degree and for the duration necessary to accomplish the primary objective, prevent the U.S. military from intervening in the reunification campaign.

For the PRC, a protracted kinetic conflict with the United States military severely complicates Taiwan reunification at best and is a regime-threatening event at worst; the success of the campaign’s primary objective then depends on the PRC deterring U.S. engagement altogether or otherwise delaying U.S. military intervention until the primary objective is achieved.

Warfare Techniques: Deter U.S. Intervention
Taiwan imports 98 percent of its energy resources and is vulnerable to a blockade; however, a blockade will constitute *casus belli* and has an anticipated time horizon of weeks to months before Taiwanese surrender, which leaves the United States ample time to intervene. As such, the PRC cannot simply wait for the blockade to take effect; it must concurrently escalate the conflict to accelerate ROC surrender or prevent U.S. interference.

There are two likely operations the PLA can take to prevent U.S. interference:

1. Preemptive missile strikes on U.S. bases in the Asia-Pacific with the intention of crippling any U.S. counteroffensive until the primary objective is achieved; and
2. Establishing air superiority over Taiwan before the U.S. is able to position forces to contest Taiwanese airspace.

Notably, the operations are not mutually exclusive. Rather, their primary variance is in certainty; any operation which includes preemptive missile strikes on U.S. bases is certain to invite and near-certain to delay a U.S. military response, while only
establishing air superiority without preemptive strikes is less certain to invite or delay U.S. military intervention.

While the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) has both capability and capacity to preemptively and precisely strike U.S. bases, infrastructure, command centers, and warships in Japanese ports, an ongoing bombardment necessary to continuously crater all runways and runway-length taxiways at all major U.S. bases in Japan would be extravagantly costly and divert resources better dedicated to Taiwan itself. Moreover, seizing the initiative describes identifying strategic windows of opportunity and modulating the relevant operational factors to maintain war control. In the Taiwan scenario, this window of opportunity is a geographic provision: U.S. analysts argue Taiwan under PLA attack would face a delay of two days up to one month before American forces are able to intervene. Taking the minimum estimate, a preemptive missile strike squanders this two-day window by ensuring American retaliation following the window’s close. Rather, the PLA can use the two days to establish conditions able to altogether prevent U.S. military interference with the campaign.

The two-day window of opportunity is best spent establishing air superiority over Taiwan’s airspace without any preemptive strikes on U.S. bases. Air superiority enables other “air, maritime, and land warfighting missions” and constitutes an “important plank in conventional deterrence.” Additionally, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF), has nearly 1,500 fighters overall, of which around 600 are fourth generation, and can reasonably dedicate a force structure of up to 800 aircraft to a Taiwan campaign, outnumbering Taiwan’s 420 fighters by nearly 2:1. The Taiwanese air force would likely be unable to defend its airspace without U.S. assistance. In the absence of compelling political or humanitarian crises urging its involvement, the U.S. may reasonably decline to fight the PRC over Taiwan if the air war is effectively resolved before U.S. forces arrive in the theater; this disinclination may be sharpened if the PRC clearly and credibly communicates missile threats to regional U.S. air bases should the U.S. not indicate its nonparticipation in the conflict within the two-day window.

War control capabilities here offer the PRC a wider breadth of options in coercive diplomacy: refraining from preemptive strikes on U.S. air bases can communicate a credible assurance that the PRC intends a limited campaign. Were the PRC to strike U.S. assets, American leaders would likely retaliate and would likely face domestic audience costs for failing to do so. This assurance can be reinforced by refraining from warfare techniques which expose Taiwan’s civilian population to unnecessary danger, such as an amphibious invasion followed by urban warfare, which will be discussed in greater detail below. Should American forces intervene nonetheless, a rapid horizontal escalation of missile strikes to impose losses on American forces and cripple U.S. regional infrastructure necessary for an air war realizes the PRC’s credible threat against the U.S.

In such an event, however, the PRC’s exposure to risk increases exponentially. The surest way for the PRC to achieve the political sub-objective is to rapidly establish air superiority over Taiwan, refrain from prejudicial warfare techniques against the Taiwanese civilian population, and refrain from striking U.S. bases altogether.

Pace, Rhythm, and Intensity: Rapid Escalation
Taiwan’s surveillance and early-warning systems, including an ultra high frequency (UHF) radar with a range of 3,100 miles capable of tracking stealth fighters, a robust intelligence network, and notable air defenses, suggests the ROC would have forewarning of an impending PLA attack, requiring the PLA to open hostilities with missile strikes to maximize the shock of a first strike with minimal resistance. In order to rapidly establish air superiority, PLARF opening
strikes should target Taiwan’s air bases to temporarily disable their fighters and expose them to aircraft bombing, an effort expedited by Taiwan’s concentration of approximately 180 fourth generation fighters at three of its eight air bases: all of Taiwan’s Mirage 2000 and around 120 F-16 airframes are based at Hsinchu, Chiayi, and Hualien Air Bases. The PLARF will also need to strike surface-to-air missile (SAM) defenses to clear strike routes for PLAAF bombers.

Taiwan currently depends on its nine batteries of PAC-3 systems and twelve batteries of Tien-Kung III for ballistic missile defense, with the Patriots theoretically able to intercept approximately 100 missiles between 190 interceptors; however, Taiwan currently possesses inadequate MIM-104F interceptors for the Patriots to fire a second salvo. These SAMs are also deployed in a manner that trades off SAM survivability in favor of protected targets. With a missile force of up to 1,200 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM) and up to 300 launchers and an additional 200–300 ground launched cruise missiles (GLCM) with 40–55 launchers, the PLA is equipped to launch an overwhelming opening pulse of missile strikes, followed by attacks targeting Taiwan’s air bases and suppressing enemy air defense (SEAD) from PLAAF bombers. This strike’s effectiveness will be markedly increased by recently developed PLA capabilities regarding “multi-layered firepower, joint air defense, [and] anti-missile operations” and the PRC’s stock of 100 Harpy anti-radiation missiles (ARM) with rumored capacity for indigenous production. Analysts anticipate the PLA may conduct two to three pulses of such coordinated missile/air strikes on the first day of conflict.

The capabilities described thus far suggest the PLA can conduct significant SEAD operations and establish air superiority in the early stages of conflict with Taiwan, likely within the PRC’s two-day window of opportunity before sizeable U.S. forces can arrive in the theater. To maximize the likelihood that these actions preclude international interference, the PLA will need to leverage war control capabilities to carefully modulate the pace and intensity of the conflict: though massive air/missile pulsed surges are necessary to gain air superiority and grind down Taiwan’s air defenses, the PLA will need to demonstrate restraint to avoid provoking international audiences who may intervene should the PLA bombardment impose excessive costs on Taiwan. As such, the PLA must demonstrably reduce the frequency and intensity of its airstrikes following destruction of Taiwan’s air defenses within the two-day window and avoid notable escalations in the nature or intensity of conflict, particularly in ways that would expose Taiwan’s civilians to risk, such as bombing cities.

Control the War’s End: Reconsider Invading

As discussed in this article, Mastro’s research found PLA war termination literature and military history indicate a PRC preference for significant escalation in the closing stages of war. CCP leadership may be tempted to achieve the campaign’s primary objective with similar escalations, particularly by amphibious invasion. However, effective PLA employment of war control in this case involves controlling the war’s end by resisting the tendency to escalate, thereby avoiding the adverse battlefield developments that intervening states would impose. PLA capabilities are not yet adequate for a successful Taiwan invasion; further, such an effort would likely invite international condemnation and interference sufficient to loosen or altogether lose the PLA’s control over conflict termination.

To maintain control over the war termination process, the PLA should avoid prejudicial escalations, and the logistics of an amphibious invasion are particularly prejudicial. To invade, the PLA would need to land an armada of amphibious ships to transport troops and armored vehicles on Taiwan’s beaches, secure a
beachhead under cover fire, and repeatedly reinforce the initial assault in the face of undoubtedly enormous casualties. Beyond the body count, several factors are likely to enrage international observers: to provide cover fire for the landing craft, the PLA would likely need to “saturate every 1,000-square-yard zone of land with 25 5-inch rounds per minute to prevent defenders from approaching the battlefield,” a capability the PLAN can project over at least two square miles of land. Furthermore, Americans have historically been sensitive to the “nature” of an “all-out armed invasion”; President Harry Truman was spurred to intercede in the Korean War following Pyongyang’s armored invasion across the 38th parallel in spite of excluding Korea from the list of strongpoints considered vital to U.S. security interests, and President Eisenhower threatened nuclear strikes following the PLA’s amphibious offensive in the 1954–1955 Taiwan Strait Crisis. Employing an amphibious assault in this campaign would constitute a failure of war control.

The most visceral opposition to a PLA invasion of Taiwan would arguably come from the knowledge that a successful invasion would prelude extended urban warfare. American observers will likely be familiar with the “slow, massive destruction” characterizing such from graphic coverage of combat in Aleppo and Mosul and exact a political cost on elected officials for inaction as was exacted on President Barack Obama for inaction in Syria. American involvement due to excessive Chinese escalation would constitute a significant war control failure to control termination processes, in which escalatory efforts to terminate conflict through victory carry second-order effects which harm rather than serve the Chinese national interest.

Political Success in a Reunification Campaign

The manner in which war control would be employed in the hypothetical campaign more closely mirrors the PLA’s employment of war control techniques in the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis than that of those employed in the Korean War. While all three scenarios involve careful modulation of warfare techniques, the pace of war, and the manner of the conflict’s end, PLA escalations in the Korean War were defensive and intended to keep UN forces at the 38th parallel. Conversely, the hypothetical Taiwan scenario follows the historical crisis insofar as the PRC’s ultimate goal is to prevent the U.S. from acting.

In the 1958 Crisis, the key to achieving Mao’s political objectives was to modulate the PLA’s warfighting intensity such that it was provocative enough to convince Khrushchev it merited a nuclear response but not enough to convince Eisenhower of the same. All the same, the key to achieving the political objectives in the hypothetical scenario is to modulate the PLA’s warfighting intensity such that it is enough to convince the U.S. that an intervention would be costly, and prohibitively so, while keeping the nature and intensity of the conflict below a level at which American policymakers would feel morally compelled to intervene. If such a balance exists and the PRC is able to maintain it, then the PLA will have demonstrated war control to be the ideal tool the SMS claims it to be.

Even with effective war control techniques, the biggest asset to the PRC in the hypothetical campaign is outside of its control: should the U.S. decide, like Eisenhower and Dulles did in 1958, to find a long-term resolution to tensions across the Taiwan Strait even at great cost to the ROC, the PRC will certainly accomplish its sacred mission.

Limitations and Conclusion

War control is an evolving concept in PLA literature with ontological roots in PLA Cold War military behavior. Increased military capabilities from ongoing modernization efforts likely significantly expand the political goals CCP leaders can reasonably identify for a conflict,
particularly as modern weaponry and improved training increases the potential lethality of PLA combat escalation, thus reinforcing the danger of a Chinese threat. Coupled with modernized capabilities, effective war control may constitute a means for the PRC to dictate rather than merely respond to battlefield conditions with strategically determined escalations of warfighting intensity.

This article and its analyses are limited by several assumptions, most notably the relevance of the *Science of Military Strategy*. While the continued discussion of war control in some capacity across the 2001 and 2013 SMS suggests it is likely this concept reflects that of PLA military planners, the document does not definitively describe China’s official military strategy or doctrines. Finally, this discussion draws heavily from unquantifiable aspects such as an aggressive strategic culture and *quankan* as a guiding principle, neither of which has assured influence on the thinking of CCP leaders, notably Xi Jinping.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of this article is represented in the degree of changes between the 2001 and 2013 editions of the SMS; war control’s conception underwent significant changes between the two editions and may change again or be dropped altogether by the publication of the subsequent edition. Notably, the 2013 edition was drafted largely in 2011 through 2012 and as such mostly reflects concepts developed during Hu Jintao’s leadership of the CCP. Whether it reflects the thinking of the current CMC Chairman or his top strategists is far from certain.

China has never comprehensively and consistently implemented war control throughout a conflict. Escalation after escalation in the Korean War produced shocking victories and crushing defeats. Mao’s apparently masterful modulation in the 1958 Crisis may have collapsed had international and American public opinion not shifted to oppose Eisenhower’s plans to use nuclear force. Nonetheless, the political flexibility and opportunities in coercive diplomacy afforded by sustained, precise scaling of warfighting intensity offer an important possibility that the PLA may now or in the future rapidly adjust to, shape, or dictate future battlefield conditions even when at an operational disadvantage. Whether the PRC can avoid dramatic miscalculation and demonstrate the reality of this degree of control has yet to be seen.

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Endnotes


4. See Ian Easton, “How China Would Invade and Conquer Taiwan (And Here’s How to Stop It)” The National Interest March 19, 2018; and Zachary Keck, “Is China’s J-20 Stealth Fighter Training to Fight the U.S. Navy?” The National Interest May 12, 2018


11. Ibid, 87.


30. Ibid, 94.

31. Ibid, 90, 95.


37. Ibid.


43. Ibid


45. Christensen, Worse Than a Monolith, 70–72, 85.


49. Kissinger, Diplomacy, 489.


51. Kissinger, Diplomacy, 489.

52. Christensen, Worse Than a Monolith, 61, 113, 120.

53. Ibid, 122.

54. Kissinger, Diplomacy, 491.


58. Li, “PLA Attacks and Operations During the Taiwan Strait Crises,” 161–163.


62. Li, “PLA Attacks and Operations During the Taiwan Strait Crises,” 164.


64. Li, “PLA Attacks and Operations During the Taiwan Strait Crises,” 160.


67. Gurtov, “The Taiwan Strait Crisis Revisited,” 64.
68. Li, “PLA Attacks and Operations During the Taiwan Strait Crisis,” 165; Soman, “Who’s Daddy’ in the Taiwan Strait?,” 388.
73. A pattern of alignment is an informal expectation of support derived from some regularity of behavior, including joint military or diplomatic exercises. See Glenn H. Snyder, Alliance Politics, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 7
82. Heginbotham et al., The U.S.—China Military Scorecard, 45–68.
86. Gormley et al., A Low-Visibility Force Multiplier, 155, footnote 16.
89. Gormley et al., A Low-Visibility Force Multiplier, 153, footnote 1.
95. Ibid, 155.
96. Easton, “How China Would Invade and Conquer Taiwan (And Here’s How to Stop It)”;
Zachary Keck “How Taiwan Is Planning to Stop an Invasion by China” *The National Interest*
April 27, 2018.
98. Ibid, 89.
99. Christensen, *Worse Than a Monolith*, 28–31; Li, “PLA Attacks and Operations During the
Taiwan Strait Crises,” 156.
101. See, for example, Robert F. Worth, “Aleppo After the Fall” *The New York Times Magazine*
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102. See, for example, Ivor Prickett, “On Mosul’s Front Line: A Grueling Battle on Civilian
103. See, for example, Kathy Gilsinan, “The Terrible Cost of Obama’s Failure in Syria” *The
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When the Lights Go Out: Vulnerabilities to US Critical Infrastructure, the Russian Cyber Threat, and a New Way Forward

R. Kekoa Koehler

US critical infrastructure and key resources (CIKR), particularly power generation and water distribution, are vital to US national security. Incapacitation or destruction of these systems would have a debilitating effect on national economic security, national public health and safety, and any cross-sector combination of consequences. As the nature of our strategic competition with the Russian Federation changes and intensifies, the US Government (USG) faces a significant national security challenge from Russian cyber operations targeting US CIKR systems. Consequently, I recommend that the USG develop and implement a strategy that defends against, deters, and responds (DDR) to Russian cyber operations targeting US critical infrastructure. I propose the USG should take the following actions: (1) improve delineation, integration, and strengthen cybersecurity responsibilities and authorities across the federal enterprise; (2) implement greater enforcement of cybersecurity standards for entities managing US CIKR; (3) publicly declare cyber intrusions unacceptable as they are a direct threat to US national interests and finally; (4) introduce deliberate policies that guide unilateral retaliatory actions and sustain policy alignment with US allies and partners for graduated cost-impositions on the Russian government. Threats to the United States in cyberspace are constantly evolving. As a result, any strategy should not be pursued as a silver bullet to a metamorphizing problem. The time to act is now.

Vulnerabilities to US CIKR: A National Preparedness Problem

Disruption of US CIKR systems jeopardizes vital US national interests. The USG’s primary purpose is protecting the security of Americans and enabling the health of key economic sectors. The United States must develop a deliberative cybersecurity strategy that articulates the necessary USG actions that should be implemented to secure US CIKR and to respond to a Russian attack. For the purposes of this paper, CIKR systems threatened by Russian hacking teams refers to US energy generation centers and water distribution systems as well as their supplemental information technology systems.

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), there are 2,800 power plants. And another 170,000 facilities that form the public water system in the United States, which includes reservoirs, dams, wells,
treatment facilities, pumping stations, and pipelines.³ 85 percent of these and other CIKR facilities are in the hands of the private sector, which means that the USG can apply only relatively weak and indirect means to induce companies to secure their systems.⁴ Disturbingly, between 2002 and 2009, DHS launched a site-assessment program through its Industrial Control System Cyber Emergency Response Team (ICS-CERT) to evaluate the security of CIKR equipment and networks already installed at these facilities.⁵ The DHS found more than 38,000 vulnerabilities within critical systems that were accessible over the internet including default vendor passwords, outdated software patches, and a lack of standard protections such as firewalls and intrusion-detection systems.⁶ These are ongoing problems in the industry. ICS-CERT’s most recent 2017 annual monitoring report identified similar prevalent weaknesses in industry control system (ICS)⁷ networks within 176 assessed CIKR facilities across the United States.⁸ Despite these efforts to identify key vulnerabilities for the CIKR sector, “owners of critical infrastructure were only willing to make cosmetic changes to their systems and networks, resisting more extensive [cybersecurity improvements].”⁹ CIKR managers highlight the prohibitive costs, in part, for underinvestment as “the perceived risks to an organization or infrastructure cannot be adequately measured and a business case not satisfactorily articulated [for greater investment], which often leads to an underdeveloped incident response capability in the deployed operational ICS.”¹⁰ Larger CIKR organizations similarly suffer from this uncertainty as well as from the vast complexity of their deployed ICS components that are used to manage electromechanical equipment in either local or distributed online networks.¹¹ Moreover, ever changing CIKR interconnectivity demand presents its own challenge that “combines large scale, geographically distributed, and diverse legacy and proprietary system components.”¹²

The power grid is one of the most vulnerable and damaging US CIKR systems for cyber attackers to target. Electricity is at the core of all critical infrastructure. Kim Zetter, author of Countdown to Zero Day: Stuxnet and the Launch of the World’s First Digital Weapon, details this extensive vulnerability:

Cut the power for a prolonged period, and the list of critical services and facilities affected is—commuter trains and traffic lights; banks and stock exchanges; schools and military installations; refrigerators controlling the temperature of food and blood supplies; respirators controlling the temperature of food and blood supplies; respirators, heart monitors, and other vital equipment in hospitals; runaway lights and air traffic control systems at airports. Emergency generators would kick in at some critical facilities, but generators aren’t a viable solution for a prolonged outage, and in the case of nuclear power plants, a switch to generator power triggers an automatic, gradual shutdown of the plant, per regulations.¹³

Policymakers must be aware that CIKR intrusions will most likely expand beyond single targets and have a wider and potentially devastating ripple effect. For example, disrupting the national power grid can effectively shut down a city or even a region’s water supply. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, cyber-attacks on water or wastewater utility process control systems can “cause significant harm, such as disrupting treatment and conveyance processes by opening and closing valves, overriding alarms or disabling pumps or other equipment.”¹⁴ Furthermore, interfering with the operation of water treatment equipment can alter chemical dosing; enable individuals or organizations to take control of drinking water distribution or wastewater collection systems resulting in disabled service; reduce pressure flows of water into fire hydrants or overflow of untreated sewage into public
waterways; and change or disable alarm thresholds, which could delay detection of intrusion or water contamination. To highlight a troubling example of the vulnerability to these systems, in 2011 a water provider in California hired a team of simulated cyber-attackers (“cyber red team”) to probe the vulnerabilities of its computer networks. The cyber red team accessed the system in less than a week.

A more recent example demonstrating the disruptive potential of CIKR system intrusions occurred in Washington, DC in July 2018. On July 12, the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (DC Water) experienced a pressure loss in its water distribution system in portions of the Northeast and Northwest quadrants of the city due to an accidental activation of a pressure valve by a utility system operator. The incident prompted DC Water leadership to issue a contaminated water advisory warning in the early morning hours of July 13th. All customers in these areas were instructed to boil water intended for consumption until further notice. Fortunately, the boil water advisory was lifted two days later in its entirety, but DC Water communicated that it is likely that more than 100,000 people were affected by the incident. While this pressure valve error was minor and caused only a day of disruption to the water distribution system, it suggests how easily the system can be disrupted. Ultimately, determined and sophisticated cyber-attacks present high-risk scenarios that can compromise the ability of utilities to provide clean and safe water to US citizens and erode confidence in public-provided utilities systems.

The Threat Actor: Offensive Intent and a Ukrainian Test-Bed

The Russian Federation possesses advanced offensive cyber intrusion and intelligence capabilities that were developed to infiltrate the crucial energy generation and water systems of their strategic adversaries. As the nature of US strategic competition with the Russian Federation changes, the USG faces a significant national security challenge from Russian cyber operations targeting US CIKR systems.

Russian hacking operations are integral toward achieving Russia’s broader national, regional, and global strategic objectives. The Russian government sees its national security objectives tied to global and regional threats that seek to contain and constrain Russia’s development as a major power. The enlargement of NATO and the location of its military infrastructure led by US efforts in Estonia and Poland create an inherent threat to Russian national security from the perspective of the Russian government. Additionally, Russia identifies post-revolutionary Ukraine as an immediate security threat on its western border and a sign of US attempts to surround Russia with adversarial states. To combat this strategic threat, Russia turned to improving its offensive cyber operation capabilities. The Russian government recognizes its disadvantage in the conventional military realm which drove it to pursue below-threshold cyber operations and other gray-zone capabilities that provide attribution deniability, political and civil-society confusion, and drawn out response times for Russia’s adversaries.

Following the ousting of Ukrainian President and Russian ally Viktor Yanukovych in 2014, Russian intelligence and military cyber operators have honed their capabilities in targeted CIKR operations using Ukraine’s systems as a test-bed. In 2015, Russian cyber teams breached the ICS of three Ukrainian power distribution stations, locked controllers out of their substation control systems, and disabled 60 Ukrainian substations resulting in over 225,000 people losing access to power. The attackers then disabled backup power supplies to two of the three distribution centers, leaving Ukrainian operators stumbling in the dark as they attempted to bring the substations back online. Successful Russian cyber operations on Ukraine’s CIKR systems portends similar attacks for power generation plants and distribution centers.
centers in the United States. The control systems in Ukraine were surprisingly more secure than some in the United States as they were well-segmented from the control center’s business networks with robust firewalls. Disturbingly, the USG reported in 2014 that unattributed hackers planted similar versions of malware found in the Ukrainian power grid attacks on the networks of US power and water utilities systems. While the Ukrainian grid attack may have only lasted a few hours, US electrical grids are more extensively interconnected to key sectors that enable the US economy and provide crucial utilities services to US metropolitan areas with far larger populations than in Ukraine.

In March 2018, DHS ICS-CERT released a report indicating that from at least March 2016, a Russian cyber operation targeted USG entities, critical manufacturing sectors, and multiple US CIKR sectors, including energy, nuclear, water, aviation, and other commercial facilities. According to ICS-CERT and the FBI, Russian objectives appeared to be the targeting and exfiltration of files for accessing US CIKR ICS and supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems to compromise and disrupt infrastructure systems and organizational networks.

The US intelligence community expects that Russia will conduct bolder cyber operations and will utilize new capabilities against Ukraine as a test-bed for future cyber operations against more sophisticated adversaries such as the United States. More broadly, the Russian Government will likely build on its wide range of current operations, including disruption of Ukrainian energy distribution networks, hack-and-leak influence operations, distributed denial-of-service attacks, and false flag operations. According to the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Daniel Coats, “Russian intelligence and security services will continue to probe U.S. and allied [CIKR] systems, as well as target the United States, NATO, and allies for insights into U.S. policy.”

**Recommendation: A U.S. Strategy to Defend, Deter, and Respond to Russian Cyber Operations Targeting U.S. Critical Infrastructure**

Protecting energy and water CIKR systems is vital to the health of the United States and protection of US citizens. In response to the challenge presented by Russian government-sponsored cyber operations targeting US systems, the USG must implement a renewed and deliberative strategy. This implies taking purposeful actions within and outside of ICS networks. Consequently, I recommend that the USG develop a strategy that defends against, deters, and responds (DDR) to Russian cyber operations targeting U.S. critical infrastructure. I propose the USG should take the following actions: (1) improve delineation, integration, and strength of cybersecurity responsibilities and authorities across the federal enterprise; (2) implement greater enforcement of cybersecurity standards for entities managing US CIKR; (3) publicly declare cyber intrusions unacceptable as they are a direct threat to US national interests and finally; (4) introduce policies that guide deliberate, unilateral retaliatory actions and to sustain policy alignment with US allies and partners for increased, graduated cost-impositions on the Russian government. Threats to the United States in cyberspace are constantly evolving and, as a result, any strategy should not be seen as a silver bullet to a metamorphizing problem. The following actions provide for multi-faceted and improved US actions to the Russian hacking threat.

1. **Defend**

   Developing critical infrastructure capacity and capability to defend against a sophisticated cyber threat actor involves investments in improving process, standards, and knowledge. Currently, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the cybersecurity policy lead for the USG and executes this authority through its National Cyber and Communications Integration Center (NCCIC), which
ICS-CERT is a part of, to defend all civilian networks by promoting and sustaining coordination among the many federal entities that have cybersecurity responsibilities. However, much of the “front-end” federal coordination—that is the coordination among federal agencies that occurs before a cyber-attack to defend networks as opposed to those occurring after a cyber-attack in response—occurs based on non-institutionalized, ad-hoc relationships. As a result, the USG must explicitly delineate federal department leads in coordinating cyber incident response and enforcement authority to direct domestic cybersecurity efforts prior to cyber-attacks. Integrating the patchwork of federal offices with oversight authorities within the US critical infrastructure sectors is crucial to developing whole-of-government coordination of cybersecurity capabilities and avoiding wasteful redundancies of action.

Prioritizing support for and investments in the replacement of older systems which are connected to sensitive networks within US CIKR is integral to the defense of key energy generation and water distribution ICS networks. Additionally, the USG should pursue a revised policy for conducting cyber red teaming—also known as “white-hat hacking”—on critical infrastructure networks and develop improved enforcement and implementation of baseline National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) cybersecurity standards across CIKR stakeholders. The purpose of cyber red-team exercises would be to recurrently test the security of CIKR systems and personnel to build a resilient culture of cybersecurity preparedness across key private industries and in government. Finally, a fast-tracked, integrated information sharing platform between private-public sector stakeholders would provide a coordinated cyber-defense that detects, responds to, and communicates future adversary exploitations, including those already in US CIKR networks.

To execute these “Defend” activities of securing US CIKR, the USG would primarily utilize domestic agencies and existing institutions. The USG would designate and authorize the DHS to lead coordination and execution authorities to accomplish “Defend” objectives. To improve coordination of USG efforts and information integration at the cyber-attack “front-end”, DHS should chair a new domestic-facing National Cybersecurity Council (NCC), which would be separate from the National Security Council, to coordinate policy-making for critical domestic cybersecurity issues, to coordinate cybersecurity policy advice for the president, to ensure that policy decisions and programs are consistent with the president’s cybersecurity goals, and to monitor implementation of the president’s cyber policy agenda. Membership of the NCC would include senior representatives from: DHS, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Director of National Intelligence and subordinate intelligence agencies (including the National Security Agency, Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and National Geospatial Intelligence Agency), a representative from the Office of the Secretary of Defense’s intelligence office, the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Treasury, and the National Security Council. Underneath the Principals Committee of the NCC, DHS’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (the DHS lead agency for cybersecurity and infrastructure protection) should chair a Critical Infrastructure Sub-Committee to coordinate all USG activities and private-public partnerships for securing the Nation’s CIKR systems.

2. Deter

Deterrence involves communicating and acting upon credible commitments and stated retaliatory responses. Within the DDR strategy, cyber deterrence activities direct the USG to declare publicly that cyber intrusions against US CIKR systems are unacceptable and will carry “swift and costly
consequences to the aggressor” in alignment with language in the president’s National Security Strategy. Signaling US intolerance to strategic adversaries would emphasize the significant correlation of the health of critical infrastructure systems and the USG’s ability to protect American citizens. In doing so, repeatedly and deliberately, US policymakers would signify the gravity of critical infrastructure intrusions and disruptions to strategic adversaries as well as the willingness of the United States to respond with purposeful retaliatory punishment.

In addition to stating the importance of CIKR systems to US interests, US policymakers would communicate that attempts to disrupt and destroy these systems will carry significant costs for the attacker. Introduced through written policy, multi-faceted cost impositions against specific attackers or government organizations such as the Russian Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) would be implemented, including “naming and shaming” and US indictments of cyber attackers. Supplementing these individual sanctions with national-level cost impositions to raise the economic cost on the Russian government by implementing targeted economic sanctions, threats of trade tariffs, and multilateral diplomatic pressure would impact the Russian government’s cost-benefit analysis of conducting such operations against vital US systems. While these options would be publicly published to directly communicate our intentions to the Russian government, the president and subordinate decision makers should continue to maintain response flexibility and keep all available options on the table. Lastly, the president, vice president, all relevant Cabinet-level secretaries, and their subordinate department senior leadership would communicate that possible kinetic military response would be considered; acting as an escalatory disincentive to Russian cyber operations.

3. Response

US responses and executed activities to identified Russian cyber disruption operations in US CIKR systems would generally follow in line with the communicated cost-impositions delineated within DDR’s “Deter” section. Consequently, a “do nothing” option is not considered here. USG retaliatory actions would escalate from one realistic extreme, “naming and shaming” attackers, to the other, kinetic military response. This would depend on the criticality of the ICS system penetrated, the damage caused to the system, and subsequent harm to services provided. Subsequent USG policy responses would also consider the damage in economic services and to US citizens reliant upon healthy operational CIKR systems. I recommend policymakers produce this information by coordinating NCC members with ownership over US CIKR with the Federal Emergency Management Agency who already uses multi-hazard impact models regularly in catastrophic event preparedness, response, and lessons learned.

While the USG would impose costs on the Russian government while also enhancing defenses against future attacks relying primarily on domestic resources, I advocate for further US preventative response policies include collaborating closely with European partners in and outside NATO to multiply the effects of targeted sanctions on identified Russian attackers and government officials. US policymakers should correspondingly coordinate with NATO to sustain development of harmonized contingency plans and corresponding response options for a range of scenarios directly involving Russian-sponsored cyber-attacks on US and European CIKR. Without a more vigorous and comprehensive response, Russian cyber operations will continue to probe and intrude in US ICS networks. Other strategic adversaries including China, North Korea, and Iran may conclude the same: that continuing to conduct operations against US vulnerabilities in cyberspace remains a realistic option and one without great cost.
Conclusion: Necessary Action

US CIKR systems are vital to US national security. Disruption or destruction would have a debilitating effect on other American critical infrastructure sectors such as, the economy, public health and safety, and any cross-sector combination of consequences. As the nature of our strategic competition with the Russian Federation changes, the United States government (USG) will continue to face significant national security challenges from Russian and other strategic cyber adversaries capable of disrupting US CIKR systems. I have put forward a cybersecurity strategy proposal that highlights necessary USG actions that provide for an improved defense of US CIKR systems and networks, deters current and future Russian cyber operations, and responds to identified cyber intrusions by utilizing the broad range of economic and kinetic advantages the United States possesses to punish threat actors. Without a more vigorous and deliberative US cybersecurity strategy, Russian cyber operations will continue to intrude in US ICS networks, threatening US citizens. These successes may embolden strategic adversaries of the United States to conclude that they can act against the United States in cyberspace with impunity. The time to act is now.

About the Author

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Endnotes

1. US CIKR are those assets, systems, and networks, whether physical or virtual, that are considered so vital to the United States that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on national security, economic security, national public health or safety, or any cross-sector combination of consequences. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Critical Infrastructure Sectors,” undated, accessed October 1, 2018, https://www.dhs.gov/critical-infrastructure-sectors.


5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Industrial control system (ICS) is a general term that encompasses several types of control systems, including supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems, distributed control systems (DCS), and other control system configurations such as Programmable Logic Controllers (PLC) often found in the industrial sectors and critical infrastructures. An ICS consists of combinations of control components (e.g., electrical, mechanical, hydraulic, pneumatic) that act together to achieve an industrial objective (e.g., manufacturing, transportation of matter or energy). The control part of the system includes the specification of the desired output or performance. Control can be fully automated or may include a human in the loop.


11. Ibid., 2.


15. Ibid.


18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 5.


22. Ibid.


27. Ibid.


30. Ibid.


32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.


39. White hat hackers employ the same hacking methods as nefarious hackers or, “black hat hackers”, with one exception—they do it with the organization’s permission first making the process completely legal. White hat hackers perform penetration testing, test in-place security systems, and perform vulnerability assessments for companies. White hat hackers can be paid employees or contractors working for companies as security specialists that attempt to find security holes via hacking. Symantec Corporation, “What is the Difference Between Black, White and Grey Hat Hackers?” Undated, accessed December 6, 2018, https://us.norton.com/


42. On November 16, 2018, President Trump signed into law the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Act of 2018 establishing the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). CISA leads the national effort to defend critical infrastructure against the threats of today, while working with partners across all levels of government and in the private sector to secure against the evolving risks of tomorrow. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “CISA Cyber+Infrastructure,” undated, accessed December 4, 2018, https://www.dhs.gov/CISA.


44. Ibid.


46. Buchanan and Sulmeyer, “Russia and Cyber Operations: Challenges and Opportunities for the Next U.S. Administration.”


49. Director of National Intelligence, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, 5–6.

Challenges and Opportunities for NATO in the Western Balkans

Erin Morton

Montenegro and Macedonia serve crucial roles in the NATO alliance to guide regional cooperation and reduce Russian influence in southeast Europe. Both Montenegro and Macedonia are striving to effectively utilize their NATO memberships to combat outside threats and strengthen the Balkans region. NATO must uphold its end of the bargain to follow through on the Membership Action Plan process to reaffirm that once committed, aspirant members can expect a clear, actionable path to membership.

NATO, through its extension of accession agreements to the Western Balkans nations of Montenegro and Macedonia, continues to integrate more European nations into the Alliance. Montenegro became a full NATO member in 2017, and Macedonia is following closely behind after receiving an official invitation to begin accession talks to become a full NATO member during the July 2018 NATO summit in Brussels. This move finalized one of Macedonia’s two goals for pursuing Westernization, with the other being European Union membership. Since their respective independences, both nations have participated, or are currently participating, in NATO’s Partnership for Peace and Membership Action Plan (MAP), which is a precondition for joining NATO. The value of NATO leadership and vision may be questioned in the United States, but both Macedonia and Montenegro value NATO membership as a way to both stabilize the territory of the former Yugoslavia and enhance their own ability to defend against external threats. NATO, in return, values the geographic reach and prospect for increased strategic cooperation in a region beset by internal and external strife.

Allowing Macedonia and Montenegro into NATO contributes to the realignment of the entire Balkan Peninsula toward the West and concludes the post-Yugoslav democratization and Westernization process for those countries, which is still in motion across the region. Cooperation conducted under the auspices of NATO may further bind the Balkan Peninsula together and reduce the risk of ethnic conflict and interstate disputes reigniting. NATO, in turn, can demonstrate its credible commitment to enlargement by finalizing Macedonia’s accession process. Such a commitment serves to encourage other NATO aspirants and demonstrates resolve to current members. By building trust through and within NATO partnerships, Montenegro, Macedonia, current NATO members Croatia and Albania can create opportunities to build peaceful, prosperous conditions in the Balkans.

Background

Macedonia and Montenegro are, respectively, the most recently invited and newest full members of NATO. Macedonia’s bid to become a full NATO member has been stymied by a long-running dispute with Greece over its official name. Upon achieving independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1991, Macedonia declared itself to be the Republic of Macedonia. This name choice was not without controversy, as Greece claims the national name Macedonia implies territorial claims over the Macedonia region of Greece. Greece has, therefore, blocked Macedonia from becoming a member of NATO or the European Union unless Skopje agrees to change the name. To begin to resolve the issue, Macedonia accepted a 1993 compromise that, pending a permanent
settlement of the dispute, designated it as “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” for all purposes within the United Nations. This initial change contributed to a breakthrough in June 2018, as the Greek and Macedonian governments reached an agreement to rename Macedonia as North Macedonia, subject to the approval of the Macedonian Assembly. With an accord reached by the two prime ministers, NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg extended the official invitation to Macedonia to begin accession talks in July.

Montenegro became the 29th member of the NATO alliance on June 9, 2017, giving NATO its first new member since 2009. However, NATO accession placed Montenegro directly at odds with Russia, its former ally and historic benefactor, leading Moscow to vehemently oppose Montenegrin accession. NATO members and the pro-NATO population within Montenegro assert that NATO membership has stabilized and strengthened the new state of Montenegro and will continue to stabilize the entire Balkans region.

Challenges to Euro-Atlantic Integration

Both Macedonia and Montenegro face many challenges as they integrate into NATO and move forward as productive members of the Alliance. Montenegro’s NATO accession began from a completely blank slate, as it had to build NATO-compatible institutions vastly different from the bureaucratic processes established during its time as a constituent state of Yugoslavia. Montenegro also had to face the challenges created by Russian interference throughout its accession process, and it continues to do so even now. For example, Montenegro accuses Russia of fomenting a 2016 coup attempt and funding the main opposition party, the Democratic Front, to create an environment hostile toward NATO.

Despite the strong domestic support for Western institutions and Western integration within Macedonia and Montenegro, both countries have significant opposition blocs that, with Russian support, could undermine progress made toward Western alliances. Macedonia was, until 2017, ruled by VMRO-DPMNE, a nationalist party that opposes changing the name of the country. If NATO and EU accession come at the price of the Macedonian name, nationalists may rally against Western integration and undermine the entire strategy being pursued by the government. Montenegro has a large Serb population, and the attempted 2016 coup demonstrates that there are elements within Montenegro that are willing to contemplate an undemocratic seizure of power to restore Serb rule and realign Montenegro with Russia. Moreover, in both countries there is still lingering resentment regarding NATO’s Balkan interventions during the 1990s.

While NATO is widely credited by both Montenegrin and Macedonian governments for settling internal unrest, that stabilization came with a tangible price in lives and property lost. Indeed, Montenegro joined NATO just 18 years after NATO bombs destroyed the Montenegrin Glubovci airport during the Alliance’s campaign against Serbia. This legacy of destruction against Montenegro, which at the time was a republic within Serbia, has left some of the population antagonistic toward NATO: A recent poll found that of the 34% of Montenegrins who disapproved of NATO accession, 22% noted that their disapproval stems from the 1999 NATO bombing campaign. A demonstration of Western, particularly American, support for the Western Balkans will reassure the public and counter Russian misinformation, which has created doubt and confusion over the true purpose of joining the NATO alliance.

NATO-aspirants in the Balkans have utilized referenda to combat public distrust and overcome some of the ill will. Referenda have become a particularly useful method for determining the will of the people and serving as a legitimate basis for state action in the Balkans. During Montenegro’s independence referendum,
for example, Serbia retreated in the face of Podgorica’s transparent referendum process and the internationally recognized legitimacy this process enjoyed. Indeed, Serbia participated in the setup of the referendum, which was conducted in tandem with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). It is perhaps because the Montenegrin independence referendum was considered legitimate that Russia became determined to undermine the new country through undemocratic means, as they could not impose their will by directly interfering with or challenging the referendum. Russia-NATO relations have broken down considerably since those referenda, demonstrating that Russia is willing to risk further undermining its relationship with NATO and the EU to guard against what it perceives as encroachment into a region it deems vital to its national security.

The change in the Montenegrin-Russian relationship, specifically, reflects both a deteriorating situation between Russia and NATO and a strong commitment on the part of Montenegro to ally itself with the West, particularly NATO, even at the expense of its relationship with Russia.

The Benefits of Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation in the Balkans is critical, as the Western Balkan nations that so recently warred against each other now depend on cross-border cooperation to improve infrastructure, drive economic growth, and create conditions for secure national governments. Kosovo and Bosnia, in particular, stand to gain from NATO integration, bringing opportunities for long-term peace throughout the former Yugoslav region. It is now possible, with little more than a simple border check, for Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins, and Macedonians to freely travel between their countries for work or leisure. For Macedonia, membership in NATO means belonging to an alliance that includes Greece, which could help resolve long-standing issues between the two countries. Working together on security cooperation in the region through a larger, multilateral body would likely serve to build confidence and create larger shared goals and objectives that, over time, could serve to build trust.

Russia may seek to exploit any weaknesses or divisions in the Euro-Atlantic community to disrupt the Western political landscape, but Greece and Macedonia recently displayed a united front against Russian interference to facilitate the Macedonian-Greek name dispute breakthrough. In August 2018, Greece expelled two Russian diplomats for running interference campaigns during the Greek-Macedonian negotiations over Macedonia’s official name. The charges against the Russians were severe: Greece accused Russia of bribing church officials and nationalist organizations to oppose the deal. Similarly, Macedonia has accused Russia of starting pro-Macedonian riots to undermine support for the name change. Combined, these two missions serve to foment opposition to Macedonia joining NATO, which is a core objective of Moscow. Greece reaffirmed its commitment to resolving the name dispute by taking punitive action against Russia, a move met with approval by the United States and the NATO community.

Concerns over Enlargement

Those who oppose further NATO enlargement raise concerns over the ability of Balkan states to maintain interoperability and capability requirements for effective NATO membership. These fears, while not unfounded, often seem excessive. After all, NATO officials have time and again stressed the open door nature of NATO enlargement, and the Membership Action Plan identifies and addresses necessary defense reforms that must occur so that new members can contribute to the Alliance. Earlier this year, President Trump also gave voice to fears that Montenegro’s accession could commit the United States to war, but these concerns about enlargement leading to Russian retaliation are not new, nor are
they unique to Montenegro. They are also exceedingly vague: With whom, exactly, would Montenegro enter into armed conflict? Particularly for Macedonia, fears of overt Russian aggression can be mitigated by the circumstances. Macedonia does not have a strong historic or political relationship with Russia; unlike previous new members to the Alliance, it was not a part of the Soviet sphere. In truth, the more present danger to the Alliance was its 2008 decision to leave Macedonia with no clear path to accession. Indeed, this hesitancy to extend membership to Macedonia resulted in the country experiencing a nationalist revival and backing away from its democratic reforms.

Montenegro and Macedonia have demonstrated their willingness to join NATO’s missions in Europe and in outside operations, such as Afghanistan and Libya. NATO has benefited from their contributions on those missions and continues to derive value from their support through an array of cooperative programs.

Conclusion

NATO stands as the longest-lived security alliance in history. Continuing NATO expansion into the Balkans through the inclusion of Montenegro and Macedonia in the Alliance will strengthen and stabilize the Balkan region and serve to further unify the European continent. Given that threats from hostile actors are evolving to target NATO allies in new and increasingly sophisticated ways, NATO must demonstrate credibility through its new member process. Russia will continue to seek new opportunities to weaken aspirants and new members. In response, NATO can and should confidently and continuously expand its partnerships to build trust throughout the Balkans.

About the Author

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Endnotes


6. Ibid.

7. UN General Assembly Resolution RES/47/225, 98th plenary meeting 8 April 1993.


19. Ibid. 276.


Bryce Aspelund

Following Germany’s retreat from western Ukraine in 1945, the Soviet Union conducted a counterinsurgency campaign against the nationalist OUN-UPA. The campaign was notable for matching counterinsurgent strategy to the Soviet culture of paranoia. By syncing strategy and culture, the Soviets effectively utilized their most proficient functions of state security—aggressive intelligence collection and maximal application of force. U.S. policymakers should consider how to combine American strategy and culture in a similar manner, as well as apply successful aspects from models outside the traditional American canon of counterinsurgency literature.

In 1929, during the interwar period, a nationalist Ukrainian group, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), was established in Vienna. Rooted in the remnants of defeated veterans of the Polish-Ukrainian War, the OUN began operating in western Ukraine with the revolutionary goal of creating an independent, ethnically Ukrainian society. Gaining combat experience both fighting alongside Nazi Germany and against them in Western Ukraine, OUN joined the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in 1942 to create one guerrilla organization, OUN-UPA, under the charismatic leadership of Stepan Bandera. Realizing that the Soviets would be returning from the front in World War II to retake western Ukraine after the defeat of the Germans, OUN-UPA prepared itself for a bloody conflict with Soviet forces.

Having already penetrated much of the Western Ukrainian population with partisan forces, in essence state-backed guerrillas, the Soviets were prepared for conflict. With no official counterinsurgency strategy solidified in doctrine, the Soviets began enemy-centric operations in spring 1944 against the OUN-UPA with 30,000 troops; the Soviets drew upon their counterinsurgent experience against the Central Asian Basmachi insurgency from 1917–1931. As many counterinsurgents throughout history have found, with some notable exceptions, a strategy based upon attrition tends not to be successful in defeating insurgent groups. The losses imposed on OUN-UPA by the Soviet’s attrition strategy only prompted the group to abandon its military command structure in favor of small unit tactics and clandestine operations in 1946, staving off annihilation by avoiding direct confrontation, and prolonging the conflict.

Soviet response to the shift in tactic was delayed, but by 1947, pursued a strategy focusing on separating the insurgents from the population through the use of targeted assassination, civilian reprisals, infiltration, informant networks, mass deportations, and propaganda. The Soviets capitalized on their impressive intelligence collection capabilities, which were the result of a culture of paranoia and refined by operations such as the “Great Illegals” program. By 1949, the Soviets had essentially destroyed the UPA, whose command structure remained separate from OUN, leaving the politically focused OUN to shift from insurgency to an underground movement. In 1955, the insurgency was definitively defeated.

The Soviet counterinsurgency campaign in western Ukraine was successful in achieving strategic objectives in furtherance of its grand strategy in the region: to secure the Motherland. The Soviets selectively
applied lessons from their previous experiences eliminating dissidents, using maximum military force surgically applied to targets dictated by accurate intelligence. The element that made the Soviet strategy viable is the match of counterinsurgent strategy to the culture of paranoia. By combining strategy and culture, albeit inadvertently, the Soviets effectively utilized their most proficient function of state security: intelligence collection. Future counterinsurgent forces should turn an honest, introspective eye on their own organizational capabilities, and match culture and strategy to develop effective tactics.

Literature Review

This research paper attempts to assess the effectiveness of COIN strategy outside the current American model by examining the Soviet counterinsurgency against OUN-UPA in Western Ukraine. The modern American counterinsurgency, codified by GEN. David Petraeus in U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3–24, draws heavily on the classic works of French, British, and American counterinsurgency practitioners, such as Roger Trinquier, Frank Kitson, and John Nagl. Whereas Western models directly confront the teachings of Mao Tse-Tung, the Soviets used a counterinsurgency strategy to combat an insurgency uninfluenced by Mao’s manual for future guerrillas, On Guerrilla Warfare. In modern times, breaking from the singular “hearts and minds” counterinsurgency model enshrined in FM 3–24 is critical in developing effective strategies to combat threats not explicitly covered by doctrine. The early 2000’s insurgency perpetuated by Al Qa’eda in Iraq, followed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant’s (ISIL) quasi-insurgency/criminal movement’s evolution to proto-state, break the mold for insurgencies laid out by the Central Intelligence Agency in their *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*. While the United States will likely not intentionally ignore democratic norms, which separate its efforts from those of an authoritarian state, the Soviet model does provide lessons on countering insurgency that should be heeded by American policymakers in the future.

Current scholarship surrounding the 1944–1955 Soviet counterinsurgency campaign in western Ukraine is relatively sparse. Dr. Alexander Statiev, Associate Professor at the University of Waterloo and author of *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*, provides the most in-depth, English account of Soviet counterinsurgency immediately following World War II in the Baltic states—Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, and Ukraine (collectively known as the western borderlands). Delving deeper into the subject, Jeffrey Burds examines the effect of the Soviet’s reliance on human intelligence in combating OUN-UPA in his article, “Agentura: Soviet Informants’ Networks & the Ukrainian Underground in Galicia, 1944–48.” Additional studies by Daniel Byman and Yuri Zhukov use this insurgency to examine effectiveness of the authoritarian model of counterinsurgency, in order to determine why non-democratic states tend to be successful at COIN.

This article attempts to build upon the previously listed works in assessing the effectiveness of the counterinsurgency campaign, and offer a new explanation for Soviet success. By aggregating and analyzing works focused directly on the Soviet counterinsurgency campaign, declassified American and clandestinely acquired Soviet intelligence reports and intercepts, insurgency literature, and both historic and current Russian language sources, this assessment attempts to fill the gap in the aforementioned literature by providing a campaign analysis and lessons learned, which should inform U.S. policymakers when formulating counterinsurgency strategy in the future.

The Soviets: Grand Strategy & Intelligence Culture

The Bolshevik leaders of the October Revolution in 1917—Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin—created a state beholden to the
will and whims of its singular “infallible” leader, determined to maintain power at all costs. In the years under Lenin’s rule, and to an even greater extent under Stalin after 1924, the Bolsheviks consolidated and concentrated power in the Communist Party by using excessive force to eliminate internal challengers. The “instinctive Russian sense of insecurity” of internal instability, compounded by newly empowered leaders intent upon utter destruction of all forms of resistance, led to a culture of paranoia, which influenced Soviet strategy and tactics. Fearing conspiracies of public uprisings, secret plots to overthrow the Communist Party, assassinations, counterrevolutionaries, and popular resistance to implementing communism, the Soviet security apparatus was oriented towards rooting out dissidents and deterring the spread of anti-Soviet ideology.

Having come to power, initially by revolution and later through shrewd politicking after the death of Lenin, Stalin sought stability and safety. The cultural memory of the previous 150 years was not lost on Stalin in 1944. Russia had been invaded by France once and Germany twice, both times suffering from Germany’s resurgence in two World Wars. In addition to the nearby threat of Germany, the Marxist-Leninist ideology found itself in a fundamental impasse with the global threat of capitalism represented by the West, with which coexistence was believed to be impossible. The fear of invasion, coupled with eternal suspicion of sabotage by capitalist nations and the underlying Russian tradition of paranoia of state instability, led Stalin to create a grand strategy to seize its Slavic neighbors—Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia—and place them under “absolute Soviet control.” Through the absolute loyalty the Communist Party intended to instill, this quasi-Russo manifest destiny could provide a buffer zone of safety against invasion and eliminate the saboteur effects of western capitalism. The volatile combination of the cult of personality surrounding Joseph Stalin, the generational culture of paranoia permeating Russian society, a history of extreme brutality by the security apparatus, and the communist system, promoted a grand strategy that mirrors both the goals and assumptions of the leader.

In the context of the emerging Cold War, the Soviet leadership channeled their paranoia into a state dominated by the intelligence apparatus, which ruthlessly hunted enemies of the Party. Following the purges of Tsarists, peasant rebels, and counterrevolutionaries, human intelligence collection prowess was achieved through a network of undercover agents directed at the West during the 1930s, a program known as the “Great Illegals.” By way of its experience in penetrating counterrevolutionary cells during the “Great Terror” from 1937–38 and in executing the “Great Illegals” program, exploitation, infiltration, sabotage, and deception became cornerstone tactics for the Soviet intelligence apparatus.

Despite an impressive collection capability, major intelligence failures (e.g. being caught off-guard by the Nazi invasion in Operation Barbarossa in June 1941) terrified Stalin and the party leadership. By 1943, the ensuing paranoia prompted intense introspection and self-reevaluation by the Soviets, which resulted in a shift in organizational culture to one intent upon omnipresent intelligence collection. The Soviets incorporated every form of intelligence collection, to include radio and signals intelligence, while maintaining that human intelligence and less technical means of collection were most reliable. While collection proved to be a Soviet strength, reports suggest that Stalin preferred to act as his own analyst, allowing raw intelligence to further compound his paranoia of internal conspirators and the “new enemy”—the United States and Britain—in the West. By 1946, the strict hierarchy of the Communist Party channeled Stalin’s own overreactions intelligence requirements, beliefs about the state of
world affairs, fears of instability, and strategic goals to the rank-and-file members. An organizational environment, where one’s livelihood depended upon meeting requirements, resulted in overestimated success and underperforming units.

**Soviet Counterinsurgency Experience**

The Russians, and later the Soviets, were no strangers to combating insurrections and insurrections, having taken part in Caucasian wars in the 19th century against the Naqshiebandi uprisings in the Ferghana Valley in 1896, as well as the Kazakh revolts in 1916. Beginning in early 1918 in Turkestan, where the Soviets tested a strategy guided by Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Red Army and the Chekists, forerunner to the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), sought to bring the Muslim insurgents under Communist control.

Though lacking both a unifying front and a political solution, besides expelling the Soviets, the rural Basmachi insurgency used hit-and-run tactics for more than three years in active conflict within Turkestan, and seven more from across the border. The Soviet campaign against the Central Asian Basmachi insurgency forced strategic innovation, though these strategic insights and actions were de facto in practice and never officially codified.

In the first three years of its counterinsurgency efforts, the local Soviet forces attempted aggressive military policy in conjunction with repressive measures to force the population into submission. After the Soviets engaged Basmachi insurgents in open conflict, killing their supporters and declaring Sharia law invalid, the insurgents gained popular support. In late 1919, the Red Army was sent to Turkestan and quickly recognized the need for a political solution and an easing of military aggression. By addressing local grievances, including famine and economic hardship, as well as using intelligence networks and crafting propaganda using local language and culture, the Soviets began to turn the tide of the insurgency. The Red Army was soon able to push the insurgents into Afghanistan and prevent their return to Turkestan by coupling Sovietization with political concessions. Rather than imposing a singular party model, the Soviets tailored the Communist Party to the Turkestan region by sensitizing the Party apparatus to Islamic culture and thereby making it palatable to the populace.

Though the Basmachi insurgency was one of the first the Soviet Union countered after its formation, it became an example of how counterinsurgency should be conducted. The Soviets sought to: 1) separate the insurgents from their base of support; 2) win over locals though tailored propaganda; 3) create strong Communist links to the area for future peace; 4) field locals into the fight against the insurgents; 5) use Marxist-Leninist ideology to guide post-conflict efforts; 6) use maximum force to eliminate insurgents and their supporters, including collective punishment, purging, forced relocation, and repression; and 7) create intelligence networks to guide and support military operations.

The lessons learned from this counterinsurgency, like many experiences with protracted warfare, arrived after a period of failing to correctly assess and address the type of conflict in which the Soviets were engaged. The Soviets managed to successfully balance political and military solutions with propaganda efforts, engage an appropriate number of troops, create a local army to combat the insurgents, divide insurgent forces, and create a strong Party apparatus through which power could be exerted over the local leaders. Undoubtedly, the creation of intelligence networks, using trained Soviet agents and recruited locals to penetrate the Basmachi organization as well as informants, allowed the Soviets to locate and eliminate Basmachi cells, while reducing the brutal excesses of the first phase of counterinsurgency.

The Soviets would take part in a handful of more protracted struggles over the next half century. Few, however, were nearly as successful as the counterinsurgency against
the Basmachi, as many of the lessons of the campaign were forgotten or abandoned after World War II, largely due to not codifying these lessons in doctrine.

Origins of the Insurgency in Western Ukraine

Unlike the Muslim Basmachi, Ukrainians share a common ancestry with the Russian people. In 1667, the eastern portion of Ukraine was seized by Tsarist Russia from the Polish-Lithuanian Empire and the remainder was ceded to Russia in 1793. For a brief period, Ukraine maintained autonomy from Russia and its Polish neighbor, but western Ukraine was eventually brought back under Polish rule between 1918 and 1939. In the winter of 1920 into the spring of 1921, Lenin’s greatest concern—anti-Communist counter-revolutionary forces—arose in Ukraine, with the entire country vehemently opposed to Bolshevik rule. In 1919, Ukrainian nationalist groups gathered in nearby Poland, Czechoslovakia, and in European countries like Germany and France, operating underground and creating international factions to support the internal struggle in Ukraine. By 1920, former military officers secretly formed the Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO) in Prague, and, in 1929, a group of students and members of UVO created the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).

The Homeland Executive Command of OUN, headed by Stepan Bandera and manned by Galician youth, sought to use terrorism and violence as a means to achieve an independent Ukraine. The OUN’s brand of nationalism was nestled in the slogan “Ukraine for Ukrainians” and housed in military command and control structures. Col. Yevhen Konovalets, a veteran Ukrainian revolutionary, shaped the organization’s training, discipline, and militant tactics, embodied in the OUN’s preference for targeted assassinations.

The Polish government took action against the Ukrainian nationalists in response to the assassination of a Polish politician Tadeusz Holowko in 1931 and the Polish prime minister of internal affairs Colonel Bronislaw Pieracki in 1934. From 1934–39, Bandera and other OUN leaders were arrested and placed in a concentration camp for their part in the assassinations, during which time Konovalets was assassinated by a Soviet agent in 1938. Upon his release in September 1939 due to the outbreak of World War II, Bandera went to Rome, where OUN’s staff and de facto leader Colonel Andriy Melnyk were located. Though both pursued the same goal of an independent Ukraine, Bandera and Melnyk’s differences caused the OUN to split into two factions: OUN-M (Melnykites) and OUN-B (Banderites).

In the spring of 1941, the Second Emergency Great Conference of OUN confirmed Stepan Bandera as its new Supreme Commander. A top-secret report to Stalin in March 1940 on the new Soviet territory following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 notes that 11,000 individuals in western Ukraine and Belorussia were members of various counterrevolutionary espionage and sabotage organizations. This, however, was only a fraction of the total number OUN members and supporters at the time. In May 1941, mere days before the initiation of Operation Barbarossa, OUN-B members parachuted into Ukraine with the goal of sabotaging Soviet communications and gathering intelligence for the German military. On June 30, 1941, Bandera and his fellow OUN leaders entered the Western Ukrainian city of L’viv with the Third Reich’s Galician battalions, “Nachtiagall” and “Roland,” and declared an independent Ukrainian state. The Nazis did not accept OUN’s declaration and arrested Bandera. OUN members of both factions were executed in September 1941 as a result.

In October 1942, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) was officially established as the militant wing of OUN-B’s political efforts, evolving from the group’s units formed to assist Germany. While the OUN sought to infiltrate the Soviet power
structure for intelligence gathering, the UPA would fight the military battles. By the summer of 1943, the UPA had more than six company’s worth of recruits and began to designate regional arms for command and control. In line with a military command structure, the UPA Supreme Command held General Staff with the following directorates: Operations, Intelligence, Logistics, Training, Information (Propaganda), and Political Education. By March 1944, OUN and UPA had almost entirely ceased fighting with the retreating Nazi forces and prepared for the return of Soviet forces.

The Insurgency in Western Ukraine

As the Soviets returned to reclaim Ukraine and impose Soviet rule, OUN and UPA had already gained support from much of the Western Ukrainian population, as evidenced by dug-in hideouts found at nearly one in four homes. OUN-UPA propaganda against mobilization into the Red Army, terrorism against the population, and support acquired by opposing colonial German forces up until July 1944, allowed the OUN and UPA to gain a substantial foothold in the region. Having already combatted Soviet partisan forces throughout much of World War II, OUN-UPA forces were intimately familiar with many of the standard operating procedures of the NKVD and Red Army, even training with a Red Army infantry manual. The UPA, at this time from summer 1944 to spring 1945, were largely conducting direct actions, such as raids, ambushes, and assassinations against the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the NKVD. These punitive actions sought to “save UPA from total destruction, to reestablish and maintain control over their areas of operation, analyze their new enemy [the Soviets] and find appropriate techniques to combat [them].” The NKVD reported 2,207 direct actions with 689 terrorist acts and assassinations in just the first half of 1945. Focused in the Lviv, Drohobycz, and Volhynia oblasts, OUN and UPA challenged the returning Red Army militarily and suffered heavy losses from the Bolshevik units, roughly division-sized and supported by tanks and army aviation.

By 1946, with postwar membership estimates ranging between 100,000 and 300,000 personnel, OUN-B and UPA became one organization, OUN-UPA, and implemented a change in strategy to a “deep clandestine tactic” after massive losses to the Red Army. This meant that the OUN would act only in small teams, avoid open combat, and seek to expand the network of clandestine intelligence cells. The UPA arranged its units in company-sized units or smaller and attached to the OUN cells. As such, OUN-UPA could conduct a protracted, “revolutionary struggle” against the Soviets. The dual chains of command from both the OUN and UPA allowed the insurgent organization to be extremely resilient in the face of losses, as well as providing a shadow government in the areas not under direct control of the Soviets. With this revision of strategy, OUN-UPA held three lines of effort, or tactical schemes, in progressing a protracted conflict:

1. Activities aimed at disruption of Sovietization:
   a. Developing legal networks of supporters, with minimal open fighting.
   b. Infiltrating covert agents into Soviet administration to prepare to topple the government.
   c. Disrupt collectivization.
   d. Deceive through conspiracy and disinformation the OUN-UPA intents and capabilities.

2. Educate youths and prepare them for revolutionary struggle:
   a. Develop the means to select youth before they are conscripted into the Red Army.
   b. Educate youth in the nationalist teachings.
c. Train youth in revolutionary techniques (e.g. conspiracy, propaganda, intelligence, sabotage, etc.).

d. Manage the activities of youth organizations.

3. Spread OUN influence to the whole of Ukraine:
   a. Establish networks and reserves in the east and south.
   b. Begin propaganda and intelligence activities.
   c. Propagandize and poll workers sent from the east, to bolster undercover OUN covert agents.

Tactically, OUN-UPA sought to exploit intelligence it gathered through its vast penetration of the Soviet apparatus in Ukraine. A 1945 raid on a hideout of the head of OUN-SB (“sluzhba bezbeky”) counterintelligence in the Carpathian Mountains revealed a document entitled “NKVD-NKGB Agentura in Practice”—in essence a “malleus maleficarium of anti-Soviet espionage,” a primer for hunting Soviet spies. The precise details regarding NKVD intelligence practices, specifically targeting children between the ages of 12 and 14 for interrogation about insurgent activity under threat of death, suggested the author was a member of the Soviet security organ. OUN-UPA counterintelligence was highly effective at subverting and deceiving the Soviets until 1947, oftentimes preventing Soviet success more than 75% of the time. OUN-UPA also focused attacks against Soviet soldiers and their supply lines, with the goal of retrieving weapons and demoralizing the troops. Reprisals for compromised Soviet agents and supporters were harsh, often involving execution and desecration of the corpse, with a note left on the chest reading “for support of the NKVD.” From 1947 on, OUN-UPA had declining success in their operations, as Soviet forces managed to separate the insurgents from the population, forcing them to live in the forests with little opportunity to receive support from the population.

By the end of 1949, the UPA was largely disarmed and most combat had subsided, with much of the remaining forces escaped into the Carpathian Mountains or fled Ukraine altogether. In March 1950, OUN leader Roman Shukhevych was killed during an NKVD raid. Though highly sought after, external support for OUN-UPA was sparse; however British intelligence and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) did make contact and provide limited support, to both OUN-B and OUN-M factions, in the form of radios and material support. The CIA was highly suspicious of the efficiency of these groups and figured they could possibly serve as an early warning system for Soviet intentions to go to war. Nevertheless by 1955, the insurgency was definitively defeated, though the organization survived with Stepan Bandera at its helm until his assassination by a KGB agent in 1959 in Germany. Following the collapse of the insurgency, modern-day remnants of the OUN began as offshoots of OUN-B, creating multiple evolutions such as OUN-Z, OUN-R, ZCh-OUN, KUN, etc. Ultimately, Soviet intelligence networks compromised attempts at further assistance by Soviet opponents, preventing revived recruitment and thus a successful OUN-UPA rebirth. However, as evidenced by the black and red UPA flag flown by present-day Ukrainian nationalist militias in the contested regions of Donbass and Luhansk, the ideology of OUN-UPA was not fully eradicated and continues to inspire Ukrainian youth to this day.

Soviet Counterinsurgency in Western Ukraine

Soviet purges of Ukrainian nationalists were the first efforts to eliminate counterrevolutionary dissidents arising from anti-Bolshevik revolts in the spring of 1921. During and after the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviets used partisan forces
extensively, subordinating these units to the Fourth Administration of the NKVD’s command structure. These irregular forces took the place of the regular army in military operations while the Red Army reorganized. The value of the partisans was their ability to move swiftly and stealthily, though in actual combat and intelligence collection these forces were lacking. Following World War I, Western Ukrainians maintained connections to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, which gave Moscow a reason to believe that enemies were on their borders. In the wake of the “Great Terror,” within the resulting conspiratorial atmosphere of infiltrators and ruthless repressions, the NKVD implemented a policy of monitoring all forms of international communications and domestic telephone conversations in 1939 to protect against external influence.

Immediately following Operation Barbarossa’s initiation in June 1941, Stalin ordered the deployment of the partisan forces into western Ukraine to combat Nazi forces in the region. After a failed first iteration, the partisans were replaced and retrained, essentially equating to an entirely new force. From 1942 on, this completely reimagined force, ranging between 350 and 2000 men, was trained in language and culture to live amongst the population, impose political influence, recruit intelligence networks, collect intelligence, and give reports using radios. The partisan forces were expected to live by their own means without assistance from higher headquarters. The teams recruited locals, German and Ukrainian defectors, and Red Army deserters, including those separated from their units, into the partisan movement. Partisan forces carried out intelligence collection, propaganda, psychological, direct action, and assassination operations. The original intent was to make the western Ukraine population inhospitable for the German forces. However, as Ukrainian nationalists became increasingly more hostile toward Soviet troops throughout World War II, the partisans managed to develop intelligence networks that the Soviet forces would eventually use in the counterinsurgency campaign. While the Soviet partisans were generally unequipped to directly engage OUN-UPA forces, they created the conditions for future Soviet success through their development of clandestine informant networks, propaganda dissemination, and presence in the region as a Soviet representative.

Despite the irregular nature of the partisan forces, by 1943, the movement was brought under command of the NKVD Central Staff, eventually subordinating it to the same pervasive Communist Party structure that commanded the Red Army. In terms of operational effect, the reigning in of the partisan movement ensured subservience to the Bolshevik leadership, and specifically Stalin. By bringing the partisans closer to the flagpole, the level of participation in intelligence collection became even greater, having been charged with three tasks: intelligence for the Red Army, intelligence for the political agencies of the oblast—region—and intelligence pertaining to security and operations. The increased use of partisans as intelligence collectors, as well as recruiters developing a network of informants and a depth of knowledge about the population and terrain, reduced interagency friction between the NKVD, MVD, and the Red Army while providing unparalleled ability to tailor propaganda to the local population.

However, following instances of UPA killing partisans in April 1943, the commander of the Ukrainian Partisan Headquarters ordered that “fifteen OUN members and their German masters will be shot for each partisan killed by UPA,” in spite of knowing that “such actions alienated the local people and drove them to the nationalists.” Whereas previously partisans had no policy to combat OUN, these incursions shifted Soviet strategy to include efforts to provoke the public to shun the nationalists combating Nazi forces. The multidimensional complexity of the Western Ukraine, split between brutal
occupation by Nazi forces, UPA performing ethnic cleansing, Soviet violence against the populace, and a shared Slavic brotherhood between Ukrainian and Russians, created chaos that the Soviets were able to exploit through partisan warfare.\textsuperscript{97} In addition to partisan forces, Soviet forces consisted of militias, anti-banditry secret police, internal troops, frontier armies, and liquidation battalions.\textsuperscript{98}

Following the retreat of Nazi troops from Western Ukraine, the Soviets sought to recapture the region as an integral part of the grand strategy to combat “capitalist encirclement,”\textsuperscript{99} in the rapidly unfolding Cold War. What remained in western Ukraine following the departure of Nazi forces was the insurgency led by OUN-UPA in 1944–45.\textsuperscript{100} Though the Basmachi experience was not enshrined in doctrine, Soviet forces embarked on a counterinsurgency campaign that mirrored a handful of the successful tactics from the Central Asian campaign. The objectives of the Soviet counterinsurgency were to rebuild Communist Party infrastructure, begin recovery from World War II, and destroy anti-Soviet resistance movements.

From the outset in late 1944, Soviet forces sought to overwhelm the insurgents with a region-wide offensive, accepting a 33% casualty rate,\textsuperscript{101} and largely ignoring the large intelligence networks created by the partisans. Repression, land reform, class exploitation, mass deportations, and heavy firepower were used, but to little strategic effect after initial success in liquidating insurgents.\textsuperscript{102} However, by 1945, Soviet forces shifted to a surround-starve-destroy pattern. This method focused on blockading UPA insurgents inside a village, conducting reconnaissance, cutting off supplies, and liquidating the members inside the village.

In 1945, the Red Army became increasingly available as troops returned from the Soviet western front, bolstering troop numbers to well over 600,000, and creating a 1:10 Soviet troop to insurgent ratio.\textsuperscript{103} According to NKVD reports, in 1945, over 50,000 insurgents were liquidated; though judging on the ruthlessness of the surround-starve-destroy pattern, that number is likely conflated with total deaths, which includes civilians.\textsuperscript{104} The Soviet’s use of excessive force to liquidate insurgents was epitomized by the largest operation, known as the “Great Blockade” from January 11 to April 10, 1946. Across all towns and villages in Western Ukraine, operations were carried out to eliminate the insurgent forces, with some estimates that total UPA forces were reduced by 40–60\%, equating to between 50,000 and 150,000 casualties.\textsuperscript{105}

In addition to military efforts, deportations of Western Ukrainians began as the Soviets returned at the end of World War II. These deportations sought to pursue two goals: eliminating opposition and facilitating collectivization—forced consolidation of peasant households into collective farms. According to Dr. Alexander Statiev, “guerrilla families ‘represented the major accomplice and shelter for the [OUN-UPA] . . . the deportation of these civilian sympathizers was a means to destroy this infrastructure without resorting to extreme violence.’”\textsuperscript{106} The use of mass deportations, beginning in 1947, helped push the population to refuse to support OUN-UPA.\textsuperscript{107} In response to the loss of support in the cities and villages, OUN-UPA insurgents moved into the forests, seeking safe haven.\textsuperscript{108} From the Carpathian Mountains and the forests of the Pripyat Marshes, OUN-UPA desperately attempted to regain its hold over the population, but to no avail.

Of utmost importance to the Soviet counterinsurgency was the use of human intelligence to infiltrate the insurgent organization, create a network of informants, direct propaganda, target insurgents, and root out infiltrators.\textsuperscript{109} Infiltration was a ruthlessly effective means of sowing uncertainty and fear, as well as providing valuable intelligence. In the words of one Ukrainian insurgent, “the Bolsheviks try to take us from within . . . you can
never know directly in whose hands you will find yourself. At every step you can expect [an enemy] agent. From such a network of spies, the work of whole teams is often penetrated . . . [which] has brought major losses to the OUN.”

Soviet proficiency at infiltration was honed through World War II and through the “Great Illegals” program, the experiences of which were used to train agents to be deadly effective and blend seamlessly into the insurgent group and local population. Soviet agents often successfully turned captured insurgents into double agents and inserted local recruits into the OUN-UPA ranks.

Additionally, Soviet forces dressed as insurgents and conducted guerrilla operations against civilians, though these operations were of varied success. Informant networks, such as those recruited by Soviet partisans, provided some of the most accurate information on OUN-UPA action, but often resulted in brutal reprisals against informants and their families. However, Soviet special operations forces found creative means to track insurgents, such as passing psychotropic drugs to civilians to slip into insurgents’ food and drink when they arrived to prevent escape and scented drugs that dogs could follow into the forest hiding places of insurgents.

The use of censuses and ID cards effectively excluded insurgents from daily life in the villages and cities controlled by the Soviets. In 1947, the Soviets reevaluated their counterinsurgency strategy, focusing on “soft power,” and using propaganda to shape the population’s perception of the conflict. These information operations sought to both deny the insurgents the moral high ground when comparing reprisals against civilians and gain popular support through three narratives: the Communist and Marxist-Leninist ideology’s benefit to the poor, appeal to Slavic identity and “fraternal brotherhood,” and highlighting the insurgents’ connections to Nazi atrocities.

The Soviets’ new focus on “soft power” did not mean that violence was not used; rather, kinetic actions would be focused on reducing civilian casualties through intelligence-driven operations. From 1948 to 1950, NKVD was responsible for the majority of OUN-UPA’s casualties, assassinating most of the UPA’s leadership. Mass resettlement diluted support for the insurgents in western Ukraine by removing supporters of the nationalist movement and importing more Poles into the region. Additionally, troop numbers increased to the ratio of one Soviet for every three insurgents, ensuring Soviet military superiority. In conjunction with the previously created counterinsurgency infrastructure, the Soviets all but eliminated the UPA by 1950 by killing of the OUN leader, Roman Shukhevych. Due to the separate command structures, the OUN survived much longer, finding support for the all but defunct OUN-M faction from the CIA in the mid-1950s. The assassination of Stepan Bandera by a KGB agent in 1959 in Germany left the OUN essentially a shell of an organization, with members released from prison attempting to recruit, but failing to bring new life to the OUN.

While the organization fell into disarray, the Soviets continued to hunt the Ukrainian nationalists, though less aggressively, never fully losing the sense of paranoia and fear of counterrevolutionaries that developed the intelligence apparatus and facilitated its successful counterinsurgency campaign.

Counterinsurgency Campaign Assessment

Undoubtedly, the Soviet counterinsurgency in western Ukraine from 1945 to 1955 was successful in achieving both grand strategic and campaign objectives. The goals of securing the homeland from enemies at home and abroad, as well as rebuilding Communist Party infrastructure, beginning the recovery from World War II, and destroying anti-Soviet resistance movements were met by matching ends, ways, and means in counterinsurgency strategy and tactics. Post-insurgency, the Soviets used Ukraine as a buffer state.
between themselves and NATO powers, with no other popularly supported resistance movement arising.

However, the Soviets’ success was not initially apparent, and was not easily measured until well after the decisive battle had been fought. The Soviet counterinsurgency in western Ukraine can be divided into three phases of counterinsurgency strategy, delineated by the strategic focus and tactical shifts by Soviet forces. Each will be assessed individually. The first phase (1944—March 1947) focused on attrition by regular army forces and isolation of insurgents from their supplies. Initially, the OUN-UPA’s military structure was extremely vulnerable to this traditional force-on-force conflict. After the UPA shifted to small unit, guerrilla warfare, the Soviets were unable to maintain effectiveness, in large part due to ignoring the need for intelligence in favor of large military operations. Towards the end of the phase, counterinsurgency efforts were shifted to the NKVD units, which used the extremely successful, though indiscriminate, surround-starve-destroy method, in conjunction with deportations. By the second phase (1947—1949), NKVD shifted strategic focus to denial of popular support. Recruitment of locals and a focus on intelligence gathering, as well as propaganda and mass deportations, made this phase extremely successful. In the final phase (post-1949), the Soviets became impatient and increasingly resorted to violence against civilians. However, the fruits of the partisans’ labor in building intelligence networks paid off in their use of intelligence gathering as the core strategic component. By reverting to attrition, in part due to lacking a metric of success, the Soviets nearly jeopardized their efforts to destroy popular support for the insurgents. Successfully conducted leadership assassinations offset these effects and brought the insurgent organization to its knees.121

In the end, according to Yuri Zhumkov, the Soviets accurately assessed that OUN-UPA gained support through six methods: “charismatic leadership, esoteric and exotic appeals, terrorism, provocation of government repression, demonstrations of potency, and coercion.”122 In directly combating these methods of garnering support through intelligence gathering, separating insurgents from popular support through deportations and censuses, using propaganda to disgust the people with the insurgents’ history with the Nazi regime and civilian reprisals, eliminating the OUN-UPA’s ability to supply itself and carry out operations, and assassinating the leaders, the Soviets adapted to create a successful counterinsurgency campaign. Through the unity of effort inherent in the strict hierarchical Soviet system, the lack of stigma surrounding the use of maximum force, prevention of consistent external support for the insurgents, and high troop to insurgent ratios, tactics to disrupt insurgent support had positive strategic effects.

The Soviets ignored many of the lessons worth replicating from their experience combating the Basmachi in Central Asia, such as tailoring Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Communist Party structure to local customs and opting for intelligence collection as the initial central focus. Perhaps due to post-World War II hubris surrounding the strength of the Soviet army, or perhaps disregard for the lessons of history by the infallible leader, Stalin, counterinsurgent strategy lacked the quick success predicted to follow the enemy-centric approach of attrition. While historical documents suggest either could be viable explanations, Soviet counterinsurgent forces managed to adapt.

In Western Ukraine, Soviet success was due to the match of counterinsurgency strategy with Soviet culture. The culture of paranoia within the Soviet Union, almost exclusively influenced by Stalin and his advisors, resulted in an extraordinarily capable intelligence apparatus, specializing in deception, infiltration, coercion, repression, and the use of maximum force. The Soviets had already cultivated, and were constantly improving their
abilities in these areas, which resulted in a highly successful counterinsurgency strategy. By focusing on intelligence collection, arguably the Soviet’s greatest strength, counterinsurgents turned the tide of a strategically unsuccessful policy of attrition and ultimately made the Soviets successful in countering the OUN-UPA.

Lessons Learned & Recommendations for U.S. Policymakers

The brutal nature of the Soviet Union’s treatment of its citizens, both a cause and result of the culture of paranoia, is completely antithetical to Western values and oftentimes deters analysis and application of the regime’s lessons learned. However, the Soviet campaign to defeat the OUN-UPA insurgency merits increased attention by scholarly and policy communities. As insurgencies arise and either ignore or hybridize the lessons of Mao—such as ISIL in Iraq and Syria and its constituent parts throughout North Africa, Afghanistan, and Southeast Asia—this Soviet counterinsurgency experience presents an opportunity to learn from a different playbook that counters a method of insurgency outside the mainstream conception in the US. The advantage of applying such lessons is that American counterinsurgency becomes better informed and attuned to a greater variety of opponents and strategies, thereby increasing the chance that Americans will not forget the lessons of history, much the same as the Vietnam experience was forgotten in Iraq after 2003.

U.S. policymakers should consider the following six observations when creating and evaluating present and future counterinsurgency campaigns and doctrine, in order to prevent a similar decay of doctrinal and experiential knowledge.

First, prevention of external intervention should be a top priority, as this allowed Soviet efforts to carry out their campaign uninhibited. Through human penetrations of Western intelligence, like Kim Philby, and as a result of reducing the insurgents’ operational efficiency within the region and international recruitment, OUN-UPA received little more than sparse tactical support from the CIA. Unlike the British experience in combating the IRA or the insurgency in Rhodesia, the Soviets faced an enemy entirely reliant upon themselves for funding, recruitment, and training, with no lifeline for help when converting from an openly militant organization to a clandestine insurgency by 1946. By staving off critical forms of external support—safe haven and transit, substantial financial resources, political support and propaganda, and direct military support—the Soviets exploited this critical flaw through overwhelming numbers and skilled application of pressure on the insurgents, greatly contributing to their success. As can be seen in U.S. counterinsurgency in Iraq, external support from Iran and global terrorist groups, such as Al Qa’eda, created a situation where some of the generators of violence were located outside of the area of operations, thereby allowing a hydra-like situation where every success and failure is followed by twice as many unintended consequences. U.S. policymakers should be adamant that future counterinsurgency campaigns seek to prevent external support early and continue to counter such influence through the entirety of the campaign, through both diplomacy and intelligence gathering inside and outside of the area of operations. When possible, double agent operations offer a great advantage to counterinsurgents, by offering a secret window into insurgents’ critical support providers that can be used to combat their influence.

Second, the use of maximum military force can be strategically effective if efforts are made to avoid civilian casualties. As Andrew Shaver and Jacob Shapiro conclude from their evaluation of newly declassified documents from the Iraq War, “information flow goes down after government forces inadvertently kill civilians and it goes up when insurgents do.” At best, civilian casualties stymie the critical
flow of information that allows counter-insurgents to, in the words Mao, remove the insurgent “fish” from the “sea” of civilians. At worst, civilian casualties create greater pools of recruits for insurgents and increase insurgent violence. The Soviet experience combating OUN-UPA makes clear that employing maximum military force, using the surround-starve-destroy pattern, can force insurgents to completely change their tactics, thereby weakening their overall strategy. This can be useful both to separate insurgents from the population, as happened when OUN-UPA was forced into the forests of the Carpathian Mountains, but also to drastically reduce the size of the insurgent force. The extreme brutality directed against the OUN-UPA gave a great incentive for defection when the Soviets granted periods of amnesty. However, effectively applying maximum military force is reliant upon accurate intelligence and adequate troop numbers in relation to the size of the country and number of insurgent forces.

Third, adequate troop levels must be deployed in order to avoid the effects of geographic dispersion. Even when the Soviets increased their troop to population ratio to 1:10 in 1945, the insurgency continued to operate throughout western Ukraine for an nearly eight more years. This stands in stark contrast to the American doctrine of 1:50 outlined by FM 3–24. Whereas this doctrine sought to address the deficiencies that plagued the U.S. in Vietnam, the American experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have been unable to garner enough support from the populace for such an overwhelming surge in either battlefield. The Soviet experience demonstrates how a surplus of counterinsurgents can bolster all lines of the COIN effort—propaganda, infiltration, civilian reeducation, direct action, etc. Even with maximal effort, insurgencies still prove incredibly difficult to eradicate completely. If enough counterinsurgent forces are not engaged, the likelihood of failure increases exponentially.

Fourth, intelligence networks are critically important to a successful counter-insurgency strategy. Civilian informants, locally recruited infiltrators, and accurate intelligence collection are the hallmarks of effective targeting of insurgent forces. Multiple historical experiences—eliminating dissidents after the October Revolution, training long-term agents of infiltration for the “Great Illegals” program, an intelligence apparatus focusing on human intelligence gathering after the intelligence failure related to Operation Barbarossa, and the partisan wars of World War II—gave the Soviets both the organizational knowledge instilled in their training and forces in place to exploit a wealth of intelligence networks in western Ukraine. The result of these experiences was an ability to greatly tailor operations to the micro-environments of cities and oblasts within western Ukraine that were highly effective at eliminating insurgents and exploiting local knowledge for propaganda and information operations. Certainly, the Soviets did not always capitalize on this capability; however, this ability is clearly demonstrated throughout the campaign to destroy OUN-UPA. For the U.S., the need for intelligence networks is not lost on the military or participating intelligence agencies. Where the U.S. should take heed is in the ideal to cultivate and tend to deep intelligence networks based on infiltration, double agents, and tailoring solutions to the micro-climates where they exist.

Fifth, unity of effort from the top down, with clear strategic objectives, allows for a large organization to be as decisive as possible. The U.S.’s bureaucracy and top-down approach are often better suited for conventional conflicts. “Whole-of-government” approaches are difficult to generate buy-in and appear antithetical to command structures working independently. The Soviet model excels in this sense due to its communist structure; grand strategy, strategy, operations, and even tactical decisions are all set by a single leader. Undoubtedly, as Stalin demonstrated, cognitive biases
and thinking errors become magnified and can ignore the realities of the situation. Additionally, such a model encourages inaccurate reporting to save both the lives and careers of individuals at all levels of the Soviet structure. However, the ability for all branches of government and the military to be subordinated to one unified policy with a clear strategy ensured unidirectional movement. The U.S. would be well-served by such an approach, with a more tailored approach appropriate to the nature of the American political-military system. While long-term policy should be designated in the appropriate bodies of government, strategy should have a means of continuity that is insulated from erratic political shifts. Finally, there should be a greater reliance upon company-level commanders on the ground to implement strategy and policy within each of their micro-environments. By combining a unity of effort with tailored approaches, “big picture, small brush” implementation, the U.S. can greatly increase efficiency of operations.

Finally, the Soviet counterinsurgency campaign to defeat OUN-UPA demonstrates the efficiency of matching strategy and culture that no counterinsurgency campaign since has managed to achieve. The Soviets married the strict hierarchy of the Bolshevik system through unimpeded engagement of the military in brutally coercive operations and the highly effective intelligence apparatus to infiltrate the insurgency and collect actionable intelligence as a result of the inherent Russian paranoia of revolution. At no point did Stalin and his subordinates recognize this potential during the partisan fighting of World War II in western Ukraine; rather through a series of failures and semi-successful strategic shifts, the Soviets stumbled upon this marriage.

Following the casualty-acceptant Soviet tactical model remains uncouth for countries unwilling to upend democratic norms. Yet rarely do tactics alone change the tide of war, particularly in a protracted conflict such as an insurgency. Therefore, policymakers should recognize that achievable goals are accomplished by means of viable strategy and implemented through effective tactics. However, determining a viable strategy is dependent upon the tactics which exist within the toolbox of the counterinsurgent. These tools must be sharpened to meet the precise, scalpel-like needs of counterinsurgency, as opposed to the blunt instrument of conventional warfare. Skills which result from some deeply rooted facet of the counterinsurgent’s cultural fabric tend to be the most precisely used, while new skills are developed through trial and error. This experimental approach oftentimes has the effect of alienating the population, further compounding the difficulty of counterinsurgency.

A COIN strategy should initially rely upon the proficiency of counterinsurgent forces in tactics which have already been developed and tested in combat. Such deliberate introspection by a counterinsurgent to discover their strengths transforms the Soviet example from accidental success to intentional strategic planning. For U.S. policymakers, matching counterinsurgency strategy with American culture, and specifically military culture, capitalizes on skills that the U.S. does best, preventing the quagmire of trying to attain proficiency in new tactics after the campaign is already underway. The American public is impatient, at times impetuous, and highly reliant upon new technology over time-tested analog means.

The U.S. stands as a beacon of hope of a better life for those subjected to inhumane circumstances. American counterinsurgency strategy should both account for, and capitalize on, these cultural foundations. The U.S. is not bound by FM 3–24 or the classic models of counterinsurgency strategy, which have a spotty record of success. As the Soviet campaign in western Ukraine illustrates, policymakers would be well-served to consider how to apply lessons learned from non-American models of counterinsurgency to campaigns that do not fall neatly into the classic insurgency model.
About the Author

Bryce Aspelund is a Master’s Candidate in Georgetown University’s Security Studies Program within the Walsh School of Foreign Service where he focuses on Terrorism and Substate Violence. Previously, he graduated Summa Cum Laude from the University of Texas with a Bachelors of Arts in Government and a minor in Russian Language. He has studied abroad as a Fulbright Hayes Scholar and served for five years on active duty as a United States Army Ranger-qualified Paratrooper, including a tour in Afghanistan. He currently aspires to continue serving in the national security field at home and abroad.
Appendix A:
Soviet Partisan Intelligence
Requirement Examples & Oath for
Recruited Partisan Informants

Soviet Partisan Intelligence Requirements
From: Eleventh Army intelligence report,
dated March 1942
1. What factories have been restored
   and are again in operation?
2. Are there Russian deserters, and,
   if so, where?
3. Which inhabitants have not
   obeyed the evacuation order?
4. Names of mayors.
5. Names of auxiliary policemen.

Oath for Recruited Partisan Informants
The persons recruited for the partisan in-
telligence net were solemnly inducted by
the following oath:

Pledge of Partisan Intelligence Infor-
mants: I __________________ pledge
to the Intelligence Section:
1. To report all persons and groups
   who engage in espionage against
   the Red Army and the partisan
   movement.
2. To report all observations of the
   enemy and his equipment.
3. To discharge honestly and promptly
   all missions given me by the officer
   in charge of the intelligence section.
4. Never to talk to anyone about my
   connections with the intelligence
   section.
5. To sign all reports made by me
   under the cover name of . . . in
   order to maintain complete secu-
   rity of information.
If I do not discharge the missions en-
trusted to me, I shall be shot.

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Appendix B:
Soviet Force Types in Western Ukraine

Militias: Locally recruited civilians and
military members unfit for service on
the front line. Poorly trained, suffered
from high levels of trauma from combat,
and had little chance of survival against
OUN-UPA.

Anti-Banditry Departments (OBB):
Secret police to fight underground and
nationalist organizations, under NKVD.
Typically comprised of five officers led by
a lieutenant, ranging in abilities to conduct
operations.

Unit 1: ID of central and national
OUN Directorates
Unit 2: Operational-level initiatives
against lower-ranking directorates
in the field
Unit 3: Fighting OUN-M and other
nationalist organizations
Unit 4: Leading Liquidation Battal-
ions and Secret-Service and Com-
bat Groups
Unit 5: Operational register, gath-
ering records on members of the
underground
Unit 6: Radio communication, op-
erating personnel of “Triewoga”
radio equipment

Internal Troops: Support militia and
NKGB, as well as protect the rear area of
front line and support counterintelligence
efforts.

Frontier Armies: Regionally structured
forces to fight armed nationalists, as well
as protect the borders.
**Liquidation Battalions:** Ex-partisans and local civilians, served to pursue nationalists and protect key areas. Typically, only received ten hours of training per month, often the recipient of OUN-UPA reprisals.

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What “Winning” Looks Like: Perceptions of Success in Modern Counterinsurgency

Gregory Durso

Gauging “success” in counterinsurgency operations is a fundamentally subjective endeavor and requires a substantial amount of interpretation. Current literature defines success as the local government being empowered as a legitimate actor and retaining considerable popular control, with a degraded insurgent ability to disrupt or influence either the population or the government. Yet these markers may not fully capture the potential outcomes of a counterinsurgency campaign and tracking the progress of that effort can be quite difficult.

This paper attempts to determine how success was understood by officers in Afghanistan, charged with carrying out counterinsurgency operations at the ground level, by comparing their efforts and priorities to what the available literature and doctrine claimed was necessary for success. First, I review what indicators of successful counterinsurgency operations look like according to the social science and theoretical work that forms the basis for military doctrine on counterinsurgency. Second, I conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews of twenty current or former Company-grade officers with experience in counterinsurgency operations between the years of 2010 and 2014 in Afghanistan. Using both inductive and deductive approaches, I analyzed data through thematic analysis to gauge performance and understanding based on three empirical indicators consistently found in the literature: levels of violence, popular support for the Afghan government, and improvement in the capacity of Afghan security forces and/or governance.

My research suggests that officers understand what is generally expected of their operations in counterinsurgencies according to the published doctrine. However, these officers also frequently articulated difficulties in measuring or understanding what specifically constituted success. I review these findings and conclude that the assessments, efforts, and understanding at the lowest level of command are geared towards simplifying a complex environment. Success becomes redefined on the military’s own terms.

What was less clear is if a failure to achieve success could be attributed to organizational imperatives of the U.S. military itself, rather than a host of other factors. Nevertheless, there was a perceptible empirical link between the operations undertaken and the results that were desired to defeat the insurgents.

On December 1, 2009, President Barack Obama unveiled his new strategy for the conflict in Afghanistan to an audience of 5,000 Cadets at West Point. The President said this new strategy would “break the Taliban’s momentum and increase Afghanistan’s capacity over the next 18 months.” President Obama outlined the need for a force surge, similar to the one used in Iraq, to “effectively train and partner with Afghan security forces to better secure the population.” The president, however, warned that “the days of providing a blank check were over” and that “effort must be based on performance.”

His immediate audience included the 900 members of the West Point Class of 2010, many of whom would go on to help implement this strategy as the Army’s newest Junior officers.

To be successful, the officers of the United States military would need to reevaluate “success” and develop ways in which to measure it. Military operations
have always been about achieving political effects in the end, but at every level of counterinsurgency (COIN)—tactical, operational and strategic—these effects become immediate and impactful. “Determining who is ‘ahead’ at any given moment is usually feasible in more conventional warfare,” but when dealing with counterinsurgencies, Campbell, O’Hanlon and Shapiro argue that, “The effects result from human perceptions with unique political communities.”5 Unlike the seizure of terrain or the destruction of an opposing government’s forces, success in counterinsurgencies is often based on perceptions, which is “inherently a contextual and qualitative process.”6

To understand this challenge, this paper examines the extent to which company-grade officers7 understanding of “success” aligns with the existing literature on counterinsurgency. Narratives of counterinsurgency typically suggest that the core principles of COIN have remained consistent and timeless, but are either implemented too late (e.g. Vietnam)8 or insufficiently (e.g. Afghanistan)9. Austin Long argues that the application of COIN doctrine has been applied unevenly, contrary to a popular narrative of counterinsurgency which assumes a uniform approach by all the units involved.10 This assumption creates a gap in the study of counterinsurgency and military operations. The entire military is presumed to be a constant, rather than a variable. An examination of company-level leadership is instructive in understanding how doctrine is understood by those implementing it on a tactical level.

In this paper I explore whether what is expected of military units for a successful counterinsurgency operation aligns with established doctrine. I also explore whether the current system for evaluating those operations is empirically linked to the existing literature. To accomplish this, this paper uses qualitative methods to focus on the case study of Afghanistan during the surge ordered by President Obama in 2009. The time period of the surge runs from 2010–2015.11

My hypothesis is that among company-grade officers there is a broad understanding of basic COIN concepts, as outlined in the U.S. Army Field Manual on Counterinsurgency (“FM”). However, there remains a heavy focus on kinetic metrics, a rejection or reluctant execution of perceived “soft” skills outlined in COIN literature, and a poor understanding of the mechanisms to achieve the counter-insurgent goals. In terms of empirical indicators, this paper focuses on three areas that are consistently highlighted in most doctrine and in counterinsurgent literature: 1) Levels of violence in areas of operations; 2) Indicators of popular support for the government; and 3) Improvement of government capacity (including government security forces).12 I will develop a theoretical framework based on these three empirical indicators and will elaborate on how these conceptualizations of success are understood by the officers charged with conducting these operations.

Definitions

Understanding what company-level military leadership is required to accomplish during a counterinsurgency operation requires a viable definition of what exactly they are supposed to counter. Without that definition, the question of how officers perceive success cannot be understood. It is not sufficient to describe insurgencies simply as “irregular warfare.” Rather, insurgency is better understood as a space where a typically weaker non-state force attempts to defeat a militarily superior force in order to alter the political landscape. Inter-state warfare is also conducted to modify the political landscape. The difference in insurgency is that the political landscape under physical attack is deemed to be “legitimate,” and therefore the attempts to change or overthrow that government are “illegal.”13

These definitions are not new. David Galula, a French officer during the
Algerian War, paraphrases Clausewitz in his 1964 work *Theory and Practice of Counterinsurgency Warfare* by stating: “Insurgency is the pursuit of the policy of a party, inside a country, by every means.”\(^{14}\) The distinction “by every means” is an important one. Insurgency, and by extension, counterinsurgency, is understood as a conflict that requires more than mere combat power. Direct fighting by armed combatants is only one aspect of the overall struggle. As such, most definitions rest on the central tenant that victory or defeat does not revolve around owning territory nor the elimination of your opponent’s forces; instead, it centers on the population and its relationship to the government.

Given this study focuses on military officers, it is important to understand the doctrinal definition of insurgency, which should provide the foundation for their operations. The U.S. military defines insurgency as “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict. It is a protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control. Political power is the central issue in an insurgency.”\(^{15}\) If the insurgency is focused on subverting the government and increasing its own legitimacy, then it follows that the counterinsurgents must focus on reinforcing the legitimacy and position of the government, while limiting the ability of insurgents to influence the population of a given area. Therefore, success likely centers on the ability of a military force to exert some control over a population, which would reassert what Max Weber calls their “monopoly on the legitimate use of force,” which is the “basic bargain being obtained by offering security to its citizens.”\(^{16}\) Defeating an insurgency requires that “counterinsurgents make it in the interest of civilians to support the government.”\(^{17}\) Counterinsurgents can attempt to do this through violent coercion\(^{18}\) or a more persuasive approach, such as improving social services.

Lastly, there needs to be a general understanding of what it means to be “successful” in a population-centric form of counterinsurgency. For the purposes of this article, this will be defined as elements of the literature the external military force would rely on to guide their operations.\(^{19}\) There are a few principles that are pervasive throughout most counterinsurgent literature and are highlighted in the Field Manual. The most important of these is simply that the focus of all efforts should be made with regard to the population, which remains “the center of gravity.”

The Field Manual, published in 2006, draws heavily from such works referred to as “The Classics” in the FM’s bibliography. This includes firsthand accounts of revolutionary, colonial warfare by David Galula, T.E Lawrence, Mao-Zedong, and Robert Thompson. Citing newer, analytical work, the Field Manual relies on scholars and practitioners such as Gil Merom, John Nagl, David Kilcullen, Montgomery McFate, and Robert Taber to instruct officers on military operations.

The Field Manual includes three areas of focus, drawn from those sources, that form the key empirical indicators that I use for my case study:

1. Security of the population and levels of violence as indicators of insurgent strength.
2. Popular support for the government or political primacy for the government.
3. Improvement of government capacity\(^{20}\), in military, political and economic terms.\(^{21, 22}\)

While securing the population seems straightforward as a military operation, the second and third areas of focus tend to fall into the realm of what certain authors refer to as “armed social work.”\(^{23}\) Kilcullen defines armed social work as operations that “encompass community organizing, welfare, mediation, domestic
assistance, economic support, all under the conditions of extreme threat."24 If these lines of effort form the principles which guide operations during counterinsurgencies, the challenge becomes, according to Campbell et al., how to “translate them into actionable policy in a given case, and determine if efforts to do so are succeeding.”25

Literature Review

This paper sits at an intersection between the political/military theory of counterinsurgency and the organizational theory of how militaries operate. My hypotheses are predominately based on organizational and cultural theories, but first require an understanding of some of the empirical work on counterinsurgency as it relates to the three Field Manual indicators.

Security and Levels of Violence

There is a robust body of literature on violence in civil wars and insurgencies. Understanding and addressing violence, as the defining factor separating political resistance from insurgency, is critical to the operations of militaries in counterinsurgencies. Security is “the core state function to citizens within its territory. Security is the most basic precondition for civilian support of the government.”26 It follows then that in order to reach the goal of government legitimacy, threats to the population must be controlled or eliminated. It remains the very first requirement for COIN operations in the Field Manual: “Creating a secure physical and psychological environment is the first task” of a counterinsurgency operation.27 Yet perceptions of success by officers should not be solely measuring SIGACTs (Significant Actions). Instead, in my research, I look for indicators suggesting that violence, or lack thereof, was perceived, reported, and understood in more than just a single, numerical way.28

Popular Support: Does Development Work?

Popular support for the government is paramount during an insurgency. As the Field Manual notes, “If states compete directly with insurgents in social service provision, they can weaken the link between communities and violent groups.”29 Accordingly, this may reduce the recruitment base for insurgent groups and strengthen the link to the government. There is some empirical evidence to back up this claim. Andrew Beath et al. found that introductions of government development “improved villagers’ attitudes towards the government, both local and central.”30 Yet there is not sufficient social science consensus to “generate clear predictions about how, and therefore where and when, benign measures work.”31

In my analysis on officer perceptions of success, I will look to see if development, economic, political, or social projects were undertaken, to what extent, and in what ways the efforts and outcomes were measured. As a starting point, I will evaluate the utility of development as a means of influencing popular support based on the conclusions of Berman et al.: “Programs must be conducted in territory secure enough to be implementable, their design must be sufficiently informed about local preferences to benefit the local community; and they must be conditional on cooperation”.32

Building Capacity

The goal in foreign counterinsurgency interventions is not only to defeat the insurgents, but to create the conditions for the host nation to be more independent. This requires the host nation to be able to unilaterally provide the necessary security and administer the government in a way that minimizes support for the insurgents. This partnership between host nation and allied forces can create frictions and typically makes the counterinsurgent task more difficult.33 In this analysis, I will attempt to discover if building partner capacity was conducted in a way that focused on three key factors: leadership (such as managing corruption and troop discipline), as well as efforts to connect security forces to the population in positive ways; an emphasis on quality over pure quantitative metrics,
which would include a willingness to assess partnered forces honestly; and capacity extended beyond purely security force relations to governance or rule of law.

**Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

The preceding discussion lays the foundation for understanding what rigorous social science and doctrine says military forces should be doing to succeed in counterinsurgency. Yet questions remain as to how well officers understand these foundations and how they perceive and interpret success in their operations. An understanding of organizational theory and militarized identities allowed me to establish a theoretical framework to better analyze my qualitative data.

**Hypotheses**

My hypotheses were developed based on assessing how military doctrine communicates the mechanisms of conducting COIN to its officers and builds on the existing literature on the core institutionalized identities of the military. That existing literature includes work by Susan Woodward, Austin Long, John Nagl, Morton Halperin and Ryerson Christie. Based on this foundation, I tested the following four hypotheses:

H1: Officers have a general understanding of what counterinsurgency doctrine is about and what should be expected of them.

H2: Officers place more value in kinetic indicators to determine success or failure in counterinsurgency operations.

H3: Officers reject or are reluctant to focus on “soft skills” in counterinsurgency, which include improvement to governance, development, economic support, or capacity building.

H4: Officers have difficulties in creating mechanisms that are empirically linked to assess progress, or lack thereof, in counterinsurgency operations.

The focus on the three empirical indicators (security, popular support, government capacity) provide the foundation for testing these hypotheses.

**Methodology**

My qualitative method consisted of twenty in-depth interviews of officers with first-hand experience with counterinsurgency operations. The interviewees are anonymous because of the sensitive nature of the subject and because many are still serving in a military capacity. None of the interviewees were compelled to talk about classified material. The dataset was analyzed via thematic deductive and inductive coding. I structured questions that were used for each interview to establish consistency, but based on answers I would follow up to provide the interviewee a chance to discuss what was important to them. The mixed approach allowed me to generate questions with a substantial amount of prior knowledge about the topic, but still allowed for the more exploratory approach of the interviewees’ subjective lenses. Because of the complexity of counterinsurgency operations, qualitative methods are well-suited to help explain the process officers use to understand the situations they faced and the decisions they made.

**Analysis and Findings**

*The Primacy of Violence*

Analyzing the first empirical indicator, levels of violence, highlighted a fairly consistent approach to the value of kinetic activity. It was clear that security, and by extension, violence, occupied a central role in any discussion of operations. Beyond that, I was attempting to determine an understanding of how levels of violence, or the usage of offensive capabilities, informed or drove perceptions of success.
Officers clearly understood that protection for civilians in counterinsurgency operations was a critical foundation for other lines of effort. A substantial number of interviewees were quick to address the utility of offensive capabilities: “If I go after the enemy to clear and drive them out, I’m going to make contact and have SIGACTs . . . does it look bad? Does it look like there’s a downward trend? I had more contact, more events, but in doing so I’m actually improving the situation” (Interview 13). Other officers focused on the need to avoid civilian casualties: “You didn’t want to harm any of the civilian population. The goal there was that they were the key terrain (Interview 8). A majority of officers understood that the population was the center of gravity, yet often disagreed on what that concept meant: “I believe the most important goal we could make a difference on was securing the population . . . allow[ing] them to regain control of their physical environment” (Interview 6).

However, acknowledging the importance of security as the foundation for counterinsurgency is different than relying on indicators of security or violence to validate overall success. The COIN literature argues that there are limits to the utility of violence as a gauge of success. Kilcullen, for example, contends that the use of SIGACTs can be misleading because “low levels of violence might tell you that someone is in control of a district, but it doesn’t tell you who.”37 This echoes Stathis Kalyvas’ “zones” assessment of violence in his work on civil wars. He identifies that complete control over an area by insurgents does not require much in the way of violence.38 The interviewed officers exhibited reasonable understanding that this metric was not the sole indicator of success. Yet the seeming simplicity of this metric was a lure for measuring success and reporting it up the chain of command. As one officer surmised when asked about the priorities of his chain of command: “I think that they looked at the level of kinetic activity as an indicator of how well we were doing” (Interview 4). Another officer noted that, “The most important line of effort was definitely security. The metrics we used were all based around security-related topics, number of SIGACTS in the area, number of firefights, [and] IEDs” (Interview 12). The simplicity of SIGACTs, in the form of raw quantitative data, incentivizes their use. Despite an understanding that levels of violence can mean different outcomes in different areas, it appears that the analysis done at the ground level had to be manipulated in order to be codified and packaged at higher command levels. In Interview 3, the participant believed that “a lot of those metrics kind of ended there with nice, quantifiable numbers in terms of significant acts of violence and things like that.” He, like many others, might have understood that it wasn’t so simple, but complicated qualitative assessments were not as useful.

According to the 2017 Afghanistan Index, SIGACTs at the theatre level are sorted by type (e.g. IED, small arms, aircraft loss), perpetrator (e.g. insurgent, government, coalition), victim, and location.39 These macro-level statistics can suffer from the same lack of nuance as those at the micro-level, as casualties and events rose sharply along with the surge, and coalition forces moved into areas previously untested, which at first glance would suggest that levels of violence were skyrocketing.

The theme of measuring inputs versus outputs was clear in the analysis of the violence indicator and remained consistent through all the empirical indicators. Among participants, there was strong rejection of the idea that the number of enemy casualties was indicative of success—a point that has been emphasized in COIN doctrine and literature and was clearly reinforced in training. Nevertheless, consistent with Ryerson Christie’s “internal contradiction” about the military’s core identity, my analysis demonstrates that there is still a stronger valuation of more “traditional” military functions. As one officer explained, “Infantrymen, even
the officers, want to go out there and earn their CIB [Combat Infantryman’s Badge]. It’s important to their future, their identity. Getting it becomes part of the mission” (Interview 14). Officers noted that as a military organization, the ability to deal with, and deal out, violence was inherent to the task, and the primacy of kinetic activity could always be explained as necessary for the security of the population. This is exemplified by the remarks of one participant, who reflected that, “Security is the baseline. If you do not have security, nothing else follows. And we just never had, in my opinion, a level of security that would warrant reasonable efforts in other power veins to create stability” (Interview 4).

Kinetic indicators, however, appear to still be overvalued as barometers of mission success—a clear deviation from what is outlined in COIN doctrine and social science. Officers serving in eastern Afghanistan reflected on their experience with defining success: “It’s chronic in that we had the ability to analyze, but it’s through a straw hole. No one has the depth of experience to connect that analysis to either other trends that are horizontal to it or the bigger picture, or how it connects in time” (Interview 1). Or as Interview 12 noted: “My battalion received a Meritorious Unit Citation for the companies up north and all the fighting . . . but no matter how successful we were on the kinetic side, it didn’t really correlate to success on the non-kinetic side . . . it made no impact on the things that really mattered to the population.”

Popular Support

When asked to identify the biggest problem in their local area, in a 2008 Asia Foundation poll of Afghan civilians, insecurity received only 14% of the vote, tying for the sixth most popular answer behind a host of quality of life concerns such as unemployment, electricity, access to potable water, roads, and healthcare. Popular support for the government, a key tenet of counterinsurgency doctrine, ostensibly should require organizations such as the military to address these quality of life concerns. My analysis was not conclusive as to whether these development functions were rejected. There were some general themes of skepticism as to the effectiveness of such efforts. The source of the reluctance however, appears debatable and varied greatly. My findings are consistent with the existing body of literature, as the qualitative data indicates that officers perceived popular support and development as important but struggled to empirically link it to their understanding of success. It appeared difficult to prove that gains in development were truly weakening the insurgency. Interviewees were uniformly adamant that these types of efforts were outside their area of expertise, but exhibited an understanding that development needed to be a part of their operations. For example, one participant (Interview 12) stated that, “You could see the issues, but we weren’t trained sufficiently to actually address it, to actually be able to influence those problems, even though we could see them every day.” Another, Interview 11, noted that, “The fundamental goal of your military campaign comes down to winning the, if not the allegiance, at least the passive acceptance by the population of the side your supporting, right? I think some of this nuance gets lost.”

Local and Conditional

The existing COIN literature states that it is possible to make gains in popular support for the host government if the programs are locally tailored and conditional. The theme of local versus supra-local understanding was apparent in the interviews. Namely, what happened in a Company or Platoon’s area of operations, and the understanding of the officers in that area, was not necessarily translatable to other areas. Additionally, some officers argued that development in their areas “worked,” but was disconnected to a larger strategy: “They [brigade] did all these asynchronous efforts that were not founded
in any strategic directive... you end up with ridiculous metrics that have nothing to do with fact, can cause catastrophic second, third order effects simply because we thought we knew how to measure something that is pretty intangible” (Interview 6). While any one program or development effort might yield results, attempts to centralize the efforts throughout larger areas would not guarantee a similar outcome.

The Population is a Prize and Development is a Weapon

Portions of the interviews revealed a propensity of officers to discuss the population as a uniform, passive group. Officers mentioned that when “...we talk about winning the population... it was a metric driving factor, not actually qualifiable, we considered them a resource” (Interview 6). Considering the population as a resource, or a group to be acted upon, appears to limit how the officers could understand the agency of the population. Typically, and in line with their doctrine, there was overwhelming support for the idea that the majority of the population was neutral or indifferent to the ongoing struggle between insurgents and the government. In line with the existing doctrine, officers tended to view the population as a prize—something to be won over. Success, therefore, belonged to the side that did more for the population. Development becomes a “weapon system,” where it is trained on a specific area or group to yield specific results in the form of support or actionable intelligence. While there was some qualitative evidence in my dataset that development projects did improve access to actionable human intelligence, a relatively tangible benefit, linking development (political or economic) to increased popular support was difficult. Because of that difficulty, many officers seemed resigned to merely using “brick and mortar” (Interview 3) numbers to suggest success, where the number of physical projects was the key indicator, not necessarily what those projects yielded. As one participant (Interview 11) stated: “Those were our attempts to answer local concerns or provide some kind of evidence of governance improving the lives of people. And it was pretty farcical. We built a school, but it was never used.” Another officer expressed a similar sentiment: “We were able to provide, in conjunction with the Afghans, for example, a local school, a medical clinic that was being built... but again, those are brick and mortar type things, which don’t always ‘answer the mail’ in terms of if the population was actually better off when we left” (Interview 2).

Corruption

Corruption at the local and provincial level was mentioned by over 90% of the interviewees. Of that 90%, the majority highlighted abuses of development or civil works projects contracted out to Afghans or a perceived lack of appreciation for, or disinterest in, efforts to improve economic, health care, or political well-being by the Afghan population. In both instances, the fault lay with someone else. Either the Afghan Army or contracted companies were abusing the system, or a passive Afghan population was ungrateful for the efforts of the coalition.

Despite this, interviewees indicated an understanding of the complexity of gaining popular support for the government. The source of the inconsistency of those efforts, however, was split nearly evenly among higher headquarters being unable to mass produce the effects, the local unit being unable to execute projects effectively, and local actors undermining or ignoring the efforts.

Consequently, it does not appear that officers rejected or were reluctant to attempt development efforts; rather, they were stymied by the complexity of linking their efforts to a broader strategic gain. Campbell et al. argue that “knowing how to gauge political progress is hard. It is not a matter of meeting specific ‘benchmarks’ so much as creating a spirit of nonviolent politics and compromise, so that future disputes will be settled in the halls
of parliament rather than on the streets or battlefield.”

That sentiment was echoed by a small portion of officers, who argued similarly that building popular support was akin to “opening a door to a conversation, to show good will, that bought some people trust or confidence” (Interview 13). Based on the qualitative data, it appears that gauging popular support consisted of assessing local willingness to communicate with coalition forces. As one officer put it: “The metric was . . . ‘are they willing to communicate or execute a task close to the specifications you provided?’ [or] even just ‘are you willing to walk with us?’” (Interview 12). Most officers admitted that this was not a very scientific method.

Capacity Building

The need to pass on responsibilities for security and governance to Afghan forces was well-understood by the majority of the interviewed officers. Over 90% of the interviewees stated that security transition was a key goal during their deployment.

Assessing officer’s perceptions of what needed to be done to improve capacity, and what constituted success, lead me to uncover three organizing themes.

Leadership

A significant portion of the officers stressed that corruption, abuse of power, or lack of adequate leadership were the major roadblocks to improving capacity. Officers noted a range of issues: Afghan Army or police supplies being stolen by Afghan personnel; Afghan forces (particularly police) extorting civilians or actively working with the insurgency; or Afghan forces refusing to patrol or leave their bases. There appeared to be a fixation that corruption, abuse, or inability to perform basic military functions stemmed from “Afghan culture.” However, when pressed, few officers presented a more detailed explanation.

One officer put his assessment bluntly: “That’s the Afghan way in a lot of ways.” The inability to discipline Afghan troops or control Afghan officers left many of the interviewed officers wondering how the insurgency could be defeated by an arguably weaker state. With few tools at the Afghan state’s disposal for bureaucratic control, imposing discipline was difficult.

Quality vs. Quantity

Measuring the quality of their partnered Afghan forces proved to be challenging for the interviewed officers. Some resorted to assessing willingness of their partnered force, such as measuring “…a combination of the distance the Kandak would push, or the number of missions the Kandak would go out on” (Interview 8). Others relied on subjective assessments of the unit, but argued that those reports were not as valued by their chain of command because it “doesn’t brief well.”

The literature on training indigenous forces supports the conclusions made by the interviewed officers that determining the competency of Afghan forces was highly subjective. As Campbell et al. explained: “It is among the most difficult activities to document accurately—mostly because the leadership of units is hard to measure in terms of its competence and its loyalty to the nation rather than to sectarian groups. Capable forces that might refuse to fight, or even go over to the other side at a key moment, do not represent progress.”

Officers seemed to prefer quantitative approaches to measuring improved capacity simply because a more nuanced assessment proved too difficult to track as the reports ran up the chain of command. Even the “Security Indicators” in the 2017 Afghan index rely on two statistics—the size of Afghan security forces and the growth of the Local Police forces—as the only means of assessment for capacity improvement.

Ultimately, hard numbers seemed to matter more than more nuanced assessments as indicators. Whether that was the
number of police, the amount of equipment supplied, money spent, or training sessions conducted, as long as that number was “headed in the right direction” (Interview 12) then the military brass believed that progress was being made. One participant (Interview 2) summed this up by saying, “That sometimes came down to, did they show up? Are they still there? Are they still in uniform at their checkpoints? It was mostly as simple as that.”

Despite the reliance on quantitative data, a slight majority of the officers appeared mindful of the fact that the raw numbers did not necessarily mean that capacity was improving in a meaningful and sustainable way. As one officer (Interview 7) with extensive work with Afghan Local Police stated, “. . . I think the data [we used] would not show that the security force wasn’t necessarily successful in achieving its stated goal of providing local security.”

**Government Capacity Beyond Security**

Lastly, I attempted to determine what, if any, efforts were taken to improve capacity on systems or organizations outside of the Afghan security forces. I was aware that, in the words of Austin Long, “Restoration of governance is unfamiliar [to the military], not being a major component of professional military education.”

Despite this, while a plurality of officers stated that improving local governance was important to their stated mission, only 20% said that their units made efforts to do so beyond providing security. Of those officers, the most common effort was hosting a regular “shura,” or meeting of local elders.

**Sustainability**

It was clear throughout the interviews that officers were concerned that their efforts were not sustainable for the Afghan forces once the coalition forces left them on their own. While most reported that declaring their partnered force prepared to conduct unilateral operations and “putting themselves out of a job” was a necessary step to move into the next phase of counterinsurgency operations, few believed they would hold out:

> For the most part the way we left it was about the way that we found it. We helped them in a lot of ways, but that was pretty much just based on our capabilities. We didn’t do a lot to do anything sustainable with them in terms of training or equipping or improving their systems that would last past our deployment (Interview 12).

**Discussion: Weak Mechanisms in a Chaotic Landscape**

Qualitative research is never foolproof, but my analysis provided consistent directional answers for my first three hypotheses. It is clear that the interviewed officers do have a general understanding of COIN doctrine and what was expected of them in counterinsurgency. Officers appeared to recognize that kinetic indicators are not always the best measurements of success, yet most tended to appreciate their internal value to the military culture. Instead of rejecting “soft skills,” most officers were conscious of the value of development, but struggled to focus their efforts into clear and tangible results throughout their areas of operation.

The qualitative data also shed interesting light on my fourth hypothesis: The difficulties of measuring or understanding what constituted success is clear. What is less clear is if the perceived failure to achieve success could be attributed to the process the U.S. military used, rather than a host of other factors. While my research cannot fully answer that question, my empirical indicator assessments led me to conclude three themes that remained consistent throughout my analysis and help provide context for my fourth hypothesis.

**Measuring Inputs**

My analysis highlighted the reliance on inputs to indicate success. However, the inputs do not tell a complete story.
Instead, “All that could be proven with such data was that the strategy was in fact being implemented as planned—not that it would necessarily succeed.”

Consistently, officers referred to inputs as indicators of progress (e.g. The Number of schools built, the percentage of projects transitioned over to local authorities, etc.). The problem with inputs, however, is that they suggest nothing about results. In interviews, officers would point out how often they went out on patrol, or the number of “touch points” they had with the local population; however, those numbers do not necessarily indicate better local security or improved popular support. There is not necessarily a causal link between the activities undertaken and the results that were desired.

**Local vs. Supra-local**

The interviews suggested a friction point between the decentralized, highly local workings of the companies and platoons, and the efforts to synchronize those efforts across a broader area. There was a disconnect between what Junior officers thought *should* occur and what actually *did* occur. As one participant put it (Interview 6): “The battalions should have had more autonomy . . . the first real disconnect between tactical and strategic hit at the Brigade level.” Ben Connable argues that the difficulty in understanding “success” in counterinsurgency is “the incongruity between decentralized and complex COIN operations, and centralized, decontextualized assessment.” My data suggest this argument by uncovering a consistent theme of local and supra-local disconnect. It is very difficult to scale local successes, as the context that may make a unit successful in one area likely does not exist one district over. Despite their localized efforts and potential understanding, it appears to have little connection elsewhere. For example, an officer serving in Helmand Province lamented that he “dutifully wrote down my notes and dutifully sent them up electronically to battalion and all that kind of stuff. But it was never done in any sort of systematic way” (Interview 11).

The attempts to centralize counterinsurgency operations, to provide a unity of effort, appeared to have created a paradox. Locally, certain tactics or plans would generate noticeable improvements. Yet the attempt to maximize those improvements over a larger area was less effective. This suggests that there may be infinite possibilities for defining success (or failure). What worked for one unit in one area might not be replicable in another area. The interviews illustrate that counterinsurgency efforts will vary not just from province to province, but from village to village. The inability to find uniform ways forward appears to frustrate a strict hierarchical structured organization like the U.S. military, where success and failure now are now determined by local forces. My data suggests that Army culture devalues a more dialectic approach that would be valuable for a complex problem like insurgency. American forces agonized over destroying poppy fields, as per a theatre-wide directive. One officer (Interview 3) noted the difficulty between local and supra-local efforts: “The poppy funds the Taliban, which is true, yeah, but there is nothing else going on, poppy is the only thing in town. So we go ahead and destroy these acres, but then you just ruined this farmer’s livelihood. What’s he gonna do now? Well, maybe join the Taliban.”

“The Chain of Command wanted to hear success stories”

When success is difficult to measure, or even explain, in counterinsurgency operations, the data indicate that the military will look inward, and make the “success” about the organization. This supports Woodward, Nagl and Halperin’s assertion that the operations become about the organization. What the interviews reveal is that some of the efforts undertaken, were far less about what it would do for the Afghans, but rather what it said about
the Americans. For many of the officers it seemed that the goal of the deployment was to validate their own training or efforts. As Interview 2 noted: “The success was ‘you guys went out there and you did a good job’ . . . and that was kind of it.” Another participant (Interview 1) shared a similar observation: “You just reverse engineer success . . . take a lot of casualties? Well, we were successful because obviously we were fighting the enemy. The answer? All roads lead to success.” This desire to brush aside complicated events or ambiguous conclusions appeared to some officers as a way for the organization to cope: “We wouldn’t focus on things that got worse . . . the things that got worse had to be out of our control . . . the things that got better, were things that we affected” (Interview 1). So, for instance, if the Afghan Army didn’t patrol, or the Taliban took over a district, it could be safely concluded that the failure was not of the coalition’s own making.

Another major concern of the interviewees was that the deployment timelines were not conducive to assessing success. On a typical 9- or 12-month tour, officers complained that “the things we did, can’t really be measured. It’s basic. You apply the same criteria to a set of outcomes to determine if they are alike or not” (Interview 5). Instead, a new unit would come in and “the process has to start all over again” (Interview 19). Others pointed out that this didn’t just apply to units, as individual officers would be replaced mid-tour for career progression, what one interviewee referred to as an example of “S-1 running S-3.” More broadly, the themes in this section and throughout my research revealed consistent difficulties in linking efforts and assessments to the end states desired to defeat insurgencies.

Conclusion

This analysis points out the gaps that exist between counterinsurgency theory and its implementation at the absolute first point of contact. Numerous authors in the ongoing debate over security and development policy in places like Afghanistan will argue that, despite all efforts, “No external or externally supported COIN force was able to prevail if the host-nation government was insufficiently committed.” Indeed, this project was not meant to undermine or dismiss the efforts made by the officers interviewed or their units; rather, it was designed to explore if those efforts were related to what the literature says will lead to success.

Exploring how success is not only understood, but how it is measured, is critical to developing the literature on counterinsurgency. The lack of empiricism in military operations, not just counterinsurgency, can have far reaching effects. The U.S. military is not alone in misusing empirical assessment; reports about the efficacy of measuring efforts by aid organizations and NGOs abound. Ben Connable argues that “assessment is often conflated with measurement or some form of centralized quantitative analysis” and warns that without a “decentralized alternative or a way to comprehensively incorporate non-quantitative data” we are failing to even comprehend the issue.

My research sought to explore a small part of this issue, by attempting to determine how the officers charged with executing counterinsurgency policy understand success and its mechanisms in relation to what the literature says their understanding should be. This qualitative effort comports with many of the observations of those who study conflict and insurgencies, and these processes should continue to be explored. Of even greater value would be additional qualitative projects that include datasets on civilian population perceptions during insurgencies. A better understanding of the intricacies of insurgency, and of those who experience it, is essential because “the science of war, and the business of studying metrics, only goes so far.”
About the Author

Gregory Durso is a first year SSP graduate student in the U.S. National Security concentration. He graduated from the United States Military Academy in 2010, and he holds a Masters degree in Conflict Studies from the London School of Economics. He served as an Active Duty Army officer for 6 years, deploying twice to Afghanistan. He remains in the Reserves.
Endnotes

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Officers will be capitalized throughout this paper, as it refers specifically to U.S military commissioned Officers.
6. Ibid.
7. Company-grade is a designation comprised of junior level Officers, Lieutenants and Captains, whose span of control typically runs from platoons (30–40 members) to companies (140–160 members).
11. Coalition combat operations in Afghanistan were formally ended on December 21, 2014. The mission was renamed Operation Resolute Support. The stated goals of the coalition are different, and are less useful for comparison in this paper.
12. Note that this third empirical indicator is linked to the second in many ways, but specifically focuses on external forces’ attempts to improve capacity of host nation government and defense forces.
17. In many works on counterinsurgency, the population is neatly divided into three camps: pro-government, pro-insurgent, and neutral. R.D. Petersen, in his work on resistance in Eastern Europe, contends that a “spectrum” is a more useful way to measure individual support, which varies based on location and allows for a deeper understanding of each citizens political agency with regard to participation. Roger Petersen, Resistance and Rebellion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Montgomery McFate and Andrea V. Jackson, “The Object Beyond War: Counterinsurgency and the Four Tools of Political Competition” Military Review 86 (15) February 2006: 13.
18. In Paths to Victory, a RAND study on counterinsurgency outcomes, the authors determined that a coercive focus, dubbed “Iron fist,” mostly resulted in COIN losses (34 out of 44 test cases). They do concede that a more coercive government could prevent insurgencies from forming in the first place, but contend that as a strategy during an ongoing insurgency, a coercive approach was ineffective over time. Christopher Paul et al., Paths to Victory (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2013),170–172.
19. There is much debate as to what makes a “successful” counterinsurgency strategy. However, my paper does not seek to determine which methods are most beneficial (if any), but rather to evaluate the understanding of success by Officers as it relates to the literature they would use. For more information on the COIN debate see Patricia Owens, Economy of Force (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Mary Kaldor and Shannon Beebe, The Ultimate Weapon is No Weapon (New York: Public Affairs Press, 2010); Jeffrey Dixon, “What Causes Civil Wars?”

21. 2 and 3 are closely linked. The reason for their separation is due in part to the focus on outside militaries and their role in external insurgencies. Most works referencing outside involvement stress the importance of transferring “ownership” to the host government. Therefore, while both 2 and 3 require similar lines of effort, 3 is predominantly about how the external armed forces improve the capacity of the host government.


24. Ibid., 37.


26. McFate and Jackson, 16.


30. Andrew Beath, Christia Fotini, and Ruben Enikolopov, “Winning Hearts and Minds? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan” Working Paper 2011–14, 1. The authors make two concessions in their research. First, the most contested provinces in Afghanistan, Kandahar and Helmand, were not included in the sample size, which can skew the findings regarding popular support for the government throughout the country. Second, the most successful government programs were run by a foreign military (CERP) and therefore could not necessarily correlate to support for the Afghan government.


34. The focus will be on localized government or rule of law. There is minimal expectation that Officers in the company-grade level would be involved with provincial, regional, or national efforts to improve capacity in governance, industry or legal frameworks.


40. The CIB is awarded to soldiers who engage in close combat with enemy combatants.

42. Scholars such as Patricia Owens argue vociferously that thinking like this denies political agency to the population and leads to fundamental misunderstandings of insurgencies. The “opinions and beliefs of those living in a war zone” are not monolithic nor purely reactionary to the acts of either the insurgents or counterinsurgents. Patricia Owens, Economy of Force (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 245.

43. Campbell et al., 2009: 10.

44. This is also a reflection of the time period of the deployments. Only two participants were deployed during the “clear” phase of the surge post-2010, where partnered operations or Afghan Army capacity building was not a priority.

45. An Afghan Kandak is the equivalent of an American Battalion.

46. Interviewee 1, 6, 15, 16 and 20 all used this exact phrase.

47. Campbell et al., 23.


49. Long, 6.

50. One Officer stated that they were actively looking to “. . . brief something that would justify us pulling out”

51. Campbell et al., 8.

52. How often coalition leadership had a face-to-face interaction with the population.

53. Connable, xv.

54. S-1 is personnel management and S-3 is operations management. This saying would imply that the needs of individual careers and human resourcing superseded the operations being conducted.

55. Paul et al., 185.

56. Connable, 11.

57. Campbell et al., 11.