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A New Way of War: The Role of Perception in Counterinsurgency

BY

Victor John

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# Table of Contents

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INTRODUCTION.....	4
CHAPTER I: DEFINING TERMS.....	9
CHAPTER II: FOUNDATIONS OF THE U.S. COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY.....	16
CHAPTER III: ELEMENTS OF COUNTERINSURGENCY.....	30
CHAPTER IV: THE U.S. COUNTERINSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN.....	48
CHAPTER V: THE CHECHEN INSURGENCY.....	70
CHAPTER VI: COMPARISON OF CASE STUDIES.....	88
CONCLUSION: ANALYSIS OF THE MODEL.....	107

# Introduction

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The United States has committed 14 years, 6,802 lives, and 6 trillion dollars to the War on Terror.<sup>1</sup> And as the battle rages on, the Middle East is seemingly stagnating or getting worse. The leaders of the world need to fundamentally rethink their approach to counterinsurgency and terrorism. We must ask questions as to who and what we are fighting, and learn from our past failings so we can understand the fundamental differences between conventional warfare and counterinsurgency.

The nature of war continues to evolve with the increasing prevalence of insurgent extremist movements, and this change in the nature of the enemy requires a change in military and policy thinking. U.S. military policy is little changed from a World War II era conception of war as a Clausewitzian, winner-takes-all approach. Through this work I seek to demonstrate the limitations of this view as it applies to counterinsurgency.

There is a general lack of understanding regarding counterinsurgency. There is no agreed upon policy for combating insurgencies despite its long history, and competing definitions of insurgency itself. Through this thesis I seek to achieve two main goals: First, to explain and understand the nature of insurgency, carefully defining terms, and using two case studies as examples. Second, I offer a series of elements, a framework of analysis, that I hope will assist military and policy thinking in how to confront the difficult task of counterinsurgency warfare. The case studies, Chechnya and Afghanistan, are examples of two drastically different approaches—a deliberate choice to illustrate different ways of thinking and reacting to insurgencies. I then apply the framework of

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<sup>1</sup> As cited by <http://icasualties.org>

analysis to both conflicts. I seek to ultimately answer the question: *what makes an effective counterinsurgency force?* I hope to illustrate the importance of perception and the ability to shape and define goals as it relates particularly to counterinsurgency. Through this I hope to show the success and flaws in military counterinsurgency thinking, and how they should change.

### Organizational Overview

The organization of the thesis proceeds as follows: a definition of terms used in this paper for the purpose of overall clarity of the subject; a history of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy foundations; the key elements important to combating and understanding counterinsurgency; the first case study of Afghanistan including a brief history of relevant events; the second case study of Chechnya with brief relevant history; a comparison and analysis of the tactics used in separate counterinsurgency—or lack thereof—and relevant comparison to overall counterinsurgency strategy; and lastly a discussion of the applicability of the framework I have put forward, and my predictions and recommendations for the future.

The first chapter is devoted to explaining and defining relevant terms related to insurgency and counterinsurgency. There is little agreement on the meaning of terms that are in common use today such as terrorism, insurgency, extremism, and the like. This section also explains terms as applied to counterinsurgency: victory, defeat, success and failure each have specific meanings as applied to counterinsurgency. These must be defined in non-traditional military terms. For example, success is not measured in enemies killed but in the ability to curtail the population's support of the insurgency. The

excessive use of force and focus on enemies killed was a mistake often made in Chechnya, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and countless other insurgency wars.

The second chapter is an analysis of the foundation of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy. Through the Vietnam War, the U.S. created a counterinsurgency strategy that remains prevalent today; one that has failed to change through the multiple wars the U.S. has fought against modern insurgencies. This chapter is an analysis of the tactics—mistakes and successes—used in the Vietnam War, and how those were perpetuated in U.S. military and policy thinking. This war affected the overall military mindset of the U.S. After using Vietnam as a ‘guinea pig’ for counterinsurgency strategy, this war incidentally became a major foundation of the U.S.’ counterinsurgency strategy. The drastic disconnect between the overall policy goals, such as the ‘hearts and minds’ approach, and the reality on the ground made the small improvements achieved in Vietnam even less successful.

Chapter three offers a review of pertinent literature that focuses on counterinsurgency tactics and strategy. This chapter then provides an explanation of relevant counterinsurgency elements as a framework to analyze, and eventually improve, military tactics and policy. These five elements are: use of force (violence); the role of the public (both local and foreign); urban and rural differences in warfare and population control; limitations and ability of military forces; and time. These elements serve as guidelines for analyzing the effectiveness of counterinsurgency forces. The main focus of this part is the importance of perception in establishing success and failure and the reevaluation of traditional military paradigms. These paradigms must be replaced by an understanding that the loyalty and trust of the local population is the only true victory in

counterinsurgency war. These five elements serve as a framework of analysis to examine the case studies as well. There is also a serious importance placed on creating achievable goals. These goals must be uncompromising and practical—while the military tactics on the ground must be flexible. The importance of perception and norms in the development of goals is quintessential in creating benchmarks of success and the ‘goal posts’ of victory.

Chapter four of the paper is the case study of Afghanistan. I focus here on the specific reasoning in the creation of U.S. goals. These goals often morphed and changed according to the demands of the U.S. public and the perception that the war was not a successful one. I explain the relevant recent history of the country for context and to help understand the nature of the population there, and point out the faults and missed opportunities of the U.S. led coalition. The overall strategy is heavily focused on creation of an idealistic democracy led by a secular state, and these aspirations restrained the U.S’ ability to succeed in Afghanistan. I will use the five elements of counterinsurgency to evaluate the successes and failures of the U.S. in Afghanistan.

Chapter five is the case study of Chechnya, in which I describe the relevant history of the area and the Russian wars there since the 1990s. The main focus is on the counterinsurgency strategy of the Russian political leadership and military, and how it greatly differs from that of the U.S. The Russian federal troops had no constraints in their treatment of the populace, and arguably achieved what they came to do: subduing the independence of Chechnya. But Russia’s pyrrhic victory in Chechnya was only achieved through violence, torture, mass killings, rape, intimidation, and random punishments of all kinds, effectively breaking the backs of the public to the point where they were forced

to reject the insurgency. It is also important to note that this victory remains conditional, and the control exercised in Chechnya by the Kremlin is only through a brutal strongman and massive direct federal funding of the region. I will use the five counterinsurgency elements to analyze the counterinsurgency in Chechnya.

Chapter six is a comparison of the case studies—weighing the success and failure in each strategy, and outlining the how the support or intimidation of the population helps to achieve or degrade the ultimate goals of the operation. I present an overview of the role of perception and the establishment of goals in each case, and then evaluate and compare each case study using the above mentioned counterinsurgency elements.

The conclusion will evaluate the effectiveness of the model as a framework of analysis of counterinsurgency strategy. I will also outline the most important facts from my analysis, and present my predictions for the outcomes in both conflicts.

# Chapter I: Defining Terms

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To understand a phenomenon we need to understand the words we use to explain it. The way we use terminology, whether intentionally or not, affects our perceptions of the way we interpret events. Without clear definitions of our words, meanings are easily lost among various connotations or altered with political transitions. Terrorism is a perfect example. It has come to have many definitions in our society—criminal behavior, evildoers, Muslims, extremists, politically motivated violence, and many more. For this thesis, I hope to create clear and concise definitions of key elements and words that are relevant to the study of counterinsurgency.

David Maxwell of Georgetown University put it bluntly: “There is no national policy for unconventional warfare;”<sup>2</sup> and furthermore, there is no national understanding of what unconventional warfare signifies in any way—it is often grouped with other political ‘buzzwords’ like terrorism, insurgency and counterterrorism. Without a real and consistent definition of these terms, it is impossible to evaluate the current state of warfare on the global stage. Like the perpetrators of acts of terror, the meaning of these acts is elusive. This is not to say that the definitions are non-existent, but only that they are non-consistent. Merriam Webster defines terrorism as: “the use of violent acts to frighten the people in an area as a way of trying to achieve a political goal” and insurgency as: “a usually violent attempt to take control of a government<sup>3</sup>”—here they do not sound so different. The way we define these terms delineates how we understand

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<sup>2</sup> Maxwell, David S. "Do We Really Understand Unconventional Warfare?" *Small Wars Journal* Oct. 2014

<sup>3</sup> *Merriam-Webster Online*. Merriam-Webster, [merriamwebster.com](http://merriamwebster.com). Web. 17 Dec. 2014.

their meaning in war and politics. Anyone can commit an act of terror—how is it so different from a crime? An insurgency uses terror as a *tactic*, but an insurgency is a network of individuals, who plan, practice and execute specific acts to undermine the security of a state system. We must understand our terms, and choose our words carefully.

### **TRADITIONAL AND ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT**

The first terms we must define are those that describe conflict itself. The Prussian military tactician Carl von Clausewitz has been an important contributing figure in the development of U.S. military strategy. Most of his work was completed in the early 1800s, his most notable piece, *On War* was unfinished at the time of his death. Clausewitz has been one of the most influential military strategists in history, and has greatly influenced U.S. military thinking. He defined war as "an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will."<sup>4</sup> This, indeed, is the overarching purpose of war, as broadly defined as possible. The importance in this definition is in the ambiguity to achieve these ends—the tactics and strategies used. Once the difference in tactics is incorporated into our definition of conflict, the above definition becomes too broad to apply to the nuanced nature of unconventional war.

Conventional war is a type of conflict usually conducted by states; it involves clearly marked troops that represent a sovereign state in violent conflict against other clearly marked troops. Unconventional war is a conflict between two belligerents that are not necessarily states nor is the war a declared state action. There is no requirement of what is military and what is not—each side chooses the rules that they follow. The

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<sup>4</sup> Clausewitz, Carl Von. *On War*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2013. Pg 3.

insurgency's fighters are unmarked, and their targets are often 'soft'—such as civilian centers and infrastructure. The hallmark of unconventional war is guerilla war tactics—hit and run attacks, avoiding the full force of the opposing military. Therefore, the definition of unconventional war is broad and encompasses many conflicts. For the purposes of this paper, unconventional war is the conflict between a state entity and a non-state violent actor that seeks to undermine the power of the state.

### **TERROR AND INSURGENCY**

Terrorism and insurgency are often grouped together, but in fact are two separate concepts. Robert Schaefer, in his analysis of the two Chechen wars, defines them clearly, saying “[t]errorism is a crime in the classic sense—just the same as murder, armed robbery, or kidnapping, regardless of the reasons for doing so.”<sup>5</sup> It is the way we *define* these terms that gives them gravity. Schaefer says, “insurgencies may choose terrorism as a method, but terrorism and insurgency are fundamentally different things.”<sup>6</sup> However, in the ‘War on Terror’, terrorism has multiple meanings, and seems to define whatever enemy we are fighting. Insurgency is a concerted effort to overthrow an established government, state, or political power. It is a movement of people determined to achieve such ends. Terrorism is a tactic, specifically, the use of violence against the local population or political targets to instill fear in the population—fear either of retaliation for state support, or fear of the lack of a state’s security. Insurgency is the use of guerilla

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<sup>5</sup> Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 34.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 35.

warfare by imbedded underground organizations, often 'flat' in structure. The purpose of these groups is to overthrow the government that is in control of a given state.

The definition of terror for the United States has proved to be an important part of how we see the world. More than a tool to understand events, definitions have come to shape how we perceive them. Peter Sederberg explores this idea by analyzing President Bush's 'War on Terror,' saying that "paradoxes arise, of course, because we are making war on a tactic, one used by both regimes and challengers."<sup>7</sup> Defining a force that challenges states must be done in two ways; we must understand their goals, and their tactics. Terror as a tactic can be used by a state, but a movement that is an insurgency fundamentally seeks to uproot and drastically change, if not destroy completely, a political system of governance.

### **VICTORY AND FAILURE**

When do we achieve victory? In conventional war, Clausewitz defines victory as the destruction of the enemy's will to fight and/or or the material needed to wage war. In counterinsurgency, there is no such ability. The ability of the insurgent to fight arises through the local population's backing—whether through supplies, recruits, or political support. Therefore victory in counterinsurgency is the *complete rejection* of the insurgency by the local population. This can be achieved through many avenues. The counterinsurgency's role and the goals this force sets are important to how it can define victory. Goals must be established that are broad enough to be flexible to the situation,

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<sup>7</sup> Sederberg, Peter C. "Global Terrorism: Problems of Challenge and Response." Ed. Charles W. Kegley. *The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls*. London: Pearson Education, 2003: Pg. 282.

but precise enough to be realistically achieved. Noriyuki Katagiri, in his book on the success of insurgency throughout history, *Adapting to Win*, states that “[k]ey to understanding victory lies in the nature of the political objectives states pursue through the use of military force.”<sup>8</sup> In a sense, victory is what you make it—it is defined by the belligerents themselves. When U.S. forces left Iraq in 2011, both the United States and the insurgency declared victory. Often the insurgency’s goals are simply to rid the country of the invader, and most often the invader will eventually have to leave. This allows insurgent movements to continually assert success. When a counterinsurgency declares victory, it must be within the confines of how they themselves defined it. Reaching these established goal posts is essential to keeping the support of both the local, and the invading force’s ‘home,’ population.

Sun Tzu said, “[a]ll warfare is based on deception,”<sup>9</sup> and indeed counterinsurgency depends on the approval of their home population—the war hinges on their support. The portrayal of the war, therefore, affects the population’s perception, and can be either the key to success or determinant of failure. The support of the local population should be, and most often is, the first concern of a counterinsurgency force; they cannot achieve their goals on the ground without the local support, and cannot continue the fight without their own public’s backing. Therefore, to prove success, a counterinsurgency force must adhere to the goals they have defined (goals tailored to the situation). Success is achieved through the counterinsurgency’s ability to win the support of the local population—or the hatred—as long as it forces a wedge between the population and the insurgency. Territory is therefore of little importance if it does not

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<sup>8</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 17

<sup>9</sup> Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*. Trans. Lionel Giles Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002. Pg. 42

change the situation in which the populace exists, for “insurgents must trade territory for performance in order to maintain the strategic parity”<sup>10</sup> with conventional forces. Any insurgency, to be classified as such, must immediately adopt guerrilla war tactics to be successful, for “[w]ar against a stronger foreign power is an impossible task if the insurgent side adopts a conventional military model.”<sup>11</sup> This shifts the strategic goals of the insurgency and the counterinsurgency away from violence, and towards gaining popular support.

The counterinsurgency’s failure, therefore, is any engagement with the insurgency or populace that pushes the populace to form stronger bonds with the insurgency. Most counterinsurgency forces must distance themselves from an obsession with justice and revenge—the idea that those responsible for attacks will be brought to justice, punished or killed. As Katagiri notes, “If anything, the 2010 killing of Osama Bin Laden reinforced the already disorganized nature of guerilla insurgency and the institutional linkage with other terrorist groups.”<sup>12</sup> The counterinsurgency must therefore have explicit rules of engagement, based on the fact that destruction of an insurgency will come from within the locality, and will not be achieved by outside pressure alone. Sun Tzu said “supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting.”<sup>13</sup> In counterinsurgency, this is the only way to fight.

## **VIOLENCE AND NON-COMBATANTS**

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<sup>10</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 53

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 63

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

<sup>13</sup> Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*. Trans. Lionel Giles Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002. Pg. 48

Violence in counterinsurgency, no matter how justified, is almost always an impairment to its effectiveness. Since it is the perception of the population that is key, the more civilian fatalities there are, or those they perceive to be civilian deaths, is much more important than the number enemy combatants killed. Counterinsurgency therefore is a state building and governance effort, and must provide a more desirable situation for the local populace. Violence, just like in any society, undermines the effectiveness of establishing stability. Most militaries, on the contrary, are designed for short, decisive conflict. In the Iraq war “American operations suffered from their inability and unwillingness to maintain a military presence to protect Iraqi citizens and embrace a legitimate political process.”<sup>14</sup> Any violence, therefore, limits the ability of the state or invading force to show that the situation is stable, and further the contest for legitimacy with the insurgency.

Non-combatants are anyone who is not actively engaged in violence, or not perceived as such. Although violence against the population may achieve the short-term goal of discouraging support of the insurgency like it did in Chechnya, this is only temporary.<sup>15</sup> Violence can coerce, but provides no guarantee of future stability, and furthermore; violence against non-combatants engenders revenge. To gain support of the population, the counterinsurgency must use violence to the least extent possible.

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<sup>14</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 104.

<sup>15</sup> Among others, Anna Politkovskaya, Ariel Cohen, and Robert Schaefer all express concern regarding the next generation of Chechens and their desire to seek revenge. The failure of governance in Chechnya is partly to blame (30% unemployment in 2012, even higher among the youth). Only through massive reconstruction efforts and almost complete autonomy has Chechnya remained part of Russia, and temporary fixes cannot last forever.

## Chapter II: Foundations of The United States' Counterinsurgency Strategy

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*'War is...an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will.'*<sup>16</sup>

—Carl von Clausewitz

The United States military strategy largely developed as a response to European military power. As general of the Continental Army, George Washington was not a traditionally educated soldier, but he was experienced. Although he preferred to engage the British in a traditional Clausewitzian manner, Washington was immediately confronted with a menagerie of obstacles: his army was almost completely untrained; desertion was rampant; and the only way to maintain the army was to constantly attract more volunteers to the revolutionary cause. As Russell Weigley puts it: “Washington’s generalship was one shaped by military poverty.”<sup>17</sup> With these impediments, Washington was forced to change his perception of the way in which this war would be fought. Although not by design, he changed his ideological stance on combat. Following closer to the teachings of Sun Tzu, Washington evaded the British General Howe—never directly engaging him, but only attacking when the ill-equipped continental soldiers could fight isolated sections of the British army. Following Sun Tzu, Washington attacked on holidays, at night, and whenever he could achieve some type of strategic advantage. “If he is inactive, give him no rest. If his forces are united, separate them. Attack him where

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<sup>16</sup> Weigley, Russell Frank. *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977. Pg.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 3.

he is unprepared appear where you are not expected.”<sup>18</sup> This strategy of war, often called revolutionary warfare, is not far removed from the tactics of an insurgency.

The post revolutionary period in the United States was largely focused on increasing the resources to support a stable standing army. With the exception of the Revolutionary War, the United States military strategy has been based on a Napoleonic era strategy of war, from which Carl Von Clausewitz’s military strategy emerged. *On War*, Clausewitz’s major work, focuses on the complete annihilation of the enemy’s forces as the ultimate goal of any military campaign. With this military ideology in mind, the United States committed an increasing amount of resources to its military and became a major power by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mostly due to the thriving economic and trade power that the U.S. had become. The United States continued to expand this style of military thinking and planning through World War II and into the Cold War until it became the military industrial complex that exists today. Only when confronted with the conflict in Vietnam was the United States forced to change its military strategy. By the end of that war, the United States was forced to question not only its strategy, but also its military ideology as a whole.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF U.S. MILITARY STRATEGY**

For the first century of its existence, United States’ leaders paid minimal attention—the least they could afford—to the military development and strategy of the country. Congress was reluctant to commit any funds at all to the maintaining of a substantial army, partly due to the fact that the federal government received little income

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<sup>18</sup> Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002. Pg. 43

to fund any programs.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, through a combination of budget problems and minimal political will,

[t]he United States was not involved in international politics continuously enough or with enough consistency of purpose to permit the development of a coherent national strategy for the consistent pursuit of political goals by diplomacy in combination with armed force.<sup>20</sup>

This strategy dominated military doctrine in the United States until the U.S. Civil War. Congress still was focused on the smallest expense possible; for example, it took more than a decade to finally approve a navy to protect U.S. merchant ships that were being attacked by Barbary pirates.

As Clausewitz understood it, there were two kinds of war, unlimited war to achieve the absolute defeat of a nation's will to fight; and limited war, which was dedicated to achieving small gains in territory or a limited political advantage. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S. could only afford the later type. Consequently, U.S. preparation for both World War I and II involved hurried weapons production and drafting of civilians to fight. After World War II, the foreign policy doctrine of the U.S. was completely reversed from what it had been. President Truman understood the threat of communism to be a global struggle, one where the United States would engage anywhere and at any time. This doctrine was more than just military:

[t]he new national strategy would be not merely a military strategy but an all-inclusive planning for the use of the nation's total resources to defend and advance the national interests, encompassing military strategy and Clausewitz's use of combats along with other means.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Weigley, Russell Frank. *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, Pg. xix

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

The Truman Doctrine still echoes today in our military thinking. When the Korean War broke out in 1950, the United States was in military transition, and with the new communist threat, Truman was not willing to commit resources necessary to unite the peninsula. Moreover, given the military mentality that the only obstacle to victory was lack of resource appropriation, the U.S. ceased all aggression. In military thinking, there was no war that the United States could not win with the proper commitment, and it was this understanding created a foundational block of U.S. military thinking.

### **EMERGENCE OF A COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY?**

With the start of the Vietnam War, this foundational understanding led military and policy experts to appeal for unrestricted latitude in conducting war operations, a few even considering nuclear weapons. There were conflicting opinions in President Kennedy's administration about whether or not an independent South Vietnam could survive, but one strategic argument was unquestioned: if Vietnam fell to the Communists, the rest of Southeast Asia would be threatened, and the United State's reputation would be tarnished. According to the 'domino effect' theory of the time, South Vietnam (SVN) falling to the communists was the worst-case scenario for U.S. interests. Any opinion that did not achieve the final goal of establishing a free and independent SVN and the defeat of the communist North Vietnam (NVN) was discarded.

The United States was involved in Vietnam as early as 1945, and starting in 1961, President Kennedy provided major troops and military advisors to SVN, but the war is often given the start date of 1963, and attributed to President Johnson. Johnson expanded the military and political goals in Vietnam to complete military victory. General

Westmoreland, soon after his involvement in 1964, began to ask for more troops, more funding, and more commitment to a deteriorating situation. The war effort was made increasingly more expensive with fewer successes and “[i]n tandem with this increase in U.S. military activity, Vietnam began to serve as a laboratory for counterinsurgency techniques and weapons.”<sup>22</sup> This included massive bombing through operation ROLLING THUNDER, the use of Agent Orange, and many other destructive tactics. The war was expanded North to consistent, and at times 24/7, bombings of Hanoi and other Northern cities, while in the south a strong insurgency was developing. The insurgency in SVN, the National Liberation Front (NLF), was operating a separate government whenever U.S. and South Vietnamese (AVRN) troops were not present. In response, the U.S. panicked—increased troop levels, more bombing in the South, more destruction.

The U.S. military and AVRN troops systematically harassed and brutalized the civilian population through a variety of tactics including bombing suspected villages, bulldozing them over and bombing them again; complete removal of the entire village populations to ‘secure locations’ and constant military patrols that involved harassment, burglary of homes, rape, and other torture of civilians. As these tactics proved increasingly counterproductive, the draft exploded in the U.S.; more bombs were dropped, and any change in tactics that did not lead to a total Clauswitzian military victory was pushed aside as weakness.

The involvement of the United States was so great that Johnson saw the only way out as doubling down on his tactics. Why were we doing this? Regardless of the real answer, the goals stated by the White House were non-negotiable:

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<sup>22</sup> Young, Marilyn Blatt. *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991. Pg. 82.

Our objective is the independence of South Viet-Nam and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves—only that the people of South Viet-Nam to be allowed to guide their own country in their own way. We will do everything necessary to reach that objective, and we will do only what is absolutely necessary.<sup>23</sup>

This ideological stance was the centerpiece of the justification for the war. What was absolutely necessary to the U.S. was the denial of Communist powers—the U.S.S.R. and China—from gaining support in Indochina. In the words of President Nixon “go for all the marbles...I have made some bad decisions, but a good one was this: when you bite the bullet, bite it hard—go for the big play.”<sup>24</sup> Vietnam was now ‘America’s Baby’ and would not be lost; the United States would not lose the prestige of her powerful military prowess. No policy would be considered that did not involve the establishment of a non-communist government in SVN, and contained the spread of communism.

The overall tactical strategy of the United States was, therefore, adherence to Clausewitz and his understanding of what victory meant. The fight, however, was not against a conventional enemy, and “the two sides fought not just with different tactics but in different dimensions.”<sup>25</sup> The United States was concerned only with their own definition of victory, ignoring any social measures or the needs of the population and

[a]fter a decade of intense engagement in Indochina, the categories of America’s understanding of the Third World remained pristine of historical experience. The abstract mythological model, applicable to any nations, upon which United States policy based itself, reflected not so much ignorance of the history, culture and society of others as indifference. This in turn reflected American history, culture, and society, which had always denied that traditions or social constraints had to matter. The United

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<sup>23</sup> President Johnson, as cited above, *Ibid*, pg. 156

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 247

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 84

States had created itself and it could help other nations to do the same.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile the NLF strategy was just the opposite, they were “instructed to learn local languages, customs, and habits, to help people with their daily work...to win their sympathy and little by little to conduct revolutionary propaganda,”<sup>27</sup> and to understand that “the successful waging of a people’s war depends, above all, on the fullest possible mobilization of a committed population.”<sup>28</sup> Above all it was clear that “what the United States had labored mightily to produce was not a democratic, independent new nation-state but an autocratic ruling family held in place by foreign power.”<sup>29</sup> The United States, in their treatment of the Vietnamese, effectively drove them to support the NLF, whose support steadily rose throughout the war. The strategy was heavily focused on the military aspects of the war, and even when tactics changed to winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of the population, the solution was still military and the escalation of this war was the only way in which to achieve these goals.

This military strategy of fighting ‘whatever and wherever’ the fight against Communism closely followed the Truman Doctrine. President Truman vowed to fight communism wherever it may be. This espoused a military solution to tasks that were not always military in nature. What seemed to be emerging was, according to U.S. military doctrine, that there are no conflicts or challenges that are not suited for the military. And all can be solved by increasing amounts of force, military prowess, or destructive technology. The United States forgot history in Vietnam, formulated unachievable goals and used unchanging and counterproductive military tactics in attempting to achieve

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pg. 103

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pg. 9

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pg. 30

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, pg. 59

them. This is not to say that attempts to develop a counterinsurgency were not tried—using Vietnam as a test subject, the U.S. tried everything they could think of, but nothing truly deescalated the violence to the point where they actually *interacted* with the Vietnamese population. Moreover, the pervasiveness of this political and military mindset failed to evolve to achieve its goals. In a similar fashion, with President Bush’s ‘Global War on Terror,’ the U.S. was flung yet again into a global commitment of imposing our ideology on the world. “[A] world ordered by the principles and practices of the liberal capitalist system that governed America was good for America and good for the world.<sup>30</sup>” The United States believes that our own democratic secular system is an ideal model for the rest of the world.

### **CHANGE IN TACTICS**

The many instances of changes in tactics had little effect on the successes of U.S. and AVRN (South Vietnamese) forces. The NLF strategy was both more practical and more flexible. They quickly realized that “despite the apocalypse of American firepower, they might yet defeat the United States: by fighting at extremely close quarters, the North Vietnamese could make American air and artillery support far less effective.”<sup>31</sup> The U.S.’ failure to offer any support to the population of Vietnam is the obvious strategic failure, but the inability to change tactics or strategy even after the devastating effects of the Tet offensive was due to the commitment to one narrow definition of victory. The actual

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid pg. 138

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, pg. 162

gravity of this offensive was less important in Vietnam as it was in the U.S.<sup>32</sup> Mary McCarthy explained this affliction in describing Johnson's commitment to the war: [President Johnson] "acts as if he had a mournful obligation to go on with the war unless and until somebody finds him an honorable exit from it. There is no honorable exit from a shameful course of action."<sup>33</sup>

In an attempt to change tactics, the United States began to have substantial 'bombing pauses' to tempt the North into peace talks, and the South Vietnamese government began to ease restrictions on protests and freedom of the press. By 1970, however, there was no going back. The United States had treated the entire situation as a military one for so long that the only solution became a military victory, which was impossible to achieve. The United States had created its own worst fear: leaving in defeat, nothing achieved, with no trophies earned. Even in April of 1969, with over 500,000 active troops serving in Vietnam, large swaths of South Vietnam were still completely in NLF hands. As President Nixon ostensibly sought to achieve peace, or at least some success he could report to the U.S. public, he expanded the war to Laos and Cambodia in a final effort to stabilize South Vietnam for independence from America. As ground troops were drawn back, the air war was expanded and increased in strength. This proved to be an ineffective tool against an insurgency, and it stands as a principle disconnect between fighting conventional wars and those of insurgency. Alexander de Seversky articulates this problem:

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<sup>32</sup> Studies show that support for the Vietnam war dipped to 30% in 1968 after an all time high of 62% in 1965. See Lorell, Mark A., Charles Kelley, and Deborah R. Hensler. *Casualties, Public Opinion, and Presidential Policy during the Vietnam War*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1985. Print.

<sup>33</sup> Young, Marilyn Blatt. *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991. Pg. 209.

Total war from the air against an underdeveloped country or region is well-nigh futile; it is one of the curious features of the most modern weapon that is especially effective against the most modern type of civilization.<sup>34</sup>

The counterinsurgency strategies that the U.S. tried to develop in Vietnam were limited and remain limited today.

### **MODERN PARALLELS**

The United States military doctrine is still shaped by a presumed understanding that we know what is right for other countries, and that the U.S. knows how to fix their problems for them.<sup>35</sup> There is no lack of resources that explain the problems with combating an insurgency, but an ideological understanding. The United States still formulates its goals based on a democratic ideology. Even if the goals of the U.S. in the current wars are based more on a guarantee of oil trade, the forceful application of neo-liberal triumphalism has adverse effects on the local population. Successful counterinsurgencies have, like the British Malayan war of 1948, succeeded in capitalizing on an understanding of the local population.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, to succeed in

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<sup>34</sup> Weigley, Russell Frank. *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977. Pg. 393

<sup>35</sup> This notion is present in much of U.S. policy thinking. See Gregory Gause III: *Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?* David Maxwell says that there is a community in Special Operations that dismisses historical examples of unconventional war, which is seen as “not worth the effort necessary to develop a deep understanding of the phenomena.” Steven Metz says that “creating a brand identity” for the invader is key to effective counterinsurgency. Meaning that the U.S.’s ‘brand’ is democracy, and this is not always the best tool. See Metz, Steven. *New Challenges and Old Concepts: Understanding 21<sup>st</sup> Century Insurgency*. Strategic Studies Institute, 2007. See also footnote 37.

<sup>36</sup> Katagiri describes the “Malayan Emergency” as a success story that “dispels the myth that guerilla forces are invincible in modern conflict.” *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 79.

counterinsurgency, an understanding of the local population—the Vietnamese, the Afghan—is more important than imposing what is accepted in the U.S.<sup>37</sup>

Both in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Vietnam War, a similar outline was followed. The United States identifies a commitment to protect its civilians, interests, or a cause to support, and rallies the public to support action by calling it national interest. And then as casualties mount and no coherent strategy appears, the public begin to lose interest. Then all that is left is to end the war with the fewest deaths and the lowest costs, while attempting to still declare victory and to prove that we achieved our goals. Eventually we are forced to move the goal posts themselves to the point where we can call our fight a success. In Afghanistan, a confusing situation now stands, and “[b]ehind it all, the old question hover[s]...Who was the enemy? Al-Qaeda. The Taliban. The green on blue turncoats. Karzai. The Pashtuns. The Pakistanis. Everyone. It was past time to go.”<sup>38</sup>

Changing what has become a common narrative in U.S. counterinsurgency strategy involves engaging the population of a foreign country in a deliberate and specific manner—we must be clear about how we form our opinions and goals. For example, throughout the Vietnam War, rhetoric about the ‘women to be courted’ was used as a metaphor for U.S. strategy. Johnson described the possibility of Chinese intervention:

The slow escalation of the air war in the North and the increasing pressure on Ho Chi Minh was seduction, not rape. If China should suddenly react to slow escalation, as a women might react to attempted seduction, by threatening to retaliate (a slap in the face, to continue to metaphor), the United States would have plenty of time to ease off the bombing. On the other hand, if the United States were to

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<sup>37</sup> See L.H.M Ling’s paper “Globalizing Globalization,” In *Global Political Economy: Contemporary Theories* (2013) for interesting insights into the nature of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ and how we perceive those who are foreign to us.

<sup>38</sup> Bolger, Daniel P. *Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. Pg. 402

unleash an all-out, total assault on the North—rape rather than seduction—there could be no turning back, and Chinese reaction might be instant and total.<sup>39</sup>

There seems to be a nuanced focus on the traditional masculinized warrior who is objectified as the perfect soldier—fearless, strong, and powerful, capable of destruction. The common military understanding of diplomacy is inadequate to achieve success in counterinsurgency. Moreover, there is a fundamental understanding of military operations as forceful and violent<sup>40</sup>, but these tactics are counterproductive in Afghanistan, and were in Vietnam. As Michael Fitzsimmons states, “a theory of counterinsurgency strategy that is integrative of a diverse range of approaches to governance, identity, and legitimacy remains to be developed.”<sup>41</sup> Military aggression is one part of a complex and difficult process of counterinsurgency. For example, the role of women has been shown to be of utmost importance and a great resource in battling extremism in third world countries; indeed the State Department’s Strategy on Women In Terrorism and Counterterrorism contends that “[w]omen represent an enormously under-utilized resource in the struggle against violent extremism.”<sup>42</sup>

With the focused targeting of women as important community members and advancing their status, much progress can be achieved. Women do more to support their families and communities with the money they earn, and are more likely to actively resist

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<sup>39</sup> Young, Marilyn Blatt. *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991. Pg. 141

<sup>40</sup> I mean here to focus on the U.S.’ attachment to military solutions, not instead on governance and state building efforts. Michael Fitzsimmons describes an over-emphasis on force protection over population interaction in Vietnam. See footnote 41.

<sup>41</sup> Fitzsimmons, Michael. "Hard hearts and open minds? Governance, identity and the Intellectual foundations of counterinsurgency strategy." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 31.3 (2008): Pg. 27.

<sup>42</sup> Couture, Krista L. "A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism." *Foreign Policy* (2014): 7-47. *Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence*. Web. 13 Oct. 2014. Pg. 10

the desire of men in their families and communities to join extremist movements. It is targeted aid like this that has the most success in controlling the population. It is something that no amount of bombing, fighting, or fear of punishment can do.

Krista Couture states that “[i]n addressing radicalization, the desired outcome must be accomplished with tailored, locally based solutions; *there is no one size fits all* (italics in original).<sup>43</sup>” A targeted program is necessary. With the over commitment to military tactics, the U.S. is limiting its options and ability to achieve its security goals.<sup>44</sup> It is important to note that, like all counterinsurgency efforts, this must also be tailored to the specific state, group, or culture that the counterinsurgent is attempting to influence. In many countries, removing the traditional roles of women can be damaging in the eyes of many societies.

### **FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE NEEDED**

Fundamental change in U.S. military thinking is necessary to combat insurgencies. The United States cannot gain the support of the population without targeted aid to support that population. U.S. policy has not shifted from the masculinized military doctrine of Truman, and did not learn from the experiences in Vietnam. As is recommended in the COIN counterinsurgency manual, simply dampening the effects of violent action will not change the public’s view of the invader. This fundamental shift must be more than less bombing and less bullets. If the United States is to support

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pg. 8

<sup>44</sup> In 2006 Gen. Petraeus wrote the new Counterinsurgency Field Manual to address the problems in combating insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan. He recommends a shift away from violence and military operations to a population centric understanding. See Gen. Petraeus, David H., and Lt. Gen James F. Amos, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. Kissimmee: Signalman, 2006. Print.

democracy, it must target key civilian leaders and important members of society—like women—who can change the community.

As the United States draws the Afghanistan operation to a close, we must count successes in every active citizen, every woman who is empowered to lead in her community, every Imam and village elder that rejects extremism. And through these successes can we appeal truthfully to the U.S. populace and show that we are achieving our goals.

In the following chapter I outline elements that I have determined to be essential to success in counterinsurgency warfare and move away from the established base of counterinsurgency strategy that was created through the Vietnam War. It is my hope that these elements can shift the U.S. foundational thinking that counterinsurgency warfare is won through the military. Through Vietnam the U.S. learned important realities, and has since forgotten them—overtaken once again by Clausewitz.

# Chapter III: Elements of Counterinsurgency

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In this chapter I intend to explain the model that I have created to analyze and better understand counterinsurgency. Through five key elements, the use of force, the role of the population, the difference in urban and rural combat, the limitations and abilities of counterinsurgents, and the role of time, I create a framework to assess counterinsurgency tactics.

The first part of the chapter offers a literature review of theories that I have found useful and informative in creating my own model. The next part of this chapter discusses the importance of perception and the creation of goals. These two key attributes serve as a consistent thread that connects all the elements and strategies of counterinsurgency. The third section is the model itself, made from the five elements noted above.

## **REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE**

Although I have used numerous sources to determine and refine the elements I present in this chapter, the following works have been the especially important to the creation of the elements I have developed, and critical in my study of counterinsurgency.

Many sources contributed to the development of the following elements of counterinsurgency; however, first and foremost I must acknowledge Noriyuki Katagiri's work *Adapting to Win*. Katagiri provides an in depth analysis of the successes and failures of insurgencies throughout history, and develops a model to explain why insurgencies succeed or fail.

Katagiri provides a model which he calls “Sequencing Theory” that stipulates the factors that lead to the success of insurgencies in fighting against foreign states. He asserts that the ability of the insurgency to evolve is key to their success. Successful insurgencies evolve through sequences, each sequence containing three phases: “state building, guerilla war, and conventional war.” And furthermore, “[a]daptation and evolution through the right sequences therefore, are central to success and failure”<sup>45</sup> of insurgencies. Katagiri concludes that the majority of insurgencies have failed to achieve their goals.

Katagiri categorizes insurgencies into six models according to their behavior. These are: The Conventional Model, The Primitive Model, the Degenerative Model, The Premature Model, The Maoist Model, and the Progressive Model. Katagiri categorizes the 147 insurgency wars that he examines into one of the above models, using specific examples as case studies. His analysis explains how insurgencies succeed, but also how they fail. To understand how to defeat insurgencies, it is essential to know their inner workings and what makes them effective. He concludes that successful insurgencies must evolve through the sequences aforementioned. Insurgencies fail, Katagiri stipulates, when they fail to evolve through these sequences, or do so too quickly. For example, an insurgency almost always fails if it attempts to engage in conventional war.

In Robert Schaefer’s book *The Insurgency in Chechnya and The North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*, he provides an analysis of the current situation in Chechnya, a history of the conflict, and recommendations for both understanding and combating insurgencies. Schaefer takes a population centric view, asserting that the key to winning a

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<sup>45</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 169.

war against an insurgency is to create a secure situation for the population. He asserts that the terrorizing of Chechen civilians was the most counterproductive process of Russian Federal troops, and contributed greatly to the insecurity in the region.

Schaefer places particular emphasis in defining terms, and understanding the fundamental difference between counterinsurgency and conventional warfare, arguing that terrorism is simply criminal behavior, and should be treated as such. Insurgency is defined as a concerted effort to destabilize or destroy a state system in part or in whole. It is insurgency warfare, therefore, that makes the war in Chechnya, and now the greater North Caucasus, so difficult.

Schaefer analyzes the Russian response in both wars, providing insights to their success and failures and concluding, among other things, that the Russians failed to create a competing ideology to that of the extremists in Chechnya. Schaefer also discusses the goals of Putin and the Kremlin as focused on the Russian population.

Russell Weigley provides a comprehensive review of U.S. strategic foundations in his work *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*, published in 1977. He offers an excellent analysis of both the foundation of American military thinking, and how it evolved into an, all out, Clausewitzian understanding of war.

Weigley notes that there was a major shift in U.S. military thinking from the first one hundred of the United States' existence, when the U.S. used the least amount of resources possible to wage war, compared to now, with what he calls limitless war. This new way of war is what we know today; it employs the wealth of the nation—political, economic, and social resources—to the cause of war. He concludes that “[a]ny strategy

other than the now familiar strategy of annihilation proved so frustratingly at variance with the American conception” of war, that it “threatened the psychological balance of the nation itself.”<sup>46</sup> It is this stubborn foundation that has perpetuated U.S. military thinking in Afghanistan.

Jens Ringsmose, Lars Mouritsen, and Peter D. Thruelsen provide a useful framework for successful counterinsurgency operations in their publication *The Anatomy of Counterinsurgency Warfare*. The authors argue that we still have a limited understanding of irregular warfare, regardless of its importance today. They also assert the importance of definitions, and how the majority of journalists have described counterinsurgency warfare much like conventional warfare.

The authors present a useful and practical framework to assess counterinsurgency warfare. This broad framework analyzes the successes of counterinsurgency tactics, from which I have used many important points. Their framework is based on five key elements: territory, tactics, center of gravity, time and means. Through these elements the authors analyze the war in Afghanistan, and make recommendations. They conclude that success in Afghanistan requires winning a ‘fight of legitimacy’ to earn the support of the population. This is one of the few sources that focused specifically on how counterinsurgency operations should evolve.

For the integration of governance and social aspects of counterinsurgency I used both Michael Fitzsimmons paper *Hard Hearts and Open Minds? Governance, Identity, and Counterinsurgency*, and Krista Couture’s study *A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism*. Both authors emphasize the importance of social programs and

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<sup>46</sup> Weigley, Russell Frank. *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977. Pg. 383.

governance structures to combat extremism. These non-military solutions are a core component in defeating insurgencies.

Fitzsimmons asserts that good governance, which he defines as “effective and efficient administration of public services and allocation of public resources”<sup>47</sup> is an essential element in combating an insurgency. He shows how governance played a key role in the success of counterinsurgency strategies. Fitzsimmons also provides extensive definitions of key elements such as identity, governance, defeat and victory. Using these elements, Fitzsimmons then applies this framework to the case studies of Malaya, Algeria, and South Vietnam.

Couture provides an examination of the complex role of women in combating extremism, using Bangladesh and Morocco as case studies. She concludes that both of these governments were able to curb extremism through the elevation and empowerment of women. Women, Couture notes, provide a more important role in household than men, and therefore can be an essential element in shaping the beliefs of children and young men—the majority of insurgent recruits. She shows that through policies that specifically target women, states can control extremism.

Based on my study of the above sources and others I created a framework of counterinsurgency elements that provides insight into what makes a counterinsurgency force effective. The following is my own framework of analysis.

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<sup>47</sup> Fitzsimmons, Michael. "Hard hearts and open minds? Governance, identity and the Intellectual foundations of counterinsurgency strategy." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 31.3 (2008): Pg. 30.

## ANALYZING COUNTERINSURGENCY: A TENTATIVE FRAMEWORK

Throughout modern counterinsurgency warfare, the conventional Clausewitzian understanding of warfare has hindered the efforts of western powers to achieve victory—by Clausewitz’s standards, a total destruction of the enemy’s capacity to fight. An element that is little considered is the importance of how the goals of counterinsurgency are actually formed. Moreover, we define these goals, and therefore *the definitions* of victory provide an important aspect that allows a counterinsurgency to achieve victory. If Clausewitz’s version of victory remains our ultimate goal, we will never succeed in combating insurgent movements. Although Sun Tzu would have certainly advised against any campaign involving an insurgency—“[t]here is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare”<sup>48</sup>—his advice is still relevant tactically, and it enables us to reconsider our assumptions, and see at the conflict with a broad lens. Master Sun’s advice is to understand yourself and your enemy:

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself, but not the enemy, every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.<sup>49</sup>

As it applies to counterinsurgency warfare, the battle encompasses not only actual combat operations, but also the overall strategy.

There was no instance in the Iraq or Afghanistan wars in which the U.S. military was overwhelmed or defeated by the insurgent force.<sup>50</sup> In insurgent war, victory is not counted in the enemy’s dead—the battle is for the support of the population. Although

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<sup>48</sup> Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*. Trans. Lionel Giles Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002. Pg. 45

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Pg. 51.

<sup>50</sup> As frequently cited by both Anand Gopal and Lt. Gen. Bolger, the U.S. forces were more than competent in every battle. No Taliban or al-Qaeda force was capable of defeating the U.S. in combat. But this was not the game the insurgents were playing.

there are other relevant factors, none is as crucial as this central element, for the approval of the local population acts as an indicator of the successes of the counterinsurgency. For a foreign force, there are two options to achieve victory; the first is through a comprehensive tactical approach that involves governance operations that appeal to the populace as its main objective, and the protection and trust of the population as its ultimate goals. The second option is to target the population in order to control the insurgency: “People may rescind support for the insurgents when *they fear government retaliation* or appreciate government actions for them.”<sup>51</sup> This may end in a pyrrhic victory, but can be effective in the short term in an area. In the Chechen Wars, Russian Federal forces were able exercise complete control over the civilian population. Without one of these options, it is impossible to succeed. Either requires massive commitments of resources—direct monetary support, military and civilian personnel, long term fixed goals, short term flexible and changing goals—and unchanging resolve on the part of the counterinsurgency forces as well as domestic popular support.

I have broken down the ability to succeed in counterinsurgency warfare to the adherence to five quintessential elements: the use of force, the role of the public, urban and rural population control, limitations, and time. Each of these elements explores an important part of combating an insurgency.

It is important to note the role of clear and defined goals and the perceptions, norms and understandings that create them. These aspects run through each element of counterinsurgency. To reiterate, counterinsurgency is first and foremost a fight for the public, both the home population of the invading force, and the local population that the

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<sup>51</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 53.

foreign force invades. A counterinsurgency must work to gain the support of the local population and also work to keep the support of their own public. The home population of the counterinsurgent force is the foundation of support for the operation. As counterinsurgency wars become longer and more expensive, the public support often dampens, or, as in the case of the U.S., the war becomes less of a priority. To do this there must be clear goals established. Any element, success or failure is dependent on the overall success towards specified goals.

### **THE USE OF FORCE**

The use of violent force must be limited and controlled. The goal must be established that the support of the population is what will lead to victory, and this can be achieved either by appealing to them or terrorizing them. In the case of the first strategy, consistency is key—the population must believe their security will be guaranteed by the counterinsurgency force. If fear is the goal of the counterinsurgent, as in the second case, terrorizing the population may be effective as well, if it is consistent and predictable. But as occurred in Chechnya, the systematic terror tactics used against the population by Russian federal troops made them fear government retaliation not just for their support of insurgents, but simply for being Chechen. This strategy—if we can call it a strategy at all—tends to be the more costly and inconsistent method.<sup>52</sup> Noriyuki Katagiri notes that terrorizing the population provides limited success, and the stability that might be gained is temporary at best.

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Schaefer and others assert that the tactics of the Russian Federal Troops were an involuntary result of the lack of discipline in the armed forces. Schaefer says that, for this reason, U.S and Russian counterinsurgency tactics are difficult to compare. Terror tactics are often a result not only of lack of discipline, but also an expression with the difficulty in fighting a counterinsurgency war. See Schaefer, pg. 195.

The majority of insurgent groups are designed to be ‘flat’ in structure—with many cells capable of operating independently from each other. Therefore, targeted killings of insurgents are only effective to the extent that they discourage the local population from supporting or joining the insurgency, which has not been shown to be effective. For the home population, targeted killings may promote support for the war from the invader’s population. Although the killing of Osama Bin Laden was a great emotional victory for the United States, its success did not curtail the Taliban insurgency. The U.S. public took Bin Laden’s death as another reason for the troops to leave Afghanistan. Violence is, at times, necessary, but always a crude tool for defeating an insurgency. Violence can never be executed perfectly, and the flaws—most importantly the killing of civilians—lead to a complete failure in the pursuit of the local population’s support. The home population, conversely, may be more perceptive about their country’s foreign war if these high value targets are found and destroyed. While the situation was changed little in Afghanistan at the death of Bin Laden, the public in the U.S. still celebrated it as a great victory. Nonetheless, the U.S. forces did not gain an increase in popular support, nor did Bin Laden’s death reignite a dedication to spend more lives and resources in the Afghan war.

### **THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC**

As Katagiri says, “popular support was so important that even insurgents themselves learned to court civilians in order to fight their more powerful enemies.”<sup>53</sup> The public is the battlefield for a counterinsurgency force. More important than any other

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<sup>53</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 108.

single factor, victory cannot be achieved without the willful or forced participation of the population.

One of the ways in which the population affects the counterinsurgency effort is through playing a role in the tactical ability of an insurgent force to supply itself with shelter, weapons, and food. Mao Tse-Tung, in addition to being a successful revolutionary leader, was also a scholar of war and a competent commander. He recognized the importance of the local population in furnishing the everyday basic needs of insurgents: “[b]ecause guerrilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation.”<sup>54</sup>

The population may support the insurgency for a number of reasons, the most common being coercion from the insurgent force, but an adaptable insurgent force will manipulate their relationship with the public to further their goals. Often, this is done through legitimate assistance in governance. In Vietnam, the NLF insurgency movement went as far as to set up a parallel government structure that operated whenever Southern Vietnamese and U.S. forces were not present. The NLF redistributed land for cultivation and its members were “instructed to learn local languages, customs, and habits, to help people with their daily work...to win their sympathy little by little.”<sup>55</sup> Whatever these sympathies are, a counterinsurgent force must work actively against their buildup and counter the dependence of the population on the insurgent force. Unless they are to resort to terrorist acts themselves, like the Russian Federal forces during the two Chechen wars,

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<sup>54</sup> Tse-Tung, Mao. *On Guerrilla Warfare*. Trans. Samuel B. Griffith. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961. Pg. 44.

<sup>55</sup> Young, Marilyn Blatt. *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1991. Pg. 9.

the counterinsurgent force must become the only supplier of security and basic civic structure. If the invading force and/or the legitimate government cannot provide basic needs—at the very least security—the population is likely to look to the insurgents for these services. For example, the *New York Times* reported in January 2015 that in light of the extreme corruption of Afghan Courts, the population has increasingly turned to the Taliban system of justice to resolve disputes.<sup>56</sup> The ability to provide and maintain governance must be a central element of the counterinsurgency. The counterinsurgent force must recognize that the protection of the civilian population—including their property and infrastructure—is a central tactical goal. With public support as the central goal of a counterinsurgency force, it is extremely costly. Maintaining public support is costly, not just monetarily, but in the loss of life. Lt. Gen. Daniel Bolger, a retired general, described the switch to a population centric strategy—limited use of violence, firepower and the acceptance of casualties to protect civilians—as ultimately harmful to U.S. troops in Afghanistan. In his view, securing the support of the local population was not achieved, nor did the coalition forces “hold anything beyond the ground on which they stood.”<sup>57</sup> *Jus ad bello*—just conduct during war—is the only means to achieving a lasting outcome of a true victory. The goal of the counterinsurgency force is therefore rejection of the insurgent by the civilian population, thus making the insurgency incapable of succeeding. However, this strategy, *jus ad bello*, is the most costly in the short term. Nations are often forced into a choice: either provide the support needed for

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<sup>56</sup> Ahmed, Azam. "Taliban Justice Gains Favor as Official Afghan Courts Fail." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 31 Jan. 2015. Web. 08 Apr. 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Bolger, Daniel P. *Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. Pg. 288.

the local population, or win over their home population. Although both are necessary, the later is usually chosen.

In this way, the population of the invader's state—its home population—can prove equally, if not more detrimental to the success of the overall counterinsurgency mission. In the United States during the Vietnam War, loss of public support for the war was key to the final decisions to withdraw. Much of the energy of the Johnson administration was focused on attempting to portray the war in a positive manner to the American people. Johnson encouraged many 'teach-ins' in which debates and lectures by experts were sponsored all over the country to further educate the people, especially the youth, of the war's merits and faults.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately for the Johnson administration, after the Tet offensive, those confident in the war's success dropped to below 40%. U.S. public opinion effectively put a time and troop limit on the war. The more individuals drafted and the more time with fewer successes, U.S. public opinion continued to drop.

Consequently, successive presidents began to lower their expectations—how to get out with the least amount of humiliation became the most important goal. As this illustrates, a counterinsurgency mission must have clearly defined goals—the way in which we achieve these goals must be flexible and open to change according to the needs of the situation, and appease both the home and the local population. The goals established must be consistent, and progress must be shown moving towards those goals. People and governments, especially democracies, get tired of war and have little tolerance for ongoing wars when little success is perceived. In the case of Vietnam, a central element to the loss of support was the draft. The United States seems to follow a familiar course

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<sup>58</sup> Marilyn Young describes these 'teach ins' as ineffective attempts to sway the population of the Vietnam War's success and justification. As cited in *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1991.

in counterinsurgency wars: fervor at the commencement of war, but as casualties and costs mount, the public slowly loses confidence. For this reason, the counterinsurgency force must attain strategic victories (real or perceived) to satisfy their home population.

### **URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION CONTROL**

In the majority of guerilla wars, the rural and urban populations have posed distinct and separate difficulties. In Afghanistan, as in Vietnam at the time of the war, the majority of the population lived in rural areas, not in cities. In lieu of major military targets, invading powers tend to focus on cities as their primary target of control. However, the differences culturally between rural and urban population must be taken into account. While many people in cities are educated, rural life outside of cities tends to be shaped by subsistence farming and the raising of animals. When attempting to control large swaths of territory, physical ability becomes stretched. It often seems that a foreign invading force has control over the nation when it has control over major cities and towns, since they are the most easily defended with the smallest troop and resource commitment relative to the number of people under their control. Attempting to maintain control over rural populations that are much more spread out and in isolated areas adds to the difficulty of the task.

Support from rural populations must be achieved through focused actions directed at small communities. Each community has different needs and cannot simply be blanketed in peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, as was the case during the first bombing phases in Iraq in 2003, when the U.S. dropped thousands of food supplies. The invading force must be the one to give the population what they need—first and foremost

protection and security. This can be achieved through the empowerment of local village leaders and elders. The NLF in Vietnam functioned primarily in the countryside, and as a legitimate government whenever the U.S. troops were not present. This is the worst possible outcome for the invading force. Temporary patrols through rural areas have little effect in convincing the population that the foreign force is reliable and present. These patrols only lead to temporary hiding of the insurgent fighters, who then come back and punish anyone who supported the foreigners. In a sense, temporary patrols through rural areas are only making the lives of those who live there more difficult. In Afghanistan, U.S. troops in rural areas were often temporary, and would be gone by nightfall.

As the soldiers passed, they saw glum women, children, and old men—no young ones—in windows and doors, watching silent, staying out of the entire episode. That night, when the Taliban males came back, the long-suffering villagers could say honestly that they'd had nothing to do with the infidels and the Afghan lackeys. It's how people stayed alive.<sup>59</sup>

Once the people do not fear the return of the insurgents due to the provided legitimate governance structures, then and only then, will they have a choice to support the counterinsurgent invading force.

### **LIMITATIONS AND ABILITY**

Understanding the limitations and ability of a military force is important in making goals and understanding success. Civilians, diplomats and politicians must play a larger role in counterinsurgency conflict than in traditional wars. Military personnel are limited in their ability to make the public feel comfortable and safe, not to mention their

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<sup>59</sup> Bolger, Daniel P. *Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. Pg. 382.

inadequate ability in providing civic structure. Therefore, it is of the highest importance for the military to attempt to provide security for the local population, as they are engaged in many battles simultaneously with the insurgency. Security must come first, however, if any foundation of popular support is to be laid. The civil structure of the area can be effective tool for gaining the support of the local population.<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps the most important limitation is that of the military as it pertains to the overall goals of the counterinsurgency mission. Specifically, the counterinsurgent military force must be used in a function not normal to the military. Victories cannot be counted in numbers of bodies due to the fact that “the distinction between retaliation, reprisal, or mere revenge is not easy to maintain when an enemy cannot be identified or located with exactness.”<sup>61</sup> Almost any killing can, at least to some extent, be framed as a civilian killing. General Bolger mentions an incident in which Taliban fighters dressed as women in burkas, and when coming upon a U.S. patrol, opened fire. When the U.S. soldiers fired back, killing the Taliban fighters, the Taliban distributed information that the U.S. soldiers had slaughtered civilian women.<sup>62</sup> How the population sees the situation is more important than the state of the situation in reality.

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<sup>60</sup> Fitzsimmons, Michael. "Hard hearts and open minds? Governance, identity and the Intellectual foundations of counterinsurgency strategy." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 31.3 (2008): 337-365.

<sup>61</sup> Townshend, Charles. *Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. Pg. 123.

<sup>62</sup> It is not clear what the Afghans themselves thought of this exact incidence. The information of approval ratings of NATO, the US, and the Taliban vary greatly according to province. In Helmand, for example, 63% of the population said the Taliban had gained strength, but only 22% of the entire population said the Taliban had influence in their area. For exact public opinion regarding the Afghan war see Cordesman, Anthony H. "Afghan Public Opinion and the Afghan War: Shifts By Region and Province." *CSIS* (2009): 1-42. Web. 4 Apr. 2015. <[http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/094013\\_afghanpollbyregion.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/094013_afghanpollbyregion.pdf)>.

The insurgent, to the contrary, is not bound by inconvenient things like the truth. As a democracy and a legitimate state, the United States ought adhere to certain protocols of legal and moral significance—as these rules often become the only thing that separates the invading force from the insurgency. The insurgent has fewer limits, and almost all are material: weapons, money, and supplies. As Charles Townshend sees it, “the biggest hazard inherent in reactions to terrorism is the impulse towards imitation.<sup>63</sup>” It is a fight of wills, not of arms, because “war is ultimately coercive, terrorism is persuasive.<sup>64</sup>” The insurgent does not have laws, a constituency, or a political party—all of which are constraints in war for a democracy. Moreover, imitating the insurgent is the worst course of action. The invader must appear successful, compassionate and consistent to the population in order to achieve any success and establish itself as a legitimate movement.

In a democracy, the warriors emerge from the civilian population and maintain extensive links to the general population through familial, traditional and/or religious ties, among others. In Russia, the Chechen wars were framed for the Russian population as the extermination of extremism, and continuous propaganda aimed at objectifying Muslims as the enemies. Putin, through control of the media, was able to portray the war according to what he wanted the public to believe—he created a general fervor of racism aimed at the local population, which, in turn, extended support for the war in Chechnya by making it seem necessary for the safety of the Russian population. It is not necessarily a democracy that has the most limitations in conducting counterinsurgency, but the government that has the least control over the perceptions of their own populace. The more a state can bend popular support, the more latitude it has to conduct

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<sup>63</sup> Townshend, Charles. *Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011 Pg. 117.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 14

counterinsurgency without restrictions. Nonetheless, as exemplified in Chechnya, any strategy that increases violence has serious drawbacks.

### **THE ROLE OF TIME**

Unlike in conventional warfare, in counterinsurgency warfare, “time is usually the ally of the weaker party.”<sup>65</sup> The insurgent is not required to show quick and decisive gains like the counterinsurgency force. Time, therefore, can be used as a weapon. The longer the insurgent forces the invader to remain in the country, they force them to commit resources and lives to the conflict. This diminishes the ability of the invader to achieve notable successes.

Moreover, the invader is constrained by time, in the sense that it must achieve measurable successes before its population stops supporting the conflict. If or when the invaders fail to achieve their goals, the insurgency has increasing opportunities to gain support. If the counterinsurgent chooses violence and intimidation of the population to gain local support, it must be quickly achieved. When the war starts, the clock starts ticking on the support given by the invader’s population. This is why broad, ill-defined goals are often detrimental to the support of the home population for conflict, and such goals risk extending the conflict. In a sense, “time always works in favour of the insurgent who—as long as they stay alive—maintain the strategic advantage.”<sup>66</sup> The home population accepts the costs and casualties as long as they understand the reasons

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<sup>65</sup> Ringsmose, Jens, Lars Mouritsen, and Peter D. Thruelsen. *The Anatomy of Counterinsurgency Warfare*. Kbh.: Fakultet for Strategi Og Militære Operationer, Forsvarsakademiet, 2008. Print.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

for the conflict and can see progress towards established goals. This is what renews the lease on public support.

## **CONCLUSION**

I will use these five key elements as a framework of analysis in assessing the successes and failures of both the United States in Afghanistan and Russia in Chechnya. Though the history of both wars is complex and long, looking through a narrower window of analysis will aid us as we try to explain the complex process of counterinsurgency. The elements described in this chapter are by no means all that contribute to the success or failure of counterinsurgency warfare, but they are essential.

It is my hope that this set of elements can be used as framework of analyses and as a possible model. We must learn from our past mistakes, for “we can only hope that the current and future policymakers can learn from the mistakes and leave a better legacy.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Rose, Gideon, and Jonathan Tepperman, eds. "Learning From Afghanistan and Iraq." *Foreign Affairs* Nov/Dec 2014 93.6 (2014): 1-2. Web. 12 Nov. 2014. Pg. 2.

## Chapter IV: The U.S. Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan

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The outcome of the U.S. counterinsurgency war in Afghanistan is still unclear, as are the goals of the mission. Often throughout the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East, “tired clichés passed as insights, and few policymakers thought of consulting Afghans who could not speak English.”<sup>68</sup> Thomas Barfield in his book *A Cultural and Political History of Afghanistan* offers a comprehensive and detailed account of the evolution of the area and its considerable outside influences. This has been my main guide to the general history of Afghanistan.

The population of Afghanistan is 85% Sunni and 15% Shia, although ethnic identity is much more tribally based, and is relatively flexible—a worthwhile strategy in a warring society.<sup>69</sup> Historically Afghans have identified more with their tribe than religion, but this, like most things in Afghanistan, varies across the country. The major tribal areas are most notably the southern Pashtun Tribal area, which account for about 40% of the population, followed by Tajik, 27%, and Hazara and Uzbek, who both account for around 8%. There is a very important split within the Pashtun population between the Ghilzai and Durrani. It must also be stated that there is a chasm between rural and urban society. Urban Afghan society has seen the rise and fall of empires. Much of the population was educated by the Soviet Union’s inclusive system. As for the rural population, life is lived much how it was a thousand years ago. Most of the population

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<sup>68</sup> Barfield, Thomas J. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010: Preface, X.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* Barfield describes ethnic identity as swaying with the power of the time. See pgs. 21 and 22.

still relies on sustenance farmers, and most of the farm work is done by hand or with the help of farm animals. Disputes are resolved through village elders.

### **RELEVANT AFGHAN HISTORY**

At the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, a puppet government was installed in Afghanistan: the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). This government, headed by Mohammad Najibullah, introduced radical socialist reforms including the equality of women and other policies destructive to familial traditions, even attempting to destroy land ownership—a important foundation in Afghan life that was based on subsistence farming. In the face of wide spread protests—both rural and urban—as well as rampant army desertions, the PDPA's only support was the Soviet Union itself, and the politburo, “having declared Afghanistan a member of the Soviet bloc, its government could not be allowed to fall.”<sup>70</sup>,

#### **Soviet Invasion**

The Soviet army invaded in full force on December 27, 1979, with the purpose of restoring order, and reestablishing the Communist government. Soviet goals were short-term stability, and restoring the authority of the PDPA government—a task that, in their opinion, would not take long. The Soviets also believed that this action would prove their commitment to a client state. Unfortunately for the Soviets, a once decentralized resistance was now mobilized to *Jihad* to expel the foreign invaders. *Jihad* the word

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<sup>70</sup> Barfield, Thomas J. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010: Pg. 233.

means *striving*, better understood as *struggle*.<sup>71</sup> A call to *Jihad* was one of the only ways to unite the tribal factions of Afghanistan, who normally would not be concerned with anything outside their own tribal area.

The Mujahedeen—*holy warriors*—also had no shortage of funds. Both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia were willing donors to their cause. The United States justified its actions due to the Soviet Union's expanding of their post WWII boundaries, and Saudi Arabia was justified as a reaction of a foreign nation invading a Muslim country.

“Together the United States and Saudi Arabia were willing to bankroll the resistance in Afghanistan in amounts that eventually reached a billion dollars a year in the mid-1980s.<sup>72</sup>” These weapons, money, and other supplies were brought to the Mujahedeen through the Pakistani intelligence agency, the ISI. This shattered the Politburo's hope of a temporary commitment to reinstate the PDPA, and one that would reinforce their international power and promise to never abandon a client state.

During the subsequent 10-year struggle between the Mujahedeen and the Soviet army, all military options were tried. Limited means was not a part of the strategy, but “since the Afghan definition of victory consisted of a Soviet withdrawal, all the resistance needed to do was to make the country ungovernable and a drain on Soviet resources.<sup>73</sup>” Time was therefore a weapon against the Soviets. When Gorbachev took power in 1985, he redefined the goals of the Afghan invasion to stabilize the country enough for Soviet troops to withdrawal. Under the 1988 United Nations sponsored withdrawal agreement, the U.S. and Soviet Union were required to stop funding their respective parties, although

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<sup>71</sup> As described by Charles Townshend in *Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. See Pg. 104

<sup>72</sup> Barfield, Thomas J. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010: Pg. 236.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*: pg. 242.

both continued to do so covertly. The United States and Saudi Arabia were satisfied with the results they had helped to create: the U.S. “had financed a war to bloody the Soviets and Saudi Arabia had paid for a war to expel an infidel occupier, and achieved that result.”<sup>74</sup>

### *The Afghan Civil War*

After the Soviet withdrawal, the PDPA reorganized in an attempt to appeal more to the Afghan people, although it was still mostly supported by the Soviet Union. Fortunately for the PDPA, the Mujahedeen warlords were unorganized, and had to spend much of their time and resources just to keep their forces together. Najibullah was also able to characterize the war as an internal Afghan affair, effectively making a uniting call for *Jihad* illegitimate. At first he was successful, and even able to buy off numerous warlords, but the chaos and poverty that ensued after the Soviet withdrawal created a new generation of people, especially young men, who grew up in war torn society and lived in the slums of refugee camps that now surrounded the major cities, that were ready for action against the PDPA. Najibullah’s government was ultimately destroyed when the Soviet aid stopped in late 1991, and from which he had failed to gain independence. Without this aid, the semi autonomous regions that used the PDPA’s payments to them as ransom completely fell apart, leading to violent and brutal struggle for power, each Warlord not strong enough to dispose of his enemies. The now limited supply of funding was fought over, creating a brutal civil war.

Afghanistan got rid of foreign occupiers by making the country so ungovernable that they wanted to leave. This strategy, perfected during the decade-long struggle to expel

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<sup>74</sup>Barfield, Thomas J. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010: pg. 247.

the Soviets, now came to haunt the Afghans themselves. Having achieved the sobriquet ‘graveyard of empires’ for their nineteenth and twentieth-century successes against the superpowers of the age, the Afghans now began digging a grave for themselves.<sup>75</sup>

The Afghan Civil war was fought between competing Mujahedeen leaders. This violent and chaotic period led many Afghans to believe that *any form* government would be better than the chaos. It was this sentiment that, in 2001, made “foreign [U.S.] forces...welcomed, against all expectations, because the Afghans saw them as a bulwark against the very Afghan forces that had driven the country into ruin.<sup>76</sup>” The Civil War set the stage of what would become a populace driven fight for stability.

Afghanistan from 1992 to 1996 was destroyed by chaotic infighting among Mujahedeen Warlords. In his book, *No Good Men Among the Living*, Anand Gopal interviewed several Afghans about their lives throughout the wars. Many said that at this time there was only fear, elders were killed, women raped in the street, there was absolutely no order, not even through Islam. Even though the Warlords claimed to be upholding Sharia, their top priority was power and wealth. For citizens in Kabul, “life’s simplest tasks took on new meaning<sup>77</sup>” and surviving became the goal for each day. With no single authority ruling the country, the armed mujahedeen factions constantly fought brutal battles, shelling cities, and creating systematic abuse of the population for which there was no penance.

The only country now interested in the fate of Afghanistan was Pakistan, and the funds were sparse. Without a foreign enemy, there was no unifying thread among

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<sup>75</sup> Barfield, Thomas J. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010: pg. 255.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid: pg. 7.

<sup>77</sup> Gopal, Anand. *No Good Men among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War Through Afghan Eyes*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Henry Holt, 2014: pg. 62.

factions who were largely supported directly from their tribal area. The real fight was for the dwindling supplies of weapons and money: “In Afghanistan, opportunism could always be counted on to undermine any other ‘ism’ (Islamism, nationalism, socialism, etc.) in this fight.<sup>78</sup>” This made the population in the cities—which was mixed—subject to the most brutal abuse: “What prestige the mujahideen factions had gained by expelling the Soviets was lost as they fought each other in the ruins of Kabul.<sup>79</sup>” There were few civilians not prepared for a drastic alternative. That alternative came through the Taliban movement.

### *The Rise of the Taliban*

The Taliban in Afghanistan rose directly from the dissatisfaction of the people with their current situation. The Taliban’s radical ideology was no impediment as long as it meant safety. Nevertheless, the Taliban withheld major parts of sharia law until they had a firm grip on the majority Afghanistan.

This movement had several important factors that forced it into power. The most important was, as aforesaid, the support gained from the populace’s dissatisfaction with current situation. The Taliban accessed this through charismatic clerics, who were able to rouse entire villages to their call of true Islam and the rule of law. Unlike other similar movements, the Taliban also had a professional military arm that it used tactically. At first the Taliban forces mostly attacked weapons depots and other strategic military installations. As they gained strength and success, volunteers flowed to them—there was no short supply of those who wanted revenge on the brutal mujahedeen warlords.

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<sup>78</sup> Barfield, Thomas J. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010: pg. 253.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*: pg. 251

However, no movement could be successful without international aid, and in Afghanistan, “power has depended solely on one’s proximity to that aid.”<sup>80</sup> A key element to the Taliban’s ascent was the direct support from Pakistan, which included military advisors, weapons, and direct supply lines were essential to the success of the movement.

By 1996, the Taliban had secured the majority of the country under their rule and began to impose sharia law, which was a much-welcomed change from the precarious lack of any system that had existed before. The Mujahedeen that were able to escape with their lives banded together to form the Northern Alliance, which, in 2001, held nothing more than the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) in northeastern Afghanistan. An important note is that the Taliban commanders had little real fighting experience, and mostly relied on exploiting old rivalries between their enemies, and paying off militias entirely, and increasingly on outside *Jihadi* recruits from nearby—chiefly Pakistan, but also Chechnya, Uzbeks, and Arabs. The Taliban were driven from Kabul during their first assault in 1996, and almost defeated by the battle hardened Mujahedeen commander Ahmad Shah Massoud and his allies. It was only through massive recruitment in Pakistan that the Taliban were able to recover and drive the remaining Mujahedeen, led by Massoud, into the NWFP where he stood against them until his death.<sup>81</sup>

Mullah Mohammed Omar then took the position of *Amir-ul Momineen* (commander of the faithful) and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was created in 1996.

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<sup>80</sup> Gopal, Anand. *No Good Men among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War Through Afghan Eyes*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Henry Holt, 2014: pg. 126.

<sup>81</sup> Massoud was killed on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2001, just weeks before the U.S. Air force bombed the front line of the Taliban forces. He was killed by two Taliban suicide bombers posing as journalists. He was later awarded the title of ‘National Hero of Afghanistan.’ See Gopal, pg. 10-12.

He made an attempt to create a functioning government, but the structure of the Taliban government was largely made up of governors who were also military commanders, all reported directly to Omar in Kandahar. As more policies of sharia law were implemented, their popularity began to slip. The Taliban were “initially lauded for bringing peace and security...but their social and religious policies became widely unpopular.”<sup>82</sup> The Taliban’s version of sharia was nothing more than a mixture of local Pashtun traditional codes and Salafi Islam. This form of Islam was not seen as a ‘pure form’ and was foreign to the majority of Afghans: when confronted by Egyptian Muslim Clerics, the Taliban were said to

have no business enforcing sharia law because their knowledge of it was rudimentary and flawed...they have no knowledge of the Arabic language, linguistics, and literature and hence they did not learn the true Islam.<sup>83</sup>

The Taliban’s main goal remained to expel foreigners from Afghan soil and to create an Islamic Emirate. These ‘near enemy’ goals contrast to the Al-Qaeda movement’s ‘far enemy’ goals. These two groups were distinctly different<sup>84</sup>.

With the Taliban government as a home base, Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorists engendered the hatred of almost every nation they interacted with. They started to insist that Hindus and Sikhs wear badges to distinguish themselves, and arrested aid workers. Omar, even though not directly allied with Bin Laden, refused to expel him from the

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<sup>82</sup> Barfield, Thomas J. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010: pg. 261.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 263.

<sup>84</sup> Seth Jones analyzes various insurgency groups and their goals, he quotes Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who said that “the purpose of targeting America is to exhaust her and bleed her to death” by ‘baiting’ her to engage in foreign wars. This is clearly contrary to the goals of the Taliban. Jones, Seth G. *A Persistent Threat: The Evolution of Al Qa'ida and Other Salafi Jihadists*. RAND Corporation, 2014: Pg. 14.

country at the request of Saudi Arabia and the United States, using the Pashtun conduct code towards guests as his reasoning.

### *The U.S. Invasion*

Two days before September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the Taliban assassinated Massoud and were preparing for their final offensive against the Northern Alliance when U.S jets started to strike key Taliban positions. Abandoned by Pakistan, the Taliban were isolated, and when the Northern Alliance started their attack on the ground, the Taliban regime unraveled. Bin Laden expressed later that to lure the U.S. into Afghanistan would create an insurgency that would eventually destroy America.<sup>85</sup> Omar and Bin Laden were soon forced to flee the country, lucky to escape with their lives. The United States now had to create a new state, and, with no political elite left, they had to start from scratch. The Afghan population saw the invasion as a “bulwark against the return of civil war...they clamored for basic security,<sup>86</sup>” but the U.S. had other more important goals: the creation of a new state based on democracy and liberal economics, with equality for all and the destruction of Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden.

Following the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the United States, led by the Bush administration, took swift and decisive action. U.S. motives were presented as clear, with a defined goal of capturing or killing of Osama bin Laden and punishing those who harbored, sponsored, or supported the terrorists that had conducted or planned the attacks on 9/11. Since Bin Laden was in Afghanistan at the time, the decision that would shape the rest of the war ultimately rested on the shoulders of the Mullah Mohammed Omar.

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<sup>85</sup> See Seth Jones' piece *A Persistent Threat: The Evolution of Al Qa'ida and Other Salafi Jihadists*. RAND Corporation, 2014: Web.

<sup>86</sup> Barfield, Thomas J. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010: pg. 270.

After consulting with Pashtun elders, Omar concluded that he could not ask Bin Laden to leave, let alone turn him over to the U.S. According to the Pashtun moral code, the *Pashtunwali*, the guest should know when to leave and when he was an undue burden on his host.

After the Taliban regime was destroyed, the U.S. was left with a difficult non-military task in Afghanistan: the building of a state. This turned out to be something for which the U.S. was not prepared. Nonetheless, a shaky and corrupt government was formed in Afghanistan and officially entered power in 2004 after the ratification of a new constitution. Hamid Karzai, the ruler of the interim government, was elected president in 2004. The United States was distracted greatly by the war in Iraq, and as the new government proved to be less than powerful, the U.S. began relying heavily on former warlords for security. As Mullah Mohammed Omar had promised, the Taliban resurfaced and began to seriously destabilize the country.

The United States and its allies launched major offensives in 2007 to clear Taliban fighters, and again in 2010. By this time the war had lost much public support in the U.S. The Obama administration shifted the focus of the “War on Terror” back to Afghanistan.<sup>87</sup>

### *Change in Tactics and the Surge*

In 2010, U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan outnumbered those in Iraq for the first time.<sup>88</sup> General Stanley McChrystal began to shift the focus of the military and

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<sup>87</sup> Public opinion of the Afghan war declined steadily from 93% in 2002, to 48% in 2014. In 2010 38% saw the Afghan war as a mistake. See Newport, Frank. "More Americans Now View Afghanistan War as a Mistake." *More Americans Now View Afghanistan War as a Mistake*. Gallup.com. Web. 04 Apr. 2015.

<sup>88</sup> As reported in "Afghan troop numbers to eclipse Iraq soon". United Press International. 25 March 2010. Retrieved 6 April 2015.

expand Special Forces operations. There was increased training of Afghan commandos, and more use of CIA Counterterrorism Pursuit Teams (CTPT).<sup>89</sup> Gen. Petraeus, McChrystal's successor, concentrated more on limiting the U.S. forces to keep civilian casualties as low as possible. Petraeus seemed to be changing the U.S. strategy to a population centric policy. Peace talks were also initiated with the Taliban, although no agreements were concluded. Soon, starting in the summer of 2011, U.S. and Coalition forces began to withdraw.

Although the surge in Afghanistan provided more successes for the U.S., it did not create a lasting impact. Indeed, Taliban attacks did not decrease during this time.<sup>90</sup> The U.S. forces and Gen. Petraeus were given too short a time to achieve stability in the country. Currently, the U.S. plans to leave 10-15,000 troops in Afghanistan and has transferred most bases and security posts over to the Afghan Army. Afghanistan is now led by President Ashraf Ghani.

## **APPLYING THE COUNTERINSURGENCY MODEL TO THE AFGHAN WAR**

### **U.S. Counterinsurgency Goals in Afghanistan**

To understand the nature of the counterinsurgency strategy of the U.S. and its allies, we must attempt to understand its goals. President Bush made many broad, sweeping statements about the United State's goals in Afghanistan in 2001, including limiting poppy production, women's rights, and economic development. These goals were overshadowed by two main goals: freedom for the Afghani people and revenge

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<sup>89</sup> Whitlock, Craig; Miller, Greg (23 September 2010). "Paramilitary force is key for CIA". *The Washington Post*.

<sup>90</sup> Chandrasekaran, Rajiv (25 September 2015). "The Afghan Surge is Over". *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved 16 March 2015.

against the perpetrators of 9/11. After President Bush's formal demand for Bin Laden was not heeded, the U.S. prepared to dispatch Special Forces units to assist the Northern Alliance in an attack on the Taliban, which began in October 2001. While CIA officers organized and assisted, thousands of bombing runs were made on key Taliban targets, and Special Forces units assassinated many Taliban leaders. This part of the war was over by the end of October 2001, the United States having chosen Hamid Karzai as the new leader of the Afghan government. The Taliban was decimated, the majority giving up and returning to their homes to work their land, others fleeing to Pakistan. Omar barely escaped with his life and slipped into Pakistan. Many scholars and generals see this time as the calm before the 'resurgence' of the Taliban. Bush reasserted the goals of the campaign:

Our goal in Afghanistan is to help its people defeat the terrorists and establish a stable, moderate, and democratic state that respects the rights of its citizens, governs its territory effectively, and is a reliable ally in this war against extremists and terrorists. For some that may seem like an impossible task. But it's not impossible if you believe what Jean Kirkpatrick said: that freedom is universal, that we believe all human beings [ought] to live in freedom and peace.<sup>91</sup>

Maybe all people do seek such freedoms, but that does not mean it is possible to achieve, or the best course of action to pursue. President Bush was essentially seeking to create a new Afghan identity based, like the U.S., on personal rights and a strong central government. But, as Catherine Kinnvall explains, "[t]he fact that individuals search for

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<sup>91</sup> "President Bush on Winning in Afghanistan." *AEI*. N.p., 28 Feb. 2007. Web. 03 Jan. 2015.

one stable identity does not mean, however, that such identities exist.”<sup>92</sup> In this way, the United States sought to invent a new Afghanistan, regardless of what existed before.

Who are the terrorists? What is stable? The Taliban government was one of the most stable governments ever in Afghanistan. Democracy, so highly valued by the West, shows no signs of dampening extremist behavior, and furthermore “the kind of checks liberal democracy typically places on executive power seems to encourage terrorist actions.”<sup>93</sup> There is no empirical evidence that shows a link between reduction in terrorism and democratic governance system.<sup>94</sup>

With the U.S. turning to the war in Iraq in 2003, Afghanistan slipped back out of control, effectively forcing the U.S. to change its strategy to that of counterinsurgency. This resurgence of the Taliban is most often left at that—as the U.S.’ attention shifted to Iraq, the Taliban were able to again gain power. As Anand Gopal describes it, the reality was in fact more deliberate. After decades of war, all Afghans were familiar with surrendering, switching sides, and simply giving up fighting when it was advantageous.

As Afghan natives, however, the Taliban could hold out hope that they’d be allowed to return to their home villages in peace and, when the chaos ended, start afresh. This was how things had gone for decades. His countrymen had learned to switch when necessary or give up the fighter’s life entirely—anything to survive.<sup>95</sup>

The U.S. military relied heavily from the start of the Afghan War on local leaders whom they trusted to police certain areas, patrol highways, and other critical security tasks.

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<sup>92</sup> Kinnvall, Catarina. "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security." *Political Psychology* 25.5 (2004): Pg. 747.

<sup>93</sup> Gause, Gregory F. "Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?" *Foreign Affairs* 84.5 (2005): 62-76. *Council on Foreign Relations*. Pg. 65.

<sup>94</sup> See Footnote 93 above.

<sup>95</sup> Gopal, Anand. *No Good Men among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War Through Afghan Eyes*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Henry Holt, 2014: pg. 18.

With these lucrative military contracts in the balance, various warlords competed to gain access to them. Once in control, the warlords would seek to prove their worth to the U.S. military through the capture of Taliban members, which often were only their rivals in the area. The U.S. was, and still is, propped up by the local strongmen in Afghanistan. But we seem to exert little control over these strongmen, allowing them to use the tactics of the enemy—terror—to achieve their goals, and these goals do not always coincide with the American goals. These strongmen systematically abused the population searching for members of the Taliban, whom had all but surrendered. Those who were not chosen as allies and strongmen were targeted. Gopal tells the story of Nabi, a mujahedeen fighter opposed to the Taliban, after his competitor Jan Mohamed Khan (JMK) gained control of the area.

Upon his release [from Taliban custody], Nabi had publicly endorsed Karzai and the Americans. Still, that did not stop U.S. forces from raiding his home some months later, breaking his windows, destroying his car, and tossing his clothes about. Supposedly the issue was a set of weapons from the 1980s. Nabi turned them over immediately. A week later the troops returned, this time accompanied by JMK's men. Nabi pleaded that he had surrendered everything, but the ransacked the house again, and, when nothing was found; he was arrested anyway and locked up in the governor's private prison.<sup>96</sup>

In making friends, the U.S. made enemies. This was a direct consequence of lack of commitment in resources, personnel and strategic focus on the war starting in 2003.

When President Obama came into office, he was forced to reorient the U.S. strategy from control of the infrastructure, weapons, and cities to a population centric approach. This reversal, although necessary, was also damaging. The lack of clear goals that are stated at

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<sup>96</sup> Gopal, Anand. *No Good Men among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War Through Afghan Eyes*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Henry Holt, 2014: pg. 128-129.

the beginning of the engagement leads to inconsistency in strategy, and lack of trust from the local population. When the U.S. changes strategies, the Afghans lose trust; now the only way to gain that trust is seemingly through funding guarantees. The United States failed to create clear, achievable goals. This is due mostly to “the unjustified confidence that Washington has in its ability to predict, and even direct, the course of politics in other countries.”<sup>97</sup>

### *The Use of Force*

American soldiers were not lacking in any engagement—they always performed and eliminated the enemy in every military fight. When there are clearly defined goals, there is no match for American military tactical ability in combat, nor is there any equal to American firepower and military technology. During the Paris Peace Accords, for example, an American general said to the Viet Cong general that VC forces had not one a single victory against U.S. forces. But as the Vietnamese commander responded,<sup>98</sup> that fact was completely irrelevant in the outcome and success of the war because “[i]nsurgencies cannot be viewed like other conflicts because they are a fundamentally different type of warfare.”<sup>99</sup> Success in military engagement is only one small part of a counterinsurgency fight.

A successful U.S. counterinsurgency strategy should have a civic and governance focus, and violence must be a last resort in combating an insurgent force. Unfortunately, U.S. operations in Afghanistan used violent force as a major part of their

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<sup>97</sup> Gause, Gregory F. "Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?" *Foreign Affairs* 84.5 (2005): 62-76. *Council on Foreign Relations*. Pg. 76.

<sup>98</sup> As quoted in Young, Marilyn Blatt. *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.

<sup>99</sup> Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 2.

counterinsurgency strategy. The U.S. had no clear goals, with no previous plan or strategy set forth. Moreover, “there is no national policy for unconventional warfare” and no tolerance “for the complex, violent, messy, and difficult to control nature of unconventional warfare.”<sup>100</sup> Perhaps the most difficult reality to face is the fact that U.S. forces must endanger themselves by more foot patrols over tank patrols and minimal bombing and helicopter attacks since each of these further isolates the population.

Katagiri estimates that

[h]igh levels of mechanization, along with external support for insurgents and government occupation of foreign territories, are associated with increased probability of state defeat because they undermine the states ability to collect intelligence from local populations and tell combatants from noncombatants, which increase the difficulty of selectively applying rewards and punishments to the populations.<sup>101</sup>

Drone strikes, although seemingly cost effective, make very little difference in convincing the population that the invading force is able to protect them, or able to serve their interests.

Clausewitz saw defeat of the enemy as the destruction of a military force and institutions, and, most importantly, the will of the enemy to fight. To be successful in counterinsurgency operations, the U.S. military must give up this way of thinking. In Afghanistan, there is no separation between conflict zones and ‘green’ zones. Both are chances to succeed or fail in gaining public support. Sun Tzu said “supreme excellence

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<sup>100</sup> Maxwell, David S. "Do We Really Understand Unconventional Warfare?" *Small Wars Journal* Oct. 2014 (2014)

<sup>101</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 16.

consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting."<sup>102</sup> This is the only option when fighting a counterinsurgency war.

### *Role of the Public*

The fundamental goal in regard to the public is to create a wedge to separate the insurgency from the population. Taking and holding one outpost in one town is not successful if the villagers there do not support the invaders<sup>103</sup>. That being said, establishing security is the first priority, without it no success can be attained; for the local population to support the invader they must not fear for their lives. As the U.S. focus shifted toward Afghanistan and away from Iraq, strategy formed around the 'surge,' and the military was able to hold more positions in more villages and towns. This 'take and hold' strategy was somewhat successful, but at a high cost. This was only one of many necessary steps to control an area in Afghanistan. As previously stated, the Surge's successes were cut short by the withdrawal of U.S. and Coalition forces.

Furthermore the U.S. forces consistently chose unreliable allies in Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai, in the last days of the agreement on troop levels after the U.S. officially pulls out, expressed his disappointment in a war that was supposed to protect Afghans.<sup>104</sup> For the public to trust the invading force, it must show critical interest in the welfare of the population. What is most destructive to this trust is civilian casualties; therefore, "[n]on-lethal targeting must supersede lethal targeting from the tactical to the strategic

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<sup>102</sup> Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*. Trans. Lionel Giles Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002. Pg. 48.

<sup>103</sup> See aforementioned CSIS study: Cordesman, Anthony H. "Afghan Public Opinion and the Afghan War: Shifts By Region and Province." *CSIS* (2009): 1-42. Web. 4 Apr. 2015. <[http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/094013\\_afghanpollbyregion.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/094013_afghanpollbyregion.pdf)>.

<sup>104</sup> As reported by Reuters, Sept. 23, 2014. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/23/us-afghanistan-karzai-idUSKCN0HI0LY20140923>

level.”<sup>105</sup> This is easier said than done—endangering the lives of American soldiers to build a level of trust from Afghans is not an easy selling point to Congress or the American people.

### Rural and Urban Tactics

One of the most difficult fights in Afghanistan has been in the countryside. With the troop surge in 2009, U.S. troops were able to expand their areas of direct control through creating outposts in more rural towns and villages. This was a dangerous strategy however, because it left many units extremely isolated—putting the tired troops under more stress. This strategy, championed by Gen. Petraeus was a necessary step in controlling the rural population of Afghanistan, but at this point in the war, the U.S. public was seeking only an exit strategy.

This new population centric strategy was important, but was not applied correctly or consistently. Unfortunately, this ‘take and hold’<sup>106</sup> tactic was applied too late. At this point in the war, it was necessary to focus not on the direct command and control of the countryside, but the on empowerment of local leaders, a “locally oriented strategy with a focus on enhancing sub-national governance and its mutually beneficial connectivity with the people.”<sup>107</sup> Towns and villages are key points that the insurgent tends to gain easily, but also depend on heavily. The combination of strong village leaders supported by the invading force can effectively eradicate the insurgency from a given area.

### Limitations and Ability

<sup>105</sup> Zweibelson, Ben. "The US in Afghanistan: Follow Sun Tzu Rather than Clausewitz to Victory." *Small Wars Journal* December 11, 2010 (2010): 1-5. Web. 12 Nov. 2014. Pg. 3.

<sup>106</sup> See Bolger, Daniel P. *Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. Pgs 341-400.

<sup>107</sup> Slaughter, Sean R., Major. *Expanding the Qawm: Culturally Savvy Counterinsurgency and Nation Building in Afghanistan*. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, 2010. Pg. 3.

There was a fundamental disconnect between the military's superb ability to fight, and its ability to support the building of a nation. To ask the military to do as little fighting as possible is a difficult request indeed. As Lt. Gen. Bolger notes, "absent was a realistic campaign concept in both counties, [and] wars of attrition developed."<sup>108</sup> The U.S. counterinsurgency strategy has digressed to simply waiting for the insurgency to give up. However, our efforts must be focused on gaining the population's support, not destroying enemy. The U.S. forces seemed to have encountered the difficulty that Lorenzo Zambenardi calls "The Impossible Trilemma" of counterinsurgency. He argues that what a counterinsurgency must do is three fold: to protect its own forces, to eliminate insurgents, and to distinguish combatants from non-combatants. He asserts "a country must choose two out of the three goals and develop a strategy that can successfully accomplish them, while putting the first objective on the back burner."<sup>109</sup> Force protection was usually the top priority in Afghanistan, and this meant little to no interaction with the local population. The U.S. must pick its two tactics based on what is most effective at achieving its goals, to make progress; the killing of insurgents must be given the least priority.

The U.S. has been stretched, not by a lack military ability but by an inability to endure. Drone strikes are increasingly commonplace, and increasingly ineffective at stemming the insurgency. The United States must reaffirm the task of building and protecting legitimate institutions. It is in our scope and ability to refocus our efforts on governance; "the strength and ubiquity of such views on the importance of providing

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<sup>108</sup> Bolger, Daniel P. *Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. Pg. 428.

<sup>109</sup> Zambenardi, Lorenzo. "Counterinsurgency's Impossible Trilemma." *The Washington Quarterly* 33.3 (2010). Pg. 22.

good governance and of winning hearts and minds amount to what might reasonably be labeled conventional wisdom.”<sup>110</sup> The foundation of popular support is the state of the population—the meeting of basic needs, the functioning of key government sectors and institutions. Using military force as a policy and state-building tool is limiting, but redefining our focus to governance and state structure is an ability that is underutilized in Afghanistan. Michael Fitzsimmons explains that the most effective way to win the population’s trust is to improve all aspects of governance, including education, healthcare, and improving the livelihood of the populace.<sup>111</sup> The United States has fundamentally failed to produce such a system.

### *The Role of Time*

To say the least, the situation in Afghanistan is fragile. But, nonetheless, the insurgency in Afghanistan has also faltered. As stated by Noriyuki Katagiri, “[a]n insurgency’s evolution or failure to evolve has a strong impact on its ability to achieve its goals.”<sup>112</sup> The Taliban has failed to redefine its role from a latent insurgency to an actual state structure. It is this evolution that the U.S. and its Afghan partners can stop. To achieve this, the U.S. counterinsurgency must also evolve.

A counterinsurgency must evolve over time, and therefore be a flexible, growing and changing entity that is always focused towards clear goals. This requires long-term commitments, but must also be capable of showing results. As exemplified in Afghanistan, “[l]arge ‘predatory’ forces cause their ‘prey’ to adapt faster than they do

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<sup>110</sup> Fitzsimmons, Michael. "Hard hearts and open minds? Governance, identity and the Intellectual foundations of counterinsurgency strategy." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 31.3 (2008): Pg. 8.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 13.

themselves.”<sup>113</sup> In a contest for the sympathies of the population, time can be the most important factor. Therefore, counterinsurgency must be an attack on multiple fronts—nation building, military protection and restoring order, and consistent improvement in the effectiveness of government structures. In this effort, the United States has markedly failed. After fourteen years of conflict, the U.S. has failed to establish clear successes. Public support for the war in the U.S. and Afghanistan continues to fall, and strategies are now focused not on succeeding to create a stable Afghan state, but on how to exit the situation. We have put warlord’s feuds above the needs of the Afghan people through our limited commitment, and this has led to the failure of the U.S. strategy to appease its own home population. The Taliban and Al-Qaeda insurgency has outlasted the U.S. commitment in Afghanistan, effectively using time, like they did against the Soviets, as a weapon against the U.S.

### **SOME CONCLUSIONS**

In the West, few stories are heard about what happened before the Taliban—whose strict teachings were often seen as bearable by the populace in comparison to what occurred before. In a society that has been destroyed repeatedly by war, Afghans seek a chance to live normal lives. Democratic participation and liberal economic development come far behind staying alive. The United States failed to understand the population from which they needed to gain support.

It is from a greater understanding of Afghan culture and history that the United States can create a fundamentally changed and increasingly effective counterinsurgency

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, pg. 26.

force. With clearly developed and concise goals that focus on the population, this force can be successful. These goals must be on a time scale, showing small steps towards a larger goal month-to-month and year-to-year. First and foremost we must understand who we are fighting and why. Successful counterinsurgencies have demonstrated knowledge of the population from which they seek support.<sup>114</sup> Only when we establish clear goals regarding realistic assessments of the challenges that we face in Afghanistan we will be able to achieve those goals.

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<sup>114</sup> See Katagiri, pg. 80.

## Chapter V: The Chechen Insurgency

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For centuries the North Caucasus has been a strategic point and a gateway to the Middle East, and since the Caucasian war of 1817, Russia has used brutal tactics to force the region under control. Some common methods were clearing and burning of forests, complete destruction of entire villages, forced resettlement of Cossacks in the best land in the area, and ethnic cleansing. Racial oppression and forced migration also became common in the region under Stalin. Chechnya in particular has been the most unfortunate in the North Caucasus—subject to brutal treatment from the Red and the White army, the Russian Empire, the USSR, and the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the Caucasus has been in almost constant conflict since the first Russian attempt to control the area in the 1700s. Al-Qaeda’s second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, called the area “one of three primary fronts in the war against the West.”<sup>115</sup> Ariel Cohen says that the instability in the North Caucasus “is a threat not just to Russia, but also Europe—and global stability.”<sup>116</sup> Douglas C. Lovelace, Jr. considers the North Caucasus “a shared interest for the United States, Europe, and Russia to make sure that the North Caucasus remains stable and does not become a breeding ground for terrorist activity.”<sup>117</sup> I will first provide a summary of relevant recent history—of which there is much—and then apply the model of five tactical strategies of counterinsurgency, along with the two overarching themes: the role of goals and perceptions in counterinsurgency.

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<sup>115</sup> Cohen, Ariel. *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus: Performance and Consequences: The Strategic Threat of Religious Extremism and Moscow's Response*. Pg. 1.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, pg. vi.

## **RELEVANT HISTORY**

The history of Russia's role in Chechnya started with the insurrection in 1817 and the beginning of an almost 50 year engagement in the North Caucasus. General Alexei Petrovich Yermolov, pompous after his last victory over Napoleon, led the Russians throughout this war. The brutal tactics used by Yermolov became the basis for all Russian strategy that was to come. Yermolov had no restrictions in his ability to use force:

To capture the Northern Caucasus, Russia used extensive military force, ethnic cleansing, agricultural colonization, and oppression to force local Islamic tribes under its rule.<sup>118</sup>

Russia would continue to use any and all force necessary to keep the North Caucasus under its rule. The tactics used only varied in degree and extent—all were violent. Yermolov used a system of carrots and sticks, but to him this only meant asking villages to turn over fighters and surrender or have the entire village destroyed. An integral part of the Russian mentality of 'us against them' was the darker skin and Islamic practices of the region. It became necessary to paint the people of the North Caucasus as "barbarians" in order to eliminate any empathy for them in the Russian military. The only thing that these barbarians could understand was force. At the core of the North Caucasus identity as 'the other' was Islam.

Islam became the main religion and a quintessential part of North Caucasian culture starting in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E, but some tribes and regions of the area were more receptive than others. While most of the North Caucasus was under Islamic rule by the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Chechnya did not adopt Islam until the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. When

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, pg. 4

Islam was integrated into Chechen society, it was a Sufi form—peaceful and non-confrontational. Chechens created their own Islam, mixed with the traditions of the people. When Yermolov invaded; however, he used a ‘scorched earth’ policy, which included any means necessary to continually punish the people of Chechnya and the North Caucasus for not bowing under Russian Imperial rule—including women, children, refugees and property. Any occupied territory would be burned to the ground and resettled. In his memoirs, Yermolov describes his tactics:

I knew that attacking their villages in hardly accessible and forest areas would lead to significant casualties on our side...[but] if the villagers did not remove their wives, children and property first; they always protect these desperately, and only an example or a horror can induce them to do so.<sup>119</sup>

Therefore, the resistance to the Russian Empire quickly developed into guerrilla war tactics and what the Russians deemed barbarianism. Even when Imam Shamil, a charismatic Muslim leader in the region, was able to raise 10,000 men in a matter of days, he still used them in strategic hit and run attacks so as to not lose a strategic advantage to the superior Russian forces. Yermalov was willing to accept greater losses solely to inflict irreversible harm on civilians and the guerillas they supported.

After 1864 the Russians were able to hold the Northern Caucasus territory through ‘Russification’—forced recolonization by Russian Cossacks and elites of ‘liberated’ Caucasus land. This lasted until the Russian revolution. It seems that whenever there is conflict inside Russia, there is conflict between Russians and Chechens. Both the Red and White armies attacked the North Caucasus, missing important opportunities to make powerful allies in the North Caucasus. Either could have

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, pg. 7

tempted the North Caucasus with de facto or pseudo independence. After the defeat of the White Armies and the establishment of the Soviet Union, the North Caucasus was punished for their actions during the civil war—this time with the new technology and weapons of World War I: tanks, artillery, and air power.

During World War II, the Chechens allegedly made promises to Hitler to revolt, and, although minimal evidence for this allegation was found, Stalin proceeded to exterminate and relocate vast numbers of Ingush and Chechens, mostly to Kazakhstan. During this process, approximately one third, or 650,000 of Chechen and Ingush populations died. The crimes attributed to the various North Caucasian tribes were anything from “hiding bandits and German agents” to “betraying the motherland.”<sup>120</sup> The tactics changed, but only to incorporate new forms of punishment. Stalin,

[l]ike his tsarist predecessors, in the place of the ‘punished groups’...resettled ethnic Russians in order to dominate the indigenous ethnicities through demographic warfare rather than conventional warfare.<sup>121</sup>

Stalin also increasingly denied worship of Islam and banned the Hajj outright. This isolated the North Caucasus and created a cultural vacuum, so that even after the repatriation of the North Caucasus population under Nikita Khrushchev, Chechens had difficulty in transferring their traditions and village leadership after they returned from Kazakhstan. The traditional Sufi Islam that had flourished there before was now replaced by Salafi and Wahhabi, violent and jihadi focused Islamic sects. These new forms of Islam were well financed from abroad and attracted many younger Chechens who grew up in exile. It was from this group that the leaders of the 1990s uprisings came. But the new imported religious teachers, followers of Salafi and Wahhabi Islam, held enormous

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, pg. 16

<sup>121</sup> Ibid

sway among the younger population, and were at the forefront of the call for independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

### **THE FIRST CHECHEN WAR**

The economic collapse in the post Soviet and new Russian regions was felt in the North Caucasus, and further fuelled separatist motivations. In November 1991, Chechnya declared independence from the Soviet Union. A former Soviet Air Force general, Dzhokhar Dudayev was elected president of the Autonomous Republic of Chechnya in October 1991 with 90% of the public vote by his own calculation. He renamed the region The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria upon his election.

The new Russian Federation under Boris Yeltsin was not enthusiastic. There was a unanimous agreement between western oriented liberal thinkers and nationalists that further loss of territory “would bring about the disintegration of the Russian historic core.”<sup>122</sup> With this ideological sentiment now attached to Russia’s territorial integrity, Russian federal troops attacked Chechnya on December 11, 1994. The overall goal of persevering the ‘historic core’ is clear, but too broad—how was Russia going to attack? Who were the enemies? The unfortunate result was a continuation of first Imperial Russia’s ‘scorched earth’ policy, with the addition of a Soviet era military apparatus, and overwhelming mechanized force.

Russia’s approach to post-Soviet Chechnya has been a mix of modern strategic goals of state preservation and resistance to centrifugal processes, together with obsolescent military tactics of overwhelming, imprecise fire-power, ham-handed counterinsurgency, and roots

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, pg. 19

dating back to the Caucasus wars of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>123</sup>

Russia justified the invasion of the region with two key explanations. The first and the most important—even more so for the second Chechen war—was the fact that by Russian estimates, mercenaries from 15 countries were fighting in Chechnya leading Russian authorities to question the actual Chechens' desire for independence. The second reason is the disconnect over this exact issue. While Russian elites believed that Dudayev was illegitimately elected and bolstered by foreign funds, most Chechen elites believed that independence from Russia under Dudayev's leadership was the only option for the region. Russia had no history of protecting Chechen interests, and Chechens saw independence from Russia as their the only option.

From 1992 to 1993, Russian and Chechen authorities held a series of meetings to try to deescalate the situation—Dudayev through a clean break from the Russian Federation, and Yeltzin through what he called 'coercive diplomacy' to try to push a similar agreement like those of Dagestan and other Muslim dominated areas of the North Caucasus. Russia became more threatening and belligerent, and Dudayev's resolve for Chechen independence only firmer. The talks failed. A Russian invasion soon followed.

The Russian force—much degraded from its Soviet parent—had little competence on the ground and relied heavily on mechanized warfare. Patrols were carried out in tanks or other armored vehicles. The Russians were poorly led, as well, and lacked any understanding of counterinsurgency. This mirrored an almost global misunderstanding of counterinsurgency: “the Russians were repeating the mistakes of their 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid

forefathers, American commanders in Vietnam, and the Soviets in Afghanistan.”<sup>124</sup> The Chechens, on the other hand, had received training in Al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan and were supported by foreign funds and fresh recruits<sup>125</sup>. The Russians themselves provided recruits for the Chechen cause by demolishing cities from the air and with heavy artillery—effectively radicalizing many Chechens who opposed the war. The Russian federal troops, demoralized and undersupplied, were forced to retreat in 1996. Dudayev was killed in April 1996 when his satellite phone call was detected by Russian reconnaissance drones. Two laser guided smart missiles were fired at his location. Aslan Mashkadov succeeded him in a popular election in 1997. Around one million Chechens were displaced during the war, and many were killed. In August of 1996, the Khasavyurt Accord was signed, effectively ending hostilities between Chechnya and the Russian Federation. This accord guaranteed Chechnya funding for rebuilding after the first war’s devastation; although the amount was never settled. The agreement also guaranteed ending hostilities indefinitely.

A decisive split between the leaders of Chechnya characterized the interwar period. Increasing amounts of funding and recruits eager for jihad entered the country from the Middle East. The more radical members of the new military elite were keen on

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid pg. 27

<sup>125</sup> From “Organizatsii, svyazannye s Al-Kaidoy” (“Organizations Linked to Al Qaeda”), September 3, 2010, available from [www.un.org/russian/sc/committees/1267/NSQE9903R.shtml](http://www.un.org/russian/sc/committees/1267/NSQE9903R.shtml). A constant flow of fighters, arms, and drugs flowed from Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Afghanistan greatly influencing the region. Ariel Cohen cites that Chechen fighters received training in both Taliban and al-Qaeda camps: “several hundreds of Chechens were trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. From Ariel Cohen” *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus: Performance and Consequences: The Strategic Threat of Religious Extremism and Moscow's Response*. Pg. 27.

Robert Schaefer questions the validity of Chechens operating in Afghanistan and Iraq, but does not refute the evidence that Chechens were trained in al-Qaeda and Taliban camps. Form *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 2.

expanding the republic and creating an Islamic Caliphate in the North Caucasus. The influence of foreign commanders like the Saudi born Ibn al-Khattab and Shamil Basayev and their Wahhabi form of Islam became increasingly powerful.<sup>126</sup> They had more funding and more support to create an Islamic Caliphate in the region.

Even Mashkadov was forced by popular demand to design his own campaign under the guise of creating an Islamic state. Islam has been a keystone for achieving any level of popularity in Chechnya since 1780. Indeed

*every time* the Chechens have declared war on the Russians, Islamic fundamentalism has provided at least part of the ideology which the leaders have used in an attempt to obtain support from other Islamic countries as well as unites the local population.<sup>127</sup>

Basayev and Khattab held more sway than the more moderate Chechens like Mashkadov and Ahmad Kadyrov. The later eventually lost support, and Sharia law was declared across the region and Russian laws and courts were abolished. Mashkadov attempted to try and retain some governing ability, but the situation fell into almost complete chaos. Many international crimes including an underground slave trade, a thriving heroin trade, kidnappings and a lucrative weapons trade became commonplace. Between 1996 and 1999 around 1500 hostages were taken, with ransoms ranging between \$3,000 and \$20,000.

## **THE SECOND CHECHEN WAR**

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<sup>126</sup> See A. Cohen pgs. 17-19.

<sup>127</sup> Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 148.

In August 1999, there was a Chechen incursion into neighboring Dagestan to unite the two areas under an Islamic Caliphate. The then new Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, reframed Russia's position on Chechnya by moving away from the terminology of a war against separatists to a fight against radical Islam and a war to stop the crimes of drug, weapons, and human trafficking. The Russian elite were eager for another chance to reassert their dominance over the lawless region, and the Wahhabis gave them that opportunity.

Key to the new strategy was a propaganda war aimed at the Russian populace. It gained support not only from Russians, but internationally as well. The media, unlike the unrestrained freedom it experienced during the first war, was tightly restrained and the state controlled NTV television station was used as an important resource. The Russians again responded with massive force against the Chechens, but this time the Russians exploited the split in the Chechen leadership, acquiring an important ally: Ahmad-Hadji Kadyrov, a moderate Chechen who had opposed the Wahhabis since the first war. After Russian Federal troops retook Grozny and the majority of Chechnya, Putin appointed Kadyrov governor of Chechnya. He was given almost unilateral authority to do anything in his power to keep Chechnya under control and in Russian hands. But he had no notion of independence. In an interview with Anna Politkovskaya, one of the few journalists to report on the Chechen wars, he said in regard to Chechen independence "there will be no discussions, no ideas of that kind." Kadyrov saw Chechnya's place like Ingushetia or Dagestan: republics under the rule of the Russian federation, not autonomous, but somewhat independent. "All Chechens are Muslims. But Chechnya is not an Islamic

republic. I consider that Islam should occupy the same place with us as it does in Ingushetia and Dagestan.”<sup>128</sup>

During the war, Russian tactics changed—air raids were now followed by foot patrols. Starting in 1999, and increasing through 2009, the forces were more effectively commanded and advised. The better-organized Russian forces held negotiations with village elders, giving them a choice to surrender before they attacked. As it was generally reported, the invasion was a complete success. There were fewer Russian casualties than in the First Chechen War. After strong gains in major cities like Grozny, the Chechens retreated into their mountain hideaways and buckled down for a long conflict.

The Chechens, in the face of a renewed Russian invasion, begrudgingly gathered together to fight the invader. This time more than 52 countries were represented on the Chechen side—the rallying cry was heard all over the Muslim world to fight the Russian invader. Formal hostilities ended in 2000 and massive funds were allocated to Kadyrov to rebuild Chechnya, and “he had Moscow’s blessing to do whatever was needed to maintain supremacy of Russian rule in the republic.”<sup>129</sup> Moscow’s rosy picture of the war’s successes were not felt on the ground in Chechnya. A strong insurgency remained just outside the major cities. In Moscow’s eyes, these fighters were now entirely comprised of radical Salafi and Wahhabi terrorists, deserving of extermination.

The violent operations of Chechen terrorists have reached as far as Moscow. Terrorists are meant to horrify the public, and the attack on the Beslan School in 2004

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<sup>128</sup> Politkovskaia, Anna. *A Dirty War: A Russian Reporter in Chechnya*. London: Harvill, 2001. Pg.194. Dagestan and Ingushetia had been given semi-autonomous rule and broad latitude as long as they agreed to stay under Russian rule.

<sup>129</sup> Cohen, Ariel. *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus: Performance and Consequences: The Strategic Threat of Religious Extremism and Moscow's Response*. Pg. 45.

succeeded in doing this. Led by Basayev and Dokka Umarov, around 1100 hostages were taken at the Beslan elementary school in North Ossetia. Putin's 'no negotiation with terrorists' and a fumbling FSB counter attack on the school left more than 350 hostages dead. How many were killed by terrorists and how many by the FSB's use of heavy weapons and gas is unknown. What was demonstrated in this engagement is the ability of Putin to hold to his principles:

“Shamil's urban terrorism strategy was beaten by Putin's iron will, his reorganization of the government to give him more executive authority, and his ability to control information—but at great cost to Russian society. What should have been a crushing blow for the Russians...turned out to be the end for Basayev and his way of war.”<sup>130</sup>

Putin did not falter in his unwavering commitment to destroy the terrorists in Chechnya, and this task was not lacking in willpower, but in practical application of effective counterinsurgency.

## **APPLYING THE COUNTERINSURGENCY MODEL TO CHECHNYA**

### ***Change in Russian Goals and The Role of the Public***

The situation in Chechnya has changed, not stabilized. The insurgency is no longer based in Chechnya, but the greater North Caucasus. Ahmad Kadyrov was assassinated in 2004, and his son Razman took over control of the Chechnya. Kadyrov the younger has succeeded in decreasing the attacks in the area, but only with more than 80% direct funding from Moscow. Kadyrov's security forces are feared, and the even the Russian federal police refuse to work with the local forces.

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<sup>130</sup> Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 233.

Kadyrov changed the tactics in Chechnya—he built the largest Mosque outside of the Middle East in Grozny, and further promoted Islam in the republic, even legalizing polygamy (which conflicts directly with Russian law). Nonetheless, Kadyrov’s actions have been vastly more effective than Russia’s because they are focused on the population. Chechens attribute the relative calm and peace in Chechnya to Kadyrov. How long these brutal tactics can be effective remains to be seen. Overall, during the Chechen Wars, Russian sources site around 20,000 civilian casualties, while Chechen authorities say that 160,000 Chechens were killed or died as a result of war related ailments, 75,000 of them civilians.<sup>131</sup>

The evolution from the first to the second Chechen war saw an interesting change in tactics as well as overall goals. In the first Chechen war Russian goals were ideological: to take back the region, and to show unity of the Russian Motherland. Within these objectives was the establishment—or perhaps reinvention—of Russia as a world power, one capable of handling difficult situations. A new Russian identity was being created. Moreover, the object of Russia’s renewed counterinsurgency objective was to reunite the Russian people—not necessarily the Chechen population.

This goal was achieved, but the effects could only be temporary: the Russian population, largely harboring racist tendencies towards Chechens, is unhappy about the direct support given to Kadyrov.

The Second Chechen war was a desperate attempt to tie the region to Russia, and no means to achieve this were spared. In doing this, Putin’s Russia has not succeeded in

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<sup>131</sup> Death tolls as reported by the New York Times. Available at:  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/15/world/europe/15iht-check.html>

Also cited from Ariel Cohen in *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus: Performance and Consequences: The Strategic Threat of Religious Extremism and Moscow's Response*. Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College, 2014. See Pg. 41.

fixing an enormous problem. “The insurgency isn’t dead, it’s just different,”<sup>132</sup> and it is growing in strength.<sup>133</sup> The Russian strategy must change as well if it is to combat the new insurgency. Through Russia’s policy of destruction and punishment, the new insurgency has evolved; the tactics that dominated the first war created the nightmare of the second and the present predicament.

### *The Use of Force*

During the Chechen wars, Russian tactics included no concern for the Chechen population, but only for the perceptions of the Russian public. Unrestrained pillaging, torture, and rape were used as tactics to intimidate the local population and eliminate any support for the insurgency. The Chechen population perceived little difference between the treatment of Moscow’s terrorists and the Federal Forces. As Politskovskaya reports:

It’s hard to find any major difference between the attitudes and behavior of Minister Chaika’s fighters [internal ministry soldiers fighting in Chechnya] and those supported by...those who fight for Basayev and Khattab. A code of military honor? As a rule, neither displays anything of the kind. An idea of how to deal with the civilian population—with children, pregnant women and old men? Very vague. Blood lust? Now that’s ineradicable.<sup>134</sup>

Politskovskaya reported that many Chechens hated the insurgency as much as the Russians did, but nonetheless, they were beaten and tortured. These extreme tactics created such a fear that the majority of populace did reject the insurgency.<sup>135</sup> Within our

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, pg. 239.

<sup>133</sup> Both Schaefer and Cohen cite daily attacks in Dagestan and rising terrorist attacks in Ingushetia.

<sup>134</sup> Politskovskaia, Anna. *A Dirty War: A Russian Reporter in Chechnya*. London: Harvill, 2001. Pg 74.

<sup>135</sup> Anna Politskovskaya reports that many of the refugees questioned the military’s ability to find all the insurgents in their towns and expressed extreme frustration that they (the insurgents) had brought such utter destruction on Chechnya. Schafer says, “Insurgencies will not top until the

definition of success, this may be concluded as a successful use of force by Putin and Russia, albeit through abuse and human rights violations. The Russian invasion of Chechnya, through war crimes and cruelty, achieved their short-term goals of rejecting the Chechen independence movement.

Russia's greatest success was the splitting of the resistance. With Kadyrov installed, the Russians have someone the public can respect. Kadyrov is seeking to create a new Chechen identity united around the Muslim faith, but this Russian tactic of installing an authoritative leader was not perfect, and has many growing problems. Kadyrov's strong arm is only a temporary fix for a larger problem of insurgency. "Until the Kremlin better assimilates the peoples of the North Caucasus into Russia, the tendency for the people in the region to turn away from Moscow in preference of the Middle East is likely to continue."<sup>136</sup> In essence, Russia had no counterinsurgency strategy other than the torture of the local population, and later installing authoritarian leaders with all latitude necessary to control the insurgency.

As attacks in the North Caucasus continue to mount, Moscow's victory is turning sour. The Russian public is losing patience with the vast funds and lives committed to the North Caucasus, and the Chechen population shows no sign of turning towards Moscow.

### Limitations and Ability

Russia's attacks on Chechnya were seemingly limitless, but they were constrained by inexperience and lack of training to mount an effective counterinsurgency based

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people believe that they have more to fear from the insurgents than they do from the government" (Pg. 194). The tactics of the disorganized Russian army achieved this.

<sup>136</sup> Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 9.

around the population. Overall, the policies of the Kremlin did not relate to the reality on the ground. The tactics of torture, kidnaping and purges became the default Russian tactic in Chechnya. The systematic destruction of the population continues have effects. Victory, by all accounts, is only temporary. Moscow seems to be losing control over Kadyrov—he blatantly disobeys Russian federal laws, controls his own security forces, and uses them to torture civilians and stamp out opposition to his regime. The appearance of Chechen loyalty to Russia is based on fear and the promise of federal money.

This strategy has so far been successful. However, the fragile stability in Chechnya is now based on the depth of the Kremlin's pockets; the whims of the current Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov; and on appeasing the local population with federal money.<sup>137</sup>

Putin, during the Beslan massacre simply did not respond to the terrorist's demands—*no words were exchanged whatsoever*. Putin has been a hero of Chechnya, but only to Russians. Sooner or later, the reality that “the ability to exert control in the North Caucasus is not determined by who has the most firepower, but by who has the biggest base of sympathizers”<sup>138</sup> will prevail.

The Russian government is limited in effectiveness by its inability to change tactics. The only way they can maintain order is to continue bankrolling Kadyrov and funding more than two thirds of Chechen GDP—no plan B is evident. Even as attacks have slowed in Chechnya, they have increased to daily bombings in Dagestan. Moreover,

There is a tendency within the Russian government to want to continue to treat violence in Dagestan and Ingushetia as

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<sup>137</sup> Cohen, Ariel. *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus: Performance and Consequences: The Strategic Threat of Religious Extremism and Moscow's Response*. Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College, 2014, introduction, iv.

<sup>138</sup>Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 275.

being fundamentally different from the Chechen insurgency, yet nothing could be further from the truth.<sup>139</sup>

This war is still a war, and Russia is not winning. Chechens do not trust the Russian government, and until they fear the insurgents more than Kadyrov and Putin, this will not change.

### Urban and Rural Tactics

Only 30% of Chechens live in major cities and towns. This creates one of the most difficult counterinsurgency problems. Dominating and appealing to the population that is largely outside of cities, uneducated, and can most easily harbor insurgents is a key factor in Chechnya. To combat this problem, the Russian military needs a radical shift in tactics used on the ground and the overall strategy employed. One way to do this is to target specific members of society that create a broad social impact.

One example of a population centric approach fit for rural populations is the empowerment of women. Chechen women were often the only ones left to run society after the men were kidnapped, held hostage, or killed<sup>140</sup>. Women were the ones who organized the paying of ransoms for the return of their family members—alive or dead. It has been shown time and time again that women represent a key resource in *preventing* extremism from ever happening.

“In their more ‘traditional’ roles as mothers, wives, sisters, and caregivers, women can serve as effective voices to counter the extremist narrative, speaking either as victims or terrorism and/or as family members who sustain the adverse, injurious impact of terrorist actions.”<sup>141</sup> (11)

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, pg. 238.

<sup>140</sup> See Anna Politovskaya, *A Small Corner of Hell* and *A Dirty War*. Through her journalism, she describes the situation on the ground for Chechen civilians through both wars.

<sup>141</sup> Couture, Krista L. "A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism." *Foreign Policy* (2014): 7-47. *Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence*. Pg. 11.

Women tend to be more focused on the practical reality of the situation—food, water, shelter, etc.—than on ideological concerns. When Russia took away women’s livelihood, it also took away women’s ability to curb extremism. Russia created a humanitarian crisis in Chechnya between the first and second wars, effectively sewing fertile ground for extremism.

### *The Role of Time*

Although victory was declared in 2009 with the ending of counterinsurgency operations in Chechnya, time has worked against the success of the Russian forces. Putin’s ability to rouse popular support is falling apart. Russians know that Moscow is propping up Kadyrov and his government. As for Chechnya, this declaration of victory came as terrorist attacks increased 122 percent in Chechnya alone in 2008, and another 35 percent the next year.<sup>142</sup> The war for independence is over, but the insurgency is still very much alive. Time is working against Putin, and the pressure for lasting success is growing from the Russian population.

## CONCLUSION

The Russian victory in Chechnya is pyrrhic at best, although it did succeed in achieving the original goal: to remain in control of the region. This goal might have been more effectively achieved if Russian federal troops had not engage in the tactics they sought to eliminate: terrorism, kidnapping, and torture. Much of the failure is do simply to the lack of discipline and clear objectives given to the military. Moscow greatly underestimated the effect of a non-violent, governance based approach.

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<sup>142</sup> Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 217.

Putin is not as concerned with the reality of the Chechen situation as he is with his ability to say he achieved his goals—he is still appealing to the Russian population. It is the perception that is more important than the truth. In his view, Putin achieved his goals of a Clausewitzian victory—destroying the enemy’s will to fight, but he did this through deciding that the enemy were international terrorists, not Chechens, effectively sidestepping the issue.

## Chapter VI: Comparison of Case Studies

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Defining what strategies and tactics are used in combating insurgents is of equal importance to applying those strategies and using tactics, for it is how these strategies are perceived that will contribute to their success. Robert Schaefer defines the difference in goals of a conventional war and those of a counterinsurgency war, saying “[i]n a conventional war, each side tries to occupy the ‘high ground,’ known as *key terrain*...in an insurgency, the key terrain is the *will of the people* (emphasis in original).”<sup>143</sup> And furthermore, the will of the people hinges on their perception of the insurgency and the counterinsurgency force, for “it is a truism of insurgency that *perception is more important than truth*” (emphasis in original).<sup>144</sup> Throughout this comparison, I seek to show the role of perception in fashioning the most crucial points of counterinsurgency tactics. With this idea in mind, the essential elements of counterinsurgency tactics become the most abstract. It is the leadership’s responsibility to define the goals, including, as we have seen, victory itself. The insurgency understands and uses this tool as well. To use a previous example, Taliban insurgents have dressed as women and attacked coalition forces, and after they were killed, the Taliban used propaganda saying the West kills women—*it is not the truth that matters*.<sup>145</sup> The perceptions that

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<sup>143</sup> Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 10.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, pg. 14

<sup>145</sup> Despite U.S. successes, popularity of the U.S. and coalition forces has greatly fallen. In 2005 83% of Afghans had a favorable opinion, in 2009 it was just 47%. See Cordesman, Anthony H. "Afghan Public Opinion and the Afghan War: Shifts By Region and Province." *CSIS* (2009): 1-42. Web. 4 Apr. 2015. Available at <[http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/094013\\_afghanpollbyregion.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/094013_afghanpollbyregion.pdf)>.

counterinsurgency forces create have the ability to shape the situation; if they can win the information war against the insurgents, they can define the parameters of the game.

### **COMPARISON OF U.S. AND RUSSIAN GOALS**

The goals and achievement benchmarks set by the counterinsurgency force are key to the element of perception by both the local (who is being invaded) and foreign (the invaders) populations. The United States and the Russian Federation took very different approaches in this regard.

The U.S. set broad goals: to degrade and destroy the terrorists who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks and anyone who helps them. President Bush said on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001 that

From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime. Our nation has been put on notice, we're not immune from attack. We will take defensive measures against terrorism to protect Americans.<sup>146</sup>

The Taliban regime was destroyed in a matter of weeks after refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden, but this was not the end. The U.S. established a new set of goals. This time the goals were abstract: the spread of democracy, the protection of human rights, and the establishment of a responsible democratically elected government in Afghanistan and Iraq. The United State's role shifted from attack to state building after the fall of the Taliban. Overwhelming difficulties of a practical nature overshadowed abstract notions of justice: who was to govern this country? Who would protect the population? The U.S.

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<sup>146</sup> Bush, George W. "Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, Sept. 2001. Web. 23 Mar. 2015.

military was never suited for a type of warfare that included state building. Gen. Petraeus took attempted to reconfigure the military strategy in Afghanistan starting in 2011 to a civic and governance focus, but by that time the U.S. was already doing everything they could to leave the Afghanistan war behind.

As an ideological manifesto, Bush's speech functions perfectly, but as a definition of strategies and tactics as well as goals, it provides little information. President Bush, in the span of a few months had defined for the United States and the world what terror was, where it was, and how it was funded. These definitions and their ideological and emotional frame became the basis for the goals of the United States in the 'War on Terror' and the Authorization of the Use of Military Force—what has enabled the current war in Afghanistan.

The goals stated by the Russian federation were similarly ideologically motivated. Simply stated the Russian Federation sought to not lose any more territory, as it would degrade the Russian historic core and the new post-Soviet identity that Yeltsin sought to create. After the independence of the fifteen republics that came with the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian elite was particularly interested in the continuation of a united Russia. Moscow sought to keep what it considered the 'core' to Russian territorial integrity. There was widespread support for the notion of keeping Russia together.

President Yeltsin and the majority of Russian elites, including liberals and nationalists, believed that further losses of Russian territory to succession of various national-territorial autonomous republics could bring about the disintegration of the Russian historic core.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Cohen, Ariel. *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus: Performance and Consequences: The Strategic Threat of Religious Extremism and Moscow's Response*. Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College, 2014. Pg. 19

Remaining in control of the North Caucasus was imperative to the new Russian identity—Yeltsin had to make the new Russian federation a powerful state that was worthy of its predecessor.

Both Russia and the United States entered their respective wars with a mindset of their military superiority and with the idea that there would be a ‘quick fix’ solution.<sup>148</sup> After declaring a ‘war on terror’ the Bush administration needed to show the clear and present danger of terrorism in the world. He *defined* the world not as full of criminals who might be captured and punished, but as harboring terrorists who could threaten the United States—and any other part of the world. Terror was framed as an existential threat to the United States. Therefore, the terrorists had to be destroyed and those who supported them brought to justice. Although Bush’s war “suggest[ed] front lines, borders, and battle zones that must be defended or pacified,”<sup>149</sup> none of these actually existed after the fall of the Taliban. It was the Bush administration’s neo-conservative mentality that led to the almost obsessive approach to proving the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Washington defined their enemies as terrorists capable of attacking the U.S, terrorists if not pacified, were to attack again. It was this definition that made the war on terror.

Russian leaders, like the U.S., held a similar rigid mindset. In the wake of the first Chechen war, Moscow intentionally framed the second war differently: the fight was not

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<sup>148</sup> Washington entered Iraq and Afghanistan with the mentality that the wars would be quickly won. Specifically, promising success or victory and failing to achieve it has adverse effects on public opinion. “The U.S. public won’t tolerate...making sacrifices for a losing cause.” See Max Boot, *Counterinsurgency Is Here to Stay*, Foreign Affairs, Nov/Dec 2014. As for Putin, he declared victory in 2000, while the highest death toll was in 2008.

<sup>149</sup> Sederberg, Peter C. "Global Terrorism: Problems of Challenge and Response." Ed. Charles W. Kegley. *The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls*. London: Pearson Education, 2003. Pg. 271.

against an autonomous republic of Chechens, but against terrorists that engaged in horrifying criminal behavior from abroad. The goal of the Russian federal troops was to stop human trafficking, terrorist attacks, and banditry—to protect both the Russian and the Chechen population. As with the U.S. in Afghanistan, the stated goals of the Russian leadership were not achievable by military means alone. Anna Politkovskaya reported extensively on both Chechen wars—one of the only reporters to do so—and her analysis is quite different from that of Moscow's. She saw first hand the brutal treatment of the Chechen population and the corruption and lack of discipline of the Russian Federal troops. She concluded that the crimes Moscow had sought to eliminate led merely to a change of perpetrators.

In Chechnya, the marauding and racketeering routine masked as searching for bandits works nonstop. All that has changed in the second war are those who commit the crimes. The activities that the antiterrorist operation had sought to eradicate—violent hostage taking, slavery, ransoms for 'live' goods—are now being performed by the new masters, the soldiers.<sup>150</sup>

Moreover, Moscow defined Chechen insurgents as ruthless international criminals, allowing the government forces to justify a second invasion. They were not fighting the Chechens this time, but stopping an international terrorist movement that was known to have the capability of attacking Moscow.

The differing goals set by each are detrimental to their successes, and both had to incite popular support to their respective definitions of security threats. Moscow created an image of the core of the country needing to be maintained, while Washington focused on the ideological supremacy of liberal democracy and the role of the U.S. as promoting

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<sup>150</sup> Politkovskaya, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2003. Pg. 51

a global world order based on those principles. This form of liberal democratic triumphalism was little appreciated by the local population.<sup>151</sup>

### **U.S. AND RUSSIAN TACTICS**

The strategies stated by Moscow or Washington were different from those actually used on the ground. Comparatively, the *rhetorical* strategies by both countries were similar—eradication of terrorists and stability of the region. For Washington this would achieve a new democracy, for Moscow reintegration. But the Russian Federation’s military capacity was greatly limited after the fall of the Soviet Union. Russia and its military commanders has little control over the terrorist activities of Russian soldiers themselves and the corrupt practices during the reconstruction efforts undercut their success. While Putin spoke of the end of combat operations in 2000, Politkovskaya saw that “[t]he only thing Moscow demands of Chechnya is to maintain the lack of order. The bedlam here is commercially profitable, since controlled chaos brings much higher dividends.”<sup>152</sup> Russia continues now to control the region through corrupt and brutal practices.

The United States’ tactics were distorted by its vaguely stated goals and serious shortcomings. The mission in Afghanistan became one of state building and protection of the population. Afghanistan however, needed infrastructure and political centralization, not democracy. The United States failed to counter the insurgency, partly because it was

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<sup>151</sup> 36% of Afghans said that NATO/ISAF forces were responsible for the majority of violence in the country, a 9-point increase from 2005 to 2009. 27% believe that the Taliban is responsible. See Cordesman, Anthony H. "Afghan Public Opinion and the Afghan War: Shifts By Region and Province." *CSIS* (2009): 1-42. Web. 4 Apr. 2015.

<sup>152</sup> Politkovskaia, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2003. Pg. 173. See also Politkovskaia, Anna, *A Dirty War*, Hanvill Press, London. 2007. Chapter 3.

near impossible to alter the military role from quick decisive battles to a tool to establish needed change in the region. In the later half of the war, the U.S., under Petraeus began to shift focus,<sup>153</sup> but by this time, learning new lessons was out of the question. Max Boot says that “even if policymakers take all these lessons to heart, they can hardly guarantee success in undertakings as grueling and complicated as counterinsurgency.”<sup>154</sup>

In Chechnya, there is an important difference in Moscow’s tactics between the first and the second Chechen wars. In 1991, the army was more disorganized and less capable of achieving any measure of success. In the first war, the Federal troops were defeated by the superior fighting tactics of the Chechens and the lack of morale among Russian troops participating in the war. While Chechen forces avoided direct combat with the Russians and used precise sniper fire, the Federal troops relied heavily on massive air bombing and artillery barrages. The Federal troops were not their Soviet forefathers; they were “poorly supplied and trained, inadequately led, demoralized, exhausted, and disorganized.”<sup>155</sup>

Although these problems were not solved, many factors changed in the second war. The first thing that President Putin realized was the importance of the public, but not the Chechen public. Putin needed to solidify his new position of power, and he did so by exhibiting his iron will—he would frame the war by whatever means necessary so that Russians would understand and support it.

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<sup>153</sup> In his manual, Gen Petraeus emphasized a population centric approach, with limited focus on air power and artillery use. He lists both an overemphasis on enemy killing and capturing focus on force protection as unsuccessful practices in counterinsurgency. See Gen. Petraeus, David H., and Lt. Gen James F. Amos, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. Kissimmee: Signalman, 2006. Print.

<sup>154</sup> Boot, Max. *Counterinsurgency Is Here to Stay*, Foreign Affairs, Nov/Dec 2014. Vol. 93 Issue 6. 1-10.

<sup>155</sup> Cohen, Ariel. *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus: Performance and Consequences: The Strategic Threat of Religious Extremism and Moscow's Response*. Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College, 2014. Pg. 27

One can see that the Russians views winning a ‘hearts and minds’ campaign to be critical to their success, but is was the ‘hearts and minds’ of the *Russian* population—not the Chechen one—which is completely contrary to the vision espoused by western military thought.<sup>156</sup>

Putin reframed the entire fight to incorporate a moral obligation to stop heinous crimes that were occurring in the North Caucasus. He reorganized the military and made it smarter and more effective in fighting the insurgency.

The U.S was unrestrained in ability and capacity in Afghanistan with only one major distraction—the Iraq war. Starting in 2003 the U.S’s attention shifted to Iraq, but its military prowess was not diminished. As soon as the Iraq war began, the control of Afghanistan was left up to the local warlord hired to keep the peace. In reality, the U.S. military was ill suited to provide the necessary support of rebuilding a country, which is the task of governments. This was the key failure of the U.S. in Afghanistan: the failure to create a functioning governance structure. The warlords that were given power over various parts of the country were paid handsomely to find and turnover Taliban fighters—and that they did, only these ‘Taliban’ just also happened to be anyone who opposed their rule or former adversaries:

In south Afghanistan, the mix of American boots on the ground and strongmen itching to outflank their rival prevented such détentes. Day by day, marginalized southern communities from one valet to the next were slipping out of the governments orbit. The Americans were beginning to wear out their welcome—and it was only going to get worse.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 199.

<sup>157</sup> Gopal, Anand. *No Good Men among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War through Afghan Eyes*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Henry Holt, 2014. Pg. 131.

With the United States' ideological goals in mind, this was not a good strategy. As Schaefer understands it,

Changing the collective mind of a population requires dedication and committing all the elements of national power—diplomatic, informational, legal, and military, in a synchronized effort so that the total effect is greater than the sum of the individual parts. A military organization can't do this unless that same military organization also controls the government.<sup>158</sup>

It involves improving the lives of the local population. With the Obama administration, the US focus shifted again to Afghanistan, and so did the reconsideration of U.S. military's tactics. General Petraeus focused on limiting civilian casualties. His tactics included paying remittances for lost family members, avoiding bombing in civilian areas, and increased foot patrols and interaction with the Afghan population. This shift in tactics meant endangering the lives of U.S. soldiers to a larger degree to gain Afghan civilian support. General Petraeus understood that there are weaknesses to the tactics of terrorists, especially the fact that "terrorism cannot change minds, terrorism can only coerce."<sup>159</sup> It was the job of the U.S. to change minds, and to do that the U.S. needed to provide stable security and good governance in a country that had not known it for more than one hundred years. Following Schaefer's line of thought, "successful counterinsurgency efforts necessitate changing *minds*, and changing minds is a *government* function that is much more difficult than destroying a 50-ton tank or a state-of-the-art missile cruiser."<sup>160</sup>

Both the U.S. and Russia still measured results through tangible numbers—how many terrorists were killed, how many were villages secured—when the focus should

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<sup>158</sup> Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg.12.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, pg. 31

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, pg. 12.

have been the difficult and hard to measure task of changing the perception of the local populace. Counterinsurgency is more a political fight than a military fight. The problem was that both invading forces were caught in somewhat of a double bind: they had to appeal to both their home populations, and the population they were invading, and each of these populations wanted different results. The American public wanted successes and victories—bodies of slain terrorists, stories of schools reopening. The Afghans wanted stability and consistency—how many Taliban were killed was of little notice. Russia obsessed over similar figures, and with a tighter grip on the media, was often able to portray defeats as victories. Putin saw the quintessential element in second Chechen war to be the appeal to the Russian population. No such effort was made to appeal to the Chechens.

## **EVALUATION THROUGH THE ELEMENTS OF COUNTERINSURGENCY**

### ***Role of the Population***

The US was caught in a balancing act of appealing both to Afghans and Americans, since the support of both was necessary for success. The U.S. started to fall into a pattern of seeking short-term decisive victories. When these failed to appear, generals were switched, strategies changed—anything that would convince the public that we were getting somewhere. This strategy will never succeed, since stability is the most important goal for the Afghan population. An Afghan religious leader expressed his frustration

Through the decades of war, Afghans had survived by knowing where they stood, by calibrating themselves to power, the only sure bet in the frequent U-turns of Afghan history.... this was now proving impossible. 'We didn't

understand this new government or who it supported' said Aref, a local mullah. 'We supported them, but they targeted religious people. No one could understand it.'<sup>161</sup>

The United States and the new Afghan government needed provide consistent support to prove that this regime is better than the Taliban's.

Moscow's goals in Chechnya were, from the start, geared toward gaining support of the Russian population, especially the elite, not the Chechen population. In Putin's reasoning, this was a war against criminals, against evildoers and extremists, and these people were separate from Chechens or Russians. Putin was defining the legitimacy of the operation, this proved to be a key factor in gaining Russian support. Any means necessary was used to control this region, and what was considered control was a loosely applied understanding. Russia extracted support from the population by effectively torturing them, but "people may rescind support for the insurgents *when they fear government retaliation* or appreciate government actions for them"<sup>162</sup> (Italics mine). Putin painted the Chechen separatists fighters as inferior criminals, whose only capacity to understand was through force. The Russian troops chose to punish based on whim—punishment was not linked onto to activity, but merely to being Chechen. There was no understanding of what or what not the civilian population could do besides fear the soldiers.

Both countries goals were limited severely by the need to appeal to their home populations with demonstrable qualitative results. Russia was more successful in this area because of its complete control of the media, and the ability to frame the war in the terms

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<sup>161</sup> Gopal, Anand. *No Good Men among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War through Afghan Eyes*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Henry Holt, 2014. Pg. 134.

<sup>162</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 53.

it thought would result in higher public support. Because of their focus on the Russian population and the excessive punishment of Chechens, Russia was unable to achieve any amount of cooperation with Chechens. Russians learned the hard way that counterinsurgency cannot be effective only with the use of force. Indeed, the wars in Chechnya turned out to be more deadly for Russian soldiers than United States' wars in the Middle East. An 'end to combat operations' was called in Chechnya in 2000, while an 'end to counterinsurgency operations was declared in 2009' but;

there were at least 400 attacks in the North Caucasus in 2008 and almost 750 in 2009. During one seven month period in 2008, 173 Russian police and military were killed in the fighting and another 300 were injured. By comparison, during the same period in 2008, U.S. deaths caused by insurgents in Iraq were 148. In 2008, the total number of Russian security forces killed in the North Caucasus was 346, with another 516 reported injured. Compare that with Afghanistan, where the total number of casualties for *all coalition forces* for 2008 was 295.<sup>163</sup>

In the first war especially, Russia was most limited by military ability. There was simply not enough discipline, experience, or know-how to fight a complex counterinsurgency war. They were fighting a Soviet style war against an enemy that they could not find, see, or target. In the Second Chechen War, the Russians were able to make modest improvements in their military tactics, but the greatest gains were in the Kremlin's ability to redefine the goals of the war.

In Afghanistan, the United States was first beleaguered with an ideological conception of democracy and liberty that overshadowed any ability to make achieving democracy a realistic goal. When the insurgency reacted to U.S. mistakes, the U.S. goals became to show Afghans how to be like Americans, but the key "to understanding

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<sup>163</sup> Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 3.

victory lies in the nature of the political objectives states pursue through the use of military force.”<sup>164</sup> That is, the nature of the operation changes according to the established military and political goals. By the time these political objectives could be realized, the U.S. forces were in a quagmire, and at this point, unless fundamental changes are undertaken, the “United States’ future wars will, at best, succeed at a much higher cost than necessary—and, at worst, fail outright.”<sup>165</sup> The U.S. had the full support of the population to find and bring to justice the terrorists who perpetrated the attacks on 9/11. As the reality of the war began to stray far from this goal, the U.S. operation in Afghanistan and the ‘War on Terror’ began to lose the support of the U.S. population. With no clear successes, it is hard to expect the U.S. population to support the longest war in U.S. history.

### *The Use of Force*

One of the greatest contrasts between the U.S. and Russia’s counterinsurgency methods was the varying degree of force used. For example, Chechnya’s new ruler Ramzan Kadyrov “had Moscow’s blessing to do whatever was needed to maintain the supremacy of the Russian rule in the republic,”<sup>166</sup> this meant torture of supposed terrorists and their families, and ostracizing the non-Muslim population. Ramzan Kadyrov has been given unilateral power to maintain not only Moscow’s supremacy, but also to consolidate his own power in the region. For comparison, during General Petraeus’ command (2010-2011), U.S. soldiers were often refused air support if the target

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<sup>164</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 17.

<sup>165</sup> Boot, Max. *Counterinsurgency Is Here To Stay*. Foreign Affairs Nov/Dec 2014, 93.6. 2014.

<sup>166</sup> Cohen, Ariel. *Russia’s Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus: Performance and Consequences: The Strategic Threat of Religious Extremism and Moscow’s Response*. Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College, pg. 45.

was seen to be in an era where civilian casualties could be incurred, effectively curtailing military operation to limit civilian casualties.

In reality, the application of force by the United States and the Russian Federation was varied. While the U.S. relied heavily on air support and bombing in the beginning of the war, those tactics soon changed to support a more civilian friendly strategy. Drone strikes have increased since President Obama was elected. As for Russia, Russian Federal troops in Chechnya almost exclusively used air power and artillery to attack Chechen cities in the first war, but in the second war Russians made sure to utilize ground attacks *after* the bombing stopped. In Katagiri's statistical analysis of the success of insurgencies, he noted that

high levels of mechanization, along with external support for insurgents and government occupation of foreign territories, are associated with increased probability of state defeat because they undermine the states ability to collect intelligence from local populations and tell combatants from noncombatants, which increase the difficulty of selectively applying rewards and punishments to the populations.<sup>167</sup>

The United States adopted this principle late in the war, while Russia completely ignored any aspect of a population centric approach. The U.S. military adapted and applied new tactics due to the failures of the war in Afghanistan starting with a strategic shift to a population centric approach. In the Counterinsurgency Field Manual it emphasizes that “military actions by themselves cannot achieve success” and “both insurgent and counterinsurgents are fighting for the support of the populace.”<sup>168</sup> Both countries suffered greatly from an extreme lack of preparedness and understanding regarding what

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<sup>167</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 16.

<sup>168</sup> Gen. Petraeus, David H., and Lt. Gen James F. Amos, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. Kissimmee: Signalman, 2006. Print. Pg. 30.

kind of war they were fighting. The only way insurgencies can be overcome is to apply concise counterinsurgency tactics. The ‘learning as you go’ strategy did not and is not working. General Daniel Bolger witnessed this firsthand: “I and my fellow generals saw it [US strategy in the middle east] wasn’t working, we failed to reconsider our basic assumptions. We failed to question our flawed understanding of our foe or ourselves.”<sup>169</sup> Applying force in counterinsurgency war must be a practiced, concise effort based on an extensive knowledge of *the people* you are dealing with—the ultimate goal is using no force at all. The more force is used, the more insurgents you create. As Sun Tzu said, “Supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting.”<sup>170</sup>

Conventional military forces like those of the U.S. and Russia are not designed for long, state building enterprises, but rather short decisive conflict. Counterinsurgency war is long and grueling, and in both Chechnya and Afghanistan we have seen forces channel their frustration with the enemy onto the public. For example, the force used in Chechnya was mainly directed through brutal ‘purges’ of civilians. Politkovskaya, when interviewing a doctor at the hospital in Grozny in 2001, realized that the majority of injuries and deaths were not through traditionally military instruments:

‘Look at the numbers!’ the doctors say. ‘From June 1 to September 18, 2001, we received 1,219 patients here at the hospital, including outpatients. Of those, 267 had wounds from firearms or mine explosions. Most of them are the victims of these night robberies.’<sup>171</sup>

These ‘night robberies’ included mass rapes, kidnapping for ransom (including ransoms for corpses), and burglary. They became the hallmark of the Chechen wars for the people

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<sup>169</sup> Bolger, Daniel P. *Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. Introduction, pg. xvi.

<sup>170</sup> Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*. Trans. Lionel Giles Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002. Pg. 48.

<sup>171</sup> Politkovskaya, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2003. Pg. 86.

of Chechnya. As for the United States, although there were isolated incidences of targeted violence against the Afghan population, the magnitude is not comparable. Nonetheless, these events were some of the most destructive for U.S. Afghan relations.

The use of force as not been adequately restrained by Russia or by the United States. It is the hopelessness of the population whose needs are not being met that leads to extremism. The most effective way to lose a population's support is through violence. When interviewing Chechens in refugee camps, Politkovskaya found a recurring theme of hopelessness. There was no food or medical care; "there's no help here. We're dying little by little."<sup>172</sup> Ultimately, this seems to be how Putin was able to claim victory. He defeated the terrorists by starving the population, by killing and raping and beating them. As Schaefer describes, "It is perhaps more tragic knowing that if the police and soldiers stopped abusing and killing the people that they have sworn to protect, then they might actually defeat the insurgency."<sup>173</sup> In Afghanistan, the U.S. troops have taken painstaking efforts to improve relations with the Afghans, and achieved mixed success. Indeed, it is difficult to convince someone that they should trust you when it was you who bombed their villages.

### *Urban vs. Rural Warfare and Territory*

As soon as the bombs start to fall and the major cities are lost, insurgencies fall back on what they know they can achieve: guerilla warfare. With this strategy insurgents "must trade territory for performance in order to maintain the strategic parity"<sup>174</sup> with conventional forces. This reality makes the maintaining of cities equally important to

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid, pg. 41.

<sup>173</sup> Schaefer, Robert W. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011. Pg. 271.

<sup>174</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 53.

maintaining villages in the countryside. The U.S. and Russian forces focused mainly on securing larger cities, but after doing so realized that the frequency of attacks against them had not sufficiently decreased. Anywhere there is a population center, no matter how small, can be a strategic turning point in a fight for the support of the population. Both Russia and the United States failed to achieve a lasting security presence outside of major cities. It is quintessential to the counterinsurgency to establish the rule of a consistent legitimate security force. During the surge in Afghanistan (2010), the U.S. made a concerted effort to ‘take and hold’ more towns and rural areas, but this process had little payoff with the local population and was only temporary.

### *The Importance of Time*

Time in both conflicts proved to be a serious obstacle. Both Russia and the United States had to consistently show progress against the insurgency in order to satisfy both their home and local populations. Bush declared victory in 2003<sup>175</sup> to the American public to show the progress that was made. Putin, similarly, declared an end to combat operations in 2001, but in both of these cases victory was not at hand. It was a race against the clock—to avoid the impending plunge in public support from their respective countries.

In this way, time does not necessarily mean more support for the insurgency, but it does less for the foreign state. As casualties mount, the home population loses support in the fight if not bolstered by grand success stories. This factor explains the obsession of targeting leaders of terrorist organizations. It is not successful in gaining local popular support, but it is necessary in convincing the U.S. or Russian general public that the

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<sup>175</sup> Bush, George W. "Text Of Bush Speech." *CBSNews*. CBS Interactive, 01 May 2003. Web. 29 Mar. 2015.

armed forces are winning. In what Katagiri calls the guerilla phase, specific leaders are not important in curtailing the insurgency's hold, and "if anything, the 2010 killing of Osama Bin Laden reinforced the already disorganized nature of guerilla insurgency and the institutional linkage with other terrorist groups."<sup>176</sup>

An invading force's first concern is support from its own country, and when that fails, leaders have to start promising when the troops are going to leave. It was not the military that forced the U.S. to leave Vietnam, but the public. Arguably the same process of retreat is happening now in Afghanistan, the surge seemed to be the last hope for gaining stability and it was not successful enough. Putin's greatest success in the second Chechen War was not due to military tactics, but his ability to constrain and tailor any information coming out of the area.

### **CONCLUSION: LESSONS NOT LEARNED**

This loss of support from both the Afghani and U.S. public forced the policy of the incumbent government to change. Starting with Bush's 'mission accomplished,' the only strategy the U.S. populous was willing to hear was one that involved bringing the troops home. The support of the population, although not the only important factor in counterinsurgency, is indeed the quintessential element, and it is necessary to realize that there are two populations of concern, and can be local to the conflict or foreign. Both the United States and Russia failed to consistently to learn from the war they were—and still are—fighting. Either the U.S. forces and their Afghan allies will evolve and develop an encompassing governance based strategy, or the Taliban will. As Katagiri notes, the

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<sup>176</sup> Katagiri, Noriyuki. *Adapting to Win: How Insurgents Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2015. Pg. 181.

Taliban and al-Qaeda's inability to evolve as an insurgency restrains them from making further progress, but that does not mean that they cannot create a perpetual unstable situation that continues to countless lives and resources. Through the recent events in Afghanistan and the new government there, the present is a key moment for the United States and Afghanistan, and they must double their efforts.

In Chechnya, the Kremlin seems satisfied with the semi disastrous situation in the North Caucasus. Against the warnings of Politkovskaya and others, the Chechen youth has not become a new insurgency; rather the old, imported Islamist strain remains. The Kremlin sees this situation as one they can control, and that may be the case, but it's going to be expensive. Moscow's strategy seems to be an attempt to outlast the insurgency—they will do almost anything before they will change tactics. Moreover, Russia has never employed a true counterinsurgency strategy, but a Soviet military assault, followed by an information war. It is this fundamental change in strategy that must be achieved to declare a true victory in the case of both Chechnya and Afghanistan.

# Conclusion: Analysis of The Model

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In an address to the Armed Services Committee of the U.S. Senate, Gen. Dunford, speaking of the U.S. operation in Afghanistan said “we have reached the end state of our combat operations when the security conditions are set for the Afghan people to exploit a decade of opportunity. All of this is achievable, but it is not inevitable.”<sup>177</sup> It seems at the end of the war, the U.S. military is finally learning that we are not fighting a conventional war. Gen. Dunford later noted that 80 percent of the attacks in 2013 were where 20 percent of the population lives. The U.S. learned to fight for the population, but this lesson was learned through a long and difficult experience, regardless of the past lessons of Vietnam and countless other insurgency wars. My hope is that this paper provides an understanding of unconventional warfare that is fundamentally changed from a Clauswitzian perception of war.

The model that I have created—the five elements of counterinsurgency—is not a detailed tactical plan for counterinsurgency warfare, but a framework through which to analyze and recommend changes. I hope that it will function as a guide in evaluating counterinsurgency and understanding the perspectives that we bring to warfare even before we engage in actual combat.

I chose these five elements because they play an important role in counterinsurgency. The use of force, the role of the public, the limitations and abilities of counterinsurgency forces, the important differences in urban and rural warfare, and the

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<sup>177</sup> United States. Cong. Committee on Armed Services United States Senate. *The Situation in Afghanistan*. Dunford, Gen. Joseph F. 113th Cong., 1st sess. Cong. Rept. 113-174. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2014. Pg. 13.

role of time are elements that create a broader view of counterinsurgency that can lead to more effective strategies in this type of war. Each one needs to be taken into account, but also understood as an interactive system that is in constant interplay. Moreover, each has its place, but the way in which they *interact* that truly explains the situation. The population is at the center of any counterinsurgency effort. The counterinsurgency force's ultimate goal is to provide a system in which the population rejects the insurgency. While doing this the counterinsurgency force has to ensure that their home population perceives their action as legitimate, successful, and in the national interest. Simple enough? Not exactly. As I have explained, appealing to the local population as an armed invader is the most challenging part of counterinsurgency because it must be the most specialized. Each country, and in the case of Afghanistan each area within that country, has a separate customs, culture and morals.

Therefore counterinsurgency forces must use the structures of governance that already exist—village elders, tribal councils, and many others, all of which must be perceived as legitimate—to gain the population's trust. If a truly population centric view is to be employed, the task is to change the opinions, and at times, core beliefs of the populace. For this task governance is critical. Immediately after taking control of a country, a city, or a village, the invader must prove two things: first, that the livelihood of the people will increase or at least maintain its current level. Second, the invader must guarantee security. The population in most cases will follow whatever side proves to be more stable—the victor.

A population centric approach therefore is an extremely complex process, and to even attempt it you must know your own limitations and those of the enemy. If a

counterinsurgency force is limited in its military ability to fight the insurgents, no operation can be attempted. President Yeltzin in the first Chechen War made this mistake. If, like the United States in Afghanistan, the counterinsurgency force is vastly superior, a more complex and successful operation can be attempted with the knowledge that the military is but a small part in controlling a state or other specific area. I chose the elements of limitations and ability to demonstrate the importance of, as Sun Tzu says, knowing yourself and your enemy. The elements are a framework for how to develop a successful counterinsurgency, and this is not possible without a population centric view.

This model by no means proves who is the victor in the wars I have analyzed, nor is it meant to do so. Rather it allows us to evaluate both the potential for success and to understand why the counterinsurgency succeeded or failed. Will Afghanistan fall into chaos because of the flaws in U.S. counterinsurgency operations that I have found? Most likely not, but that is not the point. The counterinsurgency force, as we have seen, defines victory—their goals are self-made and their ability or failure to achieve them leads to success or failure. I hesitate to call the U.S. mission in Afghanistan a complete failure, but I can say we failed to reach many goals, while others were only half met. The stable democracy that was to be created is hardly depicted in the corrupt system that exists now.

The U.S. has taken ten years to discover the importance of a population centric counterinsurgency approach, the significance of avoiding violence, and greatly advanced in its knowledge of its own limits and those of the enemy; but the U.S. still lacks in other key areas of the model. As Gen. Dunford stated, 80 percent of attacks in Afghanistan are where 20 percent of Afghans live. This does not mean the U.S. is winning; as we have seen through the rural and urban element, the rural population is the most difficult to

control, but also the most likely to harbor and support insurgents—pushing the Taliban into the hills will not discourage them. However, what has degraded their efforts the most is the element of time. America's longest war, Afghanistan, has showed little successes, and has been extremely costly. The Taliban, pushed back to a latent phase, have succeeded in using time as a weapon to slowly chip away at the U.S. resolve. The U.S. learned many lessons, but almost all too late to achieve their goals in Afghanistan.

Chechnya as well could easily be called a victory for Russia in many views. Indeed, even as recently as April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a group of important insurgency leaders in the area were killed.<sup>178</sup> But this success is at a very high price. Not to mention the direct funding of the Grozny government, there are daily attacks in Dagestan—perhaps a victory Moscow can live with, but pyrric nonetheless.

The Russian operations in Chechnya provide an interesting assessment when the model is applied. Simply put, there was no Russian counterinsurgency strategy to speak of; nonetheless, the model offers interesting insights of Russian perceptions and goals. The Russian strategy was never population centric aside from the effort to appease the Russian population. The Russian federal forces offered no conception of their own limitations or abilities, nor did they assess the importance of rural warfare, have any understanding of their own limitations as a counterinsurgency force, nor have the slightest conception on the role of violence against the populace. Nonetheless, I believe that the model has shown the success of the Russians at achieving their goals. Putin, in moving the goal posts so close, failed to understand the long-term implications. In this way, time is working against the continued control of the North Caucasus as Russians,

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<sup>178</sup> See the *Moscow Times*, April 20 2015. Available at: [http://www.themoscowtimes.com/top\\_stories/article/newsletter/519363.html?](http://www.themoscowtimes.com/top_stories/article/newsletter/519363.html?)

those from whom Putin needs the support, are losing patience with the enormous costs of maintaining what the Kremlin asserts is a stable situation.

I have sought to explore how we can avoid these pseudo-victories (or failures), and by fundamentally rethinking military strategy when it comes to counterinsurgency. The elements I have put forward in no way are an end-all solution, but a tool with which to rethink and evaluate counterinsurgency operations. During the Malayan Emergency in 1948, a British administrator, Sir Gerald Templer, argued that “the answer lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the people.”<sup>179</sup> Whether or not it is intentional, a counterinsurgency force is attempting to create a new or changed identity for the local population. For the Afghans it was a western identity, one that placed democracy and liberty above all else; for Russia it was a Russian identity, not one of Chechen separatism. Did either insurgency succeed—not yet. And perhaps they never will truly achieve their goals, but applying this model helps us to understand where and how they faltered or failed.

What makes a successful counterinsurgency is the combination of factors that can be made specific to the conflict. The analytical framework presented in this thesis shows many broad general elements that are quintessential to a counterinsurgency’s success. Moreover, the elements reveal the complexity and help us evaluate the enormous cost involved when engaging in counterinsurgency warfare. National governments must understand this complexity and be prepared to assume the costs of this new way of warfare. The framework created in this thesis serves to reveal the intricacies and calculate the costs of counterinsurgency. From this point, we must reconsider our definitions;

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<sup>179</sup> Stubbs, Richard. *Hearts and Minds in Guerilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 1989. Pgs. 1-2.

definitions like terrorism and victory must be redefined to incorporate counterinsurgency, not as a type of war, but a new way of war altogether.

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*I have abided by the Wheaton Honor Code in this work: .*

*Victor John*