Soldiers and civil power: supporting or substituting civil authorities in peace operation during the 1990s

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SUPPORTING THE CIVIL POWER

Counterinsurgency and the Return to Conventional Warfare

The Second World War dramatically upset the existing world order. Superpower rivalry and the sudden and rapid disintegration of Europe’s colonial empires were the two prevailing politico-military developments to emerge in its wake. In the decades that followed, several European countries faced the simultaneous challenge to prepare for a possible large scale Soviet attack from the east, and to fight insurgent peoples in their overseas territories in Asia and later also in Africa. After becoming entangled in Vietnam in the 1960s, the Americans would eventually also find themselves engaged on two fronts, one “hot” and one “cold”. Much of the specific knowledge of Civil Affairs evaporated with the rapid reductions of the vast ground forces that had fought the Second World War. The British, Canadians, and Australians discarded their specialised capacity to perform military interim government activities, leaving only the U.S. Army in possession of a dedicated Civil Affairs organisation. Nevertheless, Civil Affairs survived in two different forms outside the United States. NATO, founded in 1949 to counter the Soviet threat in Europe, created a special function for Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) aimed at coordinating its defensive operations on the German plains with the local government institutions and population. Unlike the Americans, however, the European allies did not train personnel and failed to create an organisation for this function. Civil affairs and civil-military cooperation also re-emerged as a prominent aspect of the fight against insurgencies in the colonies, although, for the most part, not specifically designated in those terms or as a concept at the time. Defining this type of warfare is crucial to understanding the second theme in of this work, the role of military forces in internal security operations and the pivotal role of civil-military cooperation in successfully executing this type of mission. Following an introduction into irregular warfare and the problematic search for a military answer, this chapter centres on the British approach in Malaya in the 1950s, which has often been regarded a “model campaign” and “textbook case in counterinsurgency.” It stood out for a number of reasons, but most of all for its adequate balance between civilian and military measures and eventually the high degree of coordination and cooperation between soldiers, civil administrators and police.
Imperial Policing

The wide array of terminology that has been created to name the fight against irregular opponents in war is reflective of “the profound discomfort of conventional armed forces with unconventional war.” Soldiers often did not see suppressing revolts as their job, instead considering it a task for the civil administration and its police forces. Military support was to be offered as a last resort. In practice, military forces would continuously be called upon and once engaged, steadily increased their role in pacifying colonized territories. “Small wars” was a term that emerged in the course of the nineteenth century in both the British and Dutch colonies. It echoed the Spanish word guerrilla that became internationally known during Lord Wellington’s campaign against Napoleon’s forces in the Iberian Peninsula 1808-1813, where he cooperated extensively with local irregular fighters sabotaging and ambushing the French behind enemy lines. The word guerrilla-warfare has been commonly used for the tactics employed by irregulars in support of a conventional war, while “insurgency” was coined for an autonomous struggle to overthrow the existing government. The similarity in tactics employed by guerrillas and insurgents caused the terms to be used interchangeably. Both often chose to wear no uniforms, melted away in the civilian population, and preferred hit and run tactics instead of open battle.

Prior to the Second World War, the British commonly used the term “imperial policing” to describe military operations against insurgents in their colonies. The Dutch used “politico-police tasks” in the Netherlands East-Indies and continued to use the term “police actions” in 1947-1949 to emphasize the illegitimacy of the enemy who in their view were nothing but rebels and bandits who challenged the sovereign power. The Americans kept using “small wars” as the generic term to describe policing their zone of influence in Central America and their colonial adventure in the Philippine Islands in the early twentieth century. After the Second World War “counterinsurgency” and from the 1960s “counter-revolutionary warfare” were added to the list by the British to describe their answer to the insurgencies by nationalist and often Communist movements. During the Vietnam War the American Army, after taking over from the French in the South, came up with a host of new terminologies to distinguish between the different elements of unconventional military operations. The central tenet was to remove “counter” from the parlance and as a result “stabilization operations” became the term preferred by the U.S. Army. In 1971 the British General Frank Kitson, who fought in Malaya and played a major role in successfully suppressing an insurgency in Kenya in the 1950s, introduced a new umbrella-term in his book Low Intensity Operations to distinguish it from “high-intensity” conventional military operations as in for instance the Second World War, and included peacekeeping in this category. Low intensity operations became the common term used in the 1980s until the U.S. military establishment, who increasingly displayed their unease with anything other than symmetric warfare, came up with “Military Operations Other Than War” in the early 1990s in order to lump together anything the armed forces considered to be outside their primary scope. “Stabilization operations” would re-emerge at the turn of the century after operations in Bosnia and Kosovo slowly convinced
U.S. military leaders they had an inescapable role to play in the murky area between all-out war and peace.

According to counterinsurgency expert Thomas Mockaitis all of these terms were used to describe essentially the same phenomenon. This is correct if peacekeeping—with its emphasis on impartiality instead of the defeat of an enemy—is left out as a category. What most of these types of operations have in common is their attempt to defeat an enemy that refused to fight on the government’s terms, when the government’s armed forces are clearly better equipped for open battle. Driven by some ideology, mostly nationalism or Communism and often a powerful mix of both, the insurgent group’s political aim was traditionally meant to create a new order by overthrowing the established government. Insurgency is not by definition civil war, but may be one or escalate into one by splitting a society along ethnic, ideological or geographic lines. The insurgents start from a position of weakness and traditionally combine subversion, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism, but could move toward more conventional forms of warfare. The Malayan insurgents tried to follow the classic method of Communist seizure of power preached by Mao Tse-Tung, but failed. Mao distinguished three distinct stages in the Communist struggle for power: guerrilla warfare, mobile warfare and positional warfare. The stages were not necessarily consecutive and had to be handled flexibly while adapting to the enemy, but after the first stage of Mao’s classical rural insurgency, which was aimed at wearing down the government and winning the population to the cause of the revolution, some of the elite small guerrilla units could merge into large formations to attack the government forces at the time and place of their choosing. The third and last phase was all out conventional war to dislodge the government and its foreign supporters from the country. Ho Chi Minh succeeded in driving the French from Indo-China in 1954 after successfully executing what can be considered the second stage in an open battle at Dien Bien Phu. Mao had progressed to the third stage when he defeated the nationalist Chinese in 1949 and so did the Communist Vietnamese when they delivered the final blow to the South Vietnamese government with conventional armed forces in 1975 after the Americans had withdrawn the bulk of their troops in the preceding years. For insurgents to win militarily, they usually had to progress to the higher stages for which they often relied on foreign backing. However, they often did not even have to win as much as wear down the enemy to the point where lack of resources, but most often the lack of will did the job. In the colonies or during foreign intervention the disparity of will was often caused by the fact that insurgents posed no threat to the foreign power’s survival. “The guerrilla wins if he does not lose”, Henry Kissinger wrote in 1969. “The conventional army loses if it does not win.”

Probably the most dominant feature in fighting insurgencies was the limited learning process within western armies. In the course of the mostly protracted colonial wars the process was slow and in between campaigns hard-won knowledge invariably withered away. As a result western governments and their armies had a poor record in defeating insurgencies. The Dutch colonial army in the East Indies in the nineteenth century is a case in point. At the outset of every new campaign since 1830 the army advanced in large columns of heavily
armed forces, including cavalry and artillery in search of the elusive enemy and a decisive battle to win. In campaigns that often lasted more than a decade, lessons would be slowly learned by some visionary commanders who adapted their organisation and tactics to the enemy. The vicious war that started in 1873 in Atjeh in the northern part of Sumatra progressed disastrously for the Dutch until in the end of the century. Only then was the struggle slowly won by employing light and flexible constabulary-type forces, called the Korps Marechausee, and by prioritising a steady, but intensive pacification campaign aimed at controlling territory rather than killing the enemy. The tactics employed in the campaign included a strong emphasis on intelligence gathering. After the final remnants of resistance were quashed in the Indies in 1910, decades of relative peace followed in the Indies. Not until 1928 were the lessons—the bulk of which was learned thirty years earlier—officially codified and translated into official learning material for a new generation of officers. Although the handbook’s overall emphasis was on military tactics and techniques it incorporated a chapters on cooperation with civilian authorities and one on the soldier’s posture towards the indigenous population. At times the Dutch colonial army had been obliged to exercise military government in unruly areas, but overall the lessons were surprisingly enlightened. It strongly advised against collective punishment by burning homes and crops (“scuttle and burn”) as had been common wisdom in the previous century.6

Other colonial armies fared little better in the nineteenth century. The British Army had extreme difficulty adapting to the sophisticated guerrilla tactics employed by the South African Boers in 1899-1901. What often saved colonial armies in the days of traditional colonial policing was their ability to rely on their superior firepower, the indiscriminate use of force, summary justice and collective punishment for the population in order to suppress insurgencies. In the course of the twentieth century with a more critical media such methods were increasingly hard to apply, but at the time the press was hyper-patriotic and mostly uncritical. Reporters were totally dependent on the military for access to the battlefield, if they ever came close at all. When reported in the European press, harsh repressive measures only seemed to raise widespread indignation when applied to fellow white men—and women and children—in South Africa.7 Only after the Second World War did colonial armies constantly have to answer to international and domestic opinion, which heavily politicized insurgencies and the struggles to counter them.

One explanation for not adopting more effective means of military and political action was inadequate learning and the overall aversion to a type of warfare that was not considered the army’s proper role. Even when serving in the colonies, the officer corps oriented itself mainly to military developments in the homeland, where rapid technical advances were made. The profound military conservatism of the day also manifested itself in Europe, where developments in tactics dramatically lagged behind advances in weaponry, which resulted in trench warfare and stalemate during the First World War. Poor adaptation while fighting irregular opponents can also be traced to the complexity of the necessary methods, which depended on a delicate balance between civil and military measures and therefore cooperation with, and

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support of, the civilian "other." As we have seen when looking at military government, soldiers prefer to operate in what they hope or expect to be an exclusively military domain. Presumably because soldiers do not consider the causes for unrest and wider political aspects of a military problem, these aspects and the question of how to deal with them were left out of the meagre available learning material in the British and Dutch colonial armies.

Whereas learning in the Dutch colonial Army all but stagnated in the interwar period after the introduction of formal doctrine, the British steadily progressed. Free from serious internal uprisings, the Dutch focussed on the growing conventional threat from Japan in the 1930s. Unlike most other European armed forces, the small professional British Army "was in many respects an imperial police force for which conventional warfare was the interruption." Nevertheless, the literature of the interwar period was "meagre indeed for an army that faced 20 years of nearly continuous insurgency." There was very little formal learning and teaching at military colleges. Paradoxically, despite the steady stream of experience in Ireland, India, Burma, and Palestine, the British started to preserve the lessons of the more complex aspects of internal security operations in doctrine and literature only after the great campaigns were over—just like the Dutch. The same was true in the United States, where the U.S. Marine Corps published an elaborate and sophisticated Small Wars Manual in 1940. Prior to 1960 there was no substantial body of literature on colonial policing or counterinsurgency in Britain and only in the 1960s were British officers in the Staff College of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst taught more than staff work involved in the purely military aspects of cordon and search and other such operations. Only then did the wider political background and broader principles of counterinsurgency become standard teaching.

Mockaitis argues that British learning did not progress through formal channels, but by the application of three broad principles of minimum force, civil-military cooperation and tactical flexibility. Although these principles evolved unevenly during the consecutive internal security operations, they were "passed on as traditional wisdom from one generation of officers and civil servants to the next with almost no effort made to formulate doctrine, and little attention paid to preserving past experience in an organised fashion." What made them responsive to unofficial learning was their acceptance of internal security operations as a regular task for the military. In quoting the 1923 Army manual, Duties in Aid of the Civil Power, Mockaitis emphasised that British soldiers were constantly reminded that their mission was "not the annihilation of an enemy but the suppression of a temporary disorder, and therefore the degree of force to be employed must be directed to that which is necessary to restore order and must never exceed it." Rod Thornton has argued that the minimum force philosophy was produced by a mixture of ethical principles that can be traced back to Victorian values, and pragmatic considerations. Clearly ethics would have lost out if the British had not slowly become convinced that in order to rule over their vast empire effectively, the colonial yoke had to be as light as possible.

This is not to say that the British Army has not been guilty of excesses during imperial policing and counterinsurgency in the twentieth century. Despite their wide and continuous
experience the British clung to "certain bad habits with remarkable tenacity." Since the British Army persisted in dealing with each insurgency on a ad hoc basis, they often fell back on measures such as collective punishment, eventhough it proved largely ineffective. They relied on collective punishment during the insurgency in Ireland where, like in previous colonial wars, instead of winning the people to the case of the government by positive incentives and protection, they resorted to measures such as burning people's houses. After the first World War the newly created Royal Air Force was a rather blunt instrument used to subdue tribesmen in the Middle East and employed to police the Empire's borders in the most cost effective manner. The most infamous example of indiscriminate force by the British in the colonies was the shooting of between 200 and 379 Sikh protesters at Amritsar in India. However, while performing this role the deliberate or thoughtless destruction of life was clearly the exception rather than the rule there was clearly an upward learning curve as a result of informally transferred lessons within the British regiments.12

The emphasis after the First World War on the British Army's role in support of civil administration and civil police asked for a high degree of civil-military cooperation. Cooperation certainly had its ups and downs in this period as it always involved the thorny question of whether soldiers or civilians were in control. Cooperation between the military, police and civil government in Ireland was poor while fighting the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in 1919-1921. The initial solution had been to call on the military once local insurgent cells became active and a situation threatened to get out of control. Once the local military commander deemed his intervention necessary, he would assume command, but cease to coordinate his efforts with the local civilian authorities once he handed over responsibility to the civilian police. During joint police-military actions or patrols the usual uncertainty over who was in command prevailed. In Ireland poor cooperation between the military and police had a stifling effect on successful intelligence gathering and sharing, the key to finding and fighting the insurgents, for which the police—more familiar with the local situation—were essential.

When the situation threatened to become uncontrollable for local administration and police, calls were usually heard for the introduction of martial law, which in many ways resembled military government. The usual first step taken by the government, quite different from martial law, was calling a state of emergency whereby the civil government continued to exercise control and military forces acted in their support and under civilian direction at the highest level. The provisions of the state of emergency, usually a set of emergency regulations for arrest and detention in relation to arms possession and support to the insurgents, give legal backing to actions by soldiers, police and civil government officials to control violence. Martial law was a more drastic measure. It implied full-scale takeover by the military commander of central or local government institutions, soldiers running public services, officers giving orders to the police and criminals being tried by military courts.13

Calls for unity of command under military leadership were frequent in the turbulent corners of the British Empire. In the French colonies they were the preferred solution to creating "unity of effort" between soldiers and civilians during emergencies.14 In his analysis of
British counterinsurgency between 1919 and 1960 Mockaitis concluded that “[p]erhaps too much has been made of the debate over unity of command in counterinsurgency. The British experience suggests that co-operation between civil and military authorities rather than rigid control by either is what is required.” This system worked in the provinces and districts as long as there were clear political directives on the overall aim of the campaign from the top. When delegating total control to military officers, the solutions tended to become militarized with a single emphasis on security, whereas successful counterinsurgency called for measures in the political, economic and social sphere. It made officers less accountable to civilian politicians and more likely to rely on the maximum use of force. Clear political directives, the prime condition for successful civil-military cooperation, proved problematic in for instance Ireland and Palestine, where no political solution was offered. Between 1919 and the end of the colonial counterinsurgency campaigns in 1960 ad hoc civil-military cooperation slowly evolved into a system with constant liaison, sometimes with soldiers and police operating out of a joint headquarters, and eventually into the elaborate “committee system” of civil administrators, police and military commanders on all levels of government that proved so effective in Malaya.

The third principle ingrained in British military culture was tactical flexibility. In order to allow the Army to adapt to the constantly changing types of conflict and to an enemy that failed to “play by the rules”, much authority had to be delegated to local commanders. This meant that command had to be decentralized and the army needed to operate in small units, with much latitude for battalion, company and even platoon commanders. Rigid control at the centre had proved counterproductive. In Burma, India and Palestine, cooperation with their civilian counterparts on the regional and district level in order to find local solutions to specific problems were the best guarantee for adequate intelligence gathering. However, by 1945 much of the traditional wisdom of the interwar period had been temporarily abandoned on the battlefields of the Second World War, where the tactical emphasis on military operations was on army groups and divisions rather than battalions and platoons. For the troops faced with the Jewish insurgency in Palestine in the immediate post-war years, most of the available manuals and pamphlets from the interwar period focussed on the purely military aspects and cadets in the 1940s early 1950s were no longer trained in duties in aid of the civil power.16

**Integrating the Civil and Military Spheres in Malaya**

After seven months of British military government following the Japanese defeat, the British inaugurated the Malayan Union in April 1946. Under the new constitution citizenship and equal rights were granted to the Malayan Chinese minority that constituted thirty-eight percent of the population and Indians, comprising twelve percent. However, the Malay majority that made up almost half of the population and had been traditionally in administrative control under British supervision, refused to accept shared political control. The minorities consisted of former immigrant workers that had been brought in during previous decades to work on Malaya’s wealthy rubber plantations and tin mines. The enlightened measures were premature
and after serious opposition from the Malay elite the British returned to a federal system in early 1948. Power was thus restored to the nine Malay sultans that had traditionally ruled the country's nine states with British administrative advisors operating in a classic system of indirect rule.

In the Malay-dominated Federation less than twenty percent of the Malayan Chinese qualified for citizenship. The Chinese labourers had traditionally been discriminated against and had endured much hardship as a result of their Communist-inspired armed opposition against the Japanese, while the Malays had passively collaborated. Over 400,000 of the Chinese minority were "squatters", subsistence farmers living on illegally occupied land on the jungle fringes, where they had fled during the Japanese occupation. By 1948, law and order had seriously deteriorated, and early that year the predominantly Chinese Malayan Communist Party (MCP) called for open rebellion and guerrilla operations. The dormant wartime guerrilla cells were reactivated. It was on the squatters that the jungle army depended for its support, in the form of supplies of food and clothing, information and recruits. Thick jungle and rugged mountains covered eighty percent of the Malayan peninsula and provided the guerrillas with a perfect hideout from which to launch their campaign to gain control over the rural villages and ultimately urban centres. The remainder of the country was predominantly covered with rubber plantations.

The Malayan campaign can be divided into three consecutive phases. The first "defensive phase" lasted from 1948 to 1951. The second "offensive phase" started in 1952 and ended in 1955, when the insurgency was effectively broken. The remainder of the campaign was spent consolidating the gains previously made by preparing the Malayan government for self-government. Independence was granted to Malaya in 1957, but mopping up operations continued until 1960. The insurgency seriously began in May and June 1948 when many lives were lost in a wave of terror. The MCP's military wing, the Communist Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA) mostly used hit and run tactics against isolated police stations rubber plantations, tin mines and moving vehicles. Initially the terror was quite indiscriminate and managed to alienate a large part of the apathetic public, but violence after 1950 was concentrated against Europeans, government officials and Chinese who refused to cooperate with the MCP. In order to retain popular support the British had to avoid the mistakes made in Ireland, where—as in Ireland—no political solution was offered that might have addressed the legitimate grievances of the insurgents.

As much of the rural areas were in chaos calls for drastic legislation and a state of emergency became louder. The government initially restricted introducing these measures that could have provoked indignation and unrest rather than ameliorating the situation. The usual package of emergency laws quite rigorously infringed on basic civil right. By the end of 1948 nine hundred people had died at the hands of the guerrillas. Emergency Regulations were introduced, but prior to 1950 the government was by no means able to enforce them. The local police force of 9,000 constables was far too small and as a result the available military
forces were tied up performing static guard duties protecting the villages instead of effectively hunting down the insurgents. Nevertheless, in those first two years of the Emergency British troops had been able to harass the insurgents in their jungle hideouts. At least this kept them on the move and off-balance and prevented them from coordinating their operations into larger assault by bigger units. However, the Army proved incapable of inflicting any serious number of casualties while the ranks of the Communist guerrillas swelled. Mao’s victory in China in 1949 proved an inspiring example.

In the defensive phase the major theme was security for the people. As long as the regular police were still relatively weak, the Army grudgingly assumed many police duties. Their role in policing was crucial, however, since public safety was essential in order not to lose the bulk of the politically apathetic rural Chinese, who cared only for stability, but who would side with the party that was most likely to win and eventually provide law and order. Considering the fact that Communism seemed to be sweeping through China and Southeast Asia like a whirlwind, it was far from certain that they would place their bets on the British. Food and other supplies were reaching the guerrillas in sufficient quantity, partly from the approximately ten percent of the rural Chinese actively supporting them and also from the eighty percent that was coerced and intimidated by the Communists. By spring 1950 the British and Malay authorities were losing the battle as the Communists were able to recruit much faster than the government could kill and capture. Military casualties were relatively low, but the police posts were hard-pressed and losing more men than the insurgents. More than one hundred civilians were still murdered every month. If the police and civilian population lost confidence in the government, the struggle would be lost.

In 1948 the British Army could field no more than ten infantry battalions with an average strength of seven hundred. Five of these were Ghurkhas, three Malay and two British. As in any modern army, a large number of these were drivers, cooks, mechanics, signallers and quartermasters. Therefore, a battalion of seven hundred was mostly unable to put more than four hundred riflemen in the field. This left no more than 4,000 riflemen to fight approximately the same number of guerrilla’s in the jungle, who relied on civilians in the Communist Party organisation and its supporters in the villages. The number of Army battalions rose to twenty by 1951, but by that time the number of guerrillas had also doubled. At the height of the Emergency in 1952 government forces numbered 30,000 troops and 28,000 police. In addition thousands of local home guards were trained to back up the police during emergencies. All these security forces were needed to effectively fight an enemy whose numbers never rose above 8,000, or perhaps were never allowed to do so.

On the military side, the problem was the inclination of many commanders to operate in large formations. They attempted to conduct big-unit sweeps in the jungle, “clearing the area of the enemy”, without much information on their whereabouts. They launched their battalion into the jungle to try to encircle a known camp in order to wipe it out. In 1966, ten years after serving in Malaya Clutterbuck wrote:
The predilection of some army officers for major operations seems incurable. Even in the late 1950's, new brigade commanders would arrive from England, nostalgic for World War II, or fresh from large-scale manoeuvres in Germany. On arrival in Malaya, they would address themselves with grease pencils to a map almost wholly green except for one red pin. ‘Easy’, they would say, ‘Battalion on the left, battalion on the right, battalion blocking the end, and then a fourth battalion to drive through. Can’t miss, old boy.’

While the manoeuvrist approach in fighting guerrillas still prominently featured in U.S. Army textbooks when Clutterbuck lectured on counterinsurgency at U.S. Army Staff College at Fort Leavenworth in the mid 1960s, it had long since been removed from their British equivalents. The method had proved to be costly in man-hours and resources. Most of all, manoeuvres in order to cordon by large units through dense jungle were slow, hard to coordinate and noisy. Once confronted with the enemy, only the first few troops ahead of a column could see enough to shoot at the enemy anyway. In most cases, however, the soldiers would find an empty camp as the alerted guerrillas avoided such direct confrontations. This nonetheless enabled the commanding officer to claim he had cleared an area of the enemy, which would be proudly marked on the map.

Thousands of new special Malay constables completed their training by early 1949, enabling the government to man the village police posts to sufficient strength in the course of that year. This allowed the government to release more combat troops from static protective duties in the populated areas and use them more flexibly in support of the police when a villages was under threat. It also enabled them to take the offensive into the jungle in order to attack the larger guerrilla camps and conduct smaller patrols and ambushes. To be successful, however, these actions relied heavily on accurate and timely intelligence, which proved to be lacking at the outset of the campaign.

Only slowly were the time honoured principles and tactical lessons of previous campaigns rediscovered and improved upon. The lessons came to full fruition in the second, offensive phase of the campaign, when all previous experience merged. After the campaign ended, the assembled experience on successful colonial policing and counterinsurgency operations was unofficially codified by Sir Robert Thompson, who had played an important role as a colonial civil servant in Malaya. His five basic principles for successful internal security operations were laid down in his book, Defeating Communist Insurgency, written in 1966 after his disillusionment with his advisory role in to the South Vietnamese government and the U.S. Army. Thompson clearly rose above the usual focus on the military aspects of counterinsurgency and the methods used. By steering away from the methods that would be considered rather harsh by the end of the twentieth century, his analysis gained a timeless quality. The principles more or less became British doctrine and were taught at Sandhurst. He put particular emphasis on their application in Malaya and on their misapplication in Vietnam. While acknowledging the difference in circumstances facing the Americans in Vietnam, most analysts of low-level operations have since reconfirmed and elaborated on his findings.
These five points will be described and used as the context to explain how the offensive phase of the Malayan Emergency unfolded.

First and most important, the government had to identify the legitimate grievances that fed the insurgency and tackle this central problem. To that end it had to define a clear political aim, which in the colonial context was to create a free, independent and united country that was stable and economically viable. By removing the prime cause of discontent the government would be "outbidding the insurgents for the loyalty of the people." It was the most potent weapon in the counterinsurgency arsenal and the essential element of "winning the hearts and minds of the people" in order to separate the moderates from the insurgents. What facilitated finding a political solution for the British was the Malay majority's acceptance of the inevitability of sharing power with the minorities after they saw the ferocity of the insurgency after 1948. Moreover, the Second World War had brought home to the British Isles that self-rule or rapid decolonisation was inevitable. This was not sufficiently understood in countries like France, The Netherlands and Portugal, where governments desperately tried to hold on to their colonies—and suffered the consequences. "Winning the hearts and minds" became a platitude in the course of the 1960s sixties at the time of the Vietnam War and again in the 1990s, when the term re-emerged during peace operations. It was often misused to simply point at the desired effect of soldiers conducting small scale humanitarian projects, so-called "civic actions", to win over the local population. However important these measures were, the phrase had a far broader significance and re-emerged implicitly in Thompson's other principles.

Second, the government had to act in accordance with the law. The law applied to the government as well as to the insurgents, but the government had of course the power to change the law. It had much latitude to do so after the state of emergency had been declared in June 1948. As in all pre-war internal security operations a series of emergency regulations were deemed crucial to winning the struggle, some of which called for the suspension of basic freedoms and fundamental human rights in democracies. The most important regulation was the widespread registration program. Regularly checking the issued identity cards made it difficult for the insurgents to move and therefore to supply and communicate as the insurgents had poor communications equipment. It thus became difficult to sustain and coordinate larger operations. In addition to food control measures linked to the cards, curfews and travel restrictions were imposed. Second in importance according to Clutterbuck was the power to arrest and detain without trial, although control mechanisms were created to prevent abuse. Security forces also had the right to search property without a warrant. According to Thompson the government could be quite authoritarian in an emergency situation, as long as the laws were applied equally to all and the people felt it was providing security and meeting their basic needs. None of these regulations achieved any result without effective local government. "Where this is lacking, the regulations may do more harm than good, since inequitable enforcement brings resentment and nonenforcement brings contempt." Crucial to success in Malaya was that the British, unlike the Americans in Vietnam, were in full control of all
government institutions and able to use the Malays or Indians who were usually reliable as a result of their aversion to the Chinese Communists.

The concept of minimum force was an integral part of this second principle. The insurgents in Malaya often designed their operations to provoke the government into overreacting. When fighting insurgencies, frustration over the inability to capture those that were considered bandits rather than a legitimate enemy has often caused military forces to take their anger out on the civil population when suspected of supporting the insurgents. This led to collective punishment in most of the colonial wars and again on a small scale in Malaya. Thompson advised strongly against such methods, instead advocating punishment strictly aimed at the guilty. Moreover, methods such as air strikes, suppressive fire from helicopter gunships and artillery bombardments had frequently been relied upon out of concern for the lives of an army’s own troops. The use of such indiscriminate weapons often killed more innocent civilians than enemy forces. Colonial armies and the Americans in Vietnam ignored the fact that fear, rather than ideology, was the primary driving force for most civilians in choosing sides in the conflict.

When fighting insurgencies there was a point where fear of the government could come to prevail amongst the population. In both Indo-China and Algeria the French engaged, partially provoked, in a policy of ruthless suppression. They were forced to withdraw after they alienated the local population, and in the case of Algeria also estranged the French population. After having received the order to stamp out an urban insurgency in Algiers in 1957 by any means, French paratroopers gained control over the city and broke the insurgents cells. Their ruthless methods, including widespread torture alienated the Algerians and French alike. In 1947 and 1948 the Dutch in the Netherlands East-Indies sought a conventional military solution by twice relying on a speedy and successful military advance, only to fail dramatically during the costly pacifying campaigns that followed in the countryside. Their “Police Actions” eventually caused international indignation and diplomatic pressure. The Dutch were forced to leave the Indies in 1949. Maximum force and the government’s failure to ensure public security tended to feed the insurgency when the people came to consider insurgents a better alternative to guarantee their long term physical security—especially if the government was seen to be losing and offers no political solution to their grievances. It can be argued that what distinguishes pre-1940 colonial policing from modern counterinsurgency has been the shift in civilian attitudes towards the use of force in war and violence in general. Better communication led to closer scrutiny by the media, which had a serious impact on the levels of violence accepted by a home audience. This factor fully came into force in the United States during the Vietnam War through an ultimately fatal mix of excessive force used and largely uncontrolled televised images of the war.

Having learned in previous campaigns that force had to be used in a highly selective manner, the British in Malaya created an elaborate system of civil-military cooperation in order to exercise tight administrative control. This was the key to successfully applying Thompson’s third principle of counterinsurgency. The government needed an overall plan for
attacking the cause of the insurgency, not just the guerrillas. “Unity of effort”, the process of tying civil and military measures together into a single effective policy always proved extremely difficult to achieve “because it represents the fusion of civil and military functions to fight battles which have primarily political objectives [...] All the political, economic, psychological and military means must be marshalled as weapons under centralized co-ordination and direction.” The appointment of Lieutenant General Sir Harold Briggs as the Director of Operations was crucial to the development of the overall British strategy and a mechanism for its implementation. Briggs was a retired officer and a veteran of the Burma Revolt in 1930-1932 where civil-military cooperation had progressed better than in most other operations. He worked directly under the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney.

Briggs introduced what became known as the “war by committee system” that harked back to previous colonial experience, but finally put it on a formal footing. The foundations of the system were the District War Executive Committees (DWECs). Chaired by the district administrative officer, the committee included the battalion commander and the police superintendent. They worked together to conduct day-to-day operations supported by an integrated intelligence committee of soldiers and police. For each of the nine Malayan states a similar triumvirate, a State War Executive Committee (SWEC), was created. In Kuala Lumpur the High Commissioner chaired the Federation Executive Council, which issued policy directives and controlled finance. It took some time for the system to function smoothly.

The British committee system for civil-military cooperation was the alternative to the “single commander system” preferred by the French, where the military were in overall control of some or all levels of government. Only on the highest Federal level civilian and military powers were temporarily merged during the height of the insurgency in 1952-1954. This drastic measure was made possible by the shock effect created by the killing of Sir Gurney in an ambush in October 1951. Later that year, General Briggs left Malaya, an exhausted man, only to die a few months later. The man who was chosen to replace Gurney was General Sir Gerald Templer who arrived in Malaya January 1952. Not only was he the first military man to occupy this political post, he also served as the Director of Operations, thus combined military and civil authority in one person. As “the last of the proconsuls” Templer combined all the personal experience needed for leading the campaign through its most critical phase, although his predecessors had held the line and developed the schemes which he implemented. As a divisional commander he had seen combat in North Africa and Italy, where he was wounded when his jeep struck a mine in 1944. Templer was Director of Military Government in the British zone in Germany in 1945-1946, after which he served in the War Office as the Director of Intelligence and vice chief of the Imperial General Staff. Although the idea obviously predated him, the phrase “winning the hearts and minds” has often been ascribed to Templer, when he said in 1952 that “[t]he answer lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the people.” He explained: “The shooting side of this business is only 25 percent of the trouble and the other 75 lies in getting the people of this country behind us.” Templer perfected the committee system by putting extreme em-
phasis on the civilian side of the operation and the need for a closely coordinated effort. He insisted that the district and state committees meet once a day, "if only for a whiskey and soda in the evening."\(^{32}\)

With his unstoppable energy and strong and inspiring leadership, Templer played a crucial role in invigorating the schemes that had already been developed under Briggs. In 1950, Briggs had evolved an integrated plan for anti-guerrilla operations. The committee system he institutionalized was the tool with which to implement what became known as the Briggs Plan, which encapsulated the fourth principle Robert Thompson distilled from the Malayan campaign by Robert Thompson. The government had to give priority to defeating the political subversion of the people, not to defeating the insurgents by killing them. The strategy hinged on denying the guerrillas access to their chief source of supply, recruits and intelligence—the civilian population. Thereto the Briggs Plan included the resettlement of almost half a million Chinese squatters from the jungle fringes to so-called "new villages." The primary aim of this drastic measure was denial of food. The guerrillas would often be forced to come out into the open to reach the villages when unable to obtain food from nearby squatters, which allowed the security forces to attack them. The villages were encircled with wire and protected by police with back-up from local home guards. It took time, money for public facilities, compensation, offers of early citizenship and pressure to induce the subsistence farmers to move. The committee system took time to bear fruit and therefore the measures took long to implement—too long for Briggs to see the results. It did work, in the end, as witnessed by the fact that only six out of 480 "new villages" were abandoned by 1960.\(^{33}\)

In his book *Low Intensity Operations* Kitson emphasized these same principles, but put extra emphasis on the tactical handling of information by operational commanders and the fact that "the problem of defeating insurgents consists largely of finding them."\(^{34}\) Food denial, intelligence gathering and the actual act of killing insurgents were intricately linked. Even before the Briggs Plan became British strategy, individual units found out how concentrating patrols and ambushes near food sources were likely to be most successful. A vital part of the organised food denial program was the identification of villagers who were supplying food to the insurgents. Templer's tactics combined harsh treatment of villages and individuals caught collaborating with the insurgents with positive incentives for those cooperating with the government. When sufficient evidence had been collected to show conclusively that a villager was a supplier, he was discreetly confronted with this evidence by a plain-clothes Chinese detective form the Special Branch of the Police Force—the agency with overall responsibility for collecting and analysing intelligence after 1951. He could escape punishment by becoming a double agent, which many did, and continue to smuggle food to the Communists while providing the exact information on the whereabouts and movements of guerrillas. If he chose to flee to the jungle the insurgents had lost a source of supplies and information in the village, and gained another mouth to feed. Together with extremely generous rewards for peasants and voluntarily surrendered guerrillas who provided information that led to a successful ambush or attack, intelligence gathering rapidly improved.\(^{35}\)
The British had found that "flogging the jungle without information by large numbers of troops", proved "utterly useless." Now, the new sources of intelligence combined with a great deal of planning and coordination allowed small patrols with local trackers to attack camps, with others laying ambushes for the fleeing guerrillas. The necessary shift towards smaller scale operations and dispersal of forces was accompanied by a decentralization of command and control, allowing junior commanders considerable initiative in adapting the broader principles and assignments laid down by senior commanders. Commandos from the Special Air Service (SAS) played an important role in deep penetrations of the jungle, but the British found that counterinsurgency was first and foremost a job for regular infantry. Battalion and company commanders who remained in the area longer, often more than a year, became familiar with the area and personally knowing the administrators, police, and Special Branch paid off. Overall, there was little new theory but much common sense in their approach, with officers and non-commissioned officers claiming they were "making it up as we went along", applying minimum force and finding solutions with civilian partners as a reflex, rather than as a set of orders imposed from above.

Physically divorcing extremist elements from the population, which they were trying to subvert by relocation, was only one method to bring this about. A hearts-and-minds campaign was the other way to deny the guerrillas their most important protective shield—the people. By the time of Templer's appointment the British pledged that Malaya would become independent by 1957, a promise they would keep. In the meantime Templer laid great emphasis on Malayan participation in local government. An elaborate information or propaganda campaign was another vital element to keep the local population from embracing the Communists and encouraging the guerrillas to surrender. Quintessential to "winning the hearts and minds" of the Chinese, however, was their personal safety. When turning against the Communists or when they were relocated, the Chinese squatters had to believe the security forces could protect them against reprisals and intimidation. The primary element of the Briggs Plan was therefore security and protection of the population "that allow[ed] their 'hearts and minds' to be won over." At this, the British were successful. However, their success even had a downside as there were signs that the Chinese feared that the withdrawal of British troops and administrative oversight would eventually result in a Communist victory. This could frighten them into supporting the Communists who at the time were close to winning their struggle against the French in nearby Vietnam. The government therefore had to show extreme determination to see the campaign through to the very end and root out the insurgency before handing over to the independent Malayan government. The British stayed until the emergency was finally over in 1960 and after that, unlike other former colonial powers they maintained a close relationship with the new government. The British Army stayed on in an advisory role and together with Australian troops again saw action in the jungle in support of the Malaysian Army during its confrontation with Indonesia over Borneo (1962-1966). However, by mid-1954 the offensive against the insurgents was so successful that one-man
rule was no longer necessary and Templer handed his military powers to a soldier and his post as High Commissioner to his civilian deputy.\textsuperscript{41}

The fifth and last principle from Thompson’s \textit{Defeating Communist Insurgency} was the need to secure the government’s base area and to progress gradually from there. While maintaining military pressure in all parts of Malaya not cleared of guerrillas, other areas were designated as sufficiently secured for emergency regulations to be lifted. In time, the security role in these areas could be fully taken over by police and local home guard.\textsuperscript{42} Thompson and all other analysts of counterinsurgency that followed him emphasized over and over again that successfully defeating an insurgency required patience and determination. The British would go on to win two other counterinsurgency operations in Kenya and on Cyprus in the second half of the 1950s. Also here, valuable lessons were being learned, but only gradually. In both cases it would be a long haul.

As a result of the escalating war in Vietnam and Communist successes elsewhere insurgency and counterinsurgency became widely studied in the course of the 1960s. Those who had been practising subversion and insurgency, such as Mao and the Greek Cypriot insurgent leader George Grivas, wrote books on their ideas, principles and methods. Those devising measures to successfully counter them, people such as Thompson and Kitson, a civil servant and a soldier, did the same. “Unfortunately”, Kitson observed, “the fact that so much is known by those who have studied the problem does not mean that the problem has been studied by all those who should have done so.” Even in Britain, a considerable number of officers, including senior ones, consciously failed to understand what was involved and cried “that a fit soldier with a rifle can do all that is required.”\textsuperscript{43} This attitude was deeply ingrained on both sides of the Atlantic.

The root of the problem was that an officer’s qualities for fighting conventional war differed from the development of characteristics for the “lower end of the operational spectrum”, in which Kitson included peacekeeping. Traditional soldiers were trained to be “strong, courageous, direct and aggressive”, whereas the successful officer in counterinsurgency developed certain deviousness, a lot of patience and “determination to outwit their opponents by all means compatible with the achievement of the aim.” In 1971 Kitson wrote:

Those who are not capable of developing these characteristics are included to retreat into their military shells and try not to notice what is going on. They adapt the ‘fit soldiers with a rifle’ theory, and long for the day when they can get back to ‘proper soldiering’ by which they mean preparing for the next—or the last—war, as opposed to fighting in the current one. There are also some sound material reasons for not becoming too well qualified in fighting insurgents, because expertise in this field can result in an officer being channelled away from the main stream of military preferment, a factor which is more apparent in the United States than in the British Army.\textsuperscript{44}

Only after the great campaigns of the 1950s were over the principles and methods of counterinsurgency became part of the curriculum taught at the Royal Military Academy. Several
smaller insurgencies on Borneo, in Aden (South Arabia) and Oman in the sixties and early seventies, but particularly the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland, kept the interest in low-intensity operations in the United Kingdom alive in the decades to come. Obviously, the “Troubles” were dissimilar from previous insurgencies. Much of the doctrine and methods from the Malayan Emergency, a rural insurgency halfway across the globe, proved politically and practically impossible to apply in Ulster’s largely urban environment. Moreover, the ever present media seriously constrained the British security forces in Northern Ireland. Although the struggle could not be won without a proper political solution, adherence to the principles of minimum force, civil-military cooperation and tactical flexibility were essential in keeping the violence at “an acceptable level.” Despite the frustration within the British military over their inability to put a stop to the violence within the borders of the United Kingdom, the British armed forces—like the Australians who shared much of their experience in Malaya and Borneo—could look back on counterinsurgency campaigns with a certain pride. Compared to the American military’s reaction to their experience in Vietnam, this gave their soldiers a different outlook on what the proper role of the armed forces was.

Lessons Unlearned: The American Experience in Vietnam

The British experience in Malaya could not be blindly copied in Vietnam for a number of reasons. The Americans, however, instead of using the applied principles as a basis and expand on them, ended up using methods and displaying reflexes that were often diametrically opposed. The U.S. military, like the French before them, saw an insurgency as a purely military problem once they became involved. “Whereas French and American generals would say ‘turn us loose’, British ones would repeat, ‘Give us a political solution and a good police establishment.’” While lecturing in the United States in 1962 on the patient and restrained approach in Malaya, British Colonel R.B. Mans was interrupted by a chuckle from a U.S. Marine Corps major. Asked what the reason for his amusement was the major explained that in Vietnam, “[w]e will work them over with so much steel that six months will see the end of it.” Not only did the American military leaders fail to build on the British experience, they also discarded their own historical experience in counterinsurgency. The Major’s reaction was as an exponent of the way the experience in conventional battle during the war in the Pacific had come to influence the Marine Corps thinking. Prior to the Second World War the Corps had been the breeding ground for commanders skilled in low-intensity operations.

The wide variety of “small wars” fought by the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century included suppressing an insurgency in the Philippines and a punitive expedition in Mexico, where the U.S. Army played the predominant role. However, the U.S. Marine Corps became America’s primary overseas police force and built up considerable experience during a series of guerrilla wars and military interventions familiarly known as the “Banana Wars” in Central America and the Caribbean. Between 1898 and 1933 the Marines saw action twice in Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and again in Nicaragua in pacification campaigns that mostly took years and sometimes more than a dec-
ade. The accumulated wisdom of several decades of small wars was collected and codified in the late 1930s by the U.S. Marine Corps and eventually published in their elaborate *Small Wars Manual*. Quite inopportune ly, it appeared in 1940 on the eve of America's participation in the Second World War that would fundamentally change the country's foreign policy and military outlook. In 2002 a retired U.S. Marine Corps Colonel, Nick Pratt called the *Small Wars Manual* "a classic, and [...] more relevant today than anything currently in use by any military service." It defined small wars as "operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation." Woodrow Wilson had declared the purpose of these interventions "to teach the South American republics to elect good men."

Many of the same principles that emerged during British imperial policing and counterinsurgency can be found in the Marine Corps manual. Minimum force is one of them. Although Americans, like their European counterparts, had at times resorted to excessive force and collective punishment such as in Philippine insurrection, they quickly learned their lessons: "In small wars, caution must be exercised, and instead of striving to generate the maximum power with the forces available, the goal is to gain decisive results with the least application of force. In small wars, tolerance, sympathy, and kindness should be the keynote of our relationship with the mass of the population. Small wars involve a wide range of activities including diplomacy, contacts with the civil population and warfare of the most difficult kind."

The handbook explained how in major war the mission was usually unequivocally the defeat and destruction of the hostile force. "This is seldom true in small wars." Instead the Marines faced the more ambiguous mission "to establish and maintain law and order by supporting or replacing the civil government in countries or areas in which the interest of the United States have been placed in jeopardy." Other than in "big war", diplomacy had not ceased as a function and the State Department continued to play a major role in shaping the American response by exercising "a constant and controlling influence over the military operations." However, as in the Second World War, the State Department was often incapable of picking up the civilian administrative tasks in time and soldiers ended up running medical programs infrastructural projects and establishing new local governments.

Protecting the population and public security was also a central tenet of the *Small Wars Manual*. Much emphasis was put on the formation of local constabulary forces commanded by Marine Corps non-commissioned officers and used for the protection of persons and property of the population. The Marines learned to rely on small patrols and avoid big sweeps, for which they mostly lacked the manpower anyhow. "Resourcefulness and ingenuity" were called for when pacifying and the Marines were mostly given general guidelines to follow and considerable latitude in achieving objectives. "Small Wars demand the highest type of leadership directed by intelligence, resourcefulness, and ingenuity. Small Wars are conceived in uncertainty, are conducted often with precarious responsibility and doubtful
authority, under indeterminate orders lacking specific instructions." This degree of ambiguity and the room for interpretation would be unthinkable in the descriptive American military doctrine that appeared several decades later.

By the time the United States became fully involved in Vietnam in 1965 the Small Wars Manual was all but forgotten, except by some older Marine Corps veterans. The experience from the Second World War and the Korean War solidified what has been called the "Army Concept" of war, or what later became known as "the American way of war." The overarching tenet of the American approach was to fight the Viet Cong with conventional war methods. The U.S. commander in Vietnam, General William C. Westmoreland, wanted to pursue a mobile war, attacking large enemy formations, as he had done while fighting the Germans, and disrupt their supply lines. American military leaders sought a decisive victory on the battlefield and when this proved impossible against an enemy that refused to come out into the open and fight, they chose to fight a war of attrition by killing the maximum number of insurgents with "search and destroy" missions.

Instead of gradually pacifying the densely populated agricultural coastal plains and the Mekong Delta, as some Marine Corps generals suggested, Westmoreland used most of his resources to aggressively seek out and kill the enemy in the Highlands and the jungle. Continuously looking for a quick fix solution, his tactics were focussed on bringing out the enemy in sufficient numbers so he could bring his forces' overwhelming firepower to bear. Whenever the Viet Cong chose to operate in larger formations, as the siege of Khe Sahn and during the Tet Offensive, it suffered tremendous losses. But unlike the Americans, the Vietnamese were willing to suffer these losses. In the meantime the elusive Communist insurgents continued to win over, subvert and intimidate the people in the populated areas, thereby maintaining their access to supplies, information and recruits. The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army acting in its support would not abide by the American rules and the U.S. Army refused to adapt to the enemy's predominantly small-unit guerrilla tactics.

There were some notable exceptions to the mainstream American military experience in Vietnam. In 1961 and 1962 the U.S. Army Special Forces—specifically trained in unconventional methods of warfare—secured a great number of villages in the Highlands by employing proven counterinsurgency methods that emphasized small-scale patrols, winning the hearts and minds and intelligence gathering. In its area of operations in the north the U.S. Marine Corps conducted an overall successful but small-scale pacification campaign. Harking back to the small wars experience from the Caribbean campaigns, the Marines created the Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program. A Combined Action Platoon of approximately ten Marines would integrate their operations with up to fifty National Front home guard forces in the defence of a village or "hamlet." They would live, eat and sleep with the local population and their mission was to destroy the Viet Cong infrastructure in the village and area, protect public security and help maintain law and order and conduct civic action projects. Not only had the Marines a long history in small wars, they were also not committed to the defence of Europe that tended to exclusively focus commanders on conventional warfare.
Westmoreland marginalised all such initiatives and the program never employed more than two thousand marines.\(^54\) Another notable exception to the mainstream performance in Vietnam was the role played by the Australian Army that—fresh from Malaya and Borneo—served in Vietnam between 1965 and 1972. The American Vietnam war veteran and *Newsweek* commentator Colonel David Hackworth once said that “the only people who really know how to fight this thing are the Australians and the Viet Cong.”\(^55\)

When looking at successive versions of the U.S. Army’s capstone warfighting doctrine, Field Manual 100-5, one can see a brief surge of interest in counterinsurgency methods and principles in the early and mid 1960s, after President John F. Kennedy had showed special interest in unconventional warfare and stimulated the expansion of Special Forces. By 1968, however, the chapter on military operations against irregular forces was removed from main Army doctrine publication.\(^56\) During and after the Vietnam War the Army tended to delegate the practise of unconventional warfare, with its high demands on flexibility, improvisation and ability to interact with the local population, to the Special Forces.\(^57\) While making some use of the SAS the British always held that counterinsurgency was primarily a job for well-trained, versatile regular infantry units.

The Americans could have learned a lot more from the British experience, but Vietnam was not Malaya. While Malayan insurgents had been geographically isolated in the jungles of the Malayan peninsula, the Vietnamese Communists were amply supplied with Soviet and Chinese armaments and supplies. In Malaya the guerrillas belonged to one of three major ethnic groups, which made them much easier to isolate. For the United States in tackling the underlying political grievance in Vietnam by defining a clear political aim was far more difficult than it had been for the British in Malaya, who were in control of all government institutions. The Americans were backing up an unpopular and corrupt regime, many of whose actions were beyond the control of policymakers in Washington. The South Vietnamese government readily accepted military aid, but successfully resisted pressure for political and economic reforms. Meanwhile, what the South Vietnamese people wanted first and foremost was good government, safety and order.

Lacking a reliable political base and framework for operations in South Vietnam, the American Army preferred to seek a purely military solution. In doing so, it fundamentally broke with the desirability to use minimum force. An American general admitted that since superior technology had little to aim at, soldiers were applying firepower “on a relatively random basis.” The population was often in the line of fire and in some cases deliberately targeted. A British brigadier general who witnessed American operations in Vietnam described United States tactics as “prophylactic firepower, which means that if you do not know where the enemy is, make a big enough bang and you may bring something down.”\(^58\) Apart from heavily relying on artillery, twice the tonnage of bombs dropped by the British and American air forces in the Second World War was brought to bear on North and South Vietnam.
An integral strategy for counterinsurgency similar to that in Malaya was difficult to conceive and a system of civil-military cooperation for its implementation seriously hampered by poor local government and weak police force and home guard. On their part, the Americans failed to put sufficient emphasis on a population-oriented “hearts and minds” campaign and there was never a proper functioning system for liaison and cooperation between smaller tactical units and local authorities. One of the ironies of the Vietnam campaign was that no U.S. Army Civil Affairs reserve units were activated during the Vietnam War. Calling up the reserves that made up the vast majority of the Civil Affairs personnel had always been politically sensitive. Civil affairs could have played an important role in an army whose combat units lacked versatility and, other than the British in Malaya who regarded this a commander’s responsibility, preferred to delegate interfacing with civilian institutions and populace to its specialized branch. Instead of deploying sufficient Civil Affairs personnel, “the chequered path of civil affairs was overseen by various civilian-military hybrids, which, in spite of heroic efforts, never did fire the imagination of U.S. field commanders, who seemed determined to fight a war of attrition.”

Ill-fated attempts from 1962 to create hundreds of “strategic hamlets” in line with the “new villages” in Malaya never succeeded in rendering sufficient protection to the village population. As a result of poor civil-military cooperation and the failure to win over and protect the people, insufficient human intelligence on the enemy’s whereabouts, the American forces on their “search and destroy” missions kept “flogging the jungle without information by large numbers of troops”—and napalm. Not surprisingly, over eighty percent of the engagements in 1967 as estimated took place on the enemy’s initiative. By 1968 there were over 600,000 U.S. and allied troops supporting the 670,000 South Vietnamese security forces, but with the massive disparity of will on both sides and without proper counterinsurgency strategy and tactics, it would not be enough. Although the Americans actually started to conduct the war somewhat more skilfully from 1969 by embracing a pacification program called “clear and hold”, the South Vietnamese government and their American sponsor never succeeded in separating the population from the insurgents before public support for the war effort in the United States crumbled. Following the Viet Cong’s psychological victory in the 1968 Tet offensive U.S. military ground forces started to gradually withdraw. Approximately 57,000 American troops and at least one million, perhaps even two million Vietnamese civilians and soldiers died in the war.

Segregation: the Return to “Ordinary Soldiering”

The U.S. military establishment found the suggestion that it had failed on the battlefield unacceptable. It sought arguments to reinforce the thesis that defeat in Vietnam was not due to tactical incompetence and inflexibility, but solely a result of strategic failure. Military leaders blamed the political decision to slowly escalate the war instead of applying decisive military force at once. Combined with the frequently heard, but awkward claim that American soldiers were fighting “with one hand tied behind their back”, this was supposed to exempt the U.S. military for structurally failing to adjust their methods and principles to a guerilla-style op-
ponent and from alienating a population they had supposedly come to protect. Although the tragedy in Vietnam was indeed first and foremost the consequence of political mistakes, this did not fully exempt the military. As a result, even the few positive tactical lessons from the experience in low-intensity conflict were largely ignored. This tendency to have the negative lessons—aimed at avoiding previous mistakes—overshadow positive experience gained through trial and error would also dominate the 1990s. The prevailing strategic lesson from Vietnam was that the United States should avoid this type of intervention altogether. The high-tech Yom Kippur War in 1973, featuring the second largest tank battle in history, only seemed to confirm that Vietnam had been an aberration in the historical trend of warfare. The most significant failure the American military elite was willing to acknowledge was its inability to adequately influence policy decisions in Washington. Since the 1980s the U.S. armed forces sought to correct this and displayed “a tendency to prescribe and circumscribe what wars it will fight and not fight.”

In his highly influential U.S. Army War College study On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War, Colonel Harry Summers concluded in 1981 that the United States had lost the Vietnam War because it had not fought conventionally enough. The most fundamental “lessons learned” publication to come out of the conflict concluded that the Army should not have deviated from its big-war approach and engage in some half-hearted counterinsurgency experiments, was clearly more welcome than another, more critical in-house study that had concluded quite the opposite one year earlier. Summers thesis was embraced by the bulk of the armed forces during the post-Vietnam process of soul-searching and strengthened the idea that the sole purpose of the U.S. armed forces was to fight and win America’s wars. This “American way of war” was articulated and codified in the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine as formulated in 1984. The doctrine, named after Secretary of Defence Casper Weinberger and co-drafter Colin Powell, held that military force should only be used if there was a clear risk to U.S. national security and only as a last resort; that the objective should be unambiguous; that force should be used overwhelming and with the clear intent to win; that the operation must have strong public support and a clear exit strategy.

The idea that conventional warfare was the only proper role for military forces was also reconfirmed in continental Europe in the aftermath of a long series of colonial debacles. The experiences on both sides of the Atlantic perfectly converged in focussing on a new single military objective. Military analyst Martin van Creveld wrote:

When the last colonies—those of Portugal—were freed in 1975, many people felt that an era in warfare had come to an end. Having suffered one defeat after another, the most important armed forces of the “developed” world in particular heaved a sigh of relief; gratefully, they felt that they could return to ‘ordinary’ soldiering, by which they meant preparing for wars against armed organizations similar to themselves on the other side of the Iron Curtain.
While preparing for conventional battle against the Warsaw Pact forces during the Cold War years the Western military retreated in barracks and to military practise grounds. The few lessons from counterinsurgency that had been learned were mostly forgotten or “unlearned.” As the United States and the former colonial powers lost interest in low-intensity conflict in the third world, it further neglected operating close to civilians, integrating operations with civilian authorities and the always unpopular role of performing public security related tasks. The role military forces had played in supporting the civil power at home during and before the nineteenth century had already been disappearing in most democracies. The rapid professionalisation of police forces in the twentieth century made civil authorities less dependent on military backup during a breakdown of law and order. Only the British Army continued to support to the civil authorities during an internal security operations on a significant scale while containing the insurgency in Northern Ireland after 1970. When intervening in their former colonies in Africa, the French delegated most of these internal security operations to its Foreign Legion, thus keeping much of the experience in low-intensity operations outside the mainstream army culture. NATO member states and their militaries became fixated on armoured and combined-arms operations and on manoeuvre warfare theory. After the détente of the 1970s, the 1980s saw a revival of Cold War tension. During Ronald Reagan’s presidency the American military refound its confidence and, provided with lavish funding, developed the “AirLand Battle” doctrine aimed at resisting the numerically superior Warsaw Pact armies by relying superior technology.

While focussing singularly on possible conventional combat in Germany, NATO treated the civil-military interface as a problem on the margins of military operations, just as it had been during mobile operations in the Second World War. The functions ascribed to Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) concentrated on population and resources control and support to the host-nation authorities. NATO CIMIC was geared towards facilitating conventional military operations by clearing civilian “obstacles” such as refugees and by exploiting civilian resources and infrastructure for military purposes. As in the Second World War this happened mostly outside the scope of tactical units below army corps level, which became used to operating in what was conceived to be a purely military sphere.67 Soldiers viewed their area of operations as their near-exclusive domain and considered civilians more of a hindrance than a help.

The U.S. Army Civil Affairs branch was also largely consumed by preparations for these CIMIC-type tasks in support of conventional warfare in the defence of Europe.68 The acronym CIMIC was absent from American doctrine and only used by the U.S. military when performing a NATO role. Most of the Civil Affairs units were configured to meet these needs Nevertheless, CIMIC covered only a portion of the Civil Affairs field of operations, that formally still included low intensity operations and civil administration. However, as priorities had changed in the previous decades, Army doctrine for full assumption of government functions in enemy and friendly territory withered away. Military occupation was not seriously considered on the European battlefield and as a result Civil Affairs neglected much of
its ability to perform military government activities after the 1960s, when those with “proconsular” experience from the 1940s left the military. Around 1960 the term military government was purged and replaced by the generic term Civil Affairs to emphasize the non-coercive aspects.69 At that time Civil Affairs attempted to adapt both doctrine and organisation to counterinsurgency operations, but political deliberations had prevented it from proving its worth in Vietnam. Thereafter doctrine became largely concerned with the composition of units and not how they would be employed and by the end of the century administration of occupied territory had disappeared from its pages.

In the 1980s the Civil Affairs community, consisting of two hundred active personnel, and some five thousand reservists, was in a sorry state.70 The U.S. Army often neglected providing staff officers at general staff level (G5) in headquarters in Germany and with the Army’s strict focus on Europe, Civil Affairs was also poorly prepared to support low-intensity conflict.71 One Civil Affairs officer complained in 1990 that the Civil Affairs organisation had “no champion, no sponsor, and therefore, in spite of its great potential, tends to be lumped together with the ‘ash and trash’ units.”72 Regular Army personnel hardly knew what Civil Affairs was and tended to confuse it with the Army’s Public Affairs Division. During the mid-1980s voices were raised to focus Civil Affairs on conflict at the lower end of the spectrum and in 1987, Weinberger assigned all Civil Affairs units to the newly established Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg. The rationale behind this was to redirect Civil Affairs assets towards unconventional warfare at a time when the Reagan administration was supporting both anti-government guerrillas in Nicaragua and the counterinsurgency efforts of the government of El Salvador, but without the use of regular combat units. “Foreign Internal Defence” became the term for support irregular warfare to emphasize that the U.S. military would only help and not be involved in these unwanted low-intensity conflicts itself. The shift in focus led to some heated debate within the Civil Affairs community that was continuously trying to prove its value to an Army that strictly focussed on the conventional Soviet military threat. Many Civil Affairs officers regarded their general support role in Germany as the goal of the force while seeing unconventional warfare as “aberrations of the core raison d’être for civil affairs.”73

While the Cold War had come to an end, the Persian Gulf War in 1990 seemed to validate all the hopes and beliefs in future trends in warfare that existed within western military forces during the Cold War years. The UN-sanctioned war to evict Saddam Hussein’s forces from Kuwait was played strictly by the Weinberger-rules and executed under the military leadership of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell, a Vietnam-veteran who had helped conceive them. The type of war NATO had planned to fight on the German plain with the U.S. armed forces at its core was instead fought against an infinitely inferior enemy in the Iraqi desert. After their technological sprint in the 1980s—which left friend and foe in awe—the United States’ armed forces could bring their tremendous firepower to bear against an enemy that was so unwise as to meet the Americans on the open battlefield on their terms. The U.S. Army could manoeuvre and fire at will in a terrain that
harboured almost no civilians, had no urban centres and no local government to worry about. Before the civilian population threatened to become a problem at the far edges of the American advance toward the Euphrates, the U.S. and allied forces withdrew from Iraq—leaving the Shiite population Bush had called upon to revolt to fend for itself against Saddam’s wrath.

The conquest of Kuwait was liberation in a classical sense. With close to one thousand Civil Affairs personnel in theatre and ample time to plan, it could have been a model for U.S. Army Civil Affairs in its traditional role. However, with Civil Affairs in its civil administrative role on the back-burner in previous decades and as a result of inadequate political prioritization of this function in the planning phase, the effort to reconstruct Kuwait was chaotic. The American general left in charge of operations in post-war Kuwait recalled being handed “a dripping bag of manure”, that no one else wanted to deal with. Neither the Pentagon nor the U.S. Army had conceived an adequate plan to reconstruct Kuwait and its institutions, and few assets were initially allocated. American civilian agencies were no better prepared. The situation was salvaged with adapt improvisation by Army engineers and Civil Affairs personnel, and a large input from Kuwaiti volunteers and the Saudi government. With its incredible wealth and governing elite that could move right back into power, Kuwait would not prove the most difficult post-war nation to put back on its feet.

After defeating Saddam Hussein’s troops by the use of overwhelming force and with the Cold War at an end President George Bush launched his optimistic but vague vision of a “New World Order” that held some promise of an increased role for the United Nations in international conflict resolution. He also claimed that the United States had kicked the Vietnam syndrome. This proved only partly true. The syndrome would soon be revived during the coming era of peace operations, particularly by developments in Somalia in 1993.

Towards Civil-Military Peace Operations

If conventional warfare and irregular warfare are considered the two main categories of military operations, where did this leave peacekeeping as a military tool around 1990? Judged from the perspective of civil-military interaction in an area of operations, United Nations peacekeeping in the preceding decades had followed the trend of conventional, “inter-state conflict.” In accordance with the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs UN peacekeepers had stayed out of the murky business of civil war, or “intra-state conflict”, with its nasty tendency to pull soldiers into internal security operations. The United Nations operation in recently decolonized Congo in the early 1960s was a notable exception. Apart from sliding into peace enforcement and law and order tasks without a corresponding UN mandate, it was the first mission to involve a substantial civilian component. The unhappy experience, involving high degrees of military violence and substantial casualties and a nearly bankrupted United Nations, was consciously ignored until rediscovered after similar experiences in the mid-1990s.

Prior to 1989, peacekeeping was almost exclusively focused on separating two national armies along a status-qupo line with the hope of solving territorial disputes by restoring
internationally agreed boundaries or providing the shield that allowed them to be adjusted by diplomatic means. Initially, UN missions were limited to deploying military observers, but over the years these evolved into what later became known as “traditional peacekeeping”: operations with infantry units physically manning buffer-zones between warring armies. The principles of peacekeeping were consent of the parties involved, neutrality, observation and the use of force limited to self-defence. Many traditional blue helmet peacekeeping forces succeeded in freezing conflicts in places such as Kashmir, Cyprus and the Golan Highs, but their presence often lasted for decades without a lasting diplomatic solution ever being reached.

Peacekeeping along the “thin blue line” allowed for very little contact between peacekeepers and the civilian population and local civilian administration. Peacekeeping forces engaged in interposition hardly ever found themselves in densely populated areas or urban terrain. Involvement in public security and administrative support tasks were generally not conceived to be part of a peacekeeper’s duty. Like soldiers in conventional operations, peacekeepers expected to operate in an exclusively military domain and accordingly, local civilians were regarded as an obstacle while executing their mission. This changed drastically in the 1990s after international intervention in the internal affairs of a state—either with or without the consent of the government in question—became the norm rather than the exception in peace operations. In this type of military operation civilians were not only ever-present, they were the raison d’être for such intervention forces. Soldiers from different national backgrounds did not equally accept this fundamental point. Often, military attitudes could be traced back to their national historical tradition and the interrelated perception of what a soldier’s proper task was.

While striving to end a civil war, military forces were increasingly confronted with “the security gap” between the military security they were more or less able to create by separating opposing military factions, and their inability or unwillingness to provide public security. This gap was often a source of contention and embarrassment since relief of suffering and protection of civil population was mostly the explicit or implicit goal of an international military presence. It is important to be aware of this fundamental difference between peace operations and counterinsurgency-style operations. Both may involve internal security operations, but in counterinsurgency managing the civil-military interface to protect the civilian population was merely a means to an end—the elimination of the insurgent force.

With counterinsurgency as his main point of reference Frank Kitson warned in 1971 that “[t]he problem of co-ordinating civil and military measures is complicated enough when the campaign is the affair of a single nation, but it becomes vastly more so if allies become involved.” Kitson was thinking mainly along the lines of the military-civil administration-police triad in internal security operations, but he was amongst the first to integrate peacekeeping in his generic concept of low-intensity operations. In the new era of peace operation the playing field would become infinitely more complicated with multilateral governmental organisations such as the UN, NATO, or ad hoc coalitions in charge of the military side of
operations and the UN, national governments and a host of non-governmental humanitarian organisations, responsible for the civilian side of conflict resolution. Moreover, soldiers would mostly find themselves in countries ravaged by civil wars, where local civil administration and police organisations were often non-cooperative, dysfunctional—or as in two of the following case studies even completely absent.

The heady optimism that followed the end of superpower-rivalry would unleash tremendous international political ambitions in “peacemaking” that mostly surpassed the conceptual thinking for military operations. Although under very different circumstances and with dissimilar mandates, soldiers in the post-Cold War world were confronted with many of the challenges that previous generations of soldiers had faced before them in military governance and counterinsurgency. Their flexibility and ingenuity would mostly be tested where military and civil spheres converged.

The name “small wars” can be traced back to the writings of British Colonel Charles Callwell. C.E. Callwell, Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice (London 1903; First ed. 1896).


Thomas Packenham has argued that whereas large scale drives and a system of blockhouse lines were often seen as the key to the defeat of the Boers, it was in fact food denial, partly by large scale internment of the civilian population and scorched earth activities that finally broke the insurgency. Thomas Packenham, The Boer War (London 1979). As referred to in Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 147.

Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 173, 183.

Ibid., 185.

Ibid., 180.


Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 66, 188. See also Thornton, “British Army and Its Minimum Force Philosophy”, 85.

Under martial law a civil government recognizes that a situation is beyond its control and orders the army to take over civil authority. While fighting the Arab revolt in Palestine of 1936-1939, where the British were seriously hampered in solving the conflict since no structural political solution could be found for the Arab-Jewish conflicts, “statuary martial law” was introduced. This left the civilian governing apparatus intact as much as possible, only allowing partial military takeover in areas designated by the civilian High Commissioner. Military courts would try offences against the special emergency regulations and do so quite harshly, but civil courts would continue to handle common crime. In Palestine these extraordinary powers only contained the insurgency until the outbreak of the Second World War, but failed to solve the conflict.


Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 90

Ibid., 182-183.


68
These are the numbers of troops, police and insurgents as provided by Mockaitis. There has been some debate over the number of troops needed to contain or defeat and insurgency, or so-called “tie-down ratio.” Those more critical of the British success have placed the number of security forces needed to tie down and defeat on average 6,000 insurgents, as high as 300,000 by including the total number of members of the local home guard. Others, like Clutterbuck, place the number far lower by emphasizing the number of actual troops used in the actual fight against the insurgents in the jungle. Using those numbers, the ratios were quite even in the beginning of the conflict. He argues that the actual jungle strength of the Army only reached a two-to-one superiority in 1952. In the course of the campaign 4425 security forces, 4668 civilians and 13,509 insurgents were killed. For these numbers see Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 9; Clutterbuck, The Long War, 43. For the number of 300,000 security forces see Jeremy Black, War and the World: Military Power and the Fate of Continents, 1450-2000 (New Haven and London 1998) 274-276.

Clutterbuck, The Long War, 51-52.


Kitson, Low Intensity Operations.

Mockaitis, “From Counterinsurgency to Peace Enforcement”, 41.

Clutterbuck, The Long War, 50-51.

Sir Robert Thompson in Interview with Mocaitis. Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 186n18.

Clutterbuck, The Long War, 40.

In January 1957, when faced with a general strike proclaimed by the insurgent National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algiers the Governor of Algeria, Robert Lacoste, “invested Massu with civil power and ordered him to break the strike at any cost and by any means. Operating with a ruthlessness that included torture of suspects, he and his paras won the so-called Battle of Algiers (Jan-March). Probably the most dramatic episode of the Algerian War, it ended with the paras in command of the city and the casbah and the FLN terrorist cells broken.” From Spencer C. Tucker, Who’s Who in Twentieth Century Warfare (London and New York 2001).

Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 4-5.


Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 145.

John McCuen, The Art of Revolutionary War (Faber and Faber 1966) 72-73. As quoted in Kitson, Low Intensity Operations, 53.


Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 121.

Ibid., 116.

Kitson, Low Intensity Operations, 65.

Clutterbuck, The Long War, 97-100. Rewards were often more than what a Chinese rubber-tapper earned in ten years and therefore sufficient to start a new life with his family elsewhere.


For the British emphasis on the use of regular infantry see Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 145. In his analysis of the use of Dutch special forces in the Netherlands-East-Indies in the 1940s Dutch military historian Jaap de Moor described the tendency of Dutch as well as the French to rely on special forces in the role of “super infantry” for dealing with emergency situations. Especially in Algeria, but also in the Netherlands East-Indies the ever increasing reliance on special forces and the
parachute units to fight the insurgents seriously undermined the confidence and skills of the regular infantry. De Moor, *Westerlings Oorlog*, 30-36.


Paul Mehlsen, “The US Marines’ Combined Action Program in Vietnam: The Formulation of Counterinsurgency Tactics within a Strategic Debate”, *Low Intensity Conflict & Low Enforcement*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer 2000) 73, 78n69. Mehlsen refers to the original. For the idea that protection of the population was the central tenet of the Malayan campaign he also referred to: Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 57. Kitson was also very much aware of this when he fought the Mau Mau in Kenya. See Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*, 110, 112; Clutterbuck, *The Long War*, 199.

Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency*, 139.

Ibid., 12-9, 10.

In the description of what small wars were and how they were supposed to be conducted the drafters of the *Small Wars Manual* allowed for uncertainties in the language used that would have been impossible American military doctrine after the Second World War. In the post-war era every U.S. military doctrine became increasingly descriptive and as a result little room was left for “resourcefulness and ingenuity” called for in 1940 in the *Small Wars Manual*.

In Korea American military forces were caught totally off-guard when the North Koreans invaded in 1950. They were unprepared and largely incapable of conducting all-out combat operations since the army of occupation had adapted itself to constabulary duties that required no heavy units. Korea was important in convincing the U.S. Army never to allow itself to loose combat skills and preparedness for all-out conventional battle by adapting to constabulary duty.


60 It is commonly believed that Robert Thompson in his advisory role to the Vietnamese government and American military concieved the Strategic Hamlet Program that was announced in 1962. Peter Busch proves this not to be the case. However, with Thompson’s own schemes absorbed in the Hamlet program the British advisor believed in its eventual success and informed President Kennedy in early 1963 that the defeat of the Communist insurgents was imminent in Vietnam. By December 1963 his view had dramatically changed and by 1964 he returned to England convinced that the war was lost.


62 Only after 1968, after Westmoreland was replaced by General Creighton W. Abrams the Americans shifted their emphasis “search and destroy” towards “clear and hold”. This entail predominantly small-unit operations emphasizing population security in line the strategy and tactics adovated by some Marine Corps commanders such as Krulak and Krepinevich. Robert Thompson returned to Vietnam in 1969 as President Nixon’s advisor on pacification and, contrary to what he had believed in 1964, again estimated that the South Vietnamese government was in a “winning position”. See Lewis Sorley, A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam (New York 1999) as referred to in Max Boot, Savage Wars, 309-311. For the changing tactics under Abrams see also Spencer C. Tucker, Who’s Who in Twentieth-Century Warfare (London and New York 2001) 2; Peter Bush, “Killing the ‘Vietcong”, 155.

63 Robert M. Cassidy, “Prophets or Preatorians? The Uptonian Paradox and the Powell Corollary”, Parameters, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Autumn 2003) 138, 141. Cassidy concluded: “Since the US military ostensibly worship Clausewitz as the principal prophet of war, it should adhere to the central Clausewitzian dictum that the military is an instrument of policy.”


65 Summers measured and analysed the Vietnam war primarily by Clausewitzian standards. Christopher Bassford, one of the leading experts on Von Clausewitz, calls Summers’ use of Clausewitz’s concepts brilliant, but argues that his estimation of the character of the Vietnam War is “debatable.” Christopher Bassford, Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945 (New York and Oxford 1994) 203; Cassidy, “Prophets or Preatorians?”, 138-140.


67 Between 2000 and 2004 the author asked dozens of Dutch draftees who served as officers and enlisted men between the 1960s and the early 1990s if during their training for war in on the German plain they were ever made aware of the possible presence or interference of civilian population during military operations. The answer was always “no.”


The 1985 version of U.S. Army Field Manual 41-10, Civil Affairs Operations described four categories of missions: support conventional operations; foreign internal defence; unconventional warfare; civil administration. For the purpose of this book foreign internal defence and unconventional warfare are described by the generic term low intensity conflict.


Ibid., 130.


Kitson, Low Intensity Operations, 57