A group of Afghan community leaders, religious clerks (mullahs), and tribal elders meet to render locally binding decisions based on religious and tribal legal traditions. During the years of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, the populace often resented the government's centrally imposed legal institutions because they perceived the justice system as corrupt, inefficient, and foreign to local norms. Due to this widespread mistrust, many Afghans relied on local leaders convening informal courts outside formal institutions to provide justice in a way they viewed as more rapid, honest, and fair. The Taliban readily exploited this administrative failing by establishing a locally rooted justice system. (Photo courtesy of the Afghanistan Ministry of Justice, Public Legal Awareness Unit)

All Power Is Local

Understanding Disciplinary Power to Mobilize the Population

Maj. Robert G. Rose, U.S. Army

While serving as the counterthreat finance planner in Afghanistan in 2018, I found a problem that exemplified the Afghan government's failings. The Afghan National Security Forces operated countless checkpoints that extorted motorists for money. They capriciously set "taxes" that fed corruption networks. The Taliban also operated checkpoints, but theirs had transparent customs duties, and the revenue largely funded operations. The Taliban even provided receipts, which subsequent checkpoints honored. Why was one set of Afghans so corrupt and the other so administratively efficient?

Bernard Fall argued that "when a country is being subverted it is not being outfought; it is being out administered."[1] He recognized that in Vietnam, the communists created a parallel administrative structure that combined violence with political action.[2] In both Vietnam and Afghanistan, insurgencies developed effective administrative systems built upon traditional, grassroots structures. These insurgencies recognized how to mobilize the power of the population through diffuse, local systems that encouraged participation. The combination of local feedback and the need to compete with the government disciplined the insurgencies into creating effective administrative apparatuses. These locally rooted systems explained the efficient Taliban checkpoints.

Meanwhile, the government of Afghanistan, like the Republic of Vietnam previously, was overly centralized. It lacked a mechanism of feedback from the local population to ensure it represented their will. Foreign support permitted failing regimes to survive and insulated them from pressure to reform. With flows of aid and no checks on power, corruption flourished. The governments in Vietnam and Afghanistan, as well as their American backers, viewed power through a myopic, top-down, centralized lens. This lens created a conceptual void in which they could not recognize they were losing the war.

Due to our inability to understand the context of power in Afghanistan and Vietnam, we lost our two longest wars. We cannot willfully ignore the lessons from Afghanistan as we did with Vietnam. To learn how to effectively fight future insurgencies, the Army must reverse Carl von Clausewitz's famous quote and recognize that politics is the continuation of war by other means. The Army can better conceptualize how power flows through administrative apparatuses and interacts with individuals through the idea of disciplinary power.

Understanding Insurgency through the Lens of Disciplinary Power

To prevent another defeat, the American Army needs to conceptualize power differently. It must recognize that power rests within the population. When Napoleon's brother, Jerome, faced an uprising in Westphalia, he sent Napoleon a message saying, "I'm in trouble." Napoleon replied, "By God, brother, use your bayonets." Jerome retorted back: "Brother, you can do anything with bayonets—except sit on them."[3] Short of exterminating the populace or deploying enough soldiers to keep an eye on every member of it, bayonets alone cannot defeat an insurgency. Counterinsurgents must mobilize the population. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau stated, "The stronger is never strong enough to be forever the master unless he transforms his force into right and obedience into duty."[4] When the populace is on the government's side, it serves as a million watchful eyes pushing insurgents to the fringes of society. The insurgents are no longer fish swimming in the water of the population. The population is boiling the fish. Philosopher Michel Foucault called this power *disciplinary power*.

Foucault theorized two historic methods of power over a population: sovereign and disciplinary power. Under sovereign power, the head of state is the unity of power.[5] All eyes are on the sovereign. He rules by spectacle. His power is glorified by pomp and ceremony. He makes public examples of those who transgress his rule. The public watches as a criminal is not just executed but agonizingly drawn and quartered in the public square.

Conventional military power is an outcropping of sovereign power. It presupposes a unity of power in conventional forces and relies on the spectacle of the panoply of arms. It is designed to strike fear into foes, deter them, and when necessary, compel them.

Sovereign power works in conventional war but fails in counterinsurgency. Using the naked power of military arms cannot forever subdue a people. The population can see its shortcomings. When the bomber has passed or the patrol has returned to its outpost, the power is gone. Sovereign power breeds contempt and rebellion.

Disciplinary power rests on the reverse mechanisms. It recognizes that power resides in individuals and

attempts to make them into obedient and productive citizens. Instead of the eyes on the sovereign, they are on the population. Disciplinary power works through the discrete but certain application of force. It is a form of power that extends from the heart of the state to the capillaries of its subjects.

Foucault provided an example of how disciplinary power functioned through the panopticon, a prison

> ❝ The individual is enchained in several networks of independent social hierarchies … networks are layered in different associations according to their age, their sex, their profession, and so on. ❞

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designed by Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century. In contrast to dark, tortuous prisons, the panopticon contained a guard tower at the center with a circle of brightly lit cells surrounding it. At any time, the guard could be watching a prisoner and each prisoner would feel the certainty that any transgression would be observed and swiftly punished. The panopticon was a subtle form of power that replaced brutality with certainty.[6]

To ensure the connection between the guard and inmates, the guard was placed in the center to feel vulnerable and tied to the fate of his charges. The panopticon guard was just as counterinsurgent forces should be. David Galula postured that effective "counterinsurgent forces will be forced to live like the population, in shacks if necessary, and this will help to create common bonds."[7] The panopticon serves as an extreme illustration of how disciplinary power functions and is not replicable across an entire state.

Achieving disciplinary power over a population requires a decentralized system of surveillance. Foucault explains that disciplinary power truly took root in society with the growth of the bourgeoisie, which had an interest in protecting its property and surveying its workers to ensure they were conforming to best practices.[8] As the bourgeoise's power grew, it created a disciplinary apparatus through schools, censuses, clinics, bureaucracies, and the police force that monitored individuals and molded them into productive citizens that upheld the laws of the state. In a feedback loop, these institutions relied on popular support. As Robert Peel, the founder of the London Metropolitan Police in 1829, said, "The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police existence, actions, behavior and the ability of the police to secure and maintain public respect."[9]

With their finger on the pulse of the population, local police have always been essential to counterinsurgency, but so are the other decentralized mechanisms of power. Writing of the parallel hierarchies he witnessed fighting in Indochina, Jacques Hogard explained, "The individual is enchained in several networks of independent social hierarchies … networks are layered in different associations according to their age, their sex, their profession, and so on."[10] Similarly, Galula stated that counterinsurgency's "essence can be summed up in a single sentence: Build (or rebuild) a political machine from the population upward."[11] These theorists both understood the diffuse, local means through which disciplinary power operates and can mobilize the population to survey itself and isolate insurgents. However, counterinsurgents supported by

foreign aid tend toward top-down structures based on sovereign power.

Saigon's Centralized Failure

During the Vietnam War, the Republic of Vietnam created the opportunity for an insurgency by establishing an overly centralized government that was disassociated from the interests of rural villagers.

For centuries, Vietnam had elected local governments. An old proverb said that "the Emperor's writ stops at the bamboo hedge [of the village]."[12] The French maintained stability by simply adding a colonial administrative layer on top of traditional Vietnamese governance. For most of the Vietnamese, "government" had always meant the village council, and the peasant had little experience of any other.[13]

However, after the French departed, President Ngo Dinh Diem of the Republic of Vietnam created a highly centralized administration resting on a theory of sovereign power that viewed the population as subjects rather than participants in the political system.

In June 1956, Diem replaced all provincial, district, and village leaders with centrally appointed officials. These officials were purposefully not native to the areas they administered. This broke traditional feedback between the government and the 80 percent of the population that lived in villages. Villagers could not participate in the political decision-making process and fell under central arbitrariness, disconnected maladministration, and an explosion of corruption.[14] Do Van Doan, the Long An Province chief in 1955, said that "under the Diem regime, the majority of people were employed because of their loyalty to [his] family rather than their ability or willingness to serve the country … As a result, in the army as well as the civil administration, the majority of the leading officials were opportunists, bootlickers, and incompetent, and the effectiveness and initiative of the army and the administration were destroyed."[15]

After Gen. Nguyen Khanh overthrew Diem in a coup in 1964, the situation worsened. He replaced officials and army leaders at all echelons with those loyal to him. Leaders across Vietnam were preoccupied with either proving their loyalty or conducting intrigue against Khanh. The villagers were forgotten, and the desertion rates rose as the army's morale plummeted.

The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) consistently faced desertion and morale issues due to Saigon's policy of nonlocal service. Vietnamese villagers were tied to their communities and had little interest in serving far from home and leaving their families unprotected and their crops unattended.

Furthering the ARVN's problems, Vietnamese officers largely came from the urban elite.[16] The officers' urban orientation created a divide between them and the rural enlisted: "The peasant army is unwilling to follow a 'Saigon cowboy'; the officer, in turn, generally seeks to avoid the hardships of rural and jungle life."[17] The officers were dissociated from the villages that made up most of the Vietnamese population. They were largely content to secure themselves in outposts separated from the population. They did not tie themselves to the fate of the population as the guard in the panopticon or as the communists did.

The Communist Approach

The communists realized that the power in a revolutionary struggle came from the people. It was an understanding of power based on disciplinary power. In 1956, the Central Committee's "Oath of the Revolution in the South" stated, "We must recognize that everything in a country is accomplished by the people."[18] Violence supported the political struggle in developing forces among society's classes. The party particularly focused on understanding peasants' motivations.

For much of the population mobilized to fight for the Viet Cong, nationalism was not the principal motivating factor. Instead, local issues were the motivating factor. In interviews, communist cadre emphasized that it was seldom sufficient to recruit fighters by declaring the need to "liberate the country from American imperialists."[19] It was critical to explain how the individual would be liberated by gaining land (a critical issue to peasants since 2 percent of feudal landowners held title to 45 percent of the rice land), educational opportunities, and positions of power in the local community.[20]

The communists created a village-centered administrative apparatus. As one communist cadre recognized: "If the village level is weak, then I guarantee you, no matter how strong the central government is, it won't be able to do a thing."[21] The village committee was where most decisions were made. It recruited leadership from the rural poor and provided them opportunities to rise through their ranks.

The communists ensured their fighting forces were "a logical extension of the family and village."[22] One communist general recalled, "We still held dear that notion that service in the army should not destroy family and village life. After all, that is what the war was all about."[23] The Viet Cong recruited locally, and it was rare for guerillas to fight outside their district. They knew the terrain, the population, and each other. Unlike the ARVN, they had high cohesion and dedication to their cause.

Initially, the communists had emphasized nonviolent subversion, but in 1959, the Central Committee initiated coordinated violence with a strategy of severing Saigon from the local government. They began an assassination campaign that killed four thousand officials from April 1960 to April 1961.[24] Those who survived fled to protected outposts, and the government lost its connection with the rural population. Showing the collapse in the government's administrative reach, its tax collections dropped from 81.6 percent of the land in 1959 to 20.9 percent in 1964.[25] The Viet Cong could move and act with impunity. Government forces collapsed. The deteriorating situation led to an escalation in American involvement.

American Intervention in Vietnam

Under Robert McNamara, the Department of Defense pursued a policy of graduated pressure grounded in scientific management and Thomas Schelling's bargaining theory. McNamara and his staff believed in efficiently managing warfare like a Ford automobile plant. It was a view of warfare based on sovereign power that led to centralization and a mirror image understanding of the enemy as a unified actor. They believed with enough pressure, the North Vietnamese Central Committee would reach a negotiated settlement.[26] They hungered for data to support centrally made decisions and measure progress. This management theory enabled military leaders to fall back on the conventional operations in which they felt comfortable.

The author consults with Afghan National Security Forces and local leadership during the clearance of Siah Choy, Zhari, Kandahar, Afghanistan, on 27 March 2012. (Photo by Maj. Robert G. Rose, U.S. Army)

American military leaders discounted the enemy's bottom-up revolutionary apparatus and concentrated on main force units. American commanders sought set-piece battles and conducted large-scale clearing operations to attempt to bring the enemy to battle. In its sovereign power mindset, the American military believed that these units and the support from North Vietnam were the critical capabilities of the war rather than the parallel hierarchy

refused to give them weapons.[30] Saigon had no interest in loosening its centralized control.

With American backing, Saigon reinforced a conceptual blind spot to the problem of revolutionary warfare and never developed the communists' appreciation for disciplinary power. In the latter stages of the war, correspondent Robert Shaplen reported, "We still have no philosophy of government, no fundamental sense of direction in

> " We still have no philosophy of government, no fundamental sense of direction in which we are going, and, above all, no system of political organization, which must inevitably begin at the bottom. "

that the communists had built throughout the country. This conventional mentality also applied to advising the ARVN. U.S. advisors assessed the ARVN through a conventional lens of operations and readiness.

America's support had a caustic effect on the ARVN. Writing in 1971, Brian Jenkins observed that the ARVN's reliance on American weaponry "contributed heavily to the South Vietnam army's … alienation from the people. As reliance on foreign technology replaced local support, the army grew indifferent to the people … The indifference is reciprocated."[27]

The ARVN increased its distance from the population as it mimicked America's approach. America's preoccupation with tactical security meant that U.S. forces secluded themselves in outposts, separated from the people. Col. James Herbert, an advisor, remarked that he found it difficult to "demand that the ARVN commanders … deploy their forces so as to protect people and not just be in big mud forts to protect themselves … it is very difficult to get the Vietnamese to do what the U.S. doesn't do."[28] The focus on tactical security led to strategic insecurity.

There were attempts to reconnect with the villages and uproot the communist political apparatus, but America underinvested in them, and Saigon met them with suspicion. The Phoenix Program tried to eradicate the enemy's political apparatus but did not receive adequate support. The Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support Program united civilian and military leaders down to the district level and incorporated village-based regional and popular forces.[29] However, Saigon did not trust these militias and often

which we are going, and, above all, no system of political organization, which must inevitably begin at the bottom."[31] With overwhelming American aid, Saigon could maintain a corrupt and failing system. Once America withdrew the aid, the contradictions in the society became fully apparent and the state crumbled. Even after so much American investment, most ARVN soldiers, feeling no attachment to the government, simply melted away.

The Centralized Government of Afghanistan

Even though Afghanistan, like Vietnam, has a tradition of local rule and lacked a national political culture, the international community supported the creation of an incredibly centralized government. It was a government based on sovereign power. Donors led by the United States saw a centralized government as the most efficient means to funnel aid, modernize Afghanistan, and provide stability.[32]

Under the 2004 constitution, the president could largely ignore parliament and appointed provincial and district governors. While the constitution created elected provincial and district councils, these were merely consultative committees with no authority. Ministries in Kabul appointed district chiefs of police, education, etc., which created a dysfunctional, stovepiped system in which local officials were neither accountable to the people nor the unified authority of a governor.

National elections provided the one opportunity for the people of Afghanistan to have a voice, but they did

not bring a government that represented the people's will. The people of Afghanistan did not have a developed sense of national community that would have allowed meaningful political discourse during elections. President Hamid Karzai deliberately muffled the development of public discourse by opposing political parties, which could have developed national platforms and participatory political machinery.

The Afghan people lost their faith in democracy after two decades of increasingly fraudulent and contested elections. In 2019, they displayed their lack of trust in their electoral process when President Ashraf Ghani won with just 923,592 votes out of a population of over thirty million.[33] Each of the last three presidential elections produced contested results because of the country's winner-take-all system. With all power vested in the presidency, losers and their followers had no recourse to alternate means of power and were locked out of access to aid revenue. They could not receive the consolation prize of winning provincial or district elections. Imagine how explosive American politics would be if Donald Trump appointed the mayor of San Francisco or if Joe Biden chose the governor of Texas.

This system froze out those without ties to the Karzai or Ghani administrations. The Bonn Accords also prevented the Taliban from entering government. A decentralized system of government that allowed political parties might have seen the emergence of a peaceful Taliban political party, content to win governorships in Pashtun provinces. The political system precluded this possibility. For those shut out, the only option was conflict.

The Taliban's Approach

The government's corruption and lack of connection with the rural population provided an opportunity for a Taliban reemergence. The pressure on the movement disciplined the Taliban into an effective insurgency that recognized that it must base its power on the population to succeed. At the height of the counterinsurgency surge in 2011, the Taliban was learning from its mistakes and had established a parallel administrative apparatus. Taliban fighters credited Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour with having "totally changed our thinking: about governing, about peace, about everything."[34]

Mansour transformed the insurgency into a shadow state, restructured its institutions to create a parallel administration, created a commission to investigate Taliban-caused civilian casualties, and brought in Tajik and Uzbek leaders to broaden their base. He created a decentralized hierarchy reaching down to villages and field commanders. This autonomy allowed the Taliban to broaden to accommodate different views and keep diverse ethnic and tribal groups within the movement with minimal open dissent.

Through this decentralized structure, Taliban could use their initiative to exploit the government's failings. A Taliban leader explain how the lack of an effective judicial system in the villages gave an opening for Taliban administration: "The government was very corrupt, so justice was the first need. Even people in government-controlled areas were referring to us. These were not people who wanted the Taliban, you see, but they wanted justice. We started there because it was the necessity at the time."[35] Taliban shadow district governors would run courts for villagers' disputes that provided responsive justice nested in the norms of the local community.

The Taliban would gradually impose their rules, recruit the population into a locally based civil service, and co-opt government-financed institutions. The Taliban recognized that there was no need to attack state structures when they could capture them and use them to benefit their own administrative control. Using targeted violence to isolate the government's security apparatus to district centers, the Taliban subverted the lower echelons of the state.

By 2018, the Taliban had established a disciplinary power apparatus across much of the countryside. As one study pointed out, "Most provincial or district-level government health or education officials interviewed said they were in direct contact with their Taliban counterparts, and some have even signed formal memoranda of understanding with the Taliban, outlining the terms of their cooperation."[36] The Taliban would monitor clinics, ensure staff kept their work hours, and inspect medical supplies. In the government's chronically mismanaged schools, the Taliban vetted government teachers, observed curriculum compliance, and ensured attendance. It regulated utilities and communications, collecting the bills from the state electricity company and controlling around a quarter of the country's mobile phone coverage.[37] Its tax system extended into the lives of nearly the entire rural population through the traditional

Afghan Local Police members from Siah Choy pose for a photo on 27 March 2012 in Siah Choy, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan. The police had uprooted the Taliban from the village and prevented their influence on the population. (Photo by Maj. Robert G. Rose, U.S. Army)

Islamic zakat that taxed a percentage of crops during harvest season. The Taliban ran this administrative system by recruiting locally to ensure grassroots participation and acceptance of its decision-making.

Disciplinary Power in Zhari

For a period during the surge from 2010 to 2012, America attempted a counterinsurgency strategy that showed acknowledgment of the importance of local power structures. During this period, I participated in operations in Zhari District, Kandahar, which displayed how counterinsurgents could use disciplinary power.

Zhari is a desert that was made into verdant farmland by the canals of the Arghandab River. The population was spread between compounds in village clusters. Their major crop was grapes that grew in century-old "grape rows," which were six- to ten-foot-deep parallel trenches in which grapevines were cultivated. The Taliban made this

restricted terrain nearly impassible by seeding the farmland with countless improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These IEDs isolated the population from the counterinsurgents.

Zhari was the birthplace of the Taliban, and after the Taliban's resurgence, it had severed Zhari from government control. The Canadians had pushed back into Zhari in 2006 and had regained control of Highway 1. 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, then expanded control south toward the river. I served with 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, falling under 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division in 2011 and 2012.

Our brigade had a unique advantage. We were the only conventional unit allowed to recruit Afghan Local Police (ALP). Created in 2010, ALP were designed to protect their own villages and were like the Afghan concept of *Arabki*. Everywhere else, Special Forces ran the program. To some, including Karzai, ALP were a

controversial militia that could return Afghanistan to warlordism. The suspicion reflected the distrust for the decentralized empowerment of rural Afghans at the heart of Kabul's problems. The ALP were exactly the locally based force required to cut the Taliban from the villages. It was essential to recruit and vet them through village shuras using traditional Afghan grassroots democracy, which provided meaningful authority

reestablish the ALP station in the center of town. This second time, we held the station. With growing confidence, the ALP patrolled their village and partnered with the ANA. With their lifelong knowledge of Siah Choy, the ALP rooted out the Taliban and its shadow administration.

A few months later, the United States began to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and by the end of 2012, reduced forces in Zhari. The Taliban attempted

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to village leadership although the shuras had no legal standing in the government.

During our battalion's decisive operation in the Taliban-controlled village of Siah Choy, we planned the operation to empower local government and tie it to the district government. We threw away operational security and brought in local leaders, the district police chief, and the Afghan National Army (ANA) leadership to plan the operation and select an ideal site for the ALP with a partnered force in the center of Siah Choy.

After destroying dozens of IEDs and encountering sporadic Taliban ambushes, we pushed into the town. I walked side-by-side with Haji Ghulam, the village leader, as we entered the village. After clearing the village, we organized a shura and gathered the town's elders for them to vote on leadership.

We empowered the shura to select ALP members to protect their village and to establish participation in a system of disciplinary power to prevent the Taliban from returning. An American and ANA platoon would partner in the ALP station as they received training and developed confidence. Immediately after the mission, the American company commander withdrew the platoon to a large outpost outside Siah Choy, which could not surveil the population. He was unwilling to act as the guard in the panopticon and tie up his fate with the villagers.

Due to Taliban intimidation, the ALP withdrew, and we had to conduct another clearance of the village and

to move back in, but the empowered local leaders had an "awakening" that kept the birthplace of the Taliban movement largely free from its control. When I was back in Afghanistan in 2018, the Afghan Assessment Group still rated it as government controlled.

Zhari succeeded despite government policy. The local shuras that vetted ALP did not have any authority or budget from the central government. The ALP worked because of our focus on creating a village-based form of government and security that Kabul did not support. Elsewhere, since there was no formalized local control, warlords captured the ALP program or it fell into corruption.[38] If it had been supported by a decentralized government apparatus, the ALP would have represented an ideal form of disciplinary power to isolate the Taliban from the population. It was a better concept of power than all the others tried over twenty years.

Failed Alternative Strategies in Afghanistan

After 2012, foreign forces began transitioning to an advisory role. Advising reinforced the centralization of Afghan security forces. International forces moved from advising small units to only interacting with battalions, brigades, and corps. During the last few years of the war, ensconced in forward operating bases, few foreign troops ever met an Afghan villager. Limited to interactions at higher echelons, advisors naturally developed a myopic focus on higher-level issues. They

developed capabilities for battalion-and-above clearance operations and did not promote the decentralized security apparatus that the country needed.

Even if advisors approached the Afghan National Security Forces with the right strategy, advisors lacked a forcing function to reform Afghan forces. Advising suffers from the principal-agent problem, in which the principal's (the advisor) and the agent's (the host nation) interests do not align. Without any authority over host-nation forces, advisors could not force them to change their approach to one aligned with the population. Afghan forces were neither accountable to the advisors nor to the population. In the centralized Afghan system, officers' interests were to show loyalty and provide spoils to their superiors.

While advising largely failed, an arguable success was Afghan Special Operation Forces (ANSOF). Though competent, ANSOF represented the pitfalls of centralization. ANSOF stripped talented individuals from the rest of the Afghan security services. Field Marshal William Slim warned of the caustic effects of relying on special operation forces saying that they "lower the quality of the rest of the Army ... Armies do not win wars by means of a few bodies of super-soldiers but by the average quality of their standard units."[39]

Instead of developing a locally based security apparatus, the best members of the security services were conducting raids. As Galula said, "Thus is not to say that there is no place in counterinsurgency warfare for small commando-type operations. They cannot, however, represent the main form of the counterinsurgent's warfare."[40] Galula further stated that "static units are obviously those that know best the local situation … It follows that when a mobile unit is sent to operate temporarily in an era, it must come under the territorial command."[41] Throughout the war, we ignored Galula's advice. Special operations fell under their own chain of command that ignored the local considerations of conventional, battlespace-owning units. Rather than locally focused operations dominating American strategy, by the end of the war, raids became the main effort.

Raids dovetailed with airstrikes, which were the ultimate representation of sovereign power. Airstrikes display the weakness of a counterinsurgent that is detached from the population and must rely on a technological solution. They breed contempt in the population. While targeting was extremely selective through much of the war, soaking targets from twenty thousand feet could not prevent travesties such as America's strike that closed the war by killing an aid worker and his family.[42]

Just as with McNamara's approach, there was a hope that these raids and airstrikes would bring the Taliban to a negotiated settlement. Negotiations were a mirage that represented another misbelief in sovereign power. The idea was with enough pressure on the Taliban's higher leadership, America could coerce them to a negotiated settlement. The approach did not recognize the Taliban's decentralized apparatus and take advantage of fractures in the Taliban to break off groups. The negotiators wanted a unitary Taliban to centrally agree to peace. The Taliban, like North Vietnam before, understood that momentum was on its side and was only interested in seeking short-term advantages from negotiations. Even if the momentum had shifted, the winner-take-all Afghan state did not allow for meaningful Taliban participation in politics. Successful negotiations such as with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) or Maoists in Nepal work by allowing insurgent participation in local government and policies.[43]

During the period of negotiations, I asked the J-2 (Intelligence Directorate), the Afghan Assessment Group, and the State Department if they knew the government's district tax collection rates. None of them collected that data. It was one of the basic metrics that Fall used to show the collapse of government control in Indochina. Our failure to recognize the extent of the Taliban's administrative control would not have been so embarrassing if the same thing had not happened in Vietnam.

Do Not Lobotomize the Lessons of Counterinsurgency

The U.S. Army has lost its two longest wars and seems desperate to learn nothing from them. Just as after Vietnam, the Army seeks comfort in the simple arithmetic of large-scale combat operations. Counterinsurgency is now the broader "stability operations," which is something handwaved in consolidation areas during training. Lessons from our recent experiences are quickly erased. New officers do not learn about counterinsurgency. At the Command and General Staff College, it is largely ignored. By taking this path, the Army is abdicating its responsibility to

provide options for our government in dealing with the dominant form of conflict since World War II.

America does not have another institution that can conduct counterinsurgency. We cannot rely on the State Department to fully understand the politics of a country. Foreign service officers are too few and are centrally oriented in capitals writing cables to Foggy Bottom. The Army is the only organization with the manpower to be at the local level and have a pulse on a population.

There is another route. In the 1950s, the Portuguese army dedicated itself to understanding counterinsurgency. It studied French and British experiences and developed a doctrine that it inculcated into the lowest levels of its army. With a fraction of the manpower of the United States, a minuscule budget, and in defense of an indefensible empire, it waged three effective counterinsurgency campaigns simultaneously in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau.[44]

There is no secret to success in counterinsurgency. In the 1890s, the commander of France's counterinsurgency campaign in Madagascar, Gen. Joseph Gallieni, recognized that the key was to "combine political action to military action" and "enter into intimate contact with the populations … to attach them through persuasion to the new institutions."[45] He understood the importance of decentralized politics in an insurgency. Gallieni showed that officers can excel both in counterinsurgency and conventional warfare. In the First World War, he played a critical role in saving Paris at the Battle of the Marne.

Politics Is the Continuation of War with Other Means

Fall worried that North Vietnam's Gen. Vo Nguyn Giáp "may well be among the new breed of revolutionary warfare generals for who the West may find it difficult to produce a worthy match in the foreseeable future … it is almost impossible within our military system to develop men with both brilliant tactical abilities and wide-ranging political training."[46] Vietnam and Afghanistan showed how American leaders failed to grasp the linkage between politics and power in an insurgency. If we learn the lessons of these wars, we could produce officers like Giáp and Gallieni.

To understand counterinsurgency, officers must comprehend the politics of a society. They must learn how power interacts with the population at the local level. Foucault's disciplinary power provides a lens to conceptualize how power flows through governing apparatuses to the population. During an insurgency, the insurgents have exploited a political opening and are outcompeting the government's administrative apparatus. Counterinsurgents must identify mechanisms to address administrative failings but also recognize when their presence is insulating a host nation from pressure to reform. Understanding political context provides the means to mobilize the population and boil the water that the insurgents swim in. The Army neglected this lesson from Vietnam. We must not fail to learn from our defeat in Afghanistan. ■

Notes

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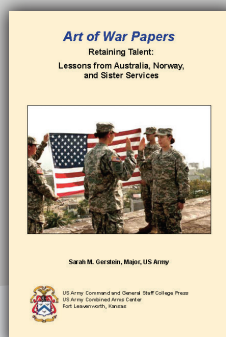21. Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 42.

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