REDEFINING INSURGENCY

Lieutenant Colonel Chris North, U.S. Army, Retired

"OH, NO! Not another suggestion on how to define insurgency! Now we'll have to change all our counterinsurgency doctrine as well!"

Yes and no. Yes, "insurgency" needs a better definition to fit circumstances today. We say the word, but it no longer applies in most areas. But, no, "counterinsurgency" and counterinsurgency doctrine may not require change—if we get the "insurgency" definition right.

The current Joint Publication (JP) 1-02 definition of insurgency as "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict" is too narrow in scope to apply to current situations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet, we continue to label those conflicts as insurgencies, even though the environments are more complex than what this simple definition involves.

The current JP definition worked well in the late 20th century, when anti-colonial and communist movements were competing with sitting governments for political power. Today, however, it is hard to identify such an organized movement; there are not only movements, but extremists, tribes, gangs, militias, warlords, and combinations of these. These groups are certainly not "an organized movement." They have different motivations and objectives. Some are networked with only loose objectives and mission-type orders to enhance their survival. Most are divided and factionalized by area, composition, or goals. Strike one against the current definition of insurgency. It is not relevant to the enemies we face today.

Many of these enemies do not currently seek the overthrow of a constituted government. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, weak government control is useful and perhaps essential for many of these "enemies of the state" to survive and operate. In some cases, the enemies are members of government political parties and alliances. In most cases, they have infiltrated government security forces. In other cases, these enemies do not seek to replace the constituted government. Merely destroying it or rendering it ineffective will serve their purpose. Most enemy actors do not have a countrywide power base. Their purpose may be to promote civil war, anarchy, and a resulting division of the spoils. Strike two against the current definition.

Clearly, there remains a strong case for better defining current conflicts. We should borrow from Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3's definition of irregular warfare as "a violent struggle among state and nonstate actors for legitimacy and/or influence over the relevant populations."

The Army should make this the new definition of insurgency. It is a great description of current conflicts and broad enough to encompass aspects of the current conflict that the current JP definition of insurgency does not.

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The Combined Arms Center is now drafting the "Joint Counterinsurgency Manual." A great improvement would be to redefine "insurgency" using the U.S. Air Force definition of "irregular warfare." Another option is to keep the definition of insurgency the same but slightly modify the definition of "counterinsurgency" to read "military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken [by a government] *to combat irregular warfare and promote stability operations*."

Either way, two major benefits would accrue. We would have a better, more inclusive definition of current and relevant conflicts, and we would not have to change counterinsurgency doctrine.

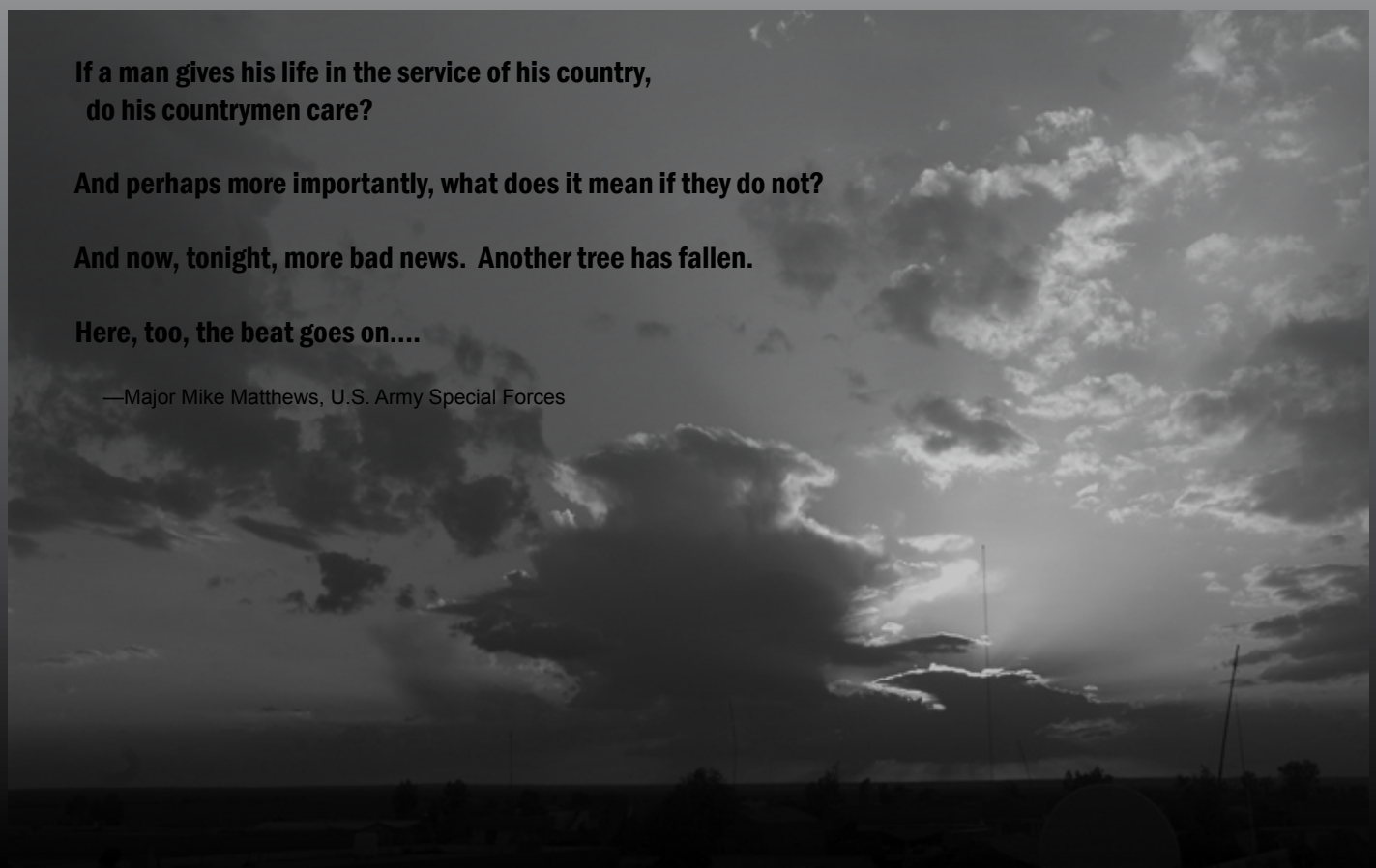
Apologies to Pogo, but we have met the "insurgency"—and it is us. We propose to overthrow the constituted definition of "insurgency" using common sense and telling it like it is. Let's pitch that third strike and start a new inning for better defining conflict in this decade. ***MR***

A Question of Trees

If a tree in the forest falls,
do the other trees in the forest care?

30 JUN 07
117 degrees. Memorial ceremony for a fallen soldier.
Bagpipes. Taps. Fold the Flag. Final salute. I hope you think of him, and his wife and child, tonight.

And back in the States? Paris Hilton.
The beat goes on....



If a man gives his life in the service of his country,
do his countrymen care?

And perhaps more importantly, what does it mean if they do not?

And now, tonight, more bad news. Another tree has fallen.

Here, too, the beat goes on....

—Major Mike Matthews, U.S. Army Special Forces