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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win, by Jeffrey Record. *Washington, DC: Potomac Books*, 2007. Pp. xii +180, index. \$24.95 (cloth). ISBN 1-597-97090-5.

United States post-invasion struggles with the Iraqi insurgency have prompted increased focus on insurgent conflicts from practitioners and academics alike. This renewed interest has produced a number of studies focusing on a topic that has largely been neglected since the end of the Vietnam War. In this well-researched account, Jeffrey Record, a professor at the US Air Force Air War College, sheds additional light on one of the most fundamental questions for great powers in the international system today: how is it that (and under what circumstances) the militarily weak have been able to prevail over the strong in insurgent conflicts?

Record is quick to point out that more often than not, the militarily strong will easily defeat the weak. However, notable exceptions, such as the American War of Independence, Chinese Communist Revolution, French-Indochina War, Vietnam War, and the Soviet-Afghan War, compel him to offer understanding of this phenomenon by arguing that weak-side victories stem from the presence or absence of several critical variables: political will, military strategy and structural constraints.

To date, three seminal works in the field of asymmetric conflict – Mack's pioneering 1975 assessment, as well as more recent offerings from Arreguin-Toft and Merom – have relied on the 'explanatory power' of a single variable from this list. For Record, each of the variables is important, but a solitary variable is incapable of explaining the outcome of weak-side insurgent victories. Instead, a mixture of these variables more accurately explains the realities of insurgent victories. More importantly, Record goes on to note that each of these three authors has ignored or downplayed a crucial variable that has played an important role in each of the strong-side defeats mentioned above: external assistance.

In each of the author's case studies, external assistance played a crucial role in producing weak-side victory. This support, intentional or unintentional, can come in the many forms, though most important is military support. As Record notes, 'A rebellion must have arms'. Though external support would not have been sufficient by itself to

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foster improbable victory, a more accurate understanding of why weaker states have been able to triumph requires a comprehensive assessment of all four of these variables discussed above.

After establishing the importance of each variable, Record draws upon this comprehensive framework to advance some tentative conclusions concerning the Iraqi insurgency, particularly as it compares to the Vietnam War. Though similar in some ways, it is the differences, which at times has been curiously absent from some of the other Iraq-Vietnam comparative discussions, that are salient.

Record moves beyond his framework and Iraq to discuss why the United States has had particular trouble in dealing with a 'materially weaker irregular foe with superior will and strategy'. Given its unique historical, cultural and ideological influences, America has been hamstrung by its tendency to separate war and politics. A general aversion to counter-insurgency has resulted, given the need to subordinate military to political goals. Instead, the United States has focused on technology-driven tactical victories, while trying to keep casualties down through the use of overwhelming firepower. This has led historically to a reliance on ineffective practices such as 'search and destroy'. American inability to grasp the importance of political developments, in combination with counterproductive use of force, has often spelled defeat.

Record concludes by focusing on seven principles that he deems critical to understanding asymmetric conflicts. As he and others aptly point out, asymmetric warfare will likely become the primary means for 'resolving violent disputes within and among states'. Therefore, the United States will continue to face asymmetric challenges. Given this reality, power practitioners and policy makers would be remiss if they did not take the small wars lessons of this book to heart.

Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win is a succinct, well written and valuable contribution to the existing body of literature dealing with insurgencies. Record does a fine job of working with the available evidence while adding to our understanding of the Iraq-Vietnam debate, despite the difficulties inherent to dealing with this moving target.

RYAN CARR © 2007
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Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence, by Jeremy Weinstein. *New York: Cambridge University Press*, 2007. Pp. 428, index. \$26.99 (cloth). ISBN 0-521-67797-1.

Inside Rebellion by Jeremy Weinstein is a model of social research. Not only are the topic and approach new and intriguing, the logic of the

theoretical analysis is tight and compelling, and the methodological orientation captures what is best about both qualitative and quantitative work. Using an organisational economics framework, Weinstein weaves a persuasive argument that should be of interest to a wide variety of readers.

Weinstein breaks away from debates concerning the causes and duration of civil war, opting to focus on the use of violence against civilians by insurgent movements. Why, he asks, do some large insurgent organisations target civilians with terror and barbarism, while others do not? In developing an explanation, the book draws on insights from the literatures concerned with greed and grievance, resource scarcity and abundance, and ethnic or identity conflict.

The crux of Weinstein's argument is that the initial resource endowments available to rebel organisations constrain and enable particular types of violent behaviour on the part of rebels. According to the argument, factors that raise and lower barriers to organisation, initial resource endowments in particular, shape the type of individual who will join an organisation. Since, in order to join, rational individuals require that the benefits of membership in an organisation outweigh the costs, the organisation must provide selective incentives to induce participation.

Weinstein points out that generating such inducements is straightforward for resource-rich organisations (those with economic endowments). Whether they come from 'lootable' natural resources or an external patron, economic endowments allow an organisation to compensate joiners. Because everyone who joins is compensated, both opportunistic and committed individuals will populate the organisation's membership. This creates a problem.

For those committed to the ideological goals of the organisation, bearing costs and taking risks to advance the organisation's position will come naturally. For those whose motivation is more pecuniary, however, there is an incentive to shirk.¹ In situations where it is difficult to monitor the inputs of any individual, opportunistic joiners will free-ride on the efforts of others.

Over time, the committed participants become disillusioned and leave the movement. The result is an increasingly opportunistic organisation. In the absence of the norms and social ties that characterise 'activist' rebellion groups, opportunistic groups are more likely to engage in civilian brutalisation.

In contrast, according to Weinstein, activist rebellions evolve in resource-poor regions and must rely on social rather than economic endowments. With few initial endowments, greater barriers to organisation exist and organisations are faced with the prospect of relying on long-term inducements to attract members. Activist organisations overcome the deficit of short-term incentives through appeals to future improvements in collective well-being, material benefits to be earned in the future and psychological benefits associated with group belonging.

Nevertheless, a commitment problem exists for rebel leaders who, while promising these benefits in the present, may renege on providing them in the future. By developing norms of reciprocity, establishing social and group ties and building a shared revolutionary doctrine, activist groups can overcome the commitment problem. An immediate consequence of this mobilisation strategy is that the organisation develops mechanisms that monitor and restrain the actions of members. These restraints are further reflected in the more pro-social orientation of the rebels towards the population.

Inside Rebellion's empirical analysis is a major strength of this study. The core of the analysis focuses on four case studies based largely on ethnographic analysis. These include the National Resistance Army (NRA) in Uganda, RENAMO in Mozambique and *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru. The final subject is a regional sub-case within Peru. Weinstein treats the Huallaga Valley regional committee of *Sendero Luminoso* as a case distinct from the central committee due to regional variation on both the central independent and dependent variables in the theory, offering an opportunity for within-case analysis. He uses the cases to evaluate numerous observable implications drawn from his theory.

The theoretical richness of the approach allows Weinstein to extract implications across a number of dimensions – recruitment, control, governance, violence and resilience – strengthening the overall appeal of the analysis. The discussion and analysis are textured and historically sensitive – and successfully evaluate the theory's implications without falling into a strictly narrative account of the cases. While it is possible to quibble with the interpretation of the evidence in some cases, and to enquire into the choice of examining the Huallaga Valley committee (a confirming case) and not the Lord's Resistance Army (a possible disconfirming case), the overall strength of the analysis is not jeopardised.

Weinstein's study is one of the few that truly puts the complementarities of qualitative and quantitative research into practice. In addition to the case analyses, he gathers micro-level events data on the occurrence of violence over the duration of his four cases. Micro-level data provide a more appropriate test of the theory, because of the data trace fluctuations in levels of violence over time, different types of violence committed by rebels against civilians and the location of violence within the country. These factors allow Weinstein to conduct a fine-grained statistical analysis that largely corroborates his theory. While focusing on micro data allows Weinstein to avoid many of the aggregation problems associated with using proxy measures in cross-national data, he nevertheless provides a simple cross-national analysis to supplement his micro approach.

The major theoretical shortcomings of the book lie in the structural nature of the theory, which squeezes out any room for agency, and the absence of an interaction framework for the analysis. While neither

concern is devastating in any way, their absence does weaken the overall picture. With respect to the latter, the strategies, actions and strength of the state deserve more consideration than they are given here. To explain violence against civilians with only a focus on rebel organisations is problematic. If the organisational economics approach adopted here sees fit to treat rebels as purposeful, strategic actors attempting to overcome organisational problems, including control, governance and resilience, why not treat them as strategic actors vis-à-vis the state? Surely the strategic interactions of the state and rebels play some part in explaining violence against civilians.

This is a small quibble. This is an exceptionally good study, one that will become essential reading in the field.

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NOTE

1. Armen A. Alchian and Harold Demsetz, Production, Information Costs, and Economic Organization. *American Economic Review* 62, no. 5 (1972) pp. 777–95; Terry M. Moe, The New Economics of Organization. *American Journal of Political Science* 28, no. 4 (1984) pp. 739–77.

Shining Path: Guerrilla War in Peru's Northern Highlands, 1980-1997, by Lewis Taylor. *Liverpool: Liverpool University Press* (Latin American New Series 6), 2006. Pp. 232, index. \$29.99. ISBN 13-978-1-86431-004-1.

The improbable trajectory of the radical Maoist insurgent movement in Peru in the 1980s and early 1990s captured the world's attention for a variety of reasons. The Communist Party of Peru – Shining Path (*Partido Comunista del Perú – Sendero Luminoso*, PCP-SL) began its self-titled 'people's war' at the very moment Peru was returning to democracy, a most inauspicious time from the perspective of mainstream revolutionary theory. Furthermore, it offered its revolutionary option in the context of the most open election in Peruvian history, with universal suffrage and the participation of all other Marxist parties in the electoral process. And it began with fewer than 200 armed cadres in Ayacucho, one of the most rural, indigenous and isolated departments (states) in the country, with a leadership of professors and students from the local university lacking even a single member of indigenous or peasant origin.

Yet over the course of the decade, Shining Path voluntarism and government error succeeded in creating the conditions favouring

revolution that had not existed at the outset of the people's war. By the early 1990s, the Peruvian government was on its knees, political violence had become generalised and most analysts were projecting the likelihood of insurgent victory in a matter of months. Nevertheless, in spite of almost 70,000 deaths, close to a million internal refugees, the emigration of more than a million Peruvians and some \$ 25 billion in damage to the country's infrastructure, the government was able to regroup and turn the tables on Shining Path. By the mid-1990s, the guerrillas were a spent force and no longer posed a threat to the Peruvian state.

Various authors have analysed how it was that the PCP-SL could expand so dramatically and why it was defeated. Lewis Taylor, lecturer at the University of Liverpool and a keen observer of Peru since the 1970s, provides us with a fresh perspective on Shining Path by drawing on his long-standing ties to local actors in the northern *sierra* department (state) of Cajamarca and field work focusing on two administrative districts (towns) there, Cajabamba and Huamachuco, during three research trips between 1997 and 2000.

Even though this part of Peru was not a major theatre of operations between 1980 and 1995 (experiencing only about one per cent of the deaths attributed to the political violence, compared with over 50 per cent in Ayacucho), Taylor provides the reader with a fine-grained description of PCP-SL's organisation, member composition and activities there. He also places them very effectively within the larger historical and ethnographic context of the region, especially the revolutionary ferment of the late 1920s and 1930s, relatively high levels of local peasant organising, and the long-standing identification of more prosperous peasants with the APRA (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance or *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*) political party. Drawing selectively from studies of Shining Path activities in the more conflictive departments of Huancayo (Nelson Manrique), Ayacucho (Jose Coronel and Ponciano del Pino) and Apurímac (Robert Berg), the author expands the case study focus with a comparative analysis of similarities and differences.

Beyond describing how it was that Shining Path developed into such a revolutionary force in Peru, Taylor is also concerned with placing the movement into a theoretical context. In his summary review of the literature on theories of revolution, he finds the most satisfying explanation in the peasant subsistence approach pioneered by James C. Scott and utilised for Peru by Cynthia McClintock. He is persuaded that a declining economic capacity in the Peruvian *sierra*, in combination with the presence of a carefully nurtured, well organised and ideologically coherent and locally appropriate Maoist alternative, attracted certain sectors of desperate peasants (varying with local conditions and context) to make insurgency possible in the highlands

and enable its expansion. Taylor also recognises, as have others, that multiple government mistakes, especially the repressiveness of the security forces, along with an extended economic crisis, contributed to the PCP-SL's ability to generalise its people's war across most of the country by the early 1990s. He is less persuaded by the more macro-level structural explanation for insurgency that emphasises the role of authoritarian politics in facilitating its emergence.

When Taylor turns to explaining Shining Path's failure after being on the brink of success, he finds in his case study a failure of PCP-SL cadres to follow the fundamental Maoist principle of treating local peasants respectfully and to such internal problems as poorly trained mid-level cadres. He also notes, usually quite briefly, such other factors in the revolutionary organisation's collapse as: 'more robust counterinsurgency measures' (p.169), including military courts and rapid trials; security service upgrading leading to the capture of Shining Path's leader, Abimael Guzmán Renoso; the civil defence committees or *rondas campesinas*; and the Repentance Law.

Surprisingly, given the peasant subsistence crisis explanation advanced, there is no mention of the multiple micro-development organisations established in the early 1990s by the Alberto Fujimori government (1990–2000) that were explicitly focused on the country's poorest districts, mostly rural. Between 1993 and 1998, these small government entities directly channelled substantial resources to the most needy through thousands of small projects that beneficiaries selected and administered, contributing to a 50 per cent reduction in extreme poverty (from 31 per cent to 15 per cent) before the organisations were politicised in the late 1990s.

While a contribution to the large literature on Shining Path, especially in its description of local organisation in two districts and its reflections on theories of revolution, Taylor's study falls short of being a comprehensive treatment of Peru's revolutionary experience in the 1980s and 1990s. And his explanation for why the PCP-SL failed does not sufficiently address the remarkable degree to which the government was able to overcome its multiple counter-insurgency failures in the 1980s to respond with such surprising effectiveness in the early 1990s. The author has added to our knowledge and understanding of Shining Path and revolutionary theory.. Yet *Shining Path: Guerrilla War in Peru's Northern Highlands*, though useful and well written, does not provide the reader with a definitive analysis of Peru's revolutionary experience.

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Roughneck Nine-One, by Frank Antenori and Hans Halberstadt. *New York: St. Martin's Press*, 2006. Pp. 265, index, \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-312-35332-2.

Ambush Alley: The Most Extraordinary Battle of the Iraq War, by Tim Pritchard. *New York: Ballentine Books*, 2005. Pp. 294, index, \$25.95 (cloth), ISBN 0-89141-880-6.

Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda, by Sean Naylor. *New York: Berkley Books*, 2005. Pp. 425, index, \$25.95 (cloth), ISBN 0-425-196097.

Thunder Run: The Armored Strike to Capture Baghdad, by David Zucchini. *New York: Atlantic Monthly Press*, 2004. Pp. 352, \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 0-871113-911-1.

Several accounts have already been published about US military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The quality has varied, but there are some gems among them. This review will look at four of the best accounts at the operational-tactical level, one from Afghanistan and three from the invasion of Iraq. While these are not the only quality accounts at this level – Bing West's *The March Up*, about the US Marine Corps advance to Baghdad, and *No True Glory*, about the battles for Fallujah, come to mind – the accounts being reviewed have common themes running through them. Some of them have already been reviewed individually in other publications but not in comparison with each other.

All of these books tell tales of the extraordinary initiative, aggressiveness, valour and resource utilisation displayed by US fighting forces in Washington's most recent conflicts. There is a consistency throughout the accounts despite the diversity of the author's backgrounds. One (the first) was written by a former Special Forces NCO, the other three by journalists from *Army Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and the BBC respectively. The books are highly readable. All tell the story of how American forces made deep, bold strikes into enemy territory, faced superior enemy forces and triumphed.

However, three of the four books are quite sobering, because the victories obtained almost did not happen. Furthermore, the reasons for the near failures were similar in each case. Most disturbing, assumptions about the enemy were either incomplete, incorrect or dismissive. The enemy reacted in completely unexpected ways and managed to draw US forces into well planned kill zones or counter-attacks.

Some of this is understandable. *Not a Good Day to Die* goes into great depth about the progression of operations in Afghanistan, the

patterns of enemy behaviour and the previous engagement at Tora Bora. All of this combined to lead the US to make assumptions about the enemy that then proved to be incorrect. In *Ambush Alley* and *Roughneck Nine-One*, the accounts reveal that similar assumptions were made, but these were less forgivable, because they were based on behaviour from Operation Desert Storm, 12 years before.

A cliché that is worth repeating says that we always prepare to fight the last war, or in the case of Operation Anaconda, the last battle. This is a dangerous practice, as our enemies are much smarter than we think they are and, like us, they do after-action reviews and lessons-learned assessments. They adapt and develop new and more dangerous ways to confront us. Three of the four books demonstrate this.

In *Not a Good Day to Die*, the Americans assumed their opponents were trying only to escape and ignored information that they were setting up a kill zone covered by heavy weapons in fortified positions. Because of this, American troops landed in the middle of this prepared kill zone. In *Ambush Alley*, when the Marines met little resistance, they drove into the middle of the city and took the bridges, not realising that the enemy deliberately let them do so in order to surround, isolate and annihilate them. The problem was not so much with the bold drive on the bridges. More egregious was the failure to have forces on hand to reinforce or relieve them in a timely manner. In *Roughneck Nine-One*, assumptions about the enemy's lack of will to fight caused lightly equipped Special Forces A-teams to expose themselves without adequate support to a well executed, armoured counter-attack.

Thunder Run is the exception. Very soon after the ground forces began the campaign, knowledge about Iraqi dispositions and intentions vaporised. Many of the high-tech tools used to develop intelligence on enemy forces became virtually useless. Reconnaissance was done the old fashion way, by fire. Hence, in *Thunder Run* we see the 3rd Division acting a little more cautiously. Its forces had experienced combat near Najaf, so it had some idea of how the enemy was fighting. It then did an experimental raid to the Baghdad International Airport. It was only after this experience that the 'thunder run' into the heart of Baghdad was planned and executed. Although daring and risky, the participating units had significant knowledge of the enemy forces and their behaviour. The risks were calculated based on current knowledge about the enemy.

In the other three cases, where US forces walked into enemy traps, only small things prevented the enemy from annihilating US troops. In Afghanistan, had the enemy mortar teams been even slightly more skilled or perhaps lucky, the 10th Mountain Division elements would have been annihilated. As it was, things were difficult. At Nassiriyah, only the poor marksmanship skills of the Iraqis and the lack of coordinated action at critical moments prevented them from overrunning

the Marines before help arrived. At the Green Line, the only factor that saved the Special Forces was the poor marksmanship of the Iraqi tanks. In the latter case, the tank crews had probably not properly aligned the tank guns with their sights, and this maintenance failure neutralised an otherwise skilfully executed armoured manoeuvre.

In these three cases, higher US headquarters and support elements often exacerbated the situation by giving orders or providing support that caused more damage than the enemy. In Operation Anaconda, US aircraft bombed allied Afghan forces attempting to manoeuvre against the enemy. Similarly, in northern Iraq, US aircraft bombed Kurd allies, producing virtually all of the casualties suffered by friendly forces in that battle. At Nassiriyah, American planes bombed Marine vehicles, killing 12 Marines. Higher headquarters in Anaconda and at Nassiriyah were not always helpful. Not anticipating that the Iraqis could resist so fiercely, the Marines were slow to reinforce the troops on the bridges.

At Anaconda, higher headquarters refused to listen to the reports by troops on the ground, which resulted in the unnecessary shooting down of helicopters and the death of several US servicemen. In northern Iraq, the company commander continually halted the operation to get guidance from higher headquarters, miles away from the scene of the battle. The problem, of course, was that this caused pauses and delays that could have been fatal had the enemy seized the initiative (and were unnecessary as the teams were designed to operate independently and had standard operating procedures and tactics, techniques and procedures to make responsible operational decisions).

These accounts indicate that there are some disturbing elements in our operational practices that need some serious re-evaluation. It is inevitable that our luck will run out, and it will be the enemy on whom the gods of war will smile.

What in the end allowed US troops to prevail in these battles? First, Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan has been presented in the media as a US victory. It should not be, and *Not a Good Day to Die* does a very good job of telling us why. It was only a victory in the sense that the forces participating in the operation were not annihilated, and at the end of the day the US forces dominated the terrain on which the battle was fought. It should have been a disaster but was not due to luck and superior US training. The United States has probably the best trained military force in the world, and it shows. How US forces snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat is due to the superior education and training system, and this becomes clear in all of the accounts.

Thunder Run was only possible thanks to this superior system. No other military in the world would have attempted such an operation. The Marines at Nassiriyah held on and fought against overwhelming odds because that is what they were trained to do. In *Roughneck Nine-One*,

the author rightly dedicates a lot of space to the pre-deployment training of his team. He repeats several times that the battle was won during this training. Patton is reported to have said that a pint of sweat saves a gallon of blood. His dictum continues to hold true today.

However, what is still disturbing as demonstrated by the accounts is the frequency with which highly trained US troops find themselves in desperate situations, where the only difference between them and their enemies is this superior training – and where higher headquarters either hinders or hurts. This is probably due to at least two factors.

First, *the US love affair with technology and network-centric warfare*. During the 1990s, it was thought that technology could replace men: in intelligence and warfare. Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate that while technology enhances men, it does not replace them, and in asymmetric warfare it can sometimes even be a hindrance. In our zero-defects, instant communications world, we still need to let the sergeants and lieutenants lead on the battlefield. Virtual awareness will never replace actual awareness. The repeated bombing of the wrong targets on the battlefield show this and indicates that there is still much to do to improve the accuracy and safety of air support.

Second, *underestimation of the enemy*. Because we have superior education and training, we tend to be dismissive of other militaries and their methods. Nobody can beat the US in a stand-up battle. We have made sure of that. However, there are other ways to defeat the United States, and our enemies continually think about these ways. This was demonstrated at Anaconda and Nassiriyah and in northern Iraq, where underestimation of the enemy nearly resulted in disaster. They will learn from their mistakes, go back to the drawing board, and beat us next time if we do not stay on our toes. Only in *Thunder Run* did US forces not underestimate the enemy, and by carrying out an unexpected bold strike into the heart of Baghdad, the enemy was caught off-balance.

There is much food for thought in these works.

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The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace, by Ali A. Allawi. *New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007. Pp. 518, index. \$28 (cloth). ISBN 978-0-300-11015-9.*

It is hard to know what to make of a book such as this. It is part memoir, part study, part polemic, part self-promotion, part and parcel of the ‘conspiracising’ that so dominates thinking on issues in the Middle East or the fever swamp of American politics. It combines fact and fancy,

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reason and rationalisation in equal measure, with no real way to distinguish one from another.

Minister Allawi, who spent much of his life in exile from Iraq, a victim of the Saddam Hussein (Husayn) regime, and one of those who returned to his country in the wake of the US invasion, is an articulate, thoughtful (but partisan) observer, and he has written a book that is in many ways interesting but on the whole unhelpful. The tome has the merits of most memoirs in that it contains first-hand knowledge of key events – and the flaws of the same that make reading them an exercise in caution. It will be many years before one will have the distance and access to the information to evaluate all the sense and nonsense that now swirl around the US invasion of Iraq and its aftermath.

Before proceeding, a disclaimer. I was a member of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq and was thus, in some ways, part of the ‘conspiracy’ that seems to be a recurring theme in Minister Allawi’s account. You may read my observations with that in mind. I also do not buy into the various wild-hare conspiracy explanations that preoccupy so many in accounting for why the US eventually undertook regime change in Iraq, which should confirm for some that I am part of that conspiracy. I address my remarks to future analysts whose first task is to try to understand complex events rather than having opinions about them that precede research and lead to cherry picking facts to suit preconceived conclusions.

The Occupation begins with the by-now familiar ‘it was a neo-conservative’ conspiracy to remake US foreign policy, with Iraq as one of the first objects of that approach, thus to remake the world in the image of a new US empire, with the figures of Leo Strauss and Bernard Lewis lurking in the background as *eminences grises*. The familiar litany of names of prominent figures in the Bush administration is advanced – Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, Fief, Perle, Rodman, Elliott etc. – all part of a cabal influenced by Strauss and such fellow travellers as Irving Kristol, Francis Fukuyama and a cast of lesser characters who are further condemned for also shading into the conservative Christian right.

The problem is that neo-conservatism is a figment of the imagination of the political left, coined originally by Michael Harrington to condemn ‘heresy’ in former leftist colleagues who abandoned the ‘faith’ and were thus apostates deserving to be cast into the outer darkness, the most vilifying term being to name them conservatives or, worse, neo-conservatives. Hence much of this name-calling, which has now entered into the political repertoire as part of a partisan debate masquerading as objective analysis, camouflages long-standing differences in interpreting international affairs.

This debate, which has taken on more salience in a post-Cold War world, when the verities of engagement and US purpose are less certain, has pitted various groups against one another for how to explain the world and define what the US should do about it. One can take sides in

this debate, but name-calling as a substitute for analysis is not helpful. Into this charged environment, Minister Allawi wanders and deploys the tropes and allusions that seem to offer an explanation characteristic of non-neo-conservatives for how the US decided to make war on Iraq.

He argues, for example, that the Bush Administration decided upon war based on claims of Iraqi connections to al-Qaeda that everyone knows did not exist. But, as the 9/11 Commission Report points out, this was not clear. In fact, there was evidence of such connections. The problem with intelligence information, however, is that it is in and of itself not evidence, nor is it always reliable. That means it is open to interpretation. Surprise! In a political environment, interpretation had a political element.

The Bush administration did not make up the connections, but it may have over-interpreted the meaning of those connections. It did so against a background of over 12 years of US engagement with Iraq under Saddam Hussein following his invasion of Kuwait. It did so in an environment of the preceding Clinton administration's talk of the need for regime change in Iraq. It did so against a background of repeated Iraqi violations of UN resolutions as well as egregious violations of every standard of decent government, including the indiscriminate murder of hundreds of thousands of its own citizens. It did so against the very emotional, for the US, background of al-Qaeda attacks on American soil. There was, therefore, a context for Bush administration decision-making that cannot be accounted for by simplistic reference to the baleful influence of neo-conservatives bent on warmongering.

Minister Allawi, in the vein noted above, also misreads the Iraq Survey Group Report on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and Hans Blix's account in his more reliable memoir, *Disarming Iraq*. He's in good company. The issue is, of course, weapons of mass destruction. The ISG found none. Ergo, there were none; the Bush administration knew this and lied, once again because of the aforementioned evil influences. But as Blix notes in this memoir, even he believed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, a point Minister Allawi omits to mention. Blix's concern was that the absence of weapons found before the invasion was proof neither that they did not exist or that they did exist, but that the evidence was insufficient to draw a conclusion. He was less certain that US intelligence community's confidence that there were weapons was valid and that what was needed was more time for inspectors to get to the bottom of things.

In addition, what the ISG report makes abundantly clear is that while Iraq had no extant weapons that they could discover, Saddam Hussein had created an infrastructure to acquire such weapons as soon as UN sanctions were removed, the removal of which was a major policy objective. Iraq had an extensive illicit network, including front companies and foreign contacts with North Korea, Russia and others to reconstitute

a programme of WMD development quickly. And all of this, again, in the aforementioned environment of Iraqi deception, international aggression and domestic human-rights violations. With the Kosovo intervention and humanitarian justifications for such intervention an emerging argument in US policy circles a growing reality, Iraq fit many criteria for some type of US response that is perfectly understandable without resort to conspiracy accounts, however much they may comfort.

Minister Allawi also plays rather loosely with a range of other facts that are embroiled still in controversy. For example, he argues that the US turned a blind eye to Iraqi use of chemical weapons against the Kurds. While conspiracy theories abound on this point, there is no evidence to support such a contention and much, including State Department condemnation of the fact, to the contrary. Or, similarly, there is his statement that there was no explanation of the *USS Vincennes*' shoot-down of an Iranian jet liner in 1988. It is a curious statement given the Fogarty Commission, ABC News's almost hysterical *Nightline* report on the incident, Congressional investigations and the usual cloud of conspiracy theories – all of which explain the event. Take your pick. If Admiral Fogarty's report on the incident is a tissue of lies, then someone should have faced criminal charges. Yet posturing is not evidence, no matter how seriously believed or forcefully stated. Repetition does not create fact.

With these rather loose analytical elements, one is invited to caution when Minister Allawi turns to discuss events that he was more personally involved with. Many of those cannot be verified. Many seem to accord with what other accounts provide but some do not. His explanation that CPA was influenced by a secret cabal of fundamentalist Christians seeking to transform Iraq into a bastion for converting the region is pure nonsense. No doubt some believe this. No doubt, given the composition of CPA, there were fundamentalist Christians present. There were also Jews. Draw your conclusions accordingly. This is polemic not analysis. The essence of conspiracising.

When, however, Minister Allawi argues that however the US decided its course of action in Iraq it was based on ignorance of facts on the ground, fanciful expectations of outcomes based on wish-fulfilment and a confidence in direct military action without sufficient planning for post-conflict management, he is on surer ground. His passionate arguments for and his emotional engagement with reconstructing a viable Iraq is poignant, pertinent and prescient. Read with care, there is much to learn from this account, much of it cautionary for the future, much of it wise in its concern.

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The Pentagon's New Map: Blueprint for Action, A Future Worth Creating, by Thomas P.M. Barnett. *New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons*, 2004. Pp. 435, index. \$26.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-399-15175-3.

According to Barnett, globalisation is inexorably linked to international security, and future presidents need to convey the notion to the American public. For threats and 'bad actors' threaten the global economy – and must be confronted. Thus the author believes it is imperative for the United States to implement a foreign policy that promotes globalisation by spreading economic and cultural connectivity between nations to eliminate security threats.

Barnett lays out a multi-tiered strategy that stresses inter-agency cooperation, high-level discourse with the public and allies to enable international cooperation. He asserts that incorporating states into the global economy, through military force or burgeoning trade alliances, is more than an effort to strengthen American power. Globalisation actually reduces international security concerns, which include terrorism, pandemic diseases, counterfeiting, human rights abuses and drug trafficking. The removal of governments that engage in such activities allows competent governments, with the assistance of a United States-led coalition, to adopt standards that produce economic growth and spur a secure environment for the general population.

Still, the author argues for military action before other avenues are explored. He cites satellite television and the Internet as examples that can serve as the impetus for change as a population can adopt other cultural trends and alternative forms of expression.

The invasion of Iraq provides an example of how the US can use its strength strategically to remove an international security threat and secure prosperity. The case also illustrates, we now realise, the necessity of post-conflict stabilisation efforts, which are essential to achieve peace.

Indeed, Barnett believes that future US-led conflicts will be successful only if they are conducted within a comprehensive strategy to achieve peace. Overwhelming use of firepower to end rogue regimes must be followed by a peacekeeping campaign to administer basic services and to conduct population control efforts. This is not something done quickly or easily. The division between then Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and then Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shenseki, the author notes, was a leading cause for the chaos that ensued in Iraq once the regime had been removed.

Barnett engages his audience with the competing opinions of Rumsfeld and Shenseki regarding the level of forces Operation Iraqi Freedom would require. Rumsfeld wanted a small and nimble force that could mobilise

and then defeat Iraqi forces quickly. Shenseki believed that post-conflict stabilisation efforts would require more than the civilian leadership at the Pentagon was willing to commit to control sectarian divisions after the Iraqi Army was defeated. As is now well known, precisely what was missing in Rumsfeld's analysis was a force to confront the task of rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure, providing security to the population. It follows that the challenge the US and its allies face is to implement a restructuring effort of military institutions so that national leadership has the tools to successfully conduct such operations as dictated by policy.

Barnett's thesis has much to commend it, because it offers a comprehensive strategy to combat numerous security threats that face the global environment. It gives equal weight to both military and civilian institutions in their roles in stabilising troubled security environments.

However, the argument is not without limitations. Barnett tends to ignore the realities of international politics that can be an obstacle to his blueprint. For instance, Iran's desire for a nuclear energy programme does not bother him, because he feels if Iran were brought into the global economy it would moderate its policies. This seems a leap. Although Iran may eventually agree to establish an economic relationship with other nations, it remains far from certain that these developments will occur. The author does not even discuss the Iranian government's relationship with China and Russia, which have been reluctant to support sanctions in response to Iran's nuclear ambitions. He also seems to suggest that the end of the current North Korean government is imminent despite enormous obstacles. This is also a questionable conclusion. North Korea maintains a substantial military presence that threatens South Korea, which is an important US ally.

The author's main asset is hence his ability to promote thought, but he often fails to address the obstacles that stand in the way of implementing his vision. He does not use traditional citations, and a substantial amount of what is set forth is theoretical and based on an unrealised vision of the international security environment. He does occasionally cite previous work that supports his argument. Since his thesis has yet to be realised, he relies on evidence that suggests the validity of his argument, rather than delving more completely into challenging his own assumptions. Barnett's ultimate goal, however, is a laudable one: to look past political partisanship and forge a grand strategy that will provide security for the United States and its allies.

What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat, by Louise Richardson. *New York: Random House*, 2006. Pp. 336, index. \$25.95. ISBN 1-400-06481-3.

In *What Terrorists Want*, Richardson brings the thoughtfulness of a comparative historical perspective to bear on the most visible current manifestation of terrorist activity today, Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. The result is an excellent introduction to the study of terrorism, fulfilling the need for an accessible primer, while also offering seasoned researchers pearls of insight neatly summarised and contextualised.

This book is full of wisdom, the kind of wisdom that comes only from years of studying terrorism and from having direct experience with the subject. It may be favourably compared to Bruce Hoffman's *Inside Terrorism*. Hoffman's primer, it should be made clear, goes into more depth than Richardson's. Nevertheless, the essentials are present in Richardson's analysis and it should be commended for its clarity and brevity.

The real benefit of the Richardson work, though, is that it is not just a primer on terrorism. The text devotes its entire second half to a consideration of counter-terrorism and to America's 'war on terror'. For this half alone, the book is worth its cover price. Its brief and accessible introduction to counter-terrorist strategies, informed by a fair, even-handed, yet critical assessment of the America's current strategy, is unparalleled.

Post-9/11 work on counter-terrorism has taken two forms. Most commonly, one finds discussions of counter-terrorism in the context of the war on terror. Other studies of counter-terrorism have adopted an exceedingly narrow focus, aimed at a particular aspect of the problem, the Patriot Act, for instance. Richardson's work walks a fine line in between, offering 'classical' insight into counter-terrorism while also engaging in a discussion of current issues.

One aspect of the study that deserves to be singled out is the integration it achieves between the framework developed for studying terrorism and the understanding of counter-terrorism advocated in the second part of the book. Richardson uses her causal framework to leverage a set of policy recommendations for the American counter-terrorist effort that are grounded, pragmatic and policy-relevant. This framework is nicely summarised in her statement, 'Terrorism is caused by the lethal triple cocktail of personal disaffection, an enabling society, and a legitimising ideology' (p.70).

Terrorist groups can be classified, according to Richardson, on two dimensions: first, by whether they have a close or isolated relationship with the community; and, second, whether their primary goals are

temporal (achievable without overthrowing the system) or transformational (require system change). The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), for instance, are considered to have a close relationship to its community and a temporal goal of autonomy/secession.

Not content with such broad framework, Richardson also focuses on the secondary goals of revenge, renown and reaction. Her analysis concentrates on the interplay of each of these factors. It is clear from the framework that terrorism is a 'rational' act; but the immediate, emotional element of revenge is an important factor in many terrorist attacks. Sometimes the motive for *revenge* is a personal trauma, at other times abuses against the larger community are the issue. The behaviour, rather than being irrational or antisocial, is in fact 'pro-social' in its orientation. That is, concern for the community often makes terrorist acts altruistic. *Renown*, another secondary terrorist goal, points to the importance of media publicity and community support as essential to any long-term terrorist campaign. Finally, *reaction* must be considered because terrorist attacks are meant to provoke an overreaction by counter-terrorist forces that will drive the community into the arms of the terrorists.

Having set the stage, Richardson devotes the second half of her book to an examination of counter-terrorism. Using her analysis of revenge, renown and reaction, she examines America's war on terror. Arguing that US counter-terrorist policies have been wrong in almost all instances, she posits that US (over)reaction to 9/11 has amplified the desire for revenge in the Islamic community and increased the renown of the terrorists worldwide.

She points to two major mistakes in America's response. First, the declaration of a 'war on terror' amounts to an unwinnable fight directed against a 'tactic' rather than a group using the tactic. Consequently, the policy has no foreseeable end. The distended scope of the policy drags the US into a war with not only al-Qaeda but with any and all other terrorist groups. It gives the terrorists the status of soldiers rather than criminals, and places the US in a situation of war where 'immediate' action is always required. Ultimately, declaring war has meant that the military, the bluntest of foreign policy instruments, has become the centre of the counter-terrorist response – diplomacy and intelligence are marginalised.

Second, conflating the war on terror with the 'threat' from Saddam Hussein has severely harmed US credibility and dramatically increased the renown of fundamentalist terrorists. The Iraq War, according to Richardson, was such a dramatic overreaction to the events of 9/11 that it was bound not only to play into the terrorists recruitment efforts, but also to fragment the coalition of states sympathetic to America's suffering in the aftermath of the attacks.

For Richardson, these two major errors highlight the problem currently faced by the US and the prospects for a more effective policy. She details a six-point outline for an effective counter-terrorist response: (1) have a defensible and achievable goal; (2) live by your principles; (3) know your enemy; (4) separate the terrorists from their communities; (5) engage others in countering terrorists; and (6) have patience and keep your perspective. In one way or another, the US has failed on every front.

Commenting briefly on only a couple of these points: Richardson argues convincingly that intelligence and diplomatic failures occurred in large part because the administration under-funded these key areas. As a result, we do not know our enemy. Are al-Qaeda's aims negotiable? Is it US policies rather than US values that are the issue? Would withdrawal from the Middle East prevent further attacks? Richardson points out that these are fundamental yet largely unanswered questions, precisely because the US response was impatient, military-driven and unilateral.

She further suggests that American policy has failed utterly in separating the terrorists from their communities. Not only have communities and terrorists been pushed closer together; no concerted effort was made to prevent or offset this tendency. While separation is an important part of the counter-terrorist effort, several of Richardson's suggestions on this front raise doubts.

The most troublesome is also the most appealing intuitively. Richardson argues, like many others, that major aid projects are likely to be one of the most effective strategies for countering the growing dislike of America and for separating terrorists from their communities. The issue isn't so much that the strategy is wrong as it is that there may be serious secondary effects in need of deeper consideration. Who should receive aid and how much should be delivered? How much aid should the US realistically distribute? Will those who are excluded be resentful? Do massive aid flows create the wrong incentive? In other words, if aid is received to undermine terrorist organisations, do governments really have an incentive to rid themselves of terrorists? Questions of this sort are important and deserve serious consideration.

Overall, *What Terrorists Want* is an exceptionally good book. For seasoned researchers there is a great deal of food for thought; for policy makers the framework is relevant to their actual decision-making; and for students the material provides possibly the best starting-point into the literature on both terrorism and counter-terrorism.

K. JOEL COBB © 2007
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Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces, by Linda Robinson. *New York: Public Affairs*, 2004. Pp. 368. \$14.00 (pb), index. ISBN 1-58648-352-8.

Imperial Grunts: The American Military on the Ground, by Robert D. Kaplan. *New York: Random House*, 2005. Pp. 421. \$27.95 (cloth), index. ISBN 1-4000-6132-6.

Linda Robinson and Robert Kaplan are two of the best known and most respected war correspondents today. Veterans of many conflicts, they have gained unprecedented access to our nation's military forces, in order to tell 'a good story' about what American military forces do on the ground, around the world, every day – not just during crisis or conflict.

During the first Gulf War, journalists were relegated to 'pools' or subjected to staff briefings rather than having unrestricted access to front-line forces. This Pentagon policy decision reflected the experiences in the Vietnam War of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, and other senior military officers. Yet in the attempt to limit the negative reporting, the military found itself again severely criticised by the media, this time for limiting its access during this conflict. Fast forward 13 years to the second Gulf War, where the Pentagon sought to reverse its previous policy and allow unprecedented access to its military forces. Torie Clark, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs at the time, is credited with developing the 'embed' media plan. She was quoted at the time as saying that it was a win-win strategy, since the Pentagon believed it had had 'a good story' to tell to the American public.

While many new war correspondents cut their teeth on the second Gulf War, becoming instant experts on the military, other seasoned (veteran) journalists continued to do what they did best – report not only on the war, but on the soldiers who fought them and the country that sent its 'blood and treasure' into harm's way.

Ms Robinson's focus is specifically on the US Army Special Operations Forces (SOF) and the unique role SOF play in the ongoing war on terrorism. Her text reads like a novel, weaving together personal stories of soldiers' lives, from their family background, through their specialised training at Ranger School and the 'Q' course, to the bonding of warriors in combat; from Just Cause to the Balkans to post 9/11 conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Rather than offer political commentary about the conflicts themselves, Robinson is more comfortable as a sociologist, attempting to explain the unique SOF culture and the men who choose to make their profession as 'masters of chaos'. Having had access to these warriors and their missions in support of US policy objectives, she also offers her views on the importance of SOF in future conflict, based on *their* understanding of today's conflict environment. As she states, 'They understand that the battlefield is a human one and that creating psychological impact is the key to victory.'

Robert Kaplan, on the other hand, does not shirk from offering political commentary, peppering his work throughout with large doses of political philosophy and history, attempting to capture the role of America's armed forces today as 'imperial grunts', serving on the front lines of America's new empire. Kaplan is less concerned with telling the story of individual lives in combat and conflict than with explaining the role those individuals play in the broader geopolitical context today. He does not limit his observations to the role of SOF forces but looks at the broader spectrum of military forces, to include the marines, as well as Army foreign area officers (FAOs), and the role they play in advancing US strategic policy choices around the world.

Kaplan's experiences as a war correspondent mirror those of Robinson, having spent time 'in the field' with US military forces around the globe. His research on the role of the military today in the execution of the war on terrorism has taken him to many remote outposts, 'injun country' as he calls it – places such as Mongolia, Yemen, Colombia and the Horn of Africa, as well as Afghanistan and Iraq. Whereas Robinson's focus is primarily on the role of SOF military operations in the later conflicts, Kaplan's view is much broader, producing a perspective on the role of US military power in the world today in enforcing America's 'empire'.

This empire Kaplan observes is less one of conquest and forts in remote colonial outposts than of influence and access, with America's military personnel serving as the main instruments of US security policy. As Kaplan notes, 'The American Empire of the twenty-first century depended upon a tissue of intangibles that was threatened, rather than invigorated, by naked exercise of power ... an empire of behind-the-scenes relationships that was all that was possible anymore.'

If Kaplan's thesis is correct, that relationships are the key to the exercise of American power, then it becomes clear that the *individuals* who wear the uniform take on an increased significance, more so than the institutions or units themselves. Thus Robinson's observations of the unique SOF 'warrior culture' and the character of those individuals serving in that capacity are magnified. The heroic (or debased) behaviour of individuals is more significant than ever before. Kaplan echoes that sentiment in his narrative on Second Lieutenant Joshua Parker, whose heroic action in combat in Iraq led to a posthumous awarding of the Navy Cross – 'to think that any humane and peaceful global order is possible without such men would be self-delusory'.

After the second Gulf War, some liberal academics and fellow reporters took the 'embeds' to task, arguing that those journalists who spent so much time with the military lost their objectivity ('sleeping with the enemy', so to speak). They were criticised for taking too high a view of the professionalism and competency of the military forces they were assigned to cover. Some veteran war correspondents, now television

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anchors, even chose not to wear an American flag pin on their lapel for fear of being seen as 'biased' in their reporting. Robinson and Kaplan would likely argue just the opposite, that their time spent with the US military allowed them a greater insight and depth of reporting which had previously not been possible during other conflicts.

Masters of Chaos and *Imperial Grunts* allow both an opportunity to lay a foundation for future journalistic and academic inquiry on the role of the US military as a whole, and SOF in particular, in framing national security policy. While Robinson's work ends with her text, Kaplan promises a second book, continuing his first-hand observations.

In summary, both texts provide similar yet unique insights on the US military and its role in the war on terrorism; and both are worth reading, particularly for those with little understanding of the US military today. Robinson's narrative style and her ability to put substance behind individual characters in her text make it an easy and enjoyable read. Kaplan's familiarity with history, culture and politics, as well as his ability to weave a more complex treatise on the issues of empire and the role of military force, makes his text even more interesting and challenging. It is sure to produce a lively discussion among students of international politics on the definition of empire and America's 'imperial' role in the world today.

RICHARD J. KILROY JR. © 2007
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Exposing the Real Che Guevara and the Useful Idiots who Idolize Him, by Humberto Fontova. *New York: Sentinel*, 2007. Pp. 224, index. \$23.95 (cloth). ISBN 978-1-59523-027-0.

The problem with Che Guevara literature is that it is either gushing in its praise of the man or rabid in its condemnation. What is often lacking is sound research, documentation and rational presentation. This book disappoints on all counts. It is viscerally anti-Che. Not that the author doesn't have good reason to hate the man: His family and friends were victimised by the super icon.

Therein lies the problem. By having such hatred of Guevara, Fontova will allow the man no virtue. This is a weakness, because almost all of us are a combination of good and bad. Thus the only audience who will be convinced are those who already share the author's convictions. *Exposing* will not debunk the books by Jon Lee Anderson, Jorge Castañeda or Paco Ignacio Taibo.

Fontova's sources and information are not well documented or directly related to the subject matter. For example, a great amount of the book is spent on discussing the arrest, torture and execution of prisoners in the first seven or so years of the revolution. Fontova essentially attributes all of this to Che Guevara, although many of the cases did not occur when

Guevara was head of the Cuban government offices that carried out the executions, or they were carried out by different Cuban government entities altogether. Guevara may indeed have set up the Cuban secret police, and he may have been bloodthirsty, but it is sloppy to attribute every one of the murders and abuses to him. Fontova should have focused much more narrowly on the cases and evidence that could be directly linked to Guevara.

Even so, Fontova raises some very uncomfortable points for Guevara admirers. He offers some compelling evidence that Che was bloodthirsty, enjoyed killing and was bigoted towards many causes that have taken on Guevara's image as a representative icon: rebellious youth, intellectuals, musicians, artists, blacks, gays and women. Unfortunately, the weak research allows true believers among these groups exits through which they can escape reality rather than be made to confront uncomfortable truths.

For Fontova does ask a very valid question: Why have none of the biographers of Che interviewed the surviving victims of the man? Many are in Florida, available. They have their biases, but the authors of the other works seem to accept uncritically the word of the Cuban government, which itself would hardly seem a neutral source.

Where Fontova is weakest is in his analysis of Guevara as military commander. He correctly points out that Che was no military genius, strategist or operational level commander. This is important, since too often the contrary is asserted. Paul J. Dosal's book on Che as military commander, for instance, makes this mistake, especially in claiming that Che was a great strategist, which he most decidedly was not.

The problem is that Fontova goes too far the other way. He claims that Guevara had no military merit, that he never fought a real battle and that he was a coward, to boot. It is difficult to accept this argument. If you are that incompetent and evil, nobody follows you in a combat environment. There are many testimonies to the effect that Guevara was personally brave in combat and an exemplar in his personal conduct as a combatant. Dariel Alarcon Ramirez, for instance, who survived Bolivia and then defected from the regime, never questions Che's personal bravery. He never questions his tactical skill. It is evident that Che knew how to set up a pretty mean ambush.

While Batista's army was inept and corrupt, Che doesn't do too poorly in Congo and Bolivia, either, against much better troops. For this reason, it is hardly likely, as the author asserts, that Che's most famous battle, Santa Clara, was a total sham. The train commander may have been bought off. I have no evidence to support or deny this claim. The battle may have been nothing next to the epic struggle that the revolution portrays it as, but it was a significant battle nonetheless.

Fontova also hurts himself by trying to demonstrate the level of Che's cowardice by contrasting it with lengthy, maudlin descriptions of the valour displayed by exile-Cubans at the Bay of Pigs and in the Congo, as

well as by anti-Castro Cubans in the Escambray. While the bravery of these men and women is undisputable, it is a tangent that only discredits Fontova's arguments, because it highlights how hard he is trying to make his condemnation stick. These accounts are better subject for a different book, except as they relate directly to Che.

Where Fontova does make a valid point is to question Che Guevara's other military skills. The three basic military skills are move, shoot and communicate. Che could shoot, but was not too good at either moving or communicating. In Cuba and the Congo, others must have done this for him. Neither Che nor his men seem to have been very good with maps and compasses, as they wandered around lost in Bolivia for several months. They also seemed to have forgotten basic things such as communications and had no way of contacting one another once Che divided the group into two.

Worth continued thought is Che's disposition at the end. Che does not seem to have fought to the bitter end at La Higuera but rather surrendered at the first opportunity early in the battle. The most reliable witness here is Gary Prado, who was a Bolivian officer at the battle.

What does seem clear is that Che Guevara was an ideological zealot. He repeatedly demonstrates the arrogance and brutality of one who is fanatically devoted to his ideology, slavishly following its dictates with little question as to the wisdom or foolishness of pursuing such a course. The problem with such individuals is that they create for themselves fragile worlds that can be easily shattered. This is why they become so rigid and brutal – and their actions increasingly desperate.

Instinctively, they know, even if they do not consciously admit it, that if the opposition comes too close, they can easily shatter the bubble. This is why Che murdered so many in the name of the revolution and why he continued to seek to make revolution after the triumph in Cuba. Che's end may indeed indicate that his bubble was finally shattered, that his world came crashing down; and this is why he was so anxious to surrender and live another day. Unfortunately for him, his previous fanatic actions had already sealed his fate.

In summation, while Fontova raises a number of good issues, his poor documentation and emotional style discredit and weaken his argument. Those who admire Che will never waiver after reading this book; and those who are in the opposing camp will burn even fiercer with hatred. The well researched, balanced, academic definitive book on Che has then yet to be written.

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Dialogues with Chin Peng: New Light on the Malayan Communist Party, edited by C.C. Chin and Karl Hack. *Singapore: Singapore University Press*, 2004. Pp. xxvii+ 413, index, \$25.00 (paper). ISBN 9971-69-287-2.

Alias Chin Peng: My Side of the Story, by Chin Peng. *Singapore: Media Masters*, 2003. Pp. 527, index, \$26.74 (paper). ISBN 981-04-8693-6.

At a time when American generals are browbeating their staffs for insights into the nature of insurgency and staff college instructors are leaving no journal unread to find the next big thing in counter-insurgency (COIN) operations, Chin Peng and a group of South East Asian scholars have published a pair of books that allow greater understanding of the Malayan insurgency (1948–60), a favourite intellectual playground of Western COIN specialists.¹ *Dialogues*, a volume of conference essays edited by C.C. Chin and Karl Hack, and *Alias Chin Peng*, as told by Chin Peng to Ian Ward and Norma Miaflor, provide the story of the Malayan emergency through the eyes of Chin Peng, the general secretary of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) from 1947 to the present. Although the Malaysian government terminated the emergency by fiat in 1960, the MCP resistance continued to 1989.² Both books continue to 1989 and later.

Chin Peng, the *nom de guerre* for Ong Boon Hua, was born in Satiwan on the west coast of Malaya in October 1924. His family was lower-middle-class family, and he received an education at a variety of Chinese schools. After he joined the MCP in 1940, he attended an English-language school. Although an undistinguished student, he managed to read widely in Chinese mythical literature, modern Chinese poetry and letters, Marxist political philosophy and some aspects of contemporary Chinese military affairs. Most notably, he read Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*, Mao Zedong's *On Protracted Warfare* and some of Jiang Baili's works on military affairs.

Responsibility fell on his shoulders at an early age. When just 18 (in 1942), he was assigned by the MCP leadership to serve as the liaison officer to Force 136, a unit of the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), which had landed teams in Japanese-occupied Malaya to conduct sabotage and guerrilla warfare to distract Japanese troops from Allied moves elsewhere in the South East Asian Command area of operations. Chin Peng assumed the position of secretary-general of the MCP in May 1947. He has held that position to the time these works went to press.

The books are related closely in events, theme and voice. In many places they overlap, and the authors and editors acknowledge that this is the case. Therefore, the best approach is to read the Chin Peng volume first, then to turn to the Chin and Hack volume. This method gives the

reader the basics of Chin Peng's views and then the benefit of the scholarly interrogation of those views. The Chin Peng volume does not have the benefit of the careful linguistic notation that C.C. Chin and Hack provide in *Dialogues*, but it can be read relatively quickly. The reader can get the story quickly from Chin Peng while anticipating a more thorough reading (and the need for accurate readings of the Chinese characters) in Chin and Hack, who have put Chin Peng's words into cultural, linguistic and historical perspective.

Whether read singly or together, these volumes provide Chin Peng's personal views on the major issues of the Malayan insurgency. Through his eyes they discuss: the early history of the MCP; the relationship between the Malayan Communists and the members of Force 136; the activities of MCP during the 'legal period' (1945–48); the decision to launch the armed struggle in 1948; the insurgent strategy and the impact of British COIN programmes on that strategy; the Baling Talks of 1955; and the later years of MCP resistance which continued until the December 1989 peace accord with Thailand and Malaysia.³

The strength of *Dialogues* is Chin Peng's responses to several of his questioners, combined with his deft ability to express his answers in measured and thoughtful ways. He seems to bring the questioner inside his thinking on certain issues, while drawing him away on others. In *Alias Chin Peng*, his treatment of similar issues can be formulaic and pat. *Dialogues* benefits from an extensive set of scholarly conveniences. The volume has been annotated with Chinese characters to ease the transitions between Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka and the other Chinese dialects of Malaya. There are abundant and helpful footnotes and a thorough bibliography. The 'scene setter' papers by the seminar members are helpful for non-specialists who want to catch up on the state of the field at the time of the conference.

Alias Chin Peng has its own strengths. This volume gives the reader a better understanding of the events that led this man – and many young men and women of his generation – to abandon their safe lives and plunge into the danger and uncertainty of the resistance. They faced war, hunger and treachery; and the reader gets a sense of the way they reacted to these threats. For example, in May 1947, Lai Te (aka Lai Tech), the MCP secretary-general, defected with a large part of the party treasury, and it became obvious that he also had worked as an agent for the British and the Japanese. Lai Te's defection came as a surprise to many in the MCP; but some of his close associates, Chin Peng included, had suspected Lai Te's *bona fides* and motives for some time.

How do young revolutionary idealists face not only the loss of their leader but also the knowledge of his duplicity and disloyalty? What did the party do to react to this potentially fatal blow? *Alias Chin Peng* gives

the reader insight into this and other issues that faced the MCP cadres from 1940 to 1989.

A further strength of *Alias Chin Peng* can be found in Chin Peng's treatment of the other revolutionary leaders and statesmen of his time. Chin Peng had working relationships with the senior officials of the Chinese Communist Party, the Vietnamese Communist Party, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Thai and Burmese Communist parties. He also had meetings with the leaders of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. As Chin Peng relates his conversations with these individuals and his impressions of their characters and motives, he provides a very helpful primer on the place of the MCP in the family of 'fraternal' Communist parties and the political-military environment of late twentieth-century South East Asia.

Chin Peng's most valuable contribution to the study of small wars and insurgencies is his authoritative observations about the problems of running an insurgent campaign against the Anglo-Malayan state. Consider the following propositions Chin Peng has provided for the reader:

Malaya did not have a common border with a Communist state. The MCP recognised this as a major problem. Chin Peng tells us: 'We desperately needed a common border with a national territory controlled by a fraternal party' (*Alias Chin Peng*, p.433). As a result of this geographical liability, Chinese and Vietnamese Communist offers of support had to be down-sized or modified.

The MCP was tied inextricably to the Chinese Communist Party. Early in the insurgency, the ethnically Chinese Malayan Communists considered themselves to be 'Chinese Communists' fighting for China and the world Communist revolution. Malaya was just the place they conducted their operations (*Alias Chin Peng*, p.163). Later in the insurgency, many retained this view, but all recognised that the Chinese Communist Party might not 'propose' but it had to 'dispose' of all important decisions. When the MCP decided in 1959 to phase out its military operations, it had to get Beijing's approval for this decision (*Alias Chin Peng*, p.410). In December 1980, when the MCP's China-based radio station became a problem in the Sino-Singaporean normalisation talks, Deng Xiaoping told Chin Peng to close it. He even told Chin Peng when to do so (*Alias Chin Peng*, p.456). It is difficult to believe any insurgent force with such close ties to an outside power could have succeeded in building the legitimacy it needed to mobilise a political movement in a non-Chinese nation.

The ethnic Chinese never amounted to more than 38 per cent of the Malayan population. Hence the MCP, as a revolutionary party, needed to build a political movement that incorporated the Malay population. The MCP did not succeed in doing this. The 1955 *Joint Written Opinion of the CPSU and the CPC* argued that the MCP should shut down its armed insurrection, at least in part because it had not built a 'broad united

front across all races' (*Alias Chin Peng*, p.367).⁴ At least to some degree this problem arose because the first Malay unit in the MCP's army had not acquitted itself well in its initial battle at Jerantut in early 1950. Chin Peng, although taking the blame for the debacle, says: 'We had to face the reality that our prospects for attracting a hard-core all-Malay fighting force were doomed for all times' (*Alias Chin Peng*, p.266). When the MCP disbanded its armed forces in May 1989, only 77 (of 1,188) demobilised guerrillas had Malay ethnic roots (*Alias Chin Peng*, p.491).

The Anglo-Malayan state had legitimacy based on over a hundred years of formal legal codes and relatively benign administration. Although Chin Peng notes that the Anglo-Malayan state was not the preferred state for the Malayan people, because it did not accommodate the all the needs of the Malayan majority, it did not engage in the excessive oppression that might have pushed the Malays into insurgency. Therefore, the 1957 announcement of 'freedom' in a new Malay state based on elections in 1955 was the ultimate political weapon against an insurgency that had lost its way.

In a final irony, when Chin Peng visited Hanoi in 1961 on his way to Beijing, the Vietnamese apparently dismissed his offers of briefings on British COIN tactics in Malaya. Perhaps the Vietnamese ignored Chin's offer because they understood the degree to which their struggle differed from the MCP's struggle in Malaya. If so, perhaps we can all learn a lesson from the Vietnamese.

Both of these books are important contributions to the field. Readers seeking to put the Malayan insurgency and British COIN operations in perspective will profit from reading them.

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NOTES

1. The key work to emerge from the conflict remains Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966). It is noteworthy that during the present vogue of counter-insurgency studies, this seminal volume has not been reprinted until recently, yet any number of works of less moment have been reissued. A valuable study that has been reprinted is Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948–1960* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press/Cavendish, 2004).
2. See e.g. Sharom bin Hashim et al., eds., *The Malaysian Army's Battle Against Insurgency in Peninsular Malaya 1968–1989*, trans. Mohamed Ghazemy Mahmud (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysian Army, 2001).
3. See General Dato' Kitti Ratanachaya, *The Last Role of Chin Peng: The Communist Party of Malaya, Malaysia and Thailand*, 2nd edn (Bangkok: Sahadhammika, 2007).
4. The *Opinion* also pointed out that the insurgency did not have a common border with a socialist state – it had not built sufficient military power to have a solid negotiating position – and it suggested that in this situation a political struggle was the best route to success (*Alias Chin Peng*, p.367).