

**Robert M. Cassidy. COUNTERINSURGENCY AND THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR: MILITARY CULTURE AND IRREGULAR WAR. STANFORD, CA: STANFORD SECURITY STUDIES, 2008.**

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One of the most pressing problems facing contemporary soldiers, policy makers and diplomats is how to deal with insurgent war in places inside what author Thomas Barnett has called the “non-integrating gap.” This term describes areas where rapid modernization of traditional societies, economic pressures, and poor governance have combined to result in endemic instability and conflict. Since the early 1990’s there has been a resurgence of low-level war in loosely governed or totally ungoverned spaces, war often colored by various kinds of religious extremism or tribal conflicts and carried out primarily by non-state armed groups, paramilitaries and weak state forces. This resurgence has caused Western soldiers and other security professionals to begin re-appraising military and strategic doctrine, as well as examining the entrenched cultures of our security institutions for the purpose of developing new approaches to the turmoil of the Twenty-first Century world. Robert Cassidy’s book, Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror, is an important contribution to the growing literature that has resulted from this critical assessment and search for solutions to what is likely to be a central military and strategic policy problem well into the future.

Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror makes two important assertions; first, that the effort, led by the United States, to combat globalized Islamist terror groups must be viewed fundamentally as a counterinsurgency. Second, that militaries have distinct cultures, and that some large power militaries, specifically the

United States Army, have cultures which often prevent them from conducting fully successful low-level combat, stability operations or counterinsurgencies.

The first point made by Cassidy, although once a rather new departure in understanding the global jihad movement, is now becoming more widely accepted. Classification of what the United States Army has now termed “The Long War” as a counterinsurgency, albeit a globalized one, is an idea which has garnered support among many soldiers and policy professionals. Cassidy’s argument centers around the idea that this conflict, like all classic insurgent wars, cannot be prosecuted solely by military action, and like any successful counterinsurgency will only be won through a careful and nuanced application of political, military, diplomatic and economic means. This idea of balance between the military and other elements of national strategy may seem obvious to someone viewing the problem from outside the military; Cassidy’s second major assertion is precisely that United States military culture is not supportive of this kind of approach. He argues that the U.S. military has been and continues to be resistant to approaching the problem of insurgent or low-level warfare from any standpoint other than the traditional, armed force-based intellectual paradigm derived from the nineteenth century ideas of Jomini, Clausewitz, Sherman and Upton.

According to Cassidy, the United States Army has always had an almost dogmatic preference for the large scale, industrialized conflict epitomized by the last years of the Civil War – it would be hard to overstate the importance of the Civil War experience in the subsequent development of the Army’s understanding of how to win wars. The later experiences of the First and Second World Wars, of course, only hardened the foundation of this cultural preference for “big power” wars. This

intellectual adherence to a view of war fundamentally derived first from the Napoleonic period and then reinforced by the world wars of the mid-twentieth century is in striking opposition to the actual military experiences of the United States for the overwhelming majority of its existence. This experience includes fighting with native people on the frontiers from the colonial period until the 1890's, the Philippine War, border conflicts with Mexico and fighting guerillas in the Caribbean and Central America. When one includes the fighting in the China-Burma-India theatre during World War Two and later, of course, in Vietnam, the vast majority of American military experience has been in low-level warfare and stability operations.

Cassidy makes these points about the divergence between actual and perceived military focus in a section titled, "Big Powers and Small Wars: The Paradox of Asymmetric Conflict." He describes how big powers have maintained this organizational preference for large, industrial-based militaries conducting firepower-centric campaigns of annihilation, while their actual experiences should have led them to a different intellectual framework for understanding their most likely adversaries and operational environments. Cassidy points out the extraordinary power of military culture to influence an approach to conflict in spite of evidence which points out the need for radical change. He then gives these arguments further emphasis in separate sections in which he analyzes the varied experiences in counterinsurgency of Great Britain, Russia and finally, the United States. In these sections Britain stands out as having a military structure and organizational culture uniquely well-suited to conducting successful small wars, while the other two powers, in contrast, do not.

Essentially amounting to a clarion call for self-examination and reform of the United States Army's approach to small wars, Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror serves as a powerful echo in both form and function of Samuel Huntington's classic book, The Soldier and the State. Clearly Cassidy's ideas have found validation in the recent operational and tactical shifts pursued by the United States in Iraq. Acceptance of the Brigade Combat team (BCT) as the primary unit of action instead of the Division, although not entirely a foregone conclusion, has developed a momentum that seems destined to be successful. Additionally, the belated recognition by some key senior leaders of the utility and even practical necessity of using local irregulars as proxies or allies in fighting insurgency, although still not widely accepted in the broader culture of the Army, is encouraging nonetheless.

One aspect of this cultural evolution that Cassidy does not address is the conflict over time between the United States Army's competing traditions of the regulars and the militia. It has often been the militia which has embraced and excelled at unconventional war, while the regulars have sought to move the Army's culture to support precisely the European-derived forms of warfare which Cassidy argues are detrimental to success in the current conflict. The writings of Emory Upton, which Cassidy credits as forming a major part of the foundation of U.S. military culture, deride militia and volunteer units as potential partners with the regular force in a major conflict. This difference concerning expertise in, as well as preference for, forms of warfare dates back to the conflicts between Provincial and Redcoat during the Seven Years War. It continued during the debate between various factions over the efficacy of the militia and Continentals during the Revolutionary War and into the 1790's, which resulted in the curious and often

unworkable dual military tradition embodied by the Militia and Calling Forth Acts. This conflict has continued throughout the military history of the United States. Winfield Scott was famously disdainful of the militia, refusing to take militia units on his brilliantly executed expedition to Mexico City. Zachary Taylor, however, used militia and volunteer units with great success during his battles against the Mexican Army in the northern theatre of that war. The United States' first twentieth century counterinsurgency, the Philippine War, was successfully prosecuted by units largely composed of volunteers and National Guardsmen, but the militia's record in the early years of the Civil War was clearly mixed, at best.

The current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are no different. For example, the Regular Army has entirely eschewed any real involvement in training and mentoring the Afghan Army and Police – the organization tasked with that mission, arguably the one most central to any enduring success in that country, is Task Force Phoenix, which since its inception in 2003 has been entirely run by National Guard BCTs and individual Embedded Training Teams. Another example is the National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP), which links various state National Guard organizations with the militaries of emerging nations, and those Guard units are charged with mentoring and assisting those countries as they develop their military capacity. As a consequence of these programs, and coupled with the continuing cultural distaste of the larger Army for anything that does not involve traditional large organization-based combat, the overwhelming majority of the Army's current unconventional and irregular warfare experience outside of Special Operations units resides in the National Guard. This fact can only continue the centuries-old conflict within American military culture between the

ideals represented by Sherman and Upton versus Crook and Wood, and Regular versus Militiaman as we move into the uncertain future of “The Long War.”

Cassidy’s writing is at times difficult, with language that can be confusing or laden with unnecessary complexity. Some of his points are weakened by repetition from one paragraph to another. These minor shortcomings, however, are clearly overcome by the importance of his ideas and the validity of his arguments. As a military professional with more than a passing interest in the subject matter of this book, I can only hope that it gets careful attention and its central themes are embraced by a readership both in academia, and within military and policy-making institutions.

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