

Reversal of Fortune?
Strategy Change & Counterinsurgency Success by
Foreign Powers in the Twentieth Century*

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Abstract

The contemporary policy question of whether a shift in allied military strategy in Afghanistan will alter the eventual outcome demands a rigorous study of strategy change in counterinsurgency warfare. We do so by analyzing 66 cases from the twentieth century in which a foreign power seeks to defend a central authority in a state or colonial territory against an insurgency. We identify whether and when a foreign power implemented a change in its counterinsurgency strategy, whether said change involved a shift toward a strategy reflecting a “hearts and minds” emphasis, as well as the foreign power’s eventual military victory or defeat. We find that while shifting towards a strategy of hearts and minds increases the chances for counterinsurgent military victory, the improvement is modest and requires nearly a decade to produce. Furthermore, we find that the impact of strategy change is conditional on the timing of the change, with an historical “window of opportunity” associated with military victory closing after eight years, a finding that bodes poorly for the allied effort in contemporary Afghanistan. More broadly, this study underscores the importance of modeling the dynamic elements of counterinsurgency strategy and outcome, an approach that will facilitate the investigation of a broad range of expectations developed in the scholarly and applied literatures.

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Introduction

The decision in spring of 2009 by newly elected American President Barack Obama to relieve Gen. David McKiernan, the military commander of the American-led mission in Afghanistan, signalled the Administration's intention to re-evaluate the allied military strategy in the face of a revitalized insurgency by Taliban, Al Qaeda, and related groups. This strategy review, the declaration of which took place at the NATO summit in April 2009, marked the formal recognition that the war in Afghanistan that was won decisively in 2002 was being lost to insurgents by 2009. Spearheading the reevaluation of allied strategy in Afghanistan is American Gen. Stanley McChrystal, a five-year veteran leader of Special Operations forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. A proponent of the integration of war-fighting and nation-building goals, Gen. McChrystal's strategic philosophy underscores the Obama Administration's intention to shift the military effort away from one "designed for high intensity combat and instead make protecting Afghan civilians their first priority" ("US General Says Troops...", 2009).¹

¹While President Obama's decision to send 17,000 additional troops to Afghanistan during summer 2009 was thought to *reflect* the adoption of Gen. McChrystal's new strategy, the policy process that unfolded during late summer and fall of 2009 indicated that this infusion of new combat troops was designed to stem further erosion of conditions on the ground, while the new Administration engaged in a strategy evaluation that *might* embrace Gen. McChrystal's recommendation, or one of several alternatives. The end product of this review process, reflected in President Obama's remarks in a speech at West Point on December 2, reflects a decidedly restrained endorsement of Gen. McChrystal's strategy recommendation (Obama, 2009). The endorsement is restrained, because it provides an infusion of troops that is slightly lower than the much publicized request by Gen. McChrystal for 40,000 additional soldiers (33,000 additional combat troops will be sent to Afghanistan), while at

The American re-evaluation of the allied military strategy prompts several questions that require further study:

- Will a shift in strategy toward one of “hearts and minds” alter the odds of military victory against the insurgents?
- What is the likely duration to victory against the insurgents following a strategy change?
- Is there a “window of opportunity” during which a strategy change might alter the course of the conflict, and has this window closed on allied forces in Afghanistan?

To answer these questions, we generalize the American-led effort in Afghanistan by considering the historical fate of foreign powers seeking to defend a central authority against an insurgency during the twentieth century. We construct a database of 66 cases in which a foreign power defends a central authority in another state or colonial territory, coding the counterinsurgency (COIN) strategies employed by foreign powers in the sample against insurgents, the timing of changes in COIN (a sub-sample of which reflect shifts toward “hearts and minds”), and whether the insurgents are defeated militarily.

Our data reflect an intentionally broad sampling strategy, including cases ranging from the notable and often referenced (e.g., the American experience in the Vietnam

the same time clearly rejecting alternative proposals that emphasized securing urban centers, training the Afghan military, and hunting terrorists with remote means, such as Predator drones (the most notable of which is referred to as the “Biden Plan” after its endorsement by Vice President Joseph Biden during spring 2009.) President Obama’s endorsement of Gen. McChrystal’s recommendation is also conservative in its identification of a rather short time frame for implementation and exit by allied forces (departure by 2011), although subsequent policy clarifications by Administration and Afghan officials suggest a longer term commitment of allied forces in Afghanistan (Mazzetti, 2009; Opper and Bumiller, 2009). Furthermore, President Obama’s strategy revision specifically supports engaging insurgents militarily beyond urban centers as well as implementing a strong civilian and civic-building component, an approach that reflects a “hearts and minds” strategy that is central to our investigation herein.

War, 1959–1975), to the less notable and rarely referenced (e.g., the German experience during the Herero War in German West Africa, 1904–1908.) While analysis of Afghanistan abounds, few studies compare the contemporary case of Afghanistan to a fully representative sample of like cases from the historical record.² As such, existing studies are hamstrung in terms of their capacity to place the fate of the war in Afghanistan in a general historical context, an issue that our study remedies.

To briefly summarize our findings, we locate some empirical support for Gen. McChrystal’s claim that a population-based COIN strategy will increase the likelihood of defeating the insurgency in Afghanistan, although this increase reflects a modest improvement over a low baseline chance of military victory. Our analysis also identifies the presence of a “window of opportunity” for COIN success, such that the strategy innovations proposed by Gen. McChrystal are too late to reverse American and allied fortunes in Afghanistan. More broadly, our analysis demonstrates the conditional and dynamic nature of COIN warfare, processes that must be accounted for in tests of general theoretical and policy claims pertaining to these conflicts.

We structure the remainder of this article as follows. The next section briefly summarizes the evolution of the war in Afghanistan, emphasizing the military campaign and Gen. McChrystal’s strategy change, followed by a brief survey of the literature on counterinsurgency in the article’s third section. The fourth section generalizes the contemporary policy problem presented by Afghanistan and in doing so presents our research design. In turn, we address the aforementioned questions by examining patterns in our sample of COIN wars. We conclude the article by discussing the

²See Jones (2008) for an analysis of contemporary Afghanistan that includes generalizable comparisons to other twentieth century insurgencies. Several studies provide within-case analysis of insurgency by, for example, examining the fate of previous COIN wars in Afghanistan, most notably the Soviet experience during the 1980s (e.g., Maley, 2009). Although these studies have the benefit of holding the characteristics of Afghanistan constant, the small sample severely constrains the co-variance between COIN strategy changes and outcome, and in doing so constrains validity and generalizability.

implications of our study for contemporary policy in Afghanistan, and the study of COIN more generally.

From Victory, to Near Defeat & Back Again?

Juxtaposed to the triumph of American-led forces against the Taliban regime at the outset of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in early 2002, the deterioration of the allied COIN war in Afghanistan by early spring 2009 is striking. Indeed, considering that former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld declared the conclusion of “major combat” in Afghanistan on May 1, 2003, as well as the fact that “[b]y late 2005, U.S. and partner commanders appeared to believe that the combat, coupled with overall political and economic reconstruction, had virtually ended any insurgency,” the post-2006 renewal of insurgent attacks, the attendant spike in civilian and military fatalities, and the failure of civilian nation-building on several fronts, marks a dramatic turn of events in Afghanistan by most any standard (Katzman, 2009, 8).

What accounts for this dramatic reversal of fortune in Afghanistan? We identify five primary sources responsible for the deterioration of post-invasion Afghanistan. First, the United States policy initially eschewed the creation of a multinational post-invasion stabilization force in Afghanistan, central to which would be contributions by European nations and coordination with the United Nations.³ When it became clear that such a force was necessary for postwar reconstruction and stabilization duties, the United States formulated and implemented an ineffective plan for such a force, a COIN strategy marked by an absence of cross-national, as well as civil-military, coordination. Furthermore, one can argue that the necessity for creating an effective multinational COIN was minimized by overly optimistic assessments that the initial

³Cordesman (2002) suggests that the United States did not initially have a clear nation-building plan and was slow in realizing the value of the multinational troops.

COIN campaign, one heavily weighted toward military force and the destruction of insurgents, was succeeding. Indeed, the immediate post-invasion COIN was arguably merely an extension of the initial war plan.

Second, American Gen. Tommy Franks' light operational footprint concept (Jones, 2008), as well as the campaign in Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)), starved OEF of critical resources necessary to propel stabilization and nation-building in Afghanistan beyond initial, post-invasion successes. The resource starvation was compounded by the emergence in Iraq of civil war conditions in 2005, which in turn required the commitment of additional resources from the United States to facilitate the surge in American military personnel during summer 2007. While some former Bush Administration officials (e.g., most notably, National Security Advisor Steven Hadley and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice) deny the diversion of resources from OEF to OIF, they remain a distinct minority in the policy assessment community (Rohde and Sanger, 2007).

Third, historically conflict in Afghanistan is one marked by internationalization of combatants through porous borders, cross-border sanctuaries, and intervention by neighboring states as well as major powers. This dynamic was certainly evident during the American support of the Mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s, as well as the internationalization of the subsequent civil war. The international nature of OEF followed a similar path, as the United States found itself fighting an insurgency that, at least with respect to the Taliban, was supported in terms of material support and cross-border refuge by America's longtime, but politically unstable ally, Pakistan.⁴ On one level, the critical influence of Pakistan on the course of OEF is a function of Pakistan's inability to secure its borders. On a second level, Pakistan considers

⁴See Rashid (2008) and Jones (2009) for a discussion of the links between Pakistan and the Taliban, and Salehyan (2007) for a general discussion of insurgent cross-border sanctuaries and their impact on interstate conflict.

its erstwhile Afghan allies, the Taliban, to present a hedge against increased Indian influence via the Karzai regime, and therefore Pakistan is reluctant to eliminate entirely the viability of this insurgent force (Schmitt and Mazetti, 2009).

Fourth, the foundation of Afghanistan's economy, one that is overwhelmingly agrarian, is problematic in that the primary crop cultivated by Afghan farmers is opium poppy, the raw material for heroin. Thus, Afghanistan's chief cash crop is extremely lucrative, which makes it virtually impossible to devise viable alternative crops for Afghan farmers. After United States forces toppled the Taliban in 2001, poppy production soared in Afghanistan, accounting for 92% of the world's opium production (*Annual Opium Poppy Survey, 2006*). Furthermore, the Taliban insurgency profited from the opium trade financially, as well as in terms of support from the Afghan people discontent with the fledgling Afghan government's provision of security and delivery of goods and services (Glaze, 2007). Coupled with a counter-narcotics strategy emphasizing eradication (Felbab-Brown, 2005), the opium poppy production undermined Afghan support for the American-led war in Afghanistan, as well as the viability of the central government in Kabul.

Last, while the United States continued its use of the special operations forces that rapidly defeated the Taliban regime in 2001, as well as remote, unmanned force technology (e.g., Predator drones), the strategic foundation for the post-invasion, COIN warfare by allied forces in Afghanistan was grounded in a more conventional application of military force, one that sought to "search and destroy" insurgent forces (Biddle, 2003). As noted, this COIN strategy resulted in excessive destruction of civilians and property, all of which provided the basis for popular backlash among the Afghan population (Northam, 2009). As such, the American and allied forces neither destroyed the insurgents, nor generated political good will between the central government in Kabul and the Afghan population.

In sum, initial strategic and operational mistakes, the failure to implement a COIN commensurate with building Afghan support, the historically internationalized nature of conflict in Afghanistan, and relatively immutable economic, political, and social conditions, provided the foundation for a revitalized insurgency. In response to these developments, Gen. McChrystal is charged with creating a strategic plan that will correct the deficiencies in American policy in Afghanistan. As such, Gen. McChrystal's proposed COIN strategy, as described at length in his formal, declassified report (McChrystal, 2009), is consistent with references in American foreign policy of "winning the hearts and minds."⁵ Gen. McChrystal proposes a population-based COIN strategy that emphasizes limiting the use of force while simultaneously increasing popular Afghan support and bolstering the legitimacy of the Afghan government.

Hearts and minds (or HaM, as we refer to it hereafter) contrasts with force-based, or enemy-centric, strategies designed primarily to defeat insurgents on the battlefield, but that are argued to result in greater civilian casualties, a tradeoff that in Afghanistan heretofore generated a backlash against the Karzai-led central government, as it did against American forces during the Vietnam War.⁶ Instead, a HaM-oriented strategy integrates a military component with local cooperation and regional integration to achieve economic development, governance, and civil society. As Gen. McChrystal conceptualizes the primary objective before the United States and its allies in Afghanistan:

⁵Dickinson (2009) catalogues the evolution of the use of this phrase, particularly its close association with pre- and post-Cold War American foreign policy, most notably as it was applied to the Vietnamese population during the Vietnam War by American Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. More recently, Presidents Bush and Obama employed this phrase in reference to the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the war on terror more broadly. However, as Dickinson notes, non-American leaders, such as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, also employed the phrase in reference to what American foreign policy *should be* towards other states. Hearts and minds is also a key component of the current *US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual No 3-24*, one closely associated with American Gen. David Petraeus' response to the dramatic increase in violence in post-invasion Iraq in 2005.

⁶This dynamic was clearly illustrated by the reaction of the Afghan central government, as well as the international community, to the NATO aerial bombing in Herat, Afghanistan in August 2008.

[a]t the end of the day, you're fighting for the population, not with the population or against the population. As you fight for them, you are trying to convince them. You are in an argument with the enemy over the population, and they are listening, and they are watching what you do and what you say. They are going to decide based on who makes the most convincing argument. Are you protecting them? Can you stop them from being coerced at midnight by an armed man who shows up and threatens them? It's a *retail war* (Schmitt, 2009, emphasis added).

The theoretical claim embedded in the appointment of Gen. McChrystal, and the revised strategy proposal, is that a strategic and operational shift to a COIN reflecting the principles of HaM will eliminate, or at least minimize, the conditions undercutting the effectiveness of the military mission in Afghanistan. By doing so, said strategic shift will increase the likelihood for a more favorable outcome for the allied coalition and Afghanistan relative to the outcome produced absent a strategy change. Indeed, Gen. McChrystal considers a successful execution of a HaM COIN as key to victory over the insurgents. In order to place the contemporary debate regarding the potential effectiveness of a HaM COIN strategy in Afghanistan, as well as our contribution to this debate as well as to the broader study of COIN, it is necessary to consider the existing literature on COIN, a task that we undertake in brief form in the next section.

Prior Research

A large and rapidly growing body of research examines COIN warfare. Three threads in this literature link the strategic mode of COIN warfare and conflict outcome. We discuss each thread briefly in turn. The first thread in the literature is associated with what might be termed the “classical COIN model,” because it draws in part

on the precepts of Mao Tse-Tung's theory of revolutionary warfare (Mao, 1978), and were largely written in response to independence and revolutionary wars occurring in the 1950s and 1960s. Contributions generally identify two COIN strategies and their respective relationships to victory by counterinsurgent armies: (1) *enemy-centric*; and (2) *population-centric*. Enemy-centric COIN warfare emphasizes defeat of the insurgents on the battlefield through the application of military force, while population-centric COIN emphasizes controlling the local population's physical location, providing sufficient security to the population, and in turn winning the local population's political allegiance. Contributors to the classical COIN literature (e.g., Galula, 2006; Callwell, 1996; Thompson, 1966), as well as contemporary contributions in this vein (e.g., *US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual No 3-24*, 2007), contend that achieving support among the local population is paramount to successful COIN warfare; that is, COIN warfare based on a primarily enemy-centric foundation is more likely to fail than are alternatives reflecting population-centric characteristics.

The second area of COIN research examines the puzzle of why strong conventional armies are often defeated by irregular, and conventionally much weaker, insurgents. Some of this research identifies the aforementioned enemy-centric strategy as the root cause for COIN failure. For example, Arreguin-Toft (2001) proposes the strategic interaction thesis for explaining conflict outcomes. This thesis suggests that reliance by counterinsurgent armies on a conventional military strategy and related means when fighting insurgents employing guerrilla strategy will typically result in a defeat for the conventional COIN force, because the guerrillas deny the counterinsurgent forces decisive battlefield victories, thereby protracting the COIN and increasing the odds that a counterinsurgent force will be defeated militarily, politically via domestic audience costs, or both.

Lyall and Wilson (2009) make a related contribution, arguing that the pattern of conventionally superior military forces losing to irregular forces is due to the increased mechanization of modern armies. As armies became more technically and mechanically dependent historically, Lyall and Wilson argue, reliance on local populations for supplies became untenable, as the non-industrialized economies within which these conflicts occurred could supply COIN armies with little more than raw materials, as opposed to the industrialized base necessary to support a mechanized army. In turn, reliance by mechanized counterinsurgent armies on their home country rather than the local population constrained trust-building and intelligence gathering by counterinsurgents, thereby limiting the effectiveness of COIN while at the same time generating popular support for insurgents.

The third area of research links the domestic regime type of counterinsurgent countries with conflict outcome. For example, some research suggests that authoritarian regimes can be relatively more effective in COIN because of the highly organized security forces common to these regimes, as well as authoritarian regimes' natural facility with repressive, even brutal, tactics to deter would-be insurgents, as well as combatting insurgencies that do emerge (e.g., Kitson, 1971; O'Neill, 2001; Trinquier, 2006). Conversely, the literature suggests that democratic regimes are more likely to encounter problems sustaining a COIN conflict, given taxation and casualty burdens (Thompson, 1979; Mueller, 1973; Merom, 2003), as well as being normatively incompatible with the nature of revolutionary wars (e.g., Sarkesian, 1985; Gabriel, 1984). Yet, while the basic thrust of this literature is that authoritarian regimes are superior counterinsurgents, other research suggests that restraint-based COIN is more fruitful (Cohen, Crane, Horvath and Nagl, 2006; Nagl, 2005), and as such, democratic regimes may be more capable of COIN warfare, or at least at no greater disadvantage relative to non-democratic regimes (Engelhardt, 1992).

In general, the existing body of research on COIN warfare is the foundation for a number of insights about various strategies and their relative effectiveness. That said, this body of research provides no generalizable assessment of a counterinsurgent army’s change from an enemy–centric strategy to a HaM-based, population–centric COIN strategy, a transformation that is central to the strategy proposed by Gen. McChrystal for Afghanistan. Certainly, prior research, most notably that by Arreguin-Toft (2001), examines the link between strategy and COIN outcome, and notable recent contributions (e.g., Kilcullen, Porter and Burgos, 2009; Nagl, 2005) underscore the value of HaM-related strategies for counterinsurgent victory. Yet, the absence of research that addresses this issue of strategic dynamism and adaptation with a representative platform constrains the application of this research to contemporary policy questions related to the contemporary COIN war in Afghanistan.⁷

In the remainder of this article, we innovate the current literature by examining COIN strategy changes and outcomes with an eye toward furnishing policy-relevant analysis for the current conflict in Afghanistan. Given our focus on testing contemporary policy claims, the remainder of this article departs from standard form. Specifically, rather than developing a theory of foreign power COIN performance in the following section, instead we consider the theoretical claim advanced by Gen. McChrystal—that a switch to a HaM strategy in Afghanistan will yield a different outcome, namely victory, that is significantly different than the outcome that would have occurred absent said strategic change—as *the theory to be vetted empirically* against a representative

⁷While our specific interest concerns forecasting the likely impact of the strategy change proposed by Gen. McChrystal in Afghanistan in 2009, one might argue that the importance of studying the dynamic properties of COIN is underscored by the evolution of war-fighting paradigms in general. For example, consider the interpretation of former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld when referring to the charge on horseback led by American Special Forces in an assault on Taliban forces in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan in 2001 (An episode described in Stanton, 2009). For Rumsfeld, “the lesson...is not that the U.S. Army should start stockpiling saddles. Rather, it is that preparing for the future will require new ways of thinking, and the development of forces and capabilities that can adapt quickly to new challenges and unexpected circumstances” (Rumsfeld, 2002, 22).

sample of like cases drawn from the historical record. As such, we turn next to formulating an appropriate research design that will facilitate the analysis of COIN strategy, strategy changes, and outcomes for counterinsurgent armies during the twentieth century.

Research Design

Foreign Powers & Insurgencies

We reason that the contemporary American-led military effort in Afghanistan reflects three primary characteristics that guide our identification of a sample of COIN conflicts during the twentieth century. First, the COIN war in Afghanistan is characterized by a foreign power seeking to defend central authority in a political unit against an insurgency. This general class of events manifests itself in the historical record in two forms that we include in our sample: (1) a central government in a state invites a foreign power to assist in the central government's counterinsurgency; and (2) the foreign power is a colonial metropole seeking to establish and maintain its centralized administration over a territory and in doing so is confronted by an anti-colonial insurgency.

Therefore, we are uninterested in COIN warfare that occurs within a sovereign state and are in turn fought solely by that state's central government without overt military involvement by a foreign power (e.g., the Peruvian counterinsurgency against the Shining Path group during the 1980s and 90s.) In short, we focus our analysis on what might be termed *foreign power COINs*, as these most closely reflect the contemporary American-led allied effort in Afghanistan.

The second characteristic of the COIN war in Afghanistan concerns the mode of intervention by foreign powers, one in which foreign powers commit significant military forces, as well as engage in combat operations, against insurgent armies, as opposed to

interventions that are primarily diplomatic or financial in nature. We focus solely on identifying cases in which foreign powers fight insurgents, rather than simply supporting such a fight diplomatically or financially.

The third issue concerns the identification of insurgencies relative to non-insurgency conflicts. In general, insurgencies reflect the presence of organized, conflict-capable groups that are willing, or do, employ military means against a central government authority. Therefore, insurgencies are qualitatively different from “uprisings,” “rebellions,” and “mass unrest.” That said, we employ an inclusive coding procedure when toeing the sometimes nebulous line separating insurgencies from other classes of intrastate conflict. Indeed, it is arguably the case that the strategy that foreign powers employ against uprisings and rebellions can serve as a selection mechanism that in turn conditions subsequently observable insurgencies in the historical record. As such, focusing solely on insurgencies that achieved maturity might mask the role of strategy in moderating conflict before the insurgency phase. We plan to investigate this process of insurgency formation elsewhere, but herein we seek to include those cases of uprising (e.g., the Hungarian Revolution in 1956), for example, that constitute what might be termed near-insurgencies.

Table 1: Foreign Power COIN Conflicts During the Twentieth Century (N= 66).

Case	Start	End	Foreign Power	Strategy Change?	Change Year	To HaM?	Insurgents Defeated?
Second Boer War	1899	1902	Britain	Yes	1900	No	Yes
Philippine American War	1899	1902	United States	Yes	1901	No	Yes
Moro Rebellion	1903	1913	United States	Yes	1906	Yes	Yes
Herero and Namaqua Wars	1904	1908	Germany	Yes	1904	No	Yes
Maji Maji Rebellion	1905	1907	Germany	No		No	Yes
Sokehs Rebellion	1910	1911	Germany	No		No	Yes
Rif War	1910	1934	Spain	No		No	Yes
Cacos Insurgency	1915	1934	United States	Yes	1916	Yes	Yes
Basmachi Revolt	1916	1931	Russia	Yes	1920	Yes	Yes
The Irish War of Independence	1916	1923	Britain	Yes	1921	Yes	No
Kaocen Revolt	1916	1917	France/Britain	No		No	Yes
Greater Poland Uprising	1918	1919	Germany	No		No	No
The Euphrates Revolt	1919	1920	Britain	No		No	Yes
Turkish War of Independence	1919	1923	Greece	No		No	No
Klaipeda Revolt	1923	1923	France	No		No	No
Syrian Revolution	1925	1927	France	Yes	1925	Yes	Yes
Rif War	1925	1934	France	No		No	Yes
PKI anti-Dutch Revolt	1926	1926	Dutch	No		No	Yes
Occupation of Nicaragua	1927	1933	United States	No		No	No
Second Italo–Abyssinian War	1935	1940	Italy	Yes	1936	Yes	Yes
Arab Revolt	1936	1939	Britain	Yes	1938	No	Yes
Chechnya Insurgency	1940	1944	Russia	No		No	Yes
Yugoslav People’s Liberation War	1941	1944	Germany	No		No	No
Yugoslav People’s Liberation War	1941	1943	Italy	No		No	No
Warsaw Uprising	1944	1944	Germany	Yes	1944	No	No
Slovak National Uprising	1944	1945	Germany	Yes	1944	No	Yes
The Forest Brothers Rebellion	1944	1953	Soviet Union	Yes	1944	No	Yes

Table 1 continued on next page.

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Case	Start	End	Foreign Power	Strategy Change?	Change Year	To HaM?	Insurgents Defeated?
Ukraine	1945	1956	Soviet Union	Yes	1949	No	Yes
Indonesian National Revolution	1945	1949	Dutch	No		No	No
Prague Uprising	1945	1945	Germany	No		No	Yes
Hukbalahap Rebellion	1946	1954	United States	Yes	1950	Yes	Yes
French Indochina War	1946	1954	France	Yes	1950	No	No
Greek Civil War	1946	1949	Britain/USA	Yes	1947	Yes	Yes
Malagasy Uprising	1947	1948	France	Yes	1948	Yes	Yes
Malayan Emergency	1948	1960	Britain	Yes	1950	Yes	Yes
Kenyan Emergency	1952	1960	Britain	Yes	1953	Yes	Yes
Algerian War of Independence	1954	1962	France	Yes	1959	No	Yes
Cyprus	1955	1960	Britain	Yes	1955	No	No
French Cameroon	1955	1970	France	No		No	Yes
Hungarian Revolution	1956	1956	Soviet Union	Yes	1956	No	Yes
Tibet	1956	1972	China	No		No	Yes
Ifni War	1957	1958	Spain/France	No		No	Yes
Vietnam War	1959	1975	United States	Yes	1968	Yes	No
Eritrean War of Independence	1961	1991	Ethiopia	Yes	1978	No	No
Guinea-Bissau War of Independence	1962	1974	Portugal	Yes	1968	Yes	Yes
Dhofar Rebellion	1962	1976	Britain	Yes	1970	Yes	Yes
North Yemen Civil War	1962	1970	Egypt	Yes	1962	No	No
Aden Emergency	1963	1976	Britain	No		No	No
Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation	1963	1967	Britain	Yes	1964	No	Yes
Mozambican Civil War	1964	1975	Portugal	Yes	1970	Yes	No
Laos	1964	1973	United States	Yes	1969	No	No
Namibian War of Independence	1966	1990	South Africa	Yes	1976	Yes	No
Northern Ireland	1968	1998	Britain	Yes	1974	Yes	Yes
Chadian Civil War	1969	1978	France	No		No	Yes
Cambodian Civil War	1970	1975	United States	No		No	No

Table 1 continued on next page.

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Case	Start	End	Foreign Power	Strategy Change?	Change Year	To HaM?	Insurgents Defeated?
East Timor	1975	1999	Indonesia	Yes	1982	Yes	Yes
Angolan Civil War	1975	1990	Cuba	No		No	Yes
Cambodia	1978	1990	Vietnam	No		No	No
Soviet-Afghan War	1979	1989	Soviet Union	Yes	1983	No	No
Nicaraguan Resistance	1979	1989	Cuba/Soviet Union	No		No	No
El Salvadoran Civil War	1981	1992	United States	No		No	No
Sri Lankan Civil War	1987	1990	India	No		No	No
Tajikistan	1992	1997	Russia	No		No	No
First Chechen War	1994	1996	Russia	No		No	No
Second Chechen War	1999	2009	Russia	Yes	2004	Yes	Yes
Somalia	2006	2009	Ethiopia	Yes	2007	Yes	No

Note: “Start” and “End” correspond to the years of a foreign power’s intervention. “HaM” reflects a strategy of hearts and minds.

Guided by these three criteria, we identify a sample of 66 insurgencies fought by foreign powers during the twentieth-century. These cases are reported in Table 1.⁸ The sample of cases are evenly distributed across the century, with 33 (50%) of the sample commencing pre-1946, and the remainder thereafter. Unsurprisingly, the major power states serve as the primary foreign powers fighting insurgencies in our sample, with 52 (79%) of the cases in our sample reflecting involvement by the major power states of the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union/Russia.

COIN Outcomes

The primary phenomenon that we wish to examine historically is the success of foreign powers in COIN campaigns while defending central authority in a state or colony. Measuring COIN success is a thorny issue for three reasons. First, COIN conflicts generate indecisive endings, even if the counterinsurgent foreign power wins militarily. Second, the determination of COIN success by a foreign power is often entwined with a foreign power's overarching political goals that are entwined with the a COIN war, goals that might be imprecise and reflect short-, medium-, and long-term components.

Last, the political goals of foreign powers may change, and this dynamism might be related to a foreign power's military success (or lack thereof) against insurgents—e.g., a difficult fight against insurgents might prompt a reassessment and limiting the standard for what constitutes for COIN success. Furthermore, a military victory might be accomplished at high cost, and in turn prompt a foreign power to accept political defeat (e.g., France in the Algerian Independence War.) In the contemporary case of Afghanistan, the goal of constructing an Afghan democracy was embraced by the

⁸In four cases—The Kaocen Revolt (France and Britain, 1916–7), The Greek Civil War (Britain and the United States, 1946–9), The Ifni War (Spain and France, 1957–8), and The Nicaraguan Resistance (Cuba and the Soviet Union, 1979–1989)—we consider intervention by more than one foreign power as a single case, due to the fact the foreign powers fought an insurgency in a coordinated fashion.

Bush Administration, yet the Obama Administration reduced emphasis on democratic institutions as a central goal in Afghanistan, preferring the achievement of stability and reduced threat of terrorism (Tapper, 2009).

To code the outcome of a foreign power COIN, we set aside the question of whether a foreign power achieved its broader political goals, focusing instead solely on whether foreign power defeated the insurgents militarily.⁹ We focus on insurgent military defeat for two reasons. First, while the identification of foreign power goals are difficult to pinpoint, all counterinsurgents seek to defeat the insurgent groups. While the means to achieve this objective varies, defeating the insurgents remains the objective. Second, we consider military defeat of the insurgents in particular because our sample, as well as in contemporary Afghanistan, reflect instances where military or police forces comprise the primary counterinsurgent instrument. In our sample, examples in which insurgents were defeated militarily include the U.S and Philippine defeat of the Huk insurgency (1954) as well as the British defeat of the Boers (1902). Examples in which the insurgents were not defeated include the Vietnam War (1959–1975), the Soviet conflict in Afghanistan (1979–1989) as well as the British experiences in Aden (1963–1976) and Cyprus (1955–1960). Table 1 reports the codings for outcome for the sample of 66 cases of foreign power COIN.

To summarize, in the full sample of 66 cases, 40 cases (60%) reflect victory (i.e., insurgent defeats) by the foreign power counterinsurgent. If we employ the conventional breakpoint of WWII, we find 24 cases (72%) of counterinsurgent victory in the pre-1946 period, while only 16 cases (48%) of counterinsurgent victory in the post-WWII sub-sample. Given this breakdown, the historical odds of success by foreign powers against

⁹While many of the cases of foreign power COIN reflect a general consensus among scholars regarding the outcome of the conflict in terms of the performance of the foreign power, in several cases such a consensus is absent (e.g., the French Experience in Algeria resulted in an overall failure for France although the insurgents were militarily defeated.) Here, we rely on historical monographs to gauge military outcomes, mindful that decisive outcomes may in some instances be difficult to code.

insurgents witnessed a marked decline after WWII, a trend that is consistent with patterns reported in previous research (e.g., Arreguin-Toft, 2001; Lyall and Wilson, 2009).¹⁰

COIN Strategy Changes

We rely on monographs and histories to code whether a foreign power significantly altered its strategic or operational plan during the course of fighting an insurgency. As noted, COIN strategies can be roughly divided into two types, population- or enemy-centered. By our definition, strategic shifts occur when a foreign power switches between population and enemy-centric COIN strategies. For example, during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Soviets evolved their COIN from an enemy-centric to a population-centric strategy, reflecting a shift from an initial focus on defeating the Mujahadeen in decisive military battle, to one of eliminating the insurgent base of support, principally through bombing and mining of the countryside (Grau and Gress, 2002).

Alternatively, operational shifts can occur from within the enemy- and population-centric approaches. For example, an operational shift may entail shifting from static to offensive operations. This is exemplified in the Algerian War of Independence, during which the French commander, Gen. Raoul Salan, focused on territorial defence. Gen. Salan's approach was an inherently passive, one which required the deployment

¹⁰Our frequencies of COIN victory are slightly greater than reported by Arreguin-Toft (2001) and Lyall and Wilson (2009). We offer two explanations for this difference. First, our sample only considers counterinsurgencies in which foreign powers are furnishing overt military support—i.e., fighting insurgents—and therefore it is reasonable to expect greater rates of success by counterinsurgents given outside military support. Second, our coding procedure bifurcates outcomes in COIN conflicts, such that insurgents are either defeated militarily or they are not. This bifurcation scheme differs from that reported in Lyall and Wilson (2009), for example, wherein the authors employ a three category scheme (i.e., victory, defeat, draw.) Because Gen. McChrystal emphasizes that policy success necessitates the military defeat of the Taliban and related groups, a bifurcation suits our needs, but is likely to inhibit the comparability of COIN outcomes generated with our sample with those previously published.

of a large number of troops to guard territory via the Morice Line. Salan's replacement, Gen. Maurice Challe, shifted away from territorial defense operations, increasing offensive operations and taking the fight to the insurgents.¹¹ Strategic and operational shifts are typically reflected by distinct phases of the conflict where one approach to achieving the desired outcome is emphasized, and are frequently marked by changes in military leadership.

Our codings for strategy change in our sample of 66 cases are reported in Table 1. The sample distribution indicates that 37 cases (56%) reflect instances in which a foreign power changed its military strategy. When we consider the pre- and post-WWII sub-samples, 17 cases (51%) reflect strategy shifts in the pre-1946 period, while 20 cases (61%) reflect such shifts in the post-1945 period.

Shifts to Hearts and Minds

HaM is a population-centric approach to counterinsurgency. However, there is considerable variance in the COIN literature in terms of the logic underlying HaM, which in turn influences any attempt to code empirically the presence or absence of this strategy.¹² For example, Stubbs (2004) considers HaM to be a tool to gain the emotional favor of the people, not simply their indifference. Mockaitis (2008) contends that HaM is a strategic evaluation of the conflict, one that seeks to address the fundamental cause of the conflict stemming from material necessity, such as adequate housing and resources. Furthermore, Rigden (2008) argues that HaM incorporates forceful action to change the perspective of the populace. Similarly, Strachan (2007, 8) argues that HaM is “about giving them [the population] the firm smack of government.” Last,

¹¹Herein, we incorporate operational shifts into the codings, because Gen. McChrystal emphasizes not only a strategic shift but also a shift in “operational culture” bringing the operational elements in line with a true population-centered COIN (McChrystal, 2009).

¹²See Dixon (2009) for an excellent overview of hearts and minds strategy.

the *The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual No 3-24* considers HaM as a method to build networks within the population, yet the manual emphasizes the strategic rationality of the population for supporting the counterinsurgent.

While there is a broad range of interpretations of HaM, we code shifts to HaM similar to the proposed strategic and operational aspects in contemporary Afghanistan (See McChrystal, 2009). First, switches to HaM-based COIN must emphasize developmental assistance and the goal of securing the populace. By way of example, consider the Hukbalahap (Huk) Rebellion in the Philippines (1946–54). Early in the Huk Rebellion, when the Filipino government sought to crush the insurgents militarily, there was no civilian aspect to the government’s strategy. Later, with the infusion of greater American support coupled with the ascendancy of the then Filipino Defense Secretary, Ramon Magsaysay, the COIN developed greater civil emphasis, such as land redistribution and the introduction of population-based civil affairs personnel. According to our coding procedure, the COIN under Magsaysay marked a clear switch to HaM principles, a type of change that is reflected in our coding procedure.

Historically, securing the population involves population resettlement, as was evident in British involvement in Malayan Emergency (1948–1960) and American involvement in the Vietnam War (1959–1975). Population resettlement is considered a HaM approach because the goal of resettlement is to secure the population, while simultaneously isolating the insurgents.¹³ However, population control measures, such as direct repression of the population, such as scorched earth policies, and mass deportation, similar to policies utilized by the British in the Second Boer War (1899–1902) and

¹³Operations such as population resettlement that we consider a part of a HaM approach involve what Markel (2006) correctly argues are repressive. However, it is important to note that this repression is starkly different, in scale and principle, from actions against the population, such as those implemented in the Soviet counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. The Soviet means to population control was not directed at gaining popular support among the population, but rather to instill a sufficient degree of fear so that the Afghan population would not support the insurgents. Conversely, HaM is aimed at gaining popular support, although it is not to be confused with a “soft approach,” as Rigden (2008) correctly observes, one devoid of a military component.

initially in Malaya (1948–1960), the Ethiopians during the Eritrian War of Independence (1961–1991), and the Soviets in Lithuania during the Forest Brothers Rebellion (1944–53), are not considered to reflect HaM principles.

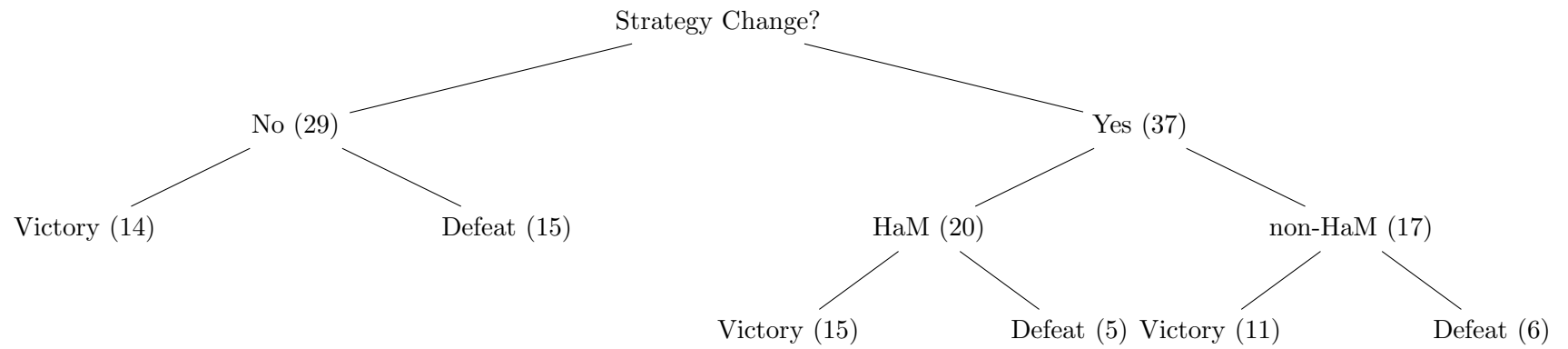
Second, switches to HaM involve the selective, or restrictive use of force. For example, during the Mau–Mau Rebellion (i.e., The Kenyan Emergency, 1952–60) the British initially employed widespread repression against civilians. However, when Gen. George Erskine took over command of the British COIN, he designated special reserves to protect the villagers as well as favoring a more selective use of military force (Bennett, 2007). Herein, the British COIN after the arrival of Erskine were coded as consistent with HaM because the British sought to protect the local population, as well as exercise restraint in the application of military force. These operational shifts are consistent with the recent restriction placed on air strikes in Afghanistan by Gen. McChrystal intended to reduce collateral damage thereby sustaining Afghan commitment to the American and allied presence.

Third, switches to policies that seek to increase the legitimacy of the local allies are considered HaM principles. Historically, these policies include the primacy of indigenous forces in security roles. By way of illustration, consider the Ethiopian counterinsurgency in Somalia that began 2006. The Ethiopians began the counterinsurgency with direct involvement of Ethiopian combat. However, the Ethiopians transitioned out of direct military action in favor of Somali units serving in this capacity. Therefore, we still consider this an operational adaptation consistent with HaM principles because it is aimed at increasing the legitimacy of their local proxy forces.

In sum, the presence of a HaM strategy is coded herein for COIN strategies reflecting efforts by foreign powers to gain the support of the population through security and development rather than through violence, intimidation or fear. Implementing our coding procedure on our sample of 66 cases results in a sub-sample of 20 of our 66

cases (30%) in which foreign powers switched their COIN strategy toward one marked by HaM. These codings are reported in Table 1. In Figure 1 we employ a tree diagram to break the full sample of 66 cases down by strategy change and outcome, demonstrating first and foremost that our sample generation strategy reflects selection on neither the presence of strategy changes nor outcome.

Figure 1: Foreign Power COINs by Strategy Change & COIN Outcome (Data From Table 1).



Duration of COIN After a Strategy Switch

Finally, a central element in the policy debate concerning whether or not to implement Gen. McChrystal's strategy change in Afghanistan concerns the length of time required for the allied force to accomplish a successful COIN. To examine this aspect of the contemporary policy problem, we identify the start and end years of the insurgencies in our sample, information reported in Table 1. The mean duration of the COIN operations in our sample of 66 cases is eight years. The mean duration of cases terminating during the pre-1946 period is 5.2 years, while post-1945 period reflects a mean duration of 10.7 years.

Additionally, where applicable for each case we identify the year in which the first strategy change was implemented by a foreign power, data that are reported in Table 1 and disaggregated visually in Figure 1. Based on this coding criteria, the mean duration from the start of an insurgency to the strategy change is 3.4 years. The mean duration from the strategy change to the end of an insurgency is six years. For the post-1946 period, the mean duration to a strategy change is 4.7 years, while the duration after a strategy change to the end of the conflict is 7.25 years.

Analysis

Our empirical analysis is designed, first and foremost, to assess the contemporary policy claim that an allied strategy change in Afghanistan will significantly improve the odds of military victory over the insurgents, in addition to providing a platform for exploring the dynamic interrelationships between strategy change, conflict duration, and conflict outcome. In the remaining subsections, we first examine the overall rates of COIN success, followed by the relationship between COIN strategy change and success, the duration of COIN following a strategy switch, and finally, and whether a "window

of opportunity” exists between the timing of COIN strategy changes and the odds of victory.

Patterns of Success

We begin by examining the overall rates of COIN success by foreign powers. Table 2 displays the distribution of COIN victory by foreign powers during the twentieth century (1899–2009, excluding the contemporary cases of Iraq and Afghanistan), as well as during two sub-periods (pre- and post-1946.) In the sample covering the full twentieth century, the distribution of cases indicates a rate of success (i.e., military victory against insurgents) of approximately 60% (40/66).

However, when subdividing the sample with a breakpoint following the end of WWII, important differences in rates of success experienced by foreign powers are evident. Specifically, during the pre-1946 period, foreign powers experienced military victory in 72% (24/33) of the cases, but in the sample corresponding to the post-1946 period the rate of success against insurgents declines to 48% (16/33).¹⁴ While this latter pattern would appear to reflect important implications for American and allied policy in contemporary Afghanistan, this analysis fails to incorporate the dynamic nature of COIN strategies employed by foreign powers, dynamism that is explicit in the policy review of strategy in Afghanistan. We consider the relationship between strategy change and outcome next.

Strategy Change & Outcome

A more nuanced assessment of patterns in COIN success requires the incorporation of shifts in COIN strategy by foreign powers. Table 3 displays foreign power COIN victory

¹⁴A χ^2 test of independence rejects the null hypothesis that the rates of success are the same before and after the year 1946 ($\chi^2 = 4.06$, $p = 0.04$).

Table 2: Foreign Power COIN Victory (1899–2009, Pre- & Post-1946).

Period	Foreign Power		
	Victory	Defeat	Total
Overall	40	26	66
Pre-1946	24	9	33
Post-1946	16	17	33

for the pre- and post-1946 sub-samples. During the twentieth century, foreign powers that implement changes in counterinsurgency strategies are rewarded with victory 70% (26/37) of the time, an outcome that is a marked improvement over a success rate of 48% (14/29) when strategy change is absent.¹⁵

Turning to the sub-samples, the pre-1946 sample of foreign power COIN success indicates a relatively high rate of success (88%, or 15/17) in cases in which a foreign power changes COIN strategy while fighting insurgents, a rate of success that moderates to 56% in cases in which foreign powers do not change their COIN strategies. Thus, in the pre-1946 sample, strategy adaptation by a foreign power is rewarded with significantly greater rates of success.¹⁶

Considering the post-1946 period, a similar pattern, though of lower overall magnitude, is revealed. Specifically, in the sub-sample of post-1946 cases in which foreign powers change COIN strategies, the success rate is 55% (11/20), whereas in cases in which COIN strategy change is absent, the rate of success reduces to 38% (5/13). Thus, while COIN strategy changes by foreign powers are uniformly rewarded with greater

¹⁵A χ^2 test of independence computed for the full sample suggests that there is a statistically significant difference in the outcome distribution between those counterinsurgents that change strategies and those that do not ($\chi^2 = 3.29$, $p = 0.069$).

¹⁶A Fisher's exact test of independence is conducted to evaluate the differences between those counterinsurgents that change strategies and those that do not in the pre-1946 period. The null hypothesis for this test is that the outcome distribution is the same for those cases reflecting strategy changes and those case that reflect no such change. The p -value resulting from this test equals .057, suggesting there is a statistically significant difference in the pre-1946 period.

rates of success, this rate reduces from 88% in the pre-1946 to 55% in the post-1946 period, a sharp reduction in the odds of military victory in the contemporary period.¹⁷

Table 3: Foreign Power COIN Victory with Strategy Changes (Pre- & Post-1946).

Period	Foreign Power			Total
	Strategy Change	Victory	Defeat	
Pre-1946	Yes	15	2	17
	No	9	7	16
Post-1946	Yes	11	9	20
	No	5	8	13

While accounting for general changes in COIN strategy by foreign powers illuminates nuances in the pattern of COIN outcomes, it remains an imprecise measurement of COIN strategies. The strategy change recently undertaken by the United States in Afghanistan is of a specific nature, that of change from a strategy primarily reflecting enemy-centric characteristics to one reflecting HaM. Next, we examine the rates of success in COIN, given changes in COIN military strategy toward one of HaM.

HaM & Outcome

Table 4 reports the rates of success for foreign powers given a shift to a COIN strategy of HaM for the full and post-1946 sub-samples. In terms of the full sample, switches by foreign powers to a strategy of HaM results in a 75% rate of success, while changes to non-HaM strategies reflect a 64% rate of success.¹⁸ Turning to the sub-sample of post-

¹⁷A χ^2 test of independence suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in the proportions of victory between foreign power COIN reflecting changes in strategy and those cases reflecting no such change in the post-1946 period ($\chi^2 = 0.86$, $p = 0.35$).

¹⁸A Fisher's exact test suggests that there is no statistically different distribution between those cases reflecting a strategy switch to HaM and those cases reflecting a switch to an alternative strategy in the twentieth century, p -value= 0.71 (two-tailed.) More importantly, however, a Fisher's exact test (one-tailed) suggests that cases reflecting a switch to a HaM strategy reflect a significantly greater frequency of military victories relative to cases in which no such strategy change occurred ($p = 0.056$).

1946 insurgencies, the frequencies reported in Table 4 reflect rates of success similar to the full sample, with changes to a HaM based strategy resulting in a rate of success of 66% (8/12). Perhaps more striking is the fact that foreign powers that switched to a strategy other than HaM defeat the insurgents only 37% (3/8) of the time.

Thus far, our analysis suggests some mixed news for American policymakers regarding attempts to salvage victory in Afghanistan. Specifically, a change to HaM results in a greater rate of victory against insurgents throughout the twentieth century. Clearly, the post-1946 rate of success of 66% is an improvement over the aforementioned general rate of foreign power rate of success of 48%. However, switches to HaM should not be considered proverbial “silver bullets” in COIN warfare, as 33% (4/12) of the foreign powers that switched to a HaM strategy ultimately failed to defeat the insurgents.¹⁹ While this analysis incorporates dynamism in the form of strategy change, it fails to include a time component. Next, we analyze the relationship between strategy change and outcome condition on the timing of strategy changes.

Table 4: Foreign Power COIN Victory with a Strategy Change to Hearts & Minds (HaM).

	Foreign Power			
	Strategy Change	To HaM	Victory	Defeat
Overall	Yes	Yes	15	5
		No	11	6
Post-1946	No	–	14	15
	Yes	Yes	8	4
		No	3	5
	No	–	5	8

¹⁹A Fisher’s exact test for the post-1946 period suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in outcome distributions between those that changed to HaM and those who switched to another strategy ($p= 0.36$ (two-tailed.)) Furthermore, the Fisher’s exact test also suggests that there is *no statistically significant difference* in outcome frequencies between those cases reflecting a switch to HaM relative to those reflecting no such change in the post-1946 period ($p= 0.23$ (two-tailed.))

Duration Following Strategy Change

Table 5 displays the mean durations (in years) for the insurgencies in which foreign powers switched strategies, as well as the duration from the point at which a switch in COIN strategy occurs to the end of the insurgency. The pattern revealed in Table 5 suggests that in cases in which a strategy change to HaM occurs, the mean conflict duration after the switch is *almost eight years for the full sample and almost nine in the post-1946 sub-sample*.²⁰

Conversely, foreign powers that switched to a non-HaM strategy experience substantially shorter conflict durations. While this pattern is not encouraging in terms of a quick resolution to the COIN war in contemporary Afghanistan, it is not entirely surprising. The nature of a HaM oriented strategy is one requiring relatively more time to implement successfully, as foreign powers vie for the allegiance of local populations, deter future insurgents, and demonstrate the benefits of supporting the central authority.

Table 5: Foreign Power COIN Duration to Cessation Given a Change to a HaM Strategy.

Period	Foreign Power Switch to HaM	Mean Duration to Cessation	Mean Duration to Cessation After Switch
Overall	Yes	11.7	7.65
	No	6.4	4.17
Post-1946	Yes	13.75	8.58
	No	9.1	5.25

²⁰Welch's t-test (one-tailed) for the full sample of 66 cases indicates that mean conflict durations following a strategy switch to HaM are statistically greater than the mean duration after a switch to an alternative strategy ($p= 0.02$). In the post-1946, however, the difference in means is not statistically significant ($p= 0.09$) by conventional standards. However, we believe that this result is mostly likely attributable to the small number of cases.

Window of Opportunity

The aforementioned analysis indicates that it is advantageous, albeit time consuming, for foreign powers to switch to a COIN strategy of HaM. However, critical questions pertaining to the current conflict in Afghanistan remain: Is there a length of time—a “window of opportunity”—in COIN during which strategy changes are more or less effective in terms of military victory? Has the American-led coalition missed this window of opportunity in Afghanistan? We investigate these questions in the remainder of this subsection.

Table 6 reports the breakdown of durations in our sample from the start of a COIN conflict to the year of the first strategy change by a foreign power. The frequency breakdown demonstrates that for those counterinsurgents that switched strategies to something other than HaM, the mean duration to the change while ultimately being victorious is 1.36 years. In contrast, counterinsurgents that switched to a strategy other than HaM and went on to lose the conflict, reflect a mean duration of five years until they switched strategies. The pattern is similar for the maximum durations for each category. For counterinsurgent foreign powers that switched strategies to something other than HaM, the maximum duration before switching while still ending in a counterinsurgent victory is five years.

Table 6: Hearts and Minds, Outcomes, and Duration to Strategy Shift.

Switch to HaM	Insurgents Defeated	Mean Duration to Switch (Years)	Max Duration to Switch (Years)
No	No	5.00	17
	Yes	1.36	5
Yes	No	6.20	10
	Yes	3.33	8

The pattern for those counterinsurgents that switched to HaM is similar, such that those foreign powers that went on to defeat the insurgents tended to switch strategies *earlier* in a conflict. Specifically, the mean duration from the start of the conflict to the strategy shift to HaM while defeating the insurgents is 3.33 years. Conversely, foreign powers that ultimately lose to insurgents switched strategies later, with the mean duration from the start of the conflict to the switch being 6.2 years. In our sample, the maximum duration to a strategy shift to one of HaM that results in the military defeat of the insurgents is eight years.

Our analysis indicates that there is indeed a window of opportunity for COIN strategy shifts that result in victory. Counterinsurgents that go on to defeat the insurgents generally switch strategies earlier in the conflict than those counterinsurgent armies that go on to lose. The shift in strategy in contemporary Afghanistan is occurring approximately eight years after the conflict began (2002–2009). As such, the current Afghan COIN switch does not exceed the maximum duration for those that still went on to defeat the insurgents, although it rests on the cusp of this breakpoint. In past conflicts, such as the Dhofar Rebellion (Oman), the British switched to HaM based strategies eight years into the conflict and were still able to defeat the insurgents. That said, a strategy switch to HaM in Afghanistan will occur relatively late, thereby increasing the chances of a long war with limited prospects for military victory.

Conclusion

In this article we conceptualize the contemporary policy debate surrounding prospects for success in Afghanistan as a general social science problem, examining the counterinsurgency record of foreign powers during the twentieth century. Our analysis suggests three primary conclusions. First, strategy changes by COIN armies improve

the chances for military victory against insurgents. This finding suggests that adaptation by militaries is an important asset in COIN. Second, different COIN strategies require different time frames to influence the course of COIN wars. With respect to Gen. McChrystal's proposed HaM strategy, the mean duration to the conclusion of a war is nearly a decade. Last, the study demonstrates that military adaptation shapes outcomes, but also that this relationship is conditional on the timing of said changes. For example, whether a COIN strategy change occurs early or late in COIN wars conditions whether the COIN fails or succeeds.

The implications of our study for the COIN war in Afghanistan are troubling. While our analysis suggests that Gen. McChrystal's attempt to alter the military strategy in Afghanistan may improve the chances for military victory against the insurgent forces, this improvement comes with important caveats. While a strategy change toward HaM improves allied chances for military victory in Afghanistan, the time required for such a strategy requires a relatively lengthy commitment by COIN armies, a prospect that is daunting given the marked erosion of American and allied public support for continued war in Afghanistan. This grim prognosis is compounded further by an additional pattern discovered in our analysis—that the chances of militarily defeating the insurgents with a HaM based strategy approaches zero when the strategy change is undertaken after eight years of COIN war, the temporal cusp upon which the American-led military effort currently rests.

More generally, our study has important implications for the study of COIN warfare. To date, theoretical work on counterinsurgency largely focuses on population-centric approaches without determining the general rate of success achieved by employing this strategy. In short, the relative strength of population-centric COIN was primarily supported by anecdote and assertion. Our analysis demonstrates support for this claim and does so with a replicable and generalizable platform.

Additionally, theorists of COIN warfare emphasize that the capacity of a COIN force to adapt given experience during a war conditions the odds of success against insurgents. Again, the extant literature provides little rigorous analysis of this claim regarding strategic adaptation. Here, we demonstrate that strategy change influences the course of COIN warfare, and we demonstrate the necessity, as well as the feasibility, of modeling these strategy change dynamically. Certainly, our efforts herein are rudimentary in this regard, but we consider it a sound point of departure.

Last, we argue that common to the literature on COIN is an overreliance on a few, visible cases, such as Vietnam and Malaysia, to the exclusion of great many less visible cases, such as the American experience in the Philippines, or the colonial wars. At best, small, selective samples undercut the leverage that research of this nature can bring to bear on a research question; at worst, selective samples provide extremely poor foundations for developing generalizable claims regarding COIN and the resulting policy decisions derived from these studies. Herein, we base our analysis on a broad sampling strategy, and we recommend this strategy in future work.

This article makes substantial strides toward understanding COIN and the role of strategy change, but it also highlights several areas that require attention in subsequent research. First, our study emphasizes the behavior of COIN forces ignoring the nature of the insurgency. Yet COIN is only half of a reciprocal relationship, and we argue that in order to further our understanding of COIN, it is necessary to integrate the characteristics of, and operational adaptation by, insurgents. Many important questions remain. For example, does the effectiveness of COIN strategy depend on the type of insurgency? How do insurgent armies react to adaptation by counterinsurgents? How do COIN and insurgent strategies interact, and in what ways does this interaction influence the timing and effectiveness of COIN strategies?

Second, as with warfare in general, central to COIN warfare is the role of domestic politics in the foreign power engaging in COIN. For example, while the focus of Gen. McChrystal's strategy is on the insurgents and the future of Afghanistan, central to its implementation and impact is public support in the United States and allied countries. Generally conceived, the interaction between the COIN war and domestic political support is likely a reciprocal, dynamic process. Under what conditions are domestic audiences more or less likely to support COIN? What shapes the durability of domestic support for COIN wars? Furthermore, the current literature lacks a systematic treatment of the process of strategy adoption as a function of domestic politics. Why do certain COIN armies adapt and implement strategy changes, while other COIN armies do not? Why are some strategies pursued rather than others? These questions suggest the necessity of explicitly modeling the emergence and evolution of COIN strategy and policy.

Third, while our analysis makes important strides in the examination of COIN strategy adaptation and conflict outcomes, it is limited to modeling solely these relationships. By doing so, we can say very little about the causal importance of COIN strategy changes relative to other stimuli that condition the evolution and outcome of insurgencies, stimuli that also bear on the impact of COIN strategies. For example, in our future research we anticipate embedding the timing and type of COIN strategy changes in a multivariate model including, for example, information on the frequency of distinct groups comprising an insurgency, the material cost to foreign powers for prosecuting a COIN, characteristics of the COIN force (e.g., size, capability), the role of third parties in aiding the COIN, or alternatively the insurgents, the conflict terrain and geography, and as noted earlier, insurgent strategy adaptation and counterinsurgent domestic audience costs. Thus, we urge subsequent research to move in the direction

of multivariate analysis, one that we argue will provide better leverage on questions central to COIN research.

Finally, observable cases of COIN warfare by foreign powers, similar to the current conflict in Afghanistan, reflect advanced stages of a lengthy, multi-stage selection process. Effective COIN strategies can eliminate an insurgent threat before a domestic conflict evolves into an insurgency, one that would ultimately populate a sample such as the one employed herein. Future research should develop solutions for controlling for these selection effects by examining cases that never achieve the status of insurgencies in conjunction with those cases that do achieve this status within a joint framework.²¹ This issue has important implications, because one might argue that the emergence of any insurgency historically represents a case of initial COIN policy failure.

In sum, we argue that the research puzzles stimulated by the allied COIN in contemporary Afghanistan demand a shift in the manner in which COIN is studied. In order to understand when and where COIN strategy changes will be work, it is important to consider information drawn from cases of COIN beyond the case in question, and to avoid overreliance on select cases. A research strategy of this nature will provide a more fruitful foundation from which to test general theoretical expectations, in addition to facilitating more accurate assessments of policy choices and their impact on COIN warfare.

²¹Despite acknowledging this problem, sample selection issues remain, driven principally by the potential for an infinite regress in the search, for a lack of a better phrase, for the seeds of insurgency. What societal conditions or “pre-COIN” policies deter the gestation of initial, or “proto,” insurgencies?

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