

Guerrilla Warfare and Counterinsurgency

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REVIEW ESSAYS

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Jones, Tim L. *Postwar Counterinsurgency and the SAS, 1945-1952: A Different Kind of Warfare*. Cass Series [in] Military History and Policy no. 9. London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2001.

Kruger, Norma J. *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980-1987*. African Studies Series no. 103. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Nowadays, it is conventional wisdom to stress that guerrilla warfare is the weapon of the weak, but that cliché sidesteps the equally challenging questions of disaggregating the dimensions of weakness for the guerrillas, on the one hand, as well as probing the breadth and depth of strength for the opponents of the guerrillas, on the other hand. The study of guerrilla warfare has given rise to something more than a cottage industry devoted both to the theory and practice of counterinsurgency as well as to how and why one protagonist defeats the other or produces a stalemate leading to a negotiated settlement of the conflict. It is not uncommon, especially in the US armed services, to find that academically gifted soldiers (and sometimes sailors, marines, or air force members) spend time in graduate schools and write their doctoral dissertations on military or naval topics, including counterinsurgency studies. A handful of these soldier-sailor-air force scholars (such as General Brent Scowcroft, Admiral William Crowe, and General Samuel Griffith) have risen to considerable heights in the military and security fields. During the Vietnam War era, there was a proliferation of studies, often undertaken by think tanks or research bureaux with government contracts, which attempted to elevate, if not to popularize and academically legitimate, the study of partisan war, rebellions, and counterinsurgency campaigns. President John F. Kennedy is usually associated with the renewed interest in the ways, means, and doctrine of counterinsurgency warfare, which increasingly became the province of special, elite military units rather than of the military establishment as a whole.

Tim Jones' volume, which grew out of his 1992 Kings College, University of London doctoral dissertation, is an excellent example not only of the fine work done in the Department of War Studies there but also of the kinds of questions younger scholars are asking now in what could be called second generation studies. Perhaps the overarching theme in Jones' work focuses on what he terms "lesson-learning" (pp. 138, 140, and 144) from the post-World War Two Palestinian, Greek, and Malayan counterinsurgency campaigns in which one set of British military and police actions and policies serves as an exemplar not only for subsequent battles but also for battles that were in progress elsewhere or for battles that

were anticipated in the immediate future. The texts for counterinsurgent warriors were being updated and revised in a sustained manner, although the author makes clear throughout his study that some mid- to high-ranking British officers have had a braking effect and have continued repeating the tactics of the past that sometimes went under the rubric of imperial policing (within the British empire). Yet, over time, the innovative doctrine took hold and drew from not only military practitioners but also those in the psychological warfare, foreign and colonial affairs, and intelligence communities. The author demonstrates that the implementation of the new doctrines tended to be somewhat softer, more consensual, entail civic action, and focus on the hearts and minds of the usually uncommitted target population groups, thereby undercutting and menacing covert or overt popular support for the insurgents. Especially in the Malayan case, Jones indicates that British success meant a meaningful commitment to making more and more Malays – and even the Chinese minority – stakeholders in the revamping of the political system to facilitate the later granting of independence. His book, which has three maps, five pages of abbreviations, 48 pages of endnotes, and 23 pages of bibliography, is a welcome complement to Keith B. Bickel's captivating volume, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915-1940* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001). Although Bickel's focus is on the US Marine Corps, and not the US Army, his research suggests what a tortuous path doctrinal pioneers have to travel in the murky area of counterinsurgency warfare. As the principal exponents and practitioners of counterinsurgency in the period between the First and Second World Wars, the US Marine Corps military intellectuals faced inter-service and civilian bureaucratic infighting and studied indifference before they were able to codify the counterinsurgency lessons they had learned in their Central American and Caribbean islands tours of duty. To some extent, as Bickel has shown, the Marine Corps small wars experts did incorporate British examples and findings into the various drafts of their classic manual. Although Jones' volume can be characterized by a smooth writing style and a keen sense of narrative and probing analysis, supported by numerous interviews and painstaking archival work (among a wide array of archives in the United Kingdom), it is not self-consciously theoretical in orientation, as is often the case with works that began as doctoral dissertations. Those who are drawn to theoretical approaches will appreciate Bickel's work on the development of small wars doctrine in the US Marine Corps, as well as John A. Nagl's *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning To Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002). Both of these works attempt to account primarily for the interrupted flow of analysis and suggestions from the lower to the higher echelons of the military establishment. Such bureaucratic and communications obstructions can unfortunately result in doctrinal, if not humiliating tactical and strategic, failures. Dr. Norma Kriger, well-known for her earlier path-breaking work on Zimbabwe (*Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices*. African Studies Series no. 70 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992]), has opened a new research vista on the brokered effects of the end of a guerrilla war in pursuit of

independence. She is a well-respected political scientist who is well versed in archival and interviewing research techniques and, like Jones, has taught in a number of universities. After reviewing a large body of peace-building studies, she finds that little research has been undertaken on the fate of guerrilla fighters who are often bypassed in the search for colonial largesse. Such veterans are the focus of her study which explores how, and to what extent, state resources are extracted and channelled to those who fought, or alleged that they fought, in the liberation war and how the symbols of state and party legitimacy are employed in the scramble for spoils and status within the new, postwar state. Thus, the matter she has chosen to investigate, within the context of a successful war for independence, are, in some measure or other, common not only to guerrilla-counterinsurgency wars but also to larger, conventional wars. The veterans bonus march in Washington, DC after the First World War, as well as educational benefits (such as the GI bill after the Second World War) and veterans' preference in government employment are all familiar examples of state resources allocated to veterans' needs in postwar US situations.

In the case of Zimbabwe, however, the British government, as the residual and nominal sovereign, played a critical role in the (London) Lancaster House negotiations that led to independence in 1980. There were two major liberation armies and their patron political parties (Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union [ZANU] and its military wing the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army [ZANLA], on the one side, and Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union [ZAPU] and its guerrilla force, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army [ZIPRA], on the other side) that were contesting against the Ian Smith regime and its client African political group led by Methodist Bishop Abel Muzorewa. There were, in addition, two silent Cold War partners involved in addition to the British, the Chinese (who backed ZANLA), and the Soviets (who favored ZIPRA), but neither member of the communist bloc participated in the Lancaster House negotiations, which were overseen by the British. The essential battle for political hegemony was waged by ZANU and ZAPU, each of which could draw upon its guerrilla forces, who were waiting in the wings as bargaining counters should they be needed. Commonwealth forces were involved in the implementation of the Lancaster House agreement for they monitored the assembly points where the guerrillas presented themselves and their weapons to begin the demilitarization of the country prior to elections for the independence legislature.

As Kriger carefully demonstrates, there was incomplete transparency in this process, for both ZANLA and ZIPRA withheld men and arms from the counting process should they perceive that the balance of power was tipping in favor of their opponents. Equally troubling was the utilization of intermittent violence in pursuit of electoral campaigning (which also occurred in Namibia in 1989 as it too moved to the goal of independence in 1990) and the fraud involved in claiming veterans' cash payments. Given the high stakes involved in the conquest of

political control at the national level and the experience of a prolonged guerrilla war, such lack of probity was not particularly surprising but probably ethically disappointing to their overseas solidarity groups. The British army (in the form of the British Military Advisory Training Team or BMATT) served as the organizer for the challenging task of melding together a new Zimbabwe army from the two antagonistic guerrilla armies and their former foes in the Rhodesian army. BMATT also served the same capacity in newly independent Namibia in order to craft the Namibian Defense Force from former foes. Instead of a military triad of ZANLA, ZIPRA, and the (African as well as white) members of the former Rhodesian army, what resulted over time was an independence army which was essentially a ZANLA fiefdom designed to be a military instrument for Robert Mugabe's ZANLA, a party which subsequently achieved a hegemonic position and used the machinery of the state to dispense clientage among its supporters. Many of those who claimed guerrilla veteran status were the least well equipped in terms of literacy and education to enter the commercial or professional sectors of the economy and in a sense resembled German Free Corps units who served as a type of freebooters in the nascent years of the Weimar Republic. They were, in effect, the dispossessed and the economic casualties of the liberation war who were least able to fend for themselves and had heightened expectations of rewards in the post-colonial dispensation. The author found that both the dominant political party as well as the former guerrillas displayed what she termed a "... remarkable consistency in their power-seeking agendas, their appeals to the revolutionary liberation war, their use of violence and intimidation, and their abuse of state resources." (p. 208)

Although they are focused on different times within the Cold War and post-Cold War eras, both of these excellent studies are commendable in their scrupulous attention to detail, their admirable command of both written and oral sources, and their willingness to revisit previous research in order to strengthen our understanding of how military establishments develop skills and doctrines for small wars (or low-intensity conflict) and of the unanticipated political and economic fallout of successful guerrilla warfare. In such wars, there seems to be an opaque, yet unmistakable primacy of politics at work. Jones is to be commended for bringing to light the British role in the Greek civil war in the early years of the Cold War, a topic he intends to explore in greater detail in his next volume, *SAS: The First Secret Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris), while Kriger has undertaken a rather iconoclastic task in demonstrating the operation of a post-liberation war spoils system which is a glaring example of a zero-sum game (with either winners or losers and with no political space for ambiguous flexibility) waged under the rather specious rubric of state legitimacy.

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