

Historical Origins of the British Army's Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Techniques

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The British Army is a counterinsurgency army. Almost since its very formation and for the greater part of its history, this army's principal mission was to acquire and then to police imperial possessions. It developed as a "small war" army, and, it may be argued, has remained a small war army even to this day. The "big wars" of World War I and World War II fitted awkwardly into the army's history, being considered by most officers to be "aberrations" that interfered with the normal activities of keeping recalcitrant natives in some sort of order.²³ Even at the height of the Cold War, with the policing of the empire a fading memory and with the army's main task to counter the Soviets on the North German Plain, the stress philosophically was still on engagements well down the conflict spectrum. This army was, as one general put it, "schizophrenic"²⁴: wanting to be engaged on the world stage in small wars but forced to maintain a watching brief on the European mainland.²⁵ Maj. Gen. John Strawson, for instance, as Chief of Staff, UK Land Forces in the mid-1970s, noted the boredom that the army felt in its static Cold War role and asked the question, "What is the Army for?" His answer was that it was there to "fulfil its country's policies and its country's interests, *and not to sit idle in barracks unused*."²⁶ Even into the mid-1980s, the Chief of the General Staff (CGS), Gen. Sir Nigel Bagnall, when asked, "what do you believe is the prime contribution of the Army to national defence?" answered: "It is the sort of sup-

²³ David Charters, "From Palestine to Northern Ireland: British Adaptation to Low Intensity Operations," in *Armies in Low-Intensity Conflict: A Comparative Analysis*, edited by David Charters and Maurice Tugwell (London: Brassey's, 1989), 176.

²⁴ Interview with Lt. Gen. Rupert Smith, NATO HQ, Mons (Nov 2001).

²⁵ This was an army that at the height of the Cold War in 1964 could have more troops in Singapore than in the United Kingdom or in Germany. See Colin McInnes, *Hot War, Cold War: The British Army's Way in Warfare, 1945-95* (London: Brassey's, 1996), 15.

²⁶ John Strawson, *Gentlemen in Khaki: The British Army, 1890-1990* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1989), 256. Emphasis added.

port the Army *always gives in an emergency.*" While going on to say that the Army had a "responsibility" in its role in Germany, he clearly put the stress on the Army's ability to intervene quickly abroad.²⁷ Thus despite the greater post-World War II emphasis on the conduct of high-intensity operations, the fact was that, as one analyst put it in the mid-1990s, "The last twenty years of a NATO focus has not significantly altered [the Army's] colonial focus and its structural legacy."²⁸ The small war—COIN—tradition in the British Army died hard.

Obligingly, given that the British Army clearly had an overall preference to conduct low-intensity conflict, circumstances conspired during much of the Cold War to ensure that such preferences were largely catered to. With the end of empire and with the government's decision to withdraw from east of Suez in 1966, the insurgency in Aden should have signified the army's last hurrah in small war and COIN terms. But just as troops settled down to a future of garrison duty in Germany and just when they thought it was safe to forget their COIN techniques, the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland began in 1969. Thus, as one analyst described it, "the entire British Army returned ultimately to its traditional role, but at home instead of abroad."²⁹

Since this is an army so evidently comfortable with low-intensity engagements (including COIN and CT warfare), the techniques it employed and continues to employ should be well worthy of study. To fully understand these British Army COIN techniques, an appreciation needs to be created of several factors that inform them. These, by and large, are deeply rooted in history. As Ian Beckett puts it, where any army's COIN techniques are involved, "there [is] invariably a particular national tradition of how to go about counterinsurgency stemming from the nineteenth century, if not before." Thus, he goes on, "armed forces tend to operate within almost a preordained tradition with respect to counterinsurgency."³⁰ It is how these "preordained traditions" come about that is the subject of the rest of this chapter. It considers two particular factors—the use of minimum force and civil-military relations—since they lie full square at the heart of the present COIN and CT tactics adopted by the British Army.

²⁷ "The Army Remains the Most Flexible Tool." Interview with Gen. Sir Nigel Bagnall, *Military Technology* 6, no. 86 (June 1986): 46. Emphasis added.

²⁸ Chris Demchak, "Colonies or Computers: Modernization Challenges in the Future British Army," *Defence Analysis* 10, no. 1 (1994): 10. See also Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 223.

²⁹ Charters, "From Palestine to Northern Ireland," 187.

³⁰ Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies* (London: Routledge, 2001), 25.

The Principle of Minimum Force

The principle of minimum force informs virtually all of the actions carried out by the British in COIN operations. It is a principle that goes back a long way. It is not, as some suggest, a product of having to deal with an insurgency on Britain's doorstep in Northern Ireland and in the full glare of the world's media. The principle is far more deeply rooted and therefore quintessentially a guiding philosophy for British COIN techniques.

There are two specific reasons why the concept of minimum force came about. The first relates to a characteristic of British political culture and the second to pragmatism. In terms of the former, it needs to be understood that Britain, in the early nineteenth century, came to be influenced by what were later to be called Victorian values. The formation of such values was very important in the shaping of the British cultural norms of today and, ultimately, of the organizational culture of the contemporary British Army. In the early nineteenth century, the country underwent something of a cultural makeover. An increasingly affluent middle class came to be influenced by a religious sentiment that manifested itself in a distinct turn toward liberal values and philanthropic action. Among other things, a desire was generated among government ministers and other opinion-formers of the time to right certain wrongs committed in the name of Britain's imperial expansion up to that point. The early years of the amassing of Britain's colonial possessions and the accompanying search for profit were witness to no little unsavoury behaviour. It was now perceived to be time to right some wrongs.³¹ Judith Jennings sums up the flavour of the period in her work on the abolition of the slave trade by Britain (in 1807): "Humanitarianism," she notes, "[became] a new principle of action on the British political scene."³² The expansion of the empire, which still continued apace throughout the nineteenth century, was now only to do so in ways that reflected Britain's new values and "in ways that were compatible with high ideals of honour and duty."³³

³¹ See Linda Colley, *Britons; Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (London: Vintage, 1996); Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (New York: William Morrow, 1972); Philip Norton, *The British Polity* (London: Longman, 1991); Henry Steele Commager, ed., *Britain Through American Eyes* (London: The Bodley Head, 1974); Ian Buruma, *Anglomania: A European Love Affair* (New York: Vintage, 2000); Jeremy Paxman, *The English: A Portrait of a People* (London: Penguin, 1999); and Roger Scruton, *England: An Elegy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000).

³² Judith Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade, 1783–1807* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 106.

³³ P. Cain and A. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688–1914* (Harlow: Pearson, 1993), 46.

These “high ideals of honour and duty” melded with the Romanticism that dominated the literature of the early nineteenth century.³⁴ The Romantic espousal of “chivalry” meant that it became the new watchword for gentlemen and especially for gentleman army officers, whose mission was to go out into the empire and spread not only British influence but also British values. The Victorian officer came to be seen by many as the epitome of “Britishness” and as a paragon of virtue who, in his dealings with whatever natives he came across abroad, had to treat them with respect and, in any conflict, use the *minimum force necessary* to restore them to order. Slaughter was not to be the “British Way.”

Such chivalric principles became socialized through the efforts of the Victorian public (i.e., private, fee-paying) school system. These schools, the main source of army officers, sought to turn out men of “character” infused with the British “way,” rather than men of intellect. The principles of such a “way” spread further and influenced a far wider audience with their later dissemination through books, comics, and, ultimately, cinema and television. The whole nation was inculcated into an appreciation of the norms that were distinctly British. The word was that when British officers and soldiers operated abroad against insurgents or those who opposed British rule, they had to do so in ways that reflected what the British people themselves believed to be *their* values.³⁵ Thus the British people chastised the military for its behaviour, for instance, after the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and at Amritsar in 1919. The Mutiny brought out, as Charles Townshend puts it, “the tiger in our race”³⁶ and was suppressed with what David Jablonsky calls, an “uncharacteristic brutality.”³⁷ The British—including the Army—came to be shocked at their own behaviour. Henceforward, operations in Britain’s late-Victorian small wars involved no small appreciation for the concept of restraint.³⁸ It may well be that henceforward, as Byron Farwell somewhat colourfully observes, “A sense of fair play marked the British method of waging war, and they seldom resorted to dirty tricks.”³⁹

³⁴ See Mark Girouard, *Return to Camelot* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); and Norman Davies, *The Isles* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

³⁵ See John Mackenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); and John Mackenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850–1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

³⁶ Charles Townshend, *Britain’s Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1986), 136.

³⁷ David Jablonsky, “Churchill’s Initial Experience with the British Conduct of Small Wars: India and the Sudan, 1897–1898,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.* For a less sanitized viewpoint see Ian Herson, *The Savage Empire: Forgotten Wars of the Nineteenth Century* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000).

³⁹ Byron Farwell, *For Queen and Country: A Social History of the Victorian and Edwardian Army* (London: Allen Lane, 1981), 121.

In all of the army's history of imperial policing it was perhaps Amritsar that signified its lowest point: "Few events in modern military history have made such a lasting impression on soldiers as the massacre at Amritsar."⁴⁰ Here, Gen. Reginald Dyer, the only British officer present, ordered his native troops to open fire on a crowd of Sikh protesters, killing between 200 and 379.⁴¹ The Hunter Committee Report that investigated the affair castigated Dyer for his use of excessive force.⁴² The clear message was that if force was to be used in maintaining control in the empire, it should only be the minimum necessary. For Dyer had not only offended a moral code, he was also seen to have transgressed English Common Law.⁴³ Troops on duty at Amritsar and elsewhere in the empire in situations of civil disorder had to operate according to the principles of such law. Under its statutes, the degree of force used in any policing situation—in Britain itself or abroad—must be no more and no less than that necessary to restore the peace.⁴⁴ As Thomas Mockaitis points out, quoting from a 1923 Army manual, *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power*:

British soldiers have constantly been reminded that their task was "not the annihilation of an enemy but the suppression of a temporary disorder, and therefore the degree of force to be employed must be directed to that which is necessary to restore order and must never exceed it." The same restraint had to be used whether the army was dealing with strikes in Britain or riots in the colonies.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency, 1919–1960* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 23.

⁴¹ 25 men of the 1/9th Gurkhas and 25 of the 54th Sikhs. *The Amritsar Massacre: General Dyer and the Punjab 1919* (London: HMSO, 2000), 63.

⁴² *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Government of India to Investigate the Disturbances in the Punjab*, Vol 6, *Reports from Commissioners and Inspectors*, (Indian Office Records, Cmd.681, 1920), 1035. Quoted in Mockaitis, *British Counter Insurgency*, 23.

⁴³ The Army used the same approach to controlling civil disturbances (and the same manuals) whether they were abroad or in the United Kingdom. *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power* (1937) contained the same restrictions as *Notes on Imperial Policing* (1934). See Anthony Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower, 1919–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 386.

⁴⁴ English Common Law was law that was not the result of some preordained legal framework such as a written constitution. It was a Law to be defined by ancient wisdom and precedent, accreted case by case, and to be the product of experience rather than pure logic. Empiricism prevailed: as new situations arose, new methods of dealing with them would be introduced instinctively on a "trial and error" basis. Thus British law itself was an objective reality; it did not depend on the will of sovereign or parliaments. It was, in essence, the will of the people.

⁴⁵ Mockaitis quoting *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power* (London: HMSO, 1923), 3. See Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency*, 18.

The problem here—and this is why Dyer took the blame completely for Amritsar—was that the decision over what level of force to use, in line with normal British practice and Common Law, was left totally to the individual judgement of the commander on the spot⁴⁶—be he general or “lone sentry.”⁴⁷ Indeed, British troops on imperial duty were *purposefully* left with little executive guidance as to how to deal with whatever disturbances they faced. The inquiries and noble committees that had investigated what excesses there had been throughout the empire’s history had failed to produce any binding recommendations and hard-and-fast rules. In fact, they stressed, as Townshend put it, “Rather that the very imprecision of the rules...was part of the British way.”⁴⁸ Thus, as Lawrence James expresses it, “the ‘British way’ of dealing with the question of civil emergency was to shroud it in obscurity. If troops were called out to preserve or restore order, their officers went into action guided only by a forcible but indistinct sense of *social constraint*.”⁴⁹ Crucially then, British soldiers came to develop a culture of independent decision making when it came to controlling situations in imperial hotspots. They were thus both encouraged to use their initiative and *actually required to do so*. Of course, the fact that *in situ* individual judgement was demanded on the use of force and that the correct balance had to be achieved led many soldiers to bemoan the “delicacy of the calculations” that they were left with.⁵⁰ As one officer dealing with rioters in Johannesburg in 1913 lamented, “It’s such a poor game—broken bottles if you don’t shoot and execrations if you do—heads they win, tails you lose.” His words, as James notes, “were later echoed by many others in similar situations.”⁵¹

These mores of social constraint of a bygone era are still maintained both within the British Army and among the British people.⁵² The norms produced during the first half of the nineteenth century still have an effect: they have been shown, in the parlance favoured by the litera-

⁴⁶ Townshend, *Britain’s Civil Wars*, 19.

⁴⁷ Michael Dewar, *Brush Fire Wars: Minor Campaigns of the British Army Since 1945* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), 130.

⁴⁸ Townshend, *Britain’s Civil Wars*, 43.

⁴⁹ Lawrence James, *Imperial Rearguard: Wars of Empire 1919-1985* (London: Brassey’s, 1988), 43. Emphasis added.

⁵⁰ Townshend, *Britain’s Civil Wars*, 19.

⁵¹ James, *Imperial Rearguard*, 58.

⁵² See Corelli Barnett, “The Education of Military Elites,” in *Governing Elites: Studies in Training and Selection*, edited by Rupert Wilkinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Henry Stanhope, *The Soldiers: An Anatomy of the British Army* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979), 66; and Cathy Downes, *Special Trust and Confidence: The Making of an Officer* (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 109 and chapter 3. See also Anthony Beevor, *Inside the British Army* (London: Corgi, 1991).

ture on socialization, to be “sticky.”⁵³ The principle of minimum force is one that the British operate with and are constrained by because it is socialized to such a large degree. It is enshrined both in English Common Law and within the psyche of individual soldiers. It was seen, for instance, to be almost unnecessary to issue British troops in Northern Ireland with Rules of Engagement since “the principle of minimum force appears to have been so widely accepted that [ROEs were] operationally redundant ... [showing] the extent to which the minimum force concept had become part of the Army’s way in warfare.”⁵⁴ When British troops went too far in Northern Ireland—as with the shootings of thirteen men on Bloody Sunday in 1972—the hue and cry can resonate through history. We are presently seeing another inquiry into the incident. This has lasted two years already and will eventually cost over 350 million dollars.

The second reason why the British decreed that the concept of minimum force should inform all COIN operations relates to pragmatism. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, as the empire reached its acquisitive peak, it became obvious that the imposition of imperial authority was never going to be purely a matter of military muscle. The small professional army (roughly 150,000–200,000 men) maintained by Britain for much of its history (which Bismarck once said he would send a German policeman to arrest!)⁵⁵ could never hope to control the almost one-third of humanity that was its charge without at least some measure of consent.⁵⁶ “The British,” as Mockaitis points out, “like all successful imperialists, had long realised that the key to maintaining an empire lay in making the yoke of foreign rule as light as possible.”⁵⁷ At-

⁵³ Kimberley Marten Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955–1991* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). See also John Meyer and Brian Rowan, “Institutionalised Organisations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony,” *American Journal of Sociology* 83 (1977): 340–360. See also Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Irvington, 1966); Harry Eckstein, “A Culturalist Theory of Political Change,” *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 3 (Sept. 1988): 789–804; and Jack Snyder, “The Concept of Strategic Culture: Caveat Emptor,” in *Strategic Power: USA/USSR*, edited by Carl Jacobsen (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 6.

⁵⁴ Charters, “From Palestine to Northern Ireland,” 175.

⁵⁵ Strawson, *Gentlemen in Khaki*, xi.

⁵⁶ James, *Imperial Rearguard*, 9.

⁵⁷ Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency*, 64.

tempting to rule through the use of violence, as Winston Churchill put it (as Colonial Secretary in 1920), “would be fatal.”⁵⁸

Downplaying the role of force, of course, did not mean that force should not be displayed. Order had to be maintained and certain groups, tribes, and nations had to be cowed, and others, who had put themselves under the protection of the British, had to have faith that the British were possessed of the ability and mindset to use force to protect them from their enemies. Ruling had to involve a balance that set the lightness of the yoke against the need to garner the prestige and respect that came from occasional punitive action that was both firm and timely.⁵⁹ As Maj. Gen. Sir Charles Gwynn put it, in his seminal pamphlet of the 1930s, *Imperial Policing*, “Excessive severity may antagonise the neutral or loyal element, add to the number of rebels, and leave a lasting feeling of resentment and bitterness. On the other hand, the power and resolution of the government forces must be displayed.”⁶⁰ But power and resolution had to be displayed within an overall political context that defined what the laws were. Those “elements” who transgressed the law needed to be punished, and those who kept within the laws were to be rewarded: “carrot and stick.” But it was vital that, in punishing, only the transgressors were targeted. Consent could be lost if violence was used too broadly. Consent, too, was vital if intelligence was to be gained. Intelligence, for a small army, was very much seen as a force multiplier, and it could only come if the British presented themselves as benign rulers who operated within legal constraints. Such an image went a long way in achieving the COIN goal of separating insurgents from their support.

For the army, the balance was achieved by having an offensive posture—in most cases by having a “presence” and showing that force was there to be used if necessary—but using that force only as a last resort.⁶¹ The presence also showed the human side of the soldiers, and was vital in gaining intelligence on the ground. The army’s preferred method of providing presence was to dominate ground and situations through foot patrolling and, if necessary, in riot situations, by shooting only the obvious ringleaders, *pour encourager les autres*. Escalation dominance was

⁵⁸ David Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force 1919–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 151. Two other authors pick up this aspect: Mockaitis points out that “Whatever minimum force cost the British in initiative it gave them back in moral advantage,” in Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency*, 27; Chuter saw that “British rule would be achieved by moral, rather than physical, ascendancy.” See David Chuter, “Britain,” in *The European Union and National Defence Policy*, edited by Jolyon Howorth and Anand Menon (London: Routledge, 1997), 109.

⁵⁹ James, *Imperial Rearguard*, 34, 74.

⁶⁰ Charles Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (London: War Office, 1934), 5.

⁶¹ Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower*, 11.

the key, but escalation by only one step at a time and by using surgical, targeted violence. Often such an approach could only work with time. Thus patience—the ability to outlast the insurgent or troublemakers—was critical.

The overall approach to counterinsurgency was perhaps characterised most completely in the 1950s as the British took on communist insurgents in Malaya. The principle architect of this approach was Gen. Sir Gerald Templar. At the heart of Templar's philosophy was his belief that "the answer lies not in...more troops...but rests in the hearts and minds of the Malayan people."⁶² This was the first use of the phrase that was to become something of a mantra for future generations of British soldiers in low-intensity operations: "hearts and minds." The prime role of the soldier in such operations was here seen not so much to be killing insurgents, but rather in denying those insurgents the oxygen of popular support. As Templar added, "the shooting side of the business is only 25 percent of the trouble and the other 75 percent lies in getting the people of this country behind us."⁶³ The army went aggressively after communist guerrillas but did so in ways that kept overall consent among the indigenous population, because soldiers were seen to be acting *within the law*. In Malaya the death of *each* guerrilla had to be justified retrospectively by a magistrate, and the keeping of a score of the number of insurgents killed ("body counts") was considered "too barbarous a practice."⁶⁴ The British tried to pass on their Malaya experience to the United States in Vietnam. There were, however, many cultural factors which militated against the passing over of ideas.⁶⁵ Indeed, the ignoring by the United States of such experience was not merely passive oversight; there was a large degree of active avoidance. This may be put down perhaps to the American disavowal of the worth of the "other." As Yacov Vertzberger puts it with respect to Vietnam, there was a "self-righteousness and ethnocentrism" that was "manifested in the belief that the American way is the only way and cannot fail." This led to an avoidance, he says, of the lessons of others and "a complete ignorance" of the low-intensity conflict experience of states from ancient Rome to contemporary Britain.⁶⁶ There was, though, also a more fundamental reasoning at work at the time of Viet-

⁶² Charters, "From Palestine to Northern Ireland," 195.

⁶³ John Cloake, *Templar, Tiger of Malaya: The Life of Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templar* (London: Harrap, 1985), 264.

⁶⁴ Trevor Royle, *The Best Years of Their Lives: The National Service Experience 1945–63* (London: Michael Joseph, 1986), 174.

⁶⁵ Robert Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* (Westview: Boulder, 1986), 41.

⁶⁶ Yacov Vertzberger, *The World in Their Minds* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 260.

nam and, it may be argued, both before and after. The U.S. Army was a “big war” army and gained its kudos from that fact.⁶⁷ It was there to protect the American people from major foreign foes and to do it quickly and without equivocation, using whatever level of force was necessary. The slow, restrained, and patient grind against flexible, adroit, small-scale opponents that epitomised traditional COIN techniques did not sit well with this army. Specifically in the early 1960s, there was an actual fear within the U.S. Army hierarchy of a “de-emphasis of military means or offensive operations against the VC” being the first steps on a rocky road toward being an army that could not fight the nation’s wars and which could not gain the nation’s respect.⁶⁸ In essence, this was an army that did not want to become a police force. Gen Lyman Lemnitzer (the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) was one who was certainly concerned and took action (back in 1961) to stop any imitation of British methods by U.S. troops in Southeast Asia.⁶⁹

Come the 1970s and Northern Ireland, it was clear that the British Army had taken aboard the salutary lessons provided by the employment of too great a degree of force. However, even given the army’s minimum force philosophy, the regiments that came to the Province⁷⁰ had to adjust to a situation—in the United Kingdom itself—that was “very different.”⁷¹ A degree of nuance was required that had not been heretofore necessary. The army initially had gone in as peacekeeper essentially to defend the Catholic population from Protestant pogroms and to keep the two sides apart. However, while initially being greeted as “saviours” by the Catholic population, mistakes made by the army ensured that this Catholic support changed fairly quickly into outright hostility.⁷² The army, in the early 1970s, in its search for weapons had erred in searching Catholic homes but not Protestant ones; had interned

⁶⁷ See Russell Weighley, *The American Way of War: A History of U.S. Strategy and Policy* (Chicago: Indiana University Press, 1973).

⁶⁸ Komer, *Bureaucracy at War*, 105.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷⁰ Fifteen infantry regiments saw active service in Borneo (1962–1966—not counting eight Gurkha), at least twelve were committed to the situation in Aden (1964–1967), and five had experience of riot control in Guyana (1962–1964) and one in Hong Kong (1967).

⁷¹ Peter Taylor, *Brits: The War Against the IRA* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 32. The habit, for instance, of shooting the ringleader could not be continued in Ulster. Even before deployments to the Province, this tactic was being called into disrepute since a single 7.62 round fired in a riot in Guyana in 1964 had killed three people and injured another. See Dewar, *Brush Fire Wars*, 62; and Charles Messenger, *For Love of Regiment: A History of British Infantry* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), 185.

⁷² See James, *Imperial Rearguard*, 217; and 32.

without trial hundreds of Catholics, but not one Protestant;⁷³ and shot dead thirteen Catholics in Londonderry on Bloody Sunday.⁷⁴ Catholic ire was manifest in an upsurge in the activities of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and the army was drawn into a long and debilitating anti-terrorist campaign.⁷⁵ When the army acted outside the law—or was party to laws which appeared illegitimate (internment)⁷⁶—then consent was lost and the mission made immeasurably harder.

Again, foot patrolling was the key to domination of the ground. By interfacing with the local population and in appearing to be responsible and friendly, attempts were made to gain the confidence of the local population and to gather intelligence.⁷⁷ This was especially important in the early years of the Troubles, when the Army had taken over from the police force in several areas. Here again, a balance lay: patrolling had to express situation dominance yet it could not be domineering. It was important in this regard that the soldier be seen as merely someone else on the street. That meant also that they had to try and look the same; they could not come across as being overly protected. If they were, it would give the impression that there was something to be feared and that the situation was not under control; that everything was not “normal.” For instance, berets were worn, wherever possible, rather than helmets. Vehicles—which created a distance between soldier and civilian—were only to be used as quick reaction assistance or in rural areas. And the type of vehicle used was important. In the era of the tracked armoured personnel carrier (APC)—noisy, aggressive, and unsuitable for COIN—old, wheeled APCs had to be taken out of mothballs and pushed back into service.⁷⁸

Linked to this need to maintain the minimum force ideal was the British Army’s historical avoidance of technical means to solve COIN problems. In maintaining the principle that the insurgent or terrorist had to be separated from the general populace, then only the most selective of

⁷³ Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency*, 100. Many officers did not agree with the policy of internment. Some were “furious.” Desmond Hamill, *Pig in the Middle: The British Army in Northern Ireland, 1969–1984* (London: Methuen, 1985), 63.

⁷⁴ “Bloody Sunday,” Londonderry, February 1972. Troops of the 1st Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, opened fire on civil rights marchers/rioters/gunmen/nail-bomb throwers in the Rossville Flats area of the city.

⁷⁵ Dewar, *Brush Fire Wars*, 140. The Army actually first came under fire from Protestant gunmen.

⁷⁶ Internment was introduced in 1971 as a means of arresting and detaining without trial suspected terrorists. It was withdrawn two years later.

⁷⁷ Lt. Col. Michael Dewar, *The British Army in Northern Ireland* (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), 180. See also Hamill, *Pig in the Middle*, 142.

⁷⁸ See Dewar, *The British Army in Northern Ireland*. See also Hamill, *Pig in the Middle*, 116.

weapons should be employed. As Gwynn put it in 1934, “in dealing with mobs, it is the weapons which are easy to control and have the quality of selectiveness which are most suitable. Great destructive power is seldom required.”⁷⁹ The use of the machine gun was limited, as was the use of armoured vehicles. Overall, in imperial policing duties, the accepted wisdom was that, “the control of mobs and rioters is logically an infantry responsibility, for it demands men, on their feet, with a rifle and bayonet, if the principle of the use of minimum essential force is to be observed.”⁸⁰ The use of airpower was likewise abjured for the same reason. Bombing from the air as a COIN tactic was considered to be inhumane almost from the time that aircraft were first considered for the role (in Iraq in the 1920s). As the British representative in Kabukput (Kurdish Iraq) put it in 1923, with airpower “much needless cruelty is necessarily inflicted, which, in many cases will not cow the tribesmen, but implant in them undying hatred and desire for revenge.”⁸¹ Aerial bombardment could never be selective enough. Throughout the history of their COIN operations, as Mockaitis sums up, “the British were willing to forego the military advantages of the aeroplane in order to preserve the principle of minimum force.”⁸²

The concept of minimum force began as a product of British political culture in the nineteenth century. It has, to this day, manifested itself in many of the norms that the British operate by in their daily lives (the United Kingdom still, for instance, has a police force that is essentially unarmed). British Army soldiers apply the principles of minimum force both because they are acculturated to do so but also because the British people expect them to do so. These principles have been seen to good effect in Afghanistan and Iraq. The emphasis has been on a low-key and patient approach. There has been the traditional emphasis on a foot-patrolling “presence” moving ahead of punitive actions. Soldiers have to be seen as nonthreatening and part of the furniture: berets instead of helmets, keeping protection to a minimum by avoiding the use of body armour, using soft-skinned vehicles and not “provocative and aggressive” tracked equipment,⁸³ removing “intimidating” dark glasses, and by getting as close as possible to the indigenous people in order to “solve problems and to cultivate local contacts.”⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (London: War Office, 1934), 14.

⁸⁰ Maj. Gen. David Belchem, *All in a Day's March*, (London: Collins, 1978), 37.

⁸¹ James, *Imperial Rearguard*, 50.

⁸² Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency*, 35.

⁸³ Maj. Gen. A. C. P. Stone, “Smaller and Still Better?”, *RUSI Newsbrief* 24, no. 8 (Aug. 2004): 86.

⁸⁴ David Chancellor, “Rebuilding Basra,” *The Officer* 16, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2004): 8.

The forces of other nations operating in Afghanistan and Iraq have learned from and copied the British approach.⁸⁵ The forces of the United States, however, have been reluctant to adopt British techniques. For the British way of warfare is, of course, at some variance with that of its principal ally. There have certainly been some tensions between the two as to the best methods of conducting COIN and counterterrorist warfare in Afghanistan and particularly in Iraq. The United States' "shock and awe" philosophy, characterised by a seeming lack of "nuance and sensitivity"⁸⁶ and of "subtlety and lateral thinking,"⁸⁷ is one which is anathema to the British.⁸⁸ U.S. forces' reliance on force protection, their more menacing attitude, and their failure to get close to the civilian population is seen as "entirely the opposite of what is required to defeat insurgency."⁸⁹ Such differences are problematic, but not necessarily insurmountable. As Gen. Sir Mike Jackson, the British Chief of the General Staff, put it in a recent speech, "we need to be able to...fight with our allies, but not necessarily as our allies do."⁹⁰

There is no escaping the British Army's entrenched—"preordained"—philosophy in terms of its use of minimum force. The concept was crucial, in that the British realised that the best way to maintain control in the empire was to get native populations on their side. Consent made places easier to rule and the use of violence would, as often as not, lose that consent. Fundamentally, minimum force emerged as a means of separating the insurgent from his support. Thus, a cultural trait came to be reinforced through its efficacy in practice. But as the army was constantly aware, such good military principles as minimum force would only work properly within an overall context of COIN operations supplied by civilian masters. Only they could provide the true "carrots" that would supplement the army's "stick."

⁸⁵ Andrew Sheves, "UK Force Capabilities: Lessons from Kabul," *RUSI Newsbrief* 22, no. 6 (June 2002): 64.

⁸⁶ Mark Joyce, "Transforming Transformation: American Trends and Transatlantic Implications," *RUSI News Brief* 24, no. 7 (July 2004): 78.

⁸⁷ Greg Mills, "Re-Learning the Lessons of Vietnam and Malaya: COIN 101 in Iraq," *RUSI Newsbrief* 24, no. 2 (Feb. 2004): 16.

⁸⁸ Greg Mills, "At Last ... Endgame in Sight in Iraq," *RUSI Newsbrief* 24, no. 8 (Aug. 2004): 89.

⁸⁹ Mills, "Re-Learning the Lessons," 16.

⁹⁰ Gen. Sir Mike Jackson, "Future of Land Warfare," *RUSI Journal* 148, no. 4 (Aug. 2003): 55.

Civil-Military Cooperation

A heritage was created during the imperial period that British Army officers working with civilian colonial officials could conduct their COIN operations in any particular region without too much interference from London. There tended to be little direction from London since there was a level of trust that both parties, civil and military, on the ground *in situ* would carry out operations in a manner that would not bring discredit on the government. The army worked reasonably amicably with civilian colonial administrators and let them take the lead in most cases, since they represented the legal authority. Officers understood that when dealing with insurgencies, civil direction was often very necessary. Behind many insurgencies lay legitimate grievances that could best be tackled by new measures brought in by civil authorities. Yes, the army could deal with the symptoms of insurgencies, but it was, as Gwynn noted, up to the civilians to deal with the causes.⁹¹

Much of the overall close civil-military cooperation can be seen to be the result of the fact that all were singing more or less from the same hymn sheet in that they—officers, government ministers, and colonial office civil servants—were usually of the same “class” and products of the English public (that is, “private”) school system. This is important to note in terms of the fact that British Army officers are not, and have never been, “castes apart.” Deborah Avant notes that “officers identified with their social class, rather than with the Army.” They “belonged,” and thus belonged to the same group as those who occupied civilian seats of power.⁹² They perceived there to be few barriers between themselves and the civilians with whom they were dealing. And the experience of such a relationship “out on the ground” was to prove invaluable in the years ahead. As Anthony Clayton puts it, “it may be argued that the interface of political and military in imperial operations provided British officers with a much sharper political sense, a willingness to listen to other people, civilian officials, military subordinates and local residents and discuss problems with them before making decisions.”⁹³

The generally congenial civil-military relationship has been maintained more or less to this day.⁹⁴ The elites still tend to originate from

⁹¹ From Gwynn, *Imperial Policing*. Gwynn’s principles (published in 1934) were the nearest thing in terms of COIN doctrine that the British came up with prior to the 1960s. They were: (1) Policy remains vested in civil government; (2) Minimum use of force; (3) Firm and timely action; and (4) Cooperation between civil and military authorities.

⁹² Deborah Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 35.

⁹³ Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower*, 517.

⁹⁴ Anonymous book reviewer, *British Army Review* 117 (Dec. 1997): 105.

the same social class: “in the British civil-military interface... there exists an identical community held together by many formal and informal contacts and shared experiences.”⁹⁵ Such processes were even seen to hold good in the fraught period of postwar imperial drawdown. Senior army leaders in this period, as they realised that defeating communist-inspired insurgencies needed something far more than naked military muscle, themselves looked for an increased level of political direction.⁹⁶ What was required was a larger package of measures—political, economic, social, *and* military.⁹⁷ Despite greater political intrusiveness, however, the new civil-military relationship that developed worked well on the whole and the army was left by the politicians to deal with operational and tactical matters as it saw fit, within an agreed framework.⁹⁸ In the Army’s COIN operations in Malaya (where both military and political control was invested in an individual British officer),⁹⁹ Borneo,¹⁰⁰ Kenya, Cyprus, Aden, and in the Military Aid to the Civilian Authorities (MACA) operation in Northern Ireland, the Army was given power—but power within a civil context. Where political masters were particularly supportive was in their patience. They tended not to demand quick results. The Army had time, particularly in the postwar

⁹⁵ Martin Edmonds, *Armed Forces and Society* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988), 67. See also William Hopkinson, *The Making of British Defence Policy* (London: The Stationery Office, 2000), 25. One Irish ex-prime minister opined that the British Army works well with the government since “it’s...the old boy network...the interaction of the officer and gentlemen class. They all look after each other.” Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland’s Ordeal 1966–1996 and the Search for Peace* (London: Arrow Books, 1996), 127.

⁹⁶ Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency*, chapter 3.

⁹⁷ Caroline Kennedy-Pipe and Colin McInnes, “The British Army in Northern Ireland 1969–1972: From Policing to Counter-Terror,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 20, no. 2 (June 1997): 4.

⁹⁸ Charters, “From Palestine to Northern Ireland,” 230.

⁹⁹ Gen Sir Gerald Templar in Malaya. He and other officers (with less overall power) – Gen. Sir George Erskine in Kenya, Field Marshal Sir John Harding in Cyprus, and Gen. Walter Walker in Borneo – were single leaders who had the power to deal with all elements of the situations in their respective theatre of operations. They presided over “an orchestrated policymaking, police, and military effort in which each tactic and technique applied by the military was part of a larger, carefully considered plan.” The chief positive here was the coherence of the plan of action in the hands of one man. Jennifer Taw and John Peters, “Operations Other Than War: Implications for the U.S. Army,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 6, no. 3 (Winter 1995): 385.

¹⁰⁰ The conflict against Indonesian-backed insurgents (1962–1966) operating into Malayan-held territory in Borneo was characterised by tremendous secrecy. The army operated inside Indonesian territory with virtual impunity and the world knew nothing. See Harold James and Denis Sheil-Smith, *The Undeclared War: The Story of the Indonesia Confrontation, 1962–1966* (London: Leo Cooper, 1971).

COIN and MACA operations, to work at the pace they judged to be right and to work on the principle that “victory or defeat in an insurgency is very largely a matter of endurance—of who gets tired first.”¹⁰¹

This is not to say that all was sweetness and light in British civil-military terms. Occasionally, the army was let down by its political masters in terms of political direction. With the end of World War II and the dimming of the imperial idea, the army was left in some difficult situations as regards political endstates. In Palestine (1945–1947), the army was left bereft of political direction as it tried—and failed—to bring peace, despite having 100,000 men stationed there. Common sense prevailed, and the government handed over the problem to the United Nations in 1947. In Aden, the government left the army completely in the lurch. The 1966 decision by the Labour government to withdraw from east of Suez meant that troops were fighting an urban COIN operation that both increased in intensity and without the benefit of intelligence. Setting a date for withdrawal meant that a number of indigenous groups began to use violence to jockey for power post-independence. And showing how many “Brits” you could kill gave evidence of how powerful you were. The result was an increase in violence directed at British troops. Moreover, setting the date also meant that intelligence completely dried up: no one was prepared to risk helping the British who would be here today but gone tomorrow.¹⁰² In Northern Ireland, the army had political direction of a sort in that they were told to create “an acceptable level of violence.”¹⁰³ This was quite difficult to achieve, given that in the early 1970s, the army in many areas represented both military authority and the police. Acting as a police force was not something the army could carry out comfortably in the United Kingdom and in the full glare of the world’s media. But the army did manage to improve the situation and were glad to restore “police primacy” in 1976. The Army from then on came under the lead of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Soldiers not only patrolled alongside police personnel in “hard” areas, but also sometimes shared the same accommodations.¹⁰⁴ Troops became used to the “interagency” dimension,¹⁰⁵ and an originally strained relationship between Army and police was supplanted by

¹⁰¹ Hamill, *Pig in the Middle*, 142.

¹⁰² See David Ledger, *Shifting Sands: The British in South Arabia* (London: Peninsular, 1983).

¹⁰³ Home Secretary Reginald Maudling in 1971. Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency*, 110.

¹⁰⁴ Sebastian Roberts, “Fit to Fight: The Conceptual Component – An Approach to Military Doctrine for the Twenty-first Century”, in *The British Army: Manpower and Society into the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Hew Strachan (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 197.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

an on-the-ground rapport that developed over the years.¹⁰⁶ At higher levels, cooperation between Army intelligence and Special Branch officers likewise improved with time.¹⁰⁷

Overall, given the long and fairly successful administration of the empire carried out by the military, political masters had confidence in senior officers and they in turn, of course, had confidence down to the level of regimental subordinates.¹⁰⁸ As Demchak puts it, “the tendency by higher headquarters to maintain distant involvement and extensive lower level autonomy is supported by the wider political community, making it as much a cultural norm as a historically necessary organizational response.”¹⁰⁹ This is summed up in the British term “mission command” (*Auftragstaktik*) whereby those at the “pointy” end of operations at whatever level are given latitude to use their own discretion without waiting for orders from above. This concept has been applicable to everyone, from the lone sentry all the way up to those of the rank of general. Such discretion is essential in COIN operations if timely actions are to be taken that nip problems in the bud. Such attitudes are still prevalent today. Soldiers at the lower end of the rank spectrum are still encouraged, for instance, by the general commanding British troops in Iraq to take the initiative and not wait for orders from officers.¹¹⁰ Those at the top are also usually free of interference—this time from civilian masters. One general commanding recent operations in both East Timor and Sierra Leone was acting so much outside the control of politicians in London that one newspaper labelled his actions as “insubordination.”¹¹¹ But he received no chastisement. In the recent war in Iraq, the British Army was given the task of taking the city of Basra. Despite particular public and media pressure to seize it as soon as possible, the

¹⁰⁶ Taylor, *Brits*, 225.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Allen, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Soldiers' Voices, 1945–1989* (London: Michael Joseph, 1990), 251. Troops on the ground had the power of arrest themselves.

¹⁰⁸ Capt. R. Smith, “A Study into the Requirement for the United Nations to Develop an Internationally Recognized Doctrine for the Use of Force in Intra-state Conflict,” in *Study for the UN to Develop Doctrine for the Use of Force* (Camberley Staff College, 1993), 2. A common phrase used by senior commanders is that political masters “let us get on with it.” Used recently by both generals Guthrie and de la Billière. See Gen. Sir Charles Guthrie, “Liddell Hart Lecture: The New British Way in Warfare,” King’s College, London, 12 Feb 2001; and Gen. Peter de la Billière, *Storm Command* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 23.

¹⁰⁹ Demchak, “Colonies or Computers,” 11.

¹¹⁰ Maj. Gen. John McColl, “Adapting Command Hierarchies,” *RUSI Journal* 149, no. 1 (Feb 2004).

¹¹¹ Chris McGreal, “A Good Man in Africa,” *The Guardian* (17 May 2000): G2, 4.

British commander was able to pause and be patient because he came under no political pressure to act swiftly.¹¹²

Generally, the British Army has a legacy of good civil-military relations, has been reasonably content with the civilian direction it has received, and is quite relaxed about working with civilians in theatre. This is still evident in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq today. The army realises that it is one tool in a package of measures that can be used to defeat an insurgency. The principal tool in this endeavour is not the army's capacity to use force, but the framework for peace supplied by civilian measures. However, it has always been important for officers that the politicians supply the legal framework for military action. Working within the law was, and always will be, a vital commodity for successful COIN operations. This is even more true today as the army, being sent on more and more overseas operations for a variety of reasons, looks to political masters to establish the legal parameters for their interventions—especially for missions that lack a UN mandate.

It would be impossible, though, in discussing civil-military relations, to ignore one particular facet. Civilians, in whatever country, have always looked to save money by reducing defence spending. In this respect, the British Army is no different. The problem, though, is that the British government is keen to send its troops into COIN and CT environments while denying them the capabilities to properly conduct such operations. Good COIN and CT operations require “presence”; they are manpower intensive. But the army of today is being asked to conduct its operations with fewer and fewer soldiers. Cost-saving cutbacks mean that the army is now the smallest it has ever been. The government has decreed that technology can replace personnel and that advances in Network Enabled Capabilities can act as surrogates for human input. When it comes to COIN operations, however, technology cannot replace simple “boots on the ground”; numbers make the difference. As the head of the army has recently pointed out, “British troops currently in Iraq are not hampered by the lack of the latest guided weapons but by the lack of sufficient soldiers to patrol effectively.”¹¹³

The British, like other nations, have a “preordained tradition” of COIN and CT techniques. The army has to use and be seen to be using minimum force. It is both a norm and a pragmatic response to dealing with insurgents and terrorists. It was the vital ingredient in separating both of these from their support base. The army also needs a legal basis for its operations—a basis supplied by civilian masters (underscored by English Common Law) and not by the military themselves. This has then to be scrupulously kept to. But the British have also worked to the

¹¹² McColl, “Adapting Command Hierarchies,” 53.

¹¹³ John Hill, “UK Reshapes Armed Forces for Expeditionary Warfare,” *ISN Security Watch* (28 July 2004), <http://www.isn.ethz.ch>.

principle that hard and fast rules for dealing with low-level conflict can never truly be declared. It was “the British way” to take each separate conflict situation and deal with it as common sense would dictate. There has never been, in British thinking, a sense of “one strategy fits all” but merely a general framework, provided by culture and experience, around which policies are framed. Such preordained traditions and approaches are the product of cultural factors and of historical experience. They did not come about quickly or easily and will not be discarded quickly or easily, no matter what types of COIN or CT campaigns are conducted in the future. As Gen. Jackson put it, “There is a British way of warfare. Its roots are deep in our history...and we will set about our military business in a peculiarly British way.”¹¹⁴ The British Army is constrained in its actions by its own organizational culture and, as a democracy, by the wishes of the British people. The latter will be wary of an army that does not act in a distinctly *British* way.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Gen. Sir Mike Jackson, “Future of Land Warfare,” *RUSI Journal* 148, no. 4 (Aug 2003): 55.

¹¹⁵ Such a way may be summated by Frank Kitson’s COIN principles of 1977:

1. Good coordinating machinery (between civil and military agencies)
2. Establishing the sort of political atmosphere within which the government measures can be introduced with the maximum likelihood of success
3. Intelligence (right information = sensible policy)
4. Law (upholding the rule of)

Quoted in James Kiras, “Terrorism and Irregular Warfare,” in *Strategy in the Contemporary World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 222.