

# Introduction

## *Introducción*

HUW BENNETT, RORY CORMAC, MICHAEL S. GOODMAN,  
AND CLAUDIA HILLEBRAND

Asymmetric or irregular conflicts, often involving non-state actors, have come to dominate the foreign policy and defence agendas of Western states. Increasingly engaged in low intensity conflicts, counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism campaigns, governments have begun to call for more, and better, information from their intelligence services. Intelligence collection, analysis and exploitation play an important part in determining how states conduct their foreign and security policies. But when facing irregular, non-state opponents, particular challenges and difficulties arise. This collection of articles aims to improve the way we think about intelligence in the context of fighting ‘threats from below’.

Irregular threats are by no means a new phenomenon and can be traced back to ancient times, yet since 11 September 2001, intelligence studies, and security studies more broadly, have taken a great interest in understanding terrorist groups, and how to defeat them; however, few studies have considered the general problems encountered in understanding and countering a wide range of irregular adversaries. Crucially, the existing literature generally comprises either general studies of intelligence or books on a specific irregular threat with intelligence considered as a subsidiary issue. This special issue attempts to clarify our thinking about such asymmetric threats by taking a comparative approach and combining historical case studies with contemporary conflicts. It also examines the impact of intelligence in countering such threats, thereby placing the role of the intelligence services in wider political and military contexts. As such, articles include discussion of various threats,

---

Fecha de recepción: 08/10/2012.

from the early Cold War era to today, and across an extensive geographical range, from Palestine to Iraq, and Malaya to Northern Ireland. Asymmetric, or irregular, threats addressed in this volume include guerrilla warfare, insurgencies, terrorism, subversion, uprisings, coalition operations and so forth. Detailed discussions of definitional complexities lie beyond the scope of this volume (Salmoni, 2007: 18-24), but for the purposes of this special issue, ‘irregular threats’ (which encompass the above list) are taken as those primarily posed by a non-state actor aiming to undermine or subvert the political authority of a more powerful state through methods not necessarily associated with traditional forms of conventional warfare.

Taking an international approach, the volume brings together scholars from across the Atlantic. Their contributions, often based on new archival material or interviews, assess the use and merits of intelligence in different asymmetric settings, but also critically reflect on the limits of intelligence efforts in this context. The contributions are the result of an international conference at King’s College London, held in March 2011 by the Department of War Studies’ Intelligence and International Security Research Group.

## THEMES

Tackling non-state adversaries demands creative ways of gathering intelligence and challenges some of the more traditional intelligence processes. It is therefore important to explore intelligence practices used to identify and counter irregular adversaries in a variety of contexts. Key questions addressed in this special edition include: Where do states get their intelligence from? What kind of information prepares them best to counter or prevent irregular warfare? Which particular challenges have intelligence agencies to face in this context? What lessons can current policymakers learn from previous experiences? In addressing these questions, articles within this volume raise the following three key themes: the importance of intelligence in countering irregular threats; the unique and specific challenges posed by irregular adversaries to intelligence collection, collation, and analysis; and intelligence’s place within the broader political and military contexts in countering such threats.

## The Importance of Intelligence

Countering an irregular adversary involves identifying and isolating the threat, before eliminating it in a manner which does not alienate popular support or undermine the state's moral or political legitimacy. An effective intelligence structure has long been considered central to each of these phases (Kitson, 1971; Thompson, 1966; Galula, 2006). As with conventional warfare, intelligence is crucial in warning of impending threats and in accurately ascertaining the extent and nature of a threat. Similarly, accurate intelligence is vital in identifying not only the adversary, but also the adversary's underground support networks. Yet, as discussed below, irregular threats posed by non-state actors can be amorphous and hard to pin down, thereby increasing the demands placed upon intelligence agencies. Moreover, with insurgents, terrorists, and subversives using the local population for cover and emerging only to strike, intelligence in irregular warfare becomes crucial. Security forces must acquire the names and intentions of certain individuals, ascertain the hierarchy of dangerous non-state actors, consider the extent of local support, and identify the channels of communication and supply between the leadership and their supporters. In building up a detailed background picture, intelligence actors also need to recognise potential waverers and exploitable weak spots within the irregular adversary, its underground support network, and the broader population. As a result, human intelligence (HUMINT) assumes a greater centrality in countering irregular threats than in conventional warfare.

Once the government and security forces have obtained an understanding of the adversary and the threat posed, timely intelligence assessment can then play a further important role in generating the vital operational information which ensures contact with an otherwise elusive adversary, as Matthew Ford's article on the operational intelligence cycle in this volume demonstrates (Kitson, 1971). Similarly, accurate and timely intelligence is essential in enabling security forces and policymakers to deliver appropriate and proportionate countermeasures. For example, intelligence can ensure that precise targets are selected, thereby allowing minimum force to be used. These concepts of proportionality and selective or minimum use of force have traditionally been considered an integral part in countering irregular threats, in terms of maintaining legitimacy and

popular support. As such, effective intelligence can assume a key role in operational successes.

Finally, intelligence also plays an important, if often under-appreciated, role in the political sphere. This too is central to countering irregular threats which cross traditional military and political boundaries. It can, as Andrew Mumford's article in this volume argues, be instrumental in revealing exploitable schisms within the political leadership of an adversary. Intelligence can also help determine the political or popular acceptability (and likely consequences) of a proposed operation or policy.

### Challenges posed by Irregular Threats

Despite intelligence's centrality in confronting irregular adversaries, such threats pose specific challenges to intelligence services and to traditional processes of collection, assessment, and dissemination. Non-state actors and irregular threats can be fluid, amorphous, and develop very quickly, thereby impeding effective intelligence-gathering and the ability for analysts to acquire a detailed knowledge over time (as may be the case when examining another state such as the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War). Moreover, such adversaries are problematic to penetrate: they often operate in small cells; they are frequently composed of a distinct racial, ethnic, or religious group thereby requiring intelligence actors to possess highly specific cultural awareness and linguistic knowledge; and unlike state actors, their hierarchy can be unclear, whilst their structure or intentions can rapidly change. As a result, it can be difficult for security forces to penetrate non-state actors, to identify leading suspects and their support networks, and then to generate timely operational intelligence (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Jones, 2008: 7-44). HUMINT thus becomes increasingly central — but this presents its own problems: HUMINT operations can be time consuming, costly, dangerous, politically sensitive, and, owing to the difficulty of penetrating such groups, ultimately ineffective.

Irregular warfare involves the crossing of military and political boundaries at lower command levels than is normally the case in conventional conflicts, where cross-government integration tends to happen mainly at the strategic level. The amount of intelligence required at the tactical and op-

erational levels proliferates, to span the political, social, cultural, economic, technological and military domains. As Adam Cobb's article demonstrates, this creates unique challenges for the practitioners on the ground and requires significant training for those involved. Countering irregular threats therefore challenges a state's intelligence structures and organisational machinery particularly regarding all source assessment and channels of communication between the relevant actors. Moreover, individual government departments can have diverging and competing conceptualisations of a particular threat, hindering cooperation, intelligence sharing, and the ability to attain consensus (although the latter is more important to the British than the American system).

Irregular threats not only challenge effective cooperation within states, but so too cooperation between states. Irregular adversaries are often international or transnational in nature. This has been recently epitomised by the so called Global War on Terror and the fight against non-state actors such as Al Qaeda and its affiliates, yet has also included state-sponsored subversion permeating across national boundaries. As Jason Spitaletta et al's article in this volume demonstrates, even those groups which are tied to one territory, such as the Tamil Tigers or IRA, enjoy underground support networks which extend far beyond that territory's borders. International liaison and intelligence cooperation therefore becomes paramount as a range of states must align to counter a transnational threat. Such international cooperation can be a complex and difficult process; states must grapple with issues including how far to share intelligence, the reliability of shared intelligence, how that intelligence has been acquired, and the potential for being held hostage to the whims of a local ally (Walsh, 2009). In terms of intelligence sharing, however, it is important not to overstate the differences between conventional and irregular warfare. Since 1942 the majority of Western military operations have been conducted in alliances. This naturally involves some degree of intelligence cooperation and so similar issues apply across the spectrum of warfare.

In addition to cooperation however, the international dimension poses further problems for the traditional intelligence process which perhaps impede a state's ability to wage irregular warfare more greatly than regarding conventional operations. In terms of setting requirements and priorities for intelligence gathering, transnational threats create strains on the resources of

intelligence agencies — it is impossible for a single country to monitor so many potential trouble spots, whilst the multifarious nature of the threat requires detailed culture-specific and region-specific intelligence. When it comes to assessment, the international dimension considerably complicates an analyst's job. As highlighted by Christian Schlaepfer within this volume, it creates tension over whether to treat a threat in isolation or elevate it to a broader international context thereby challenging analysts to determine the extent to which a threat was internally or externally instigated. In relation to assessments about communist subversion in the United Kingdom and colonial uprisings, these were difficult calls to make and risked downplaying local complexities by oversimplifying a threat into an existing international pattern, or underestimating the global picture by focussing on overly insular aspects

The risk of cognitive dissonance, therefore, infuses intelligence assessments of irregular threats. Articles throughout this volume demonstrate how intelligence assessments struggled with subtle politicisation in the form of exaggerating successes, with deliberate deception by non-state actors, and with cognitive closure (i.e. a desire to bend threats into a Communist and Cold War framework). The article by Leo Blanken and Justin Overbaugh examines the cognitive issues pertinent to irregular warfare by considering the impact of counterinsurgency warfare on mirror imaging, assumptive frameworks, and deductive reasoning.

Irregular threats pose normative dilemmas for democracies no less pressing than organisational and cognitive questions. Western liberal governments face a delicate balance between national security and civil liberties and, tied in with ideas of political and moral legitimacy and the maintenance of popular support, this impacts upon the role, use, and limitations of intelligence (Wilkinson, 1977). These issues have been re-ignited by developments in the 'war on terror,' particularly regarding the practices of surveillance, detention, interrogation, and rendition. The transnational threat posed by non-state actors requires a more eclectic range of intelligence partners, who may have poor human rights records. As Julian Richards' article explores, reforming and cooperating with a state's intelligence agency which, as in the case of Afghanistan, may have a history of human rights violations creates further pressures on states countering irregular threats.

## Intelligence in the Broader Context

Intelligence does not exist in a vacuum, but is information which serves a purpose. It is therefore important not merely to describe intelligence operations, strengths, and failures as an end in themselves but to examine their impact on the broader political, policymaking, and military contexts. Articles across this volume therefore take an holistic approach by exploring the role of intelligence, its impact on policy and strategy designed to counter irregular threats, and the relationship between intelligence practitioners and policymakers. For example, the article Christian Schlaepfer includes original discussions of the role of MI5 in countering the irregular threat from subversion in the United Kingdom.

Yet the relationship between the intelligence agencies and policymakers/military leaders is a two-way process. To positively impact upon a policy or military strategy, intelligence needs to be relevant, timely, and well-coordinated. Policymakers and military leaders must therefore also provide intelligence agencies on the ground with some sort of strategic guidance, framework, or list of priorities in order to help set intelligence requirements. This relationship is an important theme reflected across numerous articles in this volume.

The intelligence landscape since September 2001 has highlighted both the centrality and novelty of the irregular threat — specifically in terms of the threat from international terrorism. A rapid proliferation of books on intelligence emerged in the 2000s covering the ‘new’ threats facing intelligence agencies, including terrorist attacks (on America, Spain, and London), the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and issues relating to rendition, torture, and surveillance. This special edition, however, demonstrates that many of the issues involved are not necessarily new and in many cases long predate 9/11. Similar intelligence challenges to those experienced today were confronted shortly after the Second World War, during the years of decolonisation, and during the Cold War. In addition to outlining the demands which irregular warfare places upon the intelligence community, this collection also reveals continuity in some of the fundamental challenges involved not only temporally but also thematically. Similar structural, cognitive, and normative problems transcend the spectrum of irregular threats from subversion to terrorism.

## ARTICLES

This volume is arranged chronologically. Spanning from the early cold war era to twenty-first century operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, it examines the role of intelligence across a range of case studies.

Articles one and two consider the role of centralised intelligence actors during the early cold war. Christian Schlaepfer explores the role of intelligence provided by MI5 and Special Branch in assessing the potentially subversive threat by the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in early Cold War Britain. Although the CPGB posed little threat to national security and stability in the political arena, its growing influence in the trade unions and its potential to exploit economic conditions for subversive ends were serious concerns for successive governments and the intelligence community. Despite the many accusations levelled publicly against the Communists, however, Schlaepfer demonstrates how surprisingly few measures were ultimately taken to prevent the subversion of industry. MI5 provided accurate assessments of the threat, based on extensive surveillance of the CPGB, and this insured that policymakers took the threat seriously.

Thomas Maguire then applies the concept of ‘state-private networks’ to early Cold War Britain to analyse the aims and methods of governmental and non-governmental cultural influence, propaganda, and psychological operations. This article explores both the role of the Foreign Office’s Information Research Department (IRD) in domestic counter-subversion and the British dynamics of ‘state-private networks’. It analyses how the IRD coordinated action through two key ‘private’ British bodies: the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress (TUC). Additionally, it examines a specific IRD campaign: countering the Soviet ‘Peace Campaign’ and promoting western rearmament. The article contends that the threat of Communism was perceived as ‘transnational’ — linking that within Britain and abroad — and thus requiring a symmetrical response, and, reinforcing this, that private British institutions were seen as the most effective media for conveying clandestine state influence. Indeed, Maguire’s article raises important comparisons between Cold War counter-subversion policies and twenty-first century transnational strategies formulated by British ministers and counter-radicalization officials in response to violent extremism.

In the third article, Jason Spitaletta et al explore intelligence in relation to underground support networks that aid terrorist and insurgent movements. The authors discuss intelligence and counterintelligence underground operations from structural and functional, as well as social and behavioural, perspectives. In doing so, this piece examines the challenges the underground presents to intelligence support to counter-network operations.

Article four explores the impact of intelligence on military strategy. Combining both historical and contemporary case studies, Andrew Mumford analyses the role played by intelligence in the modern British experience of irregular warfare in Malaya (1948-60), Kenya (1952-60), South Arabia (1962-67), the first decade of the Northern Irish ‘Troubles’ (1969-79), and Iraq (2003-09). The article argues that the British have consistently proven to be slow learners and slow strategic burners in the realm of counter-insurgency warfare. Yet intelligence capabilities proved to become the critical enabler of eventual operational successes and lever against strategic inertia, in large part due to effective decentralisation of intelligence gathering and the establishment of local intelligence networks. From the case studies what is clear is that the eventual efficacy of intelligence gathering and dissemination lent itself to eventual military success.

Intelligence cooperation often poses ethical, legal and operational dilemmas. In article five, Julian Richards explores some of the main challenges that NATO countries face in the context of the war in Afghanistan. One of the key pillars of Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Afghanistan since 2001 has been the re-establishment of a national intelligence agency, in the shape of the National Directorate of Security (NDS). Yet this has proved to be a complex and controversial process. For partner countries, the particular problem of “dirty hands” in dealing with intelligence and security agencies in problematic states such as Afghanistan has reared its head and posed very difficult political questions. This article argues that, despite serious ethical concerns over dealing with an agency such as the NDS, the importance of intelligence in contemporary asymmetric and low-intensity conflicts means we have to find a way of making the relationship work.

In article six, Leo Blanken and Justin Overbaugh demonstrate that deductive reasoning plays a crucial, but often underappreciated, role in military intelligence despite recent critics advocating shifting intelligence opera-

tions in Afghanistan towards a highly inductive approach. In past conventional conflicts there has been a reliance on an implicit ‘mirror image’ model of the enemy to allow for deduction, yet regarding counterinsurgency, the authors argue that one should still work to develop an appropriate model of the enemy, rather than abandon deduction altogether. This article uses historical and contemporary examples to demonstrate the necessity of deductive reasoning. It aims to provide a new lens through which to assess military intelligence doctrine, and explains how this can be used to formulate policy suggestions for dealing with counterinsurgency in the war in Afghanistan.

In the seventh article Matthew Ford explores the intelligence methods used on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Specifically the focus is on the pioneering efforts of General Stanley McChrystal, who whilst commander of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in Iraq sought the reorganisation of the intelligence-gathering, analysis and distribution cycle into Fusion Cells, so as to map insurgent networks quickly. Pioneered in Baghdad and subsequently applied in Afghanistan, the speed at which data was processed and turned into actionable intelligence made it possible to launch several special forces raids on insurgents on a nightly basis. This increase in operational tempo helped JSOC defeat insurgent networks before they might organise themselves to make an attack. This article asks how the claims made about the success of JSOC relates to the wider ambitions embodied in a counterinsurgency campaign where the goal is to develop political solutions to intractable conflicts.

In article eight, Adam Cobb explores the United States Marine Corps and the growing disconnect between training and requirements regarding intelligence competencies. The article examines the challenges that long-distance expeditionary counterinsurgency warfare conducted in alien cultural environments places on intelligence capabilities. These include lack of access to intelligence assets, a lack of analytical expertise, and pressures on the individual Marine. Due to the nature of the irregular threat, an intelligence corporal must not only master technical competencies but is also required to be an historian, anthropologist, and cultural adviser. The article therefore further explores how intelligence and operations can be better integrated.

Together these articles offer a useful and relevant framework to allow academics and policymakers to better understand the relationship between

intelligence and irregular warfare. With such matters dominating twenty-first century security and defence agendas, the themes discussed in this volume will continue to resonate into the future. Understanding the challenges which irregular threats pose to traditional intelligence processes, and the impact intelligence has on countering irregular forces is vital in understanding how states try to counter ‘the threat from below’.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- EILSTRUP-SANGIOVANNI, M. and JONES, C. (2008). ‘Assessing the Dangers of Illicit Networks: Why al-Qaida May Be Less Threatening Than Many Think’. *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp 7-44.
- GALULA, David (2006 [1964]). *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International.
- KITSON, Frank (1971). *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping*. London: Faber and Faber.
- SALMONI, B. (2007). ‘The “Fallacy” of Irregular Warfare’. *The RUSI Journal*. No. 1524, pp 18-24.
- THOMPSON, Robert (1966). *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- WALSH, James (2009). *The International Politics of Intelligence Sharing*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- WILKINSON, Paul (1977). *Terrorism and the Liberal State*. London: Macmillan.