

## The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counterinsurgency

By Walter C. Ladwig III  
Cambridge University Press, 2017  
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Reviewed by Andrew Byers

This is an important book for theorists and practitioners of counterinsurgency alike. Ladwig, who teaches at King's College London, begins by pointing out that most U.S. counterinsurgency thinking errs in assuming that the United States will share common goals, interests, and priorities with the local government that it is supporting. As recent experiences in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan indicate, that assumption should not be taken for granted. In fact, many U.S. elements of strategy applied in counterinsurgency—ending political and military corruption, bolstering political legitimacy by addressing the public's concerns, engaging in economic reform—may appear just as threatening to the local government's interests as the insurgency itself. Some local governments' political and other interests

simply do not coincide with those of the United States, and that can lead to tremendous difficulty in convincing them to adopt U.S.-backed reforms. Indeed, Ladwig's central argument is that the "forgotten front" in these conflicts—the relationship between the United States and local government it is trying to aid—is just as important.

*The Forgotten Front* is structured with three theoretical chapters and three case studies—the Philippines during the Hukbalahap (Huk) Rebellion, 1946–1954; South Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem, 1955–1963; and El Salvador during its civil war, 1979–1991. Ladwig concludes with a final chapter with policy prescriptions and implications. The three case studies vary widely in outcome: the Philippines is considered a success; Vietnam, a clear failure; and El Salvador's results are much more mixed. So what explains the differing results?

According to Ladwig's analysis, outcomes were primarily determined by the amount of influence the United States was able to exert over its ally to reform itself and adopt desired U.S. policies. In the Philippines, where the United States was able to exert the most influence, a successful outcome was achieved. In South Vietnam, where the United States was never able to induce internal reform, failure resulted. In El Salvador, where the United States was able to exert a moderate and fluctuating amount of influence, a much more mixed outcome resulted.

In each case study, Ladwig examines discrete "influence events" in which the host nation began by opposing U.S. calls for reform or policy change and the United States then attempted to exert influence over its recalcitrant client. Influence is, of course, difficult to measure, but Ladwig uses agency theory—concerned with how one party attempts to motivate another to act on its behalf—to assess the patron-client dynamics in each case study. The United States had two chief strategies for influencing its clients: *inducement* (a client will comply with the patron's preferred policies if aid is unilaterally provided and strong statements of support are made) and *conditionality* (policies that attempt

to shape a client's behavior by making assistance contingent on prior compliance with the desired policy). One of Ladwig's key findings—a point that should shape future U.S. policy choices—is that client governments almost universally complied with U.S. desires for policy change when it attached conditions on its aid, but never when it simply provided inducements. Open-ended inducements, Ladwig found, simply do not work.

Ladwig argues that significant credit for the successful counterinsurgency in the Philippines must go to the United States because of its sustained, active intervention that relied heavily on the use of conditional aid. This pushed the Filipino government to adopt the necessary military, political, and economic reforms to implement and execute a successful counterinsurgency campaign. The U.S. dominant influence approach was one of conditional aid and constant pressure, always tying aid to reform, and it worked.

In the case of Diem's South Vietnam, the United States primarily employed inducements, with little success; significant pressure was seldom brought to bear to force Diem to adopt the reforms that would have led to long-term stability of his government, and he was never held accountable for his failures. The United States only tried conditioned aid twice during this period and appeared to gain greater influence as a result, but these efforts were not sustained. Inducements without conditioned aid failed dramatically in the early years of the Vietnam War.

In El Salvador, U.S. influence varied over time and from issue to issue. The United States alternated use of inducements and conditionality across three different administrations, but important reforms and policy changes only occurred when strict conditions were attached to aid.

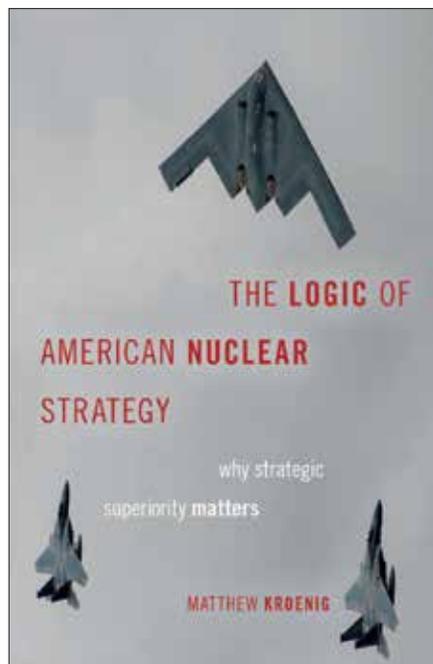
There are, of course, obvious policy implications and lessons learned here for the United States well beyond these three historical case studies. For example, as the United States revisits its relationship with Pakistan and considers how it might best support its goals in places

like Afghanistan and Iraq, it should think hard before offering unrestricted aid, which has an exceedingly poor track record in forcing clients to make the kinds of internal changes needed to compete successfully against an insurgency. More explication and analysis on why governments often choose inducements over conditionality is needed, since open-ended inducements with no specific actions required in exchange for the aid are so common. Deeper analysis is also needed of the complexities and difficulties of adopting a policy conditionality.

Because of its central theme and extensive supporting evidence, *The Forgotten Front* is one of the most significant recent books on counterinsurgency, with major policy implications for the United States and its allies. JFQ

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### **The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy: Why Strategic Superiority Matters**

By Matthew Kroenig  
Oxford University Press, 2018  
\$29.95 280 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0190849184

Reviewed by Michael Fitzsimmons

Famously, Henry Kissinger once wondered out loud, “What in the name of God is strategic superiority? . . . What do you do with it?” Over 40 years later, the questions still resonate, and Georgetown University professor Matthew Kroenig aims to tackle Kissinger’s quandary. *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy* begins with a puzzle: if the basic premise of U.S. nuclear deterrence strategy is supposed to be that the United States can survive a massive nuclear attack and retaliate with great force (so-called assured destruction), why have successive Presidents maintained nuclear capabilities that go well beyond what is required for this goal?

Robert Jervis asked this same question back in 1984 in a book titled *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Cornell University Press, 1984). His

answer was—more or less—that policy-makers do not understand what they are doing. Kroenig’s book serves, in part, as a rebuttal to Jervis’s argument.

Of course, the issues here are far from just a rehash of Cold War debates. To the contrary, nuclear strategy is back at the forefront of national security policy thanks to nuclear modernization efforts by Russia, China, and North Korea. These developments have been duly noted in the Defense Department’s new National Defense Strategy and Nuclear Posture Review, which have effectively put efforts toward long-term nuclear disarmament initiated by President Barack Obama (with the support of such stalwart Cold Warriors as Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, Sam Nunn, and Bill Perry) on the back shelf.

So Kroenig’s book arrives at an auspicious time for new analysis on nuclear strategy. The centerpiece of his argument is the “superiority-brinkmanship synthesis theory”: that nuclear superiority—a larger or otherwise more capable nuclear posture than a rival—increases a state’s power in crisis bargaining by means of increasing its resolve. This builds directly on the premise first established by Thomas Schelling that nuclear crises are “competitions in risk taking,” where the party most willing to run risks (that is, engage in brinkmanship) will prevail.

To make his case, Kroenig organizes the book in two parts, subtly tilting the analytic playing field in his direction with the subtitles “The advantages of nuclear advantages” and “The disadvantages of nuclear advantages?” He identifies four interrelated advantages: reducing the cost of nuclear war, increasing resolve in crisis, providing coercive bargaining leverage, and enhancing deterrence. He then critiques arguments about four ostensible disadvantages of U.S. nuclear superiority: increasing the likelihood of nuclear war, sparking arms races, exacerbating proliferation, and costing too much.

The book is the first in Oxford University Press’s “Bridging the Gap” series, aimed at improving the worthy but perennially difficult goal of better linking academic and policy experts in areas of international relations. In this context,