

Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions That Shaped Our World

By Anthony James Joes

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Reviewed by
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If failure is the best teacher, then the study of insurgent victories is obviously of benefit in enhancing counterinsurgent strategies. While each insurgency has different dimensions, they all share varying points of commonality. These are the gems to be mined. In this book, Anthony James Joes analyzes the Maoist revolution in China, Ho Chi Minh's victory in French Indochina, Fidel Castro in Cuba, and the Afghan victory over the Soviets. The Cuban case gets short shrift (somewhat ironic given that the book's cover depicts Cuban revolutionaries); it is less than half the length of the other chapters, and Joes notes in his conclusion that he offers it as a "control case" against which to compare the other insurgencies. Given the subtitle of the book, though, the lesser emphasis on Cuba is understandable. It is the insurgency whose "global" impact can be most debated.

Each case is described in significant detail, and Joes generally achieves a good balance between the level of specific detail and the larger lessons for theoretical analysis. However, the cases do at times get down to levels of specificity that historians will value but that may obfuscate the larger theoretical lessons. In describing the Maoist victory in China, Joes discusses both the Japanese and the Nationalists as the counterinsurgents, but the narrative at times blends the events. While the actual chronology overlaps at times, this section is a little unclear. The lyricism of the writing sometimes distracts from the insights. Joes repeatedly refers to the Soviet army as the "Army that defeated Hitler," when the actual facts detailed in the case show it was nothing

of the sort. Traditions and history matter, but training, equipment, and experience matter more.

On the theoretical side, Joes highlights major factors contributing to insurgent victory. These are the quality of the military leadership, the absence of a peaceful road to change, the inability to prevent external assistance, insufficient forces, and an inability of the counterinsurgents to give full attention to the conflict. The fact that many of these errors are unavoidable in the cases presented is perhaps the hardest lesson. Many counterinsurgents cannot find a peaceful road to change once the conflict has moved too far along for a compromise to be reached.

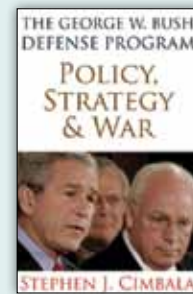
In terms of leadership, Joes rightfully highlights the mistakes made by the government/counterinsurgent forces in either their perception of the threat or the viability of their response. Insurgencies succeed because counterinsurgents fail. This theme recurs throughout the book, but the reasons for such misperception can be very different across the cases. While the case studies highlight specific manifestations of counterinsurgent weakness/inaptitude, the real lesson is understanding the role of these weaknesses and then trying to find how they may manifest themselves in different situations. Counterinsurgency (COIN) forces may underestimate the enemy (as the Nationalist forces did against Mao, or the Soviets in Afghanistan), or they may be unable to commit extra needed forces (France in Indochina). This ends up being the same phenomenon—the lack of sufficient personnel to handle needed COIN operations—but for very different reasons. Joes also notes the role that timing plays in insurgent success. The Japanese invasion meant Nationalist forces understandably had to reprioritize their efforts against the Japanese rather than crushing the communist movement. Timing obviously matters, but how to take advantage of this insight in each particular case is the perennial question.

In the conclusion, Joes offers examples of counterinsurgent victory, but only in passing. Beyond the "usual suspects" (the British in Malaya), he also points to examples such as El Salvador, which is a fascinating case of counterinsurgent success. This is obviously not the topic of this book, so perhaps that will be the focus of a companion volume. There are some minor editorial issues (*The Rape of Nanking* is listed twice, under Chang and "Chong," and Callwell's *Small Wars* is missing

from the bibliography), but overall the book is well edited. A last point that Joes cannot be blamed for, is that, given recent revelations of Stephen Ambrose's work on Eisenhower, conclusions drawn from that work may be questioned.

Joes writes with clarity, but those who have read Jeffrey Record's *Beating Goliath* and Joes's own *Resisting Rebellion* will find little new insight. Any new student of counterinsurgency, however, will find useful information here, as will historians looking for concise analysis on these specific cases. JFQ

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The George W. Bush Defense Program: Policy, Strategy, and War

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Several years after leaving the White House, George W. Bush remains a polarizing figure for many Americans. While hyper-partisan popular critiques of the Bush administration line bookshelves throughout the country, the scholarly literature remains much more limited in comparison, particularly in the area of national security policy. Evaluating the national security policy of any Presidential administration is challenging due to the complexity of the subject matter; however, in the case of the Bush administration, the challenge is compounded by the relatively limited time that has elapsed since the end of the administration. Passions remain high, and many of the historical documents required to conduct comprehensive analyses will remain classified for the foreseeable future, though a number of key documents have already been declassified.