

BOOK REVIEWS

Hunt, Richard and Richard Shultz, Jr. (eds.), *Lessons from an Unconventional War: Reassessing U.S. Strategies for Future Conflicts*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1982.

O'Neill, Bard, William R. Heaton and Donald J. Alberts (eds.), *Insurgency in the Modern World*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982.

Sarkesian, Sam C. and William L. Scully (eds.), *U.S. Policy and Low-Intensity Conflict: Potentials for Military Struggles in the 1980's*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1981.

Summers, Harry G., Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*. Presidio Press, 1982.

In the aftermath of the war in Vietnam American students of political and military affairs, like American society in general, tried to avoid all topics that reminded them of the terrible national trauma that surrounded that war. Articles on the politics of Southeast Asia were few and far between. Journals dealing with military affairs published almost no articles on the military lessons of the Vietnam War. New books and articles on low-level conflict, revolutionary movements, and counter-insurgency, of which there had been a large number throughout the 1960s, became almost nonexistent after 1970.

Since about 1980, however, Americans have put the worst aspects of the Vietnam trauma sufficiently behind them to begin to re-examine many of the political, military and moral issues that were involved in the war. One aspect of this process of re-examination is that in recent years there have been a number of very good studies of low-level conflict. The four works to be discussed in this review are part of this second generation of studies on low-level conflict.

The articles in *U.S. Policy and Low-Level Conflict* deal with a number of issues, but the following topics receive the most attention: the threat to American national security posed by low-level conflict; the capabilities that the United States has to respond to the problem of low-level conflict; what lessons the United States can learn from how other nations have dealt with the problem of low-level conflict; and the constraints that the United States must accept in formulating its policy toward low-level conflict.

Insurgency in the Modern World is a comparative analysis of a number of post-World War II insurgencies. In the first chapter editor O'Neill develops an analytical framework to be used in assessing insurgencies. The rest of the chapters of the book use this analytical framework to discuss insurgencies in Northern Ireland, Thailand, Guatemala, Uruguay, Iraq, Oman, and Angola.

Lessons from an Unconventional War and *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* are both efforts to analyze the reasons for the

American defeat in Vietnam. The Hunt and Shultz volume is a collection of essays dealing with American advisors in Vietnam, the pacification program, American strategy in Vietnam, domestic attitudes toward the war, and lessons from Vietnam for other low-level conflicts in the 1980s. In *On Strategy* Summers argues that the American failure in Vietnam was due to a disregard for some of the key principles of strategy laid down by the great strategic thinker Carl von Clausewitz. He cites, for example, the inability of the United States to establish a clear set of strategic objectives in the war, thereby making certain that its military operations could not possibly succeed because those operations were not related to any set of strategic objectives. This is borne out by a number of writers on Vietnam who have related the story of how, when Clark Clifford became Secretary of Defense in 1968, he could not find anyone in the Defense Department who could give him a clear idea of the military goals of the United States in Southeast Asia.

While there can be no doubt that the impact of the so-called "post-Vietnam syndrome" on American politics has eased significantly in recent years, this syndrome continues to influence the way in which Americans feel about political issues. With respect to the recent studies on low-level conflict, this "post-Vietnam syndrome" leads many people to fear that these studies are a new version of the "counter-insurgency craze" of the early 1960s. Since there is a widespread belief that this craze contributed to the American decision to undertake a large-scale military intervention in Vietnam in 1965, there is a great deal of concern that the recent studies on low-level conflict could encourage American military interventions in cases where such interventions would not be in the national security interests of the United States.

It is quite true that all too many of the counter-insurgency studies of the early 1960s were poorly researched and failed to address many of the key issues involved in low-level conflicts. Such deficiencies are common in studies on any new issue. Consider, for example, the large number of poor analyses that were produced in the immediate aftermath of the emergence of widespread concern about the environment in 1970, about energy in 1973, and about the American economy's need for high technology in 1981.

However, while it is true that the first wave of studies on a particular issue will have serious flaws, it is equally true that over time further research can be done and new experiences can be analyzed, and that through this such flaws can be corrected. This group of books clearly demonstrates that the current studies on low-level conflict have overcome many of the mistakes and omissions of the studies done in the 1960s.

First, in the earlier studies there was not nearly enough attention paid to the experiences of other countries that had had to conduct counter-guerrilla campaigns. For example, shortly after their withdrawal from Indochina in 1954 the French military prepared a detailed analysis of the difficulties that they had experienced in their

struggle with the Viet Minh and came up with a series of recommendations to overcome these difficulties. Such an analysis should have been of great interest to the United States; yet it was not even translated into English until 1967, and by the time of the American withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973 only a handful of people in the U.S. military and government had read this study.

The new generation of studies on low-level conflict makes a much greater effort to research and evaluate the experiences of other nations with low-level conflict. In Sarkesian's and Scully's book there is a pair of articles analyzing the British and French experiences with low-level conflict. As these articles show, a great deal can be learned from the experiences of the British and the French, particularly given the long colonial heritage of both nations, the post-1945 wars fought by the French in Indochina and Algeria and by the British in Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus and Northern Ireland, and the fact that Britain, France and the United States are all democracies, sharing the common problem of how to maintain public support for overseas interventions.

The book edited by O'Neill *et. al.* is another example of the emphasis given to the study of a number of countries' experiences with low-level conflicts. In the opening chapter O'Neill discusses six variables that are crucial in analyzing any insurgency: popular support, organization, cohesion, external support, environment, and the government role. The other chapters in the book all analyze their case studies in terms of these variables, thus giving the reader a clear comparative understanding of the insurgencies discussed in the book.

Second, the literature of the 1960s on low-level conflict paid little attention to the problem of building and maintaining public support for any sort of American military intervention overseas. Instead, public support was taken for granted and it was not a factor that was subjected to much serious analysis. Put differently, the 1960s analyses of low-level conflict tended to deal with the issue of public support for overseas intervention in a style reminiscent of the well-known story about an economist who is asked how he would open a can of beans if he were marooned on a desert island. The economist replied: "First, assume a can opener. . . ." The 1960s analysts of low-level conflict similarly "assumed public support."

The Vietnam War, if it proved nothing else, certainly proved that the American public will not automatically support every U.S. military intervention overseas. Consequently, the new generation of studies on low-level conflict have carefully evaluated what sort of military interventions the public might and might not support. Both the Sarkesian and Scully volume and the Hunt and Shultz volume consider the attitudes of the American public toward the war in Vietnam, and then use these analyses to try and foresee how the public would react to various types of future U.S. military interventions overseas. Summers argues that a key factor in the American defeat in Vietnam was the failure to realize that the sort of military intervention that the United States undertook in Vietnam was of such a nature and on such a large

scale that it could not maintain long-term public support and, therefore, had no chance of success. Summers concludes that any future military intervention by the United States will end as disastrously as Vietnam unless, before undertaking the intervention, American officials have built a durable base of public support for the action.

In sum, the new analyses of low-level conflict should not be seen as simply "Counter-Insurgency Craze, Part II." Rather, this new body of literature builds on that earlier body of literature by accepting its valid insights while correcting its omissions and flaws.

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Wilkinson, Paul, *The New Fascists*, London and Sydney: Pan Books, 1983

Paul Wilkinson has written this book with the avowed purpose of alerting "the general public, and particularly the young generation, to the resurgence of neo-fascist and related movements of the ultra-right."¹ The phenomenon with which he is concerned is the spread in the 1970s and 1980s of extreme right-wing parties and organizations, many of which resemble, where they do not deliberately emulate, the pre-1945 fascist movements. This world-wide resurgence of fascism, as he sees it, is an accompaniment to the recent economic slump and to growing racial and national antipathies.

Fascism is here defined as an extreme movement which espouses authoritarian views, builds on an intolerance of racial or ethnic minorities and on anti-communism and deliberately appeals to irrational fears and hatreds. While fascists organize themselves into political parties, preferably under the leadership of an idolized *fuhrer*-figure, they also frequently give secret or open support to affiliated terrorist groups. Rejecting flatly and without justification the definition by Ernst Nolte and others who view fascism as a product of peculiar historical circumstances between 1918 and 1945, Wilkinson does nevertheless admit that many of his post-1945 fascisms have been mere carbon copies of Hitler's movement. He also admits that anti-communism has not been as vital an element in recent years and that many of the neo-fascisms today have difficulty finding leaders who are recognizable *fuhrer*-figures. In short, the practical definition which he offers of contemporary fascist movements is that of extreme and violent right-wing parties that trade on racial and ethnic hatreds.