

Mockaitis, Thomas R. *British counterinsurgency in the post-imperial era*. Manchester, UK and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995.

This is yet another valuable contribution to the study of counterinsurgency by Thomas Mockaitis, an admirable companion to his previous effort, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60* (London: Macmillan, 1990). It is well-researched and documented, drawing on a wide range of available primary and secondary sources. These open sources are supplemented by interviews with serving and retired military officers.

The work includes four case studies of British counterinsurgency, post-imperial campaigns: the Indonesian Confrontation (1962-66), South Arabia (1962-67), Dhofar (1967-75) and Northern Ireland (since 1969), along with chapters assessing the overall evolution of doctrine and the lessons learnt. The choice of case studies provides a useful range of settings and situations from urban operations in Aden and Belfast, to the dense jungles of Borneo, the desert areas of the Radfan and remote Dhofar. The post-imperial era also saw British forces operating in a far greater variety of roles than the withdrawal from empire scenario revisited in Aden. The new roles involved rendering military assistance to recently independent Malaysia to combat Indonesian aggression, providing advice and leadership to Omani forces against communist insurgents and, finally, in Northern Ireland, fulfilling their constitutional role in aid to the civil power.

The general principles which the British Army developed in the imperial era (minimum force, civil-military cooperation and tactical flexibility) proved their worth once more in post-imperial counterinsurgency campaigns. Yet these general principles and the vast experience gained from a half century of fighting insurgents was not distilled into a comprehensive doctrine and taught to serving officers. Thus, the application of past experience in post-imperial conflicts was uneven. During the Indonesian Confrontation British forces were at a considerable advantage under the command of General Walter Walker, who had served in the Malayan campaign and was author of the closest thing to an unofficial counterinsurgency "bible" for two decades, *The Conduct of Anti-terrorist Operations in Malaya*. Other campaigns were not as fortunate. Operations in South Arabia lacked focus and in rural areas relied on the false economy of aerial bombardment at the expense of a hearts-and-minds effort, which had proven so successful in other conflicts. This shortfall contributed, along with other factors, to the only clear cut defeat in the post-imperial era. In Dhofar British officers serving the Sultan of Oman developed a highly effective intelligence gathering network, despite difficult conditions. This effort was closely linked to an effective hearts-and-minds campaign and a devolved command and control structure which eventually choked off the communist insurgency. It is not surprising that Northern Ireland, by far the longest and most complex counterinsurgency campaign the British Army has ever fought, would experience the greatest changes. The Army entered the streets of Belfast and Londonderry with little guidance or established policies. Mistakes were made in the early years, sometimes from a misapplication of lessons from previous campaigns, such as the use of internment-without-trial in 1971-72, but over time the security forces adapted to the situation relearning past lessons and developing new approaches. The period since the early 1970s has seen a formalization of British counterinsurgency doctrine, much of it based on the experience of Northern

Ireland, which now spans six volumes, and that conflict has now replaced Malaya as the example to be taught.

The author identifies the "media revolution" of recent decades as being the most significant difference between the imperial and post-imperial eras. Although the British Army had occasionally experienced the wrath of a hostile press in earlier years, most notably during the Anglo-Irish War (1919-21) and during the Zionist insurgency (1945-48), intense media scrutiny, especially with the advent of television, had a profound effect on the conduct of operations. For example, in 1963 media coverage of a campaign of aerial bombardment and village clearing in the Radfan area of South Arabia triggered a public outcry. Similar operations in the Radfan during the 1950s, without the media present, went largely unnoticed, despite much higher casualties than the 1960s version. The constant media presence in Northern Ireland, according to the author, has resulted in increased restrictions in the conduct of operations beyond those normally associated with the principle of "minimum force," the standard for conduct in previous campaigns. Handling the media in many post-imperial campaigns became an essential part of operational planning rather than simply an after thought. Television coverage has also brought the public closer to the conflict and increased sensitivity to casualties. As Mockaitis observes: "... it is hard to imagine a British public tolerating 4,436 casualties including 509 dead suffered by a national service army during the highly successful Malayan Emergency campaign." (pp. 14445)

The author also cites technical and logistical advancements as having a significant impact on post-imperial counterinsurgency, especially the advent of helicopters, and improvements in firepower and weaponry. Although both government forces and insurgents have both reaped gains in the technological arena, Mockaitis gives the edge to the police and military, especially in later years with the introduction of computers for the processing of intelligence data.

The conclusions offered in *British counterinsurgency in the post-imperial era* are well reasoned and amply supported by the available documentation. The work provides a useful bridge in understanding the transition from imperial to post-imperial counterinsurgency and sheds valuable light on the uneven development of British doctrine from the early 1960s to the current situation in Northern Ireland. The author offers the principles developed and refined during this period as a possible model for use in future United Nations peacekeeping operations.

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