

Hearts and minds? Psychology in classic counterinsurgency writing

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Abstract:

The notion of winning local 'hearts and minds' away from an insurgency is a staple of counterinsurgency theory, and points to the essentially psychological nature of such activities. Here I explore the connection between psychology and counterinsurgency through the contrasting writings of three theorists from the late 1950s. I find that among the classic counterinsurgency writers, notably David Galula, there is much intuitive or folk psychology - but very little understanding of either conceptual ideas or empirical findings on offer in the research community. I also discuss how two, more academically engaged writers, were employing psychological concepts to understand insurgency, albeit resulting in accounts of widely varied quality.

Introduction:

Counterinsurgency, like all war, is essentially a psychological phenomenon - the objective is to coerce or persuade groups of individuals to do your bidding, through force if necessary.¹ As the practitioner and theorist Frank Kitson rightly noted, 'it is in men's minds that wars of subversion have to be fought and decided'.² And yet, the connection between the empirical science of psychology and the practical activity of counterinsurgency is sketchy at best. Counterinsurgency theorists typically indulge in folk psychology, sometimes informed by their practical experiences in the field, some aspects of which prove more scientifically robust than others. Their writing, however, makes very little direct referencing to psychological concepts or research. This is surprising, given the reputation for counterinsurgency writing to be more academically engaged than other strategic sub-genres. In its modern incarnation, counterinsurgency has attracted considerable attention from the anthropological community, but comparatively little psychological research. And in earlier times too, there is evidence only of very limited involvement, some of which I explore here.

The writing on counterinsurgency theory and practice is voluminous. Here I situate my paper in a period of the late 1950s; the height of the 'classical' period of counterinsurgency, towards the end of European empire.³ And I focus in on just three theorists by way of illustrating some key points. In reverse order, these are Lucian Pye, an

¹ For more on which, see Payne, K. (2011). "Some principles for influence in counterinsurgency." *British Army Review* **150**. And on the essential psychological nature of war, see Rosen, S. P. (2005). *War and human nature*. Princeton, N.J. ; Oxford, Princeton University Press.

² Kitson, F. (1971). *Low intensity operations : subversion, insurgency, peace-keeping*. London, Faber and Faber., p. 31

³ Classical in the sense used here is to distinguish between the writings of the decolonisation era, and the modern revival in the context of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The label is something of a misnomer - counterinsurgency in its modern guise could justifiably be said to have started with French practices in north Africa in the 19th century. See especially Etienne de Durand, 'France' in Rid, T. and T. A. Keaney (2010). *Understanding counterinsurgency : doctrine, operations and challenges*. London, Routledge.

American political scientist, writing up the findings of his interviews with sixty Chinese Communist prisoners during the insurgency in Malaya in the 1950s; Colin Carothers, a medical doctor trained in psychiatry whose writings were influential in shaping attitudes of the authorities during the Mau Mau Emergency in Kenya; and, firstly, David Galula, that most famous of French counterinsurgency theorists, thanks to his revival in the context of the Iraqi insurgency.

Why choose those three practitioner-theorists from among those writing about the phenomenon in this period? Galula aside, they are not particularly representative of the broad stream of writing about counterinsurgency that has come down through strategic studies literature to be accepted as a theoretical 'classic'. Nonetheless, each illustrates something particular and significant about the relationship between psychology and counterinsurgency.

For Pye, it's the place of empirical research in supporting conceptual thinking, and also some fairly cutting edge social psychology of the group, building on the sort of work carried out in psychology by Kurt Lewin and Gordon Allport, but making some telling insights himself about groups and norm change.

For Carothers, it's the danger of making sweeping, reductive generalisations based on the purported psychological traits of individuals and populations. Though he ostensibly grounds his psychology in culture, he presents a deterministic, prejudiced view of the African psyche, rooted in an evidence light, ethno-pathological tradition. That is, rather than studying the social psychology of the problem, he presents a hugely controversial account of the mental deficiencies of an entire people. Also he demonstrates the pervasive and persuasive power of pseudo-expertise, not least on officialdom, especially when his proscriptions chime with their prejudices.

And finally, for Galula, the lesson is about the limits of folk psychology in mainstream counterinsurgency theory written by practical men of action, seeking to abstract from hard-won lessons in the field. Galula like many of his counterparts, makes some useful observations, but provides a frustrating lack of specificity about the processes of group influence, and also makes some sweeping judgments that simply are not borne out by the psychological research.

Psychology in the 1950s

All three writers are creatures of their time, which necessitates studying them in the context of the discipline of psychology as it was then. Doing so allows us to say something meaningful about the relationship between psychology and strategy. This was a time when the discipline of psychology was still in flux.⁴ For the most part, it was increasingly dominated by the behaviourist tradition, whose theorists, like John Watson and B. F. Skinner, largely rejected efforts to access and understand inner mental processes in favour of observable behaviours.⁵ This stark experimental tradition, however, made no discernible impact on the writing of contemporary counterinsurgency theorists. Scarcely more evident was the influence of Freudian and other psychoanalysts, whose ideas, though coming under increasing assault from sceptical academic community, nonetheless

⁴ For an overview, see Benjamin, L. T. (2007). A brief history of modern psychology. Malden, MA, Blackwell.

⁵ See for an example of the genre from this period, see Skinner, B. F. (1953). Science and human behavior. New York, London, Free Press; Collier-Macmillan.

enjoyed widespread public reputation. Psychoanalysis advances the idea that much of what shapes our attitudes and behaviours is determined in the subconscious. But since the subconscious was definitionally inaccessible by introspection, rigorous experimental techniques were out, and the tradition drew on a blend of speculation and philosophy. Some of its insights proved sound, but much has not stood up to scrutiny. As with behaviourism, there is little directly psychoanalytic read across in the counterinsurgency tradition, though the work of JC Carothers is an interesting exception.

A third tradition emerging within psychology is the one of most interest here, because it is here that the counterinsurgency writers have most common ground in subject matter, if not in method, with the academic field. This is the sub-discipline of social psychology. Experimental social psychologists of the era were producing robust findings about group and individual behaviour. Prominent among these were Muzafer Sherif, Solomon Asch and the prolific Leon Festinger - with their findings on conformity and norm formation within groups, and on conflict between them.⁶ These psychologists, part of an experimental tradition dating back to the beginning of the 20th century, were interested primarily in the study of the individual mind in its social context. How were the attitudes and behaviours of the individual related to those of the group, and how did they change? Their landmark experiments were conducted in the laboratory environment, but they certainly saw the application to real world processes of conflict and war.⁷

Allport and prejudice

One example of contemporary psychology serves to illustrate the available material available to theoretically minded counterinsurgents. Gordon Allport's influential 1954 study of the psychology of prejudice affords an excellent insight into the state of psychology during this period.⁸ Allport considered a range of approaches to understanding the phenomenon of prejudice, from the sociological, rooted in the cultural and historical attributes of given societies, to the psychoanalytical, based on the attributes of individuals, including, for example, the structure of their character, and their personal sense of frustration. In this last, he represents the continued influence in the discipline at that time of psychoanalytic theories, albeit with some considerable reservations.⁹

Allport, though, placed most of the emphasis in his explanation of the phenomenon of prejudice in the social group, and in people's innate tendency to categorize themselves and others as belonging to one group or another. He described the heuristic value of

⁶ For some landmark examples of contemporary research on group processes by the three psychologists, see Festinger, L. (1952). "Some consequences of deindividuation in a group." Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 47(2): 382-389., Sherif, M. and C. W. Sherif (1966). Groups in harmony and tension : an integration of studies on intergroup relations. New York, Octagon Books. (first edition, 1953), and Asch, S. E. (1955). "Opinions and social pressure." Scientific American 193(5): 31-35.

⁷ See, for example, Sherif, M. (1958). "Superordinate goals in the reduction of intergroup conflict." American Journal of Sociology 63(4): 349-356., p. 351 or Sherif, M. and C. W. Sherif (1966). Groups in harmony and tension : an integration of studies on intergroup relations. New York, Octagon Books., p. 54

⁸ Allport, G. W. The nature of prejudice, Addison-Wesley, 1979(1989).

⁹ For example, he heavily caveats the 'scapegoat' theory of frustration relief, noting, in particular, that it does not everywhere lead to aggression, and he flatly rejects Freud's conception of aggression as some sort of inevitable tendency in life. *Ibid.*, at pp. 350-352 and p. 354

groups, part of a cognitive process of 'least effort'.¹⁰ He also identifies the search for 'self esteem' or status to be one of the key themes in understanding prejudice - a quest that can be addressed through the group and our place within it.¹¹ These elements form the basis of much subsequent psychology, embracing findings like Kahneman and Tversky's on cognitive heuristics, Tajfel and Turner on Social Identity and Self Categorization Theory, and Leon Festinger on Cognitive Dissonance.¹² This farsighted conceptualisation of the question of prejudice makes the book so important as a landmark in psychology, and such a useful comparator for the counterinsurgency theorists considered here.

There is, Allport suggested, a 'propensity to prejudice' rooted in man's 'natural tendency to form generalizations, concepts, categories, whose content represents an oversimplification of his world of experience'.¹³ He noted the availability of multiple in-groups to which we might belong, or categorize ourselves. And, while recognising that prejudice is essentially a phenomenon held by individuals, Allport maintained that the source of prejudice lies most commonly in the influence of the ingroup norm on the development of the individual.¹⁴ Hostility to outgroups, he deduced, was not necessary to form an ingroup, though such hostility could certainly strengthen the sense of belonging. And, importantly, Allport pointed to the role of emotion in shaping attitudes towards outgroups, noting that the essentially subjective state of prejudice involved '*feelings* of difference play the leading part, even if the differences are imaginary'.¹⁵

His eclectic approach also faithfully captures the diversity of activity in psychology during a pivotal decade for the subject. In short, there was an emerging understanding of the importance of understanding cognitive processes, the role of the social group, and of the need to ground arguments in experimental finding, not psychoanalytical speculation.

Allport's subject matter is highly germane to the study of insurgency and counterinsurgency, and one might expect counterinsurgents, confronted essentially with a problem involving social groups and conflict to draw extensively on this sort of research. Equally, one might have expected psychologists engaged in understanding human conflict to see in the complex processes of nationalism and decolonisation a testbed for their ideas about social cognition. But overwhelmingly one finds limited evidence of either process. The principal writers on counterinsurgency from the 1950s do indeed concentrate on the group, and they do seek to establish the motivations for behaviours within and between these groups. Nonetheless, there is a large disconnect between psychological research

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 173

¹¹ Ibid., p. 372

¹² Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Evanston, Ill., Row., Turner, J. C. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group : a self-categorization theory*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell., Kahneman, D., P. Slovic, et al. (1982). *Judgment under uncertainty : heuristics and biases*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press., Tajfel, H. (1982). *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*. Cambridge, Paris, Cambridge University Press, Maison des sciences de l'homme.

¹³ Allport, G. W. *The nature of prejudice*, Addison-Wesley, 1979(1989)., p. 27

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 41

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 125. Here again, he anticipated subsequent developments in affective psychology and neuroscience. See, for example, Damasio, A. R. (1996). *Descartes' error : emotion, reason and the human brain*. London, Papermac., and on emotions and groups, Tiedens, L. Z., C. W. Leach, et al. (2004). *The social life of emotions*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

and what was being written by counterinsurgency theorists, even those versed in some aspects of psychology.

David Galula versus *Guerre Psychologique*

David Galula represents the apotheosis of the practitioner-scholar, eulogised by the modern counterinsurgent community. John Nagl, one of the key architects of the landmark US Army and Marine Corps doctrine for counterinsurgency argued in his forward to the 2006 re-edition of Galula's landmark book *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, that the Frenchman had 'primacy of place in the canon of irregular warfare'.¹⁶ That book, written while researching at Harvard and first published in English in 1964, has had a profound impact on the Anglo-Saxon tradition of counterinsurgency, principally via its rediscovery by the class of 2006. And it stands as a good example of the tradition of practical guidance on counterinsurgency, written by reflective officers, largely for the guidance of other army officers.

Galula is sometimes seen as part of a French tradition in counterinsurgency writing, though Etienne de Durand argues that he figures only as a second-tier figure in his homeland.¹⁷ To some extent, nonetheless, Galula described some of the broad themes in what the French came to call *guerre revolutionnaire*.¹⁸ Like other French writers of counterinsurgency, he saw this revolutionary war largely through the prism of anti-communism. And like other French writers he described it in terms a psychologist might understand:

War is not a chess game but a vast social phenomenon with an infinitely greater and ever expanding number of variables.¹⁹

In parts of what followed, Galula made useful points that *are* consistent with findings from psychology - pointing, for example, to the advantages to be had from creating a broad front insurgent movement.²⁰ For the most part though, he either offers no psychological understanding of counterinsurgency, or presents thoughts on the group, norms and attitudes that reference no psychological research, and that are in some cases of dubious validity.

Truth

This psychological weakness is particularly apparent when it comes to Galula's view of truth and the idea that, rather than 'social proof', the government would somehow be held to a more 'objective' notion of performance than the insurgent. This simplistic view persists

¹⁶ Galula, D. and J. A. Nagl (2006). *Counterinsurgency warfare : theory and practice*. Westport, CT ; London, Praeger Security International., p. vii

¹⁷ de Durand, E, 'France' in Rid, T. and T. A. Keaney (2010). *Understanding counterinsurgency : doctrine, operations and challenges*. London, Routledge., pp. 11-27

¹⁸ See Paret, P. and J. W. Shy (1962). *Guerrillas in the 1960's*. London, Pall Mall.

¹⁹ Galula, D. and J. A. Nagl (2006). *Counterinsurgency warfare : theory and practice*. Westport, CT ; London, Praeger Security International., p. xi

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32

through to the doctrine writers of today, and contrasts with at least a half century of psychological research.²¹ For Galula two different standards of truth were on offer, one for the insurgent, another for the counterinsurgent.

The insurgent, having no responsibility, is free to use every trick: if necessary, he can lie, cheat, exaggerate. He is not obliged to prove; he is judged by what he promises, not by what he does. Consequently, propaganda is a powerful weapon for him. [...] The counterinsurgent is tied to his responsibilities and to his past, and for him, facts speak louder than words. He is judged on what he does, not on what he says. If he lies, cheats, exaggerates and does not prove, he may achieve some temporary successes, but at the price of being discredited for good.²²

This view badly understates subjective notion of many supposed 'truths', and the role of group norms and attitudes in shaping those social proofs.²³ Particularly, it understates the role of authority in establishing credibility and in controlling information.²⁴ A similar misunderstanding is offered by many other writers on counterinsurgency. Robert Thompson, for example, urged a 'strict adherence to the truth' in government propaganda.²⁵ Similarly, Kumar Ramakrishna, in his recent history of counterinsurgency in Malaya insists, like Galula on matching of word and deed in order to achieve credibility.²⁶

As the writing of Allport and other social psychologists readily suggested, however, truth and meaning were more slippery concepts. Both sides in an insurgency were seeking to shape group norms, often around ethereal truths, like justice, honour, freedom and so forth; and both could use emotion to do so - for example in creating and exploiting fear and anxiety, and resolving it by offering utopian solutions. The incumbent, like the insurgent, need not be completely burdened by the need to match words and deeds. They too could readily demonise out-groups and create emotional bonds to the ingroup. On this point, Galula's contemporary, Jacques Hogard, was on firmer ground. A writer of the French counterinsurgency tradition that became known as *guerre psychologique*, Hogard had a sure feel for relative truth and the role of emotion. 'It is,' he wrote

important never to lose sight of the power of ideas. Men of all races are ultimately far more sensitive to emotional arguments than reasoning or even interest. [...] It is

²¹ See, for example, Ministry of Defence, draft 'Joint Doctrine Note: Strategic Communications', DCDC, forthcoming 2011; or Ministry of Defence, 'JDP 3-40 Stabilisation: The Military Contribution', DCDC, at p. 3-8, which urges commanders to 'be first with the truth' in order to influence locals.

²² Ibid., p. 9

²³ For an overview, see Cialdini, R. B. (2001). *Influence : science and practice*. Boston, Mass. ; London, Allyn and Bacon.

²⁴ On which, see Pratkanis, A. R. and E. Aronson (2001). *Age of propaganda : the everyday use and abuse of persuasion*. New York, W.H. Freeman.

²⁵ Thompson, R. G. K. (1966). *Defeating Communist insurgency : experiences from Malaya and Vietnam*. London, Chatto & Windus., p. 96

²⁶ Ramakrishna, K. *Emergency propaganda : the winning of Malayan hearts and minds, 1948-1958*, Richmond : Curzon, c2002.

therefore necessary to propose an ideal around which locals can rally. If this ideal must be defined at a very abstract level, it must also be appropriate for them.²⁷

Ingroup love versus outgroup hate

Elsewhere Galula sometimes throws out more interesting psychological contentions, but invariably devoid of supporting evidence. For example, he argues that 'since it is easier to unite "against" than "for" [something,] the general cause [being exploited by the insurgency] will probably be a negative one, something like "throw the rascals out".²⁸ There has since been a thriving debate in social psychology on whether outgroup dislike or ingroup liking is a stronger motivator for group favouritism. But the broad consensus is that ingroup liking may be more potent as a motivator for group loyalty and distinction than outgroup hate - contradicting Galula.²⁹

Of course, the demonisation of outgroups is a staple of conflict, as Allport and the Sherifs had already noted. As such may serve perfectly well as an inspiration or motivation for resistance to authority - but it need not be the case that it is always more powerful, as Galula asserts, so confidently and consisely that one might almost slide unquestioningly over it on first reading.

Control

Perhaps the most astute psychological observation in the whole book is Galula's suggestion that 'guerrilla operations will be planned primarily not so much against the counterinsurgent as in order to *organise* the population'.³⁰ Insurgent violence, he suggested, divides the population into an us and them, forcing them to choose sides. But there is something more: Galula makes a point common to the French literature at the time about control:

[E]very inhabitant under the insurgent's control is made to belong simultaneously to at least two organisations: one *horizontal*, is a geographic organisation, by hamlet, village or district; the other *vertical*, groups the inhabitants by categories of every kind, by age, by sex, by profession. The party cells crisscross the whole structure and provide the cement.³¹

²⁷ Hogard, J 'Guerre Revolutionnaire et Pacification', *Revue Militaire d'Information*, January 1957, pp. 7-24, p. 21

²⁸ Galula, D. and J. A. Nagl (2006). Counterinsurgency warfare : theory and practice. Westport, CT ; London, Praeger Security International., p. 15

²⁹ As Brewer argues in a classic paper, 'Findings from both cross-cultural research and laboratory experiments support the [...] view that ingroup identification is independent of negative attitudes toward outgroups and that much ingroup bias and intergroup discrimination is motivated by preferential treatment of ingroup members rather than direct hostility toward outgroup members', Brewer, M. B. (1999). "The Psychology of Prejudice: Ingroup Love and Outgroup Hate?" Journal of Social Issues 55(3): 429-444.

³⁰ Galula, D. and J. A. Nagl (2006). Counterinsurgency warfare : theory and practice. Westport, CT ; London, Praeger Security International., p. 34, emphasis added.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38, emphasis in original

This is the picture of Communist insurgency - but aside from the specific historical contingency of that model of control, the point is not simply to 'mobilize the population for a total war effort' as Galula suggests, or even 'to keep everybody in line' - though clearly compliance is a goal. It is rather more fundamentally about shaping the identities and group roles of those affected - as such it is a properly totalitarian aspiration, both for the guerrilla, and for the counterinsurgent who emulates the strategy, as some of Galula's contemporaries urged.

This sense of social identity, and the capacity of the counterinsurgent to mould it, is, however, wholly absent from Galula's understanding of control, and hence perhaps from our contemporary Anglo-Saxon understanding of French counterinsurgency theory. Control, however, was a prominent theme in the wider French literature on 'psychological war', perhaps, as de Durand conjectures, because French officers had had to endure similar techniques at the hands of Vietnamese captors.

Andre Souyris, writing in 1959, provides an example of the essentially psychological understanding of the French tradition, though he did not develop the thinking explicitly in terms of cognitive consistency theory.³² Souyris thought that the *guerre psychologique* conducted by the army involved the same processes as the psychological warfare being conducted by the insurgent. This insurgent, he suggests, conquers by destroying existing social groups, and building a new order based on revolutionary organisations. To do this, he simultaneously employs destructive techniques aimed at the disruption of society and the disintegration of individuals, alongside constructive techniques aimed at involving individuals in a controlling hierarchy and within an ideological framework adapted to the particular social context in which the insurgents found themselves. To compete, Souyris argued, the counterinsurgent should adopt a similar organisational approach, involving the population in counter-revolutionary organisation. While the totalitarian methods of the Communist insurgent were in opposition to Western moral values, it was the protection of existing social groups that would provide the most effective defence against insurgency. To that end, organisation and instruction of the constituent social groups within society was key: 'The number one lesson of psychological warfare,' Souyris wrote, 'is that counter-guerrilla and counter-terrorism efforts are all the more effective when they are effected by the residents themselves, organized into self-defense wards or villages and supported by the Forces of Order'.³³

Precisely the same diagnosis was on offer in articles by Hogard, who noted that the revolutionary insurgents he faced sought 'physical and psychological control of the masses,' which they achieved 'mainly by a system of parallel hierarchies'.³⁴ And he elaborated the techniques involved, noting that the revolutionaries destroy existing social groups through denunciations and informing, and via 'the most original and most diabolical [technique] of all: self-criticism'.³⁵ This worked, he thought by bringing a 'mentally exhausted individual' eventually to accept the line proffered by the revolutionaries rather than continue the fight to disguise their thoughts.³⁶ This is as close as the *guerre*

³² Souyris, A. (1959). "Realite et Aspects de la Guerre Psychologique." *Revue Militaire d'Information*: 7-28.

³³ Ibid., p. 25

³⁴ Hogard, J. (1956). "Guerre Revolutionnaire ou Revolution dans l'art de la guerre." 1497-1518., p. 1499

³⁵ Ibid., p. 1500

³⁶ Ibid., p. 1501

psychologique tradition comes to an understanding of the group and of emotion and stress in shaping attitudes. There was, however, no conception in Hogard's writing of the power of *behaviour* to shape attitude. On the contrary, he argued that pacification presupposes self-defense, but that defence must first be desired by the population.³⁷

Lastly, there was for Roger Trinquier, with Galula, is the other French counterinsurgent of some renown in the Anglo-Saxon world, once again the emphasis on control, which he calls the 'master weapon of modern warfare'.³⁸ He too urges the creation of similar organisations to those used effectively by the enemy, but again, there is no great understanding of the role of organisation in changing attitude - simply Trinquier believes that such organisations facilitate informing, so that the counterinsurgent can 'discover, and as quickly eliminate, those individuals the enemy tries to introduce among us'.³⁹

The French counterinsurgency intelligentsia had come up with a theory that acknowledged the role of social groups and, to some extent, behaviour in shaping underlying attitudes. In some respects, the theory paralleled the research of Leon Festinger and associates into what they called 'cognitive dissonance' - a central theme of which was that individuals work to reduce any uncomfortable tension between their attitudes and behaviors; from which followed the notion that this could be done by changing attitudes to conform with behaviour, rather than the other way around.⁴⁰

Like the Communists, though, the French writers arrived at their understanding of cognitive dissonance through practical experience, rather than engagement with the psychological literature: despite the term 'psychological', the authors of *guerre psychologique* referenced no theoretical or experimental psychology research that chimed with their themes.⁴¹ Meanwhile, and perhaps because little of the writing was translated into English, this ostensibly psychological French approach to counterinsurgency writing has been largely overlooked in the revival of theoretical works on counterinsurgency that has taken place since 2006.

Colin Carothers and the Mau Mau mind

A second theorist writing amidst insurgency in this era certainly afforded a role for psychology in understanding and resolving conflict. Colin Carothers, born in the Cape and educated in England, was a long-time African resident. For some eleven years from 1938, he had been the principal psychiatrist at Nairobi's Mathare Hospital for the mentally ill, though as David Anderson reports, he had no formal training in psychiatry until a 6 month

³⁷ Hogard, J. (1957). "Guerre Revolutionnaire et Pacification." *Revue Militaire d'Information* 7-24., p. 18

³⁸ Trinquier, R. (2006). *Modern warfare : a French view of counterinsurgency*. Westport, Conn., Praeger Security International., p. 28

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28

⁴⁰ Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Evanston, Ill., Row., especially Chapter 4 on the effects of forced compliance, pp. 84-97

⁴¹ For a contemporary discussion of Communist exploitation of self-criticism, unexplored in the counterinsurgency literature, see Schein, E. H. (1956). "Some Observations on Chinese Methods of Handling Prisoners of War." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 20(1): 321-327.; and Segal, H. A. (1954). "Initial psychiatric findings of recently repatriated prisoners of war " *Am J Psychiatry* 111(5): 358-363.

stint at the Maudsley during 1946.⁴² These limited qualifications had done little to check Carothers' growing influence as an expert on the 'African mind', particularly in the colony itself. In his 1953 report for the World Health Organisation, Carothers had set out a fantastic sounding ideas about the 'ethno-pathology' of an 'African mind'. 'Through all the local variations,' he declared boldly, there are in Africa 'some general [psychological] themes which are both strange and fundamental'.⁴³

Carothers' 1954 report on *The Psychology of Mau Mau* was expressly commissioned by the authorities in Nairobi, and was, as Jock McCulloch notes 'the only study of its kind commissioned by a colonial government to be written by a psychiatrist'.⁴⁴ This fact in itself says something about the limited connections between the worlds of psychology and counterinsurgency. It also hints at the essentially psycho-pathological nature of the study, despite its ostensibly social psychological trappings.

In their influential study of intergroup conflict, produced in the same period, the eminent social psychologists Muzafer and Carolyn Sherif might have had Carothers in mind when, in addition to cautioning against attempts to 'place various national cultures into clinical categories based on *individual* behavioural deviations in Western societies', they wrote that

The wide acceptance and vogue of psychoanalytic explanation in the area of group relations is probably a by-product of its great popularity in clinical treatment of individuals caught in troublesome conflicts of modern life.⁴⁵

The essence of Carothers' account was that *Mau Mau* represented something flawed in the Kikuyu psyche, which left them susceptible to magic and sinister mysticism of the movement. In a breathless twenty-eight pages, Carothers provided an account of African inferiority in tune with the prejudices of many among the settler community, and in so doing, McCulloch notes, he 'wandered a considerable distance from the cloistered world of clinical psychiatry'.⁴⁶

The pathology of groups

The report itself starts promisingly, with a declaration that people are essentially the same wherever you go:

[I]t has become increasingly clear in recent years that no fundamental differences exist between different groups of Africans, or even between Africans and Europeans.

⁴² Anderson, D. (2005). Histories of the hanged : Britain's dirty war in Kenya and the end of empire. London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson., p. 283

⁴³ Carothers, J. C. (1953). The African mind in health and disease : a study in ethnopsychiatry. Geneva, World Health Organization., p. 7

⁴⁴ McCulloch, J. (1995). Colonial psychiatry and 'the African mind'. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press., p. 67

⁴⁵ Sherif, M. and C. W. Sherif (1966). Groups in harmony and tension : an integration of studies on intergroup relations. New York, Octagon Books., p. 30 and p. 32

⁴⁶ McCulloch, J. (1995). Colonial psychiatry and 'the African mind'. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press., p. 68

[...] Individuals vary in their innate emotional and intellectual potentials, as every parent knows. But in large populations, these differences cancel out.⁴⁷

Accordingly, such differences as there are can be explained by experience of environmental factors, including cultural factors, which Carothers saw as 'overwhelmingly important [...] Studies of cultures are,' he deduced, 'in effect, studies of psychology'.⁴⁸ That situates Carothers view of psychology firmly within the ambit of social psychology, and yet this sentiment did not result in a careful study of the role of the group in shaping attitudes and behaviours, but some shockingly sweeping generalisations about the 'African' mind. This perhaps reflects his limited formal training in psychiatry (and non-existent training in psychology), which afforded some ideas about psychopathy, but which were wholly inadequate to frame an understanding of the Kikuyu revolt in the social context in which it arose.

Instead, Carothers found the African mind to be marked by an immature egocentricity, characteristic of European infants. Fantasy and imagination loomed large, along with a marked reluctance to accept the blame for anything. '[M]isfortunes,' he wrote of the African, 'are never wholly his fault.', as though this were a somehow specifically African trait, rather than a simple demonstration of the fundamental attribution bias at work.⁴⁹ For the African - all Africans, incidentally, since Carothers was not inclined to distinguish further - morality runs as far as the family: 'The outsider has no rights and, if that outsider has inspired fear and hate, the vilest of behaviour is appropriate. It is an inevitable component of the type of psychology described that, where there are no specific rules, behaviour can be governed wholly by the emotions of the moment.'⁵⁰ This is still a shocking passage to read, many years later, not least because of the consequences that followed from it.

What should a group threatened by such emotional, violent and amoral others do? Carothers reached far beyond describing the regular processes of out-group discrimination and prejudice, and in so doing displayed plenty of prejudice himself. The African mind, he thought, suffers anxiety that 'cannot be sustained for long' and, where it cannot be 'allayed by ritual procedures, action must follow. And this action in individuals often takes the forms which are marked by the highest degree of unconstraint and violence.'⁵¹

Turning to the Kikuyu in particular, Carothers supports the idea that the tribe possess a 'forest psychology'.⁵² Elaborating, he writes that, 'Such people lead relatively isolated lives; the voice of the group is less insistent'. The result? They 'must tend to rumination on more

⁴⁷ Carothers, J. C. and Kenya. (1954). The psychology of Mau Mau. Nairobi, Printed by the Govt. Printer., p. 2

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 2

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 2 The fundamental attribution bias, advanced by Heider in 1957 and one of the most established findings in modern psychology, points to the tendency to over attribute the behaviours of others to their underlying attitudes or disposition, in contrast to one's own behaviour, which is overattributed to the situation. See Heider, F. (1958). The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations, pp. ix. 322. John Wiley & Sons: New York.

⁵⁰ Carothers, J. C. and Kenya. (1954). The psychology of Mau Mau. Nairobi, Printed by the Govt. Printer., p. 3

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 3

⁵² Ibid., p. 4

personal lines, to secretiveness, to suspicions and to scheming.⁵³ Later, he notes that they are 'individualistic, scheming and litigious'.⁵⁴ This is extraordinary pejorative speculation, based on no discernible evidence of rigorous primary research. It masks Carothers' own prejudice in a cloak of ostensibly scientific language. Moreover, as Anderson argues, the idea that the Kikuyu demonstrate any sort of psychological affinity with the inhospitable forested regions adopted as sanctuary by hard-pressed Mau Mau groups is also unlikely - the remote and inaccessible forests were typically as alien to the Kikuyu pastoralists as to the pursuing forces of authority.⁵⁵

The negative stereotyping continues. For the individual Kikuyu, as Carothers sees him, authority comes through fear, and he otherwise seeks to get away with whatever he can. Power is critical in understanding this psychology. As a society in transition, through its encounter with Western modernity and power, the Kikuyu have 'envied this power, not unnaturally, and have tried to capture it by learning'.⁵⁶ But they have been frustrated in this endeavour - 'many doors remained as tightly shut as ever [... and] much bitterness has arisen on this score'.⁵⁷ He notes of the Mau Mau fighters that 'Many have had some European education but which has been inadequate for well-paid jobs, others had been ejected from the Church for failing to conform to all its regulations, all had rightly or wrongly believed themselves frustrated by factors outside their control'.⁵⁸

This idea of an encounter with another social identity producing tensions and fractures in existing social structures is essentially consonant with much work in sociology and social psychology about changes in attitudes and norms. The Sherifs, like Carothers, pointed to the rapid societal transformations of their times as making the dynamics of intergroup relations, particularly intergroup conflict, highly salient.⁵⁹ A similar process, Lucian Pye thought to be at work in Malaya. Where Carothers goes further is in ascribing to the Kikuyu some particularly malign traits and psychological attributes amidst this time of transition, not least a failure to shed their "magic" modes of thinking'.⁶⁰ While some Africans have 'acquired a considerable sophistication on European lines', this 'has been limited to comprehension of certain technological aspects of European culture. All too often there has been no acquisition of the social sense which Europeans have come to know'.⁶¹ Africans, he concludes optimistically if patronisingly, are 'eminently teachable', and if they

⁵³ Ibid., p. 5

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 21

⁵⁵ Anderson, D. (2005). Histories of the hanged : Britain's dirty war in Kenya and the end of empire. London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson., p. ??

⁵⁶ Carothers, J. C. and Kenya. (1954). The psychology of Mau Mau. Nairobi, Printed by the Govt. Printer., p. 5

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 5-6

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 17

⁵⁹ Sherif, M. and C. W. Sherif (1966). Groups in harmony and tension : an integration of studies on intergroup relations. New York, Octagon Books., p. 297

⁶⁰ Carothers, J. C. and Kenya. (1954). The psychology of Mau Mau. Nairobi, Printed by the Govt. Printer., p. 15

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 13

grasp the right lessons, are capable of 'high ability and noble character'.⁶² There is a certain irony in these lines penned less than a decade after the horrors of European war.

Oathing and cognitive dissonance

Carothers, like many contemporary commentators on the Mau Mau, makes much of their oathing ceremonies, pointing in particular to the higher oaths taken by fighters with their 'obscene and bestial nature', encompassing 'all the depravity that is imaginable'.⁶³ He was much taken with the similarities with medieval European witchcraft, in which, as in Kenya, 'men turn from the ways of God to those of Satan, and to find perverted pleasure in a reversal of the righteous rituals'.⁶⁴ A social psychologist would see such oaths as an important element in forging a collective group identity, and in making a public commitment to membership which might then act on underlying attitudes. Indeed, in 1959, two social psychologists had argued just that, in an important paper applying Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory to the effect of the severity of initiation ceremonies on the underlying liking for a group.⁶⁵

Without referencing that research, Carothers argued, in broadly similar vein, that the generally administered oath is intended to 'inspire nationalistic aspirations in the people on the basis of their own traditional beliefs'. He writes that through the higher oaths, fighting Mau Mau 'gain a sense of solidarity with their fellows of like mind and achieve within their group the sense of power over the large community that was denied to them as individuals'.⁶⁶ The group gives them a sense of prestige, hitherto lacking. This is sensible social psychology, marred by the outraged sensibilities as diabolical practices and the linkages to European witchcraft. Marred also by the faintly ridiculous suggestion that the administrator of the oath used hypnosis to subsequently control the recipient's behaviour.⁶⁷

Similar emphasis on the diabolical nature of oathing is evident in writing by L.S.B. Leakey, Carothers' more famous colleague, and eminent anthropologist. But unlike Carothers, Leakey sticks to a social and cultural account of the revolt. The higher oaths, Leakey noted, were apparently accompanied by acts of 'incredible beastliness and depravity' and even the lower ones were couched in 'magical and ritual elements known to have the most binding effect on members of the tribe'.⁶⁸ But, unlike Carothers, he sensibly left off wilder speculation about the inherently juvenile African mind. For him, Mau Mau had obtained such a hold because of genuine grievances among their Kikuyu and the personal qualities of their leaders.⁶⁹ In his earlier work, Leakey points to the progressive breakdown of social

⁶² Ibid., p. 28

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 14-15

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 17

⁶⁵ Aronson, E. and J. Mills (1959). "The effect of severity of initiation on liking for a group." Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 59(2): 177-181.

⁶⁶ Carothers, J. C. and Kenya. (1954). The psychology of Mau Mau. Nairobi, Printed by the Govt. Printer., p. 18

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 18

⁶⁸ Leakey, L. S. B. (2004). Defeating Mau Mau. London, Routledge., p. 77-78

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 105

order and values among the Kikuyu, in response to some of the changes in traditional society attendant on the changes brought about by white settlers.⁷⁰

In short, Carothers' is an example of limited psychological knowledge allied to dubious ethno-psychiatry and given a sheen of respectability by his reference to the essentially cultural, rather than racial, determinants of behaviour. In doing so, he often shelters behind the indirect voice, noting, for example that 'it is commonly remarked that Africans show no gratitude', and then going on to accept this apparently common knowledge uncritically as the basis of his own analysis of the Kikuyu psyche.⁷¹ In his conjectures about a peculiarly African, or Kikuyu mind, Carothers represented much of what is worst in paternalistic and even racist settler attitudes towards Africans in general and the Kikuyu in particular, which is deeply unfortunate, since as McCulloch writes, Carothers apparently intensely disliked the racism of the settler community of which he was a part.

Lucian Pye in Malaya

Lucian Pye was an American social scientist with a particular interest in Asian affairs and a notably psychological bent. 'All political theories make assumptions about man and society and therefore all political scientists must be to some extent both psychologists and sociologists,' he wrote in 1961.⁷² But Pye's writing neatly captures the tension between the more rigorously scientific research of social psychology and the pseudo-scientific approach to personality at work in psychoanalysis at that time. His work in Malaya broadly fits the former category, drawing as it does on extensive fieldwork with Communist prisoners, or Surrendered Enemy Personnel [SEPs]. But the paper quoted above, however, is of the other variety, even though Pye was certainly no strict Freudian, noting that efforts to incorporate Freud's psychoanalytical contributions into the framework of political theory had produced results that are 'often awkward and at times even grotesque'.⁷³

While the psychology in his Malaya book is more socially oriented, Pye is, a little like Allport, eclectic in mixing ideas and concepts from social and psychoanalytic perspectives. Moreover, like Carothers, Pye's study is not a manual for counterinsurgency in the mould of Galula's. It offers few explicit tips for the practitioner, in contrast to a better known work that emerged from the Emergency - Robert Thompson's *Defeating Communist Insurgency*.⁷⁴ In that work, a classic of the counterinsurgency canon, Thompson, like Galula, offers some intuitive psychological insights, but no detailed understanding of the social and cognitive motivations for behaviour. He intuits, for example, that nationalism, religion and customs are important factors in shaping group attitudes, though he ascribes

⁷⁰ Leakey, L. S. B. (1952). Mau Mau and the Kikuyu. London, Methuen.

⁷¹ Carothers, J. C. and Kenya. (1954). The psychology of Mau Mau. Nairobi, Printed by the Govt. Printer., p. 13

⁷² Pye, L. W. (1961). "Personal identity and political ideology " Behavioral Science 6(3): 205-221., p. 205

⁷³ Ibid., p. 205

⁷⁴ Thompson, R. G. K. (1966). Defeating Communist insurgency : experiences from Malaya and Vietnam. London, Chatto & Windus.

a greater role for economic development.⁷⁵ But there is little psychological insight to explain why, or how indeed how attitudes are formed or modified, beyond an urging for just, credible and efficient government. Thompson's book exemplifies what became a British tradition in counterinsurgency; one that prioritises the winning of 'hearts and minds', in part through minimal and lawful use of force.⁷⁶ And yet that philosophy, which subsequently met with both operational successes and failures, developed in the absence of any firm understanding of how such behaviour would impact on the social groups involved in insurgency, or of what additional methods might be employed to enhance influence.

Pye's account of Malaya is much more overtly psychological in tone and more rigorous in method. He describes the motivations involved in joining a revolutionary insurgency, drawing on interviews with some 60 individuals who joined the Communist party and subsequently left it, having surrendered to the authorities. As an insight to the motivations of insurgents, it surpasses most other writing on counterinsurgency, and leaves a high water mark in the relationship between theories of insurgency and psychology.

Social identity

In common with contemporary mainstream social psychology, Pye explicitly relates communist insurgency to social identity. The insurgent, he argues exploits a weakened sense of group identity on the part of the individual in a developing society undergoing rapid transition in its encounter with modernity:

Large numbers of people [in the underdeveloped world] are losing their sense of identity with their traditional ways of life and are seeking restlessly to realise a modern way. In this setting, Communism seems to gain the support of those who have already been affected by what is generally called the impact of the west. They are the people who feel isolated from, and even hostile towards the ways of their forefathers. But [...] as yet they are not personally a part of the new.⁷⁷

Those susceptible to Communism, Pye noted, felt they would rise above the social position attained by their parents, but many lacked confidence in their ability to compete with their own generation in wider Malay society. All considered that they must look to their peers as the standard-setters of achievement.⁷⁸ In the old order, Pye wrote,

expectations of social mobility were minimized and the group was made constantly aware of the forces of group censure.[...] The group, in its need for stability sought to formalise most acceptable patterns of conduct. The cues for individual action could be well learned, and they were almost always found in the context of the immediate

⁷⁵ Ibid., see especially pp. 63-65. For a view that control and security measures, including resettlement, were more important in winning the insurgency than development or political reforms aimed at winning 'hearts and minds', see Hack, K. (2009). "The Malayan Emergency as Counter-Insurgency Paradigm." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32(3): 383-414.

⁷⁶ Though, as Huw Bennett argues, the practice sometimes diverged from the theory. Bennett, H. (2010). "Minimum force in British counterinsurgency." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21(3): 459 - 475.

⁷⁷ Pye, L. W. (1956). *Guerrilla communism in Malaya, its social and political meaning*. Princeton,, Princeton University Press., p. 7

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 132

group. The situation a person might encounter were usually fairly well defined by tradition and he could learn the safe and acceptable responses.⁷⁹

This understanding of appropriate norms held less of a sway over younger members of the group particularly when exposed to radical ideas about the possibilities for a transformation of their economic and social prospects. These men 'found themselves involved in far less clearly defined social relationships and they believed strongly in the possibilities of social advancement. However, their standards of success or failure were still those common to the group to which they felt they belonged'.⁸⁰

With this discussion of the group and its sway over individual behaviour, Pye is writing firmly within the tradition of social psychology. The insurgency becomes an example of intergroup conflict in a time of rapid social change; one involving referent groups to which individuals look for appropriate norms and values. And moreover Pye develops a theory of social influence, within the context of the Malayan Emergency, that has parallels not just with the two Sherifs, but also with the Social Identity Theory of Henri Tajfel and colleagues that came to dominate the discipline some three decades later.⁸¹ In particular, there are strong parallels in the idea that people have multiple group identities, some of which may be more salient at some periods than at others. As Tajfel wrote, years later, groups are in a constant state of flux, of comings and goings.⁸² For Pye, the young communists oriented their behaviour towards a particular group. 'On some cases the group was clearly defined; in others it included those with whom they had the most face-to-face dealings. Although, like their parents, they felt that the pressures of group conformity were all-important, there was little stability, either in their groups or in the status of the individual.'⁸³

Individuals adopt group identities from a repertoire of available options, and these then shape their norms and behaviours. Pye went on to describe the ways in which the communists had become involved in the cause, and the ways in which propaganda and organisation in communist orthodoxy served to communicate and reinforce the identity of the group they had joined. He found that only four of the sixty had 'gone out of their way to find communism', for the rest 'they perceived Communism as an active part of their social environment', even before joining.⁸⁴ This, he astutely noted, reflected the tendency of the men to 'attach significance only to what came within their range of personal associations'.⁸⁵ Indeed a quarter reported joining in order to maintain friendships. Here, though Pye doesn't make it explicit, the text has parallels with the idea of a 'referent group' then becoming prominent in social psychology - that is a group to which individuals may belong or aspire to belong and which accordingly shapes their norms. In contrast to the Communist referent group, the Malayan government barely featured in their social ambit:

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 133

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 133

⁸¹ Tajfel, H. (1982). Social Identity and Intergroup Relations. Cambridge, Paris, Cambridge University Press, Maison des sciences de l'homme.

⁸² See Tajfel, H. 'Instrumentality, identity and social comparisons', in Ibid., p. 485

⁸³ Pye, L. W. (1956). Guerrilla communism in Malaya, its social and political meaning. Princeton., Princeton University Press., p. 133

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 198

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 198

'The government operated in distant and limited spheres,' Pye found, 'and they could not always comprehend how its acts might impinge upon their daily lives.'⁸⁶ Proximity was a powerful force in shaping the available identities available to the young malcontents. But, importantly, hostility to the government followed the adoption of the insurgent social identity, rather than preceding it. The identity of the group shaped the attitudes of its members, rather than the other way about.

This social psychological approach to understanding the motivations of insurgents, featuring reference groups and self-categorisation, is far more sophisticated than one finds elsewhere in the counterinsurgency literature. Kitson, for example, simply notes that the insurgent identifies a suitable cause, and then projects it 'into the population by the organisation of a chain of branches and cells, using persuasion and coercion for the purpose.'⁸⁷

Cognitive Dissonance

Pye also considers some other aspects of the movement that are of significance from a psychological perspective, not least of which is the role of discipline in shaping behaviours and reinforcing the norms of group membership. He writes that, 'A fundamental feature of every form of punishment employed by the MCP was the "reforming" of the individual before his comrades, a process that was accompanied by social ostracism for a period of time'⁸⁸ This sort of group activity, a staple of communist practice, is an example of the power of peer pressure and the individual need to conform, of course, but also of the workings of cognitive dissonance. By shaping the behaviour of the individual, through extensive self-criticism, the communists shaped the underlying attitudes of the victim, as he shifted them in line with his declarations.

Here Pye was, like the French theorists of *guerre psychologique*, on territory very close to that being explored by Leon Festinger and his colleagues in America.⁸⁹ Like the French writers, Pye doesn't make this explicit - if he did he would really have scooped Festinger. But he does go further than the Frenchmen in describing the psychological processes at work, observing that as the men 'spent more time under MCP discipline they tended to accept more and more wholeheartedly the official party attitude,' eventually nearly all of them 'thought nothing of reporting on their comrade's behaviour, even if it resulted in a friend's being punished. It also is significant that most of them claimed that it was during the periods when they most completely identified themselves with the MCP's position that they were the most happy'.⁹⁰ With any dissonance between their behaviour and attitude having been resolved in favour of behaviour, well they might have been. Pye rightly describes it as a 'shift in attitude' consequent on party discipline, but describes the process underlying it as resulting from a basic personal insecurity, followed, as they became more

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 201

⁸⁷ Kitson, F. (1971). Low intensity operations : subversion, insurgency, peace-keeping. London, Faber and Faber., p. 48

⁸⁸ Pye, L. W. (1956). Guerrilla communism in Malaya, its social and political meaning. Princeton., Princeton University Press., p. 253

⁸⁹ For a classic experiment that illustrates the process at work, see Festinger, L. and J. M. Carlsmith (1959). "Cognitive consequences of forced compliance " Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology **58**(2): 203-210.

⁹⁰ Pye, L. W. (1956). Guerrilla communism in Malaya, its social and political meaning. Princeton., Princeton University Press., p. 255

closely associated with the group, by anxiety about its prospects. Peer pressure is certainly important in shaping individual attitudes. Pye describes a 'keen sense of shame' on the part of those undergoing self-criticism. They felt the opprobrium of their peers, and were motivated towards conformity, to reduce the impact on their self-esteem. But in addition to peer pressure, another important psychological mechanism was at work during the self-criticism process, namely the attempt to resolve dissonance between declared statements and underlying attitudes.

In short, Pye's study of communist guerrillas is a landmark in writings on insurgency and counterinsurgency. Based on extensive primary research, allied to a good grasp of the underlying psychology, he penned a cutting edge account of the role of the group and the changeable nature of personal identity. The lessons for the counterinsurgent are obvious, but not made explicit. Like Allport's, Pye's study was a blend of psychological traditions and sociological observation. And yet the study is intriguing for its lack of referencing to the wider tradition of social psychology and attitude formation and change within groups. Pye represented a connection between the world of the professional counterinsurgent and the academic practitioner, but the bridge was fragile, and Pye did not follow through - his later work is more psychoanalytic in flavour, and focused on area studies, not strategy.

Conclusion

The three authors that are the focus here present contrasting understandings of psychology in insurgency and counterinsurgency. Only Galula was a thoroughgoing counterinsurgent theorist, devising a range of military and political approaches to tackling the problem. The other two were more explicitly interested in understanding the dynamics of insurgency, though in so doing they offer plenty of ideas for the authorities.

One fact stands out - in addressing a social psychological phenomenon there is almost no reference to the social psychological literature. 'Hearts and minds' and *guerre psychologique* are terms highly suggestive of psychology. And just like the professional social psychologists, the theorists of counterinsurgency are interested in the behaviour and attitudes of individuals living in social groups. They share too an interest in the processes of social influence. Perhaps then it is unsurprising that the writers in the two traditions make some similar observations about human behaviour, including in times of conflict and rapid societal change. And yet, the psychological theorising of the counterinsurgency writers is intuitive and haphazard, and sometimes flat wrong.

Perhaps it is too much to expect hard-pressed men of action to dedicate themselves to the study of psychology as a prop for their strategic and operational thinking. And yet it is clear that counterinsurgency theory, then as now, is all the poorer for its failure to more rigorously engage with the scientific study of human psychology.

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