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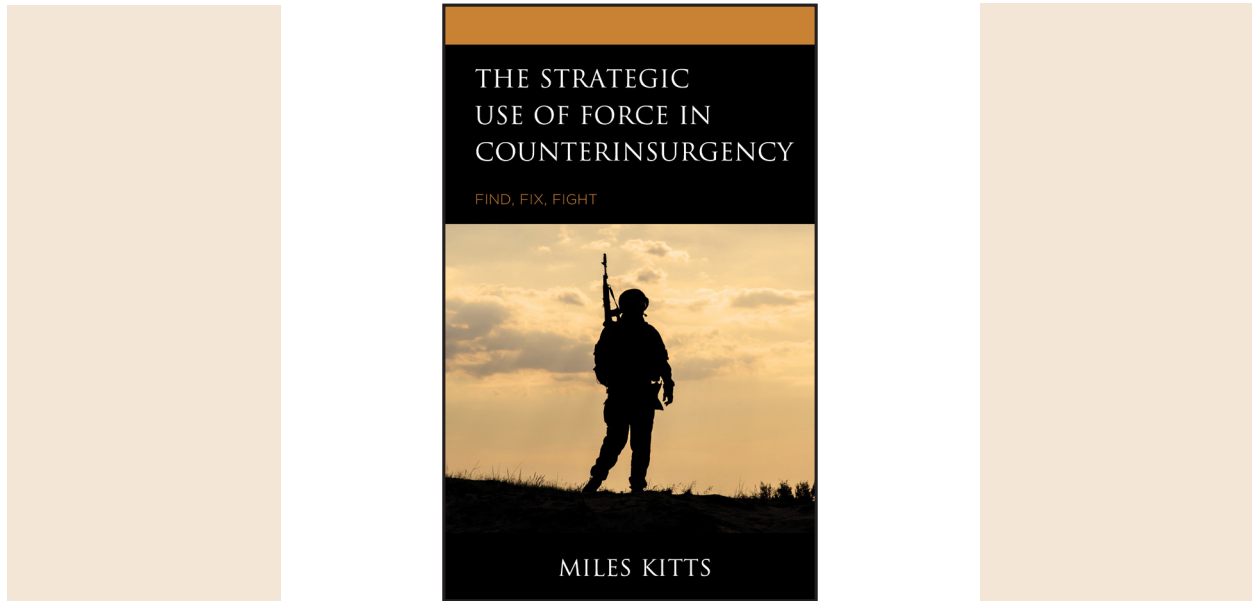
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Book Review: The Strategic Use of Force in Counterinsurgency: Find, Fix, Fight

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War is a messy enterprise. In the twenty-first century, due to the tectonic shift from conventional military style warfare to asymmetric warfare (or war amongst the people), it has grown even messier. In this new theater of conflict, conventional professional military forces battle insurgents who—despite lacking professional training and the latest weaponry—will pay any price to win. *The Strategic Use of Force in Counterinsurgency: Find, Fix, Fight* “situates itself in the broad debates surrounding the nature of strategy and warfare in a globalized world marked by the rise in influence of non-state actors” (16).

The book focuses on the use of force—which author Miles Kitts defines as “physical violence” (2) “against insurgents in order to deny them the opportunity for violence” (5). According to Kitts, the use of force in counterinsurgency is about removing insurgents’ opportunities and means to commit violence. He writes that it can be “an important tool in efforts to reduce the influence of insurgents or to reach an agreement with them” (4).

When all you have is a hammer, all problems begin to resemble nails; unintended consequences may follow the reckless use of force. Kitts explains, “it is important for counterinsurgents to have knowledge of how the use of force relates, either partly or entirely, to the conditions of the achievement of the counterinsurgency’s political goals” (5).

Kitts questions: “Does either neoclassicism or revisionism adequately address how to evaluate the utility of force in counterinsurgency and the prescriptions which should come from it” (16)? The neoclassicist school draws upon counterinsurgency theory and practices of the early Cold War and proposes that the lessons from this period should be applied to today’s post-Cold War counterinsurgency era (7). Revisionists, on the other hand, believe in a break with the past and a fundamental rethinking of the US approach to counterinsurgency (7). Kitts suggests revisionists “view insurgents and counterinsurgents as actors capable of fighting to maintain or improve their position within a fluid, interactive environment made up of numerous security actors” (69).

He argues both schools of thought lack “coherence because of the way each side evaluates the utility of force . . . rest[ing] upon a dichotomous notion of how to think about the utility of force. Specifically, both schools of thought conceive of the utility of force as resulting in outcomes which are classified as being either ‘won’ or ‘lost’ ” (178).

Kitts proposes a third option, “Reflective-Action,” a combination of elements from both schools of thought informed by the acceptance of reality’s constitution of continuity and change. His alternative “combines revisionism’s emphasis on reflective evaluation of reality with neoclassicism’s emphasis on prescribing general actions with reality” (17). Moreover, Reflective-Action synthesizes the strengths of neoclassicism and revisionism by “endorsing Neo-Classicism’s emphasis on using robust force against insurgents and support indigenous allies, while also endorsing Revisionism’s assertion that the utility of force against insurgents entails inherently mixed results” (53).

Another important concept the author discusses is the Parmenidean fallacy, which occurs when “an assessment of present conditions is made against its inherently fleeting past, rather than against other possible conditions which could have occurred” (63). He emphasizes that:

. . . the Parmenidean Fallacy should be used to inform evaluations of decisions regarding the use of force, both for the initial decision to enter into combat and for decisions once combat has been joined. The fallacy, when applied to the use of force, is not about examining how force is used and the results which are garnered by such use. . . . the Fallacy’s influence on the study of utility of force evaluates decisions regarding force (64).

In the final analysis, Kitts suggests Reflective-Action “accepts that reality consists of both continuity and change” and “provides

general practical guidance to account for continuity and change” (180). There are several strategic imperatives for counterinsurgency based on Reflective-Action: the formulation of concepts/methodologies and policies, incorporation of counterinsurgency analysis into conceptual/methodological and policy deliberations, reduction of insurgent violence, and continued outside support for local actors (180). Kitts suggests counterinsurgency policymakers should “avoid saying their political goal is ‘victory’” (180). Instead, they should emphasize resiliency, which involves counterinsurgency improving at resisting shocks, recovering from setbacks, and adapting to change (180). Kitts also notes the importance of the fourth imperative during counterinsurgency challenges—continued support for local actors after outside forces are withdrawn (186). Once withdrawal is announced, insurgent forces must be ready to fill in the power gap if policy objectives are not clearly stated and achieved.

The basic tenets of counterinsurgency undergo constant reassessment. This state of flux makes the concept of the utility of force an important debate, particularly since the heavily populated urban areas or megacities around the world today are equivalent to the jungles of South Asia in the twentieth century. Kitts states, “[S]uppressing insurgent violence will help to increase the public’s perception that the war effort is being successful, while also reducing the casualties involved. This in turn will help maintain public support for the war effort” (34).

I recommend *The Strategic Use of Force in Counterinsurgency* to readers interested in security studies, international relations, and military history and to students at the US Army War College, given that many may be involved in future counterinsurgency conflicts.

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Keywords: counterinsurgency, Parmenidean fallacy, Cold War, strategy, Reflective-Action

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