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## Response to Article Review 87

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**Response to H-Diplo/ISSF Article Review by David Ucko and Jason Fritz of Jacqueline L. Hazelton, "The 'Hearts and Minds' Fallacy: Violence, Coercion, and Success in Counterinsurgency Warfare,"** *International Security* 42:1 (2017): 80-113.

<https://issforum.org/articlereviews/87-hearts-and-minds>.

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*Strategic analysis and counter-insurgency advocacy*

In a review of Jacqueline Hazelton's *International Security* article on counter-insurgency, David Ucko and Jason Fritz fire off the latest salvo in a battle to prove COIN doctrine's enduring value.<sup>1</sup> They raise a number of entirely valid points about the historical evidence on Malaya, Dhofar and El Salvador: what happened in these conflicts and why is, of course, arguable. Whether repression or indiscriminate violence by an incumbent is strategically productive has also been the subject of much debate, with no firm consensus having emerged in the civil war literature.<sup>2</sup> Yet the reviewers are not really quibbling over the details. They seem to be protesting the finding that civilian suffering is inflicted by counter-insurgents, and what is worse, that it is inflicted on purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> David H. Ucko and Jason E. Fritz, H-Diplo/ISSF Article Review 87 (13 October 2017), <https://issforum.org/articlereviews/87-hearts-and-mind>.

<sup>2</sup> For recent surveys, see: Lars-Erik Cederman and Manuel Vogt, 'Dynamics and Logics of Civil War', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61:9 (2016): 1992-2016; Daniel Krmaric, 'Varieties of civil war and mass killing: Reassessing the relationship between guerrilla warfare and civilian victimization', *Journal of Peace Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343317715060>.

Hazelton's research, which undermines COIN, is criticised as "ethically troubling and empirically unsubstantiated" (2). With this charge the authors indicate that they have not understood the logic by which a social scientific theory is built and tested. They take issue with the attempt to propose "an unconvincing dichotomy" between good governance and coercion, as in practice these two elements often coexist in a conflict (3). Hazelton is reproached for declining to explain all cases where counter-insurgency succeeded. Let us be clear that these are impossible expectations for an article obviously written within a positivist epistemological framework. Hazelton follows a standard approach within her chosen intellectual tradition, testing competing theories against each other and drawing generalisations only so far as the evidence will bear. A theory purporting to explain every case is no theory at all.

To comprehend the pointedness of the attack in the review article, we need to appreciate a little more about the approach of the primary reviewer. The review claims that "The counterinsurgency debate tends to look for one model through which to win. This is impossible" (10). Yet this is an endeavour on which David Ucko has expended considerable effort himself. In a prize-winning article on operations in Malaya, he argues the US Marine Corps concept of "Distributed Operations" can be applied to Malaya and the War on Terror.<sup>3</sup> A later article claims that Malaya should be seen as "a model counter-insurgency campaign," which can indeed "be a useful case study in the analysis of current and future counter-insurgency campaigns."<sup>4</sup> Ucko's research programme has consistently endeavoured to promote COIN and smooth over any difficulties that may be encountered in its implementation. Even when writing on Britain's disastrous experience in southern Iraq, Ucko recommends the UK armed forces make "counter-insurgency and stabilisation greater priorities institutionally."<sup>5</sup> One might alternatively deduce the British are rather poor at counter-insurgency these days, which in any case fulfills no necessary foreign policy purpose. The basic objection in the review article seems to be Hazelton's audacity in writing negative things about counter-insurgency. The form of her writing is secondary.

The reviewers condemn the article's failure to cite pertinent studies. Hazelton's 172 footnotes with extensive references to diverse debates in political science and history thus appear to be insufficient. Ucko and Fritz would like to see more discussion on "the sustainability of peace through elite bargains," for example (4). They seem to argue that an article about military strategy during conflict should also address questions related to peace-making. Such an approach would make for a poorly focused, confused article. These criticisms are quite astonishing from writers who themselves appear to have a shaky grasp of the relevant literatures. They are fond of citing Karl Hack's excellent work on Malaya, which has done much to revise earlier, triumphalist accounts of the conflict (7, 8, 9). Yet Ucko's articles on Malaya, published in 2007 and 2010 (cited above), contain no reference to Karl Hack's scholarship. These omissions are significant beyond exposing double standards in this critique of Jacqueline Hazelton. They suggest a lack of serious engagement with scholarship

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<sup>3</sup> David Ucko, 'Countering Insurgents through Distributed Operations: Insights from Malaya 1948-1960,' *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30:1 (2007): 47-72.

<sup>4</sup> David H. Ucko, 'The Malayan Emergency: The Legacy and Relevance of a Counter-Insurgency Success Story,' *Defence Studies* 10:1-2 (2010): 13-39, quotations at 31, 35.

<sup>5</sup> David H. Ucko, 'Lessons from Basra: The Future of British Counter-insurgency,' *Survival* 52:4 (2010): 131-158, quotation at 152.

which indicates democracies have systematically violated human rights during their counter-insurgency wars.<sup>6</sup> Hack's articles, which undermine belief in counter-insurgency as a technique that can provide clean victories, are not referenced.

This points to an "ethical ramification" far more serious than Hazelton's finding that repression might have strategic effects. While Ucko and Fritz believe that to "accept savagery" in counter-insurgency is "unsubstantiated" (2), a vast body of scholarship has demonstrated precisely the accuracy of this generalisation. Though the nature of violence against non-combatants and its severity naturally vary by conflict, and even within conflicts, the notion that counter-insurgency ever exists in a clean, humane form is absurd. While Ucko's writings discuss the horrors perpetrated by authoritarian regimes, they repeatedly fail to discuss suffering inflicted by democratic states.<sup>7</sup> Ucko and Fritz do not mention in their review the highly influential studies by Benjamin Valentino, Paul Huth and Dylan Balch-Lindsay, and Alexander Downes, showing how widespread violence against civilians is commonplace in insurgencies, and that democracies are willing to deliberately target civilians for perceived strategic gains.<sup>8</sup> An earlier review article by Ucko criticized other scholars for questioning whether the last decade of counter-insurgency was a worthwhile enterprise. Those who cast doubt on the one true faith are deemed to have "gone wild."<sup>9</sup> Jacqueline Hazelton's article now comes to the attention of the defenders of COIN policy. Readers are able to draw their own conclusions about the merits of such criticism.

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Hack, 'Screwing down the People: The Malayan Emergency, Decolonisation and Ethnicity', in Hans Antlöv and Stein Tønnesson, eds., *Imperial Policy and Southeast Asian Nationalism, 1930-1957* (London: Curzon, 1995), 83-109; Karl Hack, "'Iron Claws on Malaya": The Historiography of the Malayan Emergency', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 30:1 (1999): 99-125.

<sup>7</sup> David H. Ucko, "'The People are Revolting": An Anatomy of Authoritarian Counterinsurgency', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39:1 (2016): 29-61.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Valentino, Paul Huth and Dylan Balch-Lindsay, "'Draining the Sea": Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare', *International Organisation*, 58/2 (2004), 375-407; Alexander Downes, *Targeting Civilians in War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> David H. Ucko, 'Critics gone wild: Counterinsurgency as the root of all evil', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 25/1 (2014), 161-179.