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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.

Response by **Michael Fitzsimmons**, U.S. Army War College

Published by ISSF on 23 January 2018

http://tiny.cc/ISSF-AR87-Fitzsimmons
https://issforum.org/articlereviews/87-fitzsimmons
https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-AR87-Fitzsimmons.pdf

It is gratifying to see the discussion in this forum prompted by Jacqueline Hazelton's recent *International Security* article,[1] since scholarly debates about counterinsurgency have receded from the spotlight over the past decade. One hopes that this hiatus will be short-lived given the rich empirical opportunities presented by the recent history of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

To summarize the prior discussion, Hazelton's article advances a critique of the traditional understanding of counterinsurgency theory, where "good governance" is seen as the most important ingredient of counterinsurgent success. She proposes, tests, and endorses an alternative "coercion theory," arguing that rather than good governance, the keys to success are accommodation of political elites and the use of "brute force," not only against insurgents but against civilian populations. Reviewers David Ucko and Jason Fritz fault Hazelton for building a strawman in the form of a "problematic dichotomy" between governance and coercion that does not exist in the literature she critiques, and for methodological shortcomings that result in

[1] Jacqueline L. Hazelton. "The 'Hearts and Minds' Fallacy: Violence, Coercion, and Success in Counterinsurgency Warfare." *International Security* 42:1 (2017): 80-113.

insufficient support for her conclusions.[2] Hazelton responded with a rebuttal of the reviewers' main criticisms,[3] and Huw Bennett then added a brief defense of Hazelton's analysis.[4]

This essay's purpose is to add a few points to the discussion from my own research,[5] not adjudicate the debates engaged thus far. However, it is important to note that two of Ucko and Fritz's most important critiques go unanswered in either Hazelton's response or Bennett's comments. First, while Hazelton discusses some aspects of her case selection, she does not identify—even in her response to this specific critique—what she considers to be the relevant universe of cases and, therefore, how the cases she selects are similar or different to that universe.

Second, in the case of the Malayan Emergency, which is the centerpiece of Hazelton's analysis, Ucko and Fritz point to substantial contradictory evidence to Hazelton's characterization of key variables, such as the counterinsurgents' institution of reforms, the timing of the insurgents' defeat, and the distinctions between population resettlement and indiscriminate violence. There is certainly room for debate on these points, but Hazelton's arguments that "the government . . . did not implement reforms" and that the insurgency was effectively defeated by 1949 are inaccurate. And her equation of the New Village resettlement areas with "prison camps" is questionable.[6]

Hazelton's general suspicion of good governance as the *sine qua non* of counterinsurgency, and of Malaya as the exemplar of this principle, is on firmer ground. However, the main challenge with the Malayan case as a model in this regard is not the absence of "good governance," but rather its coexistence with so many other factors that contribute to successful counterinsurgency. Targeted social and economic programs to support populations vulnerable to insurgent cooption, population security, effective military operations, political agreements among competing ethnic groups, and British commitment to Malayan independence all played significant roles in the outcomes. This multiplicity of positive factors limits the interpretive utility of the Malayan case for drawing broader conclusions about counterinsurgency strategy. Success in Malaya was overdetermined, so the effects of any one set of factors is somewhat obscured by the presence of others. From an analytical perspective, it is difficult to come to any conclusion more refined than the one Robert Komer

[2] David H. Ucko and Jason E. Fritz, H-Diplo/ISSF Article Review 87 (13 October 2017), https://issforum.org/articlereviews/87-hearts-and-minds.

[3] Jacqueline L. Hazelton, Author's Response to ISSF Article Review 87 on "The 'Hearts and Minds' Fallacy: Violence, Coercion, and Success in Counterinsurgency Warfare," https://issforum.org/articlereviews/87-response.

[4] Huw Bennett, Response to Article Review 87 (4 January 2018), https://issforum.org/articlereviews/87-bennett.

[5] The complete work is in Michael F. Fitzsimmons, "Governance, Identity and Counterinsurgency Strategy" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 2009). Portions were published as: Michael Fitzsimmons, "Hard Hearts and Open Minds? Governance, Identity, and Intellectual Foundations of Counterinsurgency Strategy," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31:3 (June 2008): 337-365; and Michael Fitzsimmons, *Governance, Identity, and Counterinsurgency: Evidence from Ramadi and Tal Afar* (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College/Strategic Studies Institute, March 2013). Subsequent references made here are exclusively to the 2009 dissertation.

[6] Hazelton, 99, 111, 112.

proposed, that "no one element was decisive. Success was achieved by the meshing of many civil-military programs, each of which interacted with the others."[7]

Moreover, several other unusual and favorable conditions made significant contributions to the victory of the British and Malayan governments. Chief among them were the absence of outside support for insurgents, the relative geographic isolation of the insurgents, and the boom in tin and rubber exports sparked by the Korean War, which buoyed the Malayan economy considerably during the most critical years of the Emergency.[8]

More generally, Hazelton's efforts to unpack the concept of governance are welcome, though the concept's treatment in the analysis is problematic. She splits governance into two parts. The first is "systematic reforms benefiting the entire population," which she associates with the good governance theory of counterinsurgent success. The second is "accommodation" of selected political actors, which she associates with her own coercion theory.[9] This distinction is certainly an important one, though it sets the bar for the good governance theory unreasonably high; many of the political, social, and economic programs that counterinsurgency theorists and practitioners would typically call "governance" would be excluded by defining it only as "reform for all." Ucko and Fritz correctly point out that traditional counterinsurgency theory never relied exclusively on "reform for all," and conclude that "the coercive theory's stress on elite bargains threatens conventional counterinsurgency theory only if the latter is reduced to absurdity."[10]

Interestingly, one counterintuitive case where a governance "reform for all" may have contributed significantly to a counterinsurgency was in Vietnam. The war in Vietnam is often thought of as either a failed counterinsurgency or a missed opportunity to even attempt a proper counterinsurgency. However, in the years following the Tet Offensive in 1968, the Viet Cong (VC) were effectively neutralized, forcing the North Vietnamese government to abandon insurgency in favor of outright conventional war.[11]

A major milestone in this history was the South Vietnamese government's completion in 1970 of the "Land to the Tiller" comprehensive land reform program.[12] The new law granted ownership of land to all current tenant cultivators and compensated the existing owners for the expropriation. Notably, the land grant was made without discrimination with regard to who had supported the government in the past. Even those

[7] Robert W. Komer, *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of A Successful Counterinsurgency Effort* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, February 1972), 76.

[8] See Fitzsimmons, 78-92.

[9] Hazelton, 89-90.

[10] Ucko and Fritz.

[11] For arguments to this effect, see Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1977); Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy At War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986); Richard Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995); Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999).

[12] See Fitzsimmons, 123-124.

tenant farmers with historical VC sympathies were granted their land. In 1972, a study funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development surveyed peasants and conditions in the South Vietnamese countryside. It concluded that "The Land to the Tiller Program is a splendid means to pacification. . . It is helping turn a once-disaffected, politically neutral mass of potential and sometimes actual revolutionaries . . . into middle class farmers in support of the regime."[13] If one is inclined to doubt the objectivity of a U.S.-government-funded survey on this topic, consider an interview with a former Communist Party member conducted by political scientist Jeffrey Race in 1970 for his renowned book *War Comes to Long An.* In assessing developments in South Vietnam after 1969, this official noted "the psychological impact of the government's land-reform proposals" as one of three key changes making it "much more difficult for revolutionary operatives to penetrate populated areas to gather food, intelligence, and recruits."[14]

More generally, a theme that recurs in the scholarship about insurgency in Vietnam is that peasant grievances there were not so much driven by the peasants' level of poverty or their absolute standard of living as by the *distribution* of wealth and power in their communities.[15] This is a dynamic that Hazelton identifies in her analysis as well, arguing that "distribution of public goods may not be relevant if the fundamental issue is the redistribution of power."[16] Clearly, this distinction is critical to any counterinsurgency strategy designed to address popular grievances.

Race explains this logic as it operated in Long An province in the early and mid-1960s:

> Economic development would go on regardless of who won, although it might be delayed while deciding who would win. Thus it was simply not an issue in the struggle. . .
>
> Government programs were focused largely on providing a general *increment* of wealth or income, whereas what attracted people to the revolutionary movement was that it represented a new society in which there would be an individual *redistribution* of values, including power and status as well as material possessions. . . Those unsympathetic to the government were glad to have dispensaries, roads, loans and farmers' associations, but they went right ahead and cooperated with the revolutionary movement, for *the same groups were still going to be at the bottom no matter how much assistance the government provided*.[17]

Race argues that one of the reasons the VC were so effective in the first half of the war was that they recognized this redistributive imperative. Of course redistribution of wealth would come naturally to

[13] Quoted in Hunt, 264.

[14] Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley:

University of California Press, 1972), 270. The other two changes were the reconstitution of local political infrastructure and the expansion of the Popular Force and People's Self-Defense Force organizations.

[15] This discussion draws on Fitzsimmons, 138-140.

[16] Hazelton, 87.

[17] Race, 176 (emphasis in the original).

Communist insurgents, central as it is to their political philosophy. But Race points out another important distinction in this regard--that participants in the insurgency, themselves, distinguished between "policies redistributive of wealth and income" and "policies redistributive of power and status."[18] Or, to put it another way, grievances about distribution had both economic and political dimensions, and they were separable.

Douglas Blaufarb makes a similar point in his analysis of Vietnam, arguing that:

> the critical aspect of rural development aid for counterinsurgency purposes was the process by which decisions were made and the aid distributed. . . Grievance processes are [more important] than the more common emphases on education, health services, roads, and the like, although the latter should not be ignored. In all these matters, the process . . . is more important than the material details. It must be a process in which the beneficiaries are confirmed in their essential goal of achieving greater control over what is done for them and to them by the power structure.[19]

The decision "processes" to which Blaufarb refers must by definition reflect the distribution of "power and status" that Race's interview respondents found to be more important than the distribution of material goods and services. In Blaufarb's view, the South Vietnamese counterinsurgency ultimately fell short in the limitations in the reform of distribution of political power. Importantly, he separates this phenomenon from the distributive problems of wealth, which were quite extensively addressed by the U.S.-South Vietnamese pacification campaign and the Land to the Tiller legislation.

So what emerges from this discussion, potentially, is a new pair of hypotheses, that among the factors that win the loyalty of a population and establish legitimacy, distributional effects may be more important than absolute effects, and political effects may be more important than economic effects. This latter point echoes the words of scholar Donald Horowitz's caution in his landmark book on ethnic conflict, that while political power is often an instrument for determining allocation of material benefits, "power may also *be* the benefit. . . Broad matters of group status regularly have equal or superior standing to the narrow allocative decisions often taken to be the uniform stuff of everyday politics."[20]

These hypotheses are fertile ground for future studies in counterinsurgency.

Michael Fitzsimmons is Visiting Research Professor at the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

[18] Race, 165.

[19] Blaufarb, 289, 309-310.

[20] Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 187 (emphasis in the original).