

The Soul of Armies: Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Military Culture in the US and UK, by Austin Long, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2017, pp. 202, Rs 1,495

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This book is a major contribution towards the field of military culture, one which has had shortage of literature traditionally. While the book primarily dwells on the counter-insurgency doctrine and military culture in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), it certainly provides modular lessons for counter-insurgency operations and military organisational behaviour throughout the world. Austin Long's analysis tries to answer a key question: why are some armies better at counter-insurgency than others? The answers lie in a multifaceted and contingent set of factors drawing home a fundamental point that while organisational culture shapes military doctrine and practice, eventually the success of counter-insurgency operations depends on the nature and reliability of the local government and security partners.

The book picks up interesting case studies on Afghanistan, Iraq, Kenya and Vietnam to point out the difference between various organisations involved in counter-insurgency and why some of those organisations find success more than others. Cultural difference turns out to be a very important reason in how armies approach counter-insurgency. In particular, the author shows how disparate cultures prevalent in the US Army, Special Operations Forces, Marine Corps and the British Army were pivotal in producing varied forms of counter-insurgency and with

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different results. This has been illustrated in the book with the help of theories on the origin of military culture. Long presents an in-depth analysis of the nature of various military organisations and the correlation to the way in which they carry out counter-insurgency operations and its success rate.

The first chapter brings to the fore quite a few troubled narratives about counter-insurgency and points out their fallacies, especially one that presumes 'right generals with right doctrine (along with significant increase in resources)' makes for successful counter-insurgency operations. Giving the example of Afghanistan and Iraq, Long shows that despite the presumed requisite for successful counter-insurgency operations in both the places, American and British troops were beleaguered and battered by insurgents. This chapter discusses various forms and phases of insurgency in the US and Europe during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and ends with four hypotheses, which are tested against available evidence drawing on the literature on military organisational culture and theory in later chapters.

The second chapter focuses on the importance of culture as a variable in security and strategic studies by bringing to the fore three waves of culture in security studies, each in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. While outlining the contextual difference between the uses of culture as a variable during the three decades, Long also points out the challenges of using culture as a variable in strategic studies, given its intrinsically amorphous nature. The chapter does a good job of defining both culture and doctrine, and of explaining the ways of interaction between culture and counter-insurgency organisations leading to the formation of doctrines. Long emphasises on the correlation between what he calls 'the first war' (critical formative experience for military organisation) and professionalisation. In this regard, he argues that once the organisational culture derived from the first war is firmly established by the professionalisation of the officer corps, very little evolution takes place thereafter. The chapter ends with delineating how military culture is different from other types of culture.

The third chapter, titled 'The Habits and Usages of War', makes a distinction between the normative and positivist elements of war culture in the US at two levels, strategic and managerial, by drawing on historical accounts ranging from the American Civil War to the mid-twentieth century. The main focus of this chapter is on depicting the changes in organisational approach adopted by the US Army at various stages in

history. Discussing the Civil War in detail, Long analyses how the initial presumptions of the army were proven wrong thereby necessitating change in strategies. For instance, most military leaders until the Civil War believed in single decisive wars and overwhelming use of artillery from a superior position. This view changed as armies became bigger, and so did strategies. As such, Long credits the period following the Civil War with the creation of subcultures in the US Army besides an overarching army. The rest of the chapter deals in detail with the evolution of the army under different circumstances that followed the Civil War: the Spanish–American War; gradual percolation of professional education in the military; consolidation of the army culture in the first half of the twentieth century; and the evolution of the Special Forces as a subculture which came into existence after World War II.

The following chapter, titled ‘From the Halls of Montezuma’, critically dwells on the professionalisation process of the US Marine Corps between 1865–1960. The chapter does a decent job of pointing out the inherent anomaly in constituting the Marine Corps as a separate military service in the US, despite a large army and navy. Although the author traces the birth of the Marine Corps to 1775, he underscores that the professionalism of the Marine Corps began only after a century of its formation, in 1880. Much of the role for the Marine Corps was decided by the relationship and influence of both the navy and the army on it. As such, the evolution of a distinct Marine Corps subculture was simultaneous with its gradual distancing from the navy and the army later on. However, its dependence on the navy in particular remained overwhelming. During much of the World Wars, the Marine Corps remained restricted to the Pacific theatre and served as standby force for small interventions abroad. However, Marine deployments in Lebanon (1958), Dominican Republic (1965), and, subsequently, in Vietnam changed the course of their strategy and perception. Essentially, the Marine culture has waxed and waned through American military history, with units finally developing their own professional culture.

Long moves on to the British Army in the next chapter, categorising its professionalisation between 1856–1948. He aptly describes the British Army as unique, given the education of the recruits in public schools and its elites commanding infantry regiments and armour units. The British Army remained without much professionalism for the period between 1509–1809, before it entered the phase of ‘porto-professionalism’. Subsequently, three factors have been listed as critical to instilling

military professionalism in the British Army: the establishment of the present Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst; the leadership of Arthur Wellesley; and experiences abroad in countries like India. Furthermore, the Crimean War of 1854 and subsequent 'Sepoy Mutiny' in India have been listed as foundational experience of the professional British Army officer corps. Through much of the years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, the British Army went through other combat experiences, adaptations and reforms. By the end of the World War I, the British Army had learnt a lot about industrial warfare and was forced to formulate new tactics and improvisation.

Discussing the US counter-insurgency in Vietnam between 1960–71, the author rightly names the chapter 'A Nasty, Untidy Mess'. Here, Long gives a detailed analysis of the response of three US organisational cultures to the challenge of counter-insurgency in South Vietnam: those by the US Army, the US Marine Corps and the US Army's Special Forces. The chapter compares organisational responses to insurgency in Vietnam between the three legs of the aforementioned military, keeping variables other than organisational factors to be constant. The author concludes that there was a huge variation in carrying out operations in the given period between the three military factions and more importantly, inter-organisational culture has been attributed with much of the variation. Chapter 7 reinforces the conclusion of the preceding chapter through a more detailed comparison of Marine and army operations in a specified area: Quang Ngai in South Vietnam between 1966–68. The findings assert that the army operations in Quang Ngai province were substantially different from Marine operations in the same province despite a written doctrine that was functionally identical. This has been accorded to factors intrinsic to the two organisations.

Returning to the British Army, Long discusses British counter-insurgency doctrine and operations in Kenya during the period 1952–56 and tests them against four counter-insurgency hypotheses presented in the first chapter. Analysing various counter-insurgency operations by the British Army in Kenya, the chapter looks at the adaptations and doctrinal changes made in the face of urban Kenyan insurgency tactics and, more importantly, how did they change under different British commanding officers. The chapter comparatively weighs various British counter-insurgency operations in the period, such as Operations Beatrice and Dante. Kenya presented a difficult and ambiguous challenge to the British Army, which in turn had to adapt to urban slums and forested

highlands. This depiction harks back to the moot point raised in the first chapter by the author about there being certain proportionality between effectiveness of counter-insurgency operations and local conditions and support.

In the penultimate chapter, the author dwells on the combined counter-insurgency efforts of the Americans and the British in Iraq between 2003–08. This chapter tests the hypothesis that conduct of counter-insurgency by different military organisations (the US Army, Marines and the British Army) in the same locale (Iraq), at the same time, other variables remaining constant, would depend on organisational culture. As such, it presents evidence on both cultural continuity and change in inter- and intra-organisational response to counter-insurgency over the years, for instance, from Vietnam to Kenya to Iraq.

The final chapter discusses the events in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2003, and then presents an overview of counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan conducted by the US Army, the US Marine Corps, the British Army, and the US Army Special Forces from 2003 to 2011. The chapter provides a positive test for the author's cultural hypothesis proposed in the first chapter that when information is ambiguous, operations and doctrine should converge over time across organisations with similar cultures and remain divergent across organisations with different cultures.

The book presents some rare analytic evidence on two perplexing questions: first, why do military organisations, despite convergence on the theoretical outlines of counter-insurgency doctrine, continue to diverge in terms of operations? And second, why do variations in conduct of operations not yield any reliably positive result? The answers to these questions lie in 'organisational culture' and local factors. All major organisations discussed in this book depict a culture (also subculture) in their conduct of operations which defies written and formalised doctrinal guidelines in a very subtle way.

This book is a critical addition to the literature on counter-insurgency and although it caters primarily to the Western operations and doctrines, it provides definite scope to be a guiding manual in understanding how counter-insurgency should work in different places. The book gains particular relevance in current times when insurgent tactics are rapidly evolving and changing.

