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Conrad Crane’s memoir, *Cassandra in Oz: Counterinsurgency and Future War*, is an unapologetic defense of the most famous military manual ever written, the Army-Marine 2006 Field Manual 3-24, “Counterinsurgency.” Crane’s book arrives on the scene as American defense institutions are largely repeating the post-Vietnam response to such operations, rejecting them in favor of great power conflict. The author writes in part to provide some background and to note his successes, but in part the book rues the re-rejection of the counterinsurgency approach, quoting General David Petraeus: “As long as there are insurgencies, nations will have to counter them” (pp. 226, 231).

Counterinsurgency—often known by the acronym COIN—is an operational approach to insurgency and “people’s war” that has had a rocky history, but it is hardly new. Caesar’s *Commentaries* record similar efforts in Gaul. Colonel T. E. Lawrence of the British Army worked closely with the Arab tribes during the First World War, the many lessons learned recorded in his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926) popularized in the film *Lawrence of Arabia* (1989). After World War II, Britain, France, Belgium, and other nations conducted counterinsurgency operations in places like Indochina, Algeria, and Malaya, efforts that spawned a wave of writing by David Galula (*Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, 1964), Rogier Trinquier (*La Guerre Moderne*, 1961), and Jean Larteguy (*Les Centurions*, 1960—a novel), among others. For good or ill, the 2006 FM 3-24 is rightly seen as another in this series of works, updated to meet the different forms of insurgency, but the Islamist variety in particular.

During the 1960s, John F. Kennedy counted Soviet and Chinese subversion against newly independent postcolonial nations in Africa, Latin America, and Asia as the most dangerous threat facing global stability. In response, he established the Counterinsurgency Group-SI, a process well documented in Douglas S. Blaufarb’s excellent and relatively unknown memoir, *The Counterinsurgency Era* (1977). This first “era” of COIN was pain-
fully discredited through the American experience in Vietnam.

The 2001 American war in Afghanistan and the 2003 war in Iraq, both in response to 9/11, provided the stage for the “second” COIN era. Facing a dangerous and potent insurgency in Iraq, by 2005 American involvement had, like Vietnam, boiled over to infect American politics, creating a pressure-cooker demand for new approaches. FM 3-24, “Counterinsurgency,” attempted to capture “lessons learned” not only from Iraq and Afghanistan but from a century of writing, and as a three-star commander of the US Army’s Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, David Petraeus hoped it would be a key guide for turning the hurrying insurgencies around. Conrad Crane was arguably the principal architect of FM 3-24. Its stated purpose, Crane notes, “was to present a series of tools and options that counterinsurgents could apply to their particular situations” (p. 93).

FM 3-24 is uniquely important in recent American military and diplomatic history, as it provided guidance and the intellectual underpinnings for both wars. It was also the only manual published and distributed by a civilian press in addition to the normal military channels, by the University of Chicago Press. It has served as a textbook in a number of courses, including graduate ones taught by the writer of this review. The manual is really a synthesis of more than a century of writing on the topic, a uniquely American synthesis emphasizing a blend of political and military action, recognizing insurgency as fundamentally a local competition for political legitimacy—a characteristic it shares with modern hybrid war.

As Crane notes, the 2006 version of the manual was frequently critiqued, but less frequently read by critics. And he highlights chapter 4, contributed by the US Marines, on operational design, finding it still the best introduction to design and crediting that chapter with operational design’s acceptance across the joint force. That might be a little too much of a leap, insofar as the 1991 Gulf War planning team used versions of “lines and slices” in their operational design—but Crane is right in that the 2006 version of the manual does give an outstanding introduction to the complex idea of operational design.

Crane’s book is a welcome addition to the COIN debate, tracing the development of 3-24 through the eyes of a primary participant. In many respects, Crane’s book is much like Blaufarb’s: a memoir by a key participant that mixes analysis with recollection. Taken with Fred Kaplan’s The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War (2014) and Pete Mansoor’s Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War (2013), the book will provide generations of historians and scholars with invaluable insight, from the inside. This is particularly important given the spotty way in which the electronic records of these wars will likely be preserved, since drives are so easily erased—especially when they contain classified materials and security “prudence” exerts a great pressure in opposition to the need to preserve documents for future generations. This is a point Crane also discusses (p. 15).

Counterpoint perspectives from the military lens may be interested Gian Gentile’s Wrong Turn: America’s Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency (2013), and Crane notes that he and Gentile have a long history as colleagues, though they also appeared as debating foils on many stages in the wake of 3-24’s release; I saw one such debate in person at the West Point Military History Summer Seminar in 2014, mentioned in the text. Sharper critiques from the political Left, such as Roberto J. Gonzolaz’s Militarizing Culture: Essays on the Warfare State (2016), are also mentioned, with Crane’s counterpoints provided (p. 226).

Cassandra in Oz opens with a brief memorial to First Lieutenant David Richard Bernstein, killed in action on October 18, 2003. This is intended as a moving human reminder about the motivations for the FM 3-24 writing team, anxious to avoid fu-
ture casualties. While not formally broken into actions, the work might be divided into two parts: the first contains chapters that chronicle the development of FM 3-24, while the second is a set of supporting recollections based on the author’s trip to Iraq in February 2007. In between is a useful summary of the 2006 manual. The appendix holds a number of interesting documents intended to support the author’s claim as a “Cassandra,” seeing into the future, and reinforcing tenets of FM 3-24, underscoring the “population-centric” character of the war.

The book has its flaws, as most memoirs do. A reader seeking in-depth treatment of the place of COIN within future war, suggested by the subtitle, will likely be disappointed. There is very little about the future of COIN apart from a few pages at the very end noting that it will be around as long as insurgencies are.

Nor does Crane take on the biggest question, COIN’s expense, or the question of whether America should fight these kinds of wars. He argues boldly that COIN does work, citing pre-2011 Iraq as his case and arguing that COIN was never really tried in Afghanistan. He mentions the expense of the “clear-hold-build” approach at least twice, but does not extend that to any judgment about whether a COIN approach is worth the expense.

Responding to critics, Crane addresses a number of charges that are often made against “COINdinistas” (as Petraeus, John Nagl, Crane, and David Kilcullen are often labeled): that their narratives too often surround the “savior general” perspective; that FM 3-24 was really just rehashed David Galula; and ultimately, that COIN is either frightfully expensive or doesn’t work, especially in democracies, with their short-fuse political cycles and fickle electorates. Crane takes on a few of these critiques, though he does so in abbreviated space.

While Crane does not lionize Petraeus, as Gentile so often charges, he does—as Kaplan did—place Gen. Petraeus firmly at the center of a new approach. Crane is unequivocal: “FM 3-24 would not have been created without General Petraeus’ personal involvement” (p. 44), and “even General Petraeus readily admits that; he readily gives credit liberally to the many members of the civil-military team that executed the Surge and recognizes the achievements in Iraq prior to his arrival. Still, he did standardize those practices when he arrived there, and the strategic and operational concepts of the Surge did represent a 180-degree shift in approach” (pp. 131-132).

Regarding the Galula charge, Crane notes, “I had never read any of his work until December, 2005, and I suspect that most of the writers hadn’t, either. My thinking was most influenced by Robert Thompson, Frank Kitson, and Steve Metz ... as well as by extensive readings on classical insurgent theorists Lenin, Mao, Giap, Guevara, and others” (p. 102). He then goes on to note areas he did attribute specifically to Galula, his characterization of insurgency as favoring the insurgent (p. 102), and the formula that revolutionary warfare is 80 percent political action and only 20 percent military (p. 103).

He does note in a couple of places that FM 3-24 was short on approaches other than the hugely resource-intensive approach of clear-hold-build, which dominated both Iraq and Afghanistan (p. 113), but these comments do not add much to the discussions about COIN’s place as an operational approach alongside other approaches, such as counterterror (CT).

Overall, Crane’s book resembles Blaufarb’s The Counterinsurgency Era, and will likely serve the same purpose, as a primary source for other historians as they reevaluate America’s participation in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. There is much of value, though the book remains a little short of the author’s mark of setting COIN in place for future war. The text is engaging and the anecdotes interesting, and the analysis sprinkled throughout is more than worthy of contemplation for any student of irregular warfare. And one
must come away with a far better understanding of how difficult it is to birth new ideas, and to champion them, especially with the knowledge that there are generations of First Lieutenant David Richard Bernsteins currently serving and who will serve in the future, whose lives depend on getting doctrine right. Crane has earned a worthy salute as a champion for all of them, working steadily and steadfastly to provide exactly that doctrine.

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