Considering the Soul of Armies

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IN REVIEW

Austin Long, *The Soul of Armies: Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Military Culture and the US and UK*, (Cornell University Press, March 2016).

Austin Long's newest book, *The Soul of Armies: Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Military Culture in the US and UK,* advances our theoretical understanding of counterinsurgency, military doctrine, and the behavior of military organizations. It also has important policy implications. Long correctly points out that policymakers need to have an accurate understanding of the cultures that permeate the military organizations they have at their disposal, so as to gain a firmer grasp of what those organizations can and cannot do. The book also raises further questions that are worth exploring.

Long begins by noting that despite similarities between U.S. and UK counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine, and the high degree of continuity in both countries' COIN doctrines over the decades, their militaries have responded differently to the COIN challenge, and the outcome of their COIN campaigns has varied. He identifies two central questions. *First*, is the doctrine embodied in past and current field manuals actually the right way to fight counterinsurgency? Answering this question requires examining whether the mixed record is the result of the doctrine itself or of the way doctrine was applied. *Second*, given that organizations respond differently to the challenge of counterinsurgency, are some better suited to it than others?

Long argues that culture has been a more important determinant of U.S. and UK conduct of COIN operations than doctrine. His answer to the second question is a qualified yes, but he also adds that "success has much more to do with local conditions than with military doctrine and operations." Consequently, "the agency of outsiders is limited."

Building on Elizabeth Kier's *Imagining War*, Long argues "that organizational culture is a critical intervening variable between the environment (domestic and international) and doctrine." He skillfully navigates the murky waters surrounding culture as an analytical concept and offers a definition of military culture as a clearly

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identified set of values and ideas about war. Focusing on the formative "first war" and the process of professionalization, Long traces the evolution of U.S. and UK military culture until the early Cold War period. The dominant U.S. Army culture was shaped by the Civil War, and the organization "prepared officers to lead large conscript forces armed lavishly with industrial firepower." In contrast to this culture, Army Special Forces developed their own subculture, which was more conducive to COIN operations. Within the Marine Corps, two subcultures coexisted: one focused on "small wars" (or COIN), and one emphasized amphibious operations.

British Army culture was shaped by the Crimean War (1853-56) and the Sepoy Mutiny in India (1857-59) and differed in important respects from that of the U.S. Army. "It sought to prepare officers for the dual missions of imperial policing and coalition warfare." While U.S. Army culture was centered on large units, its British counterpart focused on small units. Several features were the product of imperial policing: British officers were "routinely expected to work intimately with other military services, indigenous forces, and civilians while serving abroad." War was viewed "as a common but not total experience—conscription and mass mobilization were aberrations." Another important difference is that while U.S. Army Special Forces were marginalized within the U.S. Army culture, the Special Air Service "was well integrated into the broader British Army culture."

Long examines and explains the U.S. and UK Armies' conduct of operations in several case studies: U.S. COIN in Vietnam, 1960-71; British Army COIN in Kenya, 1952-56; American and British COIN in Iraq, 2003-8; and American and British COIN in Afghanistan, 2003-11. In the Vietnam and Kenya case studies, Long presents archival research. He recognizes that compared to the Cold War, the amount of declassified sources is much smaller in the Iraqi and Afghan cases. However, he is able to enhance his analysis of the contemporary cases by drawing on valuable insights gained during his time as a RAND Corporation consultant working with U.S. forces in both countries.

Long systematically tests the explanatory power of institutional culture relative to other factors: geopolitical environment, level of civilian intervention, structure of democratic institutions, and organizational desire to maximize resources and autonomy and reduce uncertainty. He finds that culture best explains organizational behavior, while other factors "are either indeterminate or do not explain the variation in operations." The formal COIN doctrines of all the organizations reflected what could be called population-centric COIN and were similar across the cases. But the degree to which these doctrines were implemented varied, largely due to cultural differences between the various organizations. The U.S. Army as a whole, the dominant culture of which expressed a strong preference for conventional operations, often ignored COIN doctrine, whereas those organizations whose culture was more conducive to population-centric COIN—U.S. Army Special Forces, the U.S. Marine Corps, and the British Army—tended to adhere to COIN doctrine.

Perhaps the most striking example of the impact of organizational culture is Long's comparison of U.S. Army and Marine Corps operations in the Quang Ngai province in South Vietnam, 1966-68. Drawing on archival sources, Long is able to detail the conduct of operations and identify the factors that shaped them. The