

The Empire's "Good Cop": Canada's New Counter-Insurgency Doctrine

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Introduction

Reading the recent draft publication of the Canadian Forces' first-ever Counter-Insurgency (COIN) manual, I could not help but draw comparisons between the police-state-like mentality which characterizes the document, and the invasive nature of Western medicine, which tends to surgically remove or symptomatically treat diseases without showing much concern for the root causes of the ailment. On the surface, perhaps this may seem like a bizarre analogy. Though just as the pill-pushing practitioners of Western medicine are more at the behest of the big business of big pharma than they are in the service of maintaining healthy populations, so too the strategists of Western imperialist militaries are more at the behest of capitalism than they are in the service of maintaining health of societies. Police states and imperial armies – like Western medicine – are not interested in curing the ailments of society. Their job is to thwart, if not crush, any systemic disordering to the status quo they are employed to preserve. In their language, we hear about 'surgical strikes', treating the refractory forces to capital and imperialism as cancerous aberrations to be eliminated. This is precisely the ethos of Canada's new COIN doctrine: to undermine and destroy any forms of resistance manifesting to the capitalist Empire taking shape today.

To digress for a moment, I use the word *Empire* cognizant of the baggage which the political theorists Michael Hardt and Toni Negri have lent the term since their 2000 publication by the same name. In *Empire* Hardt and Negri controversially suggested that the age of imperialism was a thing of the past – if by that it is understood to be a global system of inter-state competition and multi-polar empire-building based on a territorial logic. To be sure, the reality of inter-state conflict remains a fact of the current geo-political world, especially since the wrath of U.S. imperial adventures since 9/11. Furthermore, there remains the extremely dangerous prospect of proxy-conflicts in places like Sudan, Iran, Taiwan and Central Asia blowing over into larger theaters of war between the East (Russia, China) and the West (led by the Anglo-American-Zionist bloc). Thus imperialism is not exactly a thing of the past – at least not yet.

However, where Negri and Hardt seem to be vindicated is in their thesis that the novel character of military engagements today is that they transcend the logic of the state, obeying a sort of supranational police-state logic wherein capitalist Empire dispatches its globe-trotting armies to quell anti-systemic movements wherever they arise. Today, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Jordan are the UN's five largest contributors to 'peacekeeping' operations.² Brazil is heading up MINUSTAH's occupation of Haiti, a country whose paramilitary police forces extra-judicially kill thousands of favela-dwellers every year. While countries like US, Canada, UK, while ultimately being the arbiters of those other

imperial missions, occupy countries like Afghanistan, Iraq. Today's global order no longer seems to be characteristic of the form of imperialism theorized by Lenin. There is indeed a logic that seems to transcend the state - though without nullifying the state, as some commentators prematurely suggested in the 1990s. This logic is what Hardt and Negri call the *imperial sovereignty* of Empire.

So what does this notion of *Empire* have to do with Canada and its new counter-insurgency doctrine? In this global order, Canada is well-poised, by virtue of its inextricable economic, political, and military alignment with the United States, to play the role of what I like to think of as the 'good cop'. Remember that ubiquitous scene from all those cop flicks, where the 'bad cop' is beating up a detainee in the interrogation room, at which point the 'good cop' walks in, takes over the interrogation, warms up to the detainee, and tries to convince him to fess-up and spare the wrath of the testy 'bad cop'? Well, Canada plays the part of the good-cop in the new world order. It does not have the strength to bully around the rest of the world. But, with its ostensible history as a 'peace-keeper' and its deceptively liberal face, it plays the part to perfection, leaving the bloodier, larger missions to the United States.

Canada's Counter-Insurgency Doctrine

The Canadian counter-insurgency manual is exactly what its title suggests. It is an elaborately detailed strategic, tactical, and operational manual, 169-pages long, instructing counter-insurgency operations to the finest of operational details. In fact, the level of detail makes it almost as useful for the would-be insurgent as for the counter-insurgent.

In it, any and all resistance posed to governments and their policies deemed to be operating outside of the institutional framework of liberal democracy is lumped into the category of *insurgency*, ranging from the violent activities of national liberation movements down to the simple act of distributing anti-state propaganda. The manual makes no distinction - Taliban, Tamil Tigers, al Qaida, anarchists, Maoists, Mohawk Warriors - they are all insurgencies of one sort or another in need of subversion and destruction. Thus, the Canadian military's first-ever counter-insurgency doctrine announces the Canadian government's position with respect to global capitalist Empire loud and clear. *There is no alternative! Opposition will be crushed!*

Listing a number of prominent insurgencies in the West, past and present, the authors are surprisingly candid to admit that the root cause of insurgency is political and social grievance. Though, of course, not once in the document are the roots of such grievances linked back to their proper causes; which invariably stem back to the same politico-economic interests that an imperial army like Canada's is at the service of. The U.S. propped up Saddam in the 1980s; attacked Iraq in the early 1990s; crippled its economy and brutally starved the Iraqi people in the late 1990s with its sanctions regime; then bombed and occupied the country from 2003 onwards, with at least 600,000 dead as a result of the current occupation. Similar story with Afghanistan, with the Taliban and Osama being creations of the CIA in the U.S.'s proxy-war against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Then there was the joint US-Canada-France role in overthrowing the democratic government of Haiti and then carrying out an onslaught against the popular Lavalas movement. None of these *causes* of insurgency are detailed in the manual.

And at least in the case of the Roman Empire, the authors recognize that the insurgencies

which forced Rome to retreat from Europe and the Middle East were spawned because Rome had over-extended itself and lost legitimacy amongst its occupied peoples:

“Insurgencies are not a new phenomenon. Insurgents effectively caused the withdrawal of Roman troops over 2000 years ago from what is today Germany and Scotland. The Roman Empire had overextended itself and was seen as lacking legitimacy with the local peoples – peoples who were not averse to utilizing violence in altering the political landscape”.³

It is impossible that the military strategists who crafted this document could have made such an admission concerning the roots of insurgencies and the unwinding of imperial Rome and not draw the obvious comparison with the over-extension of modern-day capitalist Empire (militarily headed up by the Anglo-American-Zionist bloc). The fact is that today’s form of imperialism is in a state of strategic decline. On all fronts, this bloc is struggling to maintain its authority. When the world’s fourth strongest army, Israel, is defeated by Hezbollah’s paltry guerilla army of some few thousand militants; when the world’s largest army, the United States, outspending the rest of the world in military spending, can barely contain the resistance in Iraq; when the Taliban becomes the best game in town in Afghanistan, putting up fierce resistance to Canada and other occupiers; when imperial forces are at a stalemate in the best of cases, then the other variable in maintaining Empire becomes all the more important: that is, *legitimacy*. Hence the rising importance of the psychological aspect to warfare today, or as it is euphemistically put, the “hearts and minds” campaign.

However, this document makes no pretenses of genuine concern for the violent social consequences of capitalist expansion. It expresses concern for the well-being of peoples only insofar as humanitarianism can serve as a trusty fifth-column in the broader campaign to undermine support for insurgent groups.

The document places great stress on a multi-agency approach to counter-insurgency. On page 96, the document charts out examples of various levels of committees in which the military cobbles together stake holders from civilian agencies, NGOs, police forces, and religious leaders in the military’s broad front against insurgency.

Quoting Lt. Col. John A. Nagel of the US Army, the document reads “Insurgency is ultimately a war of ideas...Recognizing this fact, successful counterinsurgencies have devoted as much effort to defeating the enemy’s propaganda as they have to defeating his fighters. Winning the war of ideas has often been the decisive line of operations in successful counterinsurgency”.⁴ Thus, in the thinking of the COIN doctrine, information operations and psychological warfare play an even greater part in undermining an insurgency than the phase of direct physical conflict.

A counter-insurgency strategy neither starts nor stops with the military defeat of the insurgent: “The announcement of bold government initiatives to be started after the insurgency has been defeated can have real and significant effect on winning the hearts and minds of the population during any campaign...As with subduing a fire, the flames have to be out and the embers cold, before it can be considered finished”.⁵ Which is to suggest that the work of Canada in places like Haiti and Afghanistan, where armed resistance continues to oppose the occupying forces, is long from complete, even once, or if, they ever manage to defeat the local armed resistances. Thus, alongside armed confrontation with resistances, the COIN doctrine places great emphasis on the role of the NGO sector in undermining popular support for insurgencies. Thus the ‘Hearts and Minds’ campaign is really nothing

more than a façade, psychological warfare intended to divide a colonized population against itself and foster its dependency and reverence towards the colonizing force. The work of Yves Engler and Anthony Fenton, *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority*, illustrates a case in point, offering a comprehensive analysis of Canada's use of NGOs (if we can even call them that) in undermining support for the popular and democratically-elected government of Jean Bertrand Aristide.[6](#)

Though the document puts out the pretense of respecting the 'rule of law' and the authority of foreign governments, in its operational thinking, civil authority is only ever considered in relation to the overarching military strategy of COIN: "When operating in support of a friendly government, the [Canadian Forces] must be seen to operate clearly in support of civil power and not in isolation from it. *This can be accomplished more readily if the local security forces are incorporated into the military planning whenever possible, and the civil government is seen to be implementing those aspects of policy, planning, and control which closely affect military operations*" (my emphasis).[7](#) In other words, civil authorities are to be, in effect, subordinate to the military authority of Canadian forces, whilst projecting the image of the obverse to the local population and the rest of the world.

The only part of the operation the manual *does not* detail is the part where one civilian authority - almost always a more popular one, in either relative or absolute terms - is violently overthrown by imperialist powers and replaced with a comprador authority that will abide by the occupiers demands. Recent cases in point: the puppet regimes of Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq and Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan; as well as Haiti's former unconstitutional government of Gérard Latortue (2004-2006), hand-picked by occupiers U.S., Canada, and France. If Haitians came out as the fortunate neo-colony to be granted a semblance a popular government within its occupation - with the accession of René Prével to the presidency in May 2006 - it was only in order to contain the prospects of a wider insurgency from developing across Haiti and to give the occupation a patina of legitimacy. Even with Prével ultimately winning the President's office, the elections were carried out in conditions severely stacked against the popular movement: firstly, most of the Lavalas partisans were dead, in jail, in exile, or underground; and secondly, the Canadian-run elections were riddled with fraudulence in an attempt to force the overwhelmingly popular Prével into a run-off election. Yet, still to this day, the Haitian government remains under an unpopular UN occupation, with political killings against the popular movement continuing unabated. Thus, the imperial policy of crushing the popular movement has not ended, but only shifted gears and adapted its tactics to the new political circumstances in Haiti.

Thus, after playing its part in establishing conciliatory 'local authorities' - the part of the imperial strategy *not* detailed in this document - the military strategy of COIN stresses the importance of training local police and military forces, citing previous examples of the Canadian forces training the Afghan National Army, as well as earlier missions of training armies in the Congo and Sierra Leone.[8](#) The COIN document leaves out detailing the most recent applications of this policy - perhaps because they were outsourced to the RCMP and not the army - which include training of the paramilitary-cum-Haitian National Police (HNP) forces in Haiti; and the RCMP's training of more than 30,000 Iraqi police stationed in Jordan.[9](#) Though, to their great frustration, Canada is not quite winning the battle for the 'hearts and minds' in any of their contemporary missions. They are by no means 'winning' hearts and minds in Afghanistan, where the resistance is gaining in strength. And recent figures suggest that more ten percent of the RCMP-trained Iraqi police forces have been killed.[10](#) As for Haiti, a recent report by the British medical journal The Lancet cites more

than 10,000 extrajudicial killings and more than 35,000 instances of sexual assault or rape, most of which were committed by occupying UN forces, anti-Lavalas gangs, or the RCMP-trained HNP. On all fronts, Canada is losing the 'hearts and minds' campaign, let alone their overall counterinsurgency strategies.

Which brings us back to one of the first points made above in this section: like the Roman Empire, contemporary capitalist Empire, militarily headed-up by the Anglo-American-Zionist bloc of forces, is experiencing overextension. And once again, the other important variable in maintaining Empire is legitimacy. But the post-9/11 series of wars waged by America, UK, and Israel have brought the popularity levels of Bush, Blair, and Olmert to historic lows;¹¹ with Canada's war in Afghanistan struggling to gain the acceptance of the Canadian electorate. Something's got to give; and with the publication of Canada's COIN document, it seems like what is in store for Canada is even greater doses of militarism.

Part I of a two part article.

Parti II: Putting Canada's Counter-Insurgency Doctrine into Perspective

Notes

1 According to a recent article by Jon Elmer, the 'Draft' version of Canada's counter-insurgency doctrine was first obtained by the Inter-Press Service. I have attached a copy in .pdf form to this article.

Also see two-part series by Jon Elmer and Anthony Fenton concerning the document, 'Canada: Development Aid as a Counter-Insurgency Tool', Part I (27 March 2007), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=ELM20070327&articleId=5176>; Part II (28 March 2007), available at <http://www.dominionpaper.ca/articles/1092>. Elmer and Fenton also have a forthcoming book detailing Canadian foreign policy more broadly, entitled *The Afghanistan Adventure: Canada's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century*

2 'Peacekeeping', Wikipedia.org, Accessed: 26 April 2007.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peacekeeping>.

3 'Draft' document of Canada's counter-insurgency doctrine (COIN). P.11.

4 COIN, p.139.

5 *Ibid*, p.51.

6 Yves Engler and Anthony Fenton. *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Democracy in Haiti*. Fernwood Publishing: Black Point, 2006

7 COIN, p.57.

8 *Ibid*, p.67.

9 'Canadian Police Officers Head for Jordan to Train Iraqi Police'. RCMP Website.
http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/news/2004/n_0401_e.htm.

10 See Part I of Elmer and Fenton article for this reference, derived from a statement offered by RCMP's director general of international policing David Beer.

11 Michael Carmichael, 'Suicidal Statecraft' (4 April 2007), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=20070404&articleId=5273>.

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