

A Helping Hand or Hidden Burden: Examining the Effects of External Support on the Success of Foreign Insurgent Movements
Brandon Brooks

Abstract

How crucial is external support to the success of the armed movement? Building on the existing literature on insurgency and principle-agent theory, this paper argues that the mere provision of external assistance to an insurgency is a poor indicator for assessing the likelihood of the rebels' success. This paper begins with a brief examination of the different variations in external support for an insurgency, defined here in accordance with the US Government's Counterinsurgency Guide as a non-state armed group's "use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify or challenge political control of a region." It then proceeds to investigate the short and long-term impact of such assistance on the insurgency's ability to wage war and advance its political interests, analyzing the experiences of such renowned revolutionaries as Mao Zedong and Ernesto Che Guevara. The final sections discuss the determinants of success for an insurgency and the limitations of external support.

Keywords: insurgency, counterinsurgency, principle-agent theory, non-state actors, civil war, Mao Zedong, Che Guevara

Introduction

External support can be of critical use to insurgencies, providing resources essential to sustaining the latter's struggle against an opposing national government or foreign occupying power. But how crucial is such assistance to the success of the armed movement? Building on the existing literature on insurgency and principle-agent theory, this paper argues that the mere provision of external assistance to an insurgency is a poor indicator for assessing the likelihood of the rebels' success. The average insurgent movement is generally incapable of decisively defeating its adversary in direct military confrontations, yet engaging in protracted military struggle requires a level of discipline that appears to be lacking in many organizations. What then determines the likelihood of an insurgent's success? Whether or not an uprising is ultimately successful depends on factors internal to the insurgent movement: organizational cohesion, innovative leadership, and an appealing political ideology. In short,

groups that are unable to operate in unison, respond to changes in their operational environment, and generate support within the general public – or at the very least, specific constituencies within the latter – are destined for failure, regardless of the resources at their disposal.

While scholars often associate external support with state sponsorship, this paper conceives of the term in a much broader sense, which encompasses the actions of private citizens and non-state armed groups. Much like their state proxies, the latter may offer a range of resources of interest to insurgent movements, from financing and weapons to recruits willing to take up arms in support of the military struggle.

This paper begins with a brief examination of the different variations in external support for an insurgency, defined here in accordance with the US Government’s Counterinsurgency Guide as a non-state armed group’s “use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify or challenge political control of a region.”¹ It then proceeds to investigate the short and long-term impact of such assistance on the insurgency’s ability to wage war and advance its political interests, analyzing the experiences of such renowned revolutionaries as Mao Zedong and Ernesto Che Guevara. The final sections discuss the determinants of success for an insurgency and the limitations of external support.

Defining External Assistance

Perhaps the most well-known form of external support to an insurgency is state patronage. Under this relationship, a nation-state (the principal) provides political, logistical, and/or military support to a foreign armed movement (the agent). According to principal-agent theorists, states engage in this behavior for two reasons. Daniel Byman and Sarah Kreps insist that sponsoring insurgent groups allows the principle to project power abroad while minimizing the likelihood of it becoming embroiled in a direct military confrontation with an opposing state.² Idean Salehyan, Kristian Gleditsch, and David Cunningham, largely concur with this assessment, arguing that state patronage is less taxing on the state’s coffers, and avoids

¹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, “U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide” (Government Publication, Washington D.C., 2009), 2.

² Daniel Byman and Sarah E. Kreps. “Agents of Destruction? Applying Principal-Agent Analysis to State-Sponsored Terrorism,” *International Studies Perspectives* 11, no. 1 (2010): 1-2, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2009.00389.x>.

incurring the political blowback that often results from engaging in a costly military struggle.³ Such actions are not without risks, and may incentivize the agent to engage in reckless behavior that directly conflicts with the interests of the principal.⁴ Nonetheless, states appear to have concluded that the benefits of sponsoring foreign armed groups outweigh the risks of doing so.

Admittedly, it is hard to overstate the significance of state-sponsored insurgency. Indeed, at the same time that interstate conflict has receded from the global sphere, state-sponsored insurgency appears to have become a normal aspect of contemporary intrastate wars, influencing such disparate conflicts as that in Afghanistan, eastern Congo, and Syria.⁵ Yet the tendency to link external support with state patronage has become so intrinsic that Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan use the terms interchangeably.⁶ Scholars may certainly have good reason to focus on this form of assistance, especially given the range of resources which the state may offer an insurgent movement. Yet it is important to emphasize that the state is not the *only* external actor that may assist said organizations.

Daniel Byman and Bruce Hoffman offer a more comprehensive assessment of external support for insurgent movements in a 2001 study published by the RAND Corporation, which acknowledges the importance of non-state actors. Unlike its state-based alternative, non-state-based assistance stems from private citizens or groups acting irrespective of the foreign policy interests of the states in which they reside. This may come from a key civilian constituency sympathetic to the goals of the armed group, such as a foreign diaspora. Unlike states, whose rationale for supporting a foreign uprising is often based on geopolitical considerations, Byman and Hoffman argue that diaspora support for an insurgency is largely based on ethnic or religious

³ David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, "Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups," *International Organizations* 65, no. 4 (2011): 710-713, doi: 10.1017/S0020818311000233.

⁴ Navin A. Bapat, "Understanding State Sponsorship of Militant Groups," *British Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 1 (2011): 4, doi: 10.1017/S000712341100007X.

⁵ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Why Pakistan Supports Terrorist Groups, and Why the US Finds It So Hard to Induce Change," Brookings, January 5, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/01/05/why-pakistan-supports-terrorist-groups-and-why-the-us-finds-it-so-hard-to-induce-change/>.
Furaha Umutoni Alida, "'Do They Fight for Us,'" *African Security* 7, no. 2, (2014): 73, doi: 10.1080/19392206.2014.909244.

Lindsay Maizland, "Who's Who in Northern Syria," Council on Foreign Relations, November 5, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/whos-who-northern-syria>.

⁶ Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan, "Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups," 709-711.

affinity, that is, genuine sympathy for the struggle of their fellow brethren.⁷ This sentiment was purportedly a key factor motivating members of the Irish-American community to contribute money and arms to the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) during The Troubles.⁸

Other external actors may support an insurgent movement due to a shared ideology, one which transcends one's ethnic or religious identity. In this sense, the support which one provides to an insurgent organization is comparable to the support which an individual living in the West might provide to a preferred political campaign, ranging from material contributions to direct involvement. In either case, the rationale for providing such assistance is ultimately the same, to help a political organization accomplish a particular end-goal. Che Guevara and Illich Ramírez Sánchez (better known by his nom de guerre, Carlos the Jackal), for example, both joined leftist insurgent movements out of a shared conviction that Marxist-Leninism offered a means of bringing about a fairer, more equitable society.⁹

Alternatively, insurgent movements may receive assistance from other non-state armed groups. Palestinian nationalist organizations, for example, were known to support European left-wing insurgencies. When members of the Black September Organization took nine Israeli athletes hostage during the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, they demanded the release of Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, founders of the Red Army Faction in West Germany, in addition to several prominent incarcerated Palestinian militants.¹⁰ Like the Black September Organization, the Red Army Faction was known for being fiercely opposed to Israel.¹¹

⁷ David Brannan, Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, and William Rosenau, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), xv.

⁸ Brannan, Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, and Rosenau, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements*, 41-42.

⁹ Ernesto Che Guevara, *The African Dream: The Diaries of the Revolutionary War in the Congo* trans. Patrick Camiller (London: The Harvill Press, 2000), xii.

John D. Waghelstein, "Ruminations of a Pachyderm of What I Learned in the Counter-Insurgency Business," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 5, no. 3 (1994): 362, doi: 10.1080/09592319408423090.

John Follain, *Jackal: The Complete Story of the Legendary Terrorist, Carlos the Jackal* (New York, Arcade Publishing, 2011), 21-23.

¹⁰ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 67.

¹¹ Martin Jander, "German Leftist Terrorism and Israel: Ethno-Nationalist, Religious-Fundamentalist, or Social-Revolutionary," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 38, no. 6 (2015): 457, doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2015.1006451.

External support for counterinsurgents follows roughly the same dynamics. Beleaguered states may receive economic, political and military assistance from other countries, as the United States had provided to the Republic of Vietnam during the Second Indochina War. Furthermore, although a third-party state may wish to retain a neutral stance towards the opposing belligerents, civilians may engage in a range of functions that benefit the counterinsurgents nonetheless. The famous Abraham Lincoln Brigade, a formation of an estimated 2,800 American volunteers who fought alongside the Republican government during the Spanish Civil War, provides one such example.¹²

Assessing the Impact of External Assistance

What is the overall effect of this assistance on the insurgency's likelihood of success? The most immediate benefits of external support are seen at the tactical and operational level. First, external assistance enhances an insurgency's ability to carry out deadlier attacks at a higher frequency than it might have otherwise been able to do without support. This could be the result of an external actor providing an armed group with the basic small arms and light weapons needed to sustain its armed struggle, as Egypt and the Warsaw Pact provided to the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN). The provision of such arms placed the organization at a distinct advantage relative to other insurgent movements at the time that lacked such support and often resorted to risky gambits to obtain arms. In the case of the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya, for example, one of the most common means by which insurgents would acquire weapons and supplies was by stealing them from white settlers.¹³ Yet those whom attempted to do so risked being discovered by neighboring farmers or local security forces.¹⁴

In more extraordinary scenarios, external support may actually shift the balance of military capabilities between opposing actors to such a degree that the recipient may be able to match its adversary in conventional military engagements. Such appeared to be the case during the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, the last climatic battle of the First Indochina War. Following Mao's victory over Chiang Kai-Shek's

¹² Sebastiaan Faber, "Spain's Foreign Fighters: The Lincoln Brigade and the Legacy of the Spanish Civil War," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 5 (2016): 155.

¹³ David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 92-93.

¹⁴ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 92.

Nationalists in 1949, the People's Republic of China began to provide anti-aircraft guns and heavy artillery to the Viet Minh.¹⁵ Realizing that French General Henri Navarre had placed his forces in a tactically inferior position beyond the reach of reinforcements, Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap laid siege to the French garrison, using this equipment to overwhelm its defenses and force its surrender.¹⁶

In addition, external support for an insurgency may also enhance its fighters' ability to evade opposing security forces and improve its tactical and operational decision-making by providing it with critical military intelligence. As mentioned earlier, Morocco and Tunisia allowed the FLN to establish bases within their borders, providing a secure area for the group to receive arms shipments from Egypt and Eastern Europe, and train militants recruited from the growing number of refugees fleeing the war.¹⁷ In relation to wartime decision-making, historians Jon Halliday and Jung Chang credit the Soviet Union's military intelligence networks for giving Mao Zedong an "incalculable advantage" in his fight against Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist forces. As Chiang prepared to launch an offensive in the winter of 1931, the two note that Soviet operatives provided Mao with precise information about the movements of Chiang's army, "informing him of "exactly which units were coming, and when."¹⁸

Finally, external support may strengthen an insurgency's ability to sustain morale within the movement and disseminate propaganda. Consider, for example, the Egyptians' decision to allow the FLN to broadcast messages via Radio Cairo. In allowing the group to do so, the Egyptians provided the insurgents a platform to argue the legitimacy of their armed struggle, reminding listeners of the inferior position to which the native Algerian was subjected under French rule and establishing the insurgency as a preferable governing authority. Indeed, access to mass communications technology would be even more consequential following the climactic Battle of Algiers, when audiences worldwide began to express greater concern over the brutal means by which the French military pursued insurgents.¹⁹

¹⁵ Porch, "French Imperial Warfare," 87.

¹⁶ Porch, "French Imperial Warfare," 87-88.

¹⁷ Porch, "French Imperial Warfare," 94.

François Bugnion and Françoise Perret, "Between Insurgents and Government: The International Committee of the Red Cross's Action in the Algerian War (1954-1962)," *International Review of the Red Cross* 93, no. 883 (2011): 710, doi: 10.1017/S1816383112000227.

¹⁸ Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 96.

¹⁹ Porch, "French Imperial Warfare," 87-88.

Over the long term, these developments may markedly strengthen an insurgency's ability to survive – as Adam Lockyer and Abdulkader Sinno argue – transforming the armed struggle into a war of attrition.²⁰ According to Mao's theory of revolutionary warfare, insurgents may exploit their "monopoly on patience" to gradually build up their political-military capabilities and allow the enemy to wear itself down seeking to suppress the uprising in a quick and decisive manner.²¹ This, in turn, provides the opportunity for insurgents to determine when the moment is right to leverage their newfound might to crush the opposition and seize control of the government.²² The extent that external support can give insurgent groups an inherent advantage over their opponents by providing them with the resources necessary to conduct a protracted war of attrition is still under debate.

While Mao's prescriptions on revolutionary warfare have generated fierce debate among scholars, the assumption that counterinsurgents are less inclined, or poorly suited, to wage protracted military conflicts has received far less criticism. Indeed, at the time that Mao was still an infant, (then) British Army Major Charles Edward Callwell had already acknowledged the military's lack of enthusiasm towards fighting these sorts of conflicts, describing "the quelling of rebellion in distant colonies" as a "thankless, invertebrate" task.²³ David Galula, a French counterinsurgency theorist, echoed this general sentiment, citing a "disparity in cost and effort" as reasons why counterinsurgents are at a disadvantage in prolonged asymmetric conflicts.²⁴ The United States military's senior brass has similarly expressed a strong reluctance to engage in protracted unconventional warfare – sometimes derisively referred to as "military operations other than war," or MOOTW.²⁵ Following the fall of Saigon, John Nagl states "the U.S. military ignored

²⁰ Adam Lockyer, "Foreign Intervention and Warfare in Civil Wars," *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 5 (2011): 2340, doi: 10.1017/S0260210510001488.

Abdulkader H. Sinno, *Organizations at War in Afghanistan & Beyond* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 289.

²¹ Gene Z. Hanrahan and Edward L. Katzenbach, "The Revolutionary Strategy of Mao Tse-Tung," *Political Science Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (1955): 330-337.

²² Hanrahan and Katzenbach, "The Revolutionary Strategy of Mao Tse-Tung," 330-331.

²³ *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, page 27.

²⁴ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), 7.

²⁵ Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 45.

counterinsurgency, and continued to focus on the conventional warfare that had always been its preference."²⁶ US Army General John Shalikashvili, the thirteenth Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was much more straightforward about his thoughts on this subject matter, reportedly remarking, "real men don't do moot-wah."²⁷

Yet this emphasis on protracted conflict and survivability has several crucial flaws. First, the notion that counterinsurgents, specifically foreign occupying powers, are unwilling or unable to fight prolonged, unconventional wars is highly debatable. Clearly, there is a great deal of resentment towards fighting these sorts of conflicts, as Callwell and Shalikashvili's comments imply. Yet the historical record suggests that counterinsurgents are nonetheless willing to see these wars through to their conclusion when they believe doing so is in their vital interest, regardless of whether their opponents receive external support. For example, the United Kingdom spent ten years fighting the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLOAG) in Dhofar between 1965 and 1975, a fact that is even more impressive when one considers its military had only recently finished fighting two additional protracted asymmetric conflicts in Malaya (1948-1960) and Kenya (1952-1960).²⁸ It is also worth noting that four years into the Dhofar Rebellion, the British military would be deployed to Northern Ireland to engage in another prolonged armed struggle against Protestant extremist groups and Irish republicans (1967-2007).²⁹ Clearly the duration of these conflicts was not enough to deter British military intervention.

In a similar vein, although the counterinsurgency literature often discusses France's defeat at the hands of nationalist insurgencies in the wake of World War II, it is worth noting that its military consistently defeated local challenges to its rule over Algeria and

²⁶ John Nagl, "Counterinsurgency in Vietnam," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, ed. Carter Malkasian and Daniel Marston (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 135.

²⁷ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 45.

²⁸ Ian F.W. Beckett, "The British Counterinsurgency Campaign in Dhofar 1965-75," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, ed. Carter Malkasian and Daniel Marston (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 183.

Richard Stubbs, "From Search and Destroy to Hearts and Minds: The Evolution of British Strategy in Malaya 1948-60," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, ed. Carter Malkasian and Daniel Marston (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 113.

Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 4.

²⁹ Iron, page 219.

Indochina in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century.³⁰ Foremost amongst these insurgents was Abd el-Kader, who organized resistance against French rule in Algeria while taking refuge in neighboring Morocco.³¹ Although France was unable to defeat the FLN nor Viet Minh, its successes against their predecessors should not go ignored.

Overall, these episodes suggest that the average insurgency is poorly suited to wage protracted warfare - or at the very least, no more suited to fight these sorts of conflicts than conventional armed forces - even with foreign backing. During the Malayan Emergency, Richard Stubbs notes that many communist militants defected from the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA), citing "internal friction" within the organization, "shortages of food ... an increasing sense of hopelessness," and guarantees from the enemy that those whom surrender would be treated well.³² Furthermore, Stubbs notes that many of these captured enemy personnel would provide vital intelligence to the opposing security forces, motivated by a program offering reward money to anyone who provided "information leading to the capture or surrender of insurgents."³³ It is worth noting that this program was so enticing that some former insurgents even went back into the jungle to persuade their former comrades to lay down their arms.³⁴

Professor Ian Beckett references a similar scenario in his assessment of the British counterinsurgency campaign in Dhofar, Oman. This is especially notable given that the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLOAG), unlike the MRLA, received extensive external support, coming from China, the Soviet Union, and a range of Arab countries.³⁵ Despite this assistance, between November 1971 and January 1975, over 1,000 insurgents surrendered and were reintegrated within the Omani security forces under a British-sponsored amnesty and conversion program.³⁶ Che Guevara's account of the Simba Rebellion in the Democratic Republic of the

³⁰ Thomas Rid, "Razzia: A Turning Point in Modern Strategy," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 4, (2009): 620, doi: 10.1080/09546550903153449.

"The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the First Indochina War: 1947-1954" (Government Publication, Washington D.C., 2004), 1-3.

³¹ John Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare Have Shaped Our World* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 70.

³² Stubbs, "From Search and Destroy to Hearts and Minds," 113.

³³ Stubbs, "From Search and Destroy to Hearts and Minds," 113.

³⁴ Stubbs, "From Search and Destroy to Hearts and Minds," 113.

³⁵ Beckett, "The British Counterinsurgency Campaign in Dhofar," 247.

³⁶ Beckett, "The British Counterinsurgency Campaign in Dhofar," 183.

Congo similarly casts doubt on an insurgent's willingness to fight a protracted struggle despite receiving external assistance, remarking (somewhat bitterly) "I always warned that the war would last three to five years, but no one believed it. They were all inclined to dream of a triumphal march."³⁷ It should come as no surprise that the rebellion quickly faltered.

Second, associating conflict duration and survivability on the outcome of an armed uprising risks overlooking the possibility that an insurgency may be active but making minimal to no progress towards achieving its political goals. Effective insurgent movements must be able to, at the very least, mobilize targeted segments within the local populace and impose costs upon its adversary for resisting its political demands.³⁸ These costs could be induced militarily, as in the famous "casualties hypothesis" supported by Edward Luttwak and Scott Gartner. According to this theory, public support for a country's intervention in a foreign conflict will decline as the number of casualties sustained over the course of said war increases.³⁹ Alternatively, these costs may be imposed economically or psychologically. The PIRA's bombing campaign in the United Kingdom and continental Europe during the early 1970s appeared to exemplify an attempt to impose the latter, intending to undermine the public's sense of security.⁴⁰ Regardless of how these costs are imposed, the intended rationale is the same: to increase public pressure on the government to give in to its demands.

In summary, external support may strengthen an insurgency's military capabilities and resiliency, but this is generally not sufficient enough to guarantee the movement's success. On the contrary, the success of an insurgency depends not on the actions of external actors, but on three essential features internal to the movement: organizational cohesion, innovative leadership, and an appealing political ideology. All three are necessary to protect the legitimacy of the armed struggle, help the insurgency adapt to the environment within which it is operating, and mobilize targeted audiences (both

³⁷ Guevara, *The African Dream*, 230.

³⁸ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 4.

³⁹ Edward N. Luttwak, "A Post-Heroic Military Policy: The New Season of Bellicosity," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 4 (1996).

Scott Sigmund Gartner, "The Multiple Effects of Casualties of Public Support for War: An Experimental Approach," *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 1, (2008): 95, doi: 10.1017/S0003055408080027.

⁴⁰ Richard Iron, "Britain's Longest War: Northern Ireland 1967-2007," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, ed. Carter Malkasian and Daniel Marston (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 164.

foreign and domestic) to support the uprising. When such conditions are met, and the only issue is a lack of resources, external assistance is the most impactful.

Research by Abdulkader Sinno appears to largely confirm this assessment. After examining the outcomes of intrastate wars in the Americas, Middle East, and South Asia between the end of World War II and the end of 2001, Sinno finds that “well-structured organizations with no outside support are three times more likely to survive by the end of the conflict than badly structured organizations with abundant support.”⁴¹

The Determinants of Success in Insurgency

The outcome of the aforementioned rebellions in Dhofar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are textbook examples of the ramifications of systematic failures in organization and leadership. While PFLOAG’s embrace of Marxism may have further endeared it to its patrons in China and the Soviet Union, this decision created an irreconcilable chasm between the insurgency’s leadership and the local populace, whose society had been traditionally oriented around Islam and tribalism, both of which were incompatible with Marxist doctrine.⁴² This split also compromised the unity of the armed group, fueling rivalries which the British would later exploit to persuade many of its combatants to defect.⁴³

Similarly, in the final remarks of his diary detailing his experiences fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Che Guevara blames the insurgency’s failure on poor leadership, a lack of political education, and a general sense of indiscipline and rapaciousness. Congolese insurgents, according to Che, “rarely obey any orders from above, and their vision hardly extends beyond their own particular enclave.”⁴⁴ In addition, Che alleges the existing local dynamics among the rural Congolese deprived the insurgents of an audience receptive to its socialist ideology, writing “we could not speak here of dividing up the land in an agrarian reform, because everyone could see that it was already divided.”⁴⁵ Indeed, Che appears to concede the primacy of these factors in determining the conflict’s outcome over the material support that Belgium and the

⁴¹ Sinno, *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond*, 289.

⁴² Beckett, “The British Counterinsurgency Campaign in Dhofar,” 182.

⁴³ Beckett, “The British Counterinsurgency Campaign in Dhofar,” 182-83.

⁴⁴ Guevara, *The African Dream*, 224-228.

⁴⁵ Guevara, *The African Dream*, 223.

United States provided to the Congolese government, admitting that “in general, the Liberation Army has better infantry weapons than [Congolese Commander in Chief Moïse] Tshombe’s army.”⁴⁶

Here, it is important to acknowledge that successful insurgencies do not necessarily have to have a fixed organizational structure or coherent political ideology at the start of an armed uprising. War is a dynamic process, and as insurgencies gain more experience in this endeavor many will make changes to their senior leadership or ideological orientation to better adapt to their operational environment. Douglas Porch, a military historian at the Naval Postgraduate School, notes that at the beginning of the Algerian War, the FLN exhibited a poor organizational structure, a lack of a coherent ideology, and suffered on account of poor logistics.⁴⁷ Only gradually did the group develop into a formidable adversary with an effective political-administrative structure capable of resisting French counterinsurgency measures. In cases such as this, external support may help soften the blow from setbacks that might otherwise have been fatal to an organization lacking such assistance, thereby providing the insurgency more time to organize itself. Yet in order for this to work, insurgents must be cognizant enough to take advantage of this opportunity. The FLN appeared to have recognized this; Che’s comrades apparently did not.

Alternatively, external actors could help foster better cohesion and leadership within the insurgent movement. In the early years of the Chinese Civil War, the Soviet Union would occasionally interfere in the internal affairs of the Chinese Communist Party to resolve disputes between rival factions. On one such occasion, the Soviet Union intervened on Mao’s behalf to restore his position as commander of a Red Army brigade after his subordinates voted to relieve him of command and reinstate his rival, Zhu De, as commanding officer.⁴⁸ Although Mao may have been unpopular – drawing criticism from his comrades for showing “dictatorial” tendencies and being fond of abusing people – his accomplishments on the battlefield, coupled with Zhu’s struggles to command effectively, persuaded Moscow to side in his favor.⁴⁹ Given Mao would later lead the Chinese Communists to victory, it seems the Soviet Union made the right choice.

⁴⁶ Guevara, *The African Dream*, 229.

⁴⁷ Porch, “French Imperial Warfare,” 122-123.

⁴⁸ Chang and Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, 81-88.

⁴⁹ Chang and Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, 83-86.

The Limitations of External Assistance

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that external support does not come without risks. In accepting assistance from external actors, insurgents run the risk of becoming dependent on the former to sustain the armed struggle. This is not lost on state sponsors, who have leveraged their assistance to sanction recalcitrant organizations. Georgetown University's Timothy Wickham-Crowley suggests the Cuban government's decision to reduce its support for Latin American insurgencies in the late 1960s was influenced by its frustration with many of these groups' leaders, particularly Douglas Bravo of Venezuela's Armed Forces of National Liberation.⁵⁰ The famous "Black September" confrontation between the Jordanian government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1970 offers a more dramatic example of the tumultuous relationships that may exist between external actors and their clients. After initially granting the PLO refuge within his country, Jordanian King Hussein bin Talal ordered a brutal crackdown on the organization, a move allegedly influenced by the desire to distance the kingdom from the group's reckless attacks against Israel (whose military would often strike Jordan in retaliation).⁵¹ Although the PLO was able to recover, the king's actions caused a huge setback for the organization.

Conclusion

External support may offer an insurgency a significant advantage in an armed struggle, relative to organizations that do not receive such assistance, providing logistical, military, and political resources that might otherwise have been unavailable to the movement. While recipients of such aid may exhibit greater resiliency and stronger military capabilities, the historical record indicates that the mere provision of external assistance does not dramatically alter the likelihood that the uprising will succeed. Counterinsurgents have demonstrated they are more than willing to fight protracted struggles (however begrudgingly) against insurgent movements when doing so is in their vital interest, and certain forms of external assistance may

⁵⁰ Timothy Wickham-Crowley, "Two 'Waves' of Guerilla-Movement Organizing in Latin America, 1956-1990," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 1 (2014): 225, doi: 10.1017/S0010417513000674.

⁵¹ Iris Fruchter-Ronen, "Black September: The 1970-71 Events and Their Impact on the Formation of Jordanian National Identity," *Civil Wars* 10, no. 3 (2008): 249-250, doi: 10.1080/13698240802167991.

incur more risks to the insurgency than benefits overall. Simply put, the outcome of an intrastate conflict is ultimately decided by the belligerents, and their capacity to pressure the opposition into giving in to their demands. Insurgencies that possess an appealing ideology, strong internal cohesion, and innovative leaders are better positioned to do this than groups that lack such qualities.