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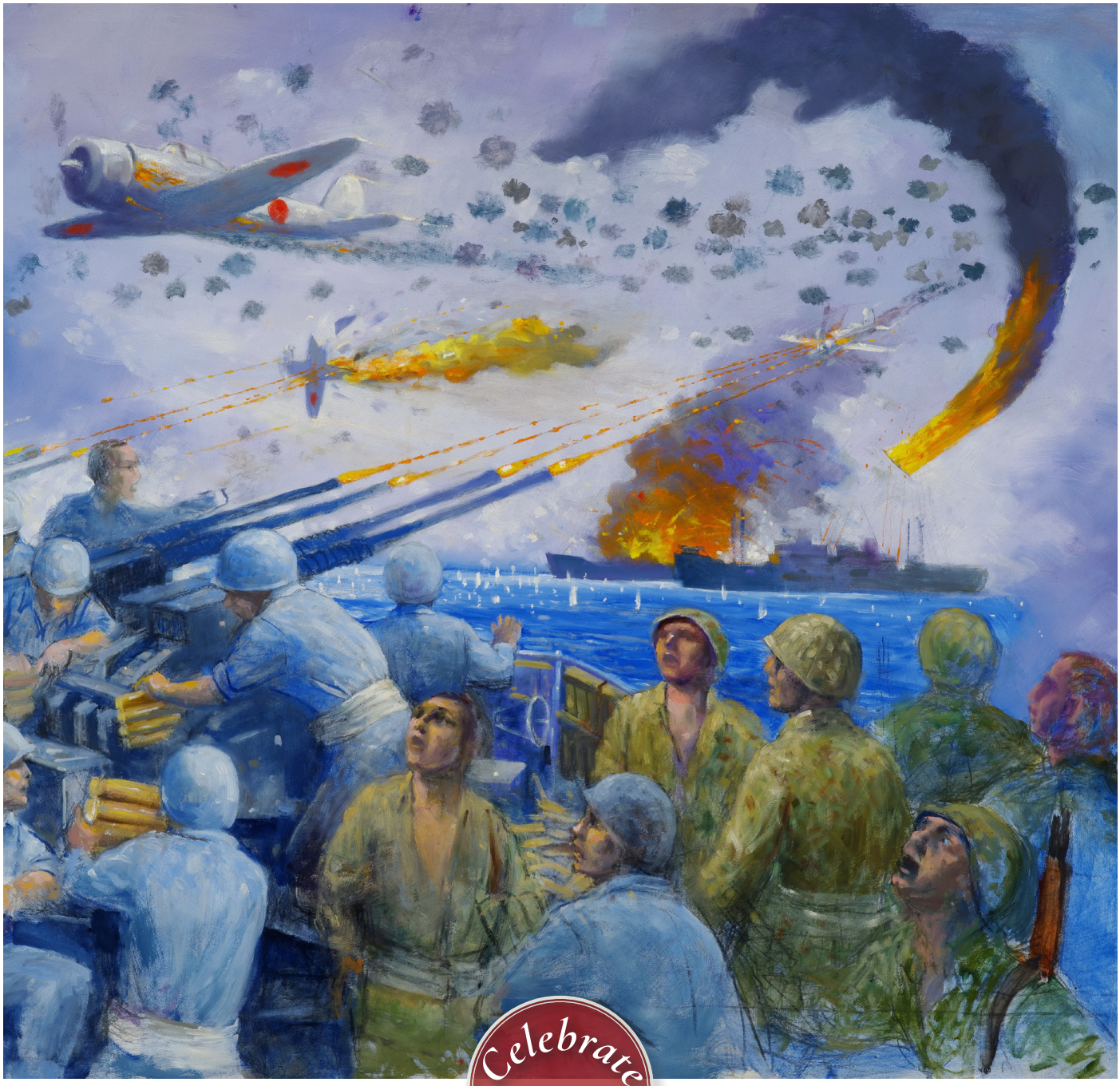

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Missed Opportunities

KENNEDY, THE MARINE CORPS, AND COUNTERINSURGENCY, 1961–1963

By Nathan R. Packard, PhD

Abstract: This article examines the U.S. Marine Corps' response to President John F. Kennedy's pledge to counter Communist inroads in the developing world and attempts to reconcile competing historiographic interpretations of the Marine Corps' response to counterinsurgency. Clarifying the relationship between Kennedy, the Marine Corps, and counterinsurgency sheds light on U.S. civil-military relations during a pivotal period of the Cold War.

Keywords: antiguerrilla warfare, civil-military relations, counterinsurgency, Flexible Response, General David M. Shoup, Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, Marine Corps Concept, population-centric counterinsurgency, small wars, slippage, Vietnam War

> This is another type of war, new in its intensity. . . . It requires in those situations where we must counter it, and these are the kinds of challenges that will be before us in the next decade if freedom is to be saved, a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training.
>
> ~ John F. Kennedy[1]

> The Counterinsurgency business. . . . The Marines knew it was going to go away. Of all the services, the Navy and Marines were the most obtuse, and the Marines most obtuse of all. "Hell, we've been to Nicaragua, we know all about that jazz. We don't need any special individual in our outfit"—and they never had one. They paid the President of the United States lip service.
>
> ~Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, USMC (Ret)[2]

Introduction

During his inaugural address, President John F. Kennedy declared that "the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans" who were prepared to "pay any price, bear any burden, [and] meet any hardship" to ensure the furtherance of freedom around the world. He identified the Third World as a pivotal battleground in the "long twilight struggle" between the Communist Bloc and the Free World and pledged the full support of the United States for "those people in the huts and villages of half the globe" struggling to break free from colonialism and poverty.[3] Kennedy's

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[1] John F. Kennedy, "Remarks at West Point to the Graduating Class of the U.S. Military Academy," 6 June 1962, JFKL, accessed 10 January 2010.

[2] Session 4, tape 1, Victor H. Krulak, interview with Benis M. Frank, 1973, transcript (Oral History Section, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA), 188, hereafter Krulak oral history.

[3] Inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy, Washington, DC, 20 January 1961, John F. Kennedy Library (JFKL).

activist approach to the Third World would be a defining feature of his presidency.[4] This article examines the U.S. Marine Corps' response to President Kennedy's call for action.[5]

Sometimes referred to as "State Department troops" and "the pointy end of the spear in America's foreign policy," the Marine Corps has long served as Washington's favored instrument for influencing events in the non-European world.[6] During the 150 years preceding Kennedy's inauguration, presidents from Thomas Jefferson to Dwight D. Eisenhower dispatched Marines on more than 100 occasions to achieve foreign policy objectives from Port-au-Prince to Shanghai and many locales in between. The length of these deployments ran from a single day in some instances to nearly two decades in the case of Haiti, with the missions assigned ranging from the hasty evacuation of U.S. citizens to the long-term administration of Caribbean countries. As a maritime nation, the United States repeatedly called on the expeditionary forces of the Marine Corps to project power around the globe and resolve situations that fell in the gray area between diplomacy and formal declarations of war. Thus, when it came to countering communist inroads in the developing world, the Kennedy administration turned, in part, to the Marine Corps for a solution.

Clarifying the relationship between Kennedy, the Marine Corps, and counterinsurgency sheds light on U.S. civil-military relations during a pivotal period of the Cold War. This paper attempts to reconcile competing historiographic interpretations of the Marine Corps' response to counterinsurgency. Some historians have argued that the Marine Corps' small wars heritage and innovative streak made it uniquely suited for counterinsurgency-type missions. Andrew Krepinevich, for example, argued in his now-classic *The Army and Vietnam* that "a history of Marine participation in small wars had given them a background in the type of conflict environment they faced in South Vietnam" where "they put their doctrine into practice."[7] As evidence, most cite the Corps' use of Combined Action Platoons (CAPs), small groups of Marines assigned to live in Vietnamese villages whose primary task was protecting Vietnamese villagers rather than engaging enemy units in combat.[8]

Conversely, other experts contend that the Marine Corps resisted counterinsurgency during the Kennedy era. As a result, it was no more prepared than the other Services when dispatched to Vietnam in large numbers beginning in 1965. Allan Millett, a Marine officer during the Kennedy years and leading authority on the history of the Marine Corps, observed that "the counterinsurgency movement did not budge the Corps from its commitment to amphibious warfare," but for one exception, "no senior Marine general embraced the mission," and that the Marine Corps considered counterinsurgency "Army business."[9] Michael E. Peterson provides a similar perspective in *The Combined Action Platoons: The U.S. Marines' Other War in Vietnam*. Peterson holds that the Marine Corps' preparations, or lack thereof, had little bearing on the Vietnam conflict during the Kennedy years. The Marines employed tactics based on experiences on the ground rather than its small wars history or pre-1965 developments. Peterson argues that the small num-

[4] This essay uses the definition of the *Third World* provided in David S. Painter, "Research Note: Explaining U.S. Relations with the Third World," *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 526: "Latin America and the Caribbean; East, South, and Southeast Asia, with the exception of Japan; the Middle East and North Africa, except for Israel; and sub-Sahara Africa." Although nations in this category are diverse, as Painter points out, they share many similarities—poverty, colonial heritage, non-European ethnic origins, and relative poverty—that make the Third World a useful concept for understanding certain aspects of U.S. foreign relations. Other scholars who use a similar framework include Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945–80* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); and Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511817991.

[5] The author would like to thank Cavender Sutton for providing valuable insights on the topic.

[6] Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 261; and Tom Clancy, *Marine: A Guided Tour of a Marine Expeditionary Unit* (New York: Berkley Books, 1996), xi.

[7] Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 172.

[8] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 172–77. For a discussion of the overall effectiveness of individual CAPs, see Cavender Sutton, " 'To Take Some of that Fear Away': Task Cohesion and Combat Effectiveness Among Combined Action Platoons, 1965–1971," *Marine Corps History* 8, no. 2 (Winter 2022/2023): 90–105, https://doi.org/10.35318/mch.2022080205.

[9] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 548.

ber of Marines assigned to CAPs—never more than 2,500 even when total Marines in the country topped 79,000—made Marine counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam "ultimately tokenism."[10] This observation is supported by statistics that show only 1.5 percent of Marines who went to Vietnam served in a CAP.[11]

This article argues that the main reason for these differing interpretations stems from the Marine Corps' failure to commit to any single course of action concerning counterinsurgency, and therein lay a missed opportunity. While refusing to embrace the administration's counterinsurgency program, the Corps' leadership never challenged it directly. Faced with a choice between substantive change and conflict with their civilian principals, they chose a third option: fostering the appearance of compliance while actually changing very little about what they were doing. In the end, this "third way" increased the likelihood that the administration would assign the Marine Corps missions for which it was not adequately prepared. By not offering their best military advice, senior Marines increased the likelihood that the nation would commit resources to an unattainable policy objective—the defeat of a powerful insurgent movement and the preservation of an independent, non-Communist Republic of Vietnam.[12]

Flexible Response and the Counterinsurgency Option

At the strategic level, Kennedy offered the so-called "Flexible Response" strategy as a fundamental shift away from his predecessor's reliance on nuclear deterrence and regional security pacts.[13] Kennedy and his advisors rejected Eisenhower's all-or-nothing approach, known as *massive retaliation*. The new president called for major increases in conventional capabilities. His goal was to produce a balanced military that was able to respond symmetrically across a broad spectrum of possible threats. Flexible Response would allow Washington to counter Soviet aggression with the appropriate level of force wherever and whenever it presented itself. In a speech delivered to Congress shortly after taking office, Kennedy defined the situation as follows:

> The Free World's security can be endangered not only by a nuclear attack but also by being slowly nibbled away at the periphery, regardless of our strategic power, by forces of subversion, infiltration, intimidation, indirect or non-overt aggression, internal revolution, diplomatic blackmail, guerrilla warfare or a series of limited wars.[14]

Only the development and employment of conventional forces could prevent the "steady erosion of the Free World through limited wars." Preparing for such encounters became the "primary mission" of U.S. forces.[15]

For the Marine Corps, the Eisenhower years had been marked by repeated budget cuts and manpower reductions; however, these cuts did not coincide with a similar decrease in operational tempo. The Marine Corps dropped from 225,000 servicemembers in fiscal year 1954 to approximately 170,000 in fiscal year 1960,

[10] Michael E. Peterson provides a similar perspective in *The Combined Action Platoons: The U.S. Marines' Other War in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 123.

[11] Michael Clodfelter, *Vietnam in Military Statistics: A History of the Indochina Wars, 1772–1991* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995), 252.

[12] Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986), 212–52. Pike argues that the Communist movement in Vietnam was arguably the most capable insurgency in military history.

[13] At the time, a broad consensus existed in favor of a doctrinal shift. For a representative example of the military perspective, see Gen Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960). For examples of contemporary academic contributions to the subject, see Henry Kissinger, *The Necessity for Choice: Prospects of American Foreign Policy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1962); and Robert E. Osgood, *Limited War: The Challenge to American Security* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957). Richard A. Aliano's *American Defense Policy from Eisenhower to Kennedy: The Politics of Changing Military Requirements, 1957–1961* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1975) serves as perhaps the best single volume on the transition from the New Look to Flexible Response. Informative accounts can also be found in Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), chaps. 17–18; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), chaps. 5–8; and Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York: Free Press, 1994), chap. 16.

[14] John F. Kennedy, "Special Message to Congress on the Defense Budget," 28 March 1961, *American Presidency Project*, Santa Barbara, CA, accessed 10 January 2010.

[15] Kennedy, "Special Message to Congress on the Defense Budget." The term *limited war*, as used during the 1950s and 1960s, was an umbrella term used to describe the many variations of non-nuclear armed conflict.

a reduction of nearly 25 percent. During the same period, its annual budget decreased by approximately 15 percent from $1.097 billion to $902 million. The reductions necessitated the deactivation of six battalion landing teams (the Corps' primary expeditionary units), slowed the adoption of the helicopter, and resulted in drastic cuts in the supporting establishment. However, while the administration was cutting the Service's budget, it also dispatched Marines to deal with several Cold War–related crises. Such missions included the evacuation of refugees from North Vietnam in 1954, the evacuation of noncombatants during the Suez crisis in 1956, landings in Lebanon and Taiwan in 1958, and maintaining a significant presence in the Caribbean both during the Central Intelligence Agency-assisted ouster of Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 and following Fidel Castro's overthrow of the U.S.-supported Fulgencio Batista government in 1959.[16]

To remedy this deficiency, the Kennedy administration made strengthening the Marine Corps one of its first steps in implementing Flexible Response. In a special message delivered before a joint session of Congress on 25 May 1961, he requested $60 million to modernize the Corps' equipment and to increase its end strength to 190,000. According to the president, the Corps would use these funds "to enhance the already formidable ability of the Marine Corps to respond to limited war emergencies" as well as its "initial impact and staying power." References to Soviet support for Third World "subversives and saboteurs and insurrectionists" highlighted the urgent need for such expenditures.[17] This initial request were the first of many budget increases received by the Corps during the Kennedy years. Although the administration held fast to the manpower ceiling of 190,000, funds allocated for research and development, operations, and maintenance increased to levels not seen since the Korean War.[18]

In Millett's opinion, "Flexible Response could not have been a more congenial strategy for the Corps."[19] He cited Commandant Wallace M. Greene, who reported in 1965 that "the Marine Corps is in the best condition of readiness that I have seen in my thirty-seven years of naval service."[20] Several key figures from the period expressed similar sentiments. For example, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, another participant turned trained historian, described the Kennedy era as the period in which the Marine Corps attained its "highest peacetime level of effectiveness"—a level not seen again until the 1980s.[21] However, there was one crucial component of Flexible Response that the Marine Corps did not find so congenial: counterinsurgency.

To prevent the spread of Communism in the Third World, the Kennedy administration pursed the complementary concepts of economic modernization and counterinsurgency.[22] Advocates of modernization theory argued that the United States could guide developing nations in their development process and build states able to meet the needs of their populations without turning to socialism or Communism.[23] According to official policy statements, by focusing on economic development the Kennedy administration would emerge victorious in "the contest between communism and the Free World for primary influence over the direction and outcome of the development process."[24] However, with Communist insurgencies ac-

[16] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 519, 533, 538.
[17] President John F. Kennedy, "Special Message to the Congress on Urgent National Needs," 25 May 1961, JFKL.
[18] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 548.
[19] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 547.
[20] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 558.
[21] Edwin H. Simmons, *The United States Marines: A History* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 216.
[22] U. Alexis Johnson, "Internal Defense and the Foreign Service," *Foreign Service Journal* 39, no. 7 (July 1962): 21.
[23] W. W. Rostow, "Guerrilla Warfare in Underdeveloped Areas," speech reprinted in LtCol T. N. Greene, ed., *The Guerrilla—and How to Fight Him: Selections from the Marine Corps Gazette* (New York: Praeger, 1962), 56. See W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511625824.
[24] "U.S. Overseas Internal Defense Policy," 24 August 1962, Meetings and Memoranda, box 319, "Special Group CI," JFKL. For a comprehensive account of the influence of modernization theory on Kennedy's foreign policy, see Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); and Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

tive throughout the Third World, the administration needed to protect its development projects against internal security threats. According to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, by applying counterinsurgency doctrine, the U.S. military would serve as the "guardians of the development process."[25] Of the relationship between modernization and counterinsurgency, Rusk offered:

> Our strategy is therefore two-fold and interacting: We must encourage the less-developed countries to move forward on their own as smoothly as possible and we must simultaneously assist in defending them against the threat of subversion.[26]

To be successful, counterinsurgency necessitated "a novel approach" and "a shift in emphasis and direction affecting the entire foreign affairs apparatus."[27] The novelty of the approach—known today as population-centric counterinsurgency—was evident in its focus on "winning the hearts and minds" of the host nation's populace as the primary objective, not defeating enemy forces on the field of battle. It necessitated a fundamental adjustment in how military leaders prepared for operations. During a West Point speech, President Kennedy notified the military, saying, "If freedom is to be saved," the armed forces would have to develop "a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training."[28] Although the president expected indigenous forces to bear the brunt of any combat, American servicemen could expect to risk their lives "as instructors or advisers, or as symbols of our Nation's commitments."[29] Consequently, the U.S. military's preparation for counterinsurgency warfare emerged as key to achieving the flexibility required by Flexible Response.

Although the administration disseminated guidance on counterinsurgency beginning in early 1961, in mid-1962 it issued its formal doctrine on the subject, "U.S. Overseas Internal Defense Policy."[30] The policy articulated the roles and missions of all subordinate agencies and was designed to serve as the foundational document for all counterinsurgency efforts. While it reaffirmed that nation-building was primarily a civilian undertaking, it tasked the military with "assisting selected developing countries to attain and maintain military security" against "external and internal threats."[31] Although indigenous troops were expected to do much of the actual fighting, the policy stipulated that "U.S. Forces may become operational" if an insurgency grew to "serious proportions."[32] Barring such cases, the administration expected the military to develop the doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures for counterinsurgency warfare. Furthermore, they were to make appropriate adjustments to their training, logistics, and research and development programs to ensure a high state of readiness for such contingencies. Lastly, they were to provide trained personnel to serve as advisors for foreign forces.

As with Flexible Response, the administration envisioned an important role for the Marine Corps in its plans for counterinsurgency. On numerous occasions, Kennedy expressed his affinity for the Corps and its ability to fight "brush-fire wars" in the Third World.[33] As mentioned above, he made a case for increased funding for the Corps based on its efficacy in putting down guerrilla uprisings.[34] The Service's history, high level of readiness, and expeditionary nature led the administration to conclude that the Corps would be a valuable instrument for executing the counterinsurgency option, along with Army Special Forces.

[25] Dean Rusk, "Problems of Development and Internal Defense," *Foreign Service Journal* 39, no. 7 (July 1962): 6. The journal reproduced an excerpt of Rusk's 11 June 1961 speech delivered at the opening of the Foreign Service Institute's "Country Team" seminar.
[26] Rusk, "Problems of Development and Internal Defense," 6.
[27] Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1977), 67.
[28] Kennedy, "Remarks at West Point to the Graduating Class of the U.S. Military Academy."
[29] Kennedy, "Remarks at West Point to the Graduating Class of the U.S. Military Academy."
[30] "Overseas Internal Defense Policy," 23.
[31] "Overseas Internal Defense Policy," 23.
[32] "Overseas Internal Defense Policy," 23.
[33] John F. Kennedy, "Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy at Luncheon Meeting, Mauston, Wisconsin," 9 March 1960, JFKL, accessed 10 January 2010
[34] Kennedy, "Special Message to Congress," 25 May 1961.

Events, however, would prove otherwise. The Marine Corps' senior leaders failed to embrace the counterinsurgency mission. Nor did they develop the "new kind of strategy" and "wholly different kind of force" Kennedy envisioned.[35] The principal liaison between the uniformed Services and the civilian administration for counterinsurgency, Major General Victor H. Krulak, later recalled, "Of all the services . . . the Marines were the most obtuse of all." Rather than make substantive changes, "they paid the President of the United States lip service."[36] Why did the Marine Corps resist an initiative with so much high-level attention? And how did it fail to make major changes while remaining in the administration's good graces?

The Marine Corps' Small Wars Tradition

Based on his reading of Marine Corps history, Kennedy believed the Corps would respond favorably to his call for action. The Corps' leaders reinforced this belief. They often presented the Marine Corps' small wars tradition as evidence of why, as an organization, it was already prepared for counterinsurgency and did not need to make any major changes. Of note, one of the first pieces of correspondence from the Marine Corps to the White House, sent less than a month after Kennedy's inauguration, cites expeditionary operations dating back to the Bahamas in 1776, as well as past successes working with "indigenous people of another color" as evidence of its readiness for "any assignment . . . anywhere in the world."[37] Yet, these same leaders, notably Commandant David M. Shoup, were suspicious of nation-building missions due in part to their pre–World War II service as colonial police. These reservations, however, were not mentioned in the official correspondence.

To appreciate the Marine Corps' selective presentation, one must examine its small wars tradition. Between the Spanish-American War of 1898 and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933, Marines intervened in the internal affairs of foreign nations on more than 20 occasions. Of these, the armed occupations of Haiti (1915–34), the Dominican Republic (1916–24), and Nicaragua (1926–33) are the most relevant to the present discussion.

President Woodrow Wilson sent the Marines in the first two cases to restore law and order and protect U.S. lives and economic interests. However, Marine forces in Haiti and the Dominican Republic quickly found themselves performing various civil functions for which they had received little guidance or training. In addition to the military-specific tasks of training indigenous security forces and fighting insurgents, responsibilities included supervising infrastructure projects, reforming the education system, promoting effective governance, and a host of other administrative and economic functions. Similarly, the Corps' 1926 deployment to Nicaragua, although not infused with Wilsonian idealism, saw Marines deeply involved in a guerrilla war that had far more to do with domestic Nicaraguan politics than U.S. interests.[38] The fact that Marines had been involved in Nicaragua's internal affairs almost continuously from 1910 no doubt contributed to the air of pessimism surrounding such expeditions. An internal study of the Corps' Nicaragua experience released in 1958, which drew heavily on contemporary reports and participants' accounts, clarified that while Marines could protect lives and property in the short term, their ability to influence internal politics in foreign nations was limited. Efforts to do so often resulted in widespread anti-Americanism.[39]

[35] Kennedy, "Remarks at West Point to the Graduating Class of the U.S. Military Academy."
[36] Krulak oral history, 188.
[37] W. M. Greene to naval aide to the president, "Marine Corps Experience and Capability in the Conduct of Guerrilla and Anti-guerrilla Type Operations," 13 February 1961, President's Office Files, 1961–1963, box 98, "Counterinsurgency," JFKL.

[38] Lester Langley, *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898–1934* (Wilmington, DE: S. R. Books, [1983] 2002); and *Whitney T. Perkins, Constraint of Empire: The United States and Caribbean Interventions* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981). For accounts that include the U.S. military's experiences in Asia as well, see Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); and Richard Millett, *Searching for Stability: The U.S. Development of Constabulary Forces in Latin American and the Philippines*, Occasional Paper 30 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Combat Studies Institute, 2010).
[39] Bernard C. Nalty, *Marine Corps Historical Reference Series: The United States Marines in Nicaragua* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1958).

From this period, three criticisms emerged that would color subsequent debates in the 1960s. First, sustained operations ashore and long-term occupation duty consumed a significant portion of the Service's manpower. While the number of Marines deployed to each country appears small by current standards (seldom more than 2,000 personnel), it is important to note that excluding the build-up associated with the First World War, the pre–World War II Marine Corps was comparable in size to the New York City Police Department.[40] With two-thirds of its roughly 20,000 Marines serving abroad at various points in the 1920s, the Corps found it difficult to do much of anything else. For example, the large number of Marines engaged in constabulary duty complicated the mobilization process during the First World War. More importantly, it slowed efforts to plan and train for a possible war against Japan in the Pacific, an eventuality that some were predicting as early as 1920.[41] Thus, small wars detracted from the Marine Corps' readiness to meet more substantial threats to the nation's security.

Second, these missions were often thankless tasks, with Marines left to administer foreign countries long after the general public lost interest and the politicians who had sent them died or left office. On the one hand, Marines were criticized for being heavy-handed tools of U.S. expansion, while on the other, they were given little support and then disparaged for having not done enough. Policymakers expected the Marines to bring about major structural changes and were often dissatisfied when this failed to occur.[42] Consequently, one of the key takeaways was that while expectations were high in these types of missions, actually effecting change in a country's social, economic, and political fabric was incredibly difficult, if not impossible. Furthermore, civil and diplomatic tasks were not something that Marines were trained for nor did they receive adequate support from other departments and agencies.[43] Compared to the Marine Corps' experiences in the two world wars—praised in the press and fêted on their return—it is not surprising that the Corps' senior leaders were less enthusiastic about reliving the Banana Wars years.

Third, senior Marines' experiences as colonial police led some senior Marines to question the motivations behind these missions. Major General Smedley Butler was arguably the most famous and outspoken of the critics. After retiring in 1931, the two-time Medal of Honor winner summarized his foreign service as follows:

> I spent 33 years . . . in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high class thug for Big Business. . . . I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. . . . I helped make Honduras "right" for the American fruit companies in 1903. . . . Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best *he* could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three *continents*.[44]

While Butler was an extreme case, he was not the only Marine with misgivings regarding the missions they were assigned. In comparison, one would be hard-pressed to find a similar tract written by a veteran of World War II.

However, the Marine Corps' small wars tradition was not entirely negative. Most, if not all, of the se-

[40] Simmons, *The United States Marines*, 121. The author cites 1939 as a case in point, a year in which both organizations had approximately 18,000 men on the payrolls.

[41] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 261; and Earl H. Ellis, *Operation Plan 712J—Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia*, 23 July 1921, Ellis biographical file, Marine Corps History Division (MCHD), Quantico, VA.

[42] For examples of the criticism and praise Marines received at the time, see Emily Greene Balch, *Occupied Haiti* (New York: Writers Publishing, 1927); and Carl Kelsey, "The American Intervention in Haiti and the Dominican Republic," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 100, no. 1 (March 1922): 166–202.

[43] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, chaps. 7 and 9.

[44] MajGen Smedley D. Butler, "America's Armed Forces, 2: 'In Time of Peace'—The Army," *Common Sense* 4, no. 11 (November 1935): 8. See Smedley D. Butler, *War Is a Racket* (New York: Round Table Press, 1935); and Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987).

nior officers credited with major victories in World War II and the Korean War, including Generals Alexander A. Vandegrift, Holland M. Smith, and Lewis "Chesty" B. Puller, learned valuable lessons in combat leadership during these campaigns. Furthermore, although chiefly focused on developing its amphibious capabilities for a possible war with Japan, in the late 1930s, the Marine Corps codified its "lessons learned" from the era in *The Small Wars Manual* (1940).[45] Considered a seminal document in modern counterinsurgency theory, the manual, much like Kennedy's "Internal Defense Policy," reinforced the importance of nonmilitary factors in counterinsurgency: "The solution of such problems being basically a political adjustment, the military measures to be applied must be of secondary importance and should be applied only to such an extent as to permit the continuation of peaceful corrective measures."[46] In fact, most issues are "completely beyond military power" to remedy.[47] Rather, long-term stability lay in the application of economic and diplomatic means to remedy the underlying causes of subversive movements, typically a lack of representative government and economic inequality.[48] With the onset of World War II, the manual fell into disuse.

As mentioned above, in the early 1960s, senior Marines often referenced the Corps' history and the manual as evidence of its preparedness for counterinsurgency. By that time, however, only a handful of senior officers and enlisted personnel still on active duty had participated in these operations. The vast majority had gained their combat experience in the conventional battles of World War II and Korea. Mention of the manual was similarly disingenuous since it had been out of print for years and was not part of the curriculum being taught to junior officers. Copies were so scarce that in 1962 an officer at Marine Corps Headquarters had difficulty locating one.[49] Along these same lines, Colonel John Greenwood, an officer tasked with conducting counterinsurgency in Vietnam, recalled that the entirety of his "guerrilla warfare expertise" was instilled through contemporary U.S. Army courses and on-the-job training, "not from Marine Corps experience 30 years previous."[50]

According to Michael Peterson, a veteran and historian of the Marine Corps' Vietnam-era counterinsurgency efforts, by the early 1960s, the Marines had "become complacent about their counterinsurgency capabilities" and "turned their backs on their own traditions."[51] General Krulak supported Peterson's conclusions and summarized the collective Marine Corps' response to counterinsurgency: "Hell, we've been to Nicaragua, we know all about that jazz. We don't need any special individual (counterinsurgency expert) in our outfit."[52] The fact that the leading proponent of this view was no less than the Commandant, General David M. Shoup, further complicated the relationship between the White House and the Marine Corps when it came to counterinsurgency.

A Medal of Honor recipient and one of Kennedy's favorite military advisors, General Shoup made no secret about his belief that counterinsurgency required no major adjustments on the part of the Marine Corps, often using history to make his case.[53] Shoup later recalled telling the president that with the help of maybe an interpreter and a radio operator, any "Marine or Army squad, properly trained for what they're supposed to be able to do . . . could do

[45] *Small Wars Manual* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1940). For a historical account of the development of the manual, see Keith B. Bickel, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915–1940* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001).
[46] *Small Wars Manual*, 16.
[47] *Small Wars Manual*, 16.
[48] *Small Wars Manual*, 18–22.

[49] R. E. Bearde to R. Rocheford, 29 March 1962, Greene Papers, box 104, "Correspondence," Archives, MCHD.
[50] Quoted in Michael E. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons: The U.S. Marines' Other War in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 18. In this work, Peterson, a veteran of the Marine Corps' counterinsurgency effort in Vietnam, provides a scholarly account of the subject with insights gained from his own experiences.
[51] Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons*, 124.
[52] Krulak oral history, 188.
[53] Theodore Sorenson, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 607. Shoup was also the only Service chief to serve for the entirety of Kennedy's presidency. In Robert Sherrod, "General David M. Shoup, 1904–1983," *Obituary*, 15 August 1983, Shoup biographical file, MCHD, the author, who first met Shoup as a war correspondent on Tarawa, recalled numerous occasions in which Kennedy expressed his deep respect for Shoup.

any anti-guerrilla job that there was to do."[54] A published interview supports the account the general gave in 1963 and his testimony before the House Armed Services Committee that same year.[55] Asked to comment on counterinsurgency, Shoup responded:

> Hell, we've been pioneers in it—in anti-guerrilla warfare that is. That's what all the talk is about. And as I said, we've been doing that since the days of the Banana Wars in Central America. . . . Any Army or Marine squad properly trained in small-unit actions can make a damn good showing in that kind of warfare.[56]

As this statement suggests, many Marines continued to view counterinsurgency in terms of identifying and capturing or killing antigovernment forces. It also shows that Marines post–World War II expected counterinsurgency operations to be similar to the Banana Wars, despite obvious differences. The revolutionary and nationalist ideas sweeping through the Global South combined with support from the Soviet Union and China made Cold War insurgencies much more difficult to defeat, especially by an outside power. Unconventional warfare had changed in important ways that many Marines failed to fully grasp.

Here, it is important to note the challenges presented by doctrinal ambiguity and unclear and inconsistent terminology. Civilian officials in the Kennedy administration were inclined to view counterinsurgency as what today would be referred to as *population centric counterinsurgency*. This approach, best articulated by French officer and military theorist David Galula, held that the best way to defeat an insurgency was to focus on the population by providing security, economic development, and government services. In this way, the government would become increasingly popular and the insurgency would grow weaker.[57] Military officers, on the other hand, tended to understand *counterinsurgency* more through the lens of direct military action. Here, the work of Roger Trinquier, a French officer and contemporary of Gallula, best captures this viewpoint. Trinquier argued that the best approach was to directly target insurgent networks through a cycle of intelligence collection and military raids.[58] Discussions of *partisan warfare*, sometimes referred to as *guerrilla warfare*, muddied the waters even further. In 1961, for example, Otto Heilbrunn published *Partisan Warfare*, a study of irregular warfare behind enemy lines in China, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia during World War II.[59] Heilbrunn, like Trinquier, focused more on military rather than civil activities, though with more attention on irregular activities against conventional military forces. In hindsight, it would have been helpful had key leaders agreed on a common set of terms. The general lack of doctrinal clarity and the newness of the topic allowed for key actors to define *counterinsurgency* in different ways—ways that often suited their own purposes.

Some of Shoup's resistance to any major adjustments also stemmed partly from the fact that he was one of the few Marines still on active duty who had participated in the policing actions of the 1920s. A journal Shoup kept while serving in Shanghai and Tientsin, China, in the late 1920s provides some insight into his thinking in this regard. He recorded seeing American missionaries, businessmen, and diplomats exploiting the Chinese people in one way or another.[60] He also documented a meeting with General Butler who referred to the expedition, or "Exhibition," as Shoup preferred to call it, as a "commercial war."[61] In addition to registering his disgust at the dis-

[54] David M. Shoup, interview with Joseph E. O'Connor, 7 April 1967, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, 26, hereafter Shoup 7 April 1967 interview.
[55] Robert Leckie, "Raring, Tearing, Cussing, Swearing United States Marine," *Saga* 25, no. 6 (March 1963); and Testimony of Gen D. M. Shoup, House Armed Services Committee Hearings, "Defense Appropriations F.Y. 1964," Shoup biographical file, MCHD.
[56] Leckie, "Raring, Tearing, Cussing, Swearing United States Marine," 74.
[57] David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006 [1964]).
[58] Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Combat Studies Institute, 1985 [1961]).
[59] Otto Heilbrunn, *Partisan Warfare* (London: Routledge, 1962).
[60] David M. Shoup, *The Marines in China, 1927–1928: The China Expedition which Turned out to Be the China Exhibition—A Contemporaneous Journal*, ed. Howard Jablon (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1987), 81.
[61] Shoup, *The Marines in China, 1927–1928*, 110.

respect shown to local Chinese by many foreigners, the young Shoup was also surprised and disillusioned by the fact that he was part of a costly operation to protect Americans overseas who were reaping considerable profits without the burden of paying taxes.[62]

Thus, General Shoup's and the Marine Corps' selective use of history to resist counterinsurgency-related change was disingenuous and a lost opportunity. By highlighting tactical successes without reexamining and presenting the strategic shortcomings and inconsistencies, the Marine Corps' actions made it all the more likely that it would be tasked with similar missions in the future. As the subject matter experts regarding expeditionary operations, the organization's leaders owed the administration a complete picture incorporating analysis on multiple levels. The Marine Corps' statements on the topic of counterinsurgency led the administration to believe it had more military capability in this mode of warfare than it actually did. Perhaps a deeper understanding of the Banana War era would have tempered Kennedy's enthusiasm for nation-building and counterinsurgency. Ultimately, the Marine Corps' use of history gave the impression that counterinsurgency was a viable option that it was fully prepared to implement. The Corps' party line was Marines had done it before and could do it again.

The Marine Corps Concept

To explain General Shoup's resistance to counterinsurgency more fully, it must be remembered that he, like Kennedy, entered office with a clear vision of where he wanted to take the Marine Corps. The fact that Eisenhower appointed him on 1 January 1960 gave him a one-year head start. A distinguished combat veteran known to the general public for his famous situation report at Tarawa—"Casualties many; percentage of dead not known; combat efficiency: We are winning"—Shoup was chosen over nine more-senior generals, several of whom promptly retired.[63] Having performed admirably in several key billets, he impressed the Eisenhower administration with his dogged approach to efficiency and readiness. Coming on the heels of the uninspired commandancy of General Randolph Pate and the organizational turmoil of the 1950s, Eisenhower selected Shoup to effect change.[64]

In line with the thinking of most senior Marines, Shoup firmly believed that the primary purpose of the U.S. Marine Corps was amphibious operations, primarily amphibious assaults, but also raids, withdrawals, and demonstrations. The Corps' amphibious focus was validated in World War II and Korea and written into law by Congress. As Commandant, Shoup's overarching goal was to continue to develop the Fleet Marine Force for rapid worldwide amphibious operations. As outlined in the National Security Act of 1947, the primary mission of the Marine Corps was to prepare for and execute amphibious landings. Although the act also tasked the Service with carrying out any other duties that the president may direct, the idea of being the nation's amphibious force in readiness so permeated the Corps' collective identity that it can rightly be referred to as the Marine Corps Concept.[65] During congressional testimony given shortly after he assumed the commandancy, Shoup defined his mission as ensuring that his Service was "prepared at all times to participate anywhere in any kind of warfare."[66] Called before Congress again

[62] Shoup, *The Marines in China, 1927–1928*, 110.
[63] Sherrod, "General David M. Shoup, 1904–1983," 3.
[64] In Don Schanche, "Return of the Old Breed," *Esquire* (January 1961), the author provides a detailed contemporary critique of the "morale-sapping effects" of Shoup's predecessor. Gen Pate's commandancy was plagued by internal dissension over personnel policies, the mishandling of the Ribbon Creek incident at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, SC, and a general lack of direction from Headquarters Marine Corps. In contrast, Shoup was widely recognized as a determined and respected leader and, in the opinion of war correspondent Robert Sherrod, a "tough Marine Officer in the best tradition." In Sherrod, "General David M. Shoup, 1904–1983," the author quotes Wallace Greene (then Shoup's second in command): "There can be no doubt that Shoup was a tough and brutal individual," but "his type was needed at this time. . . . *Truly a great man*," (emphasis original), 5.
[65] The idea of a Marine Corps Concept is borrowed from Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). According to Linn, "a military institution's concept of war is a composite of its interpretation of the past, its perception of present threats, and its prediction of future hostilities. It encompasses tactics, operational methods, strategy, and all other factors that influence the preparation for, and conduct of, warfare" (p. 233). See also Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*.
[66] David M. Shoup, "Statement Before the House Armed Services Committee," 27 January 1960, Shoup biographical file, MCHD.

in March 1961, he referred to amphibious forces as "a unique weapon" that "we have and our potential enemies do not." It was a "weapon for policy, for cold war, for little war, for big war. The weapon that allows us to project American power anywhere in the world and to whatever degree may be directed."[67] Statements such as these, combined with Shoup's efforts to prepare the Marine Corps to respond to a broad spectrum of possible contingencies, made him a favorite of the Kennedy administration. Thus, the Marine Corps Concept seemed the perfect complement to Flexible Response.

Two key elements of Shoup's program—readiness and mobility—illustrate the synergy that existed between the White House and Marine Corps Headquarters during the Kennedy era. With regard to the former, the Commandant's efforts touched all aspects of the organization: manpower was shifted from the supporting establishment to the operating forces; equipment was modernized; the Reserve component was reformed so that more reservists could be called up faster; and individual and unit training was enhanced to account for a wider range of conflict environments, including extreme temperatures and terrain. The Commandant also paid close attention to forward-deployed units in strategic positions around the world, with the goal of ensuring the appropriate mix of forces needed to respond to a range of crises.

Of note, the concept of the Marine-Air Ground Task Force was refined during Shoup's tenure. This building-block approach enabled the Marine Corps to rapidly dispatch task forces, comprised of anywhere from 1,000 to 50,000 Marines along with supporting assets, for extended operations ashore. The end result, in Shoup's opinion, was "a highly flexible and precise weapon" ready to respond to anything from "a brush fire to a major conflict."[68]

In the area of mobility, the Commandant acted on multiple levels. To improve its tactical mobility and operational reach, the Marine Corps pioneered the use of helicopters to carry Marines to the fight, a concept known as vertical assault. While efforts to adapt the helicopter to military use began in earnest in the 1940s, the combination of Shoup's leadership and Kennedy's increased funding provided a boost to such programs. Similarly, to enhance strategic mobility, the Commandant pressured the Navy to modernize its amphibious shipping both to increase lift and accommodate the helicopter. A staunch advocate of the balanced fleet concept, Shoup made a case for amphibious task forces being just as relevant as nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers; the Navy had to be ready to fight in the littorals as well as the open ocean. Thus, modern amphibious shipping capable of carrying helicopter-mobile Marine units enabled the projection of U.S. naval power farther inland than had been previously possible.

The Academy Award-winning 1961 documentary *A Force in Readiness* provided a visual representation of the Marine Corps Concept.[69] Written and produced by the Service, the film presents the Navy-Marine Corps team as a versatile tool for responding to global crises. Interestingly, the film makes no mention of counterinsurgency, even though it mentions the Service's tactical nuclear capabilities. Approximately 50 percent of the film shows Marines employing direct or indirect fire weapons. While readiness is the overarching theme of the film, the focus is clearly on readiness for conventional conflicts rather than unconventional missions. Since the General Robert E. Hogaboom Board of 1957, the Corps claimed to be working toward building a multipurpose force capable of responding to insurgencies and mid- or high-intensity conflict. However, as the film demonstrates, the Service focused its energies on the latter with an emphasis on building an amphibious force with air-mobile capabilities for employment against conventional opponents.

[67] David M. Shoup, "Statement Before the House Armed Services Committee," 13 March 1961, Shoup biographical file, MCHD.

[68] David M. Shoup, "Statement Before the House Armed Services Committee," 13 March 1961, Shoup biographical file, MCHD. See also David M. Shoup, "The Commandant's Views, Designs and Policies: Guidance for Thee in 1963," *Marine Corps Association Newsletter* 47, no. 2 (February 1963); and David M. Shoup, "Statement Before the Armed Services Committees of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives," 1963, Shoup biographical file, MCHD.

[69] "U.S. Marine Corps, 'A Force in Readiness' 1961 Recruiting Film w/Jack Webb 24984," accessed 7 July 2022, video on YouTube, 25:35.

Viewed collectively, Shoup's efforts gave the administration the flexibility and versatility it had requested. By 1963, most observers agreed that he had come through on his pledge to be able to put better-trained Marines in more locations faster than ever before.[70] The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 validated the efforts of both Kennedy and Shoup. If Fidel Castro's rise to power and the botched Bay of Pigs invasion symbolized the deficiencies inherent in the New Look's overreliance on nuclear weapons, the peaceful resolution of the crisis of 1962 represented a signal achievement for devotees of Flexible Response. The Corps' efforts to enhance combat readiness also bore fruit. In a matter of days, 45,000 Marines were deployed in the vicinity of Cuba for a possible invasion. While nuclear war was averted by the gradual application of military force in combination with diplomatic initiatives, had it been necessary, Kennedy had at his disposal a potent amphibious assault force. In Shoup's opinion, the Corps' "prompt, certain reaction" was the "most efficient and professional" in its history and a testament to the "responsiveness of Marine forces to rapidly-evolving crisis."[71] Thus Flexible Response, of which the Marine Corps' combat readiness was a key component, provided the president with a range of options from which to select to prevent the outbreak of war. Kennedy's focus on conventional forces had paid off.

This success and other initiatives that seemed the perfect complement to Flexible Response obscured disconnects between Shoup and the administration over counterinsurgency. Furthermore, the same Marine Corps Concept that was so appealing to Kennedy also helps explain both the why and the how behind Shoup's resistance to counterinsurgency. As evidenced by its approach to vertical assault, the Marine Corps had a well-deserved history of being innovative and adaptable. Advances, however, tended to occur within the broader framework of the concept. During the early 1960s, enduring commitments such as nation-building and counterinsurgency were at odds with Shoup's and the Marine Corps' long-term organizational goals.

Shoup's feelings on the relationship between counterinsurgency and amphibious readiness were most evident concerning Vietnam. Although Marine advisors had been serving in Vietnam for years and a helicopter detachment had been dispatched to the country in April 1962, the Commandant sought to limit Marine involvement. Instructions he sent to a subordinate commander, General Wallace M. Greene, the Marine Corps Chief of Staff, stated that Shoup wanted the commander to resist calls for more Marines in Vietnam because such commitments reduced the overall combat readiness of parent units.[72] Similarly, a staff officer, Edwin H. Simmons, vividly recalled the Commandant's feelings on the matter: "We don't want to piss away our resources in that rat hole."[73] After a personal visit in 1962, Shoup returned to Washington with "no doubt . . . that we should not, under any circumstances, get involved in land warfare in Southeast Asia."[74] For Shoup, not only were communist, anticolonial movements especially powerful, but countering these movements long-term was the job of land forces, not the nation's amphibious force in readiness.

Pessimistic reports from his advisors in the field also crossed General Shoup's desk during this period. One officer serving as an advisor in Vietnam reported to Headquarters Marine Corps, "Until we face up to the fact that we can't solve by military manipulation and money the problems that are generated by sociological/economic/political factors, I'm afraid we

[70] See Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, chap. 17, for a detailed description of the programs and policies mentioned.
[71] David M. Shoup, "The Building of a Force-in-Readiness," 1963, speech file, Shoup biographical file, MCHD.
[72] W. M. Greene to D. M. Weller, 25 January 1963, Greene Papers, box 106, "Personal Correspondence," Archives, MCHD.
[73] Edwin H. Simmons, interview with Howard Jablon, 27 February 1980, quoted in Howard Jablon, "General David M. Shoup, U.S.M.C.: Warrior and War Protester," *Journal of Military History* 60, no. 3 (July 1996): 527. Jablon is also the author of the only book-length biography of Shoup: Howard Jablon, *David M. Shoup: A Warrior against War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005). While informative, as part of the Biographies in American Foreign Policy series, much of the book's 117 pages address U.S. foreign policy in general rather than Shoup specifically. Jablon also authored "David Monroe Shoup," in Allan R. Millett and Jack Shulimson, *Commandants of the Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 362–81.
[74] Shoup 7 April 1967 interview, 35.

aren't going to make much headway in our struggle for the minds of the people."[75] Counterinsurgency missions could morph into resource-intensive undertakings, thereby making the United States less ready if an existential threat emerged. The open-ended commitments called for in the U.S. Overseas Internal Defense Policy failed to resonate with a Commandant who favored quick, decisive action over ill-defined nation-building campaigns.

At the same time, however, Shoup's steadfast pursuit of combat preparedness and versatility, combined with the Corps' timely response to the Cuban Missile Crisis, made it difficult for the administration to find fault with his stewardship of the Marine Corps. Shoup had to prioritize his efforts in readying his organization for an uncertain future threat environment. Were it not for the escalation in Vietnam, his inattention to counterinsurgency probably would have gone unnoticed. Counterfactuals aside, what is important is that a disconnect between civilian policymakers and their military subordinates is not always the result of an adversarial relationship or opposed points of view. The most difficult disconnects to detect occur when actors are otherwise in near-total agreement with one another. Although he repeatedly minimized the importance of counterinsurgency, from Shoup's other writings and statements, it is apparent that he believed he was acting within the boundaries set by the president. Similarly, no evidence was found to indicate that Kennedy was dissatisfied with the Commandant's performance.

The Appearance of Compliance

The fact that the Marine Corps appeared to comply with the administration's counterinsurgency initiatives further complicated matters. The organization took several steps in the form of training and publications that gave the impression that it was on the cutting edge of counterinsurgency theory and practice; however, as outlined above, critics claimed that these efforts were more style than substance, a conclusion borne out by the existing evidence.

Compared to the advances in support of greater strategic flexibility, Shoup's efforts to prepare Marines for counterinsurgency operations were minimal. Focused primarily on simply familiarizing personnel with the subject, the Marine Corps made no adjustments to force structure or operations. The preferred method for meeting the president's call to action occurred in training and education. For example, at The Basic School—the institution responsible for training all newly commissioned officers—instruction in counterinsurgency increased from zero to 51 hours between 1960 and 1962. However, 51 hours represented only 5 percent of the total instructional hours and 4 less than the time devoted to ceremonial functions such as close-order drill and sword manual. Fiscal year 1962 was the peak year for counterinsurgency training at the school. Leaders reduced it periodically during the next decade before finally removing it from the curriculum entirely by fiscal year 1973.[76]

Furthermore, much of the training offered dealt with small-unit tactics designed to defeat enemy forces rather than the hearts-and-minds approach envisioned by the administration. As occurred with the course "Counterinsurgency Scouting and Patrolling," sometimes the word *counterinsurgency* was simply tacked on to preexisting periods of instruction. In other cases, the Marine Corps included general training under counterinsurgency totals to give the impression that the Service was doing more than was the case. For instance, "Cold Weather Training" appeared in reports under the heading "Counterinsurgency Education."[77] Courses offered to more-senior officers were more closely in tune with the U.S. Overseas Internal Defense Policy; however, time devoted to this instruction paled compared to that dedicated to the conduct of amphibious landings and conventional warfare.[78] While efforts were made to familiarize Marines with counterinsurgency, the level of attention it

[75] J. E. Haffner to E. W. Snedeker, Greene Papers, box 104, "Personal Correspondence," Archives, MCHD.

[76] Basic Course Syllabi, Records of The Basic School, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, VA, FY 1960–FY 1973, Archives, MCHD.

[77] Department of Defense, "Status of Military Counterinsurgency Programs, as of August 1, 1963," Departments and Agencies, DOD, box 280, "Counterinsurgency," JFKL. See also syllabi cited in footnote 79.

[78] Senior School Syllabi, Records of the Senior School, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico VA, FY 1952–FY 1965, Archives, MCHD.

received relative to other subjects must have left students wondering as to its overall importance.

For their part, the operating forces conducted a handful of small-scale efforts to prepare Marines for counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam. In 1961, for example, Fleet Marine Force Pacific rotated small groups of officers and noncommissioned officers into Vietnam periodically for two-week familiarization periods. Also, in 1961, the 3d Marine Division created a Counter-guerilla Warfare Study Group. In 1962, the division followed that up with an Infantry Training Course and a Command and Staff Training Course. The former, however, was only one week long and emphasized kinetic, light infantry operations in jungle terrain. The latter provided 10 hours of classroom instruction. These efforts, along with others initiated by subordinate commanders in the Pacific theater, could better be described as *jungle warfare* rather than counterinsurgency as envisioned by the administration.[79] A listing of all major Marine Corps activities during this period compiled by Headquarters Marine Corps shows that the focus of Marine Corps operating forces in the United States was exercising amphibious landings in North Carolina or Southern California. Outside of the United States, typical training activities consisted of battalion-size landing operations with allies and partners.[80]

Along these same lines, the only other initiative of note was the publication of counterinsurgency-related articles in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, the Corps' professional journal. These efforts culminated with the publication of a compilation of articles entitled *The Guerrilla—and How to Fight Him* in 1962.[81] The volume includes a memorandum from President Kennedy indicating that Shoup sent him a copy that he read "from cover to cover," leaving him "most impressed by its contents."[82] Herein lies another missed opportunity in the Marine Corps' response to counterinsurgency. The authors who contributed to the volume had firsthand experience as observers and advisors in such campaigns. For example, Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith had spent years in Central America and China and was the leading expert on Mao Zedong's strategy and tactics, having been the first to translate Mao's *On Guerrilla War* into English. Other *Marine Corps Gazette* authors knew firsthand about insurgencies in Greece, Cuba, Malaya, the Philippines, and Algeria. While this group of officers was relatively small, one possible course of action could have been to group them in some sort of counterinsurgency think tank.[83]

Despite this resident expertise, at no point did the Corps come up with a substantive program to prepare for what some of its officers predicted was the future of warfare. Although an official manual—*Operations against Guerrilla Units*—was completed in 1962, much like the officer training mentioned above, it dealt primarily with tactical considerations rather than comprehensive counterinsurgency programs.[84] At the same time, the publications released gave the impression that the Marine Corps was a leader in the field. One could argue that by focusing solely on the tactical and failing to inspire any real change, the publications released were worth little more than the paper on which they were written.

As indicated by the title of the official manual referenced above, the Marine Corps conflated counterguerrilla operations and counterinsurgency. The former, based on the Corps pre–World War II experiences, viewed antigovernment forces that were more like organized criminal organizations or rural bandits. The latter involves an adversary more like the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam that is able to offer a comprehensive political program and mobilize tens of thousands of people in battalion and regimental-size units. Part of the reason that the Corps did not fully reorient toward counterinsurgency is because many officers underestimated the adversary and viewed them more as bandits and guerrillas

[79] Robert H. Whitlow, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Advisory and Combat Assistance Era, 1954–1964* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1977), 39–42.
[80] Ralph W. Donnelly, Gabrielle N. Neufeld, and Carolyn A. Tyson, *A Chronology of the United States Marine Corps, 1947–1964* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1971), 43–64.
[81] Greene, *The Guerrilla—and How to Fight Him*."
[82] Greene, *The Guerrilla—and How to Fight Him*," front matter.
[83] Greene, *The Guerrilla—and How to Fight Him*.
[84] *Operations against Guerrilla Units*, Fleet Marine Force Manual 8-2 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1962).

as opposed to competent military professionals. Here again, the lack of definitional and doctrinal clarity discussed above prevented a common appreciation of the threat.

One possible course of action vetoed by Shoup was the creation of specially trained units. After a thorough review of the subject and observing what the Army was doing in this regard, the head of Marine Corps Schools, General Edward W. Snedeker, suggested that the Marine Corps designate teams whose sole purpose would be to train for counterinsurgency missions. In Snedeker's opinion, such teams could prove "invaluable" if the need arose.[85] Similarly, Douglas Blaufarb, a career Central Intelligence Agency officer and counterinsurgency expert, referred to this question as "the most critical question faced" by senior military leaders in the early 1960s.[86] Shoup refused to create specialized units and did not reorganize his headquarters or establish a separate staff to account for counterinsurgency matters. Instead, it was assigned as a collateral duty to an existing staff section.[87] In refusing to make any major changes, Shoup ensured that counterinsurgency would be viewed as just another additional duty by his own headquarters and operational units. With no one else specifically assigned to take ownership of the concept, General Krulak was the only senior Marine whose primary mission was counterinsurgency. The fact that he was assigned to the Joint Staff rather than a position of authority within the Marine Corps served to lessen his influence.[88]

As with the use of its own history to give the impression that it was uniquely suited for counterinsurgency, the Corps' pronouncements on the subject of specially trained units were similarly misleading. Asked to provide a status report of its programs, the Marine Corps offered a document that began with the disclaimer: "No special units have been organized" because "all combat and combat support units receive training in measures to combat guerrillas." However, under the heading of "Specially Trained Counterinsurgency Forces," the document went on to list 16 subordinate commands ranging from reconnaissance battalions to medical and engineer units and even the entirety of the Marine Corps' air component as being trained for counterinsurgency missions.[89] Despite the initial statement to the contrary, the annotated listing gives the impression that the Corps did, in fact, have specially trained units.

Whether the publications and training were an honest effort to familiarize Marines with counterinsurgency, a deliberate attempt to mislead the administration, or something in between is impossible to tell. However, the Marine Corps leaders' control over information and subject matter expertise allowed them to shape the administration's perception of their efforts. Someone unfamiliar with the Corps' structure and history would be unlikely to pick up on the fact that 51 hours represented only a tiny portion of The Basic School program or that Pioneer Battalions and Topographic Mapping Companies had changed little since 1961. In the Marine Corps' defense, one could argue that counterinsurgency received the level of attention it deserved; failed attempts at nation-building were not as likely to result in the significant loss of American lives as would a botched amphibious assault. Differing opinions over priorities, however, should not excuse attempts to cloud the issue to give the appearance of compliance.

Personal Relationships

General Shoup's no-nonsense work ethic and winning personality also help to explain why his intransigence on counterinsurgency went largely unnoticed by the White House. Secretary of the Navy Fred H. Korth and

[85] E. W. Snedeker to W. M. Greene, 20 September 1962, Greene Papers, box 105, "Personal Correspondence," Archives, MCHD. Although a formal letter denying Snedeker's request was not found, the copy in Greene's papers has "no" scribbled next to the portion dealing with the creation of teams. Considering Snedeker's rank and assignment, one can safely conclude that his request would be denied only with Shoup's approval.

[86] Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era*, 80.

[87] L. L. Lemnitzer to M. Bundy, "Summary Report, Military Counterinsurgency Accomplishments Since January 1961," 21 July 1962, Meetings and Memorandum, box 319, "Special Group (C.I.)," JFKL.

[88] The specifics and ramifications of MajGen Krulak's assignment are discussed in the following section.

[89] Department of Defense, "Status of Military Counterinsurgency Programs, as of August 1, 1963," Departments and Agencies, DOD, "Counterinsurgency," JFKL.

Tazewell T. Shepard, Kennedy's naval aide, recalled numerous instances in which the president expressed his high regard for General Shoup's leadership.[90] The only member to survive Kennedy's post–Bay of Pigs reorganization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Commandant fostered positive working relationships with many congressmembers, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, and his fellow Service chiefs.[91]

To an administration very much concerned with appearances, Shoup was the iconic hard-fighting Marine Corps general with a distinctive persona. Known for being incredibly profane at times, "Uncle Dave," as his Marines nicknamed him, also wrote poetry and relaxed by gardening with his wife, rearranging his prized collection of Japanese saki bottles, and playing with his grandchildren. Facts such as these made him popular with the press, who reported favorably on his words and actions, referred to as "Shoup-isms." Shoup ended drumming out ceremonies and the use of swagger sticks. He also reduced his household staff and ordered the cessation of artillery salutes in his honor on the grounds that they cost $4.54 per round. Through actions such as these, Shoup endeared himself to the administration and the general public on a personal level. The poor Indiana farm boy cum general who never forgot his humble upbringing represented the quintessential American success story. Shoup was a valuable commodity for an administration often criticized for its elitism.[92]

Kennedy and his advisors found Shoup's masculinity particularly appealing. The first thing the president said to the Commandant was, "General, I have read about you," a reference to a book written about Shoup's battlefield heroics.[93] According to historian Robert Dean, an "ideology of masculinity" reigned in the Kennedy White House, and the president sought out men like Shoup who possessed the qualities of toughness, manliness, and "masculine virtue."[94] Two representative examples serve to illustrate this point. In early 1962, when called before Congress to respond to accusations from right-wing senators that he had not done enough to indoctrinate Marines on the evils of Communism, Shoup made it clear that he had no use for fear of Communism—or fear of anything or anyone, for that matter: "Fear breeds defeatism, and that is a disease we cannot afford in this country."[95] A year later, on a lighter note, the Commandant sent the president a copy of a 1908 directive issued by President Theodore Roosevelt requiring that Marines be able to march 50 miles in 20 hours. To see if their subordinates "still measured up," Kennedy and Shoup assembled a group of Marines and civilian White House officials, including Attorney General Robert Kennedy, to complete the challenge.[96] Widely reported in the media, incidents such as these enhanced the administration's reputation for toughness and vigor.

However, personal traits would have meant little were it not for the quality of Shoup's military advice. Of note, his role in the Cuban Missile Crisis helps to explain Kennedy's affinity for the no-nonsense Commandant. While other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were optimistic about a military strike, Shoup offered a straightforward estimate of the risks and costs involved. Rather than sugar-coat the situation,

[90] Fred Korth, interview with Joseph E. O'Connor, 27 January 1966, Oral History Program, JFKL, 4; and Tazewell Shepard, interview with William J. vanden Heuvel, 3 April 1964, Oral History Program, JFKL, 72 and 89.

[91] Part of Shoup's professional appeal stemmed from his determined effort to reduce inter-Service rivalries. He also worked closely with Secretary McNamara to improve efficiency and take advantage of new DOD business practices such as computerization and systems analysis. Unlike other Service chiefs, he readily adopted the management tools and techniques of McNamara and his civilian "whiz kids." With Marine Corps readiness as his overriding objective, Shoup cultivated any personal and professional relationships that could further this goal. See Shoup 7 April 1967 interview; and Jablon, *David M. Shoup*, 372–80.

[92] See Leckie, "Raring, Tearing, Cussing, Swearing United States Marine"; Sherrod, "General David M. Shoup"; Schanche, "Return of the Old Breed"; and Jablon, *David M. Shoup*. Shoup's "quotability" made him something of a media favorite.

[93] Shoup 7 April 1967 interview, 8.

[94] Robert Dean, "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 29–31. Dean argues that Kennedy's counterinsurgency program was based in part on a desire to appear just as heroic and masculine as revolutionaries such as Che Guevara.

[95] John G. Norris, "Shoup: A Leatherneck with Homespun Flavor," *Washington Post*, 18 February 1962. For a transcript of the proceedings along with relevant documents, see *87th Congress, Second Session, Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 87th Congress* 108, no. 20 (13 October 1962): 1903–15.

[96] Jerry Doolittle, "Craze for 50-Mile Hikes Started by President's Fitness Challenge," *Washington Post*, 11 February 1963. The attorney general successfully completed the march.

he informed Kennedy that there was no easy way out militarily; to be successful, an invasion would require "sizable forces" and "plenty of insurance."[97] To reinforce this theme, Shoup delivered a powerful presentation to his fellow chiefs. Using an overhead projector, the Commandant placed a map of Cuba over a map of the United States. To the surprise of many in the audience, Cuba was more than 800 miles long, stretching from New York to Chicago. Finally, Shoup placed an overlay with a tiny dot over top of the Cuba map and said: "That, gentlemen, represents the size of the island of Tarawa and it took us three days and eighteen thousand Marines to take it."[98] Of those, more than 1,000 were killed and 2,000 wounded, Shoup among them—a casualty rate of nearly 18 percent. In his estimation, Cuba could not be done in 72 hours "even if Castro met us on the dock and helped us unload."[99] While certainly ready to invade if so ordered, the general believed it was his duty as the administration's resident expert on such matters to inform all involved of the probable costs. Only in this way could the president make a fully informed decision.

Other key personnel within the administration, mainly General Krulak, also resulted in mixed messages on the Marine Corps and counterinsurgency. To direct the nation's counterinsurgency program and "assure unity of effort and use of all available resources with maximum effectiveness," the president established the Special Group (Counterinsurgency) under the personal oversight of Attorney General Robert Kennedy.[100] In what proved to be an interesting turn of events considering the Corps' lukewarm response, Major General Krulak was assigned as the principal liaison between civilian policymakers and the armed Services. As the Joint Chiefs of Staff's special assistant for counterinsurgency, one of his primary duties was to keep the Joint Chiefs abreast of related developments discussed at the highest levels of government. At the same time, Secretary of Defense McNamara made Krulak his own special assistant for counterinsurgency. In this capacity, he was expected to update McNamara and Kennedy in person on the military's progress and compliance. Thus, the general occupied a unique position in which he had direct access to the president, the secretary of defense, and the Joint Chiefs for all counterinsurgency-related matters. Over time, he would emerge as the administration's staunchest uniformed advocate for its counterinsurgency policies.[101]

While Shoup was less than forthright in his critique of the administration's program, the presence of another Marine general expressing a diametrically opposed opinion further complicated the matter. At a time when the administration viewed Vietnam as a laboratory for its counterinsurgency initiatives, Shoup considered U.S. involvement irresponsible and likely to lead to escalation, a view he later recalled sharing with the president.[102] Krulak, on the other hand, sent on a fact-finding mission to Vietnam by Kennedy in September 1963, returned convinced that operations had the desired effect. In a report that he delivered in person to Kennedy, he maintained that "the Viet Cong war will be won if the current U.S. military and sociological programs are pursued."[103] All the advisors Krulak interviewed "were enthusiastic about the progress of the war" and could talk about little else aside from "the war, and the progress the Vietnamese are making."[104] While his optimism was tempered by

[97] Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, ed., *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1997), 181–82.
[98] David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Ballantine Books, [1969] 1992), 66–67.
[99] Letter from BGen Edwin Simmons to Ronald H. Carpenter, 17 October 1997, as quoted in Ronald H. Carpenter, *Rhetoric in Martial Deliberations and Decision Making: Cases and Consequences* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 212. Carpenter, a professor of communication arts and rhetoric, considers Shoup one of the most effective communicators in U.S. military history.
[100] National Security Memorandum 124, "Establishment of the Special Group (Counterinsurgency)," 18 January 1962, in Mike Gravel, *The Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972), 660–61.
[101] Krulak oral history, 187–88.
[102] M. D. Taylor to J. F. Kennedy, "Counterinsurgency Activities of the United States Government," 30 July 1962, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, vol. 8, *National Security Policy* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 1996), 353; and Shoup 7 April 1967 interview, 35–36.
[103] "Report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak)," 10 September 1963, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, vol. 4, *Vietnam August–December 1963* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 1991), 154, hereafter "Krulak Report," 10 September 1963.
[104] "Krulak Report,"10 September 1963, 155–57.

the pessimistic assessment of the State Department official who had accompanied him, Krulak's glowing report confused a situation the Commandant considered fairly straightforward: the involvement of U.S. forces in any way was a step closer to a land war in Asia.

Kennedy was assassinated less than three months after receiving Krulak's report. Only a few days prior, he had asked Shoup to stay on as Commandant, an offer the general declined on the grounds that if he accepted, he would impede the promotions of a number of dedicated subordinates. However, when asked if he would be willing to join the administration in a civilian capacity, Shoup indicated that he would. Due to the timing of Kennedy's death, it will never be known what the president's intentions were or what influence Shoup might have had on the course of events in Vietnam.[105] No offers were forthcoming from the Johnson administration, and the general retired on 31 December 1963. For his part, Krulak continued to promote Kennedy-era counterinsurgency doctrine throughout the Vietnam War. He engaged in heated exchanges with General William C. Westmoreland over the efficacy of counterinsurgency versus Westmoreland's more conventional approach. For the remainder of his life, Krulak would argue that Kennedy-era counterinsurgency techniques had not been tried and found wanting in Vietnam; they had never really been tried at all.

The interactions outlined above show how perceptions can be influenced by personal relationships as well as by proximity to the president. Shoup's popularity and the value of his military advice gave him room to maneuver when it came to counterinsurgency. Unlike other senior officers, he was not required to clear his speeches with the administration, and he was given considerable latitude when it came to Marine Corps policies and programs. Yet, at the same time that he was allowed to criticize, his views were contradicted by the only other senior Marine who had the president's ear. Furthermore, Krulak's genuine enthusiasm for counterinsurgency and his closeness to Kennedy and McNamara likely led them to conclude that the Marine Corps was doing far more than it actually was. There is also no evidence of Krulak ever confronting Shoup directly over the Commandant's intransigence. Krulak was an outlier whose views were not representative of those held by other senior Marines, yet this was not common knowledge among civilian officials.

The Responsibility of Senior Military Advisors

It would only be in retirement, with the Vietnam War in full swing, that Shoup let his true feelings on counterinsurgency be known publicly. In 1965, he launched a determined campaign to end U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In a series of speeches, articles, interviews, and appearances before Congress, the former Commandant challenged both the war and the assumptions on which Kennedy's counterinsurgency policies had been based.

First, Communism was not a monolithic entity that threatened the very existence of the United States. Deriding what he considered to be Americans' "Pavlovian reaction to communism," Shoup asked his listeners to consider that aggressive Soviet actions could stem in part from "Uncle Sugar's" post–World War II encirclement of the Soviet Union rather than a drive for world domination.[106] He also discounted the notion that a civil war in Vietnam, or anywhere else in the Third World, could result in "some kind of unwanted ideology . . . creeping up on this nation."[107] By combining his impeccable military record with his sarcastic rhetoric, Shoup proved to be a powerful critic of an assumption that had undergirded U.S. defense policy since the late 1940s. Rather than seek to contain or roll back Communism, he advocated letting

[105] Shoup 7 April 1967 interview, 42.

[106] John Maffre, "Old Soldier Becomes Underground Hero," *Washington Post*, 2 April 1967; and David M. Shoup, "Speech at Junior College World Affairs Day," Los Angeles, CA, 14 May 1966, reprinted in *Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Present Situation in Vietnam*, 90th Congress (20 March 1968) (statement of Gen David H. Shoup, former Commandant, United States Marine Corps), 47, hereafter Shoup congressional testimony.

[107] Shoup, "Speech at Junior College World Affairs Day," 46.

the peoples of the world do as they please. In time, they would figure out that Communism did not work.

Second, engaging in wars along the periphery hindered military readiness in the event that an existential threat should emerge. In Shoup's opinion, the Domino Theory was fundamentally flawed. Vietnam was of no real strategic importance to the United States: "It is ludicrous to think that just because we lose in South Vietnam that very soon somebody is going to be crawling and knocking at the doors of Pearl Harbor."[108] Furthermore, the conflict's impact on readiness was clearly evident by early 1967. By that time, Krulak, then responsible for all Marines in the Pacific and a staunch supporter of the war, had nearly 70,000 of his 102,000 Marines deployed to Vietnam. It is difficult to imagine how the Corps could have responded to another Cuban Missile Crisis–type event under these circumstances. Even if South Vietnam was of some strategic value and even if it could be preserved, which Shoup did not think possible, he could not see how the gain could "ever equal one-one thousandth of the cost."[109] Thus Washington's entire strategy was fundamentally flawed in that it detracted from America's overall readiness by deploying sizable forces to a peripheral region of little strategic value.

Third, he challenged U.S. motivations on two levels. First, World War II and the Cold War had vastly increased the military's influence in American society, a stark contrast from the suspicion of standing peacetime armies that had existed previously. Massive participation and familiarity with military service had changed the fabric of the nation resulting in a general tendency to "favor military solutions to world problems" and "military task force type diplomacy."[110] This tendency was enhanced by military professionals intent on furthering their interests and those of their Service by being the first to deploy, with the end result being a gross perversion of Shoup's cherished readiness. The Services had become so ready to deploy that "contingency plans and interservice rivalry appeared to supersede diplomacy."[111] In combination with their supporters in industry, the military had emerged as an overly influential player in U.S. foreign policymaking. Along with military officers, Shoup's critique of U.S. motivations targeted U.S. business interests. In one of his more colorful statements, issued in anger after he was not appointed Commandant, he argued:

> I believe that if we had and would keep our dirty, bloody, dollar-crooked fingers out of the business of these nations so full of depressed, exploited people, they will arrive at a solution of their own. That they design and want. That they fight and work for. And if unfortunately their revolution must be of the violent type because the "haves" refuse to share with the "have-nots" by any peaceful method, at least what they get will be their own and not the American style which they don't want and above all don't want crammed down their throats by Americans.[112]

[108] Shoup congressional testimony, 3. Shoup later reiterated his point about the Domino Theory by referring to sending advisors to Laos as "an over-exaggeration of the domino theory, and an over-exaggeration of the effort that we had to put in every place." *The Reminiscences of David M. Shoup*, 29 August 1972, Columbia University Oral History Collection, 27.

[109] Shoup congressional testimony, 19. Shoup's strategic assessment was seconded by noted China expert BGen Samuel B. Griffith (Ret), who argued that Vietnam was not "vital to the security of the United States" and that "the people in Peking would be very happy to keep us bogged down there." Warren Unna, "Ex-General Assails Viet War," *Washington Post*, 12 January 1968. For a more detailed account of retired military leaders who spoke out against the war in Vietnam, see Robert Buzzanco, "The American Military's Rationale Against the Vietnam War," *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (1986): 559–76; and Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511664960.

[110] David M. Shoup, "The New American Militarism," *Atlantic Monthly* (April 1969). See also James A. Donovan, *Militarism, U.S.A.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970) for a book-length version of the arguments presented by Shoup. Donovan, a retired Marine colonel and veteran of World War II and Korea, offers a scathing critique of the defense establishment and concludes: "The American war machine will continue to dominate all other national programs, needs, and interests" and "militarism will maintain its rule over the republic's character" (p. 238). Shoup and Donovan's works were collaborative efforts.

[111] Shoup, "The New American Militarism." Shoup also believed the Johnson administration's apparent "lack of credibility" could be traced to some of the "hocus-pocus" fed to him by the armed forces, which were, each in their own way, attempting to advance their interests.

[112] Shoup, "Speech at Junior College World Affairs Day," 47.

This passage also alludes to a fourth theme, the limitations of counterinsurgency and U.S. power in general. In his testimony before the Senate, Shoup argued that in attempting to remake other peoples in America's image, "instead of winning the minds and hearts . . . we have rather closed their minds and broken their hearts."[113] He would later write that no matter how hard Americans might try, we "cannot impose our will on the political and social order" in foreign societies, for "there are limits of U.S. power and our capabilities to police the world."[114] By highlighting Washington's inability to shape the socioeconomic and political landscape of other countries, Shoup's conclusions struck at the heart of modernization and counterinsurgency theory. His pessimism also stands in stark contrast to the optimism of the Kennedy era.

The intensity of Shoup's opposition to his government's policies begs the question—what responsibility did he owe President Kennedy while still in office? One can assume his misgivings did not emerge out of the blue in 1965. Shoup's biographer, historian Howard Jablon, traced the general's "antipathy towards big business" and "aversion to U.S. imperialism" to his humble Midwestern boyhood during the Progressive Era.[115] The journal he kept while in China and other statements made throughout his lengthy career support the conclusion that Shoup's misgivings were long-standing.

From the totality of Shoup's statements while on active duty and post-retirement, it appears he agreed with historian Eric Bergerud, who held that the primary failing of U.S. strategic leaders was that "they chose the wrong battlefield."[116] Shoup grasped a fundamental truth: the political, military, and geographic conditions in Vietnam favored the communists. A solution to what was primarily a Vietnamese political problem was beyond the reach of U.S. military power. In hindsight, Shoup's estimate of the situation was accurate.

The Commandant owed President Kennedy his best military advice. Shoup's course of action—failing to articulate his views while at the same time giving the appearance of at least partial compliance—limited the information available to the president and made the implementation of the policies Shoup opposed all the more likely. In contrast, General Krulak was the ideal military agent, enthusiastically executing the president's policies. As the president's senior advisor on Marine Corps matters, the Commandant owed Kennedy the benefit of his full and unadulterated advice. We can only speculate about what impact his assessment would have had if he had put it in writing while on active duty with the same intensity that he did in retirement. At a minimum, it would have provided a complete picture of where the Marine Corps stood on counterinsurgency.

Conclusions

Considering the scope of Kennedy's foreign policy agenda, translating rhetoric into action involved multiple agencies of the U.S. government. Consequently, the bureaucratic politics approach to making sense of foreign and defense policy provides a useful framework of analysis. According to historian Garry Clifford, this approach views foreign policy not as the result of deliberate actions by a unitary central government but rather as a product of negotiation and conflict among multiple influential actors. In this model, "the president, while powerful, is not omnipotent; he is one chief among many" and considerable "slippage" can occur between presidential decisions and their execution by lesser officials.[117] Along these same lines, political scientist Peter Feaver, in describing how civil-military interactions occur on a day-to-day basis rather than in theory, uses the term *shirking* to describe slippage in the civil-military realm. Derived from principal-agent theories of civil-military relations, shirking occurs when military leaders, the agents, pursue objectives not wholly in-line with instructions given by their civilian masters, the princi-

[113] Shoup congressional testimony, 20.
[114] Shoup, "The New American Militarism," xi–xii.
[115] Jablon, *David M. Shoup*, 116.
[116] Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 335.
[117] J. Garry Clifford, "Bureaucratic Politics," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2d ed., eds. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas Paterson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 91.

pals. Through their authority within their respective Services, their subject-matter expertise, and their ability to control the flow of information, senior officers can shape policies according to their own conceptions of the national interest. While *shirking* does not necessarily imply a desire to avoid work or an adversarial relationship, it does indicate interactions that are more complex than civilian officials issuing orders and military leaders carrying them out. In this way, the power of military leaders in foreign relations is derived more from their role in execution rather than formulation.[118]

Faced with the Kennedy administration's enthusiasm for counterinsurgency, General Shoup had to choose between compliance and defiance. Ultimately, he committed to neither course of action, opting for half-measures while hoping counterinsurgency would eventually disappear. Several factors—Marine Corps history, the synergy between the Marine Corps Concept and Flexible Response, visible successes in other areas, and warm personal relationships—allowed the disconnect between the White House and the Marine Corps to go largely undetected. As General Krulak noted in hindsight, the challenges inherent in counterinsurgency were "so utterly different" and incredibly complex that it was hard for people to comprehend them, let alone come up with workable solutions.[119] However, by not fully engaging with the problem, the Marine Corps missed an opportunity to shape policies and practices that would bear directly on its future missions. In a speech he gave to a group of senior officers shortly before his retirement, Shoup remarked, "Any group that considers weighty problems is bound to have differences of opinion. Our country will rue the day we all agree on all matters."[120] While there is little doubt that the general wholeheartedly believed this, the relationship between Kennedy, the Marine Corps, and counterinsurgency highlights the importance of each party fully developing and presenting their points of view.

This case is even more instructive in that slippage occurred without recognizable disconnects between the White House and Marine Corps Headquarters. Warm personal relationships and productive collaboration on a broad range of issues obscured that the Marine Corps made no substantive changes in response to a major presidential initiative. Rather than a Manichean case of an innovative young president thwarted by hidebound military traditionalists, the slippage was far subtler, making it difficult to identify and remedy. So subtle, in fact, that a close reading of the evidence gives the impression that the actors involved honestly believed they were in step with one another. This case also illustrates the military's influence on policymaking. Although they do not decide where and when the United States will intervene, how military leaders shape their forces through decisions made on training, structure, and equipment serve to limit or expand the options available to a president.

Of course, the actors involved could not have foreseen how their preparations for counterinsurgency, or lack thereof, would bear directly on U.S. efforts in Vietnam. At the time, withdrawal remained a viable option, and few would have predicted the subsequent introduction of hundreds of thousands of U.S. combat troops. Nor could they have known the degree to which historical interpretations of their actions would inform decisions made in twenty-first century conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. This inability to predict consequences highlights the value of history for policymakers. An examination of similar events in the past that considers the missteps, differences of opinion, and paths not taken provides the perspective needed to assess current issues accurately. In the end, if there is an insight to be drawn from the events described, it is that all parties in the policymaking process must bring the full weight of their expertise to bear on the problems at hand.

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[118] Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 55–60.
[119] Victor H. Krulak, interview with William W. Moss, 19 November 1970, Oral History Program, JFKL, 7.
[120] David M. Shoup, "Speech to Armed Forces Staff College," 7 November 1963, Shoup biographical file, MCHD.