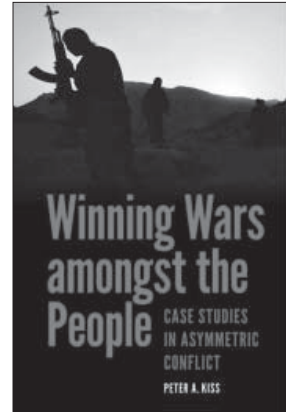


Col. (Ret.) Philip Wilkinson:

## WINNING WARS AMONGST THE PEOPLE: CASE STUDIES IN ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT

By Peter A. Kiss. (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2014. Pp. 256. \$23.96 paperback.)<sup>1</sup>



Peter Kiss proposes that his lessons for the future are laudable and timely for a particular generation of military leaders. While conflict is a normal human condition, the context, ways, and means by which we conduct conflict in pursuit of goals must be constantly evaluated and our resolution techniques refined if our responses have any chance of success. The threat we currently face from Islamic extremists mutates faster than our doctrinal responses, and Kiss should be applauded for trying to throw light on that deficit. Al-Qaeda and its affiliates have posed a very real danger since the mid-1990s; however, the ongoing conflict in Syria and the potential for violence from returning homegrown Islamists expands that threat profile and takes it to another level. Therefore, all attempts to broaden the political debate on this new threat of domestic jihad, whether described as “asymmetric conflict” or not, are helpful.

While it is now widely acknowledged that the response to an insurgency or what we might call a “domestic jihad” should be comprehensive, the examples Kiss discusses shed new light on the challenge.

He emphasises the potential advantages and pitfalls of strategic communications. The persuasive use of the media by the Kosovo Liberation Army was the decisive factor in drawing in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces and ultimately the withdrawal of Serb forces. The use of social media, as a means to mobilize and coordinate the masses, was taken to new heights in the Arab Spring. As Kiss implies, information technology and social media are essential elements of a modern strategic communications strategy of both governments and insurgents.

In light of Kiss’s observations, this reviewer wonders whether he would use the same four case studies today. I suspect the answer would depend on his target audience. While the author looked back to identify lessons for the challenge of domestic insurgency, the specifics of that threat have mutated at a pace almost inconceivable three years ago. In his French case from 2005, Kiss gave us a glimpse of the type of complexity presented by the mob in a modern inner-city context. This poses the question of whether we could now see groups of combat-hardened jihadists returning from Syria to Western cities and attempting to establish and defend “no-go” areas where sharia law reigns supreme. During the 1970s, the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland established no-go areas in Belfast and Londonderry in which they maintained their own rule of law. The troubles in Northern Ireland beginning

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Marine Corps University Journal*. 6/1. Spring 2015. 107-110.

in 1969 make an interesting study on a homegrown domestic “insurgency,” as does the Palestinian Intifada in 2001 that Kiss mentions in passing. While the British Army has a tendency to promote success in Northern Ireland as directly related to their tactics, techniques, and procedures, perhaps the real lesson is that only after the Royal Ulster Constabulary was given the security lead in 1975 was real progress made.

While the author acknowledges the need for a comprehensive multifunctional response to insurgency that addresses both its causes and symptoms, the emphasis of his research is on the military element of that multifunctional response. In virtually all counterinsurgencies where success has been defined in terms of self-sustaining peace rather than military victory, the role of the military may be to ensure that government forces retain a monopoly on the use of organized force; however, long-term peace and stability require re-establishing the rule of law and access to justice, which is the job of the police. Initially, military activities will inevitably involve combat operations, but they must be conducted with restraint as “collateral damage” is the most effective recruiting tool for insurgents. It is not enough for security forces to operate within the law, but their actions must be seen by the people as being legitimate. Kiss was ambiguous on this point (p. 188).

Perhaps it is not within the scope of the book, but from a political strategic perspective, the domestic challenge of today’s counter-jihad strategy requires additional elements than those more traditional to counterinsurgency. For example, a successful counter-jihad strategy, whether in Hungary or any other Western country, must ensure an inclusive form of governance, the redress of feelings of exclusion and disadvantage that feed terrorism, and a counter to the distortion of Islam as preached by those who promote jihad against the West.

This book is not only very interesting for what it says about domestic insurgency but also what it says about the approach that the U.S. military takes to military operations other than conventional war—operations collectively known as asymmetric warfare. The case has often been made that the lessons of counterinsurgency and peace or support operations went out the window like the proverbial baby with the bathwater in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). In this context, the U.S. military’s ability to reinvent counterinsurgency doctrine was a huge and necessary shift, and in this book, Kiss takes that doctrinal debate to another level.

My only disappointment is that the utility of Kiss’s observations is limited in a non-military and international context due to his adherence to current U.S. military language, definitions, and conceptual constructs. But, of course, this is not a surprising result from a recently retired military officer. Others might take issue with three other areas. The English and French, who fought their Hundred Years’ War in 1328–1453, might not agree that first-generation warfare came about after the Peace of Westphalia (1648) or that today’s fourth-generation warfare or asymmetric conflict is not a new phenomenon unless seen in a post-GWOT context. The Marine Corps’ *Small Wars Manual* makes that clear. The use of the strategic, operational, and tactical are seen by many as counterproductive to understand the conduct of counterinsurgency and peace support operations when the “strategic corporal” is so important (p. 181). And finally, as it was pointed out to me by a retired U.S. police chief in the occupied Palestinian territories in 2011, using such common phrases as Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP) is not helpful within the civilian interagency context or even with the police because most rely on their own specific language. That criticism aside, I would recommend this book for students in Western command and staff colleges as a useful addition to current doctrine regarding homegrown domestic jihad.