

The Collapse of Syria: A Case of the failure of Counter-Insurgency (COIN) from Clausewitz Trinity Perspective

Martua Sitompul^{1*}, Afrizal Hendra Wayan Midhio²

Magister Department, Indonesian Defence University, Bogor, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Martua Sitompul Martua.sitompul99@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Syria, Counter-insurgency (COIN), Clausewitz's Trinity, Government legitimacy, Military strategy.

Received : 12, August

Revised : 15, September

Accepted: 24, September

©2025 Sitompul, Midhio : This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

The Syrian conflict, beginning in 2011, escalated into a complex civil war, challenging the government's counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts. This study analyzes Syria's COIN failure through Clausewitz's Trinity, focusing on the interplay between government, military, and people. Using qualitative document analysis, data from government reports, academic articles, and expert analyses are examined. The research highlights an imbalance in Clausewitz's Trinity: the Assad regime lost legitimacy, the military fragmented, and excessive reliance on force alienated civilians. External support for rebels further hindered COIN efforts. The study underscores the need for balanced COIN strategies, integrating military action, government legitimacy, and popular support. These insights offer valuable lessons for addressing future insurgencies with a holistic approach.

INTRODUCTION

The Syrian conflict, which erupted in 2011 amid the broader regional turmoil of the Arab Spring, stands as one of the most devastating civil wars of the 21st century. What began as peaceful protests against the Assad regime quickly transformed into a complex multi-dimensional conflict, presenting an intriguing case study of counter-insurgency (COIN) failure in modern warfare (Phillips, 2016). The Syrian government's inability to effectively implement COIN strategies has resulted in catastrophic consequences, including the displacement of millions, the emergence of various militant groups, and the fragmentation of national sovereignty. This research examines this failure through the theoretical lens of Carl von Clausewitz's Trinity concept, which provides a sophisticated framework for understanding the intricate relationships between government, military, and people in warfare (Clausewitz 1976).

The evolution of the Syrian conflict presents a highly complex case for COIN analysis. Unlike traditional insurgencies, the Syrian situation rapidly evolved into what experts term a "compound war" - where multiple actors, including state and non-state entities, operate simultaneously with varying objectives and allegiances (Holliday 2013). The involvement of international powers such as Russia, Iran, the United States, and various regional actors has further complicated the implementation of effective COIN strategies, creating what Kilcullen (2016) describes as a "hybrid warfare" environment where conventional military operations, insurgency, and counter-insurgency operations occur simultaneously.

The rise of extremist groups, most notably the Islamic State (ISIS), further complicated the COIN landscape in Syria. The emergence of ISIS as a potent force not only challenged the Assad regime but also diverted international attention and resources away from the original conflict dynamics (Lister 2015). This development forced a recalibration of priorities among both internal and external actors, leading to shifting alliances and further fragmenting the opposition landscape.

The relevance of Clausewitz's Trinity to modern COIN operations cannot be understated. Clausewitz argued that warfare is fundamentally shaped by three interrelated elements: the government's political direction, the military's operational capabilities, and the people's passion and will (Strachan & Scheipers 2011). In the Syrian context, this theoretical framework offers valuable insights into how the breakdown of these relationships contributed to the regime's inability to maintain control and legitimacy. The Assad government's approach to counter-insurgency demonstrated a critical misunderstanding of these essential relationships, particularly in its failure to address the underlying grievances of its population while attempting to maintain military superiority.

The failure of Syria's COIN strategy can be attributed to several critical factors when viewed through Clausewitz's Trinity. First, the government's political approach, characterized by brutal repression and unwillingness to engage in meaningful reform, severely undermined its legitimacy among the population (Abboud 2016).

Second, the military dimension of the Trinity was compromised by the fragmentation of Syria's armed forces, with significant defections early in the conflict creating what Lister (2016) terms a "military legitimacy crisis." The inability to maintain military cohesion while conducting COIN operations against an increasingly sophisticated insurgency highlighted the operational limitations of Assad's forces (Pierret 2017).

Third, the people will – the third element of Clausewitz's Trinity – was irreparably damaged by the regime's indiscriminate use of violence against civilian populations. The deployment of chemical weapons, barrel bombs, and siege warfare tactics not only violated international humanitarian law but also fundamentally undermined any possibility of winning "hearts and minds" – a crucial element of successful COIN operations (Kilcullen, 2009). The resulting displacement of millions of Syrians and the creation of vast refugee populations in neighboring countries further complicated any attempts at implementing effective COIN strategies (Yazigi 2014).

The failure of Syria's COIN strategy also highlights the limitations of traditional COIN doctrine in the face of 21st-century challenges. The rapid spread of information and misinformation through social media platforms created a volatile environment where perceptions could shift quickly, complicating efforts to win over the population (Lynch 2016). The Syrian government's attempts to control the narrative were often undermined by citizen journalists and activists who were able to broadcast the realities of the conflict to a global audience.

Moreover, the protracted nature of the conflict has had profound effects on Syrian society, further undermining the government's COIN strategy. Years of violence, economic collapse, and displacement have torn apart the social fabric of the country. This societal fragmentation has made it increasingly difficult for the government to implement effective governance and reconciliation programs, key components of successful COIN operations (Heydemann 2018).

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Power Theory

Clausewitz's Trinity, also known as the Clausewitzian Trinity, is a fundamental concept in war theory proposed by Carl von Clausewitz in his renowned work, "On War". This concept provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex and dynamic nature of warfare. The Clausewitzian Trinity consists of three main interrelated and interacting elements:

- *Primordial violence, hatred, and enmity (associated with the people)*
- *Chance and probability (associated with the military)*
- *Subordination of war as an instrument of rational policy (associated with the government)*

Clausewitz argued that these three elements must be balanced to achieve success in warfare (Clausewitz, 1832/1976). In modern contexts, this trinity is often summarized as "passion, chance, and reason" (Strachan & Scheipers

2011). The first element, primordial violence, reflects the emotional and irrational aspects of war. It is closely tied to the people and represents the passion, hatred, and enmity that can ignite and sustain conflict. Clausewitz emphasized that "the passion that is to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people" (Fleming 2013). The second element, chance and probability, relates to the military and its commanders. It encompasses uncertainty, risk, and unpredictable elements in warfare. Clausewitz described this as "the space in which the creative spirit is free to roam" (Waldman 2017). This element emphasizes the importance of flexibility, adaptation, and decision-making under pressure in military operations. The third element, subordination of war to rational policy, is associated with the government. It emphasizes that war must always be a means to achieve greater political ends. Clausewitz is famous for his statement that "war is the continuation of politics by other means" (Bassford 2020). The interaction between these three elements is dynamic and unpredictable. Clausewitz likened it to "an object suspended between three magnets" (Clausewitz 1832/1976). The balance between these three elements is constantly shifting, creating the inherent complexity and uncertainty in warfare. The relevance of Clausewitz's Trinity in modern conflicts remains significant. Although the nature of warfare has changed with the emergence of non-state actors and asymmetric warfare, Clausewitz's framework still provides valuable insights. As Colin Fleming states, "Clausewitz's Trinity attempts to reconstruct the application of the trinity by focusing on the true trinity of passion, chance, and reason" (Fleming, 2013). In the context of modern counter-insurgency (COIN), Clausewitz's Trinity can help understand the complexity of conflicts. For example, in the Syrian conflict, we can see how the three elements of the trinity interact:

- *Primordial violence is evident in the sectarian and ethnic hatred fueling the conflict.*
- *Chance and probability are reflected in the rapidly changing dynamics on the battlefield and the involvement of various external actors.*
- *Subordination to rational policy is seen in the strategies of various involved parties, including the Syrian government and international powers (Abboud 2016).*

However, the application of Clausewitz's Trinity in modern conflicts also faces challenges. Martin van Creveld argues that Clausewitz's theory may be less relevant in dealing with asymmetric warfare and non-state actors (Creveld 2005). Nevertheless, many scholars argue that Clausewitz's framework can still be adapted to understand contemporary conflicts. In analyzing modern conflicts, it is important to consider how the three elements of the trinity interact and influence conflict dynamics. For example, how public opinion (first element) influences political decisions (third element) and military strategy (second element). This understanding can help policymakers and military commanders formulate more effective and comprehensive strategies.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is a sociological perspective that views society as an arena of inequality and conflict arising from differences in power, resources, and social

status. This theory emphasizes competition between groups, often framing issues in terms of domination and subordination (Sanderson 2007). The roots of conflict theory can be traced to the thoughts of Karl Marx in the 19th century. Marx argued that capitalist society is divided into two main classes: the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (working class). He believed that conflict between these classes was inevitable due to their conflicting interests (Sears 2008). The basic assumptions of conflict theory include: competition in social relationships, structural inequality, social change through revolution, and the role of conflict in uniting or destroying society. Conflict theory has evolved beyond Marx's class analysis, with Max Weber expanding the theory by including factors such as status and political power. Modern theorists also apply the conflict perspective to issues such as race, gender, and religion (Fleming 2013).

In modern contexts, conflict theory is used to analyze various social phenomena such as global economic inequality, racial and ethnic discrimination, gender inequality, political conflicts and war, and injustices in the education system (Abboud 2016). Conflict theory argues that dominant groups use their power to maintain the status quo, with social institutions such as law, education, and media seen as tools to maintain inequality (Holliday 2013). Although this theory faces criticism for overemphasizing conflict, being less able to explain social stability, and tending to ignore consensus (Creveld 2005), conflict theory remains an important perspective in sociology. This theory provides a framework for analyzing inequality, social change, and power dynamics in society. In an era of increasing global inequality, conflict theory offers a valuable tool for understanding and challenging unjust social structures (Waldman 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach to analyse the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, focusing on the failure of the counterinsurgency strategy implemented by the government. The qualitative method was chosen as it allows researchers to understand the complex dynamics and socio-political context underlying the conflict. Data is collected through literature studies and analysis of relevant documents.

The literature study encompasses books, journal articles, and research reports discussing the Syrian conflict, securitization theory, power theory, and COIN (Counter-Insurgency) theory. Through this analysis, researchers can identify patterns emerging in government strategies, author's observations and societal responses to repressive actions carried out by the Assad regime.

Document analysis includes reports from international organizations, mass media, and relevant government documents related to the situation in Syria. Sources such as United Nations reports, Human Rights Watch publications, and Syrian government statements are examined to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conflict's trajectory. The obtained data will be analyzed thematically to identify key themes related to the failure of the total war strategy and its impact on political dynamics in Syria. This thematic analysis

will reveal how the regime's reliance on militarization and repression ultimately undermined its legitimacy and fueled widespread opposition (Haddad 2011; Heydemann 2013).

By integrating these diverse data sources, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the collapse of Assad's regime, emphasizing the interplay between state strategies, societal resistance, and external influences. The findings will contribute to broader discussions on the limitations of total war strategies in contemporary conflicts and the importance of addressing root causes of instability.

RESULTS

A successful COIN strategy requires careful consideration of how these three elements (Government, Military and Population) interact and influence each other. A failure to understand or account for this dynamic frequently leads to mission failure (Kilcullen 2010).

- **Government Role:** The government provides the legitimacy, resources, and overall strategic direction for the COIN effort. Its effectiveness is paramount. A corrupt or weak government can undermine the entire operation, as it loses the trust of the population and provides little incentive for cooperation. Conversely, a strong, just, and responsive government is vital for winning hearts and minds (Galula 1964).
- **Implementation in COIN:** This involves establishing or strengthening governance structures, delivering essential services (education, healthcare, infrastructure), promoting the rule of law, and fostering economic development. It also necessitates transparency and accountability to build public trust. Government actions should be carefully calibrated to avoid alienating the population (Nagl 2005).
- **Military Role:** The military provides force protection, conducts kinetic operations (when necessary), and supports the government's efforts to regain control of territory and defeat the insurgency. However, its actions must align with the overall political strategy, rather than becoming an independent force. Excessive force can be counterproductive, fueling resentment and further alienating the population (Petraeus & Amos 2006).
- **Implementation in COIN:** Effective military action in COIN involves targeted operations, minimizing civilian casualties, and focusing on disrupting insurgent networks. It necessitates close collaboration with intelligence agencies and utilizing unconventional warfare tactics such as information operations, psychological warfare, and civil affairs (Kilcullen 2009).
- **Population Role:** The population is the most critical element in COIN. Winning the "hearts and minds" of the population is the ultimate objective. Their support can decide the outcome of the conflict by providing intelligence, denying insurgents resources and recruits, and generally undermining insurgent operations. Conversely, a hostile or indifferent population can provide sanctuary and support to the insurgency, making success extremely difficult (Thompson 1966).

- Implementation in COIN: This involves understanding the population's needs, grievances, and aspirations. It necessitates building trust through engagement, providing essential services, and promoting reconciliation. Respect for local customs and traditions is vital. Winning over the population often involves offering alternatives that make insurgent ideology and tactics seem undesirable (Kilcullen 2009).
- The Interplay: The effectiveness of a COIN operation depends on the synergistic interaction of these three elements. A strong government can leverage military capabilities effectively while simultaneously addressing the population's needs. The military's actions must be guided by the government's political objectives and aimed at gaining the population's support. The population's cooperation, in turn, makes the government more effective and allows the military to operate more successfully. A breakdown in any of these relationships can have devastating consequences (Galula 1964).

Challenges in Implementing the Trinity in COIN

- Balancing competing priorities: The need to maintain security with the need to win over the population can create tensions (Kilcullen 2010).
- Coordinating different agencies and actors: Effective COIN requires a well-coordinated effort across different government departments and military branches (Nagl 2005).
- Assessing and responding to the evolving situation: The nature of insurgency changes over time, requiring constant adaptation of strategies and tactics (Petraeus & Amos 2006).

Maintaining long-term commitment: COIN operations often require sustained effort over many years, which can be challenging for democratic governments with short electoral cycles (Thompson, 1966). The application of Clausewitz's Trinity to COIN operations provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex dynamics at play. It emphasizes the need for a comprehensive, integrated approach that balances political, military, and social considerations. However, the implementation of this framework in real-world scenarios remains challenging, as evidenced by the difficulties faced in recent COIN operations in places like Afghanistan and Iraq (Kilcullen 2009).

The application of Clausewitz's Trinity to counter-insurgency (COIN) operations provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex dynamics at play. However, the implementation of this framework in real-world scenarios remains challenging, as evidenced by the difficulties faced in recent COIN operations in places like Afghanistan and Iraq (Kilcullen 2009).

One of the key challenges in applying the Trinity to COIN is the asymmetric nature of insurgencies. Unlike conventional warfare, where the military element often dominates, COIN operations require a delicate balance between all three elements of the Trinity. The government must maintain legitimacy and provide effective governance, the military must adapt to

unconventional warfare tactics, and the population's support becomes crucial for success (Nagl 2005).

The government's role in COIN operations extends beyond merely providing resources and direction. It must also address the root causes of the insurgency, which often stem from political, economic, or social grievances. This requires a comprehensive approach that combines security measures with political reforms, economic development, and social programs. Failure to address these underlying issues can lead to a prolonged conflict and ultimately, the failure of the COIN effort (Galula 1964).

In many cases, the government's legitimacy is challenged by the insurgents, who often present themselves as an alternative to the existing power structure. This competition for legitimacy plays out in the eyes of the population, making effective governance and the delivery of basic services crucial. The government must demonstrate its ability to protect and provide for its citizens better than the insurgents can. This often involves rebuilding infrastructure, establishing functional institutions, and fostering economic growth in areas affected by the insurgency (Kilcullen 2010).

The military's role in COIN operations is equally complex. While kinetic operations remain important, the military must also engage in a range of non-kinetic activities that support the overall COIN strategy. This includes gathering intelligence, conducting civil affairs operations, and supporting the development of local security forces. The military must also be prepared to operate in a highly politicized environment, where its actions can have significant political ramifications (Petraeus & Amos 2006).

One of the key challenges for the military in COIN operations is adapting its tactics and culture to the unique demands of counter-insurgency. Traditional military training and doctrine often emphasize overwhelming force and decisive battles, which can be counterproductive in a COIN environment. Instead, COIN requires patience, restraint, and a nuanced understanding of the local context. This often necessitates a shift in military culture and training to emphasize these skills (Nagl 2005).

The population, as the third element of the Trinity, plays a crucial role in COIN operations. The concept of "winning hearts and minds" is central to many COIN strategies, reflecting the understanding that the population's support is essential for success. This involves not only providing security and basic services but also addressing the population's grievances and aspirations. It requires a deep understanding of local culture, traditions, and social structures (Thompson 1966).

However, engaging with the population in COIN operations is often complicated by the presence of the insurgents, who may intimidate or coerce the local population. This creates a complex environment where the population may be caught between the government forces and the insurgents, making it difficult for them to openly support either side. In such situations, providing security becomes paramount, as it allows the population to engage with the government without fear of reprisal (Kilcullen 2009).

The interplay between these three elements of the Trinity in COIN operations is dynamic and often unpredictable. Actions in one domain can have significant impacts on the others. For example, a military operation that causes civilian casualties can undermine the government's legitimacy and alienate the population. Conversely, effective governance and economic development can support military operations by reducing support for the insurgency (Galula 1964).

This interconnectedness highlights the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to COIN. All elements of national power – diplomatic, informational, military, and economic – must be coordinated and aligned toward the common goal of defeating the insurgency and establishing stable governance. This requires effective interagency cooperation and a clear, unified strategy that guides all aspects of the COIN effort (Petraeus & Amos 2006).

The application of the Trinity to COIN also underscores the importance of adaptability and flexibility. Insurgencies are often protracted conflicts that evolve over time, requiring COIN strategies to adapt accordingly. This adaptability must occur at all levels – from strategic policy decisions to tactical operations on the ground. It requires robust feedback mechanisms, continuous assessment of the situation, and a willingness to change course when necessary (Kilcullen 2010).

One of the key lessons from recent COIN operations is the importance of local ownership and capacity building. While external support can be crucial, particularly in the early stages of a COIN campaign, long-term success depends on the ability of the host nation government to effectively govern and provide security. This requires a focus on developing local capacity across all elements of the Trinity – strengthening government institutions, building capable security forces, and fostering a resilient civil society (Nagl 2005).

The role of external actors in COIN operations adds another layer of complexity to the application of the Trinity. In many contemporary COIN operations, coalition forces or international organizations play significant roles. This can create challenges in terms of coordination, unity of effort, and strategic coherence. It also raises questions about legitimacy, as the presence of foreign forces can be a source of resentment among the local population (Kilcullen 2009).

The information domain has become increasingly important in modern COIN operations, adding a new dimension to the Trinity framework. The ability to shape narratives, counter propaganda, and effectively communicate with both the local population and international audiences has become crucial. This requires sophisticated information operations that are closely integrated with other aspects of the COIN strategy (Petraeus & Amos 2006).

The ethical dimensions of COIN operations also merit consideration within the Trinity framework. The need to balance security imperatives with respect for human rights and the rule of law can create significant challenges. This is particularly true in the military domain, where the pressure to achieve short-term security gains must be weighed against the long-term implications of actions that may alienate the population or undermine the government's legitimacy (Galula 1964).

DISCUSSION

The application of Clausewitz's Trinity to counter-insurgency (COIN) operations provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex dynamics at play in modern conflicts. However, the implementation of this framework in real-world scenarios remains challenging, as evidenced by the difficulties faced in recent COIN operations in places like Afghanistan and Iraq (Kilcullen 2009). One of the key challenges in applying the Trinity to COIN is the asymmetric nature of insurgencies. Unlike conventional warfare, where the military element often dominates, COIN operations require a delicate balance between all three elements of the Trinity. The government must maintain legitimacy and provide effective governance, the military must adapt to unconventional warfare tactics, and the population's support becomes crucial for success (Nagl 2005).

The government's role in COIN operations extends beyond merely providing resources and direction. It must also address the root causes of the insurgency, which often stem from political, economic, or social grievances. This requires a comprehensive approach that combines security measures with political reforms, economic development, and social programs. Failure to address these underlying issues can lead to a prolonged conflict and ultimately, the failure of the COIN effort (Galula 1964). In many cases, the government's legitimacy is challenged by the insurgents, who often present themselves as an alternative to the existing power structure. This competition for legitimacy plays out in the eyes of the population, making effective governance and the delivery of basic services crucial. The government must demonstrate its ability to protect and provide for its citizens better than the insurgents can (Kilcullen 2010).

The military's role in COIN operations is equally complex. While kinetic operations remain important, the military must also engage in a range of non-kinetic activities that support the overall COIN strategy. This includes gathering intelligence, conducting civil affairs operations, and supporting the development of local security forces. The military must also be prepared to operate in a highly politicized environment, where its actions can have significant political ramifications (Petraeus & Amos 2006).

One of the key challenges for the military in COIN operations is adapting its tactics and culture to the unique demands of counter-insurgency. Traditional military training and doctrine often emphasize overwhelming force and decisive battles, which can be counterproductive in a COIN environment. Instead, COIN requires patience, restraint, and a nuanced understanding of the local context. This often necessitates a shift in military culture and training to emphasize these skills (Nagl 2005). The population, as the third element of the Trinity, plays a crucial role in COIN operations. The concept of "winning hearts and minds" is central to many COIN strategies, reflecting the understanding that the population's support is essential for success. This involves not only providing security and basic services but also addressing the population's grievances and aspirations. It requires a deep understanding of local culture, traditions, and social structures (Thompson 1966).

However, engaging with the population in COIN operations is often complicated by the presence of the insurgents, who may intimidate or coerce the local population. This creates a complex environment where the population may be caught between the government forces and the insurgents, making it difficult for them to openly support either side. In such situations, providing security becomes paramount, as it allows the population to engage with the government without fear of reprisal (Kilcullen 2009).

The interplay between these three elements of the Trinity in COIN operations is dynamic and often unpredictable. Actions in one domain can have significant impacts on the others. For example, a military operation that causes civilian casualties can undermine the government's legitimacy and alienate the population. Conversely, effective governance and economic development can support military operations by reducing support for the insurgency (Galula 1964).

This interconnectedness highlights the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to COIN. All elements of national power – diplomatic, informational, military, and economic – must be coordinated and aligned towards the common goal of defeating the insurgency and establishing stable governance. This requires effective interagency cooperation and a clear, unified strategy that guides all aspects of the COIN effort (Petraeus & Amos 2006).

The conflict in Syria under President Bashar al-Assad follows this pattern closely. Political repression, economic hardships, and pervasive corruption all contributed to the rise in discontent with Assad's regime. The government's response to the Arab Spring's peaceful protests in 2011 was brutal crackdowns rather than reforms. Instead of stifling dissent, security forces' use of arrests, torture, and military force against protesters heightened public resentment.

The Free Syrian Army (FSA), Islamist factions, and Kurdish forces were among the rebel groups that emerged as the fighting intensified. They had one thing in common, despite their divergent ideologies: opposing Assad's tyranny. International censure resulted from the government's ongoing use of excessive military force, including chemical and airstrikes. Some foreign nations, such as the U.S. and Gulf states, supported rebel groups, while others, like Russia and Iran, backed Assad.

Over time, rebels gained control of significant territories, including parts of Aleppo, Idlib, and Eastern Ghouta. However, internal divisions among the opposition weakened their ability to overthrow Assad completely. The Syrian government, with Russian air support and Iranian-backed militias, launched major counteroffensives, reclaiming lost territories. By 2018, Assad had regained control over most of Syria, though some rebel-held areas still exist.

The Syrian Civil War shows how government repression can turn public dissatisfaction into armed resistance. While the opposition made significant advances, their lack of unity and international political complexities prevented them from fully toppling Assad. Instead, the war resulted in massive civilian casualties, displacement of millions, and ongoing instability. This conflict highlights the dangers of responding to political grievances with military force and the long-term consequences of civil war.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While Clausewitz's Trinity offers a powerful lens through which to view and plan COIN operations, it is not a universal solution. Effective implementation requires careful consideration of local contexts, sustained commitment, and a willingness to adapt strategies in response to changing circumstances. The complexity of current insurgencies, frequently fuelled by transnational networks and ideological extremism, demands a nuanced response beyond traditional military solutions. COIN practitioners can anticipate better and defeat insurgent strategies by combining Clausewitz's principles with contemporary tools such as data analytics and cultural intelligence.

Moreover, developing trust and collaboration with residents is crucial, as their support generally determines the long-term sustainability of COIN programs. In this rapidly evolving world, the COIN strategies guided by frameworks such as the Trinity will be essential for achieving long-term peace and stability.

FURTHER STUDY

Future research could extend the analysis of counter-insurgency (COIN) beyond the Syrian case by conducting comparative studies in different conflict settings. Examining how Clausewitz's Trinity applies to other regions affected by insurgencies—such as Iraq, Afghanistan, or Southeast Asia—would provide broader insights into the adaptability and limitations of the framework. In addition, future studies may integrate perspectives from cyber warfare, information operations, and humanitarian dimensions to enrich the understanding of COIN strategies in contemporary conflicts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Sincere gratitude to Mr. Dr. I Wayan Midhio (Indonesia Defense University) and Dr. Afrizal Hendra for Their valuable insights and contributions to the development of this research. Their support and thoughtful discussions have been instrumental in shaping the analysis and ensuring a more comprehensive exploration of the topic.

REFERENCES

- Abboud, Samer. 2016. *Syria*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/688398>
- Bassford, Christopher. 2023. "Clausewitz's Categories of War and the Supersession of 'Absolute War'." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43 (3): 381–399.
<https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4948.8888>.
- Clausewitz, Carl von. 1984. *On War*. Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

- Creveld, Martin van. 2005. *The Transformation of War: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict Since Clausewitz*. New York: Free Press.
- Fleming, Colin M. 2013. "New or Old Wars? Debating a Clausewitzian Future." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36 (2): 213-241. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402390902743175>.
- Galula, David. 2006. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Connecticut: Praeger Security International.
- Haddad, Bassam. 2011. *Business Networks in Syria: The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Heydemann, Steven. 2013. "Syria's Uprising: Sectarianism, Regionalisation, and State Order in the Levant." California: Fride and Hippos.
- Hinnebusch, Raymond. 2012. "Syria: From 'Authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution?" *International Affairs* 88 (1): 95-113. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41428543>.
- Holliday, Joseph. 2013. *The Assad Regime: From Counterinsurgency to Civil War*. Middle East Security Report 8. Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War.
- Kilcullen, David. 2009. *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- — —. 2010. *Counterinsurgency*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kofman, Michael, and Matthew Rojansky. 2018. "What Kind of Victory for Russia in Syria?" *Military Review* 98 (2): 6-23. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2018-OLE/Russia-in-Syria/>
- Lister, Charles R. 2015. *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nagl, John A. 2005. *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ostovar, Afshon. 2016. *Vanguard of the Imam: Religion, Politics, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Petraeus, David H., and James F. Amos. 2006. *Counterinsurgency: FM 3-24*. Washington, DC: Department of the Army.
- Phillips, Christopher. 2016. *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Sanderson, Stephen K. 2007. *Conflict Theory In The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, edited by George Ritzer. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Sears, Alan. 2008. *A Good Book, In Theory: A Guide to Theoretical Thinking*. North York: Higher Education University of Toronto Press.
- Strachan, Hew, and Sibylle Scheipers. 2011. *The Changing Character of War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thompson, Robert. 1966. *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*. New York: F.A. Praeger.
- Waldman, Thomas. 2017. "Politics and War: Clausewitz's Paradoxical Equation." *Parameters* 40 (3): 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.2541>.
- Wieland, Carsten. 2020. *Syria and the Neutrality Trap: The Dilemmas of Delivering Humanitarian Aid Through Violent Regimes*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Yazigi, Jihad. 2014. "Syria's War Economy." European Council on Foreign Relations Policy Brief no. 97. London : European Council on Foreign Relations.