

## *Counterinsurgency strategies that match the VEOs' strategies in terms of direct vs. indirect lead to reduced VEO success.*

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### General Description of the Literature:

In general, this hypothesis has been pursued in the international relations literature. Mainly this question has been pursued in the context of insurgent conflicts or *small wars*. Much of the interest in this question was spawned by the US involvement in Vietnam and then was reignited as we became involved in conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. This question is also addressed within military journals; however, the focus here is on the academic work. There appears to be solid theoretical work on the question, yet stronger tests of the competing claims are still necessary.

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### Detailed Analyses

**35:** *Counterinsurgency strategies that match the VEOs' strategies in terms of direct vs. indirect lead to reduced VEO success.*

**Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence:** As mentioned above, the question became relevant during the Vietnam War. A RAND Study (Leites and Wolf 1970) and a paper by Mack (1975) set the tone for explaining how counterinsurgents win or lose insurgent conflicts. Leites and Wolf (1970) helped establish the argument that increasing insurgent costs will decrease future insurgency. Mack (1975) suggested that asymmetry in interests can explain why increasing costs will not work and why weaker actors often win these conflicts. Arreguin-Toft's (2001, 2006) work builds on Mack (1975) and suggests that asymmetry in strategies explains who wins these conflicts. In brief, he suggests that when both sides use the same strategy (both use conventional military or unconventional warfare), the stronger party will win. When the parties involved use opposite strategies (the state uses barbarism and the insurgents use a conventional strategy, or when the state uses conventional warfare but the insurgents use guerrilla tactics), the insurgents will win. Merom (2003) counters Mack (1975) and Arreguin-Toft (2001), arguing that regime type explains the outcomes of these conflicts with casualty-sensitive democracies being prone to losing asymmetric conflicts. Mack's (1975) work is important in identifying why the weak sometimes win wars, but Arreguin-Toft's (2001, 2006) arguments receive empirical support, offering a strategic explanation that can possibly explain more cases than Mack (1975). Merom's (2003) work is faulty in several ways. Most importantly, he chooses cases that confirm his argument and avoids cases that show why his argument does not work (Soviet Union in Afghanistan, for example). Both Merom (2003) and Leites and Wolf (1970) consider the use of brutality and increasing costs to insurgents without thinking about how this is conditional upon what the insurgents are doing. Relatively little empirical work beyond Arreguin-Toft's (2006) analysis has been done on this question. He evaluates five cases that vary according to regime type, time period, arms diffusion, and strategic interaction. He also performs a simple quantitative test (crosstabs) of the argument using data on over 200 conflicts.

**Empirical Support Score: 7**

**Applicability to Influencing VEOs:** Most of the literature is focused on the US or large democracies and their ability to influence insurgents. Since the concern here is with the US government's response, this limitation is ok. However, less is known about how these actions occur vis-à-vis nonviolent groups or



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groups that use mixed strategies of violence and nonviolence. Also, none of the literature has data beyond 2003.

**Applicability Score:** Direct: At least some of the empirical results directly concern the context of influencing VEOs

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