

Why Allies Rebel: Defiant Local Partners in Counter-insurgency Wars

By Barbara Elias

A review by Alexander Morales

What makes managing local partners in counterinsurgency operations a formidable challenge? That is the question that author Barbara Elias, an assistant professor of government at Bowdoin College, seeks to answer in her book *Why Allies Rebel: Defiant Local Partners in Counterinsurgency Wars*. Her overarching argument is summed as “policymakers associated with intervening forces have not fully recognized key structural factors that motivate local compliance and defiance.” Rather than explaining the challenge by blaming specific unlikable politicians or institutions, She explores the complex political-military relationship by using principal-agent theory and through considering alliance politics to discuss how foreign intervenors and local partners act in counterinsurgency (COIN) situations.

To test her argument, she examines four independent variables to assess the likelihood of compliance: (1) local partner capacity, (2) converging interests, (3) foreign dependency on local implementation, and (4) external threats. The dependent variable is framed as local compliance to the intervener’s demands. In this schema, she avoids reducing the complexity of the relationship to local allies to comply when interests converge and to defy when interests diverge. She then examines nine large-scale noncolonial COIN interventions. For five of these interventions, she uses primary source documents and archival data to form the basis of her arguments and tests her independent variables against 460 discrete policy requests derived from this research. For another the last four interventions (Egypt in Yemen, Syria in Lebanon, Cuba in Angola, and Vietnam in Cambodia) which she covers in Chapter 9, she relies on secondary

sources due to the difficulty in obtaining primary sources and are examined on a qualitative basis, but the inclusion of these interventions hedges against selection bias.

In building her theoretical framework, the author Elias makes great efforts to emphasize both the differences between colonial and noncolonial COIN interventions and the role of popular legitimacy. In noncolonial COIN, she points out, that there is a severe dependency on the part of the foreign intervener to the local partner which grants them an element of bargaining power in order to extract more resources from the foreign intervener. Further, she caveats that she is seeking general trends in compliance against noncompliance and that local priorities and pressures can change the relative perceived importance of foreign intervener requests. She acknowledges that further work will need to be done on building unique compliance gaining strategies in a COIN environment.

In terms of book structure, Chapters 2-3 clarify the author's hypotheses of compliance and methodology. Chapters 4-6 deal with, respectively, the United States in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Vietnam. Chapter 7 covers India in Sri Lanka and Chapter 8 covers the Soviet-Afghan War. Helpfully, each section covering a major intervention has a subsection covering a summary of the findings for that intervention. Chapter 9 covers the previously mentioned interventions by smaller states. The author includes helpful appendices in the end comparing requests across wars, her use of United States diplomatic cables covering the US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and her statistical analysis of local compliance that provide quick reference points for the future.

Covering many different interventions in different times and contexts, *Why Allies Rebel* provides useful data and analysis of what drives compliance that moves beyond blaming specific political personalities. Outside of the field of studying compliance, it provides helpful historical insight into the frustration of large powers attempting counterinsurgency with its use of primary study materials. Overall, this well written work is worth the read for both the practitioner and lay person.