

# Why Counterinsurgency Doesn't Work

by [James Jeffrey \(/experts/james-jeffrey\)](/experts/james-jeffrey)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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**When political leaders give the Pentagon broad goals of social transformation in the guise of "Phase IV stability operations," they undermine support for even legitimate, low-cost military missions such as an air campaign in Syria.□**

**B**oth Max Boot ("More Small Wars," November/December 2014) and Rick Brennan ("Withdrawal Symptoms," November/December 2014) provide insight into what the United States did wrong at an operational level in Iraq. Boot's precepts for doing better in the next counterinsurgency are sensible, even if some of them would require a higher tolerance for casualties, and Brennan's arguments about the errors the United States committed in Iraq from 2010 to 2012 generally ring true to me, as one of the people making some of those mistakes.

But Boot's and Brennan's arguments rely on a flawed assumption: that if only the United States had waged counterinsurgency properly, it could have succeeded. If Washington's original goal was to transform Iraq such that Baghdad could govern competently, quell the country's insurgency, and develop functional, Western-style institutions, counterinsurgency was destined to fail -- just as the United States failed in Vietnam, Somalia, and Afghanistan. The blame lies not with poor implementation but with the strategy itself...

**[Read the full article on the \*Foreign Affairs\* website. \(http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143032/james-f-jeffrey/why-counterinsurgency-doesnt-work\)](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143032/james-f-jeffrey/why-counterinsurgency-doesnt-work)** ❖

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