

The study 'Death Solves All Problems': The Authoritarian Model of Counterinsurgency by Daniel Byman seeks to answer why authoritarian regimes are more successful in counterinsurgency operations than liberal democracies.

The article states at the outset that authoritarian regimes are fundamentally disadvantaged because of 'legitimacy'. Lack of mass support, corruption in the rank and file, collusion between the militia and the elite, absence of unity of command; make insurgency far more probable in authoritarian regimes than democracies. And yet these regimes are highly successful in battling counterinsurgency. One wonders why? The answer is because authority thrives on 'conflict' and the complexity and chaos that it brings with it. Conflict thus serves as their basis for legitimacy. Opposition is seldom tolerated.

The study highlights the use of 'population transfer' as a technique to counter insurgency as an objective to separate insurgents from their support base. Pointing to the mass deportation of civilians by the Greek royalist government after World War II, the authors show how collective punishment and the denial of food, funding, intelligence, and manpower ('the four cut' approach) to the insurgents were effectively used to 'starve off' rebellion. The authors also draw attention to the horrors of the Guatemalan government's offensive in the Ixil Triangle which killed almost a third of the local population in a bid to end insurgency in the region. 'Death solves all problems' indeed ! Thus population transfer proves to be a far more effective means to foil rebellion rather than a direct offensive. It is no surprise therefore that regimes make an attempt to "drain the sea."

The article brings out the weaknesses of the authoritarian model. Since such regimes have low legitimacy, they are often challenged. Multiple and competing chains of command, disgruntled conscripts, war weariness make it difficult for authoritarian regimes to hold on to power for too long. This discomfiting position makes them rely even more on using repression as a weapon; leading to a vicious circle of violence and power feeding off each other. Peace becomes a distant dream.