



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

STUDIES

Doing What You Know: The United States and 250 Years of Irregular War

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The United States has been continuously engaged in irregular combat since initiating operations in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Along the way, U.S. military forces, particularly the Army, Marine Corps, and Special Operations Forces, have made significant adaptations. Yet achieving our political objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan continues to be elusive more than fifteen years into the Global War on Terror despite a significant investment in blood and treasure. With this study, CSBA Senior Fellow Dave Johnson explores why that is.

The United States has a long history of engaging in irregular wars and countering insurgencies, one that predates our independence. Although many of these efforts were successful, others were not. To understand what worked, what did not, and why, Dave assesses the measures, both coercive and benign, that the United States has used in a limited number of pivotal cases to determine if U.S. irregular warfare and counterinsurgency (COIN) approaches have changed significantly over the past two centuries. He also makes recommendations for the future.