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Military Doctrine and Counterinsurgency: A British Perspective

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The experience of numerous "small wars" has provided the British army with a unique insight into this demanding form of conflict. Service in Northern Ireland has given the present generation of soldiers their main firsthand source of basic experience at the tactical level, but this also tends to constrain military thinking on the subject because of the national context and political connotations. There are of course many lessons to be learned because of the similarities between the campaign in Northern Ireland, which is designated as Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA)[1] and those counterinsurgency campaigns which may be conducted elsewhere. But there are also significant differences. Tactics such as jungle patrolling and convoy anti-ambush drills--which from the perspective of Northern Ireland seem to be relics of a colonial past--may be very relevant in a different operational setting.

Despite their long experience in counterinsurgency, the British have not developed any set methods of dealing with the problem of insurgency, indeed it is probably unwise to attempt this because every situation is different. There are, however, many other approaches to this form of combat. For instance, the French in Algeria during the 1840s produced novel tactics based on highly mobile columns, and in Indochina a military-led community relations campaign predated General Sir Gerald Templer's "Hearts and Minds" policies[2] by several decades. Not only is the threat changing, but so too is the environment in which an insurgent must be confronted. For example, in any future counterinsurgency operation, military action will be conducted under the critical scrutiny of the law, the media, human rights organizations, and other international bodies such as the European Court. Thus while military planning should draw upon the lessons of the past, doctrine for counterinsurgency must evolve if it is to remain relevant.

The Attrition Theory

A straightforward attritional approach is one option. Such strategies have been adopted and some have worked. Absolute repression was used by the Germans in response to guerrilla attacks during the Second World War. Saddam Hussein's use of chemical weapons against the Kurds and his campaign against the Marsh Arabs in Southern Iraq are contemporary examples of the use of attrition. In Uruguay the Tupamaros' campaign was crushed by a vicious right-wing backlash, which not only destroyed the insurgency but in the process led to the replacement of a vibrant civil democratic government by a military dictatorship. None of the attritional "solutions" is appropriate in a liberal democracy; furthermore it is considered that a "gloves off" approach to any insurgency has a strictly limited role to play in any modern counterinsurgency campaign.

It should also be noted that the record of success for the attrition theory in counterinsurgency operations is generally a poor one. Undue emphasis on military action clouds the key political realities, which can result in a military-dominated campaign plan that misses the real focus of an insurgency. An inability to match the insurgent's concept with an appropriate government one--likened by Thompson to trying to play chess while the enemy is actually playing poker--is conceptually flawed and will not achieve success. Having deployed conventionally-trained troops and large amounts of firepower, the attritionalist commander generally feels compelled to use them. The head of the US Mission to South Vietnam, General Harkins, claimed in September 1962 that what was required to defeat the Viet Cong within three years were "Three Ms"--men, money, and materiel. The result of this approach, normally to the delight of an insurgent, is an escalating and indiscriminate use of military firepower. The wider consequences of this approach, seen both in South Vietnam and elsewhere, will often be an upward spiral of civilian alienation.

It would be wrong to deduce that any application of attrition is necessarily counterproductive: in the Malayan Campaign (1948 to 1960) the British were often able to achieve a force ratio of 20:1, and used their military superiority in numbers and firepower as a means to drive Chin Peng's communists into remote parts of the country, where they were then hunted down remorselessly. More important, the close political control which was exercised over military power throughout that campaign led directly to the successful and surgical application of attrition to military advantage.

It is necessary to appreciate that although, at times, military forces combined with a policy of attrition of insurgents may have a crucial role to play in restoring and maintaining government control, military force is not an end in itself, but always a means to achieve a wider political purpose. This implies that the military commander will have a far from free hand. Indeed, in a well-designed counterinsurgency strategy, a military commander is unlikely to direct the overall campaign. Acceptance of this fact has far-reaching implications for the doctrinal approach to a given situation and for the part that military forces will be given (and should seek) to play in any counterinsurgency campaign.

The Maneuver Theory

Insurgency can be seen as an ancient form of maneuver warfare. In Vietnam, for example, it was being practiced against foreign invaders 2000

years before Ho Chi Minh and Gien turned their attention to the Japanese, the French, and then the Americans. The insur- JUN 25 2007
 military effort to turn the government's apparent strengths against itself. This can involve a relatively low level of milita- AUG 25 2007
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The British army doctrinal publication *Operations* explains that "some elements of conventional warfighting wisdom may become irrelevant" in counterinsurgency "and acknowledges that Operations Other Than War will be governed by tight political control." Nevertheless, because counterinsurgency involves using a degree of military force, its conduct has parallels with combat in general war. The British army has adopted a seamless doctrinal approach to the conduct of operations which is applicable at all levels of conflict. It places due emphasis on the intellectual and psychological aspects of operations, not simply the material. It emphasizes the focus on people and ideas, not only on ground. Insurgent cohesion is identified and attacked by applying concentrated yet discrete force against critical weaknesses. Surprise, tempo, and simultaneity are used to overwhelm and unhinge the insurgent, bringing about a complete collapse of will and ultimately helping to create the conditions for his political defeat. As in warfighting, force is applied selectively and its use is carefully measured and controlled; destruction is a means, not an end. The doctrine eschews accepting battle for battle's sake and aims to create the conditions for government success by the application of the appropriate forces in a timely manner. All of this is directly applicable in counterinsurgency: a subtle approach to a subtle problem.

There are, however, differences of emphasis and interpretation. First, counterinsurgency operations do not readily lend themselves to neat division into discrete levels of conflict. An action at the lowest tactical level can have far-reaching operational and even strategic consequences. Indeed, if the test of whether there is a political dimension is rigidly applied, every patrol is potentially conducted at the "operational" level because the conduct of an individual soldier, amplified by the media, can become an international issue very quickly.

In general war, soldiers tend to expect that once broad political parameters have been established they will be left to decide the best way to achieve tactical goals; this is not necessarily the case in counterinsurgency, and this has important implications. While being prepared to work and offer advice at the highest levels, military commanders are unlikely to enjoy even tactical autonomy over matters that otherwise would be considered a service preserve. This is due to the relationship between "success" and the center of gravity in counterinsurgency operations.

Success is defined by the state of affairs which needs to be achieved by the end of a campaign. Since insurgency is principally a political struggle, it may be that the desired aim of the government falls short of victory in a strictly military context and setting. This is not to say that tactical defeats are acceptable, merely to acknowledge that there may be significant restrictions on the degree of military success which is both achievable and compatible with the overall political aim. In counterinsurgency, "success" may equate to handing over an internal security problem to the civil police, or simply not losing.

If, for example, the intention of committing troops is to buy time in which to address particular grievances (which need not necessarily mean making concessions), then dramatic tactical military success may in fact be counterproductive. Nor may it be possible to predict how long involvement may last, so the campaign may not be planned in the decisive, coherent fashion to which military commanders aspire. Counterinsurgency operations are often protracted, and as the nature of the task may evolve or even change radically long after troops are deployed, the political aim may likewise change over time. It is thus vital that politicians and commanders seek to identify where in the overall spectrum of government activity the military contribution lies, its relationship to the other aspects of policy, and its relative importance at any particular stage of the counterinsurgency campaign. This will vary over time and even in different geographical areas at the same time. Troops should be aware of their military role, and commanders should select accurate measures against which to judge the effectiveness of the military tactics employed; ground "captured" has even less significance in counterinsurgency than it does in warfighting.

In an insurgency, the strategic center of gravity will be the support of the mass of the people. Clearly, this is not open to "attack" in the conventional sense, although insurgent strategies often incorporate the use of coercive force. An insurgency is an attempt to force political change, and thus it follows logically that the center of gravity can be reached only by political action. The government response to an insurgency should take as its fundamental assumption that the true nature of the threat lies in the insurgent's political potential rather than his military power, although the latter may appear the more worrying in the short term. Again, in Malaya, the center of gravity was targeted not by jungle patrolling, but by the political decision to grant independence;^[3] the military contribution was invaluable, but not of itself decisive. The military campaign should focus upon the insurgents, but it is only one part of a wider solution.

The military plan should form one strand in a coordinated "attack" upon the overall aims of the insurgents. This should be established by a strategic estimate conducted by a government taking military and other advice. From this will flow further operational and tactical estimates and plans. While military forces may have a critical role to play at certain stages in the campaign, overall their contribution will be secondary and should be kept in perspective. Depending upon the level of insurgent activity, for most soldiers it is likely to be an unglamorous, rather unsatisfactory environment in which to serve. At times there may be opportunities for flair and for instigating decisive action against insurgent groups, but on most occasions troops will be confined to acting in a stabilizing, holding role with the bulk of their effort going into strategically "fixing" the insurgency. This does not imply a passive or reactive posture. An understanding at all levels of these realities and the reasons for them should help to prepare the soldier for policy decisions which at first sight may defy military logic, and give units involved in counterinsurgency a realistic expectation of "success."

The aim should never be a spectacular but possibly isolated success for one arm of the government. Rather it should be a sequence of successes that combine to work in complementary ways toward a single strategic goal. There will be multiple lines of operation (economic, legal, and military), working through a series of decisive points, but they should all complement the campaign's main effort--the primary line of operation--which must be political. The military commander will identify his decisive military points, which are then arranged onto lines of operation to achieve the desired military aim. The military plan should be based upon a number of operational objectives, understood and refined at each level, which help to destroy the insurgency by marginalization and focused selective strikes, and also provide assistance to the work of other agencies. Decisive points might include restoring public order, controlling routes, or clearing "no go" areas. Resources (the means to achieve the specified ends) should be allocated accordingly.

The strategic campaign plan should be directed in such a way as to sequence and coordinate the various agencies' individual...
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To illustrate the concept, assume that during a counterinsurgency campaign an inter-governmental initiative has succeeded in improving cross-border security cooperation (a decisive point on the dominant political line of operation); the military commander concludes that he can best exploit this advantage by reducing the flow of arms and munitions into a particular area (a military decisive point). This entails a shift of main effort, and tactical success in the border zone leads to a fall in the level of terrorist violence in the hinterland. This in turn creates a brief opportunity for a change in police tactics (a police decisive point), which improves relationships with the local community, and so forth. An example of this measured use of military power was offensive cross-border operations during the confrontation with Indonesia. Decisions regarding individual company ambushes were taken at a high level and closely controlled to complement the prevailing political tempo. In contrast, although French operations in Algeria were undertaken in accordance with a sound analysis of where the military decisive points lay, they were never properly harmonized and integrated with an effective overall strategy, and therefore missed the center of gravity.

Success in Operations

In counterinsurgency physical destruction of the enemy still has an important role to play. A degree of attrition will be necessary, but the number of insurgents killed should be no more than is absolutely necessary to achieve success. Commanders should seek "soft" methods of destroying the enemy; by arrest, physical isolation, or subversion, for example. The use of the minimum necessary force is a well-proven counterinsurgency lesson. In an era of intense media intrusiveness--one in which legality, from domestic and international viewpoints, will become ever more important--sound judgment and close control will need to be exercised over the degree of physical destruction which it is possible, necessary, or desirable to inflict. For example, the killing of a teenage gunman could be justifiable in military terms, but its possible effect on his community could jeopardize a potentially far more significant though less spectacular Hearts and Minds operation.

Success does not necessarily go to the side which possesses the best weapons or even uses them most effectively. Seeking to destroy the enemy by physical attrition will also expose members of the government force to greater risk of casualties, and as the Tet offensive in Vietnam during 1968 demonstrated, counterinsurgency campaigns can be lost despite military success. In that instance the American strategic center of gravity, public opinion in the United States, became vulnerable once the perceived costs of involvement escalated. This does not mean that risk should be avoided or the tactical initiative handed to the insurgents, merely that the wider implications of any course of action should be carefully weighed.

Attacking the insurgent's will, the strength from which he draws his cohesion, is likely to be more productive, particularly in the early stages of a counterinsurgency campaign before an insurgency can be consolidated. A sophisticated attack on the insurgent's will strikes at the center of his philosophy. This should be undertaken as part of a deliberate Hearts and Minds campaign. Although this is a somewhat dated term, it still encapsulates what is needed. It should incorporate Civil Affairs activity,[4] psychological operations, effective use of the media, and troop information. These are separate functions, but they have a common theme and are best utilized in a complementary manner. In practice the scope for such action will depend upon the way in which a particular campaign is carried out at the highest level and the freedom of action which is delegated to military commanders. Given the political authority, an approach that attacks the insurgent's will demands imagination and a responsive decisionmaking organization which has the ability to seize fleeting opportunities.

Maneuver warfare theory would indicate that it is preferable to shatter the enemy's moral and physical cohesion rather than seek his wholesale destruction. The means of attacking cohesion in counterinsurgency are readily adapted from warfighting. Firepower, which in the warfighting context is severely constrained, in counterinsurgency can be broadened to include evidence gathering, arrest, and legal action; surprise can be achieved, for example, through developing information-gathering technology which is exploited by either covert action or rapid concentration of overt force into a given area.

Tempo and Simultaneity

It has been said that low tempo appears to be a characteristic of many counterinsurgency campaigns. This is to misunderstand the term *tempo*, which is judged not by the "pace" of operations, but the speed of action and reaction relative to the insurgent. It is true that slow pace is a direct result of the protracted nature of some, though not all, forms of insurgent strategy (the "foco" theory utilized by Che Guevara, Regis Debray, and others being an exception). However, even in a Maoist-style campaign, where the insurgent may not be able to move beyond low-level guerrilla activity for a considerable time, the situation can still change radically. Diplomatic agreement to curtail external support, for example, could test the ability of insurgents to achieve a high tempo of operations. Commanders should be ready and able to adapt quickly to sudden developments, some of which may be outside their control. Certainly the accomplished insurgent commander will rely on an ability to exploit tempo, moving the classic revolutionary phases of an insurgency up where possible, and down when necessary, at such a speed as to make the security force's responses inappropriate and counterproductive.

At the tactical level, tempo is just as applicable. Here a commander can seek to establish his own tempo to seize the initiative in the local area of operations and force an insurgent group into a reactive role. An incident which in conventional war would pass almost unremarked could well attract considerable media attention in a counterinsurgency campaign and thus indirectly raise the tempo of operations. Troops and commanders at all levels should have the mental agility to adapt to rapid, even inexplicable changes in the mood of the population, for example, quicker than the insurgent. High tempo can be enhanced through physical mobility; timely and accurate contact intelligence; coordinated command, control, and communications; and flexible combat support and combat service support systems.

All effective insurgent strategies emphasize *simultaneity* by creating parallel political and social challenges as well as military ones. In Vietnam, Giap's regular and guerrilla troops worked with political cadres in a complementary fashion to exploit the fragile nature of the Saigon government. If the use of simultaneity is productive for the insurgent, then it is equally applicable for the government side. Tactically it can be

The philosophy behind mission command, once termed directive control, can be expressed as an approach in which the commander gives orders in a manner that enables his subordinates to understand his intentions, their own missions, and, of vital importance, the purpose or intent of those missions in the commander's overall concept of operations. Subordinates are told what effect they are to achieve, and the reason why it needs to be accomplished. They are also allocated the necessary resources and constrained by any particular control measures. Most important, subordinates are not told how they are to achieve their mission. The subordinate commander will decide for himself, within his delegated freedom of action, how best to accomplish his mission.

It has been argued that mission command cannot be applied in counterinsurgency, but this is to misunderstand what this term involves. Clearly, political considerations will permeate down to the lowest tactical level. This will inevitably constrain the freedom of action of junior military commanders, which could have the effect of restricting initiative at the lower levels. But paradoxically this makes mission command even more important.

Certain matters will need to be laid down in great detail. Relationships between agencies have to be spelled out, demarcation lines established, and precise SOPs written, particularly in joint operations with other agencies or combined operations with allies. Sensitive relationships with the media, the security forces of neighboring states, and the general public have to be carefully defined. However, because contact with the insurgent will be rare, it is essential to seize fleeting opportunities. In certain operational environments there may also be considerable freedom of action; for example, in remote areas junior commanders will probably have no option but to use their initiative.

Fundamentally the spirit of mission command does apply in counterinsurgency because in a politically charged atmosphere it is even more important that soldiers understand both their task and the purpose behind it. Subordinates well versed in mission command are able to work within constraints, and thus avoid the many pitfalls which await the unwary. It will be important for directives and orders to express the concept of operations in such a way that everyone understands not just the aim, but the atmosphere which is to be created.

Counterinsurgency places heavy demands and calls for particular skills and professional qualities both in commanders at all levels and the troops they lead. It requires the ability to adapt and utilize an unconventional yet highly disciplined approach to soldiering. One of the keys to mission command working in counterinsurgency lies in the selection and education of commanders. Another is preparing troops prior to and throughout military operations. Relevant and realistic training should focus not simply upon military skills, but upon those aspects which troops will find most demanding or fruitful, including legal rights and obligations, languages, media awareness, and cultural orientation. In counterinsurgency simply being able to hold a polite conversation with a civilian is a military "skill" that may need to be developed in training.

There are clearly risks in delegating authority to make decisions. Troops need clear and comprehensive orders, orders which link the commander's intent with SOPs. This approach adds an extra safeguard to minimize the risk of a commander jeopardizing the political aim. Most junior commanders and soldiers will not need to know the details of how the strategy is constructed, but through mission command they will have a feel for what is expected of the Army, what the military constraints are, and why they are imposed.

The Core Functions

Doctrine is intended to guide, and thus to help view the overall government campaign and the military element of it through the prism of the core functions; find, fix, and strike. The role of various agencies and the part they are to play will be expressed in the overall campaign director's concept of operations. The intelligence services, elements of the Army (covert, overt, and clandestine), and other government agencies "find" the insurgent by gathering all available information on him. The uniformed services, the police, and the major spending departments of government--combined with diplomatic efforts and an active Hearts and Minds campaign (including P INFO)[5]--"fix" the insurgent. Locally raised forces can also help to "fix" and have been employed to good effect in numerous counterinsurgency campaigns. Special forces, overt military and police units, psychological operations (PSYOPS), and the legal system spearhead the government's campaign to "strike," which is also reinforced through socioeconomic activities such as reorganizing local government, creating jobs, and improving social services.

Information Warfare

In counterinsurgency the strategic application of information warfare is primarily concerned with gaining the command advantage at national level, and the preparation and implementation of a strategic information plan. In the former case, this would involve the protection of government and alliance command centers and the disruption of the equivalent command centers within any insurgent organization; in the latter case, the implementation of the strategic information plan covers the acquisition and control of the information available to an insurgent organization by all national means. The targets of this information war may include political, financial, commercial, and public media sources as well as military resources.

The military part of information warfare is command and control warfare, which integrates all military capabilities including operations security, psychological operations, deception, electronic warfare, and physical destruction. It is supported by all-source intelligence and communications and information systems. Its purpose is to deny information to an adversary, and to influence, degrade, or destroy his command and control capabilities, while protecting friendly command and control capabilities against similar actions.

These five disciplines can stand alone, but are most effective when integrated to form an overarching command and control warfare strategy. Any command and control warfare cell should be within the G3/J3 operations structure, but its function involves a complex interrelation of all staff areas. There is, however, real potential for mutual interference between the different components of command and control warfare operations,

which underscores the need for close coordination at all levels.

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differing calls on the use of information warfare and command and control warfare as the campaign progresses. However, experience shows that little attention has previously been given to the preparation of an overall strategic information plan in counterinsurgency situations, Suez in 1956 being the most glaring example for the British.[6]

Despite the potential difficulties and frustrations involved, a commander could reap handsome military dividends if a sound and properly supported strategic information plan is prepared and subsequent command and control warfare planning is conducted as an integral part of any operational and tactical plans that would be necessary in a counterinsurgency campaign. This could apply equally to campaigns in other types of operations short of war.

Integrating Deep, Close, and Rear Operations

During a counterinsurgency core military functions are applicable, albeit in very specific ways, just as they are in a conventional war. Each of the functions discussed to this point can be tailored to the concepts of the deep, close, and rear battle for purposes of training and operations.

Deep operations at the strategic and operational levels will often tend to be political, diplomatic, and psychological in nature. Military involvement may be through covert and clandestine action by special units. At a tactical level, overt deep operations, such as cross-border cooperation and surveillance of areas where known insurgents live and work, will contribute to fixing. Militarily, deep operations could be decisive at the strategic and operational levels, but rarely so at the tactical level. Until the insurgent is found, he has the initiative and it is impossible to conduct any further deep or subsequent close operations against him. The finding function is a prerequisite to starting any subsequent operations, despite it being often very difficult to identify an insurgent when he can blend himself into society. This prerequisite should also endure throughout the campaign; once lost, the insurgent has regained the initiative. A police or military unit (covert or overt) tasked with conducting deep operations may be given a variety of surveillance or disruptive tasks, such as infiltrating the financial dealings of an insurgency, or conducting overt checks to break up or expose an insurgent's patterns of behavior and lines of communications.

Close operations normally take place at the tactical level in counterinsurgency operations. Those operations involving fixing tasks should normally be aimed to reassure the general public and foster improved community relations. Where close operations involve striking against the insurgency, it is essential that the deep operation has already found and fixed the insurgent group. In this manner the initiative is retained. Often, however, close operations are reactive to an insurgent group's activities and there is no time for a planned deep operation. On these occasions the fixing has to be carried out as part of the close operation. The key to success is to wrest the initiative from the insurgent as quickly as possible in order that military forces can maneuver to a position from which they can then strike.

Rear operations in counterinsurgency should attract a higher priority than they generally do in offensive operations in war, and may need a commensurately greater priority in terms of operational planning, staff effort, and resources. The aim is not simply physical protection of the force, but also securing political and public support, from which all government freedom of action flows. An insurgent commander may have identified as government vulnerabilities certain nonmilitary targets, such as VIPs or economic assets, and selected them as decisive points in his campaign. That being the case, government forces are likely to become more heavily committed to protective duties than they would wish. While the aim will always be to secure and hold the initiative by means of aggressive action, significant numbers of troops are likely to be needed until locally recruited militias can be organized to take their place and technological aids put into key locations. This has important implications for training, force structuring, and the timing of offensive operations in the military campaign plan. Counterinsurgency campaigns are often protracted affairs; establishing secure operating bases, developing lines of communication, maintaining public support, and recruiting local militia are carried out to enable the security forces to sustain a long operation. Hence the value of rear operations to any overall campaign plan.

Over and above the integration of deep, close, and rear operations, there is a discrete and undefined balance among reassurance, the application of deterrence, and military action. Applying a firm and clear political and military deterrent to insurgents and their activities helps to reassure public opinion and gain local support for government policies and plans; military action, when properly focused and directed, can remove hard-core activists and reduce the ability of insurgents to act coherently.

Rules of Engagement

Within the application of any military doctrine, it is vital for a commander to know what law applies in a given set of circumstances and what it is that triggers any changes in the law to be applied. The answer to this type of question relates directly to the sort of rules of engagement that would be issued by a government.

In the UK, government ministers provide political direction and guidance to commanders by means of rules of engagement which govern the application of force. It follows that such rules which are approved by ministers may be changed only by ministerial authority. Commanders will in turn wish to issue rules of engagement to their subordinates. These rules of engagement will be cast within the discretion allowed by the rules approved by ministers.

Rules of engagement define the degree and manner in which force may be applied and are designed to ensure that such application of force is carefully controlled; rules of engagement are not intended to be used to assign specific tasks or as a means of issuing tactical instructions. In passing orders to subordinates a commander at any level must always act within the rules of engagement received but is not bound to use the full extent of the permission granted.

Rules of engagement are usually written in the form of prohibitions or permissions. When they are issued as prohibitions, they will be orders to commanders not to take certain designated actions; when they are issued as permissions, they will be guidance to commanders that certain

