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INSURGENCIES AND COUNTERING INSURGENCIES

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HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

Chapter 7

Planning and Operational Considerations

7-1. Planning is important for gaining understanding. Military planning processes provide a way to understand an operational environment and understand the commanders' intent within that operational environment. Planning is often conducted simultaneously with other activities, such as execution and assessment, and both informs, and is informed by, those activities. Planning as understanding, continually refined and questioned through assessments, helps commanders maintain situational understanding in the ever changing environment of counterinsurgency. This continued conceptualization of the operational environment and problem is essential for the use of mission command. However, before commanders and staffs can conceptualize the problem, they need to understand certain paradoxes of counterinsurgency.

COUNTERINSURGENCY PARADOXES

7-2. A commander planning a counterinsurgency requires a specific mindset before that commander can plan or execute operations, and that mindset is the foundation for understanding how to counter an insurgency. When the United States (U.S.) acts, even temporarily, as the primary counterinsurgent, commanders operate carefully between fighting for a population and being seen as fighting against a population. When acting indirectly to enable a host nation, these paradoxes provide a framework for understanding and enabling the host nation. Throughout conceptual and detailed planning, the counterinsurgency paradoxes described in paragraphs 7-4 through 7-12 provide a set of apparent contradictions that aid commanders and staffs in developing a counterinsurgency mindset that helps commanders and staffs operate effectively. These paradoxes are offered to stimulate thinking, not to limit it. The applicability of these paradoxes depends on the local situation and, in particular, the state of the insurgency. For example, the statement that "sometimes, the more force used, the less effective it is", does not apply when the enemy is breaching the perimeter; however, that thought is applicable when effective security has already been achieved in an area. In short, commanders and staffs should not reduce these paradoxes to a checklist; they should be used with considerable thought.

7-3. The commander must be conscious of the problem of the observer effect, where the act of engaging the population, itself, makes changes in the operational environment. Any action on the environment generates a reaction, thereby altering the environment. This means the environment changes with every interaction with a society. In other words, the very act of interactions with a society changes the operational environment. Commanders must understand this reality and constantly consider its effects on their assessment and planning processes. Moreover, this fact is at the heart of many of the paradoxes that follow.

Sometimes, the More You Protect Your Force, the Less Secure You May Be

7-4. Ultimate success in counterinsurgency operations is normally gained by protecting the population, not the counterinsurgency force. If military forces remain in their compounds, they lose touch with the people, appear to be running scared, and give the initiative to the insurgents. A possible path to success could include an increase in outreach programs that focus on protecting the population. Commanders weigh the effectiveness of establishing patrol bases and operational support bases against the security of using larger unit bases. Establishing patrol bases ensures access to the intelligence needed to facilitate operations. Sharing risks with the population reinforces the connections with them that help establish legitimacy.

Sometimes, the More Force is Used, the Less Effective It Is

7-5. Any use of force produces many effects, not all of which can be foreseen. Using substantial force also increases the opportunity for insurgent propaganda to portray lethal military activities as brutal. In contrast, using force precisely and discriminately could strengthen the rule of law that needs to be established. The key to successful counterinsurgency operations is knowing when more force is needed,

and when it might be counterproductive. This judgment involves constant assessment of the security situation and a sense of timing regarding insurgents' actions.

The More Successful the Counterinsurgency is, the Less Force Can Be Used and the More Risk Must Be Accepted

7-6. This paradox is really a corollary to the paradox described in paragraph 7-5. As the level of insurgent violence drops, expectations of the population may lead to a reduction in direct military actions by counterinsurgents. More reliance is placed on police work, rules of engagement may be tightened, and troops may have to exercise increased restraint. Soldiers and Marines may also have to accept more risk to maintain involvement with the people.

Doing Nothing is Sometimes the Best Action

7-7. Often insurgents carry out a terrorist act or guerrilla raid with the primary purpose of enticing counterinsurgents to overreact, or at least to react in a way that insurgents can exploit. For example, counterinsurgents opening fire on a crowd or executing a clearing operation may create more enemies than it removes from the streets. If an assessment of the effects of a course of action determines that more negative than positive effects may result, an alternative should be considered, potentially including not acting.

Some of the Best Weapons for Counterinsurgents Do Not Shoot

7-8. Counterinsurgents often achieve the most meaningful success in garnering public support and legitimacy for the host-nation government with activities that do not involve killing insurgents (although killing clearly will often be necessary). Arguably, the decisive effort is to isolate the insurgents by denying the local population as a base of support. This establishes the need for synchronizing information operations across the various lines of effort in order to generate operational advantages for the commander conducting counterinsurgency operations. Every action, including the use of force, must be supported by adequate information. While security is essential to setting the stage for overall progress, lasting victory may come from a vibrant economy and political participation that restore hope. Particularly after security has been achieved, dollars and ballots may have more important effects than bombs and bullets. This is dependent on the context of a particular insurgency and the strategy to counter that insurgency. As with the other paradoxes, counterinsurgents cannot treat this as a uniform rule. However, a thriving economy may be more important than ammunition. Depending on the state of the insurgency, therefore, Soldiers and Marines should prepare to accomplish many nonmilitary missions to support counterinsurgency efforts. All unified action partners have a role in supporting efforts to enable governance to counter an insurgency, not just Department of State and civil affairs personnel.

The Host Nation Doing Something Tolerably is Normally Better Than Us Doing it Well

7-9. It is just as important for counterinsurgents to consider who performs an operation as to assess how well it is done. Where the U.S. is supporting a host nation, long-term success requires supporting viable host-nation leaders and institutions that are legitimate and capable. The longer that process takes, the more U.S. public support will wane and the more the local population will question the legitimacy of their own forces and government. However, if the host nation cannot perform tolerably, the counterinsurgents supporting it may have to act. Experience, knowledge of the area of operations, and cultural sensitivity are essential in deciding when such action is necessary.

If a Tactic Works This Week, It Might Not Work Next Week; If It Works In This Province, It Might Not Work In The Next

7-10. Competent insurgents are adaptive. They are often part of a widespread network that communicates constantly and instantly. Insurgents quickly adjust to successful counterinsurgency practices and rapidly disseminate information throughout an insurgency. Indeed, the more effective a counterinsurgency tactic is, the faster it may become out of date because insurgents have a greater need to counter it. Effective leaders

at all levels avoid complacency and are at least as adaptive as their enemies. There is no single prescribed set of counterinsurgency procedures. Commanders and staffs must constantly develop new practices.

7-11. The environment of an insurgency is not static and different factors may influence various areas. An operation or a tactic that works well in one area may not work well in another because of different factors in the environment. Village stability operations in Afghanistan demonstrate this. Soldiers had success in one area but did not have success in another. The reason was that the operational environments and the population's responses to these environments were vastly different. Commanders and staffs must understand the local area and not assume that the same methods will work in other areas, even in an adjacent town.

**If a Tactic Works in This Province, it Might Not Work in The Next:
The Case of the Dan Aw Patan District, Afghanistan, 2010**

In the fall of 2010, U.S. Army units comprised of special forces teams and infantry squads from the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment introduced village stability operations in the Dan Aw Patan district of Paktia Province in southeastern Afghanistan and along the Pakistan border. Village stability operations were an effort to empower Afghan villagers to defend themselves from insurgents. The primary U.S. Army mission was to recruit Afghan men in each village to serve in the local police that would provide physical security for their community and thereby decrease the power of the Taliban. In the course of the next year Soldiers regularly visited the villages of the district, meeting with local leaders and equipping and training members of the local police.

Village stability operations in Dan Aw Patan enjoyed only partial success. In the north and central areas of the district, U.S. units were able to form and train squads of local police. The villagers generally supported these efforts, participated in sustainment training, and provided useful intelligence. More importantly, the Soldiers never felt they might be in imminent danger while working with the local Afghans. In the southern part of the district, however, village stability operations failed. U.S. Soldiers in this region never enjoyed the security their counterparts enjoyed further north. Moreover, the police units that were established in these villages were far less interested in conducting patrols than in receiving pay. Despite lengthy negotiations with village leaders in which the Soldiers offered incentives such as medical assistance and funds for new schools, bridges, and other infrastructure, these local police squads never became the means of countering insurgent influence in the district.

Why did village stability operations work in the northern and central villages but not in those to the south? The answer was not obvious. The distances between the central and southern villages were minimal, less than 10 miles in most cases. The demographics in each region were essentially identical in terms of size, economics, Pashtun ethnicity, religion, and culture. The U.S. approach was consistent in its methods and leadership. In fact, the same Soldiers who led the successful efforts in the north and central regions also worked with the southern villages.

The lack of full success in the southern villages resulted from less visible factors. The southern area saw much more fighting during the Soviet occupation, and the local people viewed any foreign troops as "Soviets." More important was the existence of insurgent "rat lines" in this part of the district. From the Teri Mangel arms bazaar, located just across the border in Pakistan, historic smuggling routes crossed the Afghan border into Paktia Province toward the provincial capital of Gardez. Because of the routes' importance to the insurgent campaign, the Taliban exerted pressure on the southern villages to resist American efforts to deny freedom of movement to the insurgents and keep the routes open. Village stability operations were designed to counter exactly this type of influence. Yet because of Taliban pressure that succeeded despite the U.S. presence, the southern villages never accepted the program fully. U.S. units were not resourced to collect sufficient intelligence to discover the extent of Taliban influence, and the newly-hired local

police proved unreliable but in a passive-aggressive manner, demonstrating little initiative except in the collection of their salaries.

The case of Dan Aw Patan displays the importance of local conditions in the counterinsurgent's choice of tactics. In general, village stability operations represented an innovative approach to the challenge of securing the Afghan population at the village level. In this case, however, the counterinsurgent learned that what worked in one village did not work in a neighboring village only a few miles distant.

Many Important Decisions Are Not Made by Generals

7-12. Successful counterinsurgency operations require competence and judgment by Soldiers and Marines at all levels. Indeed, young leaders often make decisions at the tactical level that have strategic consequences. Senior leaders set the proper direction and climate with thorough training and clear guidance; they then trust their subordinates to do the right thing. Preparation for tactical-level leaders requires more than just mastering Service doctrine; they must also be trained and educated to adapt to their local situations, understand the legal and ethical implications of their actions, and exercise initiative and sound judgment in accordance with their senior commander's intent.

CONCEPTUAL PLANNING

7-13. The complexity of insurgencies presents problems that have incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements. The solutions to these challenging problems are often difficult to recognize because of interdependencies of the relationships of an operational environment. While attempting to solve these problems, the solution to one problem may reveal or create another, even more complex, problem. Operational design employs various elements to develop and refine the commander's operational approach. Operational design involves conceptual planning. Conceptual planning establishes aims, objectives, and intentions, and it also involves developing broad concepts for action. It generally corresponds to the art of war. The commander's activities of understanding and visualization are key aspects of conceptual planning. (See MCDP 5 for more information on the art of war and ADRP 5-0 for more information on understanding and visualization).

7-14. Design is the conception and articulation of a framework for solving a problem, and it is critical to conceptual planning. The purpose of design is to achieve a greater understanding of the environment and the nature of the problem in order to identify an appropriate conceptual solution. While not prescriptive, design is based on critical thinking, conceptual planning, visualization, emergence of a hypothesis, and continuous activity. Design is the primary way to develop an operational approach. First, design helps commanders and staffs create a shared understanding of the current operational environment and visualize what the environment should look like. Understanding an operational environment is an essential foundation of counterinsurgency. Second, design enables the collaborative, conceptual planning necessary to understand a problem and develop broad approaches to solving it. From there, commanders can visualize their operational approach and describe to staffs and subordinate commanders how to move the environment from the current state to the desired end state. From an operational approach, the commander conducts detailed planning. (See figure 7-1.) (See JP 5-0 for more information on design. See ADP 5-0 for more information on Army design methodology and MCWP 5-1 for more information on Marine Corps design. See chapter 2 for an understanding of an operational environment.)