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Much of the reporting on the Iraqi and Afghan wars focuses on the ground dimension . . . . The fact remains, however, that Iraq and Afghanistan are air wars as well, and wars where airpower has also played a critical role in combat.

— Anthony H. Cordesman[1]

What a difference a year makes. The idea that airpower would be playing a critical role in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars would hardly have been predicted in December 2006, when the Army and Marine Corps issued a completely revised—but airpower "lite"—counterinsurgency (COIN) manual commonly known as Field Manual (FM) 3-24.[2] Complimentary reviews appeared in unlikely venues such as *The New York Times Book Review*.[3] What seems to have captured the imagination of many who might otherwise be hostile to any military doctrine were the manual's much-discussed "Zen-like" characteristics, particularly its popular "Paradoxes" section.[4] This part of the manual contained such trendy (if ultimately opaque) dictums as "sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is" and "some of the best weapons for counterinsurgents do not shoot."[5]

These maxims helped create the perception that the new doctrine was a "kinder and gentler" form of COIN that largely eschewed the concept of "killing or capturing" enemy fighters as a means of suppressing an insurgency.[6] Supporting this interpretation is the fact that FM 3-24 favors deploying enormous numbers of forces—20 per 1,000 residents[7]—each of whom, according to the manual, "must be prepared to become . . . a social worker, a

civil engineer, a school teacher, a nurse, a boy scout."[8] Further, as popularly understood, the aim of this revamped force was not to confront the insurgents themselves, but rather to win "hearts and minds" of the indigenous population.[9] To do so, the manual prefers a low-tech approach compatible with traditional Army culture that has individual soldiers engaging in close, personal contact with the "target." In FM 3-24's interpretation of COIN, that target is a country's populace.

All of this discussion left little theoretical room for the role of airpower. FM 3-24's examination of airpower is confined to a brief, five-page annex that essentially conceives airpower as aerial artillery. Accordingly, airpower is discouraged not just because the use of force is generally disdained by the popular interpretation of the manual's theory, but also because of the mistaken idea that air-delivered munitions are somehow more inaccurate than other kinds of fires.[10]

In perhaps no other area has the manual been proven more wrong by the events of 2007. As this article will outline, the profound changes in airpower's capabilities have so increased its utility that it is now often the weapon of first recourse in COIN operations, even in urban environments. As to weapons' accuracy, by early 2008 Human Rights Watch senior military analyst Marc Garlasco made the remarkable concession that today "airstrikes probably are the most discriminating weapon that exists."[11]

It is important to underline that the manual's flawed conclusions about airpower are not the result of nefariousness or service parochialism. Rather, FM 3-24 draws many of its lessons from counterinsurgency operations dating from the 1950s through the 1970s. While this approach is remarkably effective in many respects, it inherently undervalues airpower. The revolutions in airpower capabilities that would prove so effective during 2007 were unavailable to counterinsurgents in earlier eras. The writers of FM 3-24 were stuck with antiquated ideas about what airpower might contribute to a joint COIN effort.

In any event, many welcomed the "kinder and gentler" approach to COIN as being a near-total reversal of the less-than-successful strategy then in effect in Iraq. In early 2007 one of FM 3-24's principal architects, General

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David H. Petraeus, arrived in Iraq as the senior US commander, and the manual quickly became known as "The Book" on efforts there.[12] Shortly thereafter, some 30,000 additional forces, mostly Army units, "surged" into Iraq. By the end of 2007 the level of violence was significantly reduced.

Was airpower omitted from the operations that produced 2007's successes? Hardly. Of enormous significance is the fact that airstrikes in Iraq increased fivefold between 2006 and 2007.[13] In addition, virtually every other aspect of airpower was exploited during the surge with great effect.[14] In short, contrary to the assumptions bred by FM 3-24, ground-force commanders rather unexpectedly embraced airpower's potential and created the modern era's most dramatic revolution in COIN warfare.

This article examines why airpower became critical to COIN operations in 2007, a trend continuing today and one with huge implications for the future. Among other things, it will discuss the revolutions in precision and persistence that have so radically enhanced airpower's value in COIN warfare. It will also outline the strengths and weaknesses of the Air Force's new doctrine on irregular warfare which seeks to capture the service's COIN approach. The author argues that while FM 3-24's surface-force-centric approach to COIN can work, recent experience in Iraq demonstrates that leaders of all services want a more joint and interdependent concept that exploits airpower in all its dimensions. Such an approach can reduce the need for the enormous numbers of US ground forces FM 3-24 entails, freeing them to prepare for other kinds of conflicts. Airpower can help, this article contends, to provide options for decisionmakers faced with a COIN challenge that capitalize on systems which are also useful in other kinds of conflicts.

FM 3-24 Can Work

It cannot be emphasized enough that there has never been a question as to whether FM 3-24's ground-centric approach could work. It can; its force ratios alone would overwhelm any insurgency, even without implementing any of the manual's "Zen-like" features. The American soldier is, without doubt, the finest infantryman in the world, perhaps in the history of warfare. US ground forces, if deployed in the numbers FM 3-24 dictates, simply cannot be defeated by any insurgency.

The real question, especially when looking to the future, is whether FM 3-24's approach is a practical, sustainable, and optimal strategy for the twenty-first century. Maintaining large numbers of forces in Iraq has strained the entire US military, especially the ground components. What is worrisome about a strategy so dependent upon "boots-on-the-ground" is that there are nearly 40 countries more populous than Iraq, some of which are failing or al-

ready failed states. FM 3-24's force ratios would be unattainable if the United States intervened in many of these nations.

The manual's solution is not just manpower-intensive; it requires a particular kind of manpower that is difficult to recruit, train, and maintain. As already noted, FM 3-24 calls for counterinsurgents who are experts at "soft power" activities. Although the Army recently met its recruiting goals, it has done so by inducting thousands of troops without high school degrees and thousands more requiring "moral waivers" due to otherwise disqualifying factors. While such recruits may make competent general-purpose forces, they are not the prized counterinsurgency professionals described in FM 3-24.

In framing strategy for the future, it is important to evaluate to what extent experience in Iraq has matched the perception of the doctrine. Has the situation improved because soft power techniques won hearts and minds? Or did the exercise of hard power predominate? While thousands of ground troops did surge into Iraq, relatively few were the highly trained counterinsurgents FM 3-24 desires. All the same, important aspects of the manual were implemented with great success. Troops were deployed from their sprawling compounds into scores of small outposts. Sadly, as many predicted, this contributed to 2007 being the deadliest year of the war for US forces.

Still, the physical presence of the additional forces had the sanguinary effect of stifling insurgent activity in Iraq's most prominent media center, Baghdad, and apparently creating a sense of security and progress beyond the city's limits. Additionally, FM 3-24's tenet of encouraging the reestablishment of the rule of law was markedly advanced by the creation of a secure "Green Zone" for law enforcement and judicial facilities, along with housing for Iraqi personnel and their families.[15]

As important as these developments were (and are) to the COIN effort, there is strong evidence that 2007's successes were attributable to other than the "kinder, gentler" aspects of the manual. Were hearts and minds won? Polls indicate that while Iraqi perceptions of Americans improved somewhat, the overwhelming numbers suggest that the vast majority of the population remains unchanged in their dislike of American forces. For example, 63 percent of Iraqis thought the surge had either made things worse or had no effect, and only four percent gave US forces credit for improved security.[16] Additionally, 79 percent of Iraqis had little or no confidence in American troops, and—amazingly—42 percent still think attacks on American forces are "acceptable."[17]

Yet security did improve. Giving some credence to the soft power techniques that popularized FM 3-24 does not change the fact that there was an extraordinary amount of "killing and capturing" during 2007. Although figures of enemy casualties are hard to verify, in September 2007 military of-

ficials told *USA Today* that the number of insurgents killed was already 25 percent ahead of 2006.[18] By the end of the year, some unconfirmed reports indicated the total number killed may have more than doubled compared with the previous year.[19] As regrettable as it may be, killing does seem to suppress violence in locations where "hearts and minds" remain mostly "lost."

Capturing helps too. In Iraq, the number of suspected insurgents captured and detained skyrocketed from 15,000 at the end of 2006 to more than 25,000 during 2007.[20] What makes this number so important is that as late as the fall of 2006, the total number of insurgents then at large was estimated by the Brookings Institution as totaling 20,000 to 30,000.[21] In other words, notwithstanding the chic interpretations of effective COIN doctrine, capturing and imprisoning tens of thousands of Iraqi males seems to have had a profoundly positive effect on reducing violence.

Of course "killing and capturing" were not the only reasons for the decline in violence. Accommodations were made with Sunni and Shia leaders that produced separate sectarian fiefdoms. There is the much-reported "Awakening" in Anbar province that armed and employed many former insurgents to protect their religiously homogenized territories. Similar offers were extended to other groups with some success. In a real sense, however, violence may have subsided in many of the "protected" areas because the purging of the other sects was already complete. It remains to be seen the degree to which peace came at the price of pluralism, tolerance, and genuine democracy.[22]

Obviously, there are several factors that produced the relative peace Iraq enjoyed by the end of 2007. Nevertheless it is undeniable that, as the Congressional Research Service observed in February 2008, "one of the major shifts [in strategy] has been in the kinetic use of air power."[23]

The Precision and Persistence Revolutions

Why did airpower's COIN utility become so prominent in 2007? The short answer might be captured in developments in two areas that are nothing short of revolutionary: precision and persistence. Together, these elements do not just physically degrade an insurgency's ability to wreak violence; they also can create psychological effects upon insurgents that COIN practitioners are only beginning to understand.

Historian Paul Gillespie labeled precision-guided munitions the "ultimate weapon" in conventional fights, largely because of their vastly increased ability to avoid collateral damage.[24] In fact, he cites a study that concluded only "twenty of twenty-three thousand munitions dropped by NATO in the 1999 Kosovo campaign caused collateral damage or civilian casualties."[25] Though Gillespie recognizes that even the most precise weaponry has limits with respect to the strategic and political results it can achieve, he

nevertheless insists that precision-guided munitions "have changed the modern battlefield, and in the process created a new American way of war."[26]

Changes in munitions themselves complement their newfound accuracy. Some of these have been customized for COIN operations to explicitly mitigate collateral damage,[27] and the results have proven effective. As Lieutenant General Gary L. North explained regarding the small diameter bomb (SDB):[28]

> The SDB is uniquely qualified for urban targets that call for precision accuracy and reduced collateral damage and in close-air-support missions that our aircrews find themselves in during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. We now have the ability to put ordnance in places where collateral damage might be a concern.[29]

The concept of precision is more than the ability of the weapon to hit the right place; it is as much about knowing the right place to strike. That revolution involves advanced concepts of command and control that ever-improving intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities facilitate. With regard to the latter, much of the improvement is not so much in the sensors themselves, but in the length of time the sensors are able to sense.

What has been "game-changing" in this regard is the increased availability of various long-loiter, armed unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) platforms. In the fall of 2007, retired Army General Barry McCaffrey used terms very similar to Gillespie's to describe the astonishing advances in airborne ISR capabilities that are revising the way war is conducted. In essence, General McCaffrey was describing the persistence revolution in ISR when he said:

> We have already made a 100-year war-fighting leap-ahead with MQ-1 Predator, MQ-9 Reaper, and Global Hawk.[30] Now we have loiter times in excess of 24 hours, persistent eyes on target, micro-kill with Hellfire and 500-pound JDAM [Joint Direct Attack Munition] bombs, synthetic aperture radar, and a host of ISR sensors and communications potential that have fundamentally changed the nature of warfare.[31]

Likewise, in March 2008 defense analyst Loren Thompson told *USA Today* that current UAV assets "present a whole new dimension to detecting and destroying of terrorists' cells."[32] These technological innovations have transformed COIN's all-important intelligence-gathering function. As Thompson said, a UAV is "almost like having your own little satellite over a terrorist cell."[33] Ground commanders realize the value of airborne ISR, and this explains recent reports that cite such assets as General Petraeus's "top hardware priority in Iraq."[34]

ISR developments have major implications for the way airpower is used in COIN. Conventional COIN theory as reflected in FM 3-24 places

great emphasis on intelligence obtained from the indigenous population. While such intelligence can be quite valuable, it has to be viewed through a cultural lens and is vulnerable to a multitude of subjective machinations of those furnishing the information.

Visual observations have a grammar all their own. A May 2008 *U.S. News and World Report* article explained how sophisticated aerial surveillance had become by noting that Air Force ISR capabilities often can provide a superior perspective than even the "boots on the ground."[35] The article noted that at the forward deployed Air Operations Center UAVs are used to:

> [E]stablish a "pattern of life" around potential targets—recording such things as the comings and goings of friends, school hours, and market times. Despite the distance, the real-time video feeds often give them a better vantage point than an Army unit has just down the street from a group of insurgents.[36]

Similarly, journalist Mark Benjamin provides an exceptionally incisive illustration of how the persistence revolution complements the new precision capabilities by observing that ISR assets can now effectively track individual people for extended periods.[37] Benjamin reports:

> The Air Force recently watched one man in Iraq for more than five weeks, carefully recording his habits—where he lives, works, and worships, and whom he meets . . . The military may decide to have such a man arrested, or to do nothing at all. Or, at any moment they could decide to blow him to smithereens.[38]

The last statement may be more insightful than perhaps even Benjamin realized. The precision and persistence of today's airpower creates opportunities to dislocate the psychology of the insurgents. Insurgents' sheer inability to anticipate how high-technology airpower might put them at risk can inflict stress, thereby greatly diminishing their effectiveness. For example, *The Los Angeles Times* reported in April 2008 that in Afghanistan NATO "forces recently have had unusual success in tracking and targeting mid-level Taliban field commanders, killing scores of them in pinpoint airstrikes." Because the Taliban believed that cell phone signals were being used to target them, they began blowing up telecommunications towers. The result, *The Times* reported, "could hardly have been a worse public-relations move for the insurgency" because ordinary Afghans were enraged; many had become dependent upon cell phones, and the system was a source of national pride.[39]

Another data point comes from the 2008 operations in Basra. When the Iraqi Army's effort ran into difficulties, US airpower proved instrumental in stabilizing the situation.[40] Again, evidence is emerging to suggest airpower is having the proper psychological effects. Specifically, according to CNN,

Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr ordered his militias to stand-down in a "nine-point statement [that] followed US airstrikes" in Baghdad areas considered strong-holds of his Mehdi Army.[41]

Airpower can unnerve even the fiercest fighters. Though they may be willing to die heroically in battle against US forces, that is not the death contemporary airpower permits. As one Afghan told *The New York Times*, "We pray to Allah that we have American soldiers to kill" but added pessimis-tically that "these bombs from the sky we cannot fight."[42]

The helplessness that airpower inflicts on insurgents' thinking can produce real effects. In Colombia, for example, the rebel group known as the Revolutionary Armed Force of Colombia (FARC in its Spanish acronym) is facing accelerating desertions, raising the possibility that the entire insur-gency may unravel. Why? According to interviews with former rebels, "the sheer terror of being bombed by Colombian fighter planes" was a crucial fac-tor in their decision to desert.[43]

In short, the psychological effects of persistent ISR and precision airpower are revising the oft-misunderstood notion of airpower's strategic impact. Where historically there was much discussion about the effect, or lack thereof, of airpower on the civilian populations of hostile nations, now the issue is much different: It focuses on the psychological impact on the in-surgents themselves, not the civilian population. As one report put it:

> Iraqi insurgents have learned to fear the drones. "They hear some sort of air noise and they don't know exactly what it is, but they know it's associated with 'my buddy getting killed,'" says [a US soldier]. "Anything that makes them un-easy makes me happy."[44]

As that anecdote reveals, airpower can now inflict on insurgents the same kind of disconcerting sense of vulnerability that the enemy sought to impose upon US troops via improvised explosive devices, the most deadly weapon COIN forces face.[45] Today, the situation is much-reversed as a result of American air assets: US "soldiers do not have to feel like they are sitting ducks for every ambusher or bombmaker. As they peer up at that . . . bird? . . . it's the insurgents who have to worry."[46]

As important as imposing this kind of "friction" on the minds of en-emy combatants may be, it is also still possible in certain circumstances to use airpower kinetically to influence the civilian population, albeit not in the tra-ditional way. Doing so can help win hearts and minds. For example, consider the effect when B-1 bombers destroyed an al Qaeda torture compound in early March 2008. After the facility was flattened, a former Iraqi victim declared, "I'm a lot happier now . . . . It was like my mother gave birth to me again." Fur-thermore reports say that "[a]s Coalition forces left the area, villagers stood

on the side of the road cheering and clapping to be rid of this remnant of al-Qaida."[47]

Air Force Doctrine; Needs a "Vector Check"?

Ironically, the Air Force's own recently published doctrine is not especially reflective of the precision and persistence revolution as implemented in the field beginning in 2007. The drafting of that doctrine began only when it became clear that FM 3-24, with its "airpower-lite" views, would function not just as service doctrine for the Army and Marine Corps, but also as the design for the entire operation in Iraq. By early spring 2007, the Air Force's historical complacence regarding COIN abruptly ended as it convened a COIN conference that "jump started" its own doctrine-development project.[48]

That effort produced Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, which was fielded the following August.[49] AFDD 2-3, which aims to cover counterterrorism and other operations in addition to COIN, does represent a marked advance in Air Force thinking. It references Air Force key capabilities in the areas of ISR, mobility, agile combat support, precision engagement, and command and control. Importantly, it makes the vital point that the introduction of a large US ground force on foreign soil "may exacerbate the local situation while providing adversaries a new target set for attacks and propaganda." Airpower, on the other hand, "can deliver a variety of effects from great distance without increasing force presence in a region or country."[50]

Still, there are issues. The Air Force doctrine mimics FM 3-24's tendency to overemphasize what "hearts and mind-winning" efforts by occupying troops can accomplish in situations where xenophobia imbues the populace, and the insurgency's core is comprised of ideologically immovable extremists. Thus, it undervalues the function of force in suppressing intractable insurgents. Perhaps most surprising is its seeming replication of FM 3-24's relegation of airpower to an "enabling" role as opposed to that of an independent maneuver force.[51]

Much like FM 3-24, AFDD 2-3 declares several times that irregular warfare (IW) "is not a lesser-included form of traditional warfare" as if it were relevant to an Air Force approach to COIN.[52] Actually, the record of 2007 forcefully demonstrates that airpower's instrumentalities of traditional war include—lesser or otherwise—tremendous capabilities across the full spectrum of conflict. This utility extends, for example, beyond the kinetic uses previously addressed. To illustrate: by taking 5,000 trucks off dangerous Iraqi roads in a single month, C-17 transports—the same aircraft that would be employed in high-end war—became, in effect, perfect counter-IED weaponry.[53]

This concept is vitally important because airpower's inherent flexibility differentiates it from groundpower's assertion (as reflected in FM 3-24)

that its conventional capability cannot easily transition from the traditional fight to a COIN role.[54] The failure of AFDD 2-3 to emphasize this agility as a central and unique strength of airpower detracts from the overall doctrine. Additionally, the doctrine does not examine at all how airpower may be used (as it was in 2007) to inflict a psychological toll on insurgents.

Most troubling, a central pillar of the doctrine is "building partner-ship capacity," or BPC. While BPC may have strategic, "big picture" value apart from IW, it has little practical utility in most COIN environments. It is very often too expensive and too time consuming. Iraq is a perfect example: It will take nearly three years before the Iraqis are able to conduct their first air-borne kinetic strike, and that will likely be a small-scale, relatively low-tech operation involving a few Russian helicopters.[55]

While this minimal capability may have some morale value for the Iraqis, its true military value in COIN is marginal. It should not be overlooked that the emergence of US airpower as a premier COIN weapon in 2007 de-pended greatly upon what has been described as a "battery of technology" in-volving "drone aircraft, three-dimensional satellite images, and increasingly small precision weapons guided by lasers or Global Positioning Systems."[56] For a host of reasons, few "partner" nations will have access to such high-tech capabilities, and it is simply too difficult to build these technologies on a timeline that will make a difference in most COIN scenarios.

Similarly, some advocates are urging the Air Force's acquisition of low-tech, fixed-wing aircraft, specifically for a COIN role. While there may be instances where such aircraft could prove effective, overall it is not a solu-tion the US military ought to embrace without having a rationale beyond COIN. Slow-moving, low-altitude, fixed-wing aircraft are simply too vulner-able, even to older antiaircraft systems. In a real way, implementing this sug-gestion would build an air force with significant manpower and infrastructure requirements yet with all the low-tech deficiencies that consigned airpower to a peripheral role in FM 3-24. It is simply not the kind of "airpower" that proved successful in 2007.

This is another example of how AFDD 2-3 embraces a concept appro-priate for ground forces but not for air forces. While a few months of training can turn a poorly educated but culturally imbued host-nation soldier into an effective counterinsurgent, such is not the case with airpower. It takes years of education and training to produce an airman, time and resources many nations do not have. Finally, why should the Air Force acquire a capability useful in only one kind of conflict, especially when doing so will burden the service with yet another plat-form having unique operational and sustainment requirements?

If a modest, demonstrably cost-efficient aerial kinetic capability is desired for indigenous forces, the BPC ought to focus on acquiring rotary as-

sets already part of the Army's aviation arm. Indeed, if all that is desired is a standoff, precision-strike system, the Army's satellite-guided Excalibur artillery round would seem to be a better, quicker fit for local forces.[57] These assets have utility across the full spectrum of conflict, not simply COIN, a tenet that should drive the bulk of the US military's future equipment purchases.

The Way Ahead

The experience of 2007 (and extending into 2008) indicates that neither FM 3-24 nor AFDD 2-3 have the doctrine quite right.[58] While each manual arguably advances a valued perspective, neither really captures the principles that should guide an American COIN doctrine designed to optimize a truly interdependent joint team. Several factors call for a reevaluation.

First, the efficacy of "killing and capturing" insurgents needs to be fully acknowledged. In fairness, the perceptions of FM 3-24 in this regard seem to frustrate its authors. Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, one of the manual's primary drafters, insists the manual is more about ensuring the right people were killed and captured as opposed to suggesting that killing or capturing could be avoided altogether by some collection of nonviolent means. Likewise, General Petraeus bristles at the suggestion the manual "shy[s] away from the need to kill the enemy" arguing that "[t]he words 'kill' and 'capture' are on every page."[59]

We need to understand that the complex nature of today's insurgent threat differs from that of the twentieth century. According to former Army officer John R. Sutherland, the twenty-first century has given rise to what he calls the "iGuerrilla" which he describes as "the New Model Techno-Insurgent" who exploits technology in a wide variety of ways.[60] What is key, Sutherland contends, is that the iGuerrilla "cannot be swayed by logic or argument" and is markedly different from those insurgents of the twentieth century who, he contends, are relegated to the "dustbin of history."[61]

"Hearts and minds" campaigns, however successful they may be among the bulk of the population, cannot by themselves end the pattern of near-anarchic violence the hardcore iGuerrillas use to block COIN success. Counterinsurgents can, however, defeat the "New Model Techno-Insurgent" at his own techno-game if they accept the fact that technology is a centerpiece of their culture; it is, in fact, our "asymmetric" advantage. Recently, strategic theorist Colin Gray noted:

> [H]igh technology is the American way in warfare. It has to be. A high-technology society cannot possibly prepare for, or attempt to fight, its wars in any other than a technology-led manner.[62]

The United States has to develop technology capable of substituting for "boots-on-the-ground" in order to provide future decisionmakers with broader options. Pragmatism drives this approach, not any deficiency in the valor or dedication of US ground forces. Apart from the difficulty—and risks—of acquiring and maintaining a COIN-focused Army, there is the mind-numbing price of a manpower-intensive COIN strategy.[63] Currently, it costs more than $390,000 to deploy each US soldier to Iraq,[64] an expense complicated by the political reality that COIN seldom engages, as Jeffrey Record observes, "core US security interests,"[65] at least in the public's perceptions. This fact is likely one of the main reasons why, despite the real success of the past year, a poll found that 62 percent of Americans think the United States should have stayed out of Iraq,[66] and another survey shows that 56 percent want the troops brought home.[67]

Beyond the potential reluctance of the US electorate, another difficulty in using significant numbers of US ground forces as counterinsurgents is the fact that although America's image is improving around the globe, it is still extremely negative.[68] That no country on the entire continent of Africa would host the US Africa Command headquarters is but one indicator that for the foreseeable future a large "footprint" of American ground combat forces in any overseas operation should expect to be unwelcome by the indigenous population.[69]

Thus, the notion that American COIN or nation-building efforts can best be executed by infusing the host state with large numbers of US troops is fundamentally flawed. In fact, the deeply entrenched view of US troops as an occupation force is now the main rallying point for anti-American feelings among many Iraqis.[70] More broadly, in a new book Middle Eastern expert William R. Polk argues that the "fundamental motivation" of insurgents during the past three centuries is traceable to an "aim primarily to protect the integrity of the native group from foreigners."[71]

Considering all the brutal realities of twenty-first century insurgencies it is imperative, as strategist Phillip Meilinger observes, to completely recast America's approach to COIN in an effort to achieve "politically desirable results with the least cost in blood and treasure."[72] Doing so, Meilinger contends, requires the adaptation of a new paradigm that leverages airpower's precision strike and persistent ISR capabilities with US Special Forces and indigenous troops on the ground—much the formula employed with great success in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and northern Iraq in the early 1990s. Overarching this effort would be a reconceptualization of the entire fight against extremism, one that makes psychological operations the main "weapon" and posits an intelligence entity as the supported command.[73]

To be sure, a COIN doctrine compatible with America's posture in the world, as well as its high-tech strengths, does not necessarily eliminate the need for "boots-on-the-ground." It does, however, emphasize that indigenous forces should comprise the bulk of the counterinsurgent force ratios outlined in FM 3-24. They can be supported by US Special Forces, along with specially trained Army advisers, but the "face" of the COIN effort interfacing with the local population should be native, not American.[74] This blend of local ground forces reinforced with US advisers and sophisticated American technology can work; recent reports, for example, "showed the Iraqi Army to be considerably resilient when backed by Coalition airpower."[75] Necessary for success, however, is not just any kind of airpower, but rather the high-tech precision and persistence-enabled airpower that has proven so effective since 2007.

Of course, the solution to any COIN situation will never be exclusively military. Yet at the same time it is a mistake to underestimate what military means can accomplish. In that respect, exploitation of the air weapon can contribute as never before. The experience of 2007 clearly demonstrates that its newfound precision and persistence have revolutionized COIN warfare. US doctrine must evolve to fully capitalize airpower's newly enhanced prowess.

NOTES

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