

# The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

---

Volume 41  
Number 4 *Parameters Winter 2011*

Article 8

---

11-1-2011

## Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency?

Frank G. Hoffman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>

---

### Recommended Citation

Frank G. Hoffman, "Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency?," *Parameters* 41, no. 4 (2011), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.2607.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

# Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency?

FRANK G. HOFFMAN

© 2007 Frank G. Hoffman

*This article was first published in the Summer 2007 issue of Parameters.*

The newly issued Army/Marine counterinsurgency (COIN) manual has been met with well deserved acclaim. It is a product of our collective understanding of insurgency and ongoing experiences in Iraq. It is also the product of various schools of thought about modern insurgencies, including what can be called the classical school, based on the concepts of Mao and revolutionary warfare.<sup>1</sup> In this article I will attempt to capture the impact and implications of the classical school on the new doctrine, as well as evaluate the final product.

The classicists focus, perhaps myopically, on the glorious heyday of revolutionary warfare in the 1950s and 1960s. They embrace the teachings of the British expert Robert Thompson and the French officer David Galula.<sup>2</sup> Numerous pundits have christened Galula as the modern Clausewitz of COIN.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, Thompson and Galula's concepts pervade the recent Army/Marine COIN manual, FM 3-24. Galula was a serious student of modern warfare, and following World War II spent the remainder of his career exploring revolutionary wars, from China to Vietnam.<sup>4</sup> But one senses that he would be startled by the complexity of Afghanistan and Iraq and the distinctly broader global insurgency of the Long War.

The classicists ignore the uniqueness of Maoist or colonial wars of national liberation, and over-generalize the principles that have been drawn from them. Today's insurgent is not the Maoist of yesterday.<sup>5</sup> In point of fact, there is not as much common ground among the "masters" as the classicists would have you believe.<sup>6</sup> The so-called classical principles are really a commonly accepted set of key principles and practices that have emerged over time. Some of the classical principles are just blatant flashes of the obvious, such as Robert Thompson's somber advice "the government must have an overall plan." (Given our experience in Iraq, perhaps this principle is not so obvious after

---

*Mr. Hoffman is a retired Marine Reserve infantry officer and a national security consultant in Washington, D. C. He served in the Pentagon for a decade as an analyst, and participated on several Defense Science Boards. He served as a professional staff member of the Roles and Mission Commission and the US National Security Commission. He has authored over a hundred articles and essays on military history, strategy, and future warfare. He was a member of the writing team for FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency.*

all). Other classical principles are not reflected in the writings and teachings of the masters, but have been absorbed over time. For example, the emphasis on “legitimacy” which pervades the classicist’s mantra. The new field manual wisely notes that legitimacy is best defined by the host population.<sup>7</sup>

The new COIN manual embraced these principles, along with an eclectic amalgamation of imperatives, paradoxes, and best practices.<sup>8</sup> A total of eight principles, five contemporary imperatives, ten paradoxes, and another dozen best practices are presented.<sup>9</sup> These various components were given great scrutiny during the drafting process and reflect both classical and contemporary influences.

Overall, the new Army/Marine Corps counterinsurgency manual is a substantial step forward. In particular, the introductory and campaign design chapters represent fresh thinking. The chapters devoted to intelligence and the training of indigenous forces are also quite useful. But the manual is not without its shortcomings. The classicist’s influence was a backdrop in the development of the manual. Early drafts were strongly criticized for the emphasis placed on Mao and revolutionary warfare. A writer’s conference in February of 2006, hosted by then Lieutenant General David Petraeus at Fort Leavenworth provided an opportunity for the wider community to comment on the initial draft. The writing team, headed by Dr. Conrad Crane, the Director of the Army’s Military History Institute, assessed inputs from a wide-range of experts, Iraq veterans, and international participants.

The new doctrine’s principal theme, a thread that cutting across the modern insurgency is the appropriate requirement to “learn and adapt.”<sup>10</sup> This theme is ironic given the reaction that the manual received from outside experts. The manual’s Foreword observes, “You cannot fight former Saddamists and Islamic extremists the same way you would have fought the Viet Cong, Moros, or Tupamaros.” But the manual also inexplicably states, “broad historical trends underlie the factors motivating insurgents” and “most insurgencies follow a similar course of development.”<sup>11</sup> This Yin and Yang tension permeates the opening chapter. The editors strove to merge the so-called traditional approaches with the realities of a new world shaped by globalization and the spread of extremist ideologies. It is this necessary merger of the past and the present that may be categorized as “neo-classical counterinsurgency.”

The final version of the manual was strongly influenced by the classicists. For example, it is clear that the factors motivating some insurgents today are not reflected by broad historical trends, nor do they follow previously recognized phases. Even the insurgent’s organizations are vastly different. More importantly, some insurgents do not seek clearly defined political objectives or attainable goals. Some do not even seek the overthrow of an existing regime or control of a state’s ability to govern; for these groups and individuals just participating in the jihad is enough.<sup>12</sup>

How much these new elements alter classical COIN is a critical issue. A number of highly regarded analysts are calling for a substantial reconceptualization of much of the existing theory and doctrine.<sup>13</sup> One needs to ask to what

degree is current theory derived from this evolving landscape? How has today's context and landscape altered existing classical theory? The retired Army intelligence analyst Ralph Peters has already decried the manual's outdated and dubious Maoist foundation.<sup>14</sup> Another scholar from a British university, concluded:

While the new counterinsurgency field manual is thorough, serious, and stands in sharp contrast to the political rhetoric concerning the "War on Terror" of the last few years, it is not without failings, chief among them that it is pervaded by concepts drawn from Maoist-style People's Revolutionary Warfare, which is not the sort of insurgency now being faced.<sup>15</sup>

The published version of the field manual should have set such criticisms aside, and provided the military with a framework for the training and education of soldiers and Marines. But the final version still did not venture deeply enough into today's continuing global insurgency or directly respond to changing environmental conditions that complicate, if not invalidate, standard counterinsurgency practices and principles.

### ***Environmental Conditions***

The remainder of this article will examine the influence of these new environmental factors and their incorporation in the development of the COIN manual. These and other environmental factors require us to, "Rebuild our mental model of this conflict, redesign our classical counterinsurgency and counterterrorism methods and continually develop innovative and culturally effective approaches."<sup>16</sup>

Effective COIN practices require an astute understanding of both the history of irregular conflict and an appreciation of today's evolving security environment. Several factors will impact the nature, frequency, and character of irregular warfare in the twenty-first century. The impact of these altered characteristics will have a significant influence on the conduct of such conflicts in the future.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Trans-national and Trans-dimensional Actors***

The first new factor is the explosion in the number of actors present in today's irregular warfare battlespace. No longer can a colonial power isolate its colony or client state from the outside world and quietly impose its will. What the Marines call "Small Wars" have often been multilateral or at best regional, but if trends continue they will certainly be vastly more complicated. The past several decades bear witness to the creation of many new states, an explosion in the number of nongovernmental agencies, the addition of private volunteer organizations, and a remarkable increase in companies providing services and products. Every war produces an institutional smorgasbord or mosaic of players, participants and spoilers. The COIN manual aptly describes this mosaic and the resulting difficulty of achieving unity of effort.

The impact of external forces includes a similar explosion in the number of news organizations, media outlets, and websites offering information and imagery. These outlets also facilitate involvement and economic support from ethnic and national supporters around the globe. Some analysts are extremely sensitive to the pernicious influence of the media, even accusing them of participating in the conflict, or at worst being a combatant.<sup>18</sup>

Diasporas are another structural component and source of external support. These globally dispersed communities, connected as never before by improved information and transportation technologies, comprise a growing category of external participants contributing significant resources and personnel to support respective communities. Private military or security companies are another form of armed actor in the insurgency battlespace.

These factors dramatically increase the complexity of trying to define the battlespace. The presence of the United Nations and myriad of regional relief agencies, coalition partners, private security forces or semi-military organizations, several dozen media entities, and a raft of commercial contractors make counterinsurgency planning and execution increasingly more difficult. The operational battlespace is further cluttered in terms of urban settings by foreign “human terrain” and competing interest groups. Some experts argue that we need to simplify the operational space through the use of common concepts and by “licensing” participation by various parties.<sup>19</sup>

Another implication of how diverse insurgent battlespace is becoming is the difficulty of simply defining the nature of the opponent, and assessing his strategy, structure, and means. The classicists are moot on transnational structure, and the absences of shadow governments (as in Iraq) are telling points. Future threats may pose a range of potential organizational structures, including traditional and fixed hierarchical structures led by charismatic individuals. They may organize into loosely affiliated networks, linked by a key individual, common ideology, or common enemies. They may elect to follow a more cellular structure, exercising greater autonomy and less connectivity than the old formal networks. Lastly, such organizations may employ hybrid structures, where specific capabilities or financial support are provided to local cells in an attempt to augment their functional capability for a single mission.<sup>20</sup>

Future opponents will not fit easily on an organizational chart. Researchers from RAND suggest that insurgents are adapting into even more complex organizational structures and combining with existing criminal entities to form “federated insurgent complexes” with potent resources and malevolent intentions.<sup>21</sup> Global networks and criminal financing will become ever more prominent, a factor the classicists overlook. Recent research suggests that the temporary arrangements and structures associated with such “complexes” may be too formal and rejected by today’s global jihadist. Their preferred organization is even more amorphous and could be best described as a nebula.<sup>22</sup>

Much of the interest reflected in contemporary literature in global networks is the result of the actions of al Qaeda and its ilk.<sup>23</sup> But this is not the only organizational type that we should be concerned with.<sup>24</sup> Today’s tapestry

includes traditional thugs from Africa, apocalyptic cults such as the Japanese Aum Shrinryko group, as well as clan or tribe-based opponents in Somalia. Potential adversaries may also include former military elements or paramilitary forces, as evidenced in Kosovo and by Iraq's *fedayeen*. The need is acute for a framework and the modeling tools necessary to assist policymakers and military planners in understanding these organizations, their structures, recruiting methods, goals, and operating systems.<sup>25</sup>

While FM 3-24 details the standard organization of a Maoist model, it does an excellent job of providing insight on how to analyze other social networks.<sup>26</sup> The complex nature of modern COIN and its ambiguous or mosaic structure is also presented. What the field manual does not do is assist future commanders in understanding how different organizations, having different structures, operating methods and strategic objectives, may require a different strategies or doctrinal approaches. Even highly dispersed but tightly networked groups have inherent vulnerabilities and internal factions or inconsistencies which can be exploited.<sup>27</sup> Future doctrine should expand on these variations and provide a greater degree of operational approaches so to assist commanders and their staffs in matching the diversity of adversaries with the most appropriate strategy.

### **Urbanization**

Numerous demographic and security studies underscore the increase in the degree of urbanization, especially in the developing world. The size and dynamics of these mega-cities is staggering. Demographic trends and the operational dynamics associated with a number of irregular forces around the globe point to an increase in urban conflicts. As evidenced by the insurgencies in Afghanistan, the Philippines, and Columbia, rural insurgencies have not vanished, but the complex terrain of the world's amorphous urban centers is fast becoming the insurgent and terrorist's jungle of the twenty-first century.<sup>28</sup> Irregular conflicts in cities are not entirely unique. However, the frequency and scale of urban-based conflicts is becoming an ever more important factor in our understanding of irregular war.

The rationale for this shift is founded in more than demographics. Would-be insurgents and terrorists go where the people and money are; they seek security by hiding among the population and within the complexity of a modern-day metropolis. Sanctuary and safe bases were gained in the past through distance and complex terrain, far from a government's power center. The classic guerrilla setting was the mountainous hideout, the dense forest, or wild jungle. These settings offered sanctuary for insurgent forces to train and rest. They also afforded the insurgent the cover, protection, and sustenance required.<sup>29</sup> This type of cover and support is even greater in cities with heterogeneous populations, locations in which guerrillas may freely exist. In traditional villages, outsiders are instantly identified, but in a mega-city teeming with a diverse population and high volumes of commerce, the jihadists will not be as readily recognizable.<sup>30</sup>



Today, distance is exchanged for density. Urbanization presents an environment with populations and infrastructure so dense that law enforcement, intelligence, and conventional military assets may not be as effective. Dense urban centers provide the urban guerrilla or terrorist with many of the same advantages as the classical setting, as well as the added dimension of lucrative targets.<sup>31</sup> Where political systems are brittle, the combination of population growth and urbanization fosters instability and ever-increasing challenges to political control and public security. Modern insurgents exploit these environmental factors to their advantage.

The combination of global support from diasporas and concentrations in urban complexes has altered the usual centers of gravity associated with insurgencies. In a modern urban environment, where insurgents operate within the hodgepodge of a metropolis, they can be indirectly supported by criminal activities or other external agencies. This new equation may mean that popular support is no longer as critical, especially in the early stages of an insurgency. The degree to which an insurgent or antagonist can acquire such support globally reduces even further the need for local popular support. The presumption that the insurgents still seek or need popular support from a neutral mass of “undecideds” requires reconsideration.

The new field manual devotes a single paragraph to this environmental change. It admits that urban insurgencies are “difficult to counter” because they require little or no popular support.<sup>32</sup> But aside from that statement, the remainder of the manual is oriented on the historical antecedents of revolutionary warfare.<sup>33</sup> The manual does, however, implicitly incorporate a distinction between rural and urban contingencies emanating from Iraq with its emphasis on public services, i.e., sewage, water, and trash collection. Urban populations are often dependent on these services, and key leaders have found them to be an effective tool in countering unrest and instability.<sup>34</sup>

## **Religion**

Another factor that has not been satisfactorily resolved is the role of religion in today’s global insurgency. There are those who argue that religion is an important cause or influence in such conflict. This is not a new factor in the history of conflict; religion has played a key role for millennia. But its influence on behavior is often overlooked. Some see religion as a proxy for an ideology, others simply dismiss it as an irrational factor. Still others discount its influence or note that some insurgent leaders fraudulently high-jack religion with their message. Our own secular orientation often clouds the importance of this factor in modern warfare.

Religious influence will increasingly impact and perhaps instigate irregular conflict in the twenty-first century. Clearly, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism has made religion a relevant factor. The uneven benefits associated with globalization have weakened the ability of governments to provide the political, economic, social, and security environment that most populations

seek. Some will turn to religious affiliations and ideologies to provide these needs, and some will become radicalized by their exposure.

The impact of religion has already played a key role in modern warfare. There has been a dramatic rise in the religious affiliation of numerous terror organizations.<sup>35</sup> A generation ago none of the 11 major terrorist organizations was religiously oriented. By 2004, nearly half of the world's identifiable and active terrorist groups are classified as religious.<sup>36</sup> Religion has even been used to inspire terrorist groups that use the tactic of suicide attacks.<sup>37</sup> Religiously oriented organizations account for a disproportionately high percentage of such attacks. One expert concluded "the religious imperative is the most important defining characteristic of terrorist activity today."<sup>38</sup> The same can be said of insurgencies.

History suggests that religious influences can escalate the forms, levels, and types of violence.<sup>39</sup> Religion appears to play a role in lowering inhibitions and reducing moral barriers to violence, including suicide attacks. This results in more frequent attacks, extended campaigns, and greater casualties. Religious-based conflicts tend to make it more difficult to attain political compromise or settlement. Not surprisingly, religious civil wars last approximately two years longer than the average civil or intrastate conflict, and generate four times the casualties.<sup>40</sup>

For all the discussion about religion, the new manual is relatively mute on the subject. Here the classicists won again. The introductory chapter of the manual mentions religious identity and religious extremism as a modern day influence in the ideology of some insurgents.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately it offers few indications that the classical approach to terrorist or insurgent activities are altered at all by religious-based groups. The sole admission is an acknowledgement that "killing extremists will be necessary."<sup>42</sup>

Here the Maoist's perspective pervades. The manual's operational approach never deviates from Galula or Thompson's guidance. It never acknowledges that these guidelines assume that the target population has a value system similar to America's, or fundamental concepts regarding political order that are consistent with that of a representative democracy, universal individual rights, and free market economies. But if the population's value system is not consistent with these basic elements of the US approach, or if they reject them in favor of something founded in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, we may need a dramatically revised counterinsurgency strategy.

Economic inducements and material gains will not overcome someone's faith or religious identity. Far too much of our theory is based on a Western-oriented mindset that assumes the existence of some cost-benefit calculation of self-interest. American strategists and policymakers need to understand that such equations may not transcend other civilizations and cultures.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, unconventional warfare theorists have noted that the traditional "hearts and minds" approach pertains to only specific insurgents, and not to other post-modern forms of warfare.<sup>44</sup> America needs a better understanding of when and



under what circumstances our comprehensive approach might work and where it will not.

### ***The Information Dimension***

Ideas and grievances are the seeds of most insurgencies. For more than a decade, the security implications of information technology has been evaluated.<sup>45</sup> Given that most COIN campaigns are won or lost in the political and psychological dimensions, the importance of communications and ideas are vital.<sup>46</sup> However, the new COIN manual is a bit understated in its acknowledgement of the impact of these developments. The manual simply states that the “Information environment is critical” and “interconnectedness” gives the adversary new capabilities, but offers only the broadest of supporting guidance.<sup>47</sup>

Most irregular warfare theorists realize that the psychological dimension is crucial in such conflicts. T. E. Lawrence emphasized the power of ideas. Lawrence concluded, “the printing press is the greatest weapon in the armoury of the modern commander.”<sup>48</sup> If he were alive, he might modify that conclusion in favor of the video camera or the DVD recorder. Since winning “hearts and minds” is recognized as crucial, what some are now calling the “virtual dimension” of the battlespace may become just as critical.<sup>49</sup>

The sophisticated use of modern information technology can generate significant support for one’s cause throughout the international system or more directly through a network of sympathizers and supporters. It is a force multiplier for the side capable of creating a compelling narrative in the effort to gain and sustain an advantage. The manual notes the importance of such narratives but then inexplicably defines the information domain as a potential “virtual sanctuary” to the adversary, instead of identifying the virtual dimension as a crucial zone within the expanded battlespace.<sup>50</sup>

Today, small groups have mastered “armed theater” and promoted “propaganda of the deed” to arouse support and foment discord on a global scale.<sup>51</sup> There is a plethora of outlets in the Middle East, as well as, an exponentially growing number of websites and bloggers promoting their radical visions. These outlets constantly bombarded the residents of Iraq with pictures, videos, DVDs, and sermons. The number of websites devoted to jihadist literature or themes has exploded since 9/11, with the array of tools going far beyond the internet.<sup>52</sup> As Professor Bruce Hoffman notes, today’s irregular warriors have an expanded tool kit, and are not limited to:

Simply the guns and bombs that they always have used. Now those weapons include the Minicam and videotape; editing suite and attendant production facilities, professionally produced and mass-marketed CD-ROMS and DVDs; and most critically the laptop and desktop computers, CD burners, and e-mail accounts; and Internet and World Wide Web access that have defined the information revolution today.<sup>53</sup>

While irregular wars are quintessentially won or lost in the minds of men (and women), the US government and the Pentagon have yet to master modern information operations. The decision to withdraw the Marines from Fallujah in April of 2004 highlights the powerful effect that modern communications can have on local, regional, and global audiences.<sup>54</sup>

Recent scholarship has persuasively compared the ongoing mobilization of Muslims to numerous historical parallels from the French Revolution.<sup>55</sup> These include a democratization of communications, an increase in public access, dramatic cost reductions in both production and distribution, and a greater understanding of how to exploit images that create and reinforce a particular ideology or narrative. Like the French *levée en masse*, the evolving character of communications is altering the patterns of popular mobilization, and having profound implications on why and how people will fight. The availability of modern media in all its many forms has radically changed the manner by which adversaries acquire and disseminate strategic intelligence, recruit, rehearse, and promote their cause.<sup>56</sup>

Current antagonists seem to understand this, perhaps better than America's strategists and policymakers. In a letter written by bin Laden to Emir Al-Momineed, he stated, "It is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact its ratio may reach 90 percent of the total preparation for the battles."<sup>57</sup>

The new manual does recognize the importance of the information dimension, but devotes just three and a half pages to the issue of media and information operations.<sup>58</sup> Given the critical importance of this dimension in COIN, this omission handicaps American operators in competing effectively in the war of ideas. Of a total of 60 classical books and articles cited, only a single reference is dedicated to information operations.<sup>59</sup> Because Army and Marine doctrine in this arena is fairly solid; perhaps, the manual's authors did not feel the need to repeat existing publications. A national counterinsurgency manual, authorized either by the joint warfighting or interagency community will not have the same advantage. As Professor Lawrence Freedman concludes, "In irregular warfare, superiority in the physical environment is of little value unless it can be translated into an advantage in the information environment."<sup>60</sup>

### ***Potential Implications***

The convergence of networked cells, operating in dense urban environments, passionately inspired by faith, exploiting the connectivity and real time intelligence of modern information technology, generates a very different context for COIN. Galula and the classicists are certainly not irrelevant because of this emerging context, but there is enough of a change to suggest that fundamental re-appraisals of conventional wisdom may be required.<sup>61</sup> We need a more comprehensive approach and strategy that goes beyond "clear, hold, and build." The collective impact of these environmental factors complicates the three major and interrelated competitions that are inherent to insurgency.<sup>62</sup> The

following three sections will address how these major competitions have been altered.

### *The Competition for Political Legitimacy*

Currently, we define insurgencies as a violent competition between a state and a rival political group to control a population or establish an alternative political order. There will undoubtedly be classical scenarios in which a weakened state is competing with a rival native political group for public support and the right to govern. But not all insurgencies may see themselves as competing to replace the existing government in a given set. These groups may seek to paralyze and fragment the state, rather than gain control of its apparatus and govern.<sup>63</sup> Also, there may not be a direct competition for the population's support. Since the insurgent does not require food or arms from the population, he may not seek to coerce or solicit their support. Likewise, the limited goals of the modern insurgent seeking only to destabilize vice create an alternative political order may not require the popular support of the people.

Another fundamental that may be altered in this competition is the role of the population—the people may not be the prize. This is not an entirely ahistoric idea, as Lenin and Castro did not have a great deal of popular support.<sup>64</sup> In a global insurgency, we need to be specific in a definition of which population we are referring to as the focus of popular support. The insurgent does not always view the civilian population in a particular operational area as relevant to his purpose; his support base may come from a much wider global population—what might be termed the “strategic population.”<sup>65</sup> Insurgents and terrorists may elect to ignore the civilian population in the operational battlespace or simply intimidate it to remain neutral. For al Qaeda and similar extremists, the pictures emanating from Iraq are not necessarily about influencing the local Iraqis as much as motivating and mobilizing the larger movement—the *ummah*.

In some forms of insurgency, legitimacy may be tied to identity. In many cases, ethnic identity or religious affiliation form the basis for legitimacy. Traditional US approaches are hard pressed to win in this political competition unless we operate in the most indirect manner. How do we compete with a Hamas or a Hezbollah-like entity? In Iraq, the American military must interact with identity and religious-based militias. These militias represent an alternative community formed in response to the needs of the population. Entities like Hezbollah are very trans-dimensional, meeting their respective community's security and social needs. Rather than employ our traditional “market-based” approach, we need to consider a more indirect approach utilizing a moderate representative with the same collective identity. Naturally, the adversary works to discredit and de-legitimize such representatives or candidates as a puppet of the intervening force.<sup>66</sup> This competition for valid representatives of various groups will continue to prove more difficult to recruit and influence as long as identity politics and ethnic-based conflict remain central to complex insurgencies.

### *The Competition for Perceptions*

Perceptions may trump or displace reality within the information dimension of a “counterinsurgency.” In the Information Age, perceptual isolation will be even more difficult, if not impossible. Today there are simply too many sources and means by which to transmit ideas and images in real time. The battle of ideas has always been a central competition within an insurgency, but in the past governments had some advantage. Now, the information technology revolution magnifies the ability of the modern insurgent to exploit any success. A sophisticated insurgent may extend his influence and maximize his credibility by continuously flaunting tactical successes out of proportion to their actual operational effect. This is the dimension where a true competition exists; best captured by General Rupert Smith’s analogy of rival commanders as film producers, competing with each other for the best narrative and imagery in an effort to influence people.<sup>67</sup> Instead of Clausewitz’s duel, the modern battlespace is characterized as a contest between producers with stories. Combat and casualties are no longer the cash transaction of war; it’s an exchange of carefully choreographed images and stories designed to produce a desired effect. Rather than just the physical consequences of a particular action, the psychological impact must also be considered. As Dr. Kilcullen noted “In the battlefield, popular perceptions and rumor are more important than a hundred tanks.”<sup>68</sup>

Strategists and policymakers need to accept the media, not as a combatant or opponent, but as a medium to extend influence or de-legitimize the insurgent.<sup>69</sup> We need to fully exploit the cognitive terrain of conflict and “maneuver” not only in the minds of our enemies, but, also those of allies, friends, and neutrals. Contests in the twenty-first century are inherently wars of ideas and images punctuated with violent deeds.<sup>70</sup> To succeed in the global arena, the United States and its allies need to relearn the counter-subversion strategies of the Cold War.<sup>71</sup>

Operational approaches focus on the population in a physical and geographic sense. But what does it mean to “clear, hold, and build” if the central front at the strategic level is in the virtual dimension? Should we apply the “ink blot” concept in a broader non-geographical concept? Do we focus on the strategic population to isolate the transnational threat or target the operational population? Current theories and practices are inadequate to this task. We need to recognize the perceptual “deep battle” of neo-classical counterinsurgency.

### *Security versus System Disruption Competition*

Urbanization increases the difficulty of winning the security competition.<sup>72</sup> It will be extremely difficult for the counterinsurgent force to establish a credible perception of a monopoly over lethal violence, especially in dense urban complexes. The urban guerrilla has too many tactical advantages, and the history of our efforts to impose control over large populations are replete

with opportunities to create resentment or provoke a disproportionate response. Technological diffusion and urban complexity have produced too many opportunities for the urban guerilla to strike repeatedly and effectively. The degree of systemic perturbation that this can cause, however significant in real terms, carries with it the possibility of undermining local governments and breeding instability. It is no longer necessary for the urban guerilla to mass force in an effort to seize or hold territory, or to defeat on a regular basis forces of the state. He can, however, disrupt communications, services, transportation, and energy distribution networks at will.

Ever increasing pressure will be placed on vestiges of the state and any intervening force that attempts to provide stability and public order. The government's credibility will be substantially challenged until it demonstrates it can provide security and governance. Counterinsurgency experts, including the classicists, have long recognized that it is the perception of credibility on the part of the civil population that must be gained. This perception is distinct from legitimacy.<sup>73</sup> As counterinsurgency theorists have noted, success can only be achieved when "the population is convinced that the counter-insurgent has the will, the means, and the ability to win."<sup>74</sup> Perception is the key that turns the population's neutrality into active acceptance. This competition is decidedly easier where the adversary, like today's foreign jihadist in Iraq, is an outsider and easily identifiable.

But where the insurgent is operating within his own society, he presents a difficult target. This ability to hide in plain sight is a critical sub-element in the competition for security. This dilemma would not surprise Galula, who bemoaned the government's need to consistently maintain order, while the insurgent had the luxury of selecting vulnerable targets at will. The security-disruption competition mismatch can impose heavy costs on the government, depleting resources that could be better spent on other counterinsurgency programs. Until security can be provided, and unequivocally met, other initiatives tend to stagnate.<sup>75</sup>

Isolation of the insurgent in nontraditional societies and megacities may prove infeasible.<sup>76</sup> It is axiomatic to classical COIN strategy that government forces should isolate the insurgent from the population. Although physical isolation may be possible it has always proven difficult, without draconian measures and significant investment in barriers and detention facilities. The imposition of such control measures today, thanks to the media, often weakens the proponent's position and actually may extend the conflict.

## **Conclusions**

The new field manual is a welcome step forward, reflecting current understanding of this increasingly complex arena of conflict. A few critics continue to long for "the Roman model," but they have misdiagnosed the actual problem and overemphasized kinetic solutions.<sup>77</sup> The field manual does highlight an increased requirement for discriminate force in operations to remove irreconcilable extremists. However, the idea that such a rabid minority justifies

the requirement to “out terrorize the terrorist” abuses history and is utterly incongruous with today’s environmental conditions.

Overall, the 1960s theorists cast a long shadow in FM 3-24.<sup>78</sup> The era was necessary, but not sufficient. We must do more than simply relearn classical COIN, America’s military needs to adapt old doctrine to the new and increasingly complex strategic environment.<sup>79</sup> It behooves strategists and policymakers to pay more than lip service to the notion that every insurgency is unique. Victory against the fervent and fanatical individual who finds the notion of transcendence through death enticing rather than forbidding, will not be gained by outgoverning those that do not seek to govern.<sup>80</sup> Nor will the solution to today’s so-called “irregular” challenges be found by laminating yesterday’s framework into current doctrine and strategy.

In short, we need to draw upon the classical COIN principles and revise them to reflect the realities of today’s environment. The new COIN manual is the first major step in that direction; reflecting serious thought and a concentrated effort by a group of talented people. But it still fails to answer the most critical question: How is this relevant to the highly connected, religiously inspired, urban dwelling, global guerrilla?

We need to do more than simply study the past and update doctrine. Institutional and cultural changes of a far greater magnitude are required. Most importantly, the US military needs to substantially invest in the development of the appropriate intellectual skills and adaptability of its officer corps.<sup>81</sup> There is a recognized need for more than just new rules; there is an urgent requirement for increased emphasis on human capital and institutional adaptability.<sup>82</sup>

Finally, inasmuch as there is universal agreement on the critical contributions made by non-military agencies, interagency shortfalls must be resolved.<sup>83</sup> As one long standing expert has posited:

If Iraq is a portent of the future—if protracted, ambiguous, irregular, cross-cultural, and psychologically complex conflicts are to be the primary mission of the future American military (and the other, equally important parts of the US security organization)—then serious change must begin.<sup>84</sup>

Without these changes the US military will continue to face complex contingencies without the necessary intellectual tools required to recognize and resolve these unique conditions. In short, we need to fully embrace FM 3-24’s operational imperative—learn and adapt.

## NOTES

1. The title of this paper and comments on classical counterinsurgency were provided by Dr. Mike Vlahos, Johns Hopkins University, Applied Physics Lab, “Neo-COIN?” unpublished paper, 2006.

2. Terence J. Daly, “Classical Principles of Counterinsurgency,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, 90 (Dec. 2006), 53-57.

3. Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco, The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2006), p. 465.



4. For more on Galula see his classic David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2006) reprint of the 1963 ed. with a foreword by Dr. Bruce Hoffman.
5. Martin J. Muckian, "Structural Vulnerabilities of Networked Insurgencies: Adapting to the New Adversary," *Parameters*, 36 (Winter 2006-07), 14.
6. The classics include Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1971); David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (St. Petersburg, Fla.: Hailer, 2005); Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966).
7. Field Manual 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5. *Counterinsurgency* (hereafter FM 3-24), (Washington: Department of the Army, December 2006), pp. 1-21 - 1-22.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-27. The paradoxes capture the uniquely counterintuitive aspects of insurgency. Two in particular stand out, "The more force is used, the less effective it is," and "The more you protect your force, the less secure you may be."
9. Kalev I. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review*, 85 (May-June 2005), 8-12.
10. The principal theme of the work of Army veteran and scholar John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005).
11. FM 3-24, p. ix.
12. David Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency *Redux*," *Survival*, 48 (Winter 2006-07), 116.
13. In addition to Dr. Kilcullen, see Steven Metz and Raymond Millen, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response* (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, November 2004).
14. Ralph Peters, "Progress and Peril, New Counterinsurgency Manual Cheats on the History Exam," *Armed Forces Journal International*, 144 (February 2007), 34.
15. David Betz, "Land Forces and Future Warfare: Learning to Fight Wars Amongst the People," *Contemporary Security Policy* (forthcoming), 9.
16. David J. Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 28 (August 2005), 615.
17. Here I am extending my preliminary assessment in Frank G. Hoffman, "Small Wars Revisited: America and Nontraditional Wars," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 28 (December 2005), 914-40.
18. Ralph Peters, "Getting Counterinsurgency Right," *New York Post*, 20 December 2006.
19. John MacKinlay, *Defeating Complex Insurgency: Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan* (London, Eng.: RUSI, Whitehall Paper 64, 2005), pp. 57-58.
20. The origins of this concept are from John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *The Advent of Netwar* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1996).
21. Rick Brennan, Adam Grissom, Sara Daly, Peter Chalk, William Rosenau, Kalev Sepp, and Steve Dalzell, *Future Insurgent Threats* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, February 2005), p. 162.
22. For additional insights into networks and their group dynamics see Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
23. Thomas X. Hammes, "Countering Evolved Insurgent Networks," *Military Review*, 86 (July-August 2006), 18-26; Muckian, "Structural Vulnerabilities."
24. There are a wide variety of insurgent types, with their own organizational goals and forms. One expert has identified nine forms of insurgent, Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism, From Revolution to Apocalypse* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2005), pp. 19-29.
25. See John MacKinlay, *Globalization and Insurgency*, Adelphi Paper 352, London, Eng.: International Institute for Strategic Studies, November 2002.
26. FM 3-24, Appendix B Social Network Analysis and other Analytical Tools, pp. B-1 - B-11.
27. This was a theme within *Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities* (West Point, N.Y.: US Military Academy, Combating Terrorism Center, February 2006), and Thomas Mahnken, "A Strategy for A Protracted War," pp. 35-59, in *Unrestricted Warfare*

*Symposium 2006 Proceedings on Strategy, Analysis, and Technology*, ed. Ronald R. Luman (Laurel, Md.: John Hopkins Univ., 2006).

28. Jennifer Taw and Bruce Hoffman, *The Urbanization of Insurgency: The Potential Challenge to U.S. Army Operations* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1994). Raymond A. Millen, "The Yin and Yang of Counterinsurgency in Urban Terrain," unpublished paper (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, 2006).

29. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

30. Daly, p. 56.

31. Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Washington: Brassey's, 1990), p. 46.

32. FM 3-24, pp. 1-6.

33. Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency *Redux*," pp. 119-21.

34. Peter W. Chiarelli and Patrick R. Michaelis, "Winning the Peace: The Requirements for Full-Spectrum Operations," *Military Review*, 85 (July-August 2005), pp. 4-17.

35. On terrorism and religion see Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, (Rev. ed.; New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 81-130.

36. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, pp. 84-86.

37. Dr. Bruce Hoffman of Georgetown University calculates that Islamic terrorist organizations make up 31 of the 35 known terrorist entities that use suicide attacks, and that they account for 80 percent of attacks. Bruce Hoffman, "From the War on Terror to Global Counterinsurgency," *Current History*, December 2006, p. 427.

38. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), p. 87.

39. Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994); Michael Horowitz, "Does Religion Matter? The Impact of Religious Belief on Warfare," Boston, Long Term Strategy Project Research Paper, May 2006; Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God, Why Religious Military Kill*, (New York: Ecco, 2004).

40. Monica Duffy Toft, "Religion, Civil War, and International Order," BCSIA Discussion Paper 2006-03, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, July 2006.

41. FM 3-24, pp. 1-14 - 1-15.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-23.

43. On the origins and theoretical foundations of these constructs see Austin Long, *On "Other War": Lessons from Five Decades of RAND Counterinsurgency Research*, (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2006), pp. 21-30.

44. Metz and Millen, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response*, p. 34.

45. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "Looking Ahead: Preparing for Information Age Conflict," pp. 439-93, in their *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1997).

46. Some classicists do give it appropriate weight. See Daly, p. 54.

47. FM 3-24, pp. 1-3 - 1-4.

48. T. E. Lawrence, "The Evolution of a Revolt," *The Army Quarterly and Defence Journal*, October 1920.

49. MacKinlay, *Defeating Complex Insurgency*, p. 9.

50. FM 3-24, pp. 1-16.

51. I am indebted to Dr. Steve Metz and Dr. John MacKinlay of King's College London for these terms. See Steven Metz, *Learning From Iraq: Counterinsurgency in American Strategy* (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, January 2007).

52. One lengthy study found 4,300 web sites serving terrorist organizations and supporters. Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, 2006), p. 5.

53. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, p. 198.

54. The most useful sources for understanding these battles are Bing West, *No True Glory* (New York: Random House, 2005); Carter Malkasian, "Signaling Resolve, Democratization, and the First Battle of Fallujah," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29 (June 2006), 424-52.

55. Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Cyber Mobilization: The New *Levee en Masse*," *Parameters*, 36 (Summer 2006), 77-87.

56. On modern terrorist organization's exploitation of the Internet and modern media see Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 2006, rev. ed., pp. 201-28; Gabriel Weimann, "How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet," *Journal of International Security Affairs*, (Spring 2005), 91-105.

57. Quoted in Steven R. Corman and Jill S. Schiefelbein, "Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas," Report #0601, Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State Univ., April 20, 2006, p. 3. For more on Jihadist web exploitation see Stephen Ulph, "A Guide to Jihad on the Web," *Terrorism Focus*, 2 (31 March 2005), <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369531>.

58. FM 3-24, pp. 5-8 - 5-11. The short shrift given to information operations is also noted by Thomas Rid, "War 2.0," *Policy Review* Web Special, Feb. 2007, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/5956806.html>.

59. Ralph O. Baker, "The Decisive Weapon, A Brigade Combat Team Commander's Perspective on Information Operations," *Military Review*, 86 (May-June, 2006), 13-32.

60. Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, (London, Eng.: IISS, Adelphi Paper No. 379, 2006), p. 20.

61. Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency Redux," p. 112.

62. I am indebted to Dr. Andrew Krepinevich and his work at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments regarding the analytical construct of the nature of competitions within conflict.

63. Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency Redux," p. 111.

64. O'Neill, p. 94.

65. MacKinlay, *Defeating Complex Insurgency*, p. 14.

66. Steve Metz, *Learning from Iraq*, pp. 83-84. Metz puts it simply: "Applying existing counterinsurgency strategy and doctrine, derived from 20th century ideological conflict, to Iraq thus was pounding a round peg in a square hole. This hamstrung the effort from the beginning."

67. General Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Knopf, 2006), pp. 286-87.

68. David Kilcullen, "Twenty Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency," *Military Review*, 86 (May-June 2006), 106.

69. Peters, "Progress and Peril," p. 35. Peters claims that "Perhaps the gravest omission is the failure to analyze the combatant role of the global media, which can determine the outcome of battles, campaigns and entire wars . . ."

70. Suggested by Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, p. 71.

71. William Rosenau, *Subversion and Insurgency*, (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Counterinsurgency Study, Paper 3, 2007).

72. I am indebted to John Robb and the "global guerrilla" blog for this insight.

73. An argument made in F. G. Hoffman, "Principles for the Savage Wars of Peace" in *Rethinking the Principles of War*, ed. Anthony McIvor (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2005).

74. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, p. 78.

75. Raymond Millen, "The Hobbesian Notion of Self-Preservation Concerning Human Behavior during an Insurgency," *Parameters*, 36 (Winter 2006-07), 12.

76. Megacities are defined as those with more than 10 million inhabitants. There were nine such cities in 1985, 19 in 2004, and 27 currently.

77. Edward Luttwak, "Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare, Military Malpractice," *Harper's*, February 2007, <http://www.harpers.org/DeadEnd.html>.

78. Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency Redux," pp. 112-13.

79. Robert R. Tomes, "Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare," *Parameters*, 34 (Spring 2004), p. 28.

80. Ralph Peters, "When Devils Walk the Earth: The Mentality and Roots of Terrorism," (Quantico, Va.: Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, December 2001), p. 24.

81. The importance of education is stressed by T. X. Hammes, *Sling and Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St. Paul, Minn.: Zenith Press, 2005), pp. 282-83; as well as David C. Gompert, *Heads We Win: The Cognitive Side of Counterinsurgency*, (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, June 2006).

82. John A. Nagl and Paul L. Yingling, "New Rules for New Enemies," *Armed Forces Journal International*, 144 (October 2006), <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2006/10/2088425>.

83. John Hillen, "Developing a National Counterinsurgency Capability for the War on Terror," *Military Review*, 87 (January-February 2007), pp. 13-15. For a substantive proposal on advancing this construct see Clark A. Murdock and Michele A. Flournoy, *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: U.S. Government and Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era, Phase 2 Report*, (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 2005).

84. Steven Metz, "Learning from Iraq," p. 91.