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MCWP 3-33.5

COUNTERINSURGENCY

DECEMBER 2006

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HEADQUARTERS
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

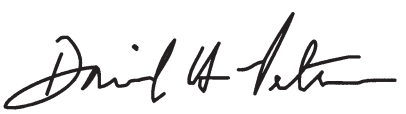
Foreword

This manual is designed to fill a doctrinal gap. It has been 20 years since the Army published a field manual devoted exclusively to counterinsurgency operations. For the Marine Corps it has been 25 years. With our Soldiers and Marines fighting insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is essential that we give them a manual that provides principles and guidelines for counterinsurgency operations. Such guidance must be grounded in historical studies. However, it also must be informed by contemporary experiences.

This manual takes a general approach to counterinsurgency operations. The Army and Marine Corps recognize that every insurgency is contextual and presents its own set of challenges. You cannot fight former Saddamists and Islamic extremists the same way you would have fought the Viet Cong, Moros, or Tupamaros; the application of principles and fundamentals to deal with each varies considerably. Nonetheless, all insurgencies, even today's highly adaptable strains, remain wars amongst the people. They use variations of standard themes and adhere to elements of a recognizable revolutionary campaign plan. This manual therefore addresses the common characteristics of insurgencies. It strives to provide those conducting counterinsurgency campaigns with a solid foundation for understanding and addressing specific insurgencies.

A counterinsurgency campaign is, as described in this manual, a mix of offensive, defensive, and stability operations conducted along multiple lines of operations. It requires Soldiers and Marines to employ a mix of familiar combat tasks and skills more often associated with nonmilitary agencies. The balance between them depends on the local situation. Achieving this balance is not easy. It requires leaders at all levels to adjust their approach constantly. They must ensure that their Soldiers and Marines are ready to be greeted with either a handshake or a hand grenade while taking on missions only infrequently practiced until recently at our combat training centers. Soldiers and Marines are expected to be nation builders as well as warriors. They must be prepared to help reestablish institutions and local security forces and assist in rebuilding infrastructure and basic services. They must be able to facilitate establishing local governance and the rule of law. The list of such tasks is long; performing them involves extensive coordination and cooperation with many intergovernmental, host-nation, and international agencies. Indeed, the responsibilities of leaders in a counterinsurgency campaign are daunting; however, the discussions in this manual alert leaders to the challenges of such campaigns and suggest general approaches for grappling with those challenges.

Conducting a successful counterinsurgency campaign requires a flexible, adaptive force led by agile, well-informed, culturally astute leaders. It is our hope that this manual provides the guidelines needed to succeed in operations that are exceedingly difficult and complex. Our Soldiers and Marines deserve nothing less.



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COUNTERINSURGENCY

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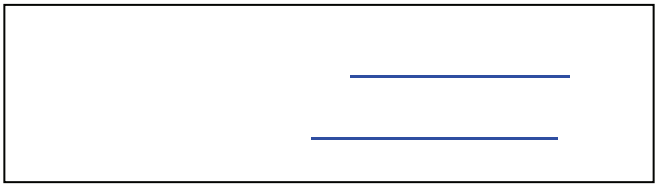

Preface

This field manual/Marine Corps warfighting publication establishes doctrine (fundamental principles) for military operations in a counterinsurgency (COIN) environment. It is based on lessons learned from previous counterinsurgencies and contemporary operations. It is also based on existing interim doctrine and doctrine recently developed.

Counterinsurgency operations generally have been neglected in broader American military doctrine and national security policies since the end of the Vietnam War over 30 years ago. This manual is designed to reverse that trend. It is also designed to merge traditional approaches to COIN with the realities of a new international arena shaped by technological advances, globalization, and the spread of extremist ideologies—some of them claiming the authority of a religious faith.

The manual begins with a description of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies. The first chapter includes a set of principles and imperatives necessary for successful COIN operations. Chapter 2 discusses nonmilitary organizations commonly involved in COIN operations and principles for integrating military and civilian activities. Chapter 3 addresses aspects of intelligence specific to COIN operations. The next two chapters discuss the design and execution of those operations. Developing host-nation security forces, an essential aspect of successful COIN operations, is the subject of chapter 6. Leadership and ethical concerns are addressed in chapter 7. Chapter 8, which concerns sustainment of COIN operations, concludes the basic manual. The appendixes contain useful supplemental information. Appendix A discusses factors to consider during the planning, preparation, execution, and assessment of a COIN operation. Appendixes B and C contain supplemental intelligence information. Appendix D addresses legal concerns. Appendix E describes the role of airpower.

Doctrine by definition is broad in scope and involves principles, tactics, techniques, and procedures applicable worldwide. Thus, this publication is not focused on any region or country and is not intended to be a standalone reference. Users should assess information from other sources to help them decide how to apply the doctrine in this publication to the specific circumstances facing them.

The primary audience for this manual is leaders and planners at the battalion level and above. This manual applies to the United States Marine Corps, the Active Army, the Army National Guard/Army National Guard of the United States, and the United States Army Reserve unless otherwise stated.

This publication contains copyrighted material. Copyrighted material is identified with footnotes. Other sources are identified in the source notes.

Terms that have joint, Army, or Marine Corps definitions are identified in both the glossary and the text. FM 3-24 is not the proponent field manual (the authority) for any Army term. For definitions in the text, the term is italicized and the number of the proponent manual follows the definition.

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Introduction

This is a game of wits and will. You've got to be learning and adapting constantly to survive.

General Peter J. Schoomaker, USA, 2004

The United States possesses overwhelming conventional military superiority. This capability has pushed its enemies to fight U.S. forces unconventionally, mixing modern technology with ancient techniques of insurgency and terrorism. Most enemies either do not try to defeat the United States with conventional operations or do not limit themselves to purely military means. They know that they cannot compete with U.S. forces on those terms. Instead, they try to exhaust U.S. national will, aiming to win by undermining and outlasting public support. Defeating such enemies presents a huge challenge to the Army and Marine Corps. Meeting it requires creative efforts by every Soldier and Marine.

Throughout its history, the U.S. military has had to relearn the principles of counterinsurgency (COIN) while conducting operations against adaptive insurgent enemies. It is time to institutionalize Army and Marine Corps knowledge of this longstanding form of conflict. This publication's purpose is to help prepare Army and Marine Corps leaders to conduct COIN operations anywhere in the world. It provides a foundation for study before deployment and the basis for operations in theater. Perhaps more importantly, it provides techniques for generating and incorporating lessons learned during those operations—an essential requirement for success against today's adaptive foes. Using these techniques and processes can keep U.S. forces more agile and adaptive than their irregular enemies. Knowledge of the history and principles of insurgency and COIN provides a solid foundation that informed leaders can use to assess insurgencies. This knowledge can also help them make appropriate decisions on employing all instruments of national power against these threats.

All insurgencies are different; however, broad historical trends underlie the factors motivating insurgents. Most insurgencies follow a similar course of development. The tactics used to successfully defeat them are likewise similar in most cases. Similarly, history shows that some tactics that are usually successful against conventional foes may fail against insurgents.

One common feature of insurgencies is that the government that is being targeted generally takes awhile to recognize that an insurgency is occurring. Insurgents take advantage of that time to build strength and gather support. Thus, counterinsurgents often have to "come from behind" when fighting an insurgency. Another common feature is that forces conducting COIN operations usually begin poorly. Western militaries too often neglect the study of insurgency. They falsely believe that armies trained to win large conventional wars are automatically prepared to win small, unconventional ones. In fact, some capabilities required for conventional success—for example, the ability to execute operational maneuver and employ massive firepower—may be of limited utility or even counterproductive in COIN operations. Nonetheless, conventional forces beginning COIN operations often try to use these capabilities to defeat insurgents; they almost always fail.

The military forces that successfully defeat insurgencies are usually those able to overcome their institutional inclination to wage conventional war against insurgents. They learn how to practice COIN and apply that knowledge. This publication can help to compress the learning curve. It is a tool for planners, trainers, and field commanders. Using it can help leaders begin the learning process sooner and build it on a larger knowledge base. Learning done before deployment results in fewer lives lost and less national treasure spent relearning past lessons in combat.

In COIN, the side that learns faster and adapts more rapidly—the better learning organization—usually wins. Counterinsurgencies have been called learning competitions. Thus, this publication identifies "Learn and Adapt" as a modern COIN imperative for U.S. forces. However, Soldiers and Marines cannot wait until they are alerted to deploy to prepare for a COIN mission. Learning to conduct complex COIN operations begins with study beforehand. This publication is a good place to start. The annotated bibliography lists a number of

other sources; however, these are only a sample of the vast amount of available information on this subject. Adapting occurs as Soldiers and Marines apply what they have learned through study and experience, assess the results of their actions, and continue to learn during operations.

As learning organizations, the Army and Marine Corps encourage Soldiers and Marines to pay attention to the rapidly changing situations that characterize COIN operations. Current tactics, techniques, and procedures sometimes do not achieve the desired results. When that happens, successful leaders engage in a directed search for better ways to defeat the enemy. To win, the Army and Marine Corps must rapidly develop an institutional consensus on new doctrine, publish it, and carefully observe its impact on mission accomplishment. This learning cycle should repeat continuously as U.S. counterinsurgents seek to learn faster than the insurgent enemy. The side that learns faster and adapts more rapidly wins.

Just as there are historical principles underlying success in COIN, there are organizational traits shared by most successful learning organizations. Forces that learn COIN effectively have generally—

- Developed COIN doctrine and practices locally.
- Established local training centers during COIN operations.
- Regularly challenged their assumptions, both formally and informally.
- Learned about the broader world outside the military and requested outside assistance in understanding foreign political, cultural, social and other situations beyond their experience.
- Promoted suggestions from the field.
- Fostered open communication between senior officers and their subordinates.
- Established rapid avenues of disseminating lessons learned.
- Coordinated closely with governmental and nongovernmental partners at all command levels.
- Proved open to soliciting and evaluating advice from the local people in the conflict zone.

These are not always easy practices for an organization to establish. Adopting them is particularly challenging for a military engaged in a conflict. However, these traits are essential for any military confronting an enemy who does not fight using conventional tactics and who adapts while waging irregular warfare. Learning organizations defeat insurgencies; bureaucratic hierarchies do not.

Promoting learning is a key responsibility of commanders at all levels. The U.S. military has developed first-class lessons-learned systems that allow for collecting and rapidly disseminating information from the field. But these systems only work when commanders promote their use and create a command climate that encourages bottom-up learning. Junior leaders in the field often informally disseminate lessons based on their experiences. However, incorporating this information into institutional lessons learned, and then into doctrine, requires commanders to encourage subordinates to use institutional lessons-learned processes.

Ironically, the nature of counterinsurgency presents challenges to traditional lessons-learned systems; many nonmilitary aspects of COIN do not lend themselves to rapid tactical learning. As this publication explains, performing the many nonmilitary tasks in COIN requires knowledge of many diverse, complex subjects. These include governance, economic development, public administration, and the rule of law. Commanders with a deep-rooted knowledge of these subjects can help subordinates understand challenging, unfamiliar environments and adapt more rapidly to changing situations. Reading this publication is a first stop to developing this knowledge.

COIN campaigns are often long and difficult. Progress can be hard to measure, and the enemy may appear to have many advantages. Effective insurgents rapidly adapt to changing circumstances. They cleverly use the tools of the global information revolution to magnify the effects of their actions. The often carry out barbaric acts and do not observe accepted norms of behavior. However, by focusing on efforts to secure the safety and support of the local populace, and through a concerted effort to truly function as learning organizations, the Army and Marine Corps can defeat their insurgent enemies.

Chapter 1
Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency is not just thinking man's warfare—it is the graduate level of war.
Special Forces Officer in Iraq, 2005

This chapter provides background information on insurgency and counterinsurgency. The first half describes insurgency, while the second half examines the more complex challenge of countering it. The chapter concludes with a set of principles and imperatives that contribute to success in counterinsurgency.

OVERVIEW

1-1. Insurgency and counterinsurgency (COIN) are complex subsets of warfare. Globalization, technological advancement, urbanization, and extremists who conduct suicide attacks for their cause have certainly influenced contemporary conflict; however, warfare in the 21st century retains many of the characteristics it has exhibited since ancient times. Warfare remains a violent clash of interests between organized groups characterized by the use of force. Achieving victory still depends on a group's ability to mobilize support for its political interests (often religiously or ethnically based) and to generate enough violence to achieve political consequences. Means to achieve these goals are not limited to conventional forces employed by nation-states.

1-2. Insurgency and its tactics are as old as warfare itself. Joint doctrine defines an *insurgency* as an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict (JP 1-02). Stated another way, an insurgency is an organized, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control. *Counterinsurgency* is military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency (JP 1-02). These definitions are a good starting point, but they do not properly highlight a key paradox: though insurgency and COIN are two sides of a phenomenon that has been called revolutionary war or internal war, they are distinctly different types of operations. In addition, insurgency and COIN are included within a broad category of conflict known as irregular warfare.

1-3. Political power is the central issue in insurgencies and counterinsurgencies; each side aims to get the people to accept its governance or authority as legitimate. Insurgents use all available tools—political (including diplomatic), informational (including appeals to religious, ethnic, or ideological beliefs), military, and economic—to overthrow the existing authority. This authority may be an established government or an interim governing body. Counterinsurgents, in turn, use all instruments of national power to sustain the established or emerging government and reduce the likelihood of another crisis emerging.

1-4. Long-term success in COIN depends on the people taking charge of their own affairs and consenting to the government's rule. Achieving this condition requires the government to eliminate as many causes of the insurgency as feasible. This can include eliminating those extremists whose beliefs prevent them from ever reconciling with the government. Over time, counterinsurgents aim to enable a country or regime to provide the security and rule of law that allow establishment of social services and growth of economic activity. COIN thus involves the application of national power in the political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure fields and disciplines. Political and military leaders and planners should never underestimate its scale and complexity; moreover, they should recognize that the Armed Forces cannot succeed in COIN alone.

ASPECTS OF INSURGENCY

1-5. Governments can be overthrown in a number of ways. An unplanned, spontaneous explosion of popular will, for example, might result in a revolution like that in France in 1789. At another extreme is the coup d'etat, where a small group of plotters replace state leaders with little support from the people at large. Insurgencies generally fall between these two extremes. They normally seek to achieve one of two goals: to overthrow the existing social order and reallocate power within a single state, or to break away from state control and form an autonomous entity or ungoverned space that they can control. Insurgency is typically a form of internal war, one that occurs primarily within a state, not between states, and one that contains at least some elements of civil war.

1-6. The exception to this pattern of internal war involves resistance movements, where indigenous elements seek to expel or overthrow what they perceive to be a foreign or occupation government. Such a resistance movement could be mounted by a legitimate government in exile as well as by factions competing for that role.

1-7. Even in internal war, the involvement of outside actors is expected. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States participated in many such conflicts. Today, outside actors are often transnational organizations motivated by ideologies based on extremist religious or ethnic beliefs. These organizations exploit the unstable internal conditions plaguing failed and failing states. Such outside involvement, however, does not change one fact: the long-term objective for all sides remains acceptance of the legitimacy of one side's claim to political power by the people of the state or region.

1-8. The terrorist and guerrilla tactics common to insurgency have been among the most common approaches to warfare throughout history. Any combatant prefers a quick, cheap, overwhelming victory over a long, bloody, protracted struggle. But to succeed against superior resources and technology, weaker actors have had to adapt. The recent success of U.S. military forces in major combat operations undoubtedly will lead many future opponents to pursue asymmetric approaches. Because the United States retains significant advantages in fires and technical surveillance, a thinking enemy is unlikely to choose to fight U.S. forces in open battle. Some opponents have attempted to do so, such as in Panama in 1989 and Iraq in 1991 and 2003. They were defeated in conflicts measured in hours or days. Conversely, other opponents have offset America's fires and surveillance advantages by operating close to civilians, as Somali clans did in 1993 and insurgents in Iraq have done since mid-2003; these enemies have been more successful in achieving their aims. This situation does not mean that counterinsurgents do not face open warfare. Although insurgents frequently use nonviolent means like political mobilization and work stoppages (strikes), they do resort to conventional military operations when conditions seem right.

1-9. The contest of internal war is not "fair"; many of the "rules" favor insurgents. That is why insurgency has been a common approach used by the weak against the strong. At the beginning of a conflict, insurgents typically hold the strategic initiative. Though they may resort to violence because of regime changes or government actions, insurgents generally initiate the conflict. Clever insurgents strive to disguise their intentions. When these insurgents are successful at such deception, potential counterinsurgents are at a disadvantage. A coordinated reaction requires political and military leaders to recognize that an insurgency exists and to determine its makeup and characteristics. While the government prepares to respond, the insurgents gain strength and foster increasing disruption throughout the state or region. The government normally has an initial advantage in resources; however, that edge is counterbalanced by the requirement to maintain order and protect the population and critical resources. Insurgents succeed by sowing chaos and disorder anywhere; the government fails unless it maintains a degree of order everywhere.

1-10. For the reasons just mentioned, maintaining security in an unstable environment requires vast resources, whether host nation, U.S., or multinational. In contrast, a small number of highly motivated insurgents with simple weapons, good operations security, and even limited mobility can undermine security over a large area. Thus, successful COIN operations often require a high ratio of security forces to the protected population. (See paragraph1-67.) For that reason, protracted COIN operations are hard to sustain. The effort requires a firm political will and substantial patience by the government, its people, and the countries providing support.