



COUNTERING IRREGULAR THREATS

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH



“Future Warriors will be as proficient
in irregular operations, including
counterinsurgency and stabilization operations,
as they are today in high-intensity combat.”

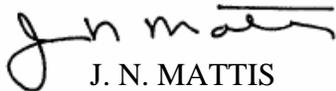
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A Tentative Manual for Countering Irregular Threats: An Updated Approach to Counterinsurgency

In the early 20th Century the debacle of Gallipoli convinced many military theorists that amphibious operations were impossibly difficult and inherently doomed to failure. Assessing the nature of the anticipated conflict in the Pacific, the Marine Corps concluded that the United States could not afford the luxury of avoiding that which was incredibly difficult. Rather than avoiding the problem, the Navy-Marine Corps team attacked it. The result was a *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations* published in 1934. Acknowledging that there was still much to learn, this manual would be refined through numerous exercises and experiences until 1940. This document provided a common framework for further exploration and refinement of the tactics, techniques and procedures that would be creatively—and successfully—applied on a global scale.

Today we face a similar situation in regard to irregular threats. The problems associated with countering irregular threats are complex, dynamic, and daunting. **Their solutions require a long-term, comprehensive approach** in the application of the instruments of national power and influence. While we are naturally predisposed toward quick and decisive conflict resolution, our conventional military preeminence virtually guarantees adversaries will resort to irregular means. The Marine Corps must **attack these problems in partnership** with the joint and interagency communities and our multinational allies. Marines must approach counterinsurgency prepared to combat armed adversaries as well as **influencing the environment through the use of information, humanitarian aid, economic advice and a boost toward good governance**. This pamphlet provides insights into a Marine Corps *Tentative Manual for Countering Irregular Threats*. It is intended to stimulate innovation and creativity in preparing for, designing, and executing operations against future security challenges.



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**A Concept for
COUNTERING IRREGULAR THREATS
A Comprehensive Approach**

Introduction

Failed and failing states that harbor transnational terrorists, foment insurgencies against friendly governments or promote irregular warfare against our allies present problems whose resolution is critical to our national well-being. However, the history of the last hundreds years demonstrates that we cannot reasonably expect to solve these problems by military action alone. The Marine Corps must take a broader approach to the defense of the United States and of its national interests overseas in an age of irregular threats.

People hungry for release from tyranny, poverty, and despair are susceptible to manipulation by the unscrupulous and the ideological fanatic, who combine age-old strategies of insurgency and subversion with technological savvy and rapid global access to information to make themselves into information age enemies. This requires military and civilian agencies of the U.S. Government to join together in the strongest interagency partnership to help the local people and their governments relieve the immediate crisis, reduce existing internal contradictions and move toward a condition that will preserve them against further trouble. Only this kind of holistic response can help a state quell the violence and chaos that provide fresh opportunities for those who would exploit a people's frustration in order to threaten the United States.

In many efforts to counter Irregular Threats, the political and cultural aspects of the conflict rather than combat will be primary, and Marines will be asked to do many things other than combat operations to beat our adversaries. This means that the

“commander” of some interventions may not be a serving military officer but could be an Ambassador, a U.S. Foreign Service officer or a police officer, each with a heavily civilian staff that ties together the political and military strategy. Marines need to be educated and trained to support humanitarian and development initiatives as well as perform combat operations to protect the civilian population. With this mix of skills and abilities, the Marine Corps will have the means to more effectively apply its maneuver warfare-based warfighting philosophy to irregular threats and to attack our enemies from many angles at once, wearing them down and drawing away their popular support. The U.S. military will contribute to winning wars against our irregular enemies with kinetic and non-kinetic means, diminishing the conditions that create instability while destroying or pushing into irrelevance those who seek to promote chaos, disorder, and suffering.

The Single Campaign

Countering Irregular Threats requires a holistic application of the elements of national power to maintain or re-establish a friendly government's legitimacy in the eyes of its people.

Concept

The nature of war has not changed since ancient times, and insurgencies present complex irregular threats which military force alone cannot resolve. The 19th century military theorist Carl von Clausewitz described a trinity of war consisting of the military, the state, and the population. He proposed a triangular relationship in which each of these elements is equally relevant and in which all three must remain in balance to achieve successful resolution of a conflict. In the past, we have concentrated on destroying the enemy's military. But in non-industrial, counterinsurgency wars, our strategic objective is the hearts and minds of the people. Though the Clausewitzian Trinity remains relevant, the focus must be re-balanced as the fight to win the people becomes central. In these *savage wars of peace*, modern technology has greatly enhanced the insurgent's speed, reach, and power. **Marines need to learn when to fight with weapons and when to fight with information, humanitarian aid, economic advice, and a boost toward good governance for the local people.** This ability to adapt resembles a group of jazz musicians improvising on a theme. To do that, Marines need to understand that defeating an insurgency is first about winning the support of the local people. We may use violence to suppress an insurgency for a time, but the only way to destroy it is by changing the way people think about the insurgency.

Two elements are required for an effective insurgency. Underlying social grievances result in a population that is dissatisfied with the status quo. The insurgent leadership provides catalysts to move a population from dissatisfaction with its government or ruling authority to active support of the opposition. These two elements mean that:

- Countering insurgency requires us to develop a comprehensive understanding of the complex character of a conflict, of its social, political, historical, cultural,

and economic contexts, and of its participants. If we are going to fight among the people, we must understand them.

- Popular support for insurgency is always about the people's seeking a better life or relief of suffering by overthrowing the existing regime.
- Human beings hesitate to move to radical action, so popular support for an insurgency is evidence that the people consider that any hope for government or societal reform is futile.

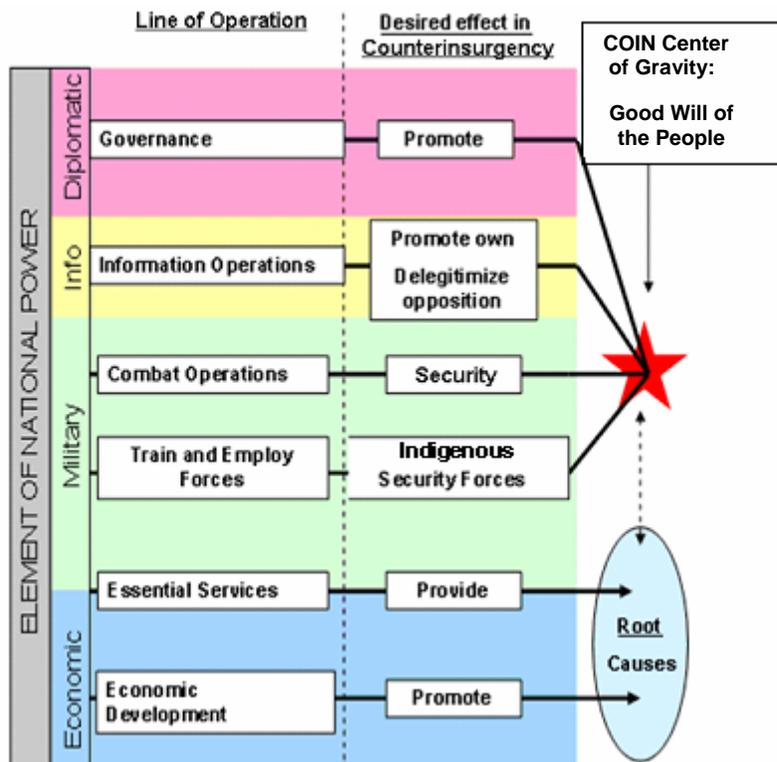
With clarity and sincerity, we must communicate to the local population through every decision and action that our intervention's purpose is to support the needs of the people and to ensure stability. It is important to remember that, if we treat the people as our enemies, they will become our enemies. Treat them as friends, and they may become our friends.

We can rally the local people to our side and undermine the insurgency that torments them and threatens U.S. interests by designing a campaign of inclusion. Today, real power is not about armaments – it is about collaborative relationships. First, we must include U.S. Government civilian agencies with Marine planners and with units in the field. Second, we must develop a fully collaborative partnership with personnel from the local government and its military. Only by genuine inclusion of all of these players can we hope to produce and implement a campaign that is perceived as legitimate by the local populace, earns the support of the American people, and poises us to defeat or destroy the insurgents and eliminate their cause.

This approach elevates the Marine Corps to a position as a full partner in the humanitarian, development, and nation building work of civilian agencies. It also makes those agencies full partners in the Marine Corps' planning, preparation, and implementation of combat and security operations. The most

direct method of guiding our efforts to achieve national objectives is to focus on Lines of Operation.

The Six Lines of Operation



Operational Approach to the Six Lines

Governance

“For the People.” The **rule of law** and effective **public administration** are essential to a functioning society. There can be no lasting stability in a nation that lacks effective enforcement of its national laws and sound management of the work of the government. Re-establishing these capacities in a country will go a long way to preventing the need for further U.S. intervention. In partnership with local authorities, the counterinsurgent team will need to assess the state of the existing government’s legal and administrative systems and refurbish or return them to effectiveness. As underlying social grievances, often expressed by the insurgents in ideological terms, are key to an insurgency, the local government must be assisted in ameliorating grievances and resolving the internal contradictions that became the root causes of the insurgency. To do this, our diplomats and civilian agency personnel will need to become *expeditionary*, as comfortable in flak jackets as they are in business suits, and will need to stand ready to serve on the front lines.



Information Operations



“Nothing but the Truth.” Information Operations are key to the success of all the other Lines of Operation and must be viewed from both the internal and external perspective. Externally, the information campaign must aim at two things: isolation

of the insurgents from their support and rebuilding the credibility of the government with the local population. These aims should never be put at risk by deception. Falsehoods serve no purpose for U.S. objectives and are too easily discovered in this information age. Only **information campaigns built on truth**, no matter how painful that truth may be for us, can help undermine an insurgency. Marines at every level need to know how to use the information campaign to improve civil-military relations, develop intelligence, and shape local attitudes in advance of operations. Internally, information is key to keeping high the morale of the individual Marine. Overcoming the often frustrating environment of counterinsurgency can be achieved through understanding the people, the enemy, and the mission. This understanding will help maintain the morale upon which military efficiency and discipline often rest. Both internally and externally, legitimacy is fundamental to information operations. Legitimacy can only be fostered if the message that is transmitted is reinforced by the actions of the Marines who interact directly with the population. Our words and actions must be mutually supporting to win the goodwill of the people and destroy the insurgency. We must show the people how bad the insurgents are and how good our forces are.

Combat Operations (Protecting the Civil Populace)

“War of the Stiletto.” An insurgent, fighting a war of ideas in a guerilla style, does not need to win any battles to achieve his objective of persuading a population to accept his cause. Counterinsurgency demands a decentralized



operational approach built on a strong foundation of comprehensive understanding and rapid distribution of information in order to **“out adapt” the enemy**. This will demonstrate that the insurgents are not able to defend themselves and the people they

claim to want to protect. Large units and large bases rarely are effective in this kind of struggle. Large unit operations often create animosity in the population, and guerillas are only too happy for us to provide them big, fixed targets for theatrical attacks. Counter-guerilla warfare requires distributed units adapted for fast, agile, and multi-axis attacks and for conducting combat operations aimed at developing intelligence. Small unit leaders must be trained to carry much more of the burden of combat decision-making, supported by **a rapid flow of tactical information and cultural intelligence**. Properly trained and disciplined, our small units will out adapt the insurgents by moving asymmetrically to isolate them, attack their command and control, and demonstrate a determination to help address the legitimate grievances of the population. In this war among the people, collateral damage must be seen as unacceptable as it will undermine the intervention’s objectives to win popular support and to restore security and stability. Any misuse of force feeds the insurgents’ propaganda campaign and makes the intervention more difficult and risky. Even more so in a counterinsurgency environment, combat operations demand the discriminate and precise use of force. This line of operation provides **the wall of security behind** which all of the other lines are free to operate to positive effect and **a windbreak** behind which the host nation can gather its resources to restore stability for its people.

Train and Employ Forces



“Breathing Room.” Well-trained and energetic indigenous security forces can so narrow the geographic terrain available to the insurgents as to squeeze them out of their area of operations and nullify the insurgency by keeping them on the run. It is

critical that we tailor security programs and train security forces in

a manner that can be sustained by the indigenous government and in ways that are politically and socially acceptable to the people. This work should not be delayed as it is tied to the departure of U.S. military forces, an action that is critically important to the legitimacy of the local government in the eyes of its people, Americans at home, and the world community. Imposing U.S. models on indigenous security forces rarely succeeds. We must find ways to **do things the local way**. This demands exquisite understanding of local conditions, tactical maturity, and cunning by all unit leaders down through the squad level.

Essential Services

“Stop the Bleeding.” The provision of essential services must be an interagency effort as it ultimately will reduce grievances of the local population and allow mission success. With their resource and logistic capabilities, Marines will be key players with their interagency, coalition, and local partners. Often, **Marines will need to be the first providers**



or coordinators of food, power, water, and rudimentary medical care until civilian agencies arrive to take up the task. This must be done in collaboration with the local people to assure that their needs are met in culturally acceptable ways and can be sustained by the indigenous government. The local population must be included as early as possible in order to bolster the economy, build self-esteem, and to place authority where it naturally should lie – in the hands of local leaders. Establishing essential services is critical to the establishment of local security.

Economic Development



“Toward a Better Life.” This line of operation has implications that last far beyond the departure of an intervention force. Reinvigorating or creating a sustainable local economy requires planning for immediate relief and for long term

economic well-being. Marine commanders and their staffs must work with U.S. civilian agencies to further stop the bleeding by stabilizing the local economy with public works projects that relieve unemployment, micro-finance programs that put back on their feet small businesses and farms, and by seeking the help of those nongovernmental and charitable organizations capable of helping to get things moving. While the long term plan largely will be managed by civilian agencies, Marines will need to provide security and support in identifying those economic activities in which the host nation has comparative advantage and which ought to be promoted, encouraging the host nation to engage with the U.S. and other countries in trade agreements that open jobs and promote business, persuading the host nation to encourage U.S. and other countries’ industry to move in, and expanding Peace Corps, other countries’ advisory programs and educational exchanges. The complexity of this work means that, more than in any other Line of Operation, Economic Development demands that Marines and U.S. civilian agencies work in intimate partnership with local authorities to develop the culturally appropriate, sustainable programs that can restore economic well-being.

USMC Small Wars Manual

(1940)

Small Wars are operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation. The application of purely military means may not, by itself restore peace and orderly government because the fundamental causes of the condition of unrest may be economic, political, or social. There may be many economic and social factors involved completely beyond military power. Peace and industry cannot be restored permanently without appropriate provisions for the economic welfare of the people. The efforts of the different agencies must be cooperative and coordinated to the attainment of the common end.

Implications for Force Development

To meet the requirements of this concept, the Marine Corps should:

- Develop the fullest **mutual understanding and collaboration with U.S. Government civilian agencies**, by sharing in training exercises and war games, to assure intimate cooperation in a counterinsurgency effort.
- Train **Marines to be both fighters and peace builders**, capable as ever in combat operations but able to support humanitarian and development activities as well.
- Train Marines in **foreign languages, cultural intelligence, negotiation, and dispute resolution**.

- Develop a **counterinsurgency campaign and operations planning program** to mentor and evaluate operational headquarters, from battalion to Marine Expeditionary Force levels, in campaign planning along the Lines of Operation approach.

Conclusion

While traditional Marine combat power remains essential to victory over an insurgency, it is unlikely to be decisive in defeating an adversary that relies for its own power on the grievances and aspirations of the local population. Winning and preserving the goodwill of the people is the key to victory. That can be achieved by deftly applying the six Lines of Operation in partnership with the other U.S. Government civilian agencies and the indigenous government. War is war but, in counterinsurgency, it often is best fought with the tools of peace.

**Low Intensity Operations:
Subversion, Insurgency, and Peace-keeping**

(Sir Frank Kitson, 1971)

The enemy is likely to be employing a combination of political, economic, psychological and military measures, so the government will have to do likewise to defeat him, and although an army officer may regard the non-military action required as being the business of the civilian authorities, they will regard it as being his (the military officer) business, because it is being used for operational reasons. At every level the civil authorities will rightly expect the soldier to know how to use non-military forms of action as part of the operational plan...this point is not always understood by soldiers whose recollections of fighting insurgency usually start at the point where they arrived in a district to find that the local administrator and policeman knew all about the business whereas they knew nothing.

Provide feedback on this concept to:

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