



Classic Counterinsurgency

The key to victory against today's insurgents

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Once again the U.S. military has been tasked with waging successful operations against insurgents. The U.S. military's signature skills of firepower, maneuver, and shock action have made it the most effective conventional fighting force in the world. Yet despite its conventional excellence, the U.S. military is struggling to counter this insurgency.

The Rules Change

Counterinsurgency is a different kind of war, with its own rules. Conventional warriors try to wage it by taking as their objective killing insurgents; counterinsurgency, however, has as its objective the control and support, willing or otherwise, of the target population. Classic counterinsurgency doctrine, developed by the French and the British in the 1950s and 1960s, provides the rules that we and our Afghan and Iraqi allies can use today to gain this control and support.

Classic counterinsurgency doctrine, as developed by the British in their successful campaign in Malaya and by the French after their defeat in Indochina, was enunciated in the mid-1960s by French Army LTC David Galula in his book, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*,¹ and British colonial civil servant Sir Robert Thompson in his *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*.² These books, only recently back in print, describe the basic principles we can use to defeat the insurgents in Iraq. Classic counterinsurgency doctrine emphasizes the primacy of political factors in defeating insurgencies. The goal is to control the population and win its support, not to kill people. Thompson states as the first principle of counterinsurgency that:

The Government must have a clear political aim: to establish and maintain a free, independent and united country which is politically and economically stable and viable.³

We need to perfect the operational and tactical means to achieve this objective. The British and French doctrines can help us if used selectively and modified if they are contrary to U.S. ideals.

The shift from simply killing or detaining insurgents to protecting the populace in order to gain its support is the first requirement for successful counterinsurgency. For a conventional military force it is the hardest adjustment to make. In Malaya the British Army succeeded and by doing so helped destroy the Communist insurgents.⁴ In Indochina the French failed and lost Indochina.

Classic counterinsurgency is a complex blend of carrot and stick. It can be likened to a tripod with its legs comprised of security, information operations (or propaganda or psychological warfare), and economic, social, and political development. We and our Iraqi and Afghan allies must address each equally.

To achieve the counterinsurgent's goals in the face of an insurgency, Galula states as one of the guiding precepts of classic counterinsurgency doctrine the truism that "In any situation, whatever the cause, there will be an active minority for the cause, a neutral majority, and an active minority against the cause."⁵ Galula continues that the counterinsurgent's problem is:

. . . to find the favorable minority, [and] to organize it in order to mobilize the population against the insurgent minority. Every operation, whether in the military field or the political, social, economic, and psychological fields, must be geared to that end.⁶

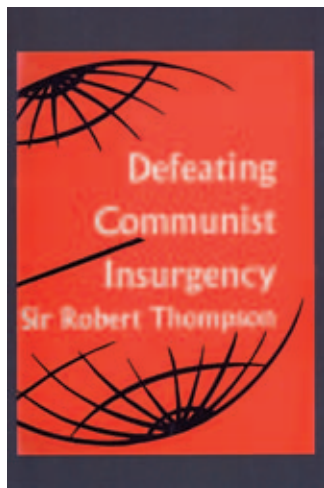
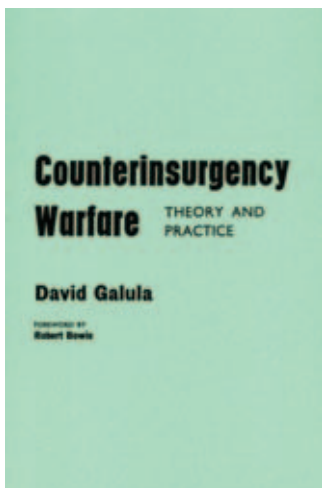
The objective of all security operations by U.S. forces and the Iraqi military and police is protection of the population from in-

Photo: The first requirement of counterinsurgency is to protect the populace. (Photo by SSgt Georgi Hernandez.)

urgent intimidation. The insurgents, using terror or ideology, have gained some of the Iraqi people's willing or unwilling support already. Before we can compete successfully for the Iraqi people's support, they must first be protected from the insurgents. Galula aptly describes the situation:

Once the insurgent has established his hold over the population, the minority that was hostile to him becomes invisible. Some of its members have been eliminated physically, thereby providing an example to the others; others have escaped abroad; most have been cowed into hiding their true feelings and have thus melted within the majority of the population; a few are even making a show of their support of the insurgency. The population, watched by the active supporters of the insurgency, lives under the threat of denunciation . . . and prompt punishment by the guerrilla units.⁷

When confronted by an insurgency at this stage, we must avoid the instinctive military reaction to exploit our superior conventional fire, maneuver, and shock action to try to kill or otherwise neutralize identified armed fighters. Such tactics are counterproductive when used on guerrilla fighters and insurgent supporters hidden among the population. Since the final objective is always population control, how, where, when, why, and which insurgents are killed or captured is more important than simply killing or capturing them.



Historically significant counterinsurgency books are back in print.

Counterinsurgency requires aggressive, imaginative, well-sourced information operations as an integral part of our effort. Often, in fact, they must drive our planning and operations. We and the Iraqi Government forces can expect to be attacked in the world media for “police state tactics” regardless of what we do, so we must use every possible legal means to present what we are doing clearly and fairly to the Iraqi people and the world.

Under the best of circumstances the Iraqi people will feel what GEN William Tecumseh Sherman described during the Civil War as “the hard hand of war.” Freedom of movement, speech, and association will be severely circumscribed; search and seizure and detention without trial limitations will be relaxed; privacy rights will be abrogated, all far beyond what is considered acceptable for peaceful Western democracies. The Iraqi people must understand that these restrictions are essen-

tial to lift the terrible burden of terrorism and anarchy under which so many of them suffer. They must be convinced that the condition is temporary and, that by their own actions, they can shorten the time under which they must live with these necessary restrictions.

We must also stay away from chicken-or-egg arguments about which comes first, security or development. They *both* have to come first. Population control measures to provide security will be palatable only if they are combined with aggressive and well-publicized efforts to provide reliable electric power, clean water, and efficient sewage and garbage disposal. We must operate on the assumption that most Afghans and Iraqis, like most people everywhere, want a future that includes freedom for themselves and their families to live and prosper without fear of their governments or their neighbors. We have to show the Afghan and Iraqi people that we and their governments are on their side, even while we are rigorously enforcing dusk-to-dawn curfews, stringent movement restrictions, and around-the-clock cordon and knock operations.

Laws and the Legal Code

As part of the effort to gain the support of Iraqi and international public opinion, as well as to demonstrate loyalty to a government of laws, we and the democratically elected local governments must cooperate to draw up a special legal code or set of emergency regulations to govern and provide a legal basis for the counterinsurgency campaign. Thompson's second principle of counterinsurgency is that “the government must function in accordance with the law.” He continues that:

. . . a government that does not act in accordance with the law forfeits the right to be called a government and cannot then expect its people to obey the law.⁸

Noting that “Some very tough laws were passed in Malaya,” Thompson continues, “The main point about them was that they were seen by the population to be effective and applied fairly to all.”⁹ Such a juridical foundation will be important in gaining local and international acceptance of activities, such as precisely delimited detention without trial and search and seizure. We must act with the confidence that most Afghans or Iraqis will trade some civil liberties temporarily to end the current terrorist dominated near anarchy that prevails in much of their countries.

A unified, countrywide counterinsurgency plan must be drawn up with the local government and security forces, including army and police, and all U.S. military forces and civilian departments and agencies. It must establish an organization to control counterinsurgency efforts in each area (probably governorates) and set priorities and timelines. Citing an overall plan as his third principle of counterinsurgency, Thompson emphasizes the importance of:

. . . a proper balance between the military and the civil effort in all fields. Otherwise a situation will arise in which military operations produce no lasting result, because they are unsupported by civil follow-up action. Similarly, civilian measures, particularly in areas disputed with the insurgents, are a waste of time and money if they are unsupported by military operations to provide the necessary protection.¹⁰

We must accept compromise of operational security as the price for involving all of the relevant Iraqi Government and political en-

U.S. units and local soldiers and police must cordon and search the whole area and confiscate all automatic weapons, explosives, and improvised explosive device (IED) components.

ties and take precautions to minimize its effect. The military principle of economy of force must be rigorously applied, despite the objections of tactical commanders and local politicians, because the counterinsurgent never has enough people or resources to be strong everywhere.

For planning purposes, classic counterinsurgency calls for dividing the country into three types of areas—those in which the insurgent effectively controls the area and carries out guerrilla warfare, areas in which the insurgent is attempting to expand his influence through controlling the population and other guerrilla activities, and areas that seem quiet but are still threatened by insurgent efforts to gain control.¹¹ Classic counterinsurgency doctrine calls for starting out with areas in the third and easiest category. U.S. and Iraqi security forces will have to exorcise the devil in the details. We don't know yet what we don't know, and we can only learn by doing.

Irreversibility must be integral to the whole operation. Once people have made the life or death decisions to risk themselves and their families in the belief that they will be protected if they support us, we can never renege on that commitment. The decision is irreversible for each Afghan or Iraqi, and it must be for us as well.¹² The insurgents must see the process as irreversible as well. Once the big green machine rolls into their territory they must believe that their only choices are to give up, leave, be captured, or die. Once momentum shifts to the counterinsurgents it becomes an important asset and can cause the insurgency's accelerating collapse.¹³

Steps To Be Taken

Galula lists the first step in reasserting control over an area and its population as the destruction, scattering, or expulsion of insurgent armed forces. Their destruction is not an end in itself. Unless follow-on programs are put in place they will regenerate themselves. The real purpose of this first step is to set the stage for further counterinsurgent action.¹⁴

Before the operation begins, the U.S. and local military units that will conduct it should be positioned around the selected area. Deception operations should be used to mislead the insurgents as to what is happening and when. Our forces start operating from the outside of the area converging toward the center.¹⁵ This will principally be a military operation, and U.S. heavy conventional units will have a major initial role, along with local military forces. The police will have a supporting role.

As the military moves forward, the U.S. and local military units and police, who will garrison the area for the duration of the counterinsurgent operations, backfill behind the advancing military forces. The sweep is then conducted from the inside out, aimed at expelling all of the guerrillas who are not killed or captured. The permanent garrisons then move into their assigned areas. This stage is complete when the local military and police, who form the gar-

risons with a quick reaction force, can easily overmatch the guerrilla remnants.¹⁶ It is at this point that we must make the explicit, widely publicized commitment to irreversibility—the United States and Iraqi Government forces have come to stay. Our commanders must have allocated all necessary troops and resources for however long it takes until the governorate can safely be entrusted to the local military and police. Even so, a U.S. presence that is still strong enough and has enough immediate backup to retain the people's confidence must be maintained indefinitely.

In order to destroy the armed guerrillas and establish population and movement control, mobile and stationary patrols and checkpoints must be omnipresent, and a curfew must be enforced with violators liable to be shot on sight. U.S. units and local soldiers and police must cordon and search the whole area and confiscate all automatic weapons, explosives, and improvised explosive device (IED) components. Anyone possessing large quantities of weapons, explosives, or any other IED components or suspicious materiel, or who cannot justify being there, must be detained and interrogated.

The importance of complete integration of information operations (IO) into the program at every level cannot be overemphasized. IO must be proactive, imaginative, and well funded. Not only must IO be ably staffed, but every member of the U.S., local military, and civilian counterinsurgency team must know his role, be carefully supervised, and be led to make sure he carries it out. This will be a difficult and dangerous time at best for the people living in the area of operations. Counterinsurgency can succeed or fail on the ability to tell the target population at every step why we are doing what we are doing and why it will be good for them.¹⁷

The next phase begins with the finalization of the deployment of small military garrisons and police forces throughout the area, backed up by powerful quick reaction forces, to protect the population and the civic action and development programs. This is where the counterinsurgency programs switch their attention from the guerrillas to the population. The counterinsurgency effort continues to work on population control, maintaining and strengthening it, and beginning to build support among the people of the area for the U.S. and local government's goals.¹⁸

Population Control

A key population control measure, with antecedents going back to ancient Rome, will be a census in which every person above the age of six is enrolled. It will require basic biographic and extensive family data, including date and place of birth and current residence of the subject's siblings, his or her parents, and their siblings. The data must be verified by the person's clan, tribal leader, or at least two responsible heads of family. Upon completion of this census, each person will be issued a bilingual identity (ID) card, with a biometric photo. Strong incentives should be created for acquir-



Impromptu vehicle inspections can be used as a change in routine, keeping insurgents unaware of friendly actions. (Photo by SSgt Georgi Hernandez.)

ing this ID card (and thus completing the census data). One example might be a ban on travel of more than 5 kilometers from the person's home of record until he has his ID card. Galula notes that insurgents can be expected to attempt to sabotage the census and ID card program by forcing the people to destroy their new ID cards; the penalties and inconveniences a person who is forced to be without an ID card would suffer, however, should soon alienate the people on whose tolerance the insurgent must depend.¹⁹

A census, if properly conducted and exploited, is a basic source of intelligence. It shows who is related to whom, who works outside of the neighborhood or village and thus has legitimate reason to travel, each person's source and amount of income and real property holdings, and who can afford certain activities.²⁰ Modern information techniques and equipment open wide opportunities for using such data. As one example, foreign "jihadis" will be instantly recognizable.

Also, as part of the census, each individual will have a private, one-on-one interview with an Iraqi policeman or policewoman, ostensibly to verify the census data and be issued the ID card. At this meeting, however, which will be monitored by U.S. military police or military intelligence personnel, each person is also asked to describe known or suspect insurgents, supporters, and activities. Also as a part of this process, as a measure against vehicleborne IEDs, every motor vehicle must be registered to an identified owner and issued large, legibly numbered license plates. A photo and identifying data for each person authorized to drive the car must be kept in it.

Senior civilian officials or military commanders interview each clan or tribal leader (sheik) and explain exactly what they expect. At a minimum, they expect his support in identifying and neutralizing his clan members who are armed insurgents or actively support the insurgents, and they expect warning of guerrilla activity in his territory. Where feasible, a sheik should be made responsible for ensuring that all roads in his clan's area are kept clear of all objects, such as debris, that might conceal an IED. He must be formally instructed that under the emergency code, heavy indemnities will be assessed against him and his clan/tribe for each failure to do so.

From the beginning of the population control phase in each governorate, U.S. and Iraqi Government aid funds and activities, ranging from small loans to provision of electricity, water, and sewage treatment, will be accelerated. Citizens' groups can be set up to allocate aid funds and resources to provide experience in self-government; eventually with active coaching they might be the basis for local government by neighborhood, town, or city councils.

Noting that "detention is perhaps one of the most controversial powers a government can exercise,"²¹ Thompson discusses in detail how detention and detainee interview procedures should be stringently controlled. Trained, professional interrogators, with extensive background data available in carefully maintained files, don't need to abuse detainees to generate accurate, timely, and detailed information. Over a relatively short period of time, the data generated by cordon and knock operations, checkpoints, the cen-

sus, previous detainees, and a carefully supervised informant program, when combined with modern data processing, will generate an awesome resource for a trained interrogator. The ever-pragmatic Thompson notes that over time:

. . . a situation gradually develops whereby an individual who is . . . captured or surrenders can then be interrogated on the basis of a mass of information already available to the intelligence organization. This shocks the truth out of him far more effectively than torture.²²

Classic counterinsurgency operations invariably include well-publicized programs through which insurgents may surrender or defect, either overtly or covertly. These defectors' knowledge of insurgent personalities, plans, and tactics is often invaluable and can make major contributions to the counterinsurgency. Thompson discusses at length the importance of an intensive psychological warfare campaign to influence insurgents to surrender or defect, emphasizing the importance of "a clear and precise government surrender policy towards the insurgents."²³ Special measures will have to be built into such programs in Islamic countries to deal with the cultural tradition of vengeance. Families of those harmed by an insurgent before he surrendered or defected to the government side cannot be allowed to take their own revenge.

When do we know that we've won in an area? Galula defines victory for the counterinsurgent as:

. . . the destruction in a given area of the insurgent's forces and his political organization . . . permanent isolation of the insurgent from the population, isolation not forced upon the population, but maintained by and with the population . . . Through this strategy, insurgency can be rolled back with increasing strength and momentum, for as soon as an area has been made safe, important forces can be withdrawn and transferred to the neighboring areas.²⁴

Conclusion

Progress in defeating the insurgency will be neither quick nor smooth, especially in the first places tried. The counterinsurgency campaign must be prosecuted patiently and implacably, however, to convince the population that U.S. and government success is inevitable. Irreversibility must be our watchword. Insurgents must decide that their only choices are to die, surrender, or hide out among the population and eventually fall into the government's net. As we succeed, success should breed success, and we should develop momentum until enough of the population decides to go with the winners so that Afghanistan and Iraq become modern, democratic societies.

Notes

1. Galula, David, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1964, pp. v–vi.
2. Thompson, Sir Robert Grainger Ker, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1966, pp. 10–11.
3. Thompson, pp. 50–51.
4. Nagl, John A., *Learning To Eat Soup With a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons From Malaya and Vietnam*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002, p. 107.
5. Galula, pp. 76–77.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
8. Thompson, p. 52.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
11. Galula, p. 70.
12. Galula strongly argues for the first area being a test area, p. 104–105.
13. Galula emphasizes irreversibility, p. 82.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 107–108.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
17. Galula, in discussing the steps for implementing a counterinsurgency program in an area, emphasizes continual "propaganda" aimed at the counterinsurgent forces (for example, antagonizing the population will not be tolerated), the populace, and the insurgent, pp. 107–135.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
19. Galula regards such a census and issue of ID cards to each individual and a family booklet to each household as an "obvious" first step in controlling the population, pp. 116–118.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
21. Thompson, p. 53.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
23. Thompson goes into great detail on psychological warfare campaigns to induce insurgents to surrender or defect and then discusses their subsequent treatment, pp. 90–94.
24. Galula, pp. 77–78 and 81–82.



>Editor's Note: These classic books may be ordered from our online edition by clicking on the book covers. For additional information on census operations, see "Census Operations and Information Management" by Maj Morgan G. Mann (MCG, Apr06, p. 24.)



>LTC Daly is a retired U.S. Army Reserve officer who worked in the national security and foreign policy fields until he retired in the 1990s. He served in Vietnam as a province-level advisor to the pacification program from 1965–67.