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# U.S. GOVERNMENT COUNTERINSURGENCY GUIDE

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT  
INTERAGENCY COUNTERINSURGENCY INITIATIVE

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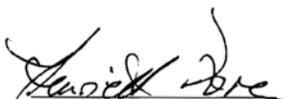
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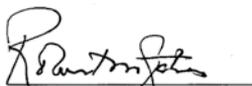
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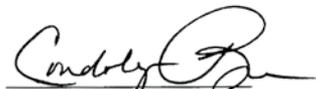
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# U.S. GOVERNMENT COUNTERINSURGENCY GUIDE



  
Henrietta Fore  
Administrator, USAID

  
Robert Gates  
Secretary of Defense

  
Condoleezza Rice  
Secretary of State

January 13, 2009

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# PREFACE

In recent years the United States has engaged in prolonged counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. It has supported many other friendly governments facing internal subversion around the globe. In so doing it has both relearned old lessons, and forged new methods and concepts for the stabilization of moderate, freedom-oriented governments. This Guide, the first of its kind in almost half a century, distills the best of contemporary thought, historical knowledge, and hard-won practice. It is the best kind of doctrinal work: intellectually rigorous, yet practical.

Irregular warfare is far more varied than conventional conflict: hence the importance of an intellectual framework that is coherent enough to provide guidance, and flexible enough to adapt to circumstances. Counterinsurgency places great demands on the ability of bureaucracies to work together, with allies, and increasingly, with non-governmental organizations. That it is co-signed by the leaders of the Departments of State and Defense and the U.S. Agency for International Development says a great deal about the partnership between these and other departments that has been, and will be, required if we are to succeed in the future. Although much of our ability to knit together lines of effort arises from the field, there is an important role for policy-relevant thought about first order questions. This Guide provides that.

American counterinsurgency practice rests on a number of assumptions: that the decisive effort is rarely military (although security is the essential prerequisite for success); that our efforts must be directed to the creation of local and national governmental structures that will serve their populations, and, over time, replace the efforts of foreign partners; that superior knowledge, and in particular, understanding of the ‘human terrain’ is essential; and that we must have the patience to persevere in what will necessarily prove long struggles.

In the field, the United States has innovated in remarkable ways. Perhaps the most important of new initiatives has been the creation of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) which bring together civilian and military personnel to undertake the insurgency-relevant developmental work that has been essential to success in both Iraq and Afghanistan. As those conflicts have evolved, so too have the PRTs: their composition has changed, and so too, in some cases, has their mission. This guide captures the kind of thinking and accumulated knowledge that has led to this successful innovation, and its adaptation over the years.

Insurgency will be a large and growing element of the security challenges faced by the United States in the 21st century. While the possibility of conventional conflict remains, the fact is that, at the moment, the main powers of the international system are deeply reluctant to engage in it. Insurgency, however, can and will flourish in the

modern environment. The strains created by globalization, by the collapse of weak state structures, by demographic, environmental, and economic pressures, by the ease of cooperation among insurgent groups and criminals, and by the appearance of destructive radical ideologies, all augur a period in which free and moderate governance is at risk. And in today's world, state failure can quickly become not merely a misfortune for local communities, but a threat to global security.

Whether the United States should engage in any particular counterinsurgency is a matter of political choice, but that it will engage in such conflicts during the decades to come is a near certainty. This Guide will help prepare decision-makers of many kinds for the tasks that will result from this fact. Like all such works, it will serve best if treated not as a rigidly defined set of recipes, but rather, as a stimulus to disciplined, but creative thought.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. A. C.', written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Eliot A. Cohen  
Counselor of the Department of State

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Insurgency is the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify or challenge political control of a region. As such, it is primarily a political struggle, in which both sides use armed force to create space for their political, economic and influence activities to be effective. Insurgency is not always conducted by a single group with a centralized, military-style command structure, but may involve a complex matrix of different actors with various aims, loosely connected in dynamic and non-hierarchical networks. To be successful, insurgencies require charismatic leadership, supporters, recruits, supplies, safe havens and funding (often from illicit activities). They only need the active support of a few enabling individuals, but the passive acquiescence of a large proportion of the contested population will give a higher probability of success. This is best achieved when the political cause of the insurgency has strong appeal, manipulating religious, tribal or local identity to exploit common societal grievances or needs. Insurgents seek to gain control of populations through a combination of persuasion, subversion and coercion while using guerrilla tactics to offset the strengths of government security forces. Their intent is usually to protract the struggle, exhaust the government and win sufficient popular support to force capitulation or political accommodation. Consequently, insurgencies evolve through a series of stages, though the progression and outcome will be different in almost every case.

Counterinsurgency (COIN) is the blend of comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously contain insurgency and address its root causes. Unlike conventional warfare, non-military means are often the most effective elements, with military forces playing an enabling role. COIN is an extremely complex undertaking, which demands of policy makers a detailed understanding of their own specialist field, but also a broad knowledge of a wide variety of related disciplines. COIN approaches must be adaptable and agile. Strategies will usually be focused primarily on the population rather than the enemy and will seek to reinforce the legitimacy of the affected government while reducing insurgent influence. This can often only be achieved in concert with political reform to improve the quality of governance and address underlying grievances, many of which may be legitimate. Since U.S. COIN campaigns will normally involve engagement in support of a foreign government (either independently or as part of a coalition), success will often depend on the willingness of that government to undertake the necessary political changes. However great its know-how and enthusiasm, an outside actor can never fully compensate for lack of will, incapacity or counter-productive behavior on the part of the supported government.

This guide employs a COIN model that comprises five main functional components:

The **political function** is the key function, providing a framework of political reconciliation, and reform of governance around which all other COIN activities are organized. In general, a COIN strategy is only as good as the political plan at its heart.

The **economic function** seeks to provide essential services and stimulate long term economic growth, thereby generating confidence in the government while at the same time reducing the pool of frustrated, unemployed young men and women from which insurgents can readily recruit.

The **security function** is an enabler for the other functions and involves development not just of the affected nation's military force, but its whole security sector, including the related legal framework, civilian oversight mechanisms and judicial system. Establishing security is not a precursor to economic and governance activity: rather security, economic and governance activity must be developed in parallel.

The **information function** comprises intelligence (required to gain understanding), and influence (to promote the affected government's cause). It is essential that the influence campaign is in tune with the strategic narrative, resonates with the relevant audiences, is based on genuine resolve by the affected government and that physical actions match. What makes COIN different from other stabilization and humanitarian tasks is that both elements of the information function will be conducted in stark competition with the insurgents' own information functions.

These four functions contribute to the overall objective of enabling the affected government to establish **control**, consolidating and then transitioning it from intervening forces to national forces and from military to civil institutions.

The imperative to achieve synergy among political, security, economic and information activities demands unity of effort between all participants (the affected government, USG agencies and coalition partners). This is best achieved through an integrated approach to assessment and planning. A common interagency **assessment** of the insurgency establishes a deep and shared understanding of the cultural, ideological, religious, demographic and geographical factors that affect the insurgency. Such understanding provides the foundation for policy **formulation** when the risks and costs of intervention are weighed against U.S. interests in determining whether to become involved and what form that involvement should take. This decision should not be taken lightly; historically COIN campaigns have almost always been more costly, more protracted and more difficult than first anticipated. Much will hinge on the degree to which policy makers consider the affected government to be receptive to assistance, advice and reform; it is folly to intervene unless there is a reasonable

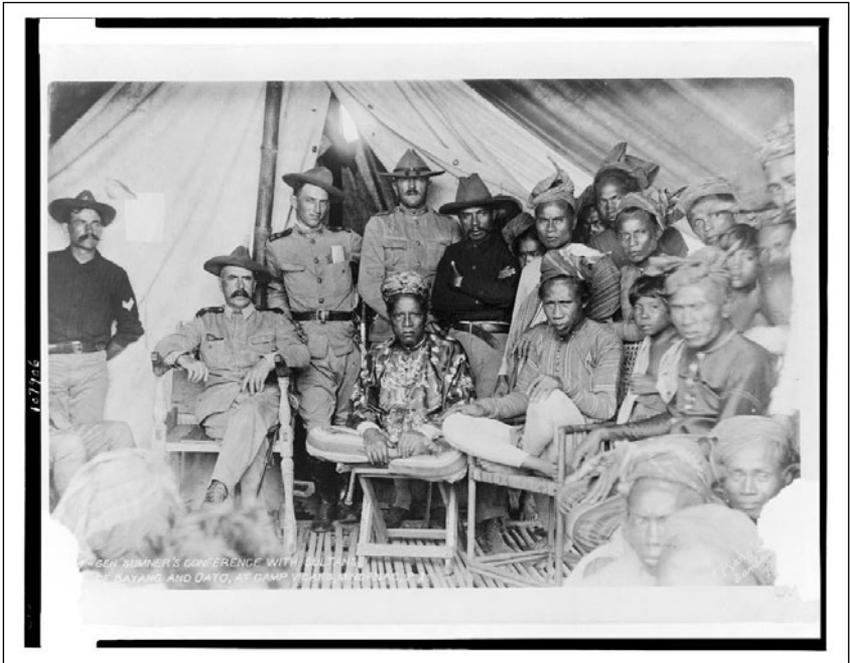
likelihood of cooperation. If the USG does decide to become involved, then policy makers should seek a careful balance which employs the most appropriate, most indirect and least intrusive form of intervention yet still gives a high probability of achieving the necessary effect. The sovereignty of the affected government must be maintained and too high a U.S. profile may be counter-productive (historically, some of the most successful U.S. engagements have been indirect and low key). Once U.S. assistance is committed, a COIN **strategy** must be devised, ideally in collaboration with the affected government and other coalition partners, since their early inclusion can help mitigate the effects of operational level differences in goals, capabilities and culture. Detailed, **integrated planning** then follows and a process of **continuous monitoring, evaluation and assessment** is used to measure progress and identify where changes in approach are necessary to achieve success.

Success in COIN can be difficult to define, but improved governance will usually bring about marginalization of the insurgents to the point at which they are destroyed, co-opted or reduced to irrelevance in numbers and capability. U.S. intervention may cease when success is assured but before it is actually achieved. Ultimately, the desired end state is a government that is seen as legitimate, controlling social, political, economic and security institutions that meet the population's needs, including adequate mechanisms to address the grievances that may have fueled support of the insurgency.

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# CHAPTER ONE: THEORY AND PRINCIPLES

## PART A: INSURGENCY



*U.S. Army General Samuel Sumner meets with the Sultans of Bayang and Oato, Philippines, 1902*

(PHOTO: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

## Definition

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**Insurgency can be defined as ‘the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.’**

Insurgents seek to subvert or displace the government and completely or partially control the resources and population of a given territory. They do so through the use of force (including guerrilla warfare, terrorism and coercion/intimidation), propaganda, subversion and political mobilization. Insurgents fight government forces only to the extent needed to achieve their political aims: their main effort is not to kill counterinsurgents, but rather to establish a competitive system of control over the population, making it impossible for the government to administer its territory and people. Insurgent activity is therefore designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control and influence.

## Characteristics

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Many of the more renowned insurgencies of the 20th Century followed the Maoist ‘Protracted Warfare’ model; being monolithic organizations with a centralized, hierarchical command structure, clearly defined aims and a sequenced approach to achieve them. However, modern insurgencies are increasingly being recognized as complex matrices of irregular actors with widely differing goals. They often lack a centralized command structure but typically are linked by dynamic, flat networks (often significantly enabled by modern communications systems). Motivations within this eclectic mix may vary from religious extremism to pure criminality and many groups may not themselves intend to become the governing authority. Often, the only common factor will be a desire to achieve local freedom from control by the government and its international supporters.

## Ideology

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During the Twentieth Century, insurgents were often motivated by Marxism, religion or nationalism (or a combination of these). Insurgencies were often led by university educated ‘intellectual elites’ whose personal circumstances were sometimes far removed from those of the rank-and-file insurgents that they inspired.

Modern insurgencies are often more complex matrices of irregular actors with widely differing goals. At least some of the principal actors will be motivated by a form of ideology (or at least will claim to be), but that ideology will not necessarily extend across the whole insurgent network. Modern insurgencies are typified by the points below.

- The charisma of insurgent leaders can sometimes be more important than ideology in convincing others to join their movement;

- Some insurgent actors will be more interested in financial reward than ideology. This applies from the unemployed youth getting paid to fight to the criminal gang leader exploiting a state of lawlessness;
- The basic wants, needs and grievances of the population may have little to do with the intellectual ideology of insurgent leaders, but may still be exploited to generate support;
- Even those fighters, sympathizers, and supporters who justify their actions with the rhetoric and symbols provided by insurgent propagandists may not be fully conversant with the ideology;
- Hatred that emerges during armed conflict, through atrocities and dispossession, often overshadows the initial motivators that drove individuals and community groups to join the insurgency or support the government;
- Players in pre-existing local conflict may draw on the insurgents (or the government) as an external ally to help them;
- In tribal societies (as found in parts of South and Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa) the support of one tribe or faction for the government may often predispose tribal rivals to support the insurgents, and vice versa.

## **Building Networks**

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Insurgents require supporters, recruits, safe havens, money, supplies, weapons and intelligence on government actions. A robust insurgency can be waged with the support of just a small percentage of a given population. From the remaining majority, insurgents require only compliance (acquiescence or inaction). The position of an active individual within an insurgent network will be determined by the combination of a number of factors including:

- The level of respect and trust they hold within a community;
- Their reputation established through previous insurgent actions;
- Their degree of motivation, ideological or otherwise;
- Their perceived loyalty to other network members;
- Their level of expertise in a particular field;
- Their access to resources, human or otherwise;
- The degree of risk they are prepared to accept.

Insurgent networks provide life support for the movements they support, but they also entail vulnerability. Command and support networks establish lines between isolated cells whose operational security may otherwise be impeccable. Some key functions may be deliverable only by individuals with dubious loyalty, for example

criminal smugglers enabling logistics supply or personnel movement. Modern information infrastructure including mobile phones and the internet provide means of rapid communications and networking between insurgents, but are also open to exploitation.

The most secure insurgent networks involve small numbers of active personnel who are trustworthy and employ tight operational security. However, the insurgent dilemma is that in order to promote the insurgency and exploit success, these small networks have to expand, exposing themselves to action by government security forces. Effective interdiction can lead to a cycle of expansion and contraction of insurgent networks as security and trust is repeatedly built up and then lost.

## **Funding**

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To fund their activities, insurgents may foster an illicit economy, sometimes of international scope, eluding government monitoring, taxation and interdiction. Such illicit financial activities diminish government revenues, increase corruption among local officials, and weaken the control and legitimacy of the government. Criminal activities may include theft, extortion, trafficking (of narcotics, arms and people), money laundering, piracy, document fraud, bribery, kidnapping and black market activity. These funding streams will often drive insurgents into alliances of convenience with organized crime. In some cases, long-standing insurgencies morph into gangs or organized criminal networks that are motivated by profit and economic self-interest, rather than ideology.

Funding may also be obtained through donations from sympathetic foreign governments, diaspora groups and individuals. Such funding streams may be simple and direct or complex and masked dependent on the efforts being taken internationally to interdict them. In extreme cases, funding may be channeled through a third party organization purportedly conducting charitable work.

## **Trans-National Dynamics**

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Most insurgencies need a physical safe haven, and may find it in neighboring countries. Moreover, contemporary insurgencies are often supported or driven by transnational networks with access to satellite communications, the Internet, global media and transnational banking systems. International support may be leveraged from diaspora or émigré communities, international institutions, friendly foreign governments and populations, or the international media. If other countries give support to the affected government, the insurgents may directly target public opinion there, pressuring them to cease their assistance. Such pressure may be exerted from the affected territory through the kidnap, torture and murder of intervening civilian nationals, often broadcast internationally to reach the population of origin. Alternatively, more direct effect may be achieved through terrorist attacks launched within the intervening country itself (perhaps facilitated by immigrant or other

sympathetic community groups). Policy makers must therefore take into account regional and global dynamics as well as the internal situation of the nation most directly affected.

## **Insurgent Political Strategy**

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To gain the support (or at least the acquiescence) of the people, insurgents may apply a combination of persuasion, subversion and coercion.

- **Persuasion** will often involve the promotion of insurgent ideology, but it can also include the provision of money, basic social services, control of land, or positions of authority. Insurgents may appeal to the self-interest of constituencies through alliances with political parties, tribal leaders, ethnic or religious groups, warlords, organized crime networks, and local bandits. To do so, they will exploit societal trends and popular grievances or needs, manipulating elements of religious, tribal, ethnic or local identity that resonate with some subset of the target population. These trends do not necessarily have to be linked directly to the ideology of insurgent leaders to be exploited by them in the mobilization of support. Such partnerships may exacerbate localized conflict, perpetuate instability and help mobilize support for the insurgency.

Propaganda is a key element of persuasion and is used at the local, national and often international levels to influence perceptions of potential supporters, opinion leaders, and opponents in the favor of the insurgents; promoting the insurgent cause and diminishing the government's resolve. More specifically, propaganda may be designed to control community action, discredit government action, provoke overreaction by security forces, or exacerbate sectarian tension.

- **Subversion** is the action used by insurgents to penetrate, manipulate, undermine or disrupt government institutions and organizations. At the same time, insurgents may exploit competing power structures, such as tribal hierarchies, clerical authorities or criminal networks that challenge the authority and reach of control of the central government. In doing so, the insurgents seek to 'out administer' the local authorities. Clearly, these techniques will be particularly effective in areas where government services are weak or absent.
- **Coercion** can either augment or replace persuasion as a means to mobilize support, depending on the ability of government forces to protect the population. Insurgents seek to intimidate government supporters or collaborators, and force community leaders to take sides in the conflict. This often entails the use of violence as follows:
  - Insurgents can use violence to intimidate or eliminate those who oppose their aims. In particular, insurgent attacks against government

- infrastructure and personnel will undermine the government's morale, confidence and capability, weakening its authority and control over affected areas;
- This effect is magnified by the depiction of such violence in propaganda, portraying the government as weak and the insurgents as strong, and exacerbating local grievances. Propaganda is sometimes the primary aim of insurgent violence;
  - Targeting members of different ethnic or sectarian groups may engender a sense of social identity, solidarity and alienation from the government;
  - By creating violent instability, insurgents may be able to encourage people to turn to them in preference to the government to 'restore' public order;
  - If insurgents can provoke excessive government action against a population, then death, injury, mistreatment, or dishonor can become a powerful motivator for retributive action against the government.

## **Challenging Government Security**

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Insurgents usually have less conventional military capacity than the government (at least in the early stages of insurgency) and so tend to use guerrilla tactics to inflict damage without allowing their fighters to be engaged by equal or larger government forces. Tactics such as raids, ambushes, assassinations, sabotage, booby traps, and improvised explosive devices take advantage of mobility, stealth, deception and surprise to weaken, discredit, or paralyze the less agile government security forces. Insurgents try to manage the tempo and intensity of their activities to permit a level of effort they can sustain indefinitely. By prolonging the conflict, they hope to exhaust the opposition, seeking to impose unsustainable costs on the government to force capitulation. Although the permutations of insurgent activity are context-driven, historical analysis shows that insurgents typically apply four basic tactics, or variations of them, to defeat stronger security forces:

- **Provocation:** Insurgents often commit acts (such as atrocities) that are intended to prompt opponents to react irrationally, in ways that harm their interests. For example, government forces, frustrated by their inability to distinguish fighters from non-combatants, may be provoked into indiscriminate reprisals or harsh security measures that alienate parts of the population. Alternatively, one tribal, religious, ethnic or community group may be provoked into attacking another in order to create and exploit instability.
- **Intimidation:** Insurgents intimidate individual members of the government (especially police and local government officials) to dissuade them from taking active measures against the insurgents. They will also publicly kill civilians

who collaborate with government or coalition forces, thereby deterring others who might seek to work with the government.

- **Protraction:** Insurgents seek to prolong the conflict in order to exhaust opponents, erode their political will, and avoid losses. Typically insurgents react to government countermeasures by going quiet (reducing activity and hiding in inaccessible terrain or within sympathetic or intimidated population groups) when pressure becomes too severe. They then emerge later to fight on.
- **Exhaustion:** Insurgents conduct activities such as ambushes, bombings, attacks on government facilities, economic assets and transport infrastructure that are designed to compel security forces to undertake numerous onerous, high-cost defensive activities that expend scarce resources without significantly advancing the counterinsurgents' strategy.

## **Stages of Insurgency**

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Every insurgency develops differently, but some general patterns can be observed. Insurgencies may evolve through some or all the stages of subversion and radicalization, popular unrest, civil disobedience, localized guerrilla activity, and widespread guerrilla warfare to open, semi-conventional armed conflict. Alternatively, they may wither away to dormancy if they are effectively countered or if they fail to capture sufficient popular support. One or more different stages may appear simultaneously in a country or region affected by insurgency. An insurgency may actually succeed in overthrowing the government (historically a rare event), may force the government into political accommodation (a more common outcome), may be co-opted by the government and cease fighting (also common), or may be crushed. Insurgencies may be co-opted by domestic or trans-national terrorist groups, morph into criminal networks, or wither into irrelevance. Measures that succeed against incipient insurgencies often differ greatly from those that are effective against mature or declining insurgencies. Thus, planners and decision-makers must clearly understand the stage the insurgency has reached, to develop appropriate responses.

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## PART B: COUNTERINSURGENCY

### Definition

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Counterinsurgency may be defined as ‘comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes’.

Best practice COIN integrates and synchronizes political, security, economic, and informational components that reinforce governmental legitimacy and effectiveness while reducing insurgent influence over the population. COIN strategies should be designed to simultaneously protect the population from insurgent violence; strengthen the legitimacy and capacity of government institutions to govern responsibly and marginalize insurgents politically, socially, and economically.

### Characteristics

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COIN is a **complex** effort that integrates the full range of civilian and military agencies. It is often more **population-centric** (focused on securing and controlling a given population or populations) than enemy-centric (focused on defeating a particular enemy group). Note that this does not mean that COIN is less **violent** than any other conflict: on the contrary, like any other form of warfare it always involves loss of life. It is an extremely **difficult** undertaking, is often highly **controversial** politically, involves a series of **ambiguous** events that are extremely difficult to interpret, and often requires vastly more resources and time than initially anticipated. In particular, governments that embark upon COIN campaigns often severely underestimate the requirement for a very **long-duration**, relatively **high-cost** commitment (in terms of financial cost, political capital, military resources and human life). The capabilities required for COIN may be very similar to those required for peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, stabilization operations, and development assistance missions. However, the intent of a COIN campaign is to build popular support for a government while marginalizing the insurgents: it is therefore fundamentally an *armed political competition* with the insurgents. Consequently, control (over the environment, the population, the level of security, the pace of events, and the enemy) is the fundamental goal of COIN, a goal that distinguishes it from peace operations or humanitarian intervention. Within these broad characteristics, the specific nature of any particular COIN campaign arises from the complex interaction of three key factors: the **characteristics of the environment** (physical, economic, political and human) in which it takes place; the **nature of the insurgent** group (or groups); and the **nature of the counterinsurgent** government and its security forces.

## Different Forms of COIN

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- **Domestic COIN versus Overseas COIN:** A nation faces very significant conceptual and practical differences between conducting COIN within its own national boundaries and intervening in a foreign country in support of another government. Intervention to conduct COIN in a foreign country is often a discretionary activity whereas internal/domestic COIN is usually not a matter of choice. Forces operating in another government's territory are vulnerable to the insurgents' "home ground" advantage: the insurgents live in the country and never plan to leave, whereas the intervening force must eventually plan on transition and departure. The population knows this and is therefore less likely to support it. A government conducting COIN in its own territory will generally have greater strategic patience to stay the course of a protracted struggle. Another "home ground" advantage is the detailed understanding of the geography, culture, history, sociology and politics of the affected country which insurgents will already possess but the intervening country will usually have to learn.

Since the United States presently faces no credible internal insurgency, all U.S. COIN campaigns are likely to be external interventions in support of a foreign government (or in failed/collapsed states). Intervention to support COIN merits careful consideration of a range of factors that are addressed in detail in Chapter 4 (Assessment and Planning).

- **Bilateral Versus Multilateral COIN:** The United States may not be the only foreign country prepared to assist the affected nation in countering insurgency. There are significant differences between campaigns supported by a single intervening power and those involving an intervening coalition or United Nations force. Coalition COIN will often be seen as a more legitimate endeavor than a U.S. only intervention, but it requires significant alliance management and coordination and is inherently less efficient than unilateral COIN. This is covered in more detail in Chapter 4.
- **Different Levels of Consent:** Not all COIN interventions will have the full consent of the affected government. There will be major differences between campaigns conducted with full consent, partial consent, or where there is no effective government. A final variation (recognized as especially difficult) is where an insurgency follows a conventional war in which an invading power or coalition overthrows the existing government, then builds a new government from scratch (or radically reforms an existing structure) while increasingly being opposed by insurgents. In this scenario, the challenges of conducting COIN may not have been fully anticipated or considered during the original decision to invade. However, by the time the insurgent threat is manifested, intervening governments may have little choice but to remain committed to a protracted and costly COIN campaign. It is important to recognize that the

decisions to intervene in Afghanistan and Iraq were not taken as decisions to undertake COIN campaigns. The strategic drivers and the factors considered were very different. Use of these examples in the study of COIN intervention could therefore be misleading and policy makers should exercise caution in drawing parallels.

## Purpose

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COIN differs from other civil-military operations both in the methods employed and in the purpose of the undertaking. The purpose of COIN is to build popular support for a government while suppressing or co-opting insurgent movements.

## Approaches

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COIN is a response to a specific set of insurgent threats and requires in-depth assessment of that threat matrix, based on solid understanding of the relevant social, cultural, economic, political and security conditions, along with detailed knowledge of insurgent motivations, goals, organization, and methods. Central to gaining the confidence and support of the population is to improve the quality of governance through political reform, strengthening the rule of law and conducting economic development as appropriate. Simultaneously, a mix of diplomacy and negotiation, police methods, intelligence work, military combat and non-combat activities should be used to destroy, contain, marginalize or co-opt the insurgents. Effective COIN therefore involves a careful balance between constructive dimensions (building effective and legitimate government) and destructive dimensions (destroying the insurgent movements). As noted, there are two basic approaches to COIN strategy:

- **The enemy-centric approach** conceptualizes COIN as a contest with an organized enemy, and focuses COIN activity on the insurgent organizations. This approach emphasizes defeat of the enemy as its primary task and other activities as supporting efforts. There are many variants within this approach, including “soft” vs. “hard,” direct vs. indirect, violent vs. non-violent, and decapitation vs. marginalization strategies. This approach can be summarized as “first defeat the enemy, and all else will follow.”
- **The population-centric approach** shifts the focus of COIN from defeating the insurgent organization to maintaining or recovering the support of the population. While direct military action against the insurgent organization will definitely be required, it is not the main effort; this approach assumes that the center of gravity is the government’s relationship with and support among the population. It can be summarized as “first protect and support the population, and all else will follow.”

A purely enemy-centric approach might work against incipient insurgencies that are led or centrally controlled by a particularly charismatic or powerful individual. However, historical experience has shown that against mature insurgencies and complex, non-hierarchical insurgencies, population-centric approaches have a higher likelihood of success.

In reality, COIN campaigns will rarely be purely enemy-centric or population-centric, but will generally include elements of both, with the relative balance changing over time. Winning the support of the population for the legitimate government will often entail a breaking of the ideological, financial or intimidation linkages between insurgent leaders and their supporters, perhaps one family grouping or village at a time. Counterinsurgents should always be looking for potential fracture lines where the coincidence of interests between the ideological leadership and a particular part of the insurgent network is weakest. A wedge may then be created through the use of carrot (political, economic & development benefits) and stick (detention & disruption) operations. Key ‘bridging’ individuals (insurgents, who by personal connections link whole tribes or other groupings to the insurgent leadership) should be a priority for reconciliation or detention, but to achieve this, a deep understanding of regional sociology and relative motivations is critical. This could be viewed as an enemy centric approach, since it focuses on the insurgent network, but its ultimate objective is to win over whole sectors of population to the government cause.

## **Primacy of Non-Military Means**

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While the provision of security is a necessary activity in COIN, it will not defeat an insurgency on its own. When possible, civilian and military measures should be applied simultaneously to achieve success in an integrated strategy that delegitimizes and undermines the insurgency, builds government control and strengthens popular support. In counterinsurgency, military forces are, in a sense, an enabling system for civil administration; their role is to afford sufficient protection and stability to allow the government to work safely with its population, for economic revival, political reconciliation and external non-government assistance to be effective.

## **Unity of Effort**

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COIN usually involves the efforts of multiple stakeholders. Unity of effort is highly desirable at the national level (among the various agencies of the affected government) and at the international level (between the affected nation and all supporting nations). This is not easily achieved, especially in the context of a coalition intervention operation. Hence, robust command-and-control (C2) mechanisms, as well as diplomatic efforts to maintain coalition cohesion and support, are fundamentally important. They must be considered in detail at the outset of a campaign, and given adequate resources and attention during it. In more complex coalition scenarios, the

appointment of a single overall strategic advisor to an affected government (ideally with the mandate and responsibility to coordinate all international civil and military assistance) may be the only means to ensure unity of effort.

## **COIN as a Special Environment**

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For military forces, COIN often involves a wider range of tasks and capabilities than are required in conventional conflict. Armed forces that are optimized for major combat operations will usually require specific training (and perhaps even structural reorganization) to meet the unique requirements of COIN. For civilian agencies engaged in diplomatic, development and information activities, COIN is less about performing a different set of tasks than about operating in a different kind of environment; often conducting their activities in chaotic, unstable, or actively hostile environments. Tasks will often need to be carried out in dramatically different ways, generally requiring specialist training and sometimes requiring development of new capabilities. However it is achieved, the targeted application of diplomatic, development and information effects in a conflict situation is fraught with the risk of unintended consequences and requires a sophisticated understanding of the local context.

## **Success in COIN**

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A COIN effort may be deemed successful when the following conditions are met:

- The affected government is seen as legitimate, controlling social, political, economic and security institutions that meet the population's needs, including adequate mechanisms to address the grievances that may have fueled support of the insurgency;
- The insurgent movements and their leaders are co-opted, marginalized, or separated from the population;
- Armed insurgent forces have dissolved or been demobilized, and/or reintegrated into the political, economic, and social structures of the country.

It should be noted that it is usually far harder to totally eliminate insurgent activity than it is to reduce it as a significant threat to the affected government. Insurgents can become extremely difficult to identify, track and interdict once their manpower and activity drop below a critical mass. Consequently, low level insurgencies may persist for many years after the main threat has been broken. International support in COIN will usually be consensually withdrawn once insurgency can be comfortably contained by the affected government. The combination of these factors means that a COIN intervention in an affected country may end several years before the insurgency there ceases.

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# CHAPTER TWO: COMPONENTS OF COIN STRATEGY

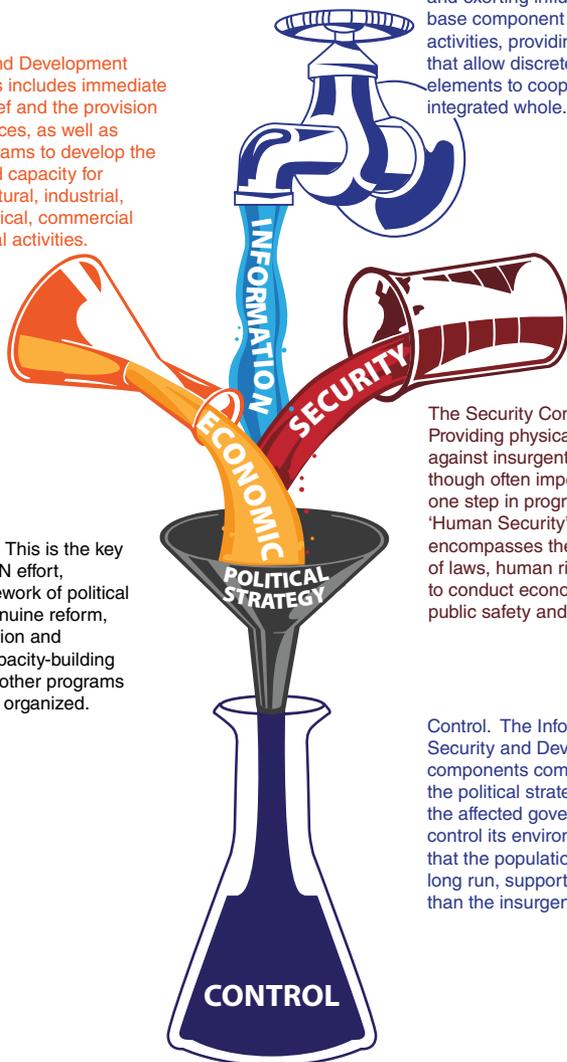
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## Comprehensive Approach to Counterinsurgency

The Economic and Development Component. This includes immediate humanitarian relief and the provision of essential services, as well as longer-term programs to develop the infrastructure and capacity for legitimate agricultural, industrial, educational, medical, commercial and governmental activities.

Political strategy. This is the key function in a COIN effort, providing a framework of political reconciliation, genuine reform, popular mobilization and governmental capacity-building around which all other programs and activities are organized.

The Information Component. Information (acquiring knowledge and exerting influence) is the base component for all other activities, providing the linkages that allow discrete functional elements to cooperate as an integrated whole.



The Security Component. Providing physical security against insurgent violence, though often imperative, is only one step in progressing towards 'Human Security' which also encompasses the maintenance of laws, human rights, freedom to conduct economic activity, public safety and health.

Control. The Information, Security and Development components combine within the political strategy to enable the affected government to control its environment, such that the population will, in the long run, support it rather than the insurgents.

To be effective, officials involved in COIN campaigns must address two imperatives —political action and security operations—with equal urgency, recognizing that insurgency is fundamentally an armed political competition and that effective security operations, though unlikely to deliver success by themselves, will almost always be a prerequisite to political resolution. Security operations, conducted in support of a political strategy, coordinated with economic development activity and integrated with an information campaign, will provide human security to the population and improve the political and economic situation at the local level. This should increase society’s acceptance of the government and, in turn, popular support for the COIN campaign. COIN functions therefore include informational, security, political and economic components, all of which are designed to support the overall objective of establishing and consolidating control over the environment, then transferring it to effective and legitimate local authorities.

The diagram on the preceding page is designed to help policy makers visualize the interaction of COIN components by illustrating the key functions of a comprehensive COIN framework. This approach builds on classic COIN theory but also incorporates best practices that have emerged through experience in numerous complex operations over recent decades.

The diagram is a visualization tool, not a template for action. It is intended to demonstrate to policy makers and program implementers where their efforts fit into a COIN strategy or campaign, rather than telling them what to do in a given situation (it is an aid to collaboration, not an operational plan). The functions are linked to one another primarily through the information function, which underpins and integrates the whole effort, and through the common campaign intent embodied in the control function.

## Information

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Information is the foundation for all other activities, and provides the linkages that allow discrete functional elements to cooperate as an integrated whole. The collection, formulation, storage and dissemination of information are crucial in shaping perceptions of the conflict by all stakeholders.

In COIN, the information flow can be roughly divided into that information which we wish to assimilate in order to inform our approach; i.e. **knowledge** and that information which we wish to disseminate in order to **influence** populations. At the same time, as counterinsurgents we are also interested in impeding the information flow of insurgent groups; both their intelligence collection and their ability to influence.

- **Knowledge:** In COIN, decisions at all levels must be based on a detailed understanding and awareness of the environment. No COIN strategy can be better than the degree of understanding on which it is based. The information

required to engender this understanding encompasses a far broader range of subjects than would normally fall under the auspices of military intelligence. In conventional warfare, decision makers mostly require intelligence about the enemy, but in COIN they primarily need intelligence about the population. COIN intelligence must therefore incorporate the spectrum of characteristics of a nation's system of systems, including political, military, economic, socio-cultural, infrastructural, informational and environmental knowledge.

At the strategic level, understanding is required of the population factors behind the insurgency, its stage of progression, the reforms required to address its causes, and the willingness and ability of the affected government to make those reforms and the implications of foreign intervention.

At the operational level, understanding is required of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the insurgent strategy, the strengths and weaknesses of the affected government and the requirements of the population. Continuous feedback on the degree of success of ongoing COIN efforts is also critical.

At the tactical level, understanding is required of the identity of active insurgents, their networks, logistics, capabilities and intent. It is also very useful to understand the views, concerns and sympathies of non-combatant civilians in order to influence them, gain additional intelligence and further isolate the insurgents. Almost all forms of intelligence collection have a role in COIN, but historically, intelligence gathered from human sources (including civilians, agents and captured/reconciled insurgents) has made the greatest contribution to success.

One of the most critical yet pervasive shortcomings that interagency operations face is the failure to manage and share knowledge. This is especially true during COIN, when a common base of understanding is key to effective collaboration.

- **Influence:** Effective COIN requires the shaping of opinions among several different population groups through messages and actions:
  - **Affected Nation:** The fundamental influence aim in COIN is to build confidence in the government while diminishing the credibility and influence of the insurgents. All actions and messages should support this aim.
  - **U.S. Population:** Where the United States is conducting a direct intervention in support of an affected nation, the costs involved (financial and human) will often be high and prolonged. Understanding and support in the U.S. will be key if the nation is to remain engaged long enough to achieve decisive effect.

- **Neighboring Countries:** Many insurgencies depend on safe havens in countries adjacent to the affected nation. Sanctuary may be giving willingly or may be beyond control of the government there. Even in non-democratic nations and ungoverned spaces, there may be merit in efforts to influence populations in these areas.
- **Coalition Nations:** Political resolve will rarely be consistently robust across a coalition. U.S. policy makers should be cognizant of the difficulties some coalition members will face in maintaining popular support for their participation.
- **Diaspora Communities:** As previously discussed, diaspora communities can play a significant role in supporting or opposing insurgencies. Positive influence here can pay dividends.

Clean separation of messages to these various populations is rarely possible and a high degree of coordination is required to allow messages to be tailored to different audiences without contradiction.

The influence strategy must cascade down from a set of strategic narratives from which all messages and actions should be derived. The narratives of the affected government and supporting nations will be different but complimentary. Messages and actions must address ideological, social, cultural, political, and religious motivations that influence or engender a sense of common interest and identity among the affected population and international stakeholders. They should also counter insurgents' ideology in order to undermine their motivation and deny them popular support and sanctuary (both physical and virtual). In doing so, counterinsurgents should seek to expose the tensions in motivation (between different ideologies or between ideology and self-interest) that exist across insurgent networks.

To enhance the legitimacy of the affected government, messages aimed at their population should be closely coordinated with and ideally delivered by their own officials. Themes and messages should be simple and memorable, and must resonate with the population. This requires detailed understanding of the COIN environment which must be continually updated. Detailed **target audience analysis** is required for each separate population group and reliable **measures of effectiveness** must be sought to assess the success of messages and if necessary recalibrate them.

Messages are delivered partly through media operations, but more prolifically and often more credibly through the thousands of daily interactions between the population, the government and the security forces. Every action in COIN sends a message, which means that words and deeds *must* be synchronized. Messages cannot simply be spin, they must be grounded in truth and reflect a

genuine willingness on the part of the affected government to undertake real reforms that address its people's needs. Failure to honor promises is usually extremely counter-productive, so officials should be cautious in making promises, and should track any that are made, with the aim of meeting or exceeding the expectations of the population.

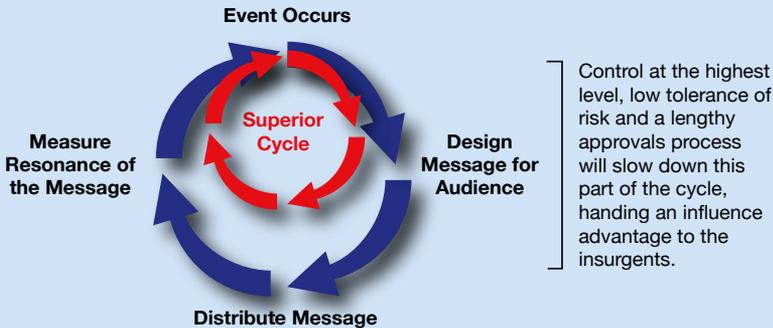
- **The Information Contest:** The flow of information (intelligence and influence) is as important to insurgents as it is to counterinsurgents. A COIN campaign should seek to limit the intelligence available to the insurgents through use of counterintelligence, deception and where possible their physical separation from the populace. Similarly, the ability of the insurgents to exert influence should be restricted by physical separation and by the pre-emption and timely countering of their messages.

Influence activities (actions and messages) can be proactive or reactive. Being proactive gives a significant influence advantage, since the first impression or report of an event that reaches a population will often receive the widest exposure and will subsequently be most resistant to alternative accounts. The insurgents that are most effective in this field design whole operations to support their influence themes. Successful COIN requires an approach to influence which is similarly proactive, entrepreneurial and prolific in 'selling' messages.

That said, the imperative to counter insurgent messages demands a reactive element to our influence activities. Speed is of the essence. The longer it takes for a rebuttal, denial or counter-message to be released, the less relevant and effective it will be. Cumulatively, whichever protagonist (insurgent or counter-insurgent) is fastest at processing the cycle of messaging will have a significant advantage in gaining influence. Some of the counterinsurgents' delay in response will be derived from the need to investigate events and establish facts (a constraint from which insurgents are often exempt), though a holding response is generally preferable to silence. Less justifiable is the delay inherent in lengthy approvals processes.

The time sensitivity of reactive influence requires counterinsurgents to employ delegation of authority, universal understanding of the narrative and a degree of risk-tolerance throughout the command chain. This has strong parallels to the military concept of the OODA loop (Observe – Orient – Decide – Act) and the theory of the mission oriented approach.

## Reactive Influence: The Importance of Delegation



## Security

In COIN scenarios, the term security is frequently used to refer to the degree to which the government can suppress insurgent activity in an area. However, the concept of 'Human Security' is a more complex metric which can only be measured through the collation of individual perceptions across a community. The paramount concern is the absence of physical violence, but other relevant factors include maintenance of laws, the protection of human rights, freedom to conduct economic activity, public safety (fire, ambulance, etc.) and public health (safe drinking water, sanitation, etc.). COIN emphasis on physical security is not necessarily an indicator that the wider concept of human security is not important, but more a case of imperative and sequencing. The end state of providing human security should be implicit in the wider efforts to improve the standard of governance down to the local level.

Physical security efforts must not focus too greatly on strengthening the military and police forces of the affected nation. Such capacity building should only be part of a broader process of Security Sector Reform (SSR) in which the whole system is developed, including the civil institutions that oversee the security forces and intelligence services, the legal framework and the justice institutions (prosecution services, judiciary and prisons) that implement it. It is particularly important that a sense of civil ownership and accountability should extend to the local level and that all elements of the security apparatus should be trusted by the population. Taking this broader view of security is very useful to countries engaged in counterinsurgency, since it links the reduction of violence to the improvement of many of the issues that are most important to a population. Indeed, effective SSR (especially reform of the justice sector) may address many of the grievances that initially fueled the insurgency.

SSR should be conducted in a balanced and carefully sequenced way, or it may have negative unintended consequences. For example dramatic improvement in police capability will only cause demoralization if the judicial system remains inherently corrupt and fails to prosecute those arrested. There may then be a tendency for the police to take justice into their own hands in the form of ‘extra-judicial killings’. Similarly, increasing military capacity and competence may risk a coup if the civil control mechanisms are not in place and the government is seen by the military to be corrupt or ineffective. Once again, a sound understanding of context is critical.

In many stable democracies, the military forces are primarily responsible for defense against external threats while the police are responsible for maintaining internal law and order. However, COIN situations often arise because the police are incapable of maintaining order (whether through lack of capacity, lack of capability, corruption or active bias) and so military intervention is often necessary. Maintenance or prompt restoration of police primacy is highly desirable as it reinforces the perception of insurgents as ‘criminals’ rather than ‘freedom fighters’ and highlights the government’s commitment to uphold its peacetime legal framework. It is also undesirable for the military to take on too great a role in delivery of local civil services as this may unbalance the distribution of power within government and increase the risk of a military coup.

The U.S. Government has significant capacity, through the Department of Defense, to develop the military forces of an affected nation. However, U.S. ability to assist in other areas of SSR is currently limited by a shortfall of deployable capacity to assist in law-making, judiciary and policing. Other countries within a coalition may be able to make a significant contribution in this area.

Unsecured areas provide particular challenges to many of the actors who are best able to remedy political and developmental deficiencies, but this does not mean that establishing security must be seen as a necessary precursor to economic and governance activity: rather, security, economic and political efforts should ideally be developed simultaneously. The common terminology “clear-hold-build” is very useful, but is probably interpreted as more of a set sequence than is always necessary or advantageous.

## **The Political Strategy**

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Political strategy is the key function in a COIN effort, because it provides a framework (of political reconciliation, reform, popular mobilization and governmental capacity-building) around which all other programs and activities are organized. In general terms, the progress of a COIN campaign is only as good as the political strategy it supports. Where the political strategy is vague, unrealistic, or lacking in support from domestic or international stakeholders, the campaign is unlikely to succeed, whatever the efficiency of individual programs. An effective political strategy focuses on strengthening the government’s capability and capacity to respond—

*and be seen to be responding*—to the needs of its people. Almost by definition, a government facing insurgency will require a degree of political “behavior modification” (substantive political reform, anti-corruption and governance improvement) in order to successfully address the grievances that gave rise to insurgency in the first place. Supporting nations may be able to assist in these reforms.

Where the security environment prevents U.S. civilian agencies from operating freely, the U.S. military may be required to provide extensive support to political, economic and governance efforts in their stead. This will be the case during the “establishment of control” phase in every COIN campaign and, in many cases, throughout the campaign. Given the difference in risk acceptance and the large and enduring resource imbalance between civilian and military agencies this is simply a fact of life: *officials and policy makers must plan for it accordingly.*

## **The Economic and Development Function**

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The economic and development function in COIN includes immediate humanitarian relief and the provision of essential services such as safe water, sanitation, basic health care, livelihood assistance, and primary education, as well as longer-term programs for development of infrastructure to support agricultural, industrial, educational, medical and commercial activities. It also includes efforts to build the absorptive capacity of local economies and generate government and societal revenues from economic activity (much of which may previously have been illicit or informal). Assistance in effective resource and infrastructure management, including construction of key infrastructure, may be critically important to COIN efforts. It must be tailored to the affected government’s willingness to undertake key reforms, capacity to absorb support, and ability to manage its outcomes.

The first principle for most development agencies is to ensure that their activities ‘do no harm’ and cultivate sustainable benefits in the regions concerned. They seek to ensure this through an in depth assessment of the background situation followed by the application of program management tools to give continuous evaluation and adjustment.

A COIN scenario presents particular challenges for the conduct of economic and development activity. For example:

- **Security:** There is often a geographical correlation between areas of highest threat from insurgents and areas most in need of development. Development agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs) may be specifically targeted by insurgents, restricting their ability to operate independently and generating more reliance on military forces to undertake this role.

- **Time-scale:** Counterinsurgents often seek to generate a rapid and obvious improvement in quality of life and economic opportunity in areas where security operations are suppressing insurgent activity. The aim is for the population to see clear benefit in government control. However, quick impact projects will usually lack the depth of assessment that precedes more deliberate programs and may therefore have a higher risk of unintended consequences. They also give less sense of long term economic optimism and commitment from both the affected government and its international supporters.
- **Parity:** U.S. assistance can sometimes influence a particular local leader or population element. Giving assistance to any one part of a population however, may be seen as preferential and discriminatory by other groups and may actually exacerbate underlying sectarian, regional or tribal tensions. This is especially so when development has actually been targeted for political effect. Using development to buy allegiance may be immediately effective in reducing violence, but in the long term it may foster corruption and reduce the credibility of the affected government and its international supporters. Development resources should be allocated in a balanced way and must not be seen to be given ‘as a reward for bad behavior’.
- **Corruption:** The requirement in COIN to build the credibility and effectiveness of the affected government can imply that development resources should be channeled through its ministries. Governments facing insurgency will often have endemic corruption and may therefore be deemed unfit to handle U.S. financial assistance, yet bypassing those ministries might only further enfeeble them. Corruption prevention measures should be implemented within a wider program of human capacity development, but will often take a lengthy time period to become effective. Sensitivity may be necessary in defining “corruption” in the context of other cultures or established norms. Similarly, the decision over when or whether to attempt change should be taken carefully, weighing the impact in terms of potential for success and desired outcome.
- **Oversight:** NGOs will often undertake a significant proportion of development activity in COIN scenarios, yet they will not always heed any form of direction from the affected nation or intervening U.S. officials. This reduces the ability of the counterinsurgents to anticipate and prevent the unintended consequences of development activity.

## Control

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The four functions (information, political, security and economic) contribute to the overall objective of enabling the affected government to control its environment. This implies the ability to contain insurgent activity (the tempo of operations, level and intensity of violence, and degree of instability that it engenders) such that the population will, in the long run, support the government against the insurgents — noting that this “balance” can differ from one society to the next. The progress of control in a successful COIN campaign often develops in three overlapping phases: establishment, consolidation and transfer (or transition):

- **Establishment of control:** During the initial phases, a government conducting COIN seeks to establish control over the environment. This requires controlling terrain, key infrastructure, economic production assets, population movement, resources and information flow. In the initial stages there will almost always be a need to catch up with insurgents who have gained the initiative, made inroads into popular support and undermined the government. Because the population is often fearful of the insurgents, the use of force (“kinetic” or lethal security operations to kill or capture insurgents) is almost always a significant feature of this phase of a campaign. Typically, only when the population sees insurgents losing engagements against the government, and sees the death or capture of insurgent leaders who previously intimidated the population, will its support begin to swing behind the government. However, establishing control requires not only the military defeat of insurgents, but also their political marginalization and the provision of economic and governance benefits to the population in order to reduce the insurgents’ appeal.
- **Consolidation:** Once control has been established in one area, the government seeks to extend and consolidate it (in geographic, demographic and functional terms). This phase is typically the longest in duration, lasting years or even decades. In COIN, establishing control over population groups and population centers is more important than the control of territory. Consolidation involves replacing insurgent networks with pro-government ones, rooting out insurgent underground cells and infrastructure, eliminating illicit governance structures and cleaning up illegal economic activity that supports insurgents.

The key indicator of success is the degree of government control in each district and not the level of insurgent violence, since the latter tends to be low in areas that are fully controlled by either side but high in contested areas. This phase involves substantially less kinetic force than the initial phase, with the military “holding the ring” while police, intelligence, governance, information and economic programs assume the lead, and political leaders work to resolve key grievances and mobilize popular support for ending the insurgency. During this phase there are often outbreaks of insurgent violence, large-scale provocations or insurgent atrocities that seek to derail the process of consolidation.

Consequently the entire theater (or parts of it that have already been cleared) may slip back under insurgent control.

The process of consolidation must be carefully managed to ensure that it does not progress too slowly (leading to popular frustration and regression to insurgent control in key areas) nor too quickly (leading to premature fielding of inadequate local security forces, or premature transition before control is fully consolidated). In a U.S. intervention, the tendency of officials to seek an early handover to elected local leaders needs to be balanced against the requirement to consolidate control, so that those leaders can assume responsibility for a stable functioning system.

- **Transition:** ‘Transition’ is used to describe not just the transfer of authority from an intervening nation to the host nation but also the handover from indigenous military forces to local civilian authority (an essential step in normalizing the environment and ending insurgency). Although described last in this theoretical sequence, transition occurs throughout a campaign, as indigenous civil structures become sufficiently legitimate, effective and credible to take the reins. In an intervention, the external force’s “exit strategy” timeline will depend almost entirely on the rate at which indigenous capacity can be built and rendered effective and legitimate. This requires considerable time and resources and must be carefully planned for from the outset. The process, pace and sequence of the process requires considerable judgment and is one of the most difficult decisions that officials directing a counterinsurgency campaign must undertake. Examples abound of COIN campaigns where ill-judged or hasty transition created opportunities for insurgent comebacks. Conversely, too slow a transition risks the loss of domestic political support for the campaign, as tangible signs of progress may be hard to perceive. It also risks creating a dependency culture in which any appetite for autonomy dwindles.

## **Relationship Between Functions**

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Maintaining an agile and flexible balance among the key counterinsurgency functions is difficult but extremely important. For example, economic assistance programs with inadequate security presence could simply create an array of soft targets for the insurgents. Security assistance in the absence of capable political leadership and oversight could create more—and more capable—armed groups outside the control of the government. Moreover, while an action may fall within one function, it often has immediate effects in the other functions. Efforts must be integrated because effects are impossible to segregate and are often complementary. Maintaining a balance between functions requires an integrated conflict management system (which may be based on a joint committee system, an integrated command model, a consultative alliance process or a combination of measures) that enacts the overall COIN strategy and coordinates the activities of key agencies (civil, military, affected nation and external/coalition).

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## CHAPTER THREE: ACTORS



*James Kunder (on right), Deputy Administrator of USAID, and Members of a Provincial Reconstruction Team discuss development issues with an Iraqi Sheikh*

(PHOTO: STAFF SGT. CHRISTIAN FOSTER, DEFENSE DEPARTMENT)

## The Affected Government

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The government threatened by a nascent or active insurgency is the most important actor in COIN. However great its know-how and enthusiasm, an outside actor can never fully compensate for lack of will, incapacity or counter-productive behavior on the part of the supported government: any COIN campaign is only as good as the political strategy which the affected nation adopts. The U.S. Government perception of the role of each actor in a COIN struggle (including its own role) may not coincide with the perception of other actors or the population. Additionally, the insurgents may portray the U.S. role as one of foreign aggressor, which may well resonate with the affected population. That population may or may not support and appreciate the security provided by an external force, but they will certainly see it as foreign and temporary; their long-term allegiance will tend to swing toward whichever local actor (government or insurgent) best aligns with their needs and political identity, or best provides security. Effective COIN therefore requires that the major effort is (and is seen by the local population to be) led by the indigenous government. Under ideal conditions, foreign forces do not operate independently of the affected government, nor are political, economic or other development assistance activities undertaken except at the request of the affected government.

But real world conditions are never ideal. Effective, legitimate governments that meet the needs of their people and are capable of managing internal security threats are, almost by definition, unlikely to require external COIN assistance. Governments that do require such assistance almost always need encouragement and assistance to address governance shortfalls, corruption, and the real or perceived issues which insurgents use to mobilize the population. Similarly, in cases where an insurgency develops after forcible regime change, the affected government will be undergoing significant reform or even institution building from scratch. An intervening nation or coalition will almost always need to co-opt, persuade or occasionally pressure the local government to give up counter-productive behaviors, take genuine steps to reform its actions, win the support of its people and demonstrate effectiveness and legitimacy. Four traits that can be used to gauge the legitimacy of a state are:

- The degree to which it honors and upholds human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- The degree to which it responds to the opinions of its citizens;
- Whether it exercises effective sovereignty;
- The degree to which it provides reasonable limits on the power of government over individual rights.

The affected government may have the desire to do only the minimum necessary to defeat an insurgency before returning to business as usual. This would bring about tension between the affected government's desire and an intervening government's

aspiration for wholesale reform and institution building to prevent a recurrence of unrest. Because leaders in an affected nation almost always emerge through the same institutional processes that gave rise to the insurgency, they may be unable or unwilling to undertake reforms; conversely, intervening forces may lack the local knowledge and situational awareness to judge what reforms are possible and understand how to undertake them effectively. Cooperation between affected nation and intervening force, however difficult, is absolutely essential for effective COIN.

Relations between the U.S. Government and the affected nation will be dynamic, especially when elections or other changes affect the composition of its government. Any sovereign government may exercise its autonomy in ways that are in opposition to U.S. interests. A quandary may arise between the U.S.'s desire to reach the end-state (a fully functional, independent and legitimate nation state) and its protection of the very U.S. interests which prompted engagement in the first place.

It is important to recognize the distinction between national level government and local or provincial government. Provincial governments are usually responsible for managing resources on behalf of the national government, but some countries that have fairly competent central governments are still unable to extend their authority and legitimacy into outlying provinces, especially where those provinces cross a social, ethnic, religious or economic fault line. In many regions of the world, the local delivery of administrative services is traditionally far more important than central government in a distant capital. Local government entities which are perceived as illegitimate, corrupt, oppressive, or non-inclusive will provide fertile ground for an insurgency to develop and operate, but are the lowest level through which the national government can deliver security and other public services. The perceived capacity of local government to provide for the population is critical to national government legitimacy.

## **The U.S. Country Team**

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All United States Government COIN strategies, plans, programs, and activities are undertaken in support of the affected government and managed through the U.S. Mission's Country Team, led by the Chief of Mission (COM) in coordination with the Department of State. As the U.S. Ambassador, the Chief of Mission is the President's personal representative to the host nation and is responsible for recommending and implementing U.S. policy regarding that country, as well as overseeing all executive branch employees there and the activities of such employees with limited exceptions. Appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, the Ambassador has extraordinary decision-making authority as the senior U.S. official present during periods of instability and crises. Where a confirmed ambassador is not present, the Charge d'Affaires represents the Secretary of State as the senior diplomat accredited to the foreign government.

**The Country Team is the central element of interagency coordination and execution in the foreign country.** When an insurgency can be identified in its early stages, the Chief of Mission and his or her senior staff may encourage the affected government to take preventive action through the use of informational, security, political and economic measures. The Chief of Mission will also bring the matter to the early attention of decision makers in Washington D.C., his or her local knowledge and situational awareness often providing the most incisive and realistic source of advice. In coordination with policy makers in Washington, the Chief of Mission may also request foreign assistance for the affected nation, help to mobilize international support, and engage non-governmental organizations. In the future, the Chief of Mission may be able to call upon elements of the Civilian Response Corps, which is currently being developed within the Department of State and which aims to provide a pool of civilian specialists and experts in reconstruction and stabilization able to respond rapidly to countries in crisis. These actions may help to address the causes of unrest before the crisis escalates and limits political alternatives to the use of force.

The applicable U.S. geographic Combatant Commander, a four star general or admiral, will be in contact with the Chief of Mission and will be able to assist in pre-empting nascent insurgencies by providing military advice and supporting security enhancement programs. If the United States decides to deploy U.S. combat forces to assist an affected government, the Combatant Commander will be tasked to plan and execute the military aspects of that support.

U.S. efforts must be designed and executed in such manner to increase both the legitimacy and effectiveness of the threatened government in the eyes of its population. COIN strategy requires a tailored approach that captures and integrates the range of U.S. Government agency and department capabilities. The U.S. Government may also elect to provide operational assistance to indigenous forces; such assistance will be the product of deliberate foreign policy decisions taken in Washington D.C., and will be subject to the oversight of the Chief of Mission. Representative capabilities of U.S. Government agencies relevant to COIN are listed in Appendix A.

## **The International Community**

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Considerable attention should be paid to the role of the international community in the development of a COIN strategy. The formation of a sanctioned multinational mission offers four principal areas of advantage to a COIN campaign:

- **Legitimacy:** When actions taken in support of a COIN campaign are consistent with applicable international law and are supported by international entities (which simultaneously condemn the insurgents) it will bolster support for intervention in the affected nation, the U.S. and the wider international community.

- **Capacity:** A multinational coalition will be able to call on a larger number of troops and more financial resources than the U.S. can muster on its own. This may have a positive effect on U.S. popular support for the campaign when U.S. taxpayers see other countries participating in and funding part of the counterinsurgency effort. The troops of other nations may be limited in capability or by political restrictions, but by undertaking suitable tasking they will still free up U.S. troops for missions in which they have a comparative advantage.
- **Specialist Capabilities:** Many U.S. allies and coalition partners have a comparative advantage in deployable capabilities relevant to COIN, such as developing national police forces, promoting economic growth or developing the administrative capacity of local officials in high threat or remote environments.
- **Regional Effects:** Regional partners can help prevent the establishment of external sanctuaries, prevent or slow the spread of the conflict to other areas, and provide local expertise, basing, and possibly even security assistance.

As well as these advantages, coalition operations bring many additional challenges such as differences in goals, training, capabilities, equipment, logistics, culture, doctrine, intelligence and language. They require early and close coordination of effort to best integrate their capabilities and expertise in the achievement of common political, economic, security and informational objectives. However, the importance of international solidarity and legitimacy means that coalition operations will remain the preferred path for U.S. COIN engagements in the foreseeable future.

## **Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGO)**

Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs), formed when two or more national governments sign a multilateral treaty to form such a body and finance its operations, possess legal personality in international law and their staffs enjoy diplomatic status. Most IGOs are regionally focused, and as such when IGO member states could be adversely affected by an insurgency in their region, the organization may act collectively to deny legitimacy, sanctuary, and support to insurgents. IGOs can also play an important role in humanitarian assistance and development.

## **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)**

NGOs are private, self-governing, non-profit organizations. Their activities (a direct function of the interests of their donors) are very diverse, but include interests such as education, health care, environmental protection, human rights, conflict resolution and similar issues. Some NGOs are implementing partners for U.S. foreign assistance, but these are a special case and will be discussed separately. Since their aims are often complimentary to the COIN effort in meeting the needs of a local

population, they should, as far as possible, be consulted to minimize duplication or gaps in assistance. However, in order to secure freedom of movement, including access to semi-permissive environments, NGOs generally strive to be independent, politically neutral, needs-driven organizations. Consequently, they often try to minimize contact with uniformed military personnel or other governmental actors, seeking ‘humanitarian space’ in which to operate. In an attempt to address this difficult dynamic, the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) has created a set of guidelines (referenced in Appendix C) for relations between U.S. armed forces and non-governmental humanitarian organizations. This requirement for separation is not absolute: despite their best efforts, NGOs will not be seen as neutral by some insurgents and where security is problematic, NGOs may rely on government resources – military and otherwise—for transportation and protection. COIN planning should take NGO activities into account, although it is unwise to rely on NGOs to provide key elements of any plan due to their independent status.

Some NGOs may actually promote aims which conflict with or are counter to the COIN strategy and COIN planners should take care to establish their motivations and activities before engagement. NGOs that oppose the affected government or actively forge links with insurgents will create security problems and risks, but they may also provide opportunities to open channels for negotiation or mediation with insurgents. Criticism by NGOs can be useful in drawing attention to those issues where reform actions are necessary. Finally, as an independent and often credible source of ‘ground truth’ about the areas in which they work, they will be an important source of information to many interested parties.

## **Diaspora Groups**

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Exile or diaspora groups from the affected nation, whether relocated in the U.S. or elsewhere, will sometimes attempt to influence insurgency situations. They may sympathize with the insurgents and therefore oppose any intervention on behalf of the affected nation, or they may offer assistance to the intervention; looking to play a role in the planning or implementation of a COIN strategy. If they succeed in having any influence over the situation then it is important for COIN practitioners to have an accurate picture of their motives, capabilities and relationship with the affected government, since these are often misunderstood or misrepresented.

## **Media**

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Media is a key actor in a successful information strategy in any COIN campaign. The U.S. Government is accustomed to interaction with western media groups, but there is often a weakness in the relationship with regional media in overseas insurgency situations. This can result in missed opportunities to influence key stakeholders.

### **MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS**

Multinational Corporations usually become involved in counterinsurgency when their corporate interests (financial interests, foreign based personnel, or infrastructure, etc.) are threatened, or when a financial advantage is perceived. COIN planners will not always have the ability to influence the activities of multi-national corporations in an affected country, but may find that their interests complement the COIN effort. In particular, firms in extractive sectors (oil, mining, etc.) have large initial investment and long production cycles, which mean that withdrawal from a country could result in significant financial cost. For such companies, investment in local stabilization activities (from micro-loans to security sector reform activities) makes economic sense.

### **CONTRACTORS**

Contractors are frequently used by the affected nation and supporting countries to provide a wide range of functions of which security is only one. Policy makers should be aware that the dynamics of contracting arrangements often lead to “contractor mission creep” over time, resulting in expanded costs and responsibilities for contractor personnel. Policy makers should also be cognizant of the fact that U.S. hired contractors, especially security contractors, are often viewed by the local population as U.S. Government representatives and any negative behavior or interaction with the local population can have an adverse impact on COIN efforts. They should therefore ensure that armed contractors (including security personnel, facility guards, trainers and advisers) are subject to robust, well-designed rules for the use of force, and that their relationship with the affected government is ethical and transparent. Despite these concerns, contractors (across all functions) are now so essential to U.S. Government overseas operations that large scale COIN intervention is probably inconceivable without them.

### **GRANTEES**

The U.S. Government generally delivers development assistance through grants to non-governmental organizations and private individuals or through contracts. U.S. Government grant managers oversee the activities of grantees to ensure that funds are used for the intended purpose. Generally, they can only change the nature of the grant once it has been authorized if the grant is written to provide for termination or modification in the event of changed circumstances. Grantees are often subject to the same ‘humanitarian space’ considerations as NGOs and frequently prefer to be separated from military activity. COIN planners must therefore maintain awareness of U.S. Government-funded grantee activities in order to protect U.S. investment, avoid duplication of effort, and prevent military compromise of their status. Grantees may require armed security personnel who would be subject to the same concerns as armed security contractors.