

Commandant's Note

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COUNTERINSURGENCY — SEIZING THE INITIATIVE

As we continue to aggressively prosecute the global war on terrorism (GWOT) we must remember that we execute tasks to standard, not to time, and that counterinsurgency (COIN) is no exception. Conducting COIN operations takes a great deal of tactical patience, and every operation sets the conditions for future success or missed opportunities. In this Commandant's Note I want to share some thoughts on COIN operations in the contemporary operational environment (COE). Some of the key points are the importance of conducting and sharing the results of intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB), and defining lines of operation in purpose driven operations, and the importance of understanding the needs of the civilian population.

In the COIN fight, intelligence truly drives maneuver. Delayed analysis and exploitation can prevent units from getting inside the insurgents' decision cycle, so rapid analysis and exploitation of time sensitive information is critical. Nearly eighty percent of the intelligence derived in COIN is bottom fed and highly perishable; targets and enemy materiel can quickly disappear. Once we complete exploitation of the target, we must quickly disseminate information back to the people who need it. Combining this information and documenting lethal and non-lethal priority intelligence requirements are critical to success, yet we often do not push it back down to the Soldiers on the ground in a timely manner. Innovative methods to capture, record, and disseminate information up and down the chain of command and across boundaries are key competencies in COIN.

Our success in combat is a function of how quickly we mass units and fires. It starts with commanders articulating their strategy to achieve desired outcomes and end states. FM 3-0 clearly delineates between lines of operation and lines of effort and clearly explains how the application of these processes allows commanders to describe how they envision their operations toward achieving the end state. Using such models allows staffs to synchronize warfighting functions and lethal and non-lethal operations to achieve operational objectives. The problem with such conceptual planning and thinking is that we cannot always easily convert the intent into definable and understood mission orders. Brigade combat team, battalion, and company-level commanders share the ownership in translating operational and strategic goals into tactical level operations. They affirm this process by continuous, organized backbriefs and rehearsals for all operations. Our Soldiers need to know *why* they are conducting non-lethal operations and *how* their efforts are tied to the bigger picture. Soldiers need to recognize that their daily activities are well-thought out, purpose-driven operations that are part of a greater plan. As leaders we just need to take more time to properly articulate the importance and necessity of each and every patrol.

Another integral part of GWOT operations is our interface with local civilian populations. Today we understand the pivotal role of the local civilian population better than ever before. As our cultural competencies have strengthened, our intuitive grasp of the COE has broadened concomitantly. The phases of operations (i.e. Clear, Hold, Build) a unit faces during the urban fight will determine how much effort must be placed on lethal

versus non-lethal options. When the security situation is such that the insurgent controls the key terrain — in many cases the people — then coalition forces and local indigenous forces will need to focus on lethal operations to gain and maintain security for the population. The transition between phases is not easy to identify — particularly in fluid situations in which one or more phases may be evolving simultaneously — but by identifying and applying valid, concrete indicators leaders can ensure they recognize the transition and can shape events.

Handling change in the COIN environment is tied to giving commanders feedback on how the fight is unfolding and maintaining the support of the local populace. To influence the population, units must have an open dialogue with key leaders and interact daily with the locals. Once we have transitioned to the Hold or Build phase, our physical demeanor should evolve to a more approachable mode. Remember, at this point we are dealing with people who have their own concerns and can tell the difference between units and leaders who are sincere versus those who are just going through the motions. When dealing with the local population we must prove ourselves every day. Meeting expectations and delivering on joint initiatives over time will cement relationships. We must broker all incentives through the local people, supported by the coalition and local government. To cement these bonds, the local government and security forces must be seen as equal partners and equal lenders in all dialogues. Remember, the Marshall Plan that rebuilt those portions of Europe over which we had influence after World War II succeeded because it demonstrated our credibility and our commitment, and because it worked within the framework of a newly reconstituted civilian authority. Continued partnership with the people and the local government prevents the insurgent from reseeding in the local populace; this makes it easier to find, fix, and finish him.

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