

# Commandant's Note

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## POPULAR SUPPORT KEY IN COUNTERINSURGENCY



The era of persistent conflict has come to characterize the global war on terrorism and reflect the determination of insurgents to dominate nations and their populations. It also demonstrates our own commitment to protecting the people of threatened nations as we assist democratically elected governments in defeating insurgencies. Unable to stand against the massed firepower that high intensity conflict against coalition forces would imply, the insurgent must create asymmetry to survive. The people are the key to winning the counterinsurgency fight; if we gain and retain their support, we defeat the insurgent. In this Commandant's Note, I want to address counterinsurgency in the context of our efforts to elicit the support of the civilian populace as we strive not simply to kill insurgents — for they can be replaced — but also to deny guerillas the psychological and logistical support and the intelligence they need to survive, operate, and recruit.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan U.S. forces operate among populations who could be either pro-government, neutral or passive, or who support the insurgents outright. Today, information operations continue to play a critical role in the global war on terrorism as we strive to inform indigenous populations in order to consolidate their support, to present better options to uncommitted factions, or to turn insurgents from the path they have chosen. We must always be first with the truth. The enemy we face today has become adept at employing media to disseminate misinformation, and we must remain alert and proactive in dealing with this threat. Our enemy has the advantage of familiarity with the local languages and dialects to tell his version of events, but as conditions stabilize and the legitimate governments consolidate their own control it is becoming possible to quickly and accurately communicate the correct version of events to a much wider audience. The seven COIN Lines of Effort (LOE) outlined in FM 3-24.2 firmly address information engagement as a key element of the counterinsurgency effort.

The inclusion and support of the civil government in full-spectrum operations remains as crucial today as when T.E. Lawrence advised and led Arab irregular troops against the Ottoman Turks during World War I. Lawrence established respect and credibility with his counterparts, just as we do today. As we interact with local civilian and military centers of influence, we must ensure continuity of effort between what we start and what our successors will see to completion, and we must introduce and improve on the relationships we have established. The connections and trust which Lawrence formed with Arab leaders were to affect British foreign policy in the post-war years. The credibility we build begins with

the awareness of local culture, and that starts with language comprehension. Long before he entered military service, Lawrence had traveled throughout the Middle East and learned Arabic; later, when he found himself interacting with the same young tribal leaders who would become leaders of the Arab world, he found he had ready access to them because he had taken time to learn their language.

Today's COIN operations focus on a clear-hold-build concept for the conduct of offensive, defensive, and stability operations that take place in the course of a counterinsurgency, including the establishment of civil security and civil control, the restoration of essential services, and support to economic and infrastructure development. As democratically elected governments assume steadily increasing roles in securing their future, our efforts to earn the credibility and support of the people will remain a priority as we protect the population, meet their needs, and make them aware of their opportunity for a better future. We cannot win their loyalty, confidence, and trust with promises we or our successors cannot fulfill. The locals know our resources are not unlimited. However, easily delivered assets such as school and medical supplies, well drilling, and community projects delivered by the community leaders who have requested them will show that the U.S. delivers on what it promises. This will undermine much support for insurgents who can offer only suffering. The war on terrorism is being played out in regions that have known war for decades, and we must train our small unit leaders to make those sensitive, high-stakes decisions that will earn and keep the support of the very people we are trying to protect. As we exercise patience and restraint in the employment of our military arms we demonstrate that we are prepared to exercise a comprehensive strategy as introduced with the seven Lines of Effort to provide more options in dealing with insurgents. We offer the technology and resources to facilitate recovery and transfer greater responsibility to the civil authority. This will further separate the insurgent from the people and resources he needs to sustain himself.

The U.S. Infantry has long been the point of the spear in the global war on terrorism, and has through her sacrifice, determination, and commitment continued to restore stability and introduce democratic principles across the globe. We can point with pride to the example our Soldiers continue to set in this era of persistent conflict. Follow me!