



FM 3-24.2: THE MOST IMPORTANT ITEM IN A COIN LEADER'S KIT BAG

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Why is there an article telling you about a counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics field manual? After all, you may have already studied it in one of your training courses. Or perhaps you saw real COIN operations in a past combat deployment, and you don't need some manual telling you what you already know.

Field Manual (FM) 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, is not simply a training document; it is not only a recipe for ambush tactics; and it is not some highbrow tome about insurgency theories. For any Army leader, it offers practical guidelines to adjust COIN tactics from nation to nation, rotation to rotation, province to province, and village to village. Written by talented, experienced tacticians from platoon to brigade level, and then vetted by Army tactical units as well as by other services and institutions, it understands that misapplied COIN tactics will scuttle much

effort and nullify lessons learned in years of unconventional fighting. If you are leading troops in the Afghanistan surge — or if you are still leading them in Iraq — use this new manual to make your outfit part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Overview of FM 3-24.2's Practical Worth

When FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, was published in 2006, it received praise for reshaping the Army's COIN doctrine — so what makes FM 3-24.2 so compelling? *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* “merges traditional approaches to COIN with the realities of the current operational environment,” as it incorporates the latest tactics and procedures gleaned from combat operations through 2008. It understands the integrated ‘process’ aspect of COIN as well as the fact that integration applies not only to functions but also to command levels.

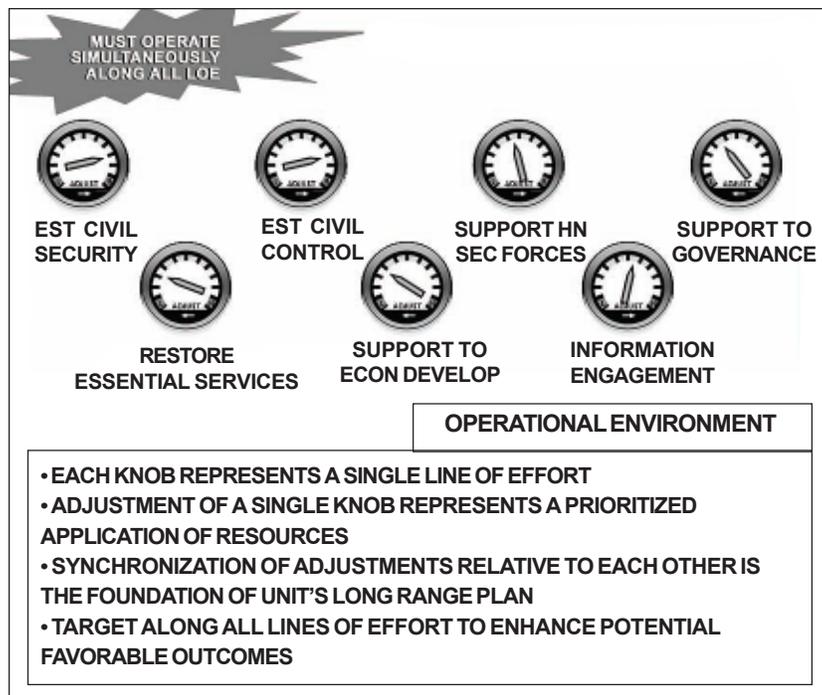
Tactics is no mere primer on small-unit counter-guerilla combat. It connects the operations of tactical units from platoon to brigade, and explains how to synthesize and apply procedures that have yielded successful COIN results. That brings up another way in which *Tactics* is well worth attention.

In his August 2009 Commander's Initial Assessment of the challenges facing the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Afghanistan, GEN Stanley McChrystal acknowledged Afghanistan's

U.S. Soldiers with the 8th Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment and Afghan National Police officers meet with a village elder in Nimakay, Afghanistan on 13 January.

Photo by TSgt Francisco V. Govea, USAF





Chapter 3, FM 3-24.2

Figure 1 — Rheostat Approach to the Lines of Effort

“uniquely complex” counterinsurgency environment, but concludes that so far “ISAF is not adequately executing the basics of counterinsurgency warfare.” He charges ISAF to change its operating practices to protect and work with the Afghans directly, even if it entails greater discomfort and risk. *All* parts of the Afghan counterinsurgency effort require sharper focus upon *how* things are done. Such comments are remarkable given that we’ve done COIN for several years and even published a new field manual for it in 2006. FM 3-24.2 more directly provides ISAF commanders with guidelines that support GEN McChrystal’s vision.

Where *Tactics* Expands Upon Previous COIN Guidance

FM 3-24.2 breaks from previous COIN tactics guides by focusing upon a broad range of activities instead of only describing military-specific tasks like counter-guerilla sweeps. As such it accounts for changes in the world and changes in U.S. Army doctrine as it focuses upon COIN’s more comprehensive nature. *Tactics* has no single planning scheme for the successful COIN campaign; instead it gives you matrices to sort out the myriad considerations, currents, and other factors involved in planning your COIN operations. Further, its planning considerations understand the importance of time phasing in this process. And when *Tactics* discusses how to design measures of effectiveness/performance for your COIN effort, its examples include questions like “How many people registered to vote at the school this week” instead of only combat-related queries like “How many rounds were expended on patrol?”

Tactics adapts many of the precepts of FM 3-24 and other doctrine manuals, and introduces a few new ones. Its first chapter explains how various acronym reference guides seen elsewhere — PMESII-PT (political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, info, physical environment, time); METT-TC (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, time, civil ops); ASCOPE (areas, structures, capabilities, organizations,

people, events) — apply to counterinsurgency operations. For example, in applying ASCOPE to COIN civil operations, *Tactics* marries a systematic approach with concrete civil concerns to make its civil ops discussion much more than a general admonition to know the locals. To enable the commander to “visualize, describe and direct operations when positional references to an adversary have little reference, such as [during] an insurgency,” the third chapter introduces seven lines of effort:

- (1) Establish civil security;
- (2) Support host-nation security forces;
- (3) Support governance;
- (4) Establish civil control;
- (5) Restore essential services;
- (6) Support economic and infrastructure development; and
- (7) Conduct information engagement.

One might say these acronyms only create an alphabet soup of competing doctrinal laundry lists. But *Tactics* provides graphs and models to explain how commanders apply these guides interactively to ascertain their units’ progress and then execute a comprehensive plan for their areas. The lessons apply up and down the chain; and many of *Tactics*’ illustrative examples describe higher command and staff situations as much as they do small-unit actions in the field.

The lines of effort appear as a recurring theme in later chapters on other counterinsurgency activities. At one point *Tactics* uses a rheostat chart to emphasize how the various lines rise and fall in priority as the commander’s COIN situation develops (see Figure 1). When applying U.S. Army decision-making procedures to a counterinsurgency and when expanding upon FM 3-24’s COIN targeting and planning methods, *Tactics* emphasizes the *process* aspect of counterinsurgency by offering time-assessment tools.

One noteworthy *Tactics* expansion on FM 3-24 involves cultural awareness. *Tactics*’ first chapter provides questions for developing a clear picture of the operating area’s people. Questions such as “What is the daily wage of an average worker/laborer? What jobs are considered honorable?” can be telling when one considers a recent *Washington Post* article on the Afghan Army. In the 9 December 2009 article “General Offers Assurances on Afghan War: McChrystal, Envoy Testify on Hill about New Obama Strategy,” authors Greg Jaffe and Glenn Kessler wrote “that as few as 52,000 soldiers regularly show up for work, because of poor pay and other reasons. In recent weeks, the military has boosted the troops’ pay so that they make as much as or more than Taliban fighters do.”

When addressing insurgency itself, *Tactics*’ second chapter converts FM 3-24’s comments about the variable nature of insurgency into categories that help the commander “track, categorize, and develop the insurgency’s pattern.” These in turn facilitate use of the lines of effort in applying the appropriate counterinsurgency methods. Of note is *Tactics*’ differentiation between *insurgency components*, with emphasis on familiar things like leadership, ideology and types of insurgencies — and *insurgency manifestations*, which focus upon tactical realities like insurgent vulnerabilities/strengths and the level of insurgent violence.

Security TTPs (We Are Still Fighting a War)

Tactics does not abandon security and combat concerns. It understands that power plants, telecommunications, roads, schools, bazaars, and government officials will not interact synergistically if guerrillas disrupt their proper function. As such, *Tactics* well addresses familiar counter-guerrilla combat operations like ambush/counter-ambush and base defense. It then spends time on recent counter-guerrilla tactical developments like sniper-defeat, counter-improvised explosive device, and counter drive-by shooting operations. It devotes an annex to intelligence preparation of the battlefield which distills FM 3-24's counterinsurgency intelligence discussion to those items most pertinent to the tactical leader. Drawing from Special Forces' experience in difficult counterinsurgency situations, *Tactics* incorporates some of their practices. For example, the CARVER (criticality, accessibility, recoverability, vulnerability effects, reconcilability, and psychological impact) model helps the commander prioritize combat options when employing limited forces in a big area with multiple threats and tasks.

ISAF, Afghanistan, And *Tactics*

To support its aim of a stable Afghanistan free of terrorist influence, the Obama Administration's surge plan gives GEN McChrystal 30,000 more troops, but resources are not his major concern. His initial assessment observed that "focusing on force or resources requirements misses the point entirely. The key take away from this assessment is the urgent need for a significant change to our strategy and the way we think and operate." For counterinsurgency, the assessment wants primary focus upon protecting, understanding, and working with the Afghans — to "spend as much time as possible with the people and as little time as possible in armored vehicles and behind the walls of forward operating bases" so that Afghanistan can ultimately handle itself. GEN McChrystal wants efficient, better coordinated operations that well use the resources granted.

To support this strategy, GEN McChrystal introduces four underlying pillars:

- (1) Gain the initiative against the insurgents;
- (2) Improve and work with Afghan security forces;
- (3) Assist improvement of governance; and
- (4) Prioritize resources to critical areas.

He will apply these to a complex Afghan society with "multiple actors and a vast set of interconnecting relationships among those actors," and thus emphasizes that "no element can be viewed in isolation." Nor can one concentrate upon one timeframe; instead ISAF commanders must be able to coordinate short- and long-term tasks in an on-going process.

With its comprehensive, interactive guidelines, *Tactics* tackles interconnectivity in COIN. Its time-task assessment tools use multiple inputs to create chronological snapshots which give commanders at all levels the situational awareness to adjust time-related goals properly. GEN McChrystal's four strategic pillars fall clearly within the lines of effort that run through *Tactics*' pages. Another recurring topic in *Tactics* involves "Clear-Hold-Build" operations, which likewise well support the ISAF's population-oriented approach. Beyond "Clear-Hold-Build," *Tactics* addresses population issues

in most other activities it describes, from tactical planning to building bases. In its chapters on COIN planning and on host-nation forces, *Tactics* describes the situational roles of other groups; and throughout its pages are steps to support the coordination process. These will help higher-level commanders maximize efforts by not only their own commands, but also by associated groups.

Regarding ISAF's overall aim of a self-secured Afghanistan, *Tactics* has chapters on stability operations and on support to host-nation security forces. Again revealing Special Forces' influence, *Tactics* includes the MORTEAM (measure, organize, rebuild, train, equip, advise, mentor) guideline in its "support to host-nation" chapter. Its annex includes straight talk about counterinsurgency and/or advisory efforts from two influential experts, David Kilcullen and Lawrence of Arabia.

"That's All Very Nice, But I've Seen This Stuff Before"

For lieutenants and captains who have finished their basic and career courses, note that your study of tactics in a counterinsurgency was an *introduction*. FM 3-24.2 tackles a way of war, COIN, that demands constant updating — and provides the means to do so. As a COIN task organizer, it especially helps when responsibilities and tactical demands shift during COIN: the captain may have to plan for a brigade; or a colonel may have to work more with 'operational NCOs' and 'strategic lieutenants.' Indeed for veteran leaders and the higher ranks, *Tactics* provides an opportunity to avoid misapplying the tactics of a previous rotation to the newest one.

It's All Yours!

FM 3-24.2 is not prescriptive. It offers no set-piece strategy, no silver-bullet solution, and no checklist that must be applied to all situations. Instead it provides tools to help you better analyze, plan, execute, and revise tactics with other leaders to develop a unique strategy for your area. It retains and promotes a key operational philosophy: on-scene commanders make the assessments and direct the actions. It therefore wants you, the individual leader, to develop and then refine constantly a unique formula which produces mission success.

Tactics gives sergeants, captains, and colonels alike a means to retain situational awareness and tactical agility in the tricky shadow world of counterinsurgency. It also well supports GEN McChrystal's assessment of how to achieve his daunting mission in Afghanistan. It is a most important document for the COIN warrior.

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