

Force Structure for Small Wars

Andrew C. Pavord

Introduction

Since 9/11 the armed forces of the United States have paid a steep price to acquire proficiency in counterinsurgency operations. After going through a painful learning process the Army and Marines published the now acclaimed counterinsurgency manual and implemented a new approach in Iraq that is delivering impressive results.¹ It is now a logical time to consider how to redesign combat units to reflect these lessons and prepare for the small wars of the future.

This article will argue that counterinsurgency brigades should be added to the U.S. Army's force structure.² Lacking forces specially trained and equipped for counterinsurgency, the Army has fought the war on terror with conventional units adapted to counterinsurgency operations. For most units, the transition from conventional organization and tactics to the very different and challenging tasks of counterinsurgency was traumatic. The costs of poor organization for counterinsurgency, in terms of battlefield mistakes and the misallocation of resources, were substantial. To provide the optimal force for fighting insurgencies the Army should develop Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) that are specifically organized, equipped, and trained for the complex challenges of counterinsurgency operations.

A counterinsurgency brigade should have the capability to defeat insurgents and to conduct stability operations.³ A core combat force of three to five infantry battalions, equipped with armored patrol vehicles, would specialize in security and small unit combat operations. One to three heavy companies backed by an artillery battery would provide the firepower to destroy insurgent concentrations. Organic human intelligence teams, engineers, and civil affairs teams would provide the capacity to find insurgents, rebuild infrastructure, and develop political institutions. Training detachments would give the brigade the capacity to recruit, train, and equip local forces to perform security tasks. The brigade staff would be experts in counterinsurgent tasks such as human intelligence, political analysis, reconstruction, and procurement. Every member of the brigade will be proficient in counterinsurgency tactics, cultures, and languages. Most importantly, because all key elements are organic, the brigade will be a true team that will train as it fights.

Creating a small number of counterinsurgency brigades in both the active and reserve force structure will create a strategic asset useful in conventional warfare, counterinsurgency, and in peacekeeping operations. Counterinsurgency brigades could perform rear area combat tasks during high intensity conflicts. After the defeat of enemy conventional forces, counterinsurgency brigades could play a crucial role in establishing stability in critical areas. Counterinsurgency brigades could also provide support to friendly governments facing an insurgency or perform peace enforcement operations such as Bosnia and Kosovo. Counterinsurgency brigades could be useful in homeland security and disaster consequence management operations.

The main objection to creating counterinsurgency units is that the U.S. cannot afford specialized units and therefore must rely on generalist units.⁴ This position underestimates difficulty and the cost of converting conventional units to counterinsurgency capabilities. The complexity of counterinsurgency creates a requirement for specialized skills, organization, and equipment that cannot be met in short deployment timeframes, even in periods where deployments are predictable. The existence of counterinsurgency brigades will improve the Army's ability to adapt conventional units to the counterinsurgency role. Counterinsurgency brigades will create an institutional home for the experts that will develop, test, and train counterinsurgency doctrine, ensuring that the hard won lessons of Afghanistan and Iraq are not lost. The operational capability and strategic flexibility of the Army would be increased by creating counterinsurgency brigades.

Organization Impacts Operations

How a unit is organized drives how it will fight. Unit capabilities and training drive leaders toward solving problems with a limited set of techniques. A unit organized to conduct battalion level operations will tend to conduct battalion level operations. Leaders in a unit structured and trained for high intensity combat operations will lean toward executing combat operations, even when the situation calls for a different approach. The old saw “if you have a hammer then all the world is a nail” is often true for unit commanders.

The organization of Army units for high intensity combat and their lack of preparation for counterinsurgency operations hampered U.S. efforts to bring stability to Iraq and Afghanistan. Thomas Rick's book *Fiasco* describes how in the initial stages of the Iraqi insurgency US forces tended to conduct large scale cordon search that detained hundreds of Iraqis. These operations, while tactically well executed, led to operational and strategic setbacks because they created widespread resentment that generated recruits for the insurgency.⁵ British Army General Nigel Aylwin-Foster's critique of the US Army's performance in post invasion Iraq, published in *Military Review*, pointed out the over-reliance on aggressive kinetic operations designed to kill or capture insurgents and cultural insensitivity that although “inadvertent arguably amounted to institutional racism.”⁶ General Petraeus, the current commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, began his review of counterinsurgency lessons learned with the observation that “[t]he insurgencies

in Iraq and Afghanistan were not, in truth, the wars for which we were best prepared in 2001.”⁷

The challenges the Army faced in executing counterinsurgency operations were, at least in part, due to the reliance on conventional units to conduct this highly specialized form of warfare. No unit is capable of performing every mission. The set of capabilities that a given unit possesses is the result of trade offs among conflicting priorities. The ability to concentrate firepower must be balanced against the ability to conduct operations dispersed over a wide area. Protection against heavy weapons must be balanced against the requirements of strategic and tactical mobility. The development of the staff skills to control highly synchronized combined arms operations may come at the expense of developing cultural understanding and political skills required for stability operations. The mentality of assault troops prepared to storm defensive positions may not be consistent with the patience required for counterinsurgency. Leadership skills required for high intensity combat cannot be developed to the highest level while simultaneously struggling to achieve mastery of the diplomatic skills required for counterinsurgency.

Current policy is that army units must simply tough it out and learn to fight both high intensity and counterinsurgency operations. Training units to “full spectrum” capability is an imposing challenge to unit commanders. It may be an overwhelming one. Generalist units forced to prepare for every contingency will struggle to master an overbroad task list. Generalist units will also face significant transition costs as they change mission focus on short notice. The saying “to attack everywhere is to attack nowhere” is applicable to organizing, equipping, and training units. Developing a force structure with a mix of units specializing in either high-intensity or counterinsurgency offers a better approach.

If experience is a guide, generalist units will be biased against preparing for counterinsurgency. The American military culture has been strongly resistant to adapting to counterinsurgency.⁸ John Nagl has described the Army’s failure to adapt to guerilla warfare in Vietnam.⁹ Thomas Ricks has made a similar argument about the American experience in Iraq.¹⁰ In the absence of an institutional home for counterinsurgency it is possible that history will repeat itself and that effort and resources will be focused on preparing for high intensity combat. After the Iraq war has passed, doctrine and training for counterinsurgency will again be neglected. In the current international security environment those lessons must not be lost.

The Global Insurgency and the Emerging Consensus on Counterinsurgency

The United States faces a global insurgency that uses asymmetric tactics to defy overwhelming American conventional power.¹¹ In past conventional wars, the goal was either to destroy a nation state deemed intolerable to the world-order (WWII) or force an adversary to the negotiating table (Korea, Arab-Israeli Wars). However, Mao initiated a new kind of warfare when he used violence to defeat the political will of the targeted government.¹² This model evolved in Vietnam, Algeria, and other wars of national liberation. According to Hammes the practitioner of “Fourth Generation Warfare”

“uses all available networks—political, economic, social, and military—to convince the enemies’ decision makes that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for the perceived benefit.”¹³

Global jihadists are fighting a fourth generation war. Jihadists use a combination of propaganda, terror, and insurgency to pursue their goal of uniting the world Muslim community under an Islamic leadership that enforces Islamic law.¹⁴ While the U.S. currently fights insurgencies that have arisen in the aftermath of victories in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US may be forced to support other friendly governments threatened by insurgents. Insurgency in Chechnya, Kashmir, and Algeria was a key part of jihadist tactics before 9/11. Jihadist attempts to expand insurgencies to other countries create the probability that the U.S. will fight insurgencies in many different contexts.

A body of literature describes the nature of counterinsurgency and provides a coherent set of ideas on how to wage this kind of war.¹⁵ David Galula’s, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, has emerged as a classic text.¹⁶ Writing in the context of Maoist wars of national liberation, Galula viewed guerilla warfare as long process of as wearing down the government’s will.¹⁷ He argued that it takes a combination of political and military action to defeat insurgencies. A long list of other theorists, many with practical experience fighting national liberation movements, promoted similar ideas.

The US military embraced the consensus view on counterinsurgency in *Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency*. The new doctrine emphasizes the critical interrelationship between political, economic, and combat operations. The clear, hold and build strategy lays out a vision of how successful counterinsurgency campaigns will proceed. First, clearing operations will eliminate insurgent concentrations in a targeted area and attack the covert insurgent infrastructure. Next, holding operations will provide security and develop local security forces. This will enable the government to win popular support and build political institutions capable of preventing the rebirth of insurgency.

Organization for Counterinsurgency

The Army lacks units specifically designed to execute the new counterinsurgency doctrine. An effective counterinsurgency unit requires the capability to:

- conduct combat operations to defeat insurgent forces,
- provide security to the population,
- win the support of the population,
- identify and develop local leaders,
- and build civil institutions.

A review of these counterinsurgency capabilities illustrates the challenges that conventional units face in counterinsurgency operations.

Combat

Counterinsurgency necessarily involves combat. Insurgents understand the strong political signal that the ability to establish sanctuaries, concentrate forces, and conduct large scale attacks sends to the population. The counterinsurgent obviously requires capability to identify and destroy insurgent concentrations. Even in relatively secure environments the capability to conduct a show of force is a necessary deterrent.

Forty years ago David Galula prescribed counterinsurgent force requirements.

“As long as the insurgent has failed to build a powerful regular army, the counterinsurgent has little use for heavy, sophisticated forces designed for conventional warfare. For ground forces, he needs infantry and more infantry, highly mobile and lightly armed; some field artillery for occasional support; armored cavalry, and if terrain conditions are favorable, horse cavalry for road surveillance and patrolling.”¹⁸

Galula’s prescription remains valid. Counterinsurgent units should be light but retain sufficient firepower. Lightly armored vehicles provide protection and patrolling capability. A few armored fighting vehicles and artillery can defeat insurgent concentrations. Above all, counterinsurgent units need ability to spread combat power over an extended area.

The Army’s Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) have too much armor and artillery and too few infantry Soldiers for counterinsurgency operations which is why units deploying to Iraq routinely trade in tanks and artillery for humvees. Designed to defeat enemy forces operating in battalion/brigade sized concentrations, the BCT uses intelligence superiority, rapid maneuver, and massed fires to annihilate the enemy. The BCT is less efficient at managing dispersed small unit combat.

Counterinsurgent brigades should be designed to conduct dispersed patrols and yet retain the ability to mass combat power to defeat company-sized insurgent concentrations. Infantry battalions should be built around armored patrol vehicles with each squad capable of conducting a patrol. The basic squad would be twelve Soldiers with three vehicles. Large infantry squads would also be better able to function with losses due to combat, leaves and other absences during long deployments. Battalion and company command and control systems should be designed to operate a 24 hour operations center. Other enhancements could include having at least one 60mm mortar per platoon and increasing the number of sniper teams. This organization would provide a more efficient distribution of combat capabilities than a BCT.

Security

The defeat of insurgent units only gains a temporary reprieve if the population is not provided security.¹⁹ The most fundamental demand that any citizen places on a government is for security. If this demand is not met, then the people will not support the

government. On the other hand, the insurgent needs the acquiescence of the population to achieve his primary requirement of cover to hide. Above all things, the insurgent needs the population to be quiet, to refuse to provide government forces with information. This limited goal can be achieved through terror even if the people do not support the insurgent's ideology.²⁰ The French counterinsurgent practitioner Robert Trinquier describes the process:

In the street, at work, at home, the citizen lives continually under the threat of violent death. In the presence of this permanent danger surrounding him, he has the depressing feeling of being an isolated and defenseless target. The fact that public authority and the police are no longer capable of ensuring his security adds to his distress. He loses confidence in the state whose inherent mission is to guarantee his safety. He is more and more drawn to the terrorists, who are alone able to protect him.²¹

The counter to the insurgent is to provide security. The people must feel that the insurgent cannot inflict violence with impunity. To be effective, security must be pervasive. Security must be provided 24/7 in the village or neighborhood block if it is to prevent the effectiveness of insurgent terror. A single night of unfettered access by insurgents can undo months of patient work in building trust and support among the people.²²

Achieving security in the face of insurgency has proven to be an elusive goal. Too often forces have defeated insurgent concentrations, provided temporary local security, and then moved on only to find the insurgency rekindled. In the words of a company commander in the early occupation of Iraq "We put trouble down, we left, trouble came again."²³ Too often strategic leaders do not understand that the absence of flames does not mean that the fire has been put out. Security operations must continue until the ashes of insurgency are cold. This pattern of failure may be exacerbated by using the wrong kind of units for security operations. Combat units focused on conventional war fight mentality, organized to mass combat power, and not prepared to utilize local manpower, may not be the most effective force for conducting security operations.

Security operations are focused at the small unit level. Platoons should be capable of independent operations over extended periods. Support organizations should push logistics to many small operating bases. Robust communications with redundant and long range capability at the squad level are required. Units must also adopt a mentality suited to security operations. The operational focus of security operations is contrary to the "can do" tempo of a combat battalion. Success in combat is measured by what happens to the enemy, the defeat of enemy forces. Success in security operations is measured by what does not happen. If a family can live its life without fear then the mission is a success. Months of tedium and weekly briefings with nothing significant to report are a sign of success.²⁴ Counterinsurgent units must be prepared for the patient work of security operations.

Trained local forces can be the answer to the chronic manpower shortages.²⁵ The practice of raising local forces for security operations has been successful in diverse campaigns such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Algeria. In Iraq and Afghanistan, local forces can serve as a bridge to the community and handle sensitive operations involving Mosques and homes.²⁶ There are risks. Local forces may commit crimes or atrocities. They may also be infiltrated by hostile groups such as the Mahdi army of Motada Sadr in Iraq and warlords in Afghanistan.²⁷ Mitigating these risks requires intensive oversight by dedicated staff and trainers.

Conventional forces in Afghanistan and Iraq faced challenges in recruiting and training local forces.²⁸ Since the units had no organic training teams, they assigned trainers from their own resources. In Iraq some units provided up to seventy embedded trainers per battalion.²⁹ After a significant delay, independent training organizations were established to recruit and train Iraqi and Afghan army units. While local units are often under operational control of brigades, there are challenges that result from the dual chain of command of embedded trainers. Counterinsurgency brigades should have organic assets to train local security forces. Placing a dedicated training unit under the command of the brigade commander would speed up the process of recruiting local forces and promote unity of effort.

Security operations must be supported by a robust intelligence effort focused on destroying political cadres and terrorist. The only sure way to root out insurgent cadres is through human intelligence. Some person has to tell the counterinsurgent forces where the insurgents are hiding. This kind of intelligence is best developed by battalions and companies through day to day interaction with the local community. To maximize effectiveness, battalions need intelligence collection teams trained to interact with the community and the capability to analyze and evaluate data.

In the early stages of Iraq and Afghanistan battalions had limited analytical capability. The failure to give commander's full control of tactical human intelligence teams caused unnecessary delays in following up key leads. Battalions rarely trained with their assigned intelligence teams which meant that the understanding of the nuances of intelligence employment was limited. Precious opportunities were lost as battalion commanders and their staffs learned hard lessons about managing counterinsurgency intelligence operations.³⁰

The addition of the military intelligence company to the brigade combat team and the increased size of battalion intelligence staff are improvements.³¹ However, this step does not go far enough. Intelligence assets, such as human intelligence experts and intelligence analysts, should be pushed to the company level. Training must also focus on counterinsurgency. Effective intelligence in counterinsurgency requires a different set of skills than intelligence in conventional war. It is not reasonable to expect that an intelligence team can be experts in both types of warfare. The intelligence personnel in a counterinsurgency brigade would have the focus necessary to master the skills required for counterinsurgency warfare.

Winning the Active Support of the People

The willing participation of the people in the governing process is the key to victory. Galula taught that the first step towards this goal is to get the population to participate in basic tasks such as enrolling in a census.³² The population may then be drawn into actively supporting the government by voting, obeying the laws, paying taxes, and even attending town hall meetings.³³ The population, the not the insurgent military forces, is the ultimate target of the campaign.³⁴ To win active popular support, units conducting counterinsurgency need five key capabilities: to understand the culture, to wage ideological struggle, to manage economic incentives, to cultivate local leadership, and to build local institutions.

Cultural failures can defeat a counterinsurgent campaign.³⁵ This is a fundamental underpinning of classic counterinsurgency theory and of American experience in Iraq. For example, the insensitivity of U.S. forces in Iraq towards the cultural norms about behavior in the sacred space of a mosque fueled the growth of both Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias.³⁶ U.S. forces conducted operations in an alien cultural environment where kinetic effects of firepower were often the least decisive effect of an operation. As stated by a division commander in Iraq, "...the cultural reality is that no matter what the outcome of a combat operation, for every insurgent put down, the potential exists to grow many more if cultural mitigation is not practiced. If nothing else done other than kill bad guys and train others to kill bad guys, the only thing accomplished is moving more people from the fence to the insurgent category-there remains no opportunity to grow the supporter base."³⁷

Understanding and acting effectively within a radically different culture is extraordinarily difficult and requires extensive training. The norms that Soldiers must navigate in Iraq and Afghanistan are bewilderingly complex. Behavior as innocuous to Americans as using dogs to search for weapons or eating onions near a mosque, can give mortal offense to Muslims.³⁸ Soldiers need the ability to understand the code of honor in warrior societies.³⁹ They need to understand the interrelationships of ethnic groups, tribes, political parties and how they operate with local governmental structures. They need to understand the influences of local history in cultures with long memories.⁴⁰ Short lectures delivered by contractors and the distribution of huge cultural awareness pamphlets during pre-deployment training are inadequate.⁴¹ Intense cultural training that creates a deep understanding of local norms at the tribal level is required. This level of cultural training is simply impossible in a unit focused on conventional warfighting. Units devoted to counterinsurgency and perhaps specializing in certain regions will have the ability to master the intricacies of foreign cultures. Personnel policies that provide officers graduate education in foreign area studies and anthropology will increase effectiveness.

Speaking to the people in their own language is a powerful tool. Nothing shows more respect for a culture than taking the time to learn its language. Soldiers fluent in the local language would be the most effective leaders in the counterinsurgency fight. Even rudimentary training in key phrases is of immense tactical value. A brigade dedicated to

counterinsurgency operations could make language training a fundamental component of its training program. Furthermore, officers and NCO's could be required to attend language training prior to assignment.

Every successful insurgency uses a powerful political ideology to mobilize support.⁴² Without an ideological foundation it is impossible for the insurgent to generate the extraordinary commitment and willingness to endure sacrifice that characterizes successful insurgents. In fact, the tenacity and courage of insurgents from Viet Cong to the defenders of Fallujah, played a decisive role in their success. The willingness to sacrifice for the cause impresses the local population and intimidates soldiers conducting counterinsurgency operations.

Insurgents have historically understood both the importance and the complexity of ideological struggle. Successful insurgencies have devoted massive resources and effort to indoctrinate their followers in the movement's ideology. In face of this investment, counterinsurgent forces are unprepared to win an ideological argument and therefore rely on efforts such as delivering school supplies to prove good will. It is all too easy for the insurgents to explain away these gestures. The intensity of the commitment of many insurgents and the passion of their message is far beyond the reach of information operations and good works. It is not possible to defeat an insurgent ideology with messages recited by young captains to village elders and delivering school supplies.⁴³ Ideological struggle is necessary to refute insurgent ideology.

An ideology is a story that answers the core questions that people face in their daily life.⁴⁴ A powerful ideology explains why people suffer, who makes them suffer, and what must be done to end their suffering. A story grounded in the people's history and their daily experience will give voice to their frustration and provide a coherent guide to action. Ideologies based on lies and distortions, such as Marxism and fascism, may still drive millions to extraordinary efforts.

Radical international Islamists such as Al Qaeda speak to an international audience through a powerful story of how failure to live in accordance with the pure teachings of the Prophet and the dictates of Islamic law has led to the degradation of Muslims.

Corruption enables infidels and their puppets to dominate holy Islamic lands, steal resources, and destroy the dignity of the community of the faithful. The proper response of a true Muslim is to live pure and conduct jihad against the imperialists. The ideology of Al Qaeda is truly transnational in that it seeks to sever the recruit's ties to their local communities and replace it with a total commitment to pure Islam untainted by local traditions or the authority of parents and tribal elders.⁴⁵

In Iraq the combination of the destruction of Iraq's Baathist regime and the American occupation, created an ideological void that insurgents were quick to fill. The Sunni insurgency developed an ideological coherence that allowed diverse factions to converge around a common political rhetoric and made it increasingly difficult for any Sunni to support the Iraqi government. The radical Islamist vision of resistance became the

dominant ideology for the vast majority of Sunni Arabs.⁴⁶ Ironically, Al Qaeda's actions, especially attempts to intermarry with locals, and their radical ideology clashed with tribal cultures and led to an extraordinary transformation in the attitudes of the people towards the insurgents. Without ideological support the insurgents suffered a dramatic decline in strength that creates the possibility of victory for the government in Iraq.⁴⁷

To achieve victory, the ideology of the insurgents must be defeated in the minds of the people. Colin Gray points out:

“Modern war, French-style could work tactically and operationally in Algeria, but never strategically. The reason was that the French military effort, no matter how tactically excellent and intellectually sophisticated was always politically hollow. The French had, and could promise, no political idea with a potent appeal to the Moslem populace.”⁴⁸

Ideological struggle is simultaneously conducted at the local and international level. The counterinsurgent must understand the local nuance and the global implications of their actions. A battalion must deal with local elders and Al Jazeera. Leaders must have the ability to recognize ideological implications of their acts and to provide counter ideology in every encounter with the local population. These are political skills developed through extensive training which short deployment training windows will not permit. A unit dedicated to the counterinsurgency mission would have the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to wage ideological warfare.

Ideology is a powerful motivator, but it works best when it is supported by economics. If people are destitute and young men lack jobs calls for jihad by extremists are more likely to be heeded. On the other hand, a prosperous community where jobs and hope is available will go far to blunt the call to jihad. Only a very few fanatics will give up a job for jihad. Opportunity itself can be a powerful counter to extremist ideology. General Petraeus states that “money is ammunition” in counterinsurgency.⁴⁹

Reconstruction projects should be targeted where local population and government aggressively supports efforts to establish security.⁵⁰ Economic incentives must also be taken to the individual level. One of the most basic ways to win loyalty is to put a person on the payroll. General Chiarelli describes the positive impact of large scale hiring on stability in Baghdad in 2005.⁵¹

Restoring or establishing basic services is also crucial for both making a good first impression and establishing long-term stability. If basic services such as water, sewer, schools, roads, electricity do not function, the government will be blamed and the insurgents will make propaganda points. An effective counterinsurgent organization should include the capacity to initiate and manage reconstruction projects.

U.S. forces were delayed in implementing reconstruction programs in Iraq and Afghanistan and still faced challenges years later. Units lacked the capacity necessary to

manage finances and procurement.⁵² Procurement specialists operating from centralized bureaucracies do not understand the operational impact of procurement actions. Procurements in counterinsurgency cannot be viewed solely through the lenses of efficiency and cost benefit analysis. Procurement should be viewed as an operational asset under the direct control of unit commanders. Units should have organic procurement and finance capability to ensure that decisions are made at the lowest level. Procurement and finance specialists should also have the training to navigate nuances of negotiating business in different cultures.

Understanding culture, waging ideological struggle, and managing economic incentives will provide a foundation for winning popular support. The key to sustaining popular support is the development of effective local leadership committed to the government. The counterinsurgent must have the political skill to identify and empower local leaders. Galalu argued that "... the turning point really comes when leaders have emerged from the population and have committed themselves on the side of the counterinsurgent."⁵³ A counterinsurgency brigade should have the capability to mentor leaders on democratic values while understanding how traditional authority operates.⁵⁴ This requires extraordinary political skills for which there no doctrine. Commanders in a counterinsurgency brigade with cultural, linguistic, and political training would be better able to develop local leaders than officers in conventional units.

Even effective leaders will not succeed unless they have the support of functioning institutions. Building institutions capable of performing security and governmental functions without military assistance is the ultimate goal of a counterinsurgency campaign. It is also a task that has challenged the capabilities of Army units. Difficulties in building and sustaining local institutions plagued efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Corruption of local officials and the inability to deliver basic services on sustained basis is a strong propaganda point for the Iraqi insurgents and the Taliban. The lack of effective legal institutions that can fairly detain and process suspected insurgents has damaged the people's faith in the good intentions of American forces.⁵⁵

While building national institutions is beyond the role of operational units, brigade-level units may play a decisive role in fostering local institutions. General Chiarelli describes how governance support teams in Bagdad provided connected nongovernmental organizations, task force leaders, local, and national government organizations.⁵⁶ The current structure of brigades provides little institution building capacity, relying on civil affairs teams which rarely train with units prior to deployments. Since civil affairs teams often have a separate chain of commands and rotate on different schedules, integration is difficult to achieve.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) were developed to lead reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Deployed several years after operations commenced, PRTs initially were ad hoc teams thrown together with minimal training. Significant coordination issues arose when PRTs operated in areas assigned to maneuver units. Parallel organizations conducting operations in the same area, in violation of the principle of unity of command, disrupted operations.⁵⁷ A far more effective approach would be to

embed the capability of a PRT within a counterinsurgency brigade. The addition of battalion-level reconstruction commands and organic civil affairs teams would provide the necessary capability. This would enable the brigade to develop operational standard operating procedures, staff processes and expertise that will maximize the synergistic effects of civil affairs and combat operations.

There are immense challenges that face a conventional unit that is forced to adapt to counterinsurgency operations. Perhaps the greatest challenge is to change the mindset and temperament of combat Soldiers.⁵⁸ General Allymin Foster noted that “another U.S. general did assert that it was unreasonable and impractical to expect front-line soldiers, given their training and pre-eminent warfighting role, to develop the levels of subtlety or master the wider range of skills predicated by the hearts and mind campaign.”⁵⁹

Counterinsurgent units will provide Soldiers trained in the nuances and mindset of counterinsurgency. The employment of counterinsurgency brigades as part of a campaign plan could enable the Army to withdraw combat forces during the transition from combat to stability operations. Combat forces could then be retrained or at least given an operational pause before resource constraints forced their use in a counterinsurgency role.

Force Structure Implications

A brigade organized, equipped and trained for counter insurgency operations will certainly perform better than a conventional force reorganized, reequipped, and retrained on short notice. The primary argument against counterinsurgency brigades is economic. In the face of budget constraints the Army cannot afford specialization and must make do with generalist units. This argument understates the enormous cost of transitioning generalist units to specific contingencies. The cost of crash programs to reorganize, reequip, and retrain units is high. Counterinsurgent units would also be useful in a high intensity conflict or in any other conceivable type of campaign. The economic benefits of creating a force of generalist units are therefore overstated.

The most powerful argument for counterinsurgent units is that creating a community of counterinsurgency experts will increase the strategic flexibility of the Army. Counterinsurgency doctrine tested in tough training exercises will remain vital. A dedicated corps of officers and NCOs, with a passion for counterinsurgency, will sharpen skills and teach succeeding generations. If necessary, this community will form a base upon which a rapid expansion of counterinsurgency capability can be built. The alternative is for generalists to try to relearn counterinsurgency by dusting off old manuals and after action reports. It is doubtful whether this approach will work any better in the future than it has in the past.

With the current focus of counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan, it may be the high intensity combat skills that are now at risk. An assault force requires extraordinary discipline and training to manage maneuver and fires, and more importantly, to lead Soldiers in combat. Intensive and focused training was necessary to achieve the level of

readiness that produced victories in the Gulf War and Iraqi Freedom. These skills are different from the skills necessary to win the counterinsurgency fight. Is it realistic to expect commanders and staffs to excel at both?

The most dangerous byproduct of generalist units is attitude. The generalist mentality assumes that there is no challenge that a smart dedicated officer backed by committed noncommissioned officers and Soldiers cannot overcome. This is a comforting thought but it is an illusion. It leads the Army to ignore the complexities of warfare, especially counterinsurgency. The new counterinsurgency manual begins with the quotation “Counterinsurgency is not just thinking man’s warfare—it is the graduate level of war.”⁶⁰ Graduate education is by definition specialized education beyond the level that can be attained by a generalist. Creating specialized units will allow the army to develop a body of graduate level experts in counterinsurgency warfare.

The demands of counterinsurgency require full time preparation which can best be achieved in units dedicated to counterinsurgency. The Army needs commanders and staffs that understand the intricacies of combat and security operations, intelligence collection and analysis, cultural nuances, political communication, reconstruction and procurement management. Generalist units will not achieve the optimal level of expertise. By making it almost impossible to specialize in any form of warfare, limiting the force structure to generalist units decreases the ability of the Army to adapt to new situations. A generalist culture is less a effective learning institution than an Army consisting of multiple communities of specialists who take specialized forms of warfare to the highest level of doctrine and practice.

To produce a dramatic improvement in capability would not require a massive reorganization of the Army. Creating three to six active brigades and up to twelve brigades in the Army National Guard would provide a ready capability to handle the initial phase of major counterinsurgency operations and the community of expertise necessary for expansion.

National Guard brigades may be especially well-suited for the counterinsurgent role. Experience gained in civilian occupations may be leveraged in Guard units. The relatively light equipment density of counterinsurgent units may be better suited to Guard fiscal constraints and maintenance capabilities. Another benefit is that there is significant overlap between the organization and skills required for homeland security and disaster consequence management. The Army should consider converting National Guard infantry formations to the counterinsurgency mission.

The Army is taking steps to improve counterinsurgency capabilities.⁶¹ The new BCTs have improved integration of specialties such as civil affairs and military police. Training centers have adapted to counterinsurgency and there is a renewed emphasis on cultural and language training. However, without dedicated units focused on counterinsurgency there remains the no institutional home to develop counterinsurgency expertise on a sustained basis. The Army should develop counterinsurgency brigades to

enhance current capability, increase strategic flexibility and ensure that the hard won lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan are not lost.

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Pavord serves in the Virginia Army National Guard. His deployments include Desert Storm as the assistant operations officer of the 372nd Military Police Battalion, Bosnia as Chief of Plans for the 29th Infantry Division, and Afghanistan as Executive Officer of the 3-116 Infantry battalion. He earned a Ph.D in political science from Johns Hopkins University in 1995.

¹ U.S. Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, (Washington: GPO, 2006) p. 5-18-23.

² The Department of Defense has considered developing units devoted to stability operations. This article argues for combat brigades that specialize in counterinsurgency. Bradley Graham, "Pentagon Considers Creating Postwar Peacekeeping Forces," *Washington Post*, November 24, 2003.

³ Brian Watson makes a cogent argument that the Army should assign support brigades the function of conducting stability operations in a post-conflict setting. He also argues that stabilization packages should be developed that could augment conventional Brigade Combat Teams. Both of these proposals have merit but implementing them would still leave a void in having units capable of defeating insurgencies.

Counterinsurgency is a specialized form of combat and not merely stabilization. See Brian Watson, "Reshaping the Expeditionary Army to Win Decisively: The Case for Greater Stabilization Capacity in the Modular Force," Strategic Studies Institute (August 2005) <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil>;

⁴ Douglas A. Ollivant and Eric D. Chewning, Producing Victory, Rethinking Conventional Forces in COIN Operations, *Military Review*, (July-August 2006) 50-59;

⁵ Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2006) pp. 192-202, 235-43.

⁶ Nigel Aylwin-Foster, "Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations," *Military Review*, (November-December 2005) p. 2-15. See also Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 99-102; Steven Metz, "Learning From Iraq: Counterinsurgency in American Strategy," Strategic Studies Institute (January 2007), p. 12, 23, 29-30, 41; Bing West, "American Military Performance in Iraq," *Military Review* (September-October 2006) 2-7; <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil>

⁷ David Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq," *Military Review*, (January-February 2006) p. 2. See also Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq", *Rand*, (June 2004), p. 5-6; George Packer *The Assassin's Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005)

⁸ Colin S Gray, "Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?," Strategic Studies Institute (March 2006) <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil>; Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," p 6-10; Watson, p. 4; Jeffrey Record, The American Way of War: Cultural Barriers to Successful Counterinsurgency, *Policy Analysis No 577*, (September 1, 2006)

⁹ John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

¹⁰ Ricks, *Fiasco*, p. 300-310.

¹¹ For descriptions of this new war see David W. Barno, "Challenges in Fighting a Global Insurgency," *Parameters*, (Summer 2006): 15-29; Frank G. Hoffman, Complex Irregular Warfare: the Next Revolution in Military Affairs, *Orbis*, (Summer 2006), 395-411.

¹² Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, (Zenith Press, St. Paul, Minn, 2004) 1-16.

¹³ Hammes, p.2.

¹⁴ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004)

¹⁵ Robert R. Tomes, "Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare," *Parameters*, (Spring 2004): 16-28; Gray, p. 8, Kalev I. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review*, (May-June 2005) 8-12; Douglas A. Ollivant and Eric D. Chewning, 51-52.

¹⁶ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1964)

¹⁷ Galula, p. 30-39; Hammes offers an excellent summary of Maoist revolutionary doctrine. Hammes, *Sling and the Stone*, p. 44-55.

¹⁸ Galula, *CounterInsurgency Warfare*, p. 64.

-
- ¹⁹ Montgomery McFate and Andrea Jackson, The Object Beyond War, Counterinsurgency and the Four Tools of Political Competition, *Military Review*, (January February 2006) 13-26 16, Hammes, Countering Evolved Insurgent Networks, p. 21.
- ²⁰ Christopher Ford, "Speak No Evil: Targeting a Population's Neutrality to Defeat an Insurgency," *Parameters* (Summer 2005), 51-62; Trinquier on Algeria. Horn Savage War of Peace; Galula.
- ²¹ Robert Trinquier, *Modern Warfare* (Westport, Conn, Praeger Security, 1964) p. 15.
- ²² Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," p.15
- ²³ Packer, *The Assassin's Gate*, p 224.
- ²⁴ As a major who served with the 3SCR in Tal Afar put it: "The tedium of counterinsurgency ops, the small, very incremental gains—our military culture doesn't lend itself to that kind of war." Major Jack McLaughlin quoted in George Packer, Letter from Iraq: The Lesson of Tal Afar, *The New Yorker*, (April, 4, 2006). See also Montgomery McFate and Andrea Jackson, p. 16-17
- ²⁵ Robert M. Cassidy, "The Long Small War: Indigenous Forces for Counterinsurgency," *Parameters*, (Summer 2006), 47-62.
- ²⁶ Douglas A. Ollivant and Eric D. Chewning, p.54
- ²⁷ Montgomery McFate and Andrea Jackson, p. 17
- ²⁸ James Fallows, Blind into Baghdad, (New York, Vintage Books, 2006) 147-186; Packer, *Assassins' Gate*, pp. 305-7, Cordesman, *Lessons of Afghanistan*, pp 50-54.
- ²⁹ Chiarelli and Michaelis, pp 7-8
- ³⁰ Bill Benson, "Tactical Intelligence Shortcomings in Iraq: Restructuring Battalion Intelligence to Win", *Military Intelligence Bulletin*; Douglas A. Ollivant and Eric D. Chewning, p. 57- 58; Packer, *Assassins' Gate*, pp. 304-5; Rothstein, *Afghanistan*, pp 99-101; Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," p. 10-12; Tomes, p. 19. See also Aylwin-Foster, p.6. For an excellent description of how Soldiers daily interaction with the population on a routine basis generates intelligence see Paul Stanton, Unit Immersion in Mosul: Establishing Stability in Transition, *Military Review* (July-August 2006) 60-70.
- ³¹ John F. Kimmons, "Transforming Army Intelligence," *Military Review* (November-December 2006), 69-72.
- ³² Galula, p.81.
- ³³ Robert Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1964)
- ³⁴ Gray p. 23
- ³⁵ Hashim, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, p. 109; Gray, p. 11, 24-6. For an Arab perspective on the cultural failings of American troops see Zaki Chehab, *Inside the Resistance: The Iraqi Insurgency and the Future of the Middle East* (Nation Books: New York, 2005).
- ³⁶ Ron E. Hassner, "Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground," *The Washington Quarterly*, (Spring 2006); Hashim, *Insurgency in and Counterinsurgency in Iraq*, p. 114.
- ³⁷ Chiarelli and Michaelis, p. 9.
- ³⁸ Chehab, *Inside the Resistance*, p. 130; Hassner, "Fighting on Sacred Ground," p. 152
- ³⁹ Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, pp. 40-2.
- ⁴⁰ Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency,"; Rothstein, *Afghanistan*, p. 94.
- ⁴¹ The cultural training provided to the 3-116th Infantry Battalion at Fort Bragg in the spring of 2004 in preparation for deployment to Afghanistan was particularly bad. The author served as executive officer of this unit.
- ⁴² McFate and Jackson, pp18-19; Hammes makes the powerful argument that ideas lie at the heart of successful fourth generation warfare. He points out that that ideas capable of generating extraordinary passion were the key to success for Mao, Ho Chi Min, the Sandistas, and the leaders of the 1987 Palestinian infatada. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, p. 129.
- ⁴³ Gray p.21
- ⁴⁴ Montgomery McFate and Andrea Jackson, p. 18-19
- ⁴⁵ Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Mark Sagerman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks*, ()
- ⁴⁶ Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 46, 67-82, 108-120; Metz, "Learning From Iraq," p. 44, 50; International Crisis Group, "In their own words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency," *Middle East Report No 50*.
- ⁴⁷ David Kilcullen, "The Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt," *Small Wars Journal*, August 29, 2007.

-
- ⁴⁸ Gray p. 22
- ⁴⁹ Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency," p. 4.
- ⁵⁰ Ford, p. 63, See also Montgomery McFate and Andrea Jackson, pp 20-22.
- ⁵¹ Chiarelli and Michaelis, p. 11-12.
- ⁵² Packer, *Assassin's Gate*, p. 241-244; David Walker, *Rebuilding Iraq: Reconstruction Progress Hindered by Contracting, Security, and Capacity Challenges*, U.S. Government Accountability Office GAO-07-426T February 15, 2007), pp 16-18.
- ⁵³ Galula, p. 57.
- ⁵⁴ Montgomery McFate and Andrea Jackson, pp 23-25
- ⁵⁵ Ford, p. 62
- ⁵⁶ Chiarelli and Michaelis, p. 12.
- ⁵⁷ Rothstein, *Afghanistan*, pp 115-7. On the evolution of PRTs see Michael J. McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?," *Parameters*, (Winter 2005-06), 32-46.
- ⁵⁸ Galula, p. 66.
- ⁵⁹ Aylwin-Foster, p.5
- ⁶⁰ U.S. Army, *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, p. 1-1.
- ⁶¹ Michael R. Melillo, "Outfitting a Big-War Military with Small-War Capabilities," *Parameters*, (Autumn 2006) 22-35

[SWJ Magazine](#) and [Small Wars Journal](#) are published by Small Wars Journal LLC.

COPYRIGHT © 2008 by Small Wars Journal LLC.

Permission is granted to print single copies for personal, non-commercial use. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution – Non-Commercial – Share Alike 3.0 [License](#) per our [Terms of Use](#). We are in this together.

No FACTUAL STATEMENT should be relied upon without further investigation on your part sufficient to satisfy you in your independent judgment that it is true.

Contact: comment@smallwarsjournal.com

Visit www.smallwarsjournal.com

Cover Price: Your call. [Support SWJ here.](#)