



## Overdue Bill: Integrating Counterinsurgency into Army Professional Education

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In the eight years since the invasion of Afghanistan, the U.S. Army has failed to integrate counterinsurgency (COIN)<sup>1</sup> into Professional Military Education (PME). Counterinsurgency instruction remains uneven in quantity and quality throughout Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) institutions, which have failed to define standards, competencies and outcomes for COIN education. This lack of consistency contributes to ongoing operational confusion and poor execution of operations in both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom due to lack of common concept of what counterinsurgency is and what it entails, despite great advances in COIN application and execution by troops in the field.

Integrating COIN into PME is crucial for improving the ability of the Army to wage our current wars. Ideally, two officers or NCO's educated at differing TRADOC schoolhouses should emerge with similar skills and knowledge competencies on doctrine and staff processes. This synchronization is crucial to allowing large staffs with multiple specialties to operate seamlessly using shared understandings of the operational environment. No such standardization exists for the topic of COIN, despite adequate published doctrine and historical military literature.

TRADOC must address this shortcoming in one of its key areas of responsibility. This paper will outline several actions executable within the TRADOC commander's existing authority to address these problems.

Professional military education reinforces the doctrinal foundations of the operational force and on the ground experience. Despite eight years of operational experience, TRADOC still lacks a comprehensive educational approach to COIN to normalize the instruction provided in its schools and centers. This is remarkable in the shadow of the massive transformation of operational force pre-deployment training to reflect the realities of the current environment. Hard won operational experience demands a complimentary educational foundation so Soldiers

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<sup>1</sup> This paper will focus on the instruction of counterinsurgency (COIN) in a holistic sense, with the realization that COIN by definition is intertwined with topics and terms such as irregular warfare, stability operations, hybrid war, low intensity conflict, security force assistance, internal defense and development, and foreign internal defense, to name but a few. The solutions proposed apply in various degrees to the Army's current implementation of these other subjects. To maintain consistency and clarity throughout the paper, COIN will be used in its broadest context.

can process and learn from their experiences and improve the force's capability to operate along the spectrum of warfare.

Graduates of separate branch schools commonly emerge with differing interpretations of counterinsurgency, usually based on the personal and professional experiences of the instructors rather than clear doctrinal foundations augmented by experience and case studies. Experience from Battle Command Training Program (BCTP) and U.S. Army COIN Center training teams describe low awareness and penetration of COIN and stability doctrine<sup>2</sup> into the operational force, despite robust practical and operational experience. This lack of linkage between doctrine and application contributes to the uneven application of COIN principles by Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The first and most critical task for TRADOC is to designate a COIN proponent responsible for developing education strategy, training support products, and coordination for all efforts related to its instruction. This responsibility could rest with a new organization, CAC organization, or a TRADOC School/Center for Excellence.<sup>3</sup> A proponent, manned with knowledgeable and experienced personnel, would create a more coherent approach to COIN than currently exists. It would exercise key authorities to oversee and implement changes in the education curricula by developing the key training assistance products and standards required to integrate COIN education into the institutional force.

As a corollary, TRADOC requires a single integrator for counterinsurgency. Such an integrator would synchronize the efforts of disparate COIN/IW related organizations, allowing a more coherent approach to counterinsurgency and stability tasks.<sup>4</sup> In addition, such an approach prevents training redundancy and methodological conflicts that exists in the current "thousand points of light" configuration.<sup>5</sup> The designated organization requires the authority, expertise, and resources to coordinate and direct implementation of counterinsurgency across the general purpose forces in coordination with the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center and School. Depending on the task analysis, this could be the same office as the COIN proponent recommended above.

A more detailed and rigorous assessment into the quality and specificity of COIN instruction is required to accurately assess the implementation of COIN into PME. Such a survey should revise these questions to provide a more accurate picture on the state of COIN education and may provide a baseline of best practices to assist further development of the concept. Previous studies relied on self-generated survey data from centers to assess the amount of ongoing

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<sup>2</sup> This doctrine, all published or revised since 2006, consists of FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*; FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*; FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*; and FM 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance*.

<sup>3</sup> The Combined Arms Center, U.S. Army Special Warfare Center and School, or Maneuver Center of Excellence all are examples of potential homes for such an organization.

<sup>4</sup> This list includes but is not limited to such entities as the U.S. Army COIN Center, Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI), Army Asymmetric Warfare Office (AAWO), Maneuver Support Center IED Defeat efforts (MANSCEN), U.S. Army and Marine Corps COIN Center, Fort Polk Advisor Training Brigade, U.S. Army Special Operations Command/JFK School (USASWCS), and West Point Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), COIN Training Academy – Kabul, and COIN Center for Excellence – Iraq.

<sup>5</sup> There is a significant amount of work occurring on COIN in the Army; the primary challenge is that it occurs in multiple stovepipes working independently and for different chains of command.

counterinsurgency related instruction in TRADOC. The COIN-related survey questions presented were broadly defined, resulting in subjects such as counter-sniper, IED-D, and other such tasks listed as COIN instruction.<sup>6</sup> While certainly valuable, these individual and collective soldier tasks do not represent an education on counterinsurgency, a broad civil-military discipline highly influenced by local conditions. Some schools, such as the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, have chosen to forgo separate courses and instead integrated COIN across the board as a theme in the instruction or as elective credit. Differences between instructors, curricula, material, and methods between and even within Army educational institutions make detailed and accurate assessments of COIN instruction difficult.

To support effective COIN instruction, the Army should fund and resource detailed COIN training and educational support packages for all grades and ranks, including initial entry training. A recurring inquiry to the U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Center and similar organizations involves the search for prepared programs of instruction on COIN subjects for implementation in PME schools and the operational force. While FM 3-24 has an on-line, self-directed individual Training Support Package (TSP), there remains little formalized guidance or resources for instructors to baseline COIN instruction. Most current instruction exists as PowerPoint slides adapted from instructor to instructor, institutionally generated material, or direct lifts of presentations from COIN luminaries such as Dr. David Kilcullen. Ad-hoc and non-doctrinal presentations should not constitute the norm of COIN instruction three years following the publication of FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency and its partner manuals.<sup>7</sup> COIN instruction requires formulation of rigorous learning outcomes applicable to all Soldiers, regardless of rank. These outcomes can be scaled in degree by grade, rank, or position as appropriate. The July 2007 COIN in Professional Military Education Conference at Fort Leavenworth developed potential educational outcomes along these lines. These outcomes would expect Soldiers, at appropriate grade levels, to be able to:

- Analyze Operational Environment and Effects of the Environment. Assess physical, cultural, and human terrain in their area and understand its effects through viewpoint of local population.
- Analyze Insurgency Nature, Strategies, and Fundamentals. Understand how insurgencies begin, grow, and function; identify strategies and methods employed by insurgents to better counter insurgent actions; and understand COIN as an environment requiring action across a broad spectrum of operations.
- Analyze Counterinsurgency Doctrine. Understand principles, paradoxes, and mindset as set forth in FM 3-24 as it differs from conventional warfare.
- Plan, Prepare, Execute, and Assess Operations in Counterinsurgency environment. Support COIN Intelligence Preparation of Environment (IPE) and MDMP. Understand how to integrate political, military, social, and economic programs and actors to achieve stability and reduce insurgent influence.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Fort Leavenworth's Center for Army Leadership (CAL) and Quality Assurance Office (QAO) conducted these surveys in October 2005 and June 2006.

<sup>7</sup> If one counts the interim Army COIN doctrine issued in 2004, five years have elapsed without an implementation plan.

<sup>8</sup> Educational outcomes derived from a July 2007 "Counterinsurgency in Professional Military Education" conference held at Fort Leavenworth.

These outcomes provide a baseline for further and more detailed work to develop nested Training Support Packages (TSPs), and other materials to assist in the normalization of COIN curricula.

Training materials and instructor notes for soldiers did not accompany the publication of FM 3-24.2 Tactics in Counterinsurgency or FM 3-07.1 Security Force Assistance. FM 3-24.2 bridges the theory to application gap present in FM 3-24. FM 3-24, describes the approach to the environment; FM 3-24.2 in turn discusses implementation of that approach at the tactical level. FM 3-07.1, Security Force Assistance, outlines how full-spectrum brigade combat teams will approach the combat advisory mission. A detailed training support package based on of FM 3-24.2 and FM 3-07.1 will assist in the integration of the material into curricula and more importantly, support instructor training. Such an effort benefits the lower level institutions focused on tactical instruction to implement the principles contained in the higher-level manuals.

Finally, the Army should develop COIN Core Mission Essential Task List (CMETL) and Deployed METL (DMETL) tasks for COIN. CMETL and DMETL link the institutional COIN effort to the operational force training requirements. The Army has yet to produce a common set of COIN related METL tasks for the operational force. There are a number of defined tasks such as conducting security force assistance, interagency integration, civil-military operations, political-military integration, and Special Operations Forces(SOF)/General Purpose Forces(GPF) fusion that warrant consideration in a unit's DMETL, along with supporting collective and individual tasks. A common set of tasks derived from doctrine would assist units preparing for operational deployments. This in turn would stimulate the creation of standardized training plans and doctrinal task lists in support of these critical tasks.

The Army was institutionally and educationally unprepared to deal with the COIN environment it confronted in Iraq and Afghanistan. After much adaption, learning, and sacrifice, we have evolved a highly capable COIN capability. The TRADOC educational system provides the foundation of learning that allows Soldiers to shift between operational environments, from the high to low end of the conflict spectrum. The premier training and doctrine institution must take the lead in creating this new breed of Soldier to face these challenges. Counterinsurgency is being addressed to some degree in every TRADOC school. The problem is one of standards, qualification of instructors, doctrinal foundations, and the "soda straw" views of an Army with multiple OIF/OEF tours in different locations at different times. If we are indeed fighting in an "Era of Persistent Conflict", a nested, sequential, and progressive approach to COIN training is required. Developing such a program will force a conscious decision on the tradeoffs between conventional and irregular competencies inherent in any rebalancing of PME curricula. Integrating COIN does not require divestiture of conventional warfare competency. If the Army is serious about implementing the "full spectrum" concept, it must reform its educational base to provide a full spectrum education covering both conventional warfare tasks and prepare for irregular warfare. This instruction must emphasize the "how" to think, to understand the differences and similarities between the two environments and to apply the right approach in the right context at the right time. It is well past time to comprehensively address counterinsurgency in our educational institutions given the ongoing challenges of the current environment.

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