



USAF DOCTRINE UPDATE

on

Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*

It's been said, "The more things change, the more they remain the same," and indeed it appears some counterinsurgency (COIN) fundamentals are enduring. For example, in 1992 the Air Force doctrine on foreign internal defense stated how airpower could best counter insurgencies.

"Aerospace power contributes most effectively... when it functions as an integrated, joint component of the overall internal defense effort. It is least effective when employed *unilaterally* [emphasis added] as a substitute for ground maneuver or long-range artillery. ...air support can be exploited to its greatest advantage by emphasizing surveillance and logistic mobility over firepower."¹

Regarding COIN operations, airpower sometimes catches some unwarranted flak regarding its relevancy to the mission. It should interest Airmen to know that the latest revision to Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, is actually rather complimentary regarding the application of airpower. Discussion points from pages VII-1 to -6 include the following specific call-outs regarding airpower in COIN.

Airpower in COIN

- "Air forces and capabilities may provide considerable asymmetric advantages to counterinsurgents, especially by denying insurgents secrecy and unfettered access to bases of operations." Contributions to the joint COIN fight have expanded since 1992 to include "close air support, precision strikes, personnel recovery (PR), air interdiction, intelligence, communications, electronic warfare (EW), combat support, counterair, airspace control, and air mobility."
- "Space capabilities provide advantages needed for success. Space contributions to COIN include intelligence collection, satellite communications, and positioning, navigation, and timing."
- "The joint force relies on cyberspace to develop a clear understanding of the operational environment."
 - "Offensive cyberspace operations should be considered if the insurgency is utilizing cyberspace to recruit or obtain funding, weapons, equipment, direct operation, or intelligence."
 - "The increasing reliance on cyberspace technology as a means of disseminating messages by the insurgents has provided a line of effort that joint forces can use to attack insurgents."
 - "Defensive cyberspace operations are vital as a force multiplier to identify insurgent activities and create conditions to deny or defeat insurgent operations both in cyberspace and in the physical domains."

¹ U.S. Air Force, AFM 2-11, Foreign Internal Defense Operations (Washington: Department of the Air Force), 3 November 1992, 9-10.

Planning

- “Air planners require visibility and awareness from the time planning begins [in a COIN environment] and throughout each phase, of actions planned at all echelons to provide the most effective air support, so coordination should occur at all levels. Furthermore, COIN planning is often fluid and develops along short planning and execution timelines, necessitating some degree of informal coordination and integration for safety and efficiency.”
- “In determining the appropriate capability to create the desired effect, planners should look at not only the direct but the longer term indirect effects that may be created.”
 - “Collateral damage and civilian casualties can be portrayed by the insurgents as unnecessary, and if perceived as such by the local population, it does much to undermine... COIN efforts.”
 - “Insurgents will inevitably exploit such incidents especially through propaganda, using international media coverage when possible.”

Intelligence

- “Just as in traditional warfare, attacks on key nodes usually reap greater benefits than attacks on dispersed individual targets.”
 - “Effective strike operations are inextricably tied to the availability of actionable intelligence... that identifies and fully characterizes the potential targets of interest.”
 - “Persistence is critical as it is often not known in advance how long a particular node will remain stationary.”

Interoperability between Ground and Air Operations

- “Video downlink and datalink technology have revolutionized real-time air to ground employment allowing air assets to seamlessly integrate into and support the ground commander’s scheme of maneuver. Armed aircraft on-call or scheduled as airborne force escorts may provide ground forces with the critical situational awareness, flexibility for maneuver, and immediate fire support necessary to succeed in the dynamic COIN environment.”
- “Airpower’s ability to quickly support ground forces can reduce the risk to dispersed ground units, lower the need for mutual support between ground units and therefore decrease overall troop requirements.”
 - “This allows counterinsurgents to further disperse ground forces in areas and in numbers that would not be feasible without air power—mutual support can come from the air rather than from other ground forces or indirect ground fire.”
 - “However, joint planners must carefully balance the risk of catastrophic tactical surprise of dispersed ground forces with the benefits gained from dispersion.”

It is incumbent upon Airmen to be able to build on this general discussion and provide more specifics to joint planners. Such information may be found in Air Force Doctrine Annex 3-24, Irregular Warfare, and other cross-linked information within the Air Force doctrine database at <http://doctrine.af.mil/>.

Published 21 January 2014. For more information, e-mail LeMayCtr.weworkflow@maxwell.af.mil. Follow us on Facebook or Twitter (#AFDoctrine) to stay up to date with the changes to doctrine!

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LeMay Center Doctrine: <https://doctrine.af.mil>

LeMay Center (.mil): <https://wwwmil.maxwell.af.mil/au/lemay>

LeMay Center public: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/lemay>

Joint Electronic Library public: <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/> Joint

Electronic Library Plus (CAC enabled) <https://jdeis.js.mil/jdeis/index.jsp?pindex=0>

This communication is in keeping with CSAF direction at the 2012 Doctrine Summit to provide the Service short papers covering doctrine and doctrine-related topics.