

# The Nine Principles of Combined Arms Action in a Counterinsurgency Environment

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*The Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army recommended the following principles and axioms for publication in Military Review. The author, a Special Forces officer, developed these nine principles while serving as the Assistant Chief of Staff, G9, for the 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division, Baghdad, in order to prepare the Division and its Brigade Combat Teams for counterinsurgency operations in a highly complex urban and rural combined, joint, interagency, and international environment.*

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**1. By, With, and Through.** Successful counterinsurgency (COIN) operations are conducted by, with, and through indigenous military, paramilitary, and police forces. Unilateral U.S. action promotes unilateral failure. Local forces know the terrain, the people, and the society and can identify insurgents who seemingly hide in the open. Apply Foreign Internal Defense techniques to build indigenous capability, and then *combat coach* host-nation forces.

**2. Ask Why.** *Understand the operational environment.* Know the geography like your own, respect the people, understand the history of the area, and pull forward the factors that mold the near-term memory of the populace. Know what makes the people comfortable (the friendly threshold), and then give it to them. Know what the enemy wants and is willing to die for (the enemy threshold), and then take him there.

**3. The Enemy.** The enemy order of battle is the *guerrilla* (red force—armed insurgent), the *underground* (yellow force—political and financial arm of the insurgency) and the *auxiliary* (green force—civilian support to the insurgency). The insurgency's objective is to subvert the people's confidence in the government's ability to protect and provide for them so that the insurgent's form of rule can manifest itself.

**4. The Formula.** COIN operations must strike a weighted balance between *lethal operations* to kill or capture the enemy, and *civic action* (*nonlethal*) to remove the causes of instability that fuel the insurgency. Organize into assault, exploitation,

and pursuit forces and develop civil information and intelligence nets to find guerrilla forces, enemy supply lines, and command and control nodes, and then conduct deliberate or hasty attacks and civic action to clear the guerrilla, occupy the underground, and secure the auxiliary. Use the lethality of mechanized forces to encircle and dominate an objective, establish artillery strongpoints throughout the battlespace and interdict enemy activities through observed fire, and use the speed of air and mechanized forces to cover large areas to pursue the enemy to the point of exhaustion. Demand reporting discipline to maximize trust and enhance freedom of maneuver.

**5. Effective Levels.** Command, control and intelligence in a counterinsurgency occur at the lowest level. *It is all bottom up and little top down.* Company commanders are the key leaders, and the company is the unit of success. Large sweeping battalion-level operations fail. Multiple-company operations executed simultaneously or in near sequence, synchronized by the battalion headquarters, work well. Brigade headquarters is the lowest level of effective diplomatic, informational, and economic synchronization with the military objective. Division headquarters establishes priorities, sets parameters, provides resources, manages the end state, and enforces the transition to follow-on U.S. Government support.

**6. Tear Down the Walls.** Walls never prevent forts from falling or cities from succumbing to siege. Forces confined to bases act as magnets for enemy attacks. Offensive night-and-day patrolling is mandatory to protect the force. *Staying put allows the enemy freedom of action.*

**7. Money.** *Money is a weapon system, but not a system for military monopolization.* The military application of money should be predominantly for tactical exploitation, whereas the large application of funding is a Department of State responsibility for foreign aid and reconstruction. The Department of State has enduring investment within the country, whereas the military is only transient. Too often,

the military disburses funding for immediate satisfaction and “feel good” projects because long-term, greater gain programs cannot be effected during the deployment timeframe.

**8. Civil-Military Operations (CMO) are the Other Side of the COIN.** In a counterinsurgency everything is a civil-military operation. *The center of gravity is the population*—what the enemy fights for and what we defend. Counterinsurgency is a war fought over human terrain. Influencing, convincing, managing perceptions, and protecting the populace are keys to a successful COIN campaign. Civil-military operations are the battlespace operating systems manager for nonlethal operations, which are predominant during a counterinsurgency.

**9. Knowing When You Have Won.** You know you have won when the militant threat waged by guerrilla forces is reduced to criminal activity, when subversion fostered by the underground enters the political process, and when the quality of life increases so that the auxiliary turns to the people and the government, not to the insurgents.

## Leadership Axioms to the Nine Principles of Combined Arms Action in a COIN Environment

- Adapt formations to fight against the insurgent.
- Maximize the strengths of all the commands and organizations in the fight and mold them into one focused effort; eliminate redundancy.
- Adapt mindsets to fight the insurgency.
- Move to the enemy; do not fix yourself.
- Think like the enemy, not yourself.
- The leading edge of a COIN fight centers on small-unit tactics and junior-leader empowerment.
- Evolve the COIN campaign as you obtain success.
- Define the enemy order of battle and systematically attack its components.
- Maintain focus on the center of gravity—the populace.

- Flatten command and control structures.
- Condense reporting requirements to daily operations, daily intelligence summaries, and weekly rollups.
- Find the thoroughbreds in the force and let them run.
- Teach Soldiers how to think, not what to think.
- Do not overreact; think first.
- Coordinate key tasks with the diplomatic, informational and economic elements of national power.
- Go on the offense and stay there.
- Master cultural astuteness, and then go beyond that to master the human dimension of war.
- Treat others as you want to be treated.
- Stay ahead of the adapting insurgent.
- Avoid the arrogance of combat.
- Stay in the fight until the job is done; you cannot commute to war.

- Realize that it cannot all be done by one element of national power. Military operations must integrate with diplomatic, informational, and economic lines of operation.
- Get all leaders out on the battlefield.
- Lead from the front, but do not get in the way.
- Ask for the resources needed, and do not overextend beyond the resources available.
- Focus on the basics: shoot, move, and communicate.
- Understand that the key leaders are the junior leaders.
- Consider mission, enemy, terrain and weather, time, troops available, and civilians (METT-TC) during mission analysis.
- Maintain a sense of humor.
- Realize that warriors die in combat, that true warriors respect death, and that warriors can embrace the loss with the family but not be

consumed by it.

- Do not worry about dying in combat; if you do, you will get yourself killed.
- Stay out of the papers and off the wire.
- Write down what you did, what you learned, and how you achieved it, and give the information to other warriors so they will know how to fight and win against the guerrilla, the underground, and the auxiliary. **MR**

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## **MR Book Reviews**

**DEFIANT SUPERPOWER: The New American Hegemony**, Donald E. Nuechterlein, Potomac Books, Inc., Washington, D.C., 2005, \$17.79.

*Defiant Superpower* is Donald Nuechterlein's eighth book on U.S. foreign policy. Nuechterlein, career diplomat and prolific scholar, examines U.S. foreign policy since 9/11 using the widely read analytical model he developed in his earlier books.

Nuechterlein's now-traditional framework divides national interests into four categories—defense of the homeland, economic well-being, favorable world order, and promotion of values—and examines those interests in terms of the intensity with which they are pursued (survival, vital, major, and peripheral). In the opening chapter he concludes that empire is not an accurate or useful way to describe the current U.S. role in the world and prefers the term "hegemonic power." For Nuechterlein, hegemonic power describes a strong degree of influence over world affairs that is less direct and overt than the term "empire."

The United States has exercised various forms of hegemony since

the end of World War II, but in the last 10 years or so, U.S. hegemony has been unbalanced by competing powers. Other nations have become reluctant to tackle difficult foreign-policy issues, and global terrorism has emerged as a threat. Since the late 1990s, the United States has felt compelled to go it alone, hence Nuechterlein's term "defiant hegemony." It is important to note, however, that he dates the emergence of defiant hegemony to the late 1990s and President Bill Clinton's second administration, *not* to President George W. Bush's administration.

In an ominous tone, Nuechterlein discusses the consequences of this defiant approach—international, diplomatic, and popular opinions unfavorable to U.S. policies, and domestic weariness at the various costs of defiant hegemony. Yet he does not show what the practical effect of that disapproval means to the United States, nor does he offer an alternative beyond the vague prescription that the United States should seek international support whenever possible. While diplomatic opposition and unfavorable poll numbers abroad are not good things, they might well

be a price worth paying for national security or victory. The book does not offer a method for weighing the two competing interests.

Nuechterlein specifically highlights the domestic and international opposition to Bush's decision to attack Iraq in 2003 and questions the country's ability to sustain the continuing costs of the war. Yet he agrees with Bush's decision. The reader is left looking for the final reckoning in Nuechterlein's analysis.

While Nuechterlein works hard to present a balanced critique, he may have tried too hard. After having read the book, we are left wondering what the point of the exercise was. The book is neither judgmental nor prescriptive; it is essentially a textbook that leaves conclusions to the reader.

*Defiant Superpower* might be worth reading for its analysis of the decision to attack Iraq using Nuechterlein's well-accepted framework for understanding national interests. Ultimately, however, its limited scope and muddled conclusions fail to satisfy.

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