



LISTEN TO THE AIRMAN

Lieutenant Colonel Gian P. Gentile, U.S. Army

ALL ARMY OFFICERS need to read *Shortchanging the Joint Fight? An Airmen's Assessment of FM 3-24 and the Case for Developing Truly Joint Doctrine*, a monograph recently published by the Air University Press. In this 115-page piece, Major General Charles L. Dunlap Jr. provides an airman's insights into the U.S. Army's new counterinsurgency manual, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. We Soldiers should not dismiss Dunlap because he is an Airman; in fact, we should listen closely to what he has to say in this most important argument.

Dunlap pointedly addresses the underlying assumptions of FM 3-24 and how these assumptions have been turned into principles and then into immutable laws that cannot be challenged. Why, for example, he asks, must the people always be the so-called center of gravity in a counterinsurgency (COIN) operation? Clausewitz teaches that a center of gravity is something to be discovered. The authors of FM 3-24 have done the discovering for us; we seem to be blindly obeying. This is not to say that in a given COIN operation the people might be the center of gravity, thereby requiring a large contingent of boots on the ground; but counterinsurgency does not always have to be fought that way.

After almost five years of COIN operations in Iraq and even longer in Afghanistan, the U.S. Army's operational doctrine no longer comes from FM 3-0, *Operations*; it comes from FM 3-24. We have become a COIN-only force. The dominance of COIN thinking in the Army has also made us dogmatic, diminishing our ability to think creatively about strategy and operations. We are in an FM 3-24-built box and are unable to see out of it.

Consider this example. In "Operation Mountain Lion: CJTF 76 in Afghanistan, Spring 2006" (*Military Review*, January-February 2008), brigade commander Michael A. Coss writes about his experience conducting COIN operations in Afghanistan. The article is important because it conveys a senior commander's perspective about his unit's conduct of operations in that country. But the article betrays the deep-seated dogmatism on counterinsurgency that has infiltrated the U.S. Army. When discussing the importance of the people in a COIN operation, Colonel Coss notes that the population is "the

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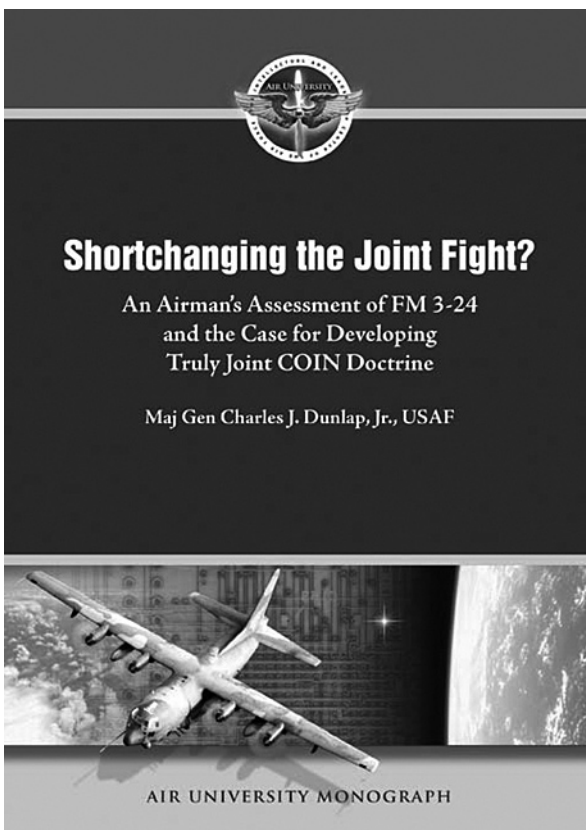
PHOTO: CPT Kevin Hadley, 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, leads a patrol in a market area in Rusafa, Baghdad, Iraq, 27 January 2008. (U.S. Air Force, SSGT Jason T. Bailey)

center of gravity in ANY insurgency” (caps mine). Again, why must this always be the case? From a theoretical and historical standpoint, it certainly does not have to be. Moreover, from a creative operational standpoint, when trying to discover what a center of gravity might be, it doesn’t have to be—and should not always be—the people. If it is, then we have already predetermined what our response will be: many boots on the ground marching to the exact beat of FM 3-24.

The value of reading Dunlap’s article is that

it lays bare the assumptions and philosophy that underpin FM 3-24 and how it has put the Army in a dogmatic box. The implications of our current dogmatism are huge for where we end up in future operations and how we rebuild the U.S. Army after Iraq.

The irony that one derives after reading Dunlap’s article is that disciples of FM 3-24 see themselves as “out of the box” thinkers when, in fact, they fit very neatly in a ground-based box, one they are unwilling to look beyond. **MR**



To access the monograph discussed in the above article, see http://www.au.af.mil/au/au/au/press/ARI_Papers/DunlapARI1.pdf

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