

COUNTERINSURGENCY IN THE 21st CENTURY: CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH. A BRITISH VIEW.

(US GOVERNMENT COUNTERINSURGENCY CONFERENCE, WASHINGTON, 28-29 SEP 06)

by

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INTRODUCTION

I have deliberately chosen the title of my talk as `...A British View`, rather than `...The British View`. My remarks and comments are personal, and do not necessarily reflect UK Government policy. But as Director of the UK's Defence Academy, I would like to give you a very quick introduction to the Academy¹. It brings together all the post-graduate education and training for all the Armed Services and for Ministry of Defence (MOD) civil servants. There is no direct equivalent in the United States. We no longer have Single Service command and staff colleges. We now have one Joint College. All our technology and management training is also now joint, and conducted at the Defence College of Management and Technology. And our strategic training and education, which in the US is carried out at the NDU, is carried out in UK at the Royal College of Defence Studies in London. I am responsible for all three of these colleges, and thus for all education and training undertaken by British officers after they have left initial officer training. I am also responsible for non-technical research, and thus for the Advanced Research and Assessment Group headed by Chris Donnelly. Co-located on our main site at Shrivenham, about 60 miles west of London, is the MOD's Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre. Shrivenham is now, therefore, the centre of military thinking in the UK.

COUNTER-INSURGENCY IN THE 21st CENTURY

At the Defence Academy we have been focusing, for rather obvious reasons, on the challenges of counter-insurgency in the 21st Century. Much of this work has been historical, but also harnessing the more current experience and intellectual capital of our staff and students, as well as engaging the expertise of our Advanced Research and Assessment Group. Indeed, the recently published and much acclaimed book, `The Ideological War on Terror`² is co-edited by the head of the Group's Conflict Studies Research Centre, Anne Aldis. An important part of our work has been in attempting to gain a better understanding of the nature of insurgencies, in particular the nature of the relatively new phenomenon of trans-national insurgency, as well as the implications for a more integrated, comprehensive approach to the business of counter-insurgency and the structures that are needed to facilitate it. I would now like to share some of these thoughts with you, and outline the steps that are currently being taken in the UK to create a national framework for such a comprehensive approach.

In the first few years of the 21st Century we have already seen the increased incidence of insurgencies worldwide, their increasing complexity, and the development of trans-national insurgency, the subject of studies by authors such as Rick Brennan and others in their RAND study `Future Insurgency Threats`³ (published in 2005) and by John Mackinlay in his Whitehall Paper `Defeating Complex Insurgencies`⁴ (also 2005). And if threat is the product of intent and capability, then the emergence of a serious insurgent intent, represented by the global Jihad of Islamist extremism, at the same time as the emergence of serious capability to facilitate that intent, represented by the internet, adds up to a serious threat indeed. Understanding the nature of this

threat is an important first step, but time prevents me from doing anything more than underlining the main points:

- that what we face goes beyond terrorism, the purpose of which within our definition⁵ is `...to coerce or intimidate governments or societies to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives`, to insurgency: `an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constitutional government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.` In this case, the aim of at least some of the movement is the overthrow of a government or governments; and for some, the overthrow of the whole global political status quo. Within this insurgency, terrorism is a tool.
- but that the movement is `organized` only in the sense that it has an overall ideological and strategic intent, expressed `top-down` by Usama Bin Laden; the era of the internet means that it does not have to be organized in a traditional sense in what it does; and, indeed, it does not, contrary to popular belief, operate `top down`, but very much `bottom up`, although its structure is almost flat; it is an exemplary Network Enabled Capability;
- that the insurgency spreads like a virus, and in structure that virus is an amoeba - that is to say it changes its shape and form as and when it needs to in order to avoid counter-measures; it can be at the same time both trans-national and a series of national insurgencies;
- that there is no single `front line` for the insurgency, external or internal, nor for the counter-insurgency.

Some might argue that the question of whether we are engaged in countering trans-national terrorism or trans-national insurgency is largely a question of semantics. I believe it is more than that, not least because we tend to think of countering terrorism as a largely security function, whereas we more readily recognize that countering insurgency requires a much more multi-faceted approach. If we attempt to counter insurgency with the tools of counter-terrorism, we are likely to be disappointed with the results.

The UK Armed Forces` current doctrine for counter-insurgency is contained within Army Field Manual `Combined Operations`⁶ published in 2001, and in a Joint publication `The Military Contribution to Peace Support Operations`⁷ published in 2004. The process is ongoing to formulate new doctrine for what is being called Countering Irregular Activity, and to publish this next year. The role of the Defence Academy is, along with others, to provide input to the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre. Much of our thinking has been focussing on the principles that should guide us in countering insurgency in the 21st Century, and I would like to share with you the four tentative conclusions that I consider most relevant to this conference.

The first is an observation which should serve as warning - that it would appear that the lessons of counter-insurgency are easy to forget. States and armed forces involved in counter-insurgencies often seem to be making the same mistakes twice. There is little excuse for this because the lessons of counter-insurgency campaigns in the 20th century are remarkably well documented. For example, the lessons of what was called the Malayan Emergency (1948-60) seem to have been forgotten particularly quickly. As James Corum has pointed out, a lesson from that

campaign, emphasized as early as 1950 in 'The Report of the Police Commission of Malaya'⁸, was the importance of an impartial and disciplined police force. Yet the British commander in Cyprus in the mid 1950s was basing his campaign on a police force renowned for its partiality, ill-discipline, corruption and brutality – with predictable results⁹. Moreover, it took us Brits a remarkably long time to learn other well documented lesson during the campaign in Northern Ireland. A further example of reinventing the wheel is, as has been pointed out at this conference, the previous and largely forgotten counter-insurgency strategy issued by President Kennedy in 1962¹⁰. Equally relevant to this conference, Sir Robert Thompson in his much quoted book 'Defeating Communist Insurgency'¹¹ lays down as one of his principles of counter insurgency:

*The government must have an overall plan. This plan must cover not just the security measures and military operations. It must include all political, social, economic, administrative, police and other measures which have a bearing on the insurgency. Above all it must clearly define roles and responsibilities to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure that there are no gaps in the government's field of action.*¹²

It seems that we are reluctant to learn the lessons of counter-insurgency. Perhaps because, as Max Boot points out¹³, most military services have a 'big war' culture and 'conceive their role in big war terms'¹⁴. Perhaps because, quite simply, we don't study enough history. But probably also because every insurgency is *sui generis* – of its own kind. Thus we should expect countering trans-national insurgency to require some very different actions from countering national insurgencies. But we assess that some of the principles hold good for both, and the remaining conclusions fall into that category.

The second conclusion, and one particularly relevant for us military people, is that insurgency is war, but it is not war. By which I mean that insurgency is certainly 'the continuation of policy by other means'¹⁵ and is therefore within Clausewitz's excellent definition of war. Furthermore, counter-insurgency often looks like war particularly to the participants, because it often, as in Iraq and Afghanistan today, involves high intensity combat operations – warfighting – and it therefore may appear, like war itself, to be a primarily military activity. But the nature of insurgency means that countering it is far more complex than warfighting, and an approach which sees counterinsurgency in purely, or even primarily, military terms is not the path to success. And yet militaries in general tend to view it in these terms: perhaps as a result of their indoctrination and training; perhaps due to a tendency towards over-simplification and an inherent uneasiness with complexity and ambiguity; perhaps partly a reluctance to 'waste' precious training time in the time-consuming business of understanding the nature of insurgency. The result for the military is often to treat counter-insurgency as if it were warfighting. Failure to understand this can result, amongst other things, in the disregard of another of Clausewitz's most important dicta:

*'The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and the commander have to make is to establish...the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.'*¹⁶

The third conclusion is that despite the ability of insurgents to operate across borders, despite the facility that the internet provides them to rely less on the population of the country in which they are operating, and despite the fact that to all intents and purposes many insurgents live their lives in the virtual world rather than the one they actually inhabit, the successful trans-national

insurgency still depends to a great extent for its strength and vitality on popular support. Thus, driving a wedge between the insurgent and the people - separating the little fishes from the water, in Mao's analogy - still remains key to countering insurgency. Indeed, although it is hard to think in terms of a trans-national and largely virtual insurgency having a centre of gravity - 'the hub of its power and movement on which everything depends'¹⁷ - popular support for the insurgency is close to being the centre of gravity of the trans-national insurgency, just as it is for national insurgency; but here it is the support, or at least acquiescence, of national and trans-national populations - people at local, national, regional levels and globally - including in non Muslim countries. So, as in national counter-insurgency campaigns, the battleground is the mind - the mind of these people - 'hearts and minds', if you prefer. Our studies show that history has no example of a successful counter-insurgency waged by a liberal democracy that did not win the hearts and minds of the population. There are examples of successful counter-insurgencies achieved by totalitarian regimes without doing so - in such circumstances, hearts and minds were irrelevant. But not liberal democracies. Three points that history would suggest about the process of winning hearts and minds deserve attention here. First, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to do this without being perceived to occupy the moral high ground and to possess legitimacy. And I underline 'being perceived'. It is too easy to believe that we ourselves occupy the moral high ground and possess legitimacy, while forgetting that this is immaterial if we do not do so in the eyes of those we are trying to win over to our argument. The ideological dimension is too often overlooked. Second, that the focus on hearts and minds can present difficulties for militaries where success is traditionally measured with attritional, warfighting metrics such as the number of enemy you kill.¹⁸ But counter-insurgencies are not won primarily by killing insurgents.¹⁹ The change required in military culture is easy to under-estimate. Not least, it requires the military to fully understand the culture of the local population - this is a matter of education, not pre-deployment training - and to comprehend the mind of the insurgent, and to do this requires at least some degree of empathy. As Harper Lee writes in 'To Kill A Mockingbird', the only way to understand another person is 'to climb into their skin and walk around in it.' Third, the implications of having to win hearts and minds on a global scale, are of course huge, not least in terms of resources and time. This will take not years, but decades - and we should not encourage unrealistic expectations to the contrary. General Templar saw the danger of doing so in Malaya. In 1953, in a visibly improving situation, Templar was asked at a press conference whether the Emergency could be declared finished. To which he replied, 'I'll shoot the bastard who says this emergency is over.'²⁰

The last and perhaps most relevant of these conclusions is simply stated: that, just as in countering national insurgencies, if the approach to countering a trans-national insurgency is not multi-disciplinary and comprehensive it will fail: 'multi-disciplinary' in that it must consist of all possible lines of operation - diplomatic, information, military, economic, but also others including political, social and legal; and 'comprehensive' in that these lines must work together in a way that is mutually reinforcing, bound together by leadership, a common objective and an agreed plan. If these lines are not bound together into a rope, they're just bits of string. Easy to say, harder to achieve.

CREATING THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Creating such a comprehensive approach is the subject of the remainder of my talk. In the UK, although the requirement for such an approach was well documented in post-operational reports and post-campaign histories as far back as Malaya in the early 1950s, it was re-learned, or at any rate re-identified, in the peace support operations which followed the end of the Cold War, notably in Bosnia in the early 1990s. UN operations there saw a wide variety of different players on

the ground - local civilian authorities, military and para-militaries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media – and there was increasing recognition that UK departments of state other than the Ministry of Defence (MOD) - notably the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and what is now the Department for International Development (DFID) could make important contributions. When NATO's Implementation Force took over in 1996, with a step change in security and stability, there was scope for a more structured approach with the potential for some coordination between players. When I arrived in 1996 to take command of Multi National Division South West I was lucky enough to have representatives from a number of OGDs attached to my headquarters, in particular a fairly senior representative from what is now DFID, together with a development budget of about \$10M for quick impact projects. The DFID representative had the authority to spend this money, with minimum referral to London for authority, paid it direct into the hands of those who did the work (no middle men) on any projects which helped in reconstruction and stability, and which supported the political and military objectives. Over 500 relatively small projects were successfully concluded, effectively breathing economic life back into local communities, and, as important from my point of view, with the help of a focused media campaign, cementing stability and support of UK and NATO forces, and undermining those who opposed us. In a word: DIME.

For operations in Kosovo in the late 1990s, more formal coordination was established at the operational (or theatre) level, with representation from OGDs in the MOD's Crisis Response Cell and at the UK's Permanent Joint Headquarters. Operations in Iraq underlined the importance not only of a comprehensive approach from within a single government and across the multinational force, but also the need for partnership with the indigenous government and at every level from national to local. In parallel, it became evident to many that coherence could only be achieved in strategic level processes were harmonized across all the instruments and agencies. The UK Government recognized this with, amongst other things, establishment of a joint multi-Departmental organisation, the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (or PCRU), to coordinate the cross-Government response following the conflict phase of overseas deployments. With representatives from the FCO, DFID and the MOD, the PCRU consists of a small number of permanent staff, but with the ability to draw on a large pool of experts who are able to deploy to a theatre to help with support and its coordination. It is at present carrying out this role in Afghanistan. The PCRU's formation has been an important step in establishing a more comprehensive approach across Government, and its remit and function have extended well beyond post conflict. Having experienced at first hand the requirement for a comprehensive approach on operations, the MOD has been and is a strong protagonist for the extension of the approach across Government. For the past year there has been a cross-Government Comprehensive Approach Working Group with participation from the Cabinet Office, FCO, DFID, MOD and the PCRU with the stated objective of 'improved joined-up approaches to civilian-military planning and training'. Work towards this objective has progressed faster in some areas than others. One of the first steps to common understanding will be an agreed definition, and the MOD proposal, currently under discussion by the other Group members is: 'Commonly understood principles and collaborative processes that enhance the likelihood of a favourable outcome within a particular situation.'²¹ At the same time there are a number of issues which the Group is also addressing, These include the different cultural perceptions in each department, collaborative working practices, potential structures and, not least, the issue of cost and budgets. Greater progress has been made in other areas, for example that of an agreed cross-Government information strategy.

It is worth emphasizing that the Group's work is to develop a comprehensive approach towards deployed operations. It is not currently focussed on a comprehensive approach to trans-

national insurgency, nor does it focus on attempts within UK to combat radicalism within Muslim communities. This latter work is undertaken elsewhere in Government and involves many different departments and agencies. It is cross-government by nature and could therefore be described as a comprehensive approach. It is directed towards Muslim communities in UK, seeking better integration within British society, a greater sense of belonging, greater involvement in national institutions, such as membership of the police and the armed forces, and greater involvement in the political process - national, regional and local. This involves outreach to the Muslim communities, including that from the armed forces. An important contribution to the subject has been the `Shrivenham Paper` on the subject of Tackling Extremism Among Muslim Youth by one of our researchers, Mehmood Naqshbandi.²²

The focus of the separate work to develop a comprehensive approach to deployed operations is on developing agreement between Government departments to structures and common doctrine, but it is also recognized that the approach must embrace a multinational dimension, both in terms of bilateral cooperation and that with international institutions. Particularly close cooperation exists with US doctrine organizations, both Joint and Single Service. Activity with international institutions includes that with the UN with its Integrated Mission Planning, with NATO and its Collective Strategy and Enhanced CIMIC, and with the European Union and what it calls its Concerted Planning and Action. But achieving a multinational comprehensive approach will involve much wider engagement and work.

A key area to achieving the Comprehensive Approach, and the area of direct concern to me, is in education and training. If we are to be prepared for the challenges of tomorrow and for the comprehensive approach to which we aspire, then training must embrace the comprehensive approach: those who will be working together need to train together. By a process of evolution rather than design, the primary institution for this has become the Defence Academy. And in a rather ad hoc (some might say British) sort of way, we have been adding bits on to our courses as we go along. All our major courses have had multinational participation for some time, but we have been increasing the participation from OGDs, and we now have participation from them and from our Agencies, either full time membership of the student body, or more often, and as is the case with NGOs, participation on specific modules of the courses. Our Advanced Research and Assessment Group also has participation from OGDs including some visiting fellows resident at the Academy, as well as participation from academic experts in the security field, both national and international. Indeed, there will be people in the audience who are in this category. OGDs and NGOs also now participate in many of the exercises held by our Permanent Joint Headquarters, and pre-deployment training for formations and units going on operations overseas. All of this has been an important step forward; those who train together come with very different philosophies and preconceived ideas about each other, and leave at least understanding each other's point of view, and what each party brings to the table. We are looking to increase still further the comprehensive nature of our student body. Another ongoing initiative at the Defence Academy is the establishment of a series of multi-national, multi-agency workshops with participation from a very senior level of officers and officials from across Government, from the governments and armed services of other nations, and from NGOs national and international. These short workshops, typically held over a weekend at Shrivenham, will, we believe, be instrumental in bringing together those who may find themselves working together on deployed operations, and should also be able to provide a more joined up approach to the business of countering trans-national insurgencies. The first of these workshops takes place in the Spring. I am, however, always seeking to stress, particularly with OGDs, that this is not the MOD trying to corner the market in cross-Government training or trying to direct such training. It's just that we happen to have the facilities and the

courses, and that in the absence of anything else it makes sense for us to host those who wish to carry out training or indeed research with us.

Finally, a few points by way of conclusion:

- At the UK's Defence Academy we are focussing on the new challenges of counter-insurgency in the 21st Century, in particular those of trans-national insurgency.
- Our initial conclusions are that while trans-national insurgency will require some unique counter measures, some of the principles of countering national insurgencies remain highly relevant; foremost amongst these are the need to understand that insurgency is war, but it is not war; the continued importance of driving a wedge between the insurgent and the people; and the need for a multi-disciplinary, comprehensive approach.
- In seeking to give substance to the comprehensive approach, the MOD is joining with OGDs across government to develop and use the approach, and is also working with international partners and organisations. Like any change programme, ownership from the top is key. Training and education is an important aspect, and the Defence Academy has become the centre for this in the UK.
- Lastly, perhaps the major challenge is the multinational dimension, not least in seeking to achieve a comprehensive multinational approach

¹ See www.defenceacademy.ac.uk

² Anne Aldis and Graeme P Herd, *The Ideological War on Terror. Worldwide Strategies for Countering Terrorism*, (Routledge, 2007).

³ Rick Brennan et al, *Future Insurgency Threat*, (RAND DRR-3443-OSD SOLIC, 2005).

⁴ John Mackinlay, *Defeating Complex Insurgencies*, Whitehall Paper 64 (RUSI, 2005).

⁵ *Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01*.

⁶ AFM *Combined Operations*, 71749 (2001).

⁷ *Joint Warfare Publication 3-50* (2004).

⁸ Quoted in James Corum, *Training Indigenous Forces in Counter-Insurgency*, (SSS, Carlisle, 2006) p.14.

⁹ 'If Harding carefully had planned to alienate the entire Greek population of the island and push the moderate Greeks into full support for EOKA he could not have done better than by his policy of unleashing a horde of untrained, poorly-led. Turkish police on the population...The abusive behaviour of the Cyprus Police was a godsend to the insurgents.' Corum p.34.

¹⁰ *United States Overseas Internal Defense Policy*, National security Action Memorandum 182 of 24 august, 1962.

¹¹ Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, (Praeger, 1960).

¹² Thompson, p.55.

¹³ Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, (Basic Books, 2002).

¹⁴ Boot, p.283.

¹⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton UP, 1984), p.87

¹⁶ Clausewitz, p.88.

¹⁷ Clausewitz, p.595. In UK doctrine, Centre of Gravity is defined as 'The characteristics, capabilities, or localities from which a nation, an alliance or a military force or other grouping derives its freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight.' (AAP-6).

¹⁸ And not just militaries: for example 'Every quantitative measurement we have show that we're winning this war.' Robert McNamara, July 1962, quoted in Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie* (Cape, 1989) p. 90

¹⁹ Successful counter-insurgencies are invariably based on an approach which seeks to outmanoeuvre the opponent – what in British doctrine is described as the Manoeuvrist Approach. Unsuccessful counter-insurgencies have sometimes started with this approach, but been sucked into a war of attrition, thus playing into the hands of the insurgents.

²⁰ Corum, p.35.

²¹ DCDC *Joint Doctrine Note 4/05*.

²² Mehmood Naqshbandi, *Problems and Practical Solutions to Tackle Extremism; and Muslim Youth and Community Issues*, Shrivenham Paper Number 1 (Defence Academy of the UK, Aug 2006).