

Counterinsurgency and Political Control

US Military Strategies
Regarding Regional Conflict

Jochen Hippler

INEF Report
81/2006



Institute for Development and Peace

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

Jochen Hippler: Counterinsurgency and Political Control. US Military Strategies Regarding Regional Conflict. Duisburg: Institute for Development and Peace, University Duisburg-Essen (INEF Report, 81/2006).



IMPRINT

Editor:

Institute for Development and Peace, INEF
at the University of Duisburg-Essen

Logo design: Carola Vogel

Layout design: Sascha Werthes, Jeanette Schade

Cover photo: Jochen Hippler

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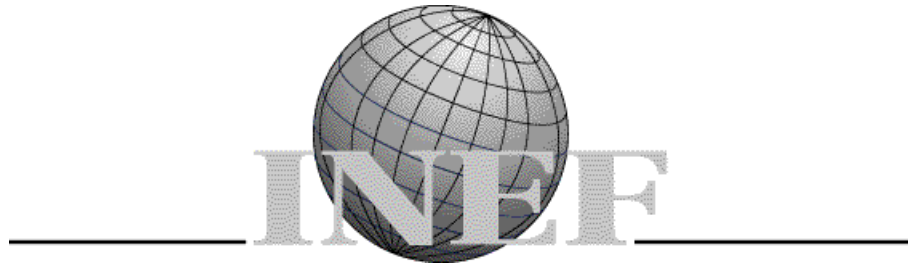
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E-Mail: inef@uni-due.de

Homepage: <http://www.inef.de>

ISSN 0941-4967



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Institute for Development and Peace
Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden (INEF)

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Abstract

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With US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan fighting rather ruthless counterinsurgency campaigns, the topic of insurgency and counterinsurgency is of pressing relevance. At the same time, questions of internal violence in developing countries have generally been high on the political and academic agenda in the context of “failed” and “failing states”.

This paper describes and analyzes US military doctrines in regard to controlling regional conflicts. It introduces the relevant US military approaches to the academic discourse.

The focal points of analysis are the strategies and concepts of the US military (mainly of the US Army and the US Marine Corps) in regard to counterinsurgency. The links between military combat and non-combat operations of the armed forces and civilian policies are of special concern.

In order to understand the US counterinsurgency strategies, this paper places them within both a historical perspective and the context of the development of military doctrine. It discusses the concepts of “Small Wars”, “Low-Intensity Conflict” (LIC or “Low-Intensity Warfare”), “Military Operations Other than War” (MOOTW) and “Stability and Support Operations”, which all deal with questions of pro-insurgency, counterinsurgency and related topics. One of the results of the analyses is that the political and social aspects of counterinsurgency are of key importance. The US armed forces are quite aware of this in principle, but to a surprising degree fail to transform this into operational concepts. Counterinsurgency is not a matter of military conquest, but of social control. And while the US Army and the Marine Corps clearly understand this in principle, they often are at a loss as to how to achieve this on the ground. The political context, US governmental policies and the military culture often lead to practices contradicting key elements of the military doctrine.

Insurgencies and counterinsurgencies are basically struggles for legitimacy, both locally and internationally, using political and military means. In a context of often unilateral or even imperial US foreign policy or policies of doubtful legality, the US armed forces may be militarily superior to all potential foes, but quite vulnerable in the competition for political legitimacy.

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1. Introduction:

Counterinsurgency as a Research Topic

Academic peace research and security studies have at least since the end of the Cold War focused on topics that relate to regional instability, or the management and prevention of violent conflict in fragile Third World or transition countries. Questions like the importance of ethnic or religious fragmentation, the role of economic factors ("greed or grievance") and the functions of states and governance mechanisms in conflict dynamics have received special attention. It has become quite obvious that inter-state wars have decreased in number and probably importance, while intra-state violence, civil wars or non-state actors have been on the rise. While inter-state war has not and will not completely disappear, as the US and British war against Iraq has demonstrated, situations of civil war, insurgencies, state breakdown and genocide have claimed the greatest number of victims. Fragmentation of states and societies and its potential for violence have been important areas of interest.

The discussion on how to respond to these situations of internal instability and violent conflict has taken several tracks. The spectrum of approaches ranges from "conflict prevention" on the one hand to "humanitarian interventionism" on the other, from attempts to deal with conflicts before they turn violent to using military means to end, manage or at least reduce human suffering from them.

The different courses of discussion have produced valuable insights with regard to pre-conflict, violence and war, and post-conflict situations. Often the results have indicated the

importance of states as crucial factors in internal violence, either because of their uncontrolled strength, their instrumentalizing of or being instrumentalized by competing groups in societies, or because of their weakness or fragmentation. Therefore terms like "weak states", "failed" (or "failing") states and "quasi-states" have gained prominence, and the issues of "state-building" and "nation-building" have been seriously discussed as proper responses to crises or as means of crisis prevention (Hipppler 2005b).

Taken together, the questions of how to avoid and how to manage violent conflict have very often been connected not primarily to an analysis of inter-state relations, but to dynamics inside states and societies. As a result the responses to political violence have also mostly focused on these aspects. The issue of how to deal with the internal political, social, economic or security affairs of a country threatened by or already disrupted by internal violence has ranked high on the academic and political agenda.

To some it might sound surprising, but very similar questions have been dealt with extensively in the military services of some countries. Sometimes the context may differ, being either "Small Wars", nation-building, low-intensity warfare, Operations Other than War, or counterinsurgency. But many military analysts have become quite aware of the problem of intra-state violence. For instance, Steven Metz and Raymond Millen of the US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, put the problem this way:



"Today the world has entered another period when sustained, large-scale conventional war between states is unlikely, at least in the near term. But mounting global discontent arising from globalization; the failure of economic development to keep pace with expectations; the collapse of traditional political, economic, and social orders; widespread anger and resentment; environmental decay; population pressure; the presence of weak regimes; the growth of transnational organized crime; and the widespread availability of arms are making insurgency common and strategically significant. This significance is likely to continue for at least a decade, perhaps longer" (Metz and Millen 2004: 1).

Other authors have connected the problems in question with the end of the Cold War,¹ which has changed international relations in general and the internal conditions in many Third World nations. Lt.Col. Charles Hasskamp of the US Air Force put it this way:

"The "containment" effect of the cold war largely prevented the window panes of the global structure from breaking and showering glass onto states other than the superpowers. Unfortunately, the two sides often ignored the task of helping to build long-term, self-sustaining economic and political capabilities for the newer nations. Providing military and economic aid to weak and corrupt regimes did little to promote democratic politics, market economies, or the institutions to support them. When the "shutters" came off, a number of the newer countries were revealed to be failed nation-states or close to that status. One result is that global security problems have accelerated and are increasingly concentrated in the old third world countries; they can generally be categorized as being political, economic, ethnic, or religious in nature. This is evidenced, for example, by recent conflicts and turmoil in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia, and Haiti. These conflicts generate emotional appeals for humanitarian or peace operations regardless of relevance to fundamental US interests" (Hasskamp 1998).

Similar questions have been dealt with by the military forces of quite a few countries, mostly in the

1 Compare also: Snow 1993, where regional conflict after the end of the Cold War and counterinsurgency are analyzed.

United States. But these military discussions have rarely been recognized by the academic community, and peace research specialists have all but ignored them, especially in Europe.² To some degree this is understandable, because the starting points and political contexts of both communities have been quite different from each other: while peace research is either a subject of academic analysis or starts from the assumption of the imperative to prevent political violence or reduce its volume, armed forces are not organizations for promoting discovery and the growth of knowledge, but tools for achieving what is perceived as the "national interest". Military forces are not primarily in the business of analyzing the world, but of providing means of coercion to control it. This implies different "cultures" within the academic and military communities: while one tries to analyze and understand conflict and war (and deals with them mostly from a distance, and by using words, writing books and articles) the other is an important actor within them. Ultimately the function of the military is to fight and win wars, which is far from being an academic exercise.³

Still, it would not be advisable to ignore the discussions, strategies and policies inside the US military with regard to regional conflicts, for two obvious reasons. Firstly, although the strategizing of the US military

2 Note the difference compared with the 1980s, when many academics and peace researchers were experts in nuclear strategy and ballistic missile systems and quite closely followed the US military discussions in these fields.

3 The US Army would clearly agree with this. Its Field Manual FM 100-5, Operations, used the following formulation 1993: "The Army's primary focus is to fight and win the nation's wars".

may have different starting points and different goals than academic discourse, it still can offer valuable insights into the character of conflict dynamics and possible ways to deal with them. This does not imply any requirement for the academic researcher to adopt a military perspective, but rather to find out whether there is anything that could be learned from it. Since armed forces are supposed to deal with violence and to fight and win wars, they often have tried to analyze and understand them first. In the words of a US Army Manual: "Insurgents must be understood before they can be defeated." (US Department of the Army 1992: no page given) It is worth looking at these attempts to understand. Secondly, the US armed forces are a major player in the field. In many regional conflicts the US forces do play an important or at least a contributing role, e.g. by advising, training or supporting local forces, by providing arms and ammunition, by developing strategies to deal with specific situations of conflict or violence, or by directly intervening. It is therefore important to know and understand the conceptual context the US armed forces are operating in, and their basic assumptions.

In the current situation, with US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan actively fighting rather ruthless counterinsurgency campaigns, the topic is of pressing relevance. The future of both countries, of the entire Middle East, and of the US role as a unilaterally acting global enforcer of imposed discipline will be decided to a great degree by the success or failure of these counterinsurgency campaigns. And Burnett/Whyte in a recent article have drawn a connection between the fashionable concepts of a "New Terrorism", Western counterterrorism

(including in Iraq) and traditional counterinsurgency:

"In political terms, the claim is that the new terrorism represents a break from the past. [...] [I]t is highly illuminating [...] that we see, in the example of Iraq, a simultaneous call for a return to the old counterinsurgency strategy. Despite all of the hyperbole surrounding the new 'netwar' and the new terrorism, it is being argued that this enemy should be dealt with in precisely the same manner as 20th century colonial rebellions" (Burnett and Whyte 2005: 14).

It is indeed interesting that a political/military strategy with such deep historical roots as counterinsurgency has been reinvented so many times and is of considerable significance in so many different political contexts and in such recent developments.

This paper will try to describe the historical development of concepts and US military doctrines in regard to controlling regional conflicts, and will attempt to systematize and analyze them. The goal is therefore a modest one, namely primarily to introduce the US military approaches to academic discourse. At some points it will also be necessary to ask whether some elements of their thinking can contribute to understanding violent conflict and political approaches to deal with them. And it will be of interest whether US military strategies may pose an additional problem for conflict resolution, and how these strategies may influence civilian actors in the field. The focus on the US armed forces results both from the fact that these are politically and militarily much more important than others, that their strategies on regional control and intervention are highly developed, and that these also are more accessible than those of other countries. This does not imply any ignoring of the fact that other countries have also been deeply in-





volved in similar operations (such as Britain, France, Israel, the Soviet Union and Russia), and that others have developed their specific approaches to counterinsurgency, like a “British school” of thought.⁴ Third World countries in some cases also have developed comparable traditions, India being one example (Varma 1988).

“*Doctrine* is the concise expression of how Army forces contribute to unified action in campaigns, major operations, battles, and engagements. ... Doctrine touches all aspects of the Army. It facilitates communication among soldiers no matter where they serve, contributes to a shared professional culture, and serves as the basis for curricula in the Army Education System. Army doctrine provides a common language and a common understanding of how Army forces conduct operations.” (US Department of the Army 2001: 1-14)

While this paper will try to analyze some of the intended and unintended impacts, problems and spill-over effects of US strategies, it still is of an introductory character. To acquaint the reader with US military thinking, it will extensively quote from military sources, especially when dealing with counterinsurgency. Wherever possible, internet addresses will be provided for documents and other sources to allow easy access for the interested reader.

At the outset a few remarks on terminology are in order. As in the academic context, the military debate also suffers from a lack of clarity in regard to terminology. The questions

we are dealing with are quite complex, and the language we use is not always clear and precise, but can further confuse the topics involved. And while it will be necessary to deal with the terminology later in more detail, a few clarifying remarks are necessary here.

The US armed forces have not consistently used the same terms to characterize the same or very similar phenomena. Over time terminology has changed and will further change in the future, and sometimes different terminology has been a result of alternative viewpoints. Four terms have been used most often to describe military policies and approaches to regional conflicts:

- *Small wars*, respectively small war doctrines or strategies;
- *Low-Intensity Warfare*, or *Low Intensity Conflict* (LIC), and corresponding doctrines; and
- *Military Operations Other than War* (MOOTW, pronounced “moot-wah”; sometimes also referred to as OOTW, “Operations Other than War”).
- *Stability Operations and Support Operations* and their doctrines.

While there are and have been minor differences between these terms, generally their meaning has been very close to each other, and often they have been used interchangeably. “Small Wars” has been used from early on, at least since the first half of the 20th century, until today, while LIC was fashionable mostly in the 1980s, MOOTW has been since the 1990s, and “Stability Operations” has been thereafter. Despite the changes of terminology, most officers dealing with these questions are aware of the continuity behind them.

⁴ Generally, for example, the British counterinsurgency operations have placed less emphasis on military combat and more on police and intelligence work and political and socio-economic development. See, for instance: Newsinger 2002, for a US view on British counterinsurgency; Cassidy 2005: 53-59. Two classical publications representing the British school of counterinsurgency are: Thompson 1966 (1974); and Kitson, 1971 (1991).

Richard McMonagle, for instance, explained in 1996:

“With the new concept of Military Operations Other Than War, new doctrine is needed. Although the title is new, many of the activities of Military Operations Other Than War previously fit within the areas of small wars or low-intensity conflict. As the military develops this doctrine, it should not only look to recent experiences, but also to those of the past.” (Richard 1996: 4)

All these terms have been and still are somewhat vague, and have included whole sub-sets of policies and concepts. Again, while we will be more differentiating and more precise on this later, here a rough orientation on the categories of the key terms may be sufficient. Generally, the main sub-categories of Small Wars, LIC, MOOTW and Stability Operations are:

- Counterinsurgency operations, that is strategies, tactics and policies to weaken or defeat local insurgent forces;
- Pro-insurgency operations, aiming at support of local insurgencies;
- Limited military operations below the threshold of conventional war, e.g. “surgical” air strikes, evacuation operations, peace-keeping, brief or limited military interventions or occupations to achieve a specific aim, counterterrorism operations, and others.

It is obvious that the last category in particular is less than precisely defined. And while this paper will not ignore it and pro-insurgency operations, its focus will be on the first category, on counterinsurgency. Historically and politically, this has probably been the most important of the three categories, and it also provides us with lessons that will be useful to understand the other elements or Small Wars/LIC/MOOTW.

It is also quite obvious that categories like insurgency and counterinsurgency intrinsically do not focus on the level of inter-state relations, but on influencing the internal security (and political) situations in foreign countries. Helping insurgent forces to succeed or repressing them are goals that aim at re-shaping the security situation completely, and at re-distributing the internal balance of power in a target country. And, as we will see, very often these aims and strategies are closely linked to questions of internal governance, and even to the problems of state- or nation-building.

Finally, it should also be mentioned that this paper is primarily based on literature that has been produced by specialists from within the US armed forces or former military officers, including official documents from the US army or other services, like the “Field Manuals” that provide guidance for respective operations and are used for training purposes.





2. From “Small Wars” to Post-Vietnam – Historical Background to Counterinsurgency

2.1 The Starting Point: The Small Wars Manual of 1940

The US military has a long history of military intervention in Third World countries, especially in the direct neighborhood of the United States. While these interventions were mostly imperial in character and aimed at political and economic control, they often included elements of counterinsurgency and re-shaping the internal politics of a target country.⁵

The numerous “banana wars” of the first third of the 20th century, such as those in Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and several other countries in Central America and the Caribbean, did not start this kind of military interventions, because there have been more than a few predecessor operations in the second half of the previous century.⁶ But while there had been some interesting conceptual discussion going on,⁷ these experiences were systematized and conceptually integrated into military doctrine for probably the first time in the late 1930s. In 1940 the US Marine Corps, which had been the most important instrument of military intervention before,⁸ produced a “Small

Wars Manual” of nearly 500 pages (US Marine Corps 1940). Right at the beginning this manual defined the term “small war”:

“The term “Small War” is often a vague name for any one of a great variety of military operations. As applied to the United States, small wars are operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose *government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory* [Italics: J.H.] for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation” (ibid 1-1: 1).

While this definition still is less than satisfactory and its terminology confusing (since it uses the term “diplomatic pressure” for all kinds of non-military tools), it already clarifies the fact that the small wars doctrine applies to “unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory” foreign governments and aims at linking military and civilian tools.

Additionally the manual clarifies the point that “most of the small wars of the United States ... have been undertaken to suppress lawlessness and insurrection” (ibid 1-2: 2). It expands on the aims of small wars by stating: “Intervention in the internal affairs of a state may be undertaken to *restore order, to sustain governmental*

5 For early examples of counterinsurgency from a US experience and also by other countries see e.g.: Beckett 1988.

6 For a useful overview in regard to US military interventions up to the 1930 see: McMonagle 1996: 7-44 and Grimmett, 2002: 3.

7 An early example of discussing strategy in regard to Small Wars and US occupation of Third World countries is: Ellis 1921: 1-15.

8 Marine Corps Colonel McMonagle summarized its role in 1996 like this: “The colonial

aspirations of the United States, in the form of manifest destiny, although much different from those of the Europeans, still required the employment of the military instrument of power to maintain its empire and protect its interests. The United States Marine Corps, in its traditional mission of service with the fleet, became the landing force of an interventionist Navy and evolved into colonial infantry.” (McMonagle 1996: 7).



authority, [Italics: J.H.] to obtain redress, or to enforce the fulfillment of obligations binding between the two states" (ibid 1-7: 12). The Marine Corps Manual also tries to clarify the moral dimension of small wars, though in occasionally somewhat surprising terms: "Interventions or occupations are usually peaceful and altruistic" (ibid 1-8: 13). This assumption is in obvious contradiction to most of the rest of the manual, since it would not be necessary if small wars were usually "peaceful". It is also less than clear whether some of the countries occupied and pacified by the US in the Small Wars up to the 1930s would have agreed on the "altruistic" character of these wars.

The most important and most frequent kinds of small wars are summarized in categories of insurgency and guerilla warfare. From the perspective of the authors of the small wars manual – and the Marine Corps, since the manual constituted its official doctrine – the main component of a small war is fighting insurgency.

"In small wars it can be expected that hostile forces in occupied territory will employ guerilla warfare as a means of gaining their end. [...] Consequently, in campaigns of this nature the Force will be exposed to the action of this young and vigorous element. Rear installations and lines of communications will be threatened. Movements will be retarded by ambushes and barred defiles, and every detachment presenting a tempting target will be harassed or attacked. In warfare of this kind, members of native forces will suddenly become innocent peasant workers when it suits their fancy and convenience. In addition, the Force will be handicapped by partisans, who constantly and accurately inform native forces of our movements. The population will be honeycombed with hostile sympathizers, making it difficult to procure reliable information. Such difficulty will result either from the deceit used by hostile sympathizers and agents, or from the intimidation of friendly natives upon whom reliance might be placed to gain information" (ibid 1-9:14).

These words adequately describe some basic elements of insurgency and guerilla war, and today remind the reader of later discussions on "people's war" from a Maoist or Latin American perspective.⁹ They also summarize many later cases of small wars/LIC/MOOTW from a US perspective, up to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In this sense, the Small Wars Manual of 1940 still is highly relevant, as has been emphasized time and again since its republication in 1986. But the most innovative element in it has been in making the connection between military elements in Small Wars and their its political, economic and psychological factors. This becomes most explicit when the causes of violence in Small Wars are being discussed:

"The difficulty is sometimes of an economical, political, or social nature and not a military problem in origin. In one recent campaign the situation was an internal political problem in origin, but it had developed to such a degree that foreign national interests were affected; simple orderly processes could no longer be applied when it had outgrown the local means of control. In another instance the problem was economic and social; great tracts of the richest land were controlled and owned by foreign interests; this upset the natural order of things; the admission of cheap foreign labor with lower standards of living created a social condition among the people which should have been remedied by orderly means before it reached a crisis" (Marine Corps 1940: 15).

The manual argues that, because the causes of conflict are not primarily military but social, economic and political, any Small Wars campaign cannot and should not be designed in military terms alone.

"The application of purely military measures may not, by itself restore peace and orderly

⁹ For a short historical background on guerilla wars see, for instance, Ibrahim 2004: 112-124.



government because the fundamental causes of the condition of unrest may be economic, political, or social. These conditions may have originated years ago and in many cases have been permitted to develop freely without any attempt to apply corrective measures. An acute situation finally develops when conditions have reached a stage that is beyond control of the civil authorities and it is too late for diplomatic adjustment. The solution of such problems being basically a political adjustment, the military measures to be applied must be of secondary importance and should be applied only to such extent as to permit the continuation of peaceful corrective measures.

The initial problem is to restore peace. There may be many economic and social factors involved, pertaining to the administrative, executive, and judicial functions of the government. These are completely beyond military power as such unless some form of military government is included in the campaign plan. Peace and industry cannot be restored permanently without appropriate provisions for the economic welfare of the people. Moreover, productive industry cannot be fully restored until there is peace. Consequently, the remedy is found in emphasizing the corrective measures to be taken in order to permit the orderly return to normal conditions" (ibid: 1-9, 15 et sqq.).

It is quite remarkable that the 1940 Small Wars manual of the US Marine Corps so strongly expresses the problems of governance and of "the economic welfare of the people" to resolve local conflicts. And the argument that these points "are completely beyond military power" will have to be kept in mind for later discussion. Other important points made by the Small Wars Manual have recently been summarized by Cassidy in *Parameters*, the Journal of the US Army War College:

"While delay in the use of force may be interpreted as weakness, the Small Wars Manual maintains, the brutal use of force is not appropriate either. "In small wars, tolerance, sympathy, and kindness should be the keynote to our relationship with the mass of the population." For small wars, the manual urges US forces to employ as many indigenous troops as is practical early on to confer proper responsibility on indigenous agencies for restoring law and order. Moreover, it

stresses the importance of focusing on the social, economic, and political development of the people more than on simple material destruction" (Cassidy 2004: 80)

The relevance of the Small Wars Manual of the US Marine Corps of 1940 mostly results from its approach to regional conflict as caused by socio-economic and political factors and its formulation of a strategy taking this into account (For a useful analysis of the Small Wars Manual see chapter 4 of: McMonagle 1996: 7-44). While it grew out of decades of imperial military interventions and by itself does not transcend this context, the manual betrays a good understanding of the character of regional conflict and its causes. It also stresses the importance of political factors, such as the (in-)capacity of the local state in conflict dynamics. The manual even contains a chapter about the organization of local elections by occupation authorities, to create a new, legitimate system of governance. In this sense the manual planned for key steps in regard to state- and nation-building under the conditions of military occupation. While the manual is outdated in many regards today – e.g. concerning the technological aspects of military operations – some of its basic strategic foundations are still relevant today (Ford 2003: 89).

2.2 World War II up to the Reagan Presidency

The Small Wars Manual had been published precisely at a time when the US perspective on its foreign and security policy was having to change dramatically.¹⁰ While before, the US military (with the major exception of World War I) had been

¹⁰ For historical background also see: Metz 1995.



mostly operating in the US “backyard” – Central America and the Caribbean, plus in the Pacific and parts of Asia – and faced only challenges of a limited degree, the Second World War and the Cold War changed the strategic and security context completely. After 1940 the main focus of US foreign and military policy became to win the global war against Japan and Germany, and then to compete with the Soviet Union, again on a global scale. Small Wars appeared to be of much lesser importance, while the danger of nuclear war and the policies of “roll back” or “containment” of the Soviet Union demanded attention. The war in Korea (with the People’s Republic of China as the main antagonist) reinforced the perception that Small Wars were now of little importance. To be sure, these kinds of conflicts never completely disappeared, as the insurgency in the Philippines (late 1940s to early 1950s) or the major CIA operations in Guatemala (1954) and against Cuba (1961) demonstrated.¹¹ But still, the attention of the US armed forces after 1945 was mostly directed towards Central Europe and the Soviet Union, and military strategies emphasized heavy armor, major war, and a reliance on a maximum of firepower, both conventional and nuclear.

“For most of the 20th century, the US military culture (notwithstanding the Marines’ work in small wars) generally embraced the big conventional war paradigm and fundamentally eschewed small wars and insurgencies. Thus, instead of learning from our experiences in Vietnam, the Philippines, the Marine Corps’ experience in the Banana Wars, and the Indian campaigns, the US Army for most of the last 100 years has viewed these experiences as ephemeral anomalies and aberrations – distractions from preparing to win big wars against other big powers. As a result of

marginalizing the counterinsurgencies and small wars that it has spent most of its existence prosecuting, the US military’s big-war cultural preferences have impeded it from fully benefiting – studying, distilling, and incorporating into doctrine – from our somewhat extensive lessons in small wars and insurgencies” (Cassidy 2004: 75).

Small Wars and counterinsurgency did and do require specific approaches compared to conventional warfare, and therefore require different kind of training, armament, and tactics. From the beginning it was doubtful whether regular soldiers would be capable of dealing with these kinds of operations, or whether specialized military units would be preferable. In the first half of the twentieth century (and to some degree even after that) the Marine Corps had been the military service mostly involved in Small Wars, and it was not by chance that the Small Wars manual had been produced by it, and not by the US Army or Navy. But even the Marines did not consider Small Wars their primary responsibility, but were struggling what its core business should be: either concentrating on amphibious operations, thereby forming a link between the conventional operations of the navy and the army, or focusing on small wars. Since World War II and the coming of the Cold War, the preference was on amphibious operations, since this was very much required in the Pacific War against Japan, and it also brought more prestige and funding. Small Wars basically were a side-show, which must not be allowed to draw too much attention away from the important strategic competition resulting from the East-West conflict (Ford 2003: 2-42).

To some degree this changed in the 1960s, when the Kennedy administration re-introduced counterinsurgency as an important part of US mili-

11 For selected Small Wars of the 1960s and 1970s see, for instance: Beckett/Pimlott 1985.



tary operations.¹² Under the Kennedy administration the organizational set-up was changed. Since counterinsurgency was being taken much more seriously, the need for specialized forces was appreciated. As a result, the Special Operations Forces of the military services were expanded considerably, and given a major role in Small Wars and counterinsurgency. President Kennedy put the new job in these terms:

“This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origins – war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins; war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him. It is a form of warfare uniquely adapted [...] to undermine the efforts of new and poor countries to maintain the freedom that they have finally achieved. It preys on economic unrest and ethnic conflicts. It requires in those situations where we must counter it, and these are the kinds of challenges that will be before us in the next decade if freedom is to be saved, a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training” (Donnelly 2003: 4).

Many high-ranking officers did not agree. The Army Chief of Staff, Gen. George Decker, remarked in direct opposition to the new emphasis on counterinsurgency that “any good soldier can handle guerrillas” and got fired later by the President for his lack of enthusiasm (Duncan 1998: 48).

At the beginning, the rediscovery of fighting Small Wars (even though this term was not often used) was mostly directed at Latin America, especially after the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs invasion against Cuba in 1961. Latin American liberation movements, often inspired by the Cuban revolution, became the main target for

the US government, and were fought with a mixture of liberal reform (in the context of the Alliance for Progress) and repression, which took the form of counterinsurgency. Soon afterwards Vietnam became another case of major US counterinsurgency operations, there in a subservient role to conventional warfare including up to more than half a million US soldiers. The US counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam to some degree were quite effective, technically speaking, by weakening the opponents. But they also suffered from two major faults: firstly, counterinsurgency and the conventional war tended to get into each other's way, and did not complement each other. Especially under the command of General Westmoreland counterinsurgency was not taken seriously, and the war was fought along quite conventional lines by the US (Sorley 1999: 1-16). Secondly, counterinsurgency, especially in the context of “Operation Phoenix”, included practices such as political murder, assassinations, torture and other forms of illegal and brutal activities, which helped with intimidating the rural population, but did not exactly win the “hearts and minds” of the Vietnamese. This campaign of murder discredited US counterinsurgency in Vietnam, both with the Vietnamese and with large sectors of the US public (Valentine 1990). When in addition to this the war was lost (politically, not militarily) the Vietnam War became a symbol of arrogance and failure, and along with it US counterinsurgency became completely discredited. This did not just apply to the US public, but also to the military: after Vietnam, the US armed forces concentrated more than ever before on preparing for major wars, either conventional or nuclear.

¹² A good overview of the discussion during the early 1960s can be found in: Greene 1965 and Rosenau 2003: 65-99.



"The US military has had a host of successful experiences in counterinsurgency war, including some distinct successes with certain aspects of the Vietnam War. However, the paradox stemming from America's unsuccessful crusade in the jungles of Vietnam is this – because the experience was perceived as anathema to the mainstream American military, hard lessons learned there about fighting guerrillas were neither embedded nor preserved in the US Army's institutional memory. The American military culture's efforts to expunge the specter of Vietnam, embodied in the mantra "No More Vietnams," also prevented the US Army as an institution from really learning from those lessons. In fact, even the term "counterinsurgency" seemed to become a reviled and unwelcome word, one that the doctrinal cognoscenti of the 1980s conveniently transmogrified into "foreign internal defense" (Cassidy 2004: 73 et seq.).

Therefore Small Wars and counterinsurgency became even less prominent in military thinking and military strategy, and a smart soldier trying to get promoted fast preferred to choose conventional warfare as his field of expertise. Conrad Crane remarked:

"Army involvement in counterinsurgency was first seen as an aberration and then as a mistake to be avoided. Instead of focusing on the proper synchronization of military and political tools with objectives necessary for success in low intensity unconventional conflicts, the Army continued to concentrate on mid to high intensity conventional wars" (Crane 2002: 2).

The Vietnam War had calmed down any appetite of US policy makers at foreign intervention for a while. The "Vietnam Syndrome" dominating foreign policy thinking, making it a big priority not to get into a similar

situation abroad again. The results included:

- The proclamation of the so-called "Nixon Doctrine", which wanted to avoid direct US military intervention by relying on local surrogates, like Saudi Arabia and the Iran of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi in the Persian Gulf;
- An even stronger concentration on the European theater of operations, with its focus on tank battles, fire power, technology, maneuver warfare and conventional and nuclear preparedness; and
- A certain distaste for low-level Third World interventions, which were perceived as potential traps to draw the US into situations of "another Vietnam". As mentioned before, Small Wars/LIC/MOOTW strategies became de-emphasized in this process.

This shift of military strategy lasted until the late 1970s and early 1980s, and finally came to an end with the election of the Reagan Administration. The early Reagan years (beginning in January 1981) marked the re-ascendancy of Small Wars strategies. While the term was generally avoided and re-christened "Low-Intensity Conflict" (LIC) / "Low Intensity Warfare", the substance of it was brought back, against the strong resistance of many high-ranking officers.



3. Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC)

Low-intensity warfare theorists had studied and drawn conclusions from the US defeat in Vietnam. Vietnam had three consequences which military planners in Washington wanted to avoid in the future:

- The war had been costly in every respect. At its peak, there were over half a million US troops in Vietnam. More than 54,000 US military personnel (besides 3.6 million of Vietnamese) were killed and the dollar cost of the war exceeded \$150 billion 1967 dollars.
- The war was lost. Despite its substantial commitment, the United States, a superpower, did not manage to defeat the impoverished developing country of Vietnam. Clearly, US strategy and tactics were inappropriate, promoting military theorists to ask why this was so and what changes had to be made to prepare for future confrontations of this type.
- In the last years and then the aftermath of the war, US society was so politically polarized that the government's scope for military action abroad became greatly restricted.

After the Vietnam era, large-scale interventions by US armed forces were seen by the majority of US policy makers as politically divisive, as well as economically expensive. They sought effective alternative means of maintaining US dominance in the Third World. The low-intensity warfare doctrine was created in order to permit an active Third World policy, including military components,

without generating the high-visibility exposure of "another Vietnam". Consequently, LIC campaigns were designed so that the extent of US involvement was kept within proscribed limits by optimizing the quality of that involvement rather than its quantity. Compared with direct military intervention, LIC was cheap and required little manpower (since local troops in counterinsurgency, or locally-recruited contras of foreign mercenaries in pro-insurgency, provide the main force levels).

Furthermore -- and this was a decisive criterion -- LIC was perceived as more effective than conventional forms of intervention. As US Army Field Manual FM 100-20 formulated in December 1990: "US policy recognizes that indirect, rather than direct, applications of US military power are the most appropriate and cost-effective ways to achieve national goals in a LIC environment" (US Department of Army and the Air Force, FM 100-20 1990: 1-2).

It was better attuned to the causes of Third World conflicts; it employed, so to speak, "appropriate technology" for military tasks; and it largely avoided the counterproductive effects of direct US intervention, such as the rise of nationalist solidarity among the population against foreign invaders. Thus, in general, it was supposed to avoid the hazards resulting from military overreaction and excessive militarization of a conflict by the United States. With the aid of specific techniques and through increased efficiency, LIC was designed to render direct US intervention unnecessary.



The literature attempts to distinguish among various categories of LIC. The main ones are:

1. Counterinsurgency;
2. Pro-insurgency, (*Contra* operations), i.e. the organization of subversion and insurgency;
3. Counterterrorism, itself a collective term for diverse concepts and instruments, all of which are aimed at the offensive, military combating of "terrorism";
4. Narrowly limited, "surgical" military operations using conventional forces. This category may be applied within any of the three tactical approaches above or independent of them;
5. Other operations, e.g. rescue actions, participation in international peace-keeping forces and the like.

Sometimes, as in the US Army Field Manual FM 100-20 in its 1990 version (which at the same time is US Air Force Pamphlet AFP 3-20) other categorizations can be found. FM 100-20 lists four of them, which overlap with those given above:

- Support for insurgency and counterinsurgency
- Combating terrorism
- Peacekeeping operations
- Peacetime contingency operations (ibid: 1-6).

Again, it is obvious that the last category is a broad omnibus, including many different possible operations.

It needs to be pointed out here that not all LIC experts would have subscribed to this categorization. For example, Professor Sam Sarkesian, a political scientist, explicitly did not interpret limited conventional opera-

tions and terrorism as LIC. However, in taking this position, he definitely stands on his own. On the other hand, Sarkesian gave expression to a broad consensus when he stated: "Revolution and counterrevolution are the main categories" of LIC (Sarkesian 1985:5).

3.1 Low-Intensity Conflict: "Not Military Conquest, but Social Control"

As the term was used by United States strategic thinkers of the 1980s and early 1990s, low-intensity warfare combined various military and non-military concepts, virtually all of which were aimed at being employed in Third World situations.¹³ In the specialized military literature, the concepts were not always precisely defined. As a result, "low-intensity warfare" (LIW) and "low-intensity conflict" (LIC) were generally used as synonyms. Related terms like "foreign internal defense", "counterinsurgency", "counterterrorism", "special warfare", "special operations", "revolutionary/counterrevolutionary warfare", "small wars", "limited wars" and others were not clearly distinguished. Sometimes they were employed as synonyms for LIC, sometimes as conceptual antitheses, sometimes as sub-categories. Almost every essay on LIC in a US military journal began with attempts of a definition, often with the result of furthering the terminological confusion.

Despite the differences, most US military analysts divided all conceivable conflicts with military impli-

¹³ For a critical and civilian view on LIC see: Klare/Kornbluh 1988; close to official viewpoints are: Corr/Sloan 1992 and Thompson 1989.



cations into three sections of a "conflict spectrum", ranging from the "lowest" level of violence and commitment (i.e. the ones with least bloodshed and the least input) to a strategic nuclear war. Within this continuum of conceivable military conflicts, confrontations like World War II or a nuclear war were grouped in the category of "high-intensity conflicts". Confrontations on the scale of the Korean or Vietnam wars were regarded as "medium-intensity conflicts". All confrontations remaining by their nature below the level of high- or mid-level conventional war would be "low-intensity conflicts" (LICs). Given this approach (LICs are conflicts below the level of war), it becomes clear that LIC of necessity had to be an omnibus: Many different types of conflict meeting this criterion were conceivable.

LICs were conflicts which required from the US point of view relatively little military input. From the perspective of the country affected, the impression may be completely different, and this may also give rise to misunderstandings. At a conference sponsored by the US Defense Department in January 1986, El Salvador's Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Adolfo Blandon stated that he could not accept the term "low-intensity", noting that his country's civil war was of a high intensity (US Department of Defense 1986: 14). US Army Colonel John D. Waghelstein, former head of the US military advisory group in El Salvador, rightly pointed out a year earlier that LIC was "total war at the social base" of a country (Waghelstein 1986: 1). The criterion of "low intensity" as part of the definition thus presupposed that one adopted the perspective of the country applying the force rather than the one on which it is applied.

However, all agreed that while LIC is theoretically possible in a modern industrial nation, it was a form of conflict most appropriate to the Third World. Furthermore, it can be stated that this concept was to be applied only in cases where there was no direct confrontation between the superpowers, since such a confrontation, should armed conflict actually commence, could scarcely be stabilized at a LIC level. Although allied, friendly or client regimes of either side or one of the superpowers themselves might be involved, LIC theory did not allow for direct conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Third World.

Finally, LIC was a concept not of a purely military nature, even though it has been developed and propounded chiefly by the US military. Instead it was an integrated political, economic and military approach, supplemented by psychological, social and diplomatic elements. Without much exaggeration it can be stated that conceptually LIC was primarily a politically oriented and integrated policy approach containing military elements – and not first and foremost a military matter: "LICs are politically dominated" (US Department of the Army 1992: no page given).

William Olsen of the US Army War College stated: "In actual fact, the definition of LIC should not concentrate on the military level of conflict, but on its political character. [...] *The aim is not military conquest, but social control, for whose attainment military means can be employed as an element of the struggle* [Italics: J.H.]. [...] The use of military force must be measured by its social and political utility. Military means are a tactical element of a strategic program that emphasizes goals

and means. Though important, the use of military might is limited, while the use of diplomatic and political means may be unlimited" (Olson 1986: 218-220).

The US Army's Field Circular FC 100-20, issued in May of 1986, defined low-intensity warfare (conflict) as follows: "LIC is a limited politico-military struggle to attain political, military, social, economic or psychological objectives. It is often of lengthy duration and extends from diplomatic, economic and psychological pressure to terrorism and insurgency. LIC is generally confined to a specific geographical area and is often characterized by limitations of armaments, tactics and level of force. LIC involves the actual or contemplated use of military means up to just below the threshold of battle between regular armed forces" (US Army Command and General Staff College 1986: V).

This definition reveals two important elements: first the general character of LIC, with the civilian aspects also being stressed (e.g. economic pressure). This is significant because some observers misinterpret LIC as exclusively or primarily a military technique. Second, it makes clear the upper limits of use of military force beyond which the concept no longer applies. The definition also clarifies that LIC is a term embracing many types of conflict.

US Air Force Colonel Cardwell commented that generally it is a case of "unconventional, socio-political, enduring and manpower-intensive warfare" and that, consequently, stamina and small-scale engagements not dependent on fire power or technology are of particular importance. "The aim is no longer to conquer and hold territory, but to maintain political and economic access to the Third

World by preemptively hindering the Soviets from achieving their expansionary goals" (Cardwell III 1985: 13).

Cardwell's statement again emphasizes the unconventional military character of Low-Intensity Warfare. But it also takes us to the geo-strategic context the LIC strategies were formulated in during the 1980s.

3.2 Third World Instability and the "Soviet Threat": US Rationale for Low-Intensity Conflict

It is interesting to note the official reasons given for the increased US commitment to LIC operations in the 1980s. On the one hand, it was argued that the military and strategic situation between the United States and the Soviet Union, especially in Central Europe, was stable. It was contended that the Soviet Union could hardly gain from a direct attack against the United States or its NATO allies and that it was therefore going on the offensive in the Third World, where there supposedly were numerous conflicts to "exploit" to isolate the leading Western countries and hem them in. Secretary of State George Schultz described this as an "out-flanking maneuver" (Schultz in *ibid*).

This argument had two interesting components: the first was the implicit (occasionally explicit) assumption that, in the fields of nuclear and conventional arms, the Soviet Union was not superior to NATO, but at most on a par, and for this reason that it turned to the Third World instead of attempting a confrontation in Central Europe. This was in direct contradiction to numerous official Western propaganda statements during the Cold War, portraying the USSR as an "overwhelming" threat.





The strategic situation in Central Europe was considered stable in the medium and long term and, in the eyes of the United States, the main threat to Western interests came from and arose in the Third World.

"The most likely threat to US interests may stem from local or regional conflicts and internal instability of allies or clients of the United States. Morocco, the Sudan, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea – up to a certain degree all allies of America or the West – are all vulnerable to internal unrest and/or external attack. [...] Internal instability, possibly leading to a revolution, is a more probable scenario in many of these countries [than an external attack: J.H.]" (Tugwell and Charters 1984: 38).

At the same time US military planners observed that conflicts in Third World countries were linked to development failures. For instance, Secretary of the Army John O. Marsh stated: "Anyone who studies the regions where insurgency occurs cannot fail to notice what the situations have in common: *immature governments, emerging economies, population explosions and social problems* [Italics: J.H.], which have something to do with insufficient food supplies, poor health service and a high rate of illiteracy. This insurgency often takes place in areas with rich deposits of natural resources of considerable interest to the West. Many of these governments are susceptible to infiltration, subversion and destabilization" (Marsh 1984: 20).

We remember that the Small Wars Manual of 1940 emphasized the negative role of "unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory" local government, while now the term of Secretary Marsh was "immature governments" for the same argument.

The economic and strategic importance of certain Third World regions for the capitalist countries and

their simultaneous instability was thus, from this perspective, a central problem of Western foreign and security policy. Given the concurrent situation of a "nuclear stalemate" between the superpowers (as a US Army document put it), the confrontation between them was perceived to be shifting into being "limited to low- or medium-intensity conflicts within Third World countries, as in Afghanistan and Vietnam, or to support for third parties against the other's clients" (US Army Training and Doctrine Command 1986: 3).

LIC was thus portrayed as a reaction to a perceived strategic stalemate between the superpowers, which made direct confrontation between them seem too risky and impracticable, encouraging a shift of venue for possible conflicts to the Third World. Quite often the Soviet Union was blamed for instability in the Third World and threats to Western interests there and accused of deliberately employing LIC strategies as forms of low-level warfare against the United States in order to prevent the latter from responding on a large scale. In this context LIC strategies fused two aspects: they were developing a set of political-military tools to deal with anti-US Third World instability and local threats to US interests, and they integrated these tools into an ideological framework of anti-communism. Interestingly, the embellished Cold War ideology was used to explain and legitimize political-military practices that by far preceded the Cold War, and to some degree even the Soviet Union's existence.

In the opinion of US strategists in the 1980s, LIC was neither harmless nor of little importance; instead, it was perceived as a Soviet strategy for waging global war against the United



States without the latter noticing. Then Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger expressed this viewpoint quite clearly at a conference he arranged on the subject of low-intensity conflict in early 1986: "Today's world is in a state of war. It is not a world war, although it is taking place throughout the world. It is not a war between fully mobilized armies, although it is not less destructive. [...] Today one in every four countries in the world is at war. In practically every case, the face of these wars is hidden behind a mask. And in practically every case, the Soviet Union and those who do the work for it are hiding behind this mask" (Weinberger 1986: 1 et sqq.).

In official military publications, this alarmist perspective was less strongly developed. The US Army's Field Manual "Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict" (FM 100-20, published in 1990) for instance formulated:

"US and Soviet interests also impact on what would otherwise be local conflicts or power shifts. The Soviets are not responsible for all conflicts in the world, but they can and do exploit otherwise internal conflicts to implement their global strategy. Soviet surrogates and client states play an important role in this effort. They have followed a basically opportunistic and pragmatic strategy, but are displaying an increasingly sophisticated approach. This approach now includes techniques for creating instability where none existed previously" (US Departments of the Army and the Air Force, FM 100-20 1990: 1-5).

It is illuminating that in the 1980s – and even after Michail Gorbatschow became the leader of the Soviet Union – the US government perceived international relations as a "global war", mostly waged in the Third World. The rhetoric used then bears close similarity to that employed to declare a "global war on terror" after September 11, 2001. The main differences are that formerly the

Soviet Union was perceived as the key "rogue state", while today we are offered a small selection of them, and that ideologically the confrontation shifted from anti-communism to fighting Muslim radicalism.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s excessive rhetoric of global war and anti-communism decreased. The 1990 version of Field Manual 100-20 is a case in point. It summarizes the main dangers of low-intensity warfare situations as:

- "The loss of US access to strategic energy reserves and other natural resources
- The loss of US military basing, transit, and access rights
- The movement of US friends and allies to positions of accommodation with hostile groups
- The gain of long-term advantages for US adversaries" (ibid: 1).

This was quite a pragmatic, interest-based justification of LIC, which lacked most of the ideological zeal which had been displayed during the Reagan Administration's time in office.

Taken together, after in the 1970s Small Wars/ LIC/ Counterinsurgency had been discredited, the new interventionist policies of the Reagan Administration demanded military strategies for Third World countries which took the lessons of Vietnam into account. Low-Intensity Conflict strategies were presented as the answer. And LIC was not just a new formulation of older military-political techniques that was discussed inside the US armed forces alone, but it was officially sanctioned and supported by the US President himself. The National Security Deci-



sion Directive 277 of June 15, 1987 (formerly "secret", but since then partially declassified) was exclusively devoted to the US strategy for Low-Intensity Conflict (National Security Council 1987: no page). It introduced a Board for Low-Intensity Conflict within the National Security Council and stressed both the crucial importance of LIC and the necessary integration of military with economic, political and informational elements. Its most important goal was to impress the military and civilian US bureaucracies of the importance of LIC and strengthen inter-agency cooperation on this matter. This point had been taken up even before NSDD 277 by important sectors of the military brass.

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief of the US Readiness Command (USCINCREDB), described low-intensity warfare as "the central strategic task facing the United States today" (Klare 1986: title page). William J. Olsen of the US Army War College, speaking at a symposium sponsored by the US Air Force, referred to low-intensity warfare as "the most urgent strategic problem" of the United States and considered it "crucial to national survival" (Olson 1985: 221). At the same symposium, two Air Force officers tersely stated, "Low-intensity conflict is the warfare of the future" (Johnson and Torres no year: 174). Then Secretary of State George Schultz characterized LIC as "a priority challenge" confronting the United States, "at least for the rest of this century". He added, "The future of peace and liberty may depend on how successfully we meet it" (Schultz 1986: 4).

One could list many other comments by prominent US political figures and military planners who

viewed the new concept as a crucial issue of the country's foreign and military policy. While this alone does not prove that their views are correct, there can be no denying that key officials in important government and military positions indeed considered the role of low-intensity warfare to be of the greatest importance. One reason for this public show of support for LIC was to counter the reluctance and passive resistance towards it on the part of senior military officers.

3.3 The Role of Public Opinion

There were important considerations connected with US domestic politics that favored the LIC option. In an interview, a senior official at the US Department of Defense discussed the need for LIC. The following aspect was emphasized several times: "One of the main problems of US foreign policy is that since Vietnam the US public is no longer prepared to wage wars in the Third World."

The Pentagon official went to say that this was a major impairment of the United States' capacity for action abroad because it not only prevented the exercise of certain military options, but also made the threat of large-scale military operations lack credibility. LIC was, he went on, an attempt at overcoming this difficulty. Low-intensity warfare was a kind of warfare that the United States could maintain over years in a specific Third World country at relatively low cost, without arousing public attention or concern. The relatively low inputs of manpower and material would scarcely allow the emergence of political opposition or even a polarization of US society as was the case at the end of the US involvement in Vietnam (Interview with the author).

Deryck Eller, addressing an Air University symposium on low-intensity conflict in 1985, said, "public support is not absolutely necessary, but there must at least be a sort of benign indifference, especially on the part of the mass media. Otherwise Congress would be compelled to end the US involvement, regardless of the risks. If LIC can be confined to the lower levels of force – with very little bloodshed for the television cameras – public support or at least benign indifference may emerge. Something as boring as Internal Defense and Development [another name for counterinsurgency: J.H.] never gets into the six o'clock news, especially if it is successful" (Eller 1985: 48).

This argument is borne out by reality. If the United States simultaneously carries out military aid and training programs and low-level operations in two or three dozen Third World countries, generally avoiding the use of American combat forces, public attention is diffused and can be contained more easily than if the United States, as in Vietnam, were to intervene directly and spectacularly with substantial force deployments and corresponding losses.

In LIC campaigns, the time factor also plays a role. In the instance of large-scale direct military intervention, domestic opposition generally grows stronger over time; when less spectacular LIC operations are carried out, the public ceases taking notice after the first flurry of interest. For example, the counterinsurgency campaign in El Salvador evolved from a highly controversial undertaking between 1981 and 1983 into a matter that was either ignored or largely accepted, not least by Congress, after 1985. This was due to certain apparent political and military successes of the

campaign and to the fact that the direct US combat role feared by critics was avoided.

Other LIC operations were planned and implemented with domestic considerations very much in mind. The invasion of Grenada in October 1983, the counterterrorist air raids on Libya in spring 1986, and the naval operations in the Persian Gulf which began in summer 1987 are some examples of this sensitivity to public attitudes. In terms of foreign policy, these operations may have been of little value, but they served, especially the first two cases, to strengthen the popularity of the Reagan administration domestically, while at the same time minimizing the risk.

3.4 The Military in Low-Intensity Conflict

The above probably suffices to outline the fundamentals of LIC doctrine. It is, however, necessary to add two more factors: Firstly, LIC operations are frequent, while actual wars (i.e. medium- or high-intensity conflicts) are relatively few in number and are unlikely to increase. Since World War II, US troops have been militarily active abroad in more than 300 cases below the threshold of war, whereas conflicts on the scale of the wars in Korea and Vietnam have been rare. Secondly, US planners increasingly noted that the military is least prepared for precisely such numerous operations below the level of war. Lieutenant Colonel Donald Vought pointed this out as early as 1977, i.e. some time before the start of a broad-based debate on low-intensity warfare (Vought 1977: 17 et seqq.).

A study prepared by Kupperman Associates for the US Army a





few years later reaches the same conclusion: "The US Army faces the dilemma that the type of conflict least likely to occur, i.e. extensive conventional confrontation between the superpowers in Europe, nonetheless dominates its thinking, training and allocation of resources. The confrontations which are most likely to attract the Army's attention are small but decisive low-intensity conflicts occurring on the periphery of the superpowers. Many of these conflicts or protoconflicts – affect important US interests, regardless of whether they have internal causes or are controlled from outside: for instance in the [Persian: J.H.] Gulf, in the Caribbean, in Africa, in the South Pacific and possibly even in the United States itself. The Army is not prepared at present for such low-intensity conflicts" (Kupperman, Ass. 1983: VIII).

This reveals the general purpose of the debate in low-intensity warfare: to adjust the entire foreign and military policy machinery of the US government, not least its armed forces, in line with the changed deployment conditions. Within the military, the aims of the discussion were to define the conditions and circumstances governing "low-intensity" operations, to develop a corresponding military doctrine, to adapt military thinking within the US military to these requirements and to implement the new doctrine in the recruitment and training of military personnel and in the allocation of arms and equipment to the forces.

It should be pointed out that neither LIC as a whole nor its rationale were accepted without dispute by US government officials and armed forces personnel. The question of how much military weight should be lent to LIC was also the subject of some

controversy. One example was the debate on counterterrorism within the US Air Force. Lieutenant Colonel Felix Moran considered a military response to terrorism both wrong and futile (Moran 1985: 30). Colonel Clarence Herrington on the contrary argued for the use of B-52s to combat terrorists (Herrington 1985: 387 et seqq.). Clearly, he missed the point of LIC, but the fact remains that there was a heated debate over the priority given to, as well as the scope and the nature of, its military component.

Second, under the Reagan administration, the non-military priorities of LIC were often proclaimed, but not always implemented. It cannot be ignored that LIC was often, in practice, progressively militarized. Simple "military solutions" to complex political problems were part of Reaganite thinking. The political aspects of LIC to some had a distinct Carter-era tinge – it seemed to smack of the former presidents' human rights policy (Hippler 1984: 45-69) – and thus ran counter to some of the political instincts of numerous Reaganites (cf. Senator Jesse Helms's description of land reform in El Salvador as an element of counterinsurgency as "communist"). Furthermore, many US officers had definite reservations about the civilian LIC elements (occasionally about the military ones as well) because these do not accord with their training, experience, ideology and qualifications. In sum, it can be stated that under the Reagan Administration, the political and social aspects of LIC tended to be de-emphasized in favor of the military.

Finally, even in "political" LIC programs, the military aspect is indispensable. LIC does not imply replacing "military solutions" with "political solutions" as much as eliminat-

ing the distinction between "military" and "civilian". Such clearly "non-military" conduct as labor strikes and demonstrations have been interpreted as "low-intensity *warfare*", while, on the other hand, the military may assume "civilian" tasks (civic action). Consequently, under LIC conditions, civilian practices tend to be militarized, and military or non-military measures, taken by the armed forces of the United States and/or the local government, will be of decisive importance for any LIC program. Ensuring local "security" with the military and the police is a measure without which any pacification program is bound to fail.

As has already been stated, LIC operations are, by their nature, quite

different from conventional military operations. It is therefore not surprising that regular military units are not optimally trained and equipped for these functions. This was one of the realizations that initiated the entire debate on low-intensity warfare. The US units with the greatest competence in unconventional operations and low-intensity warfare are the so-called Special Operations Forces (SOF), made up of the three branches of the military (For an attempt of a strategist in 1990 to project LIC and Special Operations Forces into the future, see: Paschall 1990). Since the beginning of the Reagan administration the SOF, and counterparts in other countries, have been considerably enlarged and given additional weapons and equipment (Hippler 1986: 85-97).





4. Military Operations Other than War (MOOTW) and Stability and Support Operations

The term “low-intensity warfare” (or “low-intensity conflict”) has hardly been used since the early 1990s. It generally was replaced by “Military Operations Other than War” (MOOTW; or, to use a somewhat shorter form, “Operations Other than War, OOTW) (For a technical overview see: Bonn/Baker 2000). Terminological plurality and sometimes confusion still exists, and this has been recognized in parts of the military community. After summarizing official US military terminology, the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities of the US Marine Corps, for instance, remarked:

“All of these descriptions, definitions, and charts leave room for confusion and misunderstanding. Even though the term “military operations other than war” exists in the current official joint lexicon and is commonly used throughout the Defense Department, the term itself truly is a misnomer and vestige from the past. [...] The way the term is used also is confusing – is it a capability, a type of operation, a time-frame, or an environment in which these capabilities or operations are performed? It often is used to mean all three” (US Marine Corps 2004: 4).

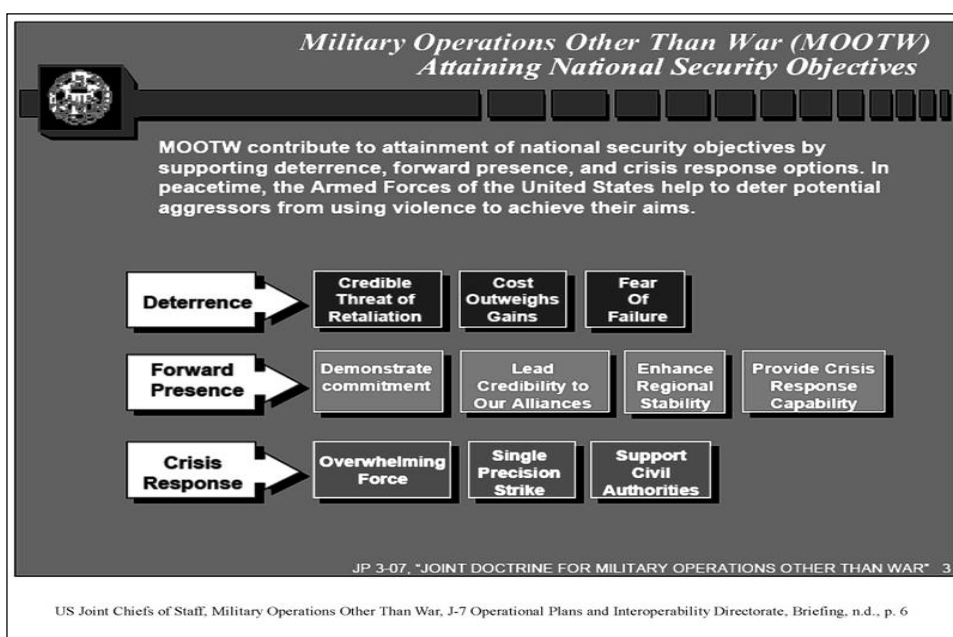
Also, some of the overlapping terms of earlier times are still being used, such as “Foreign Internal Defense” (FID), “Nation Assistance”, Counterinsurgency and others which generally refer to specific aspects of MOOTW. Lately new terms have been coined, such as “Stability and Support Operations”, taking the place of what was previously called LIC and MOOTW. An example is given by the latest version (dated February 2003) of Field Manual FM 100-20 (which was formerly titled “Military Operations in Low Intensity Con-

flict”), now published as FM 3-07 under the name of “Stability Operations and Support Operations” (US Department of the Army 2003: no page given). This document explicitly refers to MOOTW only twice in its more than 230 pages (and both times only briefly on its first page) and to low-intensity conflict not at all – while at the same time these are exactly the topics the Field Manual is dealing with in substance.

Similarly, the basic US Army Field Manual FM 3-0 “Operations”, published in June 2001, rarely mentions MOOTW (or counterinsurgency) by name, but devotes two chapters to stability and to support operations (US Department of the Army 2001).¹⁴

At least until now, the term “Military Operations Other Than War” (MOOTW) has generally taken the place of LIC, at least since 1995, when the US Joint Chiefs of Staff published their “Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War” as Joint Publication (JP) 3-07 (US Joint Chiefs of Staff 1995). But the new terminological transformation of Small Wars, LIC and MOOTW into “Stability Operations and Support Operations” seems to be well under way. Still, we will start by explaining MOOTW first, before moving on to this latest twist in doctrine development.

¹⁴ For putting FM 3-0 into context of doctrine development, see: Burke 2002: 91-97.



4.1 Exit the Cold War: Conceptual Starting Points

MOOTW doctrine in JP 3-07 and other documents starts with explaining the link between MOOTW and US national security objectives. Generally, three main functions with regard to these objectives are mentioned: deterrence, forward presence, and crisis response. This is summarized in the chart on this page.

This categorization is obviously of a very general character, but despite this leaves little room for some of the key components of MOOTW, such as counterinsurgency, pro-insurgency and counterterrorism. While it is possible to place them under the heading of "crisis response" in principle, the categories listed there do not exactly invite this. Also, some of the more general descriptions of MOOTW in the JP 3-07 (published during the Clinton Presidency) project a different starting point from that of the LIC doctrine of the Reagan years.

"MOOTW encompass the use of military capabilities across the range of military operations short of war. [...] MOOTW focus on

detering war, resolving conflict, promoting peace, and supporting civil authorities in response to domestic crises" (ibid: I-1).

This introduction of MOOTW may not constitute a break with previous LIC doctrine, but it still creates quite a different emphasis. While formerly the language had often been somewhat alarmist or even militant in regard to LIC (like: "total war at the social base" of a country; "political-military struggle to attain political, military, social, economic or psychological objectives"; or, as then-Secretary of Defense Weinberger put it: "Today's world is in a state of war. [...] It is not a war between fully mobilized armies, although it is not less destructive") the new goals of "promoting peace" and "resolving conflict" sound much softer. And while the new statement of purpose has a nearly pacifistic ring, MOOTW is clearly nothing like it. Generally, three categories are distinguished: MOOTW involving the use or the threat of force, MOOTW not involving the use or threat of force, and simultaneous operations, which include combat and non-combat operations.



Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency/Nation Assistance are explicitly mentioned as components of MOOTW, while interestingly proinsurgency (which was a key component of the “Reagan Doctrine”) is not.

In many regards, early MOOTW doctrine did connect to its LIC predecessor, especially in regard to its emphasis of the political aspects.

“MOOTW may involve elements of both combat and non-combat operations in peacetime, conflict, and war situations. MOOTW involving combat, such as peace enforcement, may have many of the same characteristics of war, including active combat operations and employment of most combat capabilities. All military operations are driven by political considerations. However, MOOTW are more sensitive to such considerations due to the overriding goal to prevent, preempt, or limit potential hostilities. In MOOTW, political considerations permeate all levels and the military may not be the primary player. As a result, these operations normally have more restrictive rules of engagement (ROE) than in war” (ibid: I-1).

4.2 General Principles of MOOTW

While this confirms principles that we have discussed before, like the centrality of political aspects in Operations Other Than War (or its predecessors) and the resulting need to limit the degree of force and violence and restrict the rules of engagement, MOOTW doctrine added some ideas which in themselves were not new, but had not been explicitly been integrated into LIC, or at least only had to a lesser degree. We have already mentioned “deterrence” and “forward presence” as starting points for MOOTW, which are not at all MOOTW-specific but reflect more traditional military thinking.

MOOTW doctrine, more than the military doctrines of the 1980s, insists on applying conventional prin-

ciples of warfare, though in a modified way. Some of these are even elevated to being “Principles of Military Operations Other Than War”, as shown in the next chart.

These principles are again quite general. To undertake any operation – including MOOTW – with a clearly defined and attainable objective and operate in an integrated and unified way definitely is a reasonable approach, but again not exactly MOOTW-specific. The same applies to the other principles enumerated: ignoring security or acting without restraint in situations of military operations would obviously be a bad idea.¹⁵ Generally, the new terminology does not break with LIC doctrine, but shifts the emphasis somewhat back to more traditional and conventional ways of military thinking.

The principle of pursuing a clear objective seems trivial, but given military experience it is not. Since political considerations are decisive in MOOTW, the overriding objective of a military operation a) has to be defined by the political leadership; b) should not be vague or contradictory in itself; c) should be translated into clear and realistic military objectives; and d) should not implicitly be changed or broadened in the course of operations without clearly and understandably redefining points a)-d). One of the problems for military leaders is that the political definitions of objectives and their degree of clarity and contradictoriness are outside their own reach, since they are determined by civilian political leaders, ultimately by the US President, his representatives or the US Congress. If the politi-

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the principles mentioned see: US Joint Chiefs of Staff 1995: II-1 through II-5.

cal goals are less than clear, contradictory or vague, military leaders can hardly translate them into clear military objectives. JP 3-07 demands:



(Figure: US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War, JP 3-07, Washington, 16 June 1995, p.II-2)

“Direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective. JFCs [Joint Forces Commanders: J.H.] must understand the strategic aims, set appropriate objectives, and ensure that these aims and objectives contribute to unity of effort” (ibid: II-1 et sqq.).

“The political objectives which military objectives are based on may not specifically address the desired military end state. JFCs should, therefore, translate their political guidance into appropriate military objectives through a rigorous and continuous mission and threat analysis. JFCs should carefully explain to political authorities the implications of political decisions on capabilities and risk to military forces. ... Change to initial military objectives may occur because political and military leaders gain a better understanding of the situation, or it may occur because the situation itself changes. JFCs should be aware of shifts in the political objectives, or in the situation itself, that necessitate a change in the military objective. These changes may be very subtle, yet they still require adjustment of the military objectives. If this adjustment is not made, the military objectives may no longer support the political objectives, legitimacy may be undermined, and force security may be compromised” (ibid: II-2 et sqq.).

One of the important problems in translating political objectives into military ones is the tendency of political leaders to use a vague language that aims more at domestic or international public relations, and not at guiding military operations. For instance, “regime change”, “establishing or strengthening democracy” or “ending a humanitarian catastrophe” may sound nice, but are not specific enough to be translated into clear objectives for military operations. They invite a situation where successful military operations do not necessarily contribute to political goals and might even lead to disaster. But there is very little the armed forces can do about this, except appealing to the political leadership to be more specific and to set political objectives realistically.

While in conventional war the objective for the armed forces is generally quite clear – destruction of the enemy and victory in military terms – in MOOTW it often is not, since it is a politico-military undertaking, where political considerations guide and limit military operations. A specific danger in this respect is mission creep,¹⁶ which means a set of objectives which gradually shifts because of the dynamics of the operation itself, which may lead to the development of a set of sub-objectives in contradiction with each other, or with the politically defined goals. This will happen the more easily the less clearly the political objectives are defined, or in the case that the political objectives change subtly or openly (see US Department of the Army 2003:1-17 et sqq.) because of foreign policy or domestic considerations. Mission creep is much more likely in MOOTW con-

16 For a general background and a critique on mission creep see: Siegel 1998.





texts than in conventional military operations, and also much more dangerous to the integrity of the operation.

For the purpose of our discussion the principle of “legitimacy” is also quite interesting, since it is of special importance in MOOTW.

“In MOOTW, legitimacy is a condition based on the perception by a specific audience of the legality, morality, or rightness of a set of actions. This audience may be the US public, foreign nations, the populations in the area of responsibility/joint operations area (AOR/JOA), or the participating forces. *If an operation is perceived as legitimate, there is a strong impulse to support the action.* If an operation is not perceived as legitimate, the actions may not be supported and may be actively resisted. *In MOOTW, legitimacy is frequently a decisive element.* The prudent use of psychological operations (PSYOP) and humanitarian and civic assistance (HCA) programs assists in developing a sense of legitimacy for the supported government” (US Joint Chiefs of Staff 1995: II-5 et seq. Emphasis in the original document).

Indeed, legitimacy can be key to success or failure, because MOOTW is at core a political undertaking. If the US public does not accept the legitimacy of a military operation abroad, domestic support or at least tolerance will decline and create potential problems with politically sustaining the military effort. If legitimacy is lacking internationally, the foreign policy context of an operation can be much more difficult, and finding allies a major problem, as the Iraq war demonstrated. And if the public of the target country does not accept the legitimacy of the US operation, it will be quite impossible to win “the hearts and minds” of a population, and general resistance to US troops might result.

Max Manwaring put it like this in a study for the US Army War College:

“The data show that the moral right of a regime to govern is the most important single dimension in a counterinsurgency war. Thus, a politically strong and morally legitimate government is vital to any winning internal war strategy. The rectitude and legitimacy of the incumbent regime is the primary target – the primary center of gravity – as far as the insurgent organization is concerned. ... A counterinsurgency campaign that fails to understand the lack of rectitude and morally legitimate governance problem and responds only to “enemy” military forces is very likely to fail” (Manwaring 2001: 19).

4.3 Types of Operations in MOOTW

From general principles MOOTW doctrine moves to the specific types of operations.

16 different types are enumerated. While LIC doctrine had generally focussed on counterinsurgency, pro-insurgency, counterterrorism and an omnibus category of “other operations”, MOOTW retains the first three types of operations, though under slightly different names: Nation Assistance/Support to Counterinsurgency, Support to Insurgency, and Combating Terrorism; the remaining omnibus category is dropped and differentiated into 13 categories, which before had been lumped together: Counterdrug Operations, Humanitarian Assistance, Evacuation Operations, Peace operations, Strikes and Raids, and Show of Force Operations, among others. Military Support to Civil Authorities is also promoted to be a distinct type of MOOTW (US Joint Chiefs of Staff 1995: III-1 to III-15).¹⁷

It is clear that there is little or no difference between the kinds of operations that LIC and MOOTW are

¹⁷ See also: US Department of the Air Force 2000: 9-22; see also: US Joint Chiefs of Staff 2001: chapter V.

supposed to conceptualize, and that only the different types of operations are grouped differently. The advantage of the new set-up lies in the more complete listing of all categories, while the older LIC doctrine was more convincing in regard to clarifying priorities. It is slightly surprising, for instance, that early MOOTW doctrine lists the potential types of operations in alphabetical order, not according to priorities or importance.

For our analysis the category of “Nation Assistance/Support to Counterinsurgency” is of key importance.

JP 3-07 differentiates Nation Assistance into three sub-categories:

- *Security Assistance*, “by which the United States provides defense articles, military training, and other defense-related services to foreign nations by grant, loan, credit, or cash sales in furtherance of national policies and objectives”.
- *Foreign Internal Defense (FID)*, which “encompass the total political, economic, informational, and military support provided to another nation to assist its fight against subversion and insurgency. [...] US FID programs may address other threats to an HN’s internal stability, such as civil disorder, illicit drug trafficking, and terrorism. [...] US military support to FID may include training, materiel, advice, or other assistance, including direct support and combat operations as authorized by the NCA, to HN forces in executing an IDAD program.”
- *Humanitarian and civic assistance* “is provided in conjunction with military operations and exercises, and must fulfill unit training re-

quirements that incidentally create humanitarian benefit to the local populace.” Those explicitly mentioned are medical, dental, and veterinary care provided in rural areas of a country; construction of rudimentary surface transportation systems; well-drilling and construction of basic sanitation facilities, and rudimentary construction and repair of public facilities (US Joint Chiefs of Staff 1995: III-10).

This categorization of “Nation Assistance/ Counterinsurgency” again does not break with previous concepts and doctrine, but it structures MOOTW components somewhat differently compared to LIC. And also, the term counterinsurgency, while present, is much less prominent.

4.4 Stability Operations and Support Operations

The term of “Stability Operations and Support Operations” is not completely new. As early as 1995 the US Army published a Field Manual “Army Operational Support” (US Department of the Army 1995) where the term Support Operation was used in a different and more technical way than afterwards. But in June 1997 a Training Circular was published, which dealt with precisely the topics that were discussed as MOOTW at the time. It did not use the term MOOTW even once in its 930 pages, but featured the term “Stability Operations and Support Operations”, including in its title (US Department of the Army 1997b). However, only in 2001 did the new term become officially recognized as being of high importance, when the keystone US Army Field Manual FM 3-0 “Operations” rarely mentioned the term MOOTW





(nine times in more than 300 pages), while devoting one full chapter to “Stability Operations” and another one to “Support Operations” (US Department of the Army 2001) Two years later the new terminology was further reinforced when a complete Field Manual (FM 3-07) was devoted exclusively to Stability Operations and Support Operations, (US Department of the Army 2003) replacing the former Field Manual FM 100-20 (“Low-Intensity Conflict”).

Both FM 3-0 and FM 3-07 categorize the potential types of military operations somewhat differently than had been done before. They list four basic categories of operations: defensive and offensive operations, which both apply to war, and stability and support operations, which previously had jointly been called LIC or MOOTW. In the words of FM 3-0:

“Full spectrum operations include offensive, defensive, stability, and support operations. Missions in any environment require Army forces prepared to conduct any combination of these operations:

- *Offensive operations* aim at destroying or defeating an enemy. Their purpose is to impose US will on the enemy and achieve decisive victory.
- *Defensive operations* defeat an enemy attack, buy time, economize forces, or develop conditions favorable for offensive operations. Defensive operations alone normally cannot achieve a decision. Their purpose is to create conditions for a counteroffensive that allows Army forces to regain the initiative.
- *Stability operations* promote and protect US national interests by influencing the threat, political, and information dimensions of the operational environment through a combination of peacetime developmental, cooperative activities and coercive actions in response to crisis. Regional security is supported by a balanced approach that enhances regional stability and economic prosperity simultaneously. Army force presence promotes a stable environment.

- *Support operations* employ Army forces to assist civil authorities, foreign or domestic, as they prepare for or respond to crisis and relieve suffering” (US Department of the Army 2001: 1-15 et sqq.).

FM 3-07 is not just an edited version of LIC and MOOTW doctrine. While preserving much of their substance, it provides a new framework for these kinds of operations, taking into account the strategic changes that had happened after the end of the Cold War. In the same way as FM 3-0, Field Manual 3-07 finally discards the remnants of Cold War thinking that had stubbornly persisted during the 1990s, and develops a rationale for the US armed forces – and Stability and Support Operations – which is much less ideological than former anti-communist thought and rooted in a new definition of US self-interest.

“Few states will have the resources, or the need, to attack the US directly in the near future. However, many will challenge it for control or dominance of a region. Potential adversaries may increasingly resort to asymmetric means to threaten our national interests. Such methods include unconventional, unexpected, innovative, or disproportional means used to gain an advantage. Adversaries may use inexpensive approaches that circumvent the US strengths, exploit its vulnerabilities, or confront it in ways the US cannot match in kind. Contemporary threats include terrorism; chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive (CBRNE) threats; information operations; exploitation of commercial or space-based systems; denial of our access to critical resources; and environmental sabotage” (ibid).

These are plain words: instead of ideological and moral bombast, US interests are at stake, such as “control or dominance of a region” or “access to markets and materials”. And since the US is militarily and politically difficult to confront directly, potential adversaries will look for feasible and cost-effective ways to pursue their own interest: they will look for “asymmetric means to threaten our



national interests". While many outside the US will ask whether US control of their respective region and access of the United States to their resources is legitimate or acceptable, it is difficult not to understand the rationale behind this statement. The next step in the argument is to look at the conditions in which these US goals are to be pursued. Here it is worth quoting from FM 3-07 at length and in context:

"Nation states will continue to be the primary political unit for the foreseeable future. Yet the process of globalization is changing the nature of state-to-state relations as the reach of nonstate actors, multinational corporations, and international organizations increases. Shifting and unstable power balances at the national and subnational levels in the Balkans, Middle East, and throughout Africa and Asia threaten to engage the vital interests of the United States.

Some forms of nationalism can cause inter- and intrastate conflict. Nationalist movements arise from the belief that nations benefit from acting independently rather than collectively, emphasizing national rather than international goals. Many sources of nationalist identity exist, including ethnic, religious, tribal, historical, or territorial. Such movements are replacing ideologically based identities. In some cases, these movements are closely linked to criminal organizations. These movements may also cause regional strife, as one nation seeks to extend its authority over adjacent groups or territory. ... Some in the non-Western world reject Western political and cultural values. In some instances, regimes that use Western political forms of government are under attack by ethnic, religious, and nationalist groups seeking to establish or reestablish their identity. As tribal, nationalist, or religious movements compete with Western models of government, instability can increase. This instability threatens not only Western interests within the state, but often threatens to spill across borders" (US Department of the Army 2003: 1-10 et sqq.).

Using the changing role of the nation-state, sub-national instability, and globalization as starting points is not that different from many discussions in the academic community, and nor is the emphasis on ethnic and

national identities as factors in regional conflict. The point for the US army here, though, is not these developments as such but the fact that they "threaten Western interest within the" – foreign – "state", and can also do so regionally. An extra paragraph is reserved for the problem of "ungovernability". It is explained that the "global economy can render economic policies and controls ineffective" and that some governments therefore "fail to provide economic stability and security for their populace". The problem of rising unemployment is mentioned in this context. And, returning to a topic and terminology already present in the Small Wars and LIC discussions, the field manual emphasizes that "immature government infrastructures in developing democracies can cause expectations to be unmet, often leading to conflict" (ibid).

Again, this is an intelligent way to perceive some of the conditions leading to local and regional conflict, where the global economy is eroding the internal stability of so many countries. The problem of governance indeed is a key problem of creating stability and overcoming violence in numerous societies. As we can see, Cold War thinking has been succeeded by a more modern and more appropriate way to define a country's own strategic environment. We might ask why these important factors were been recognized by the US armed forces much earlier, since they are not exactly new and did not start in 2000. But we should remind ourselves that many academics have also been hypnotized by traditional Cold War thinking. A little later the manual is even talking about a "modified concept of the enemy" and demands reasonably: "Commanders must take care to not create an enemy where one



does not exist" (ibid: 1-16). And FM 3-0 puts it like this: "The "enemy," for example, may be a set of ambiguous threats and potential adversaries" (US Department of the Army 2001: 9-5).

US forces have come a long way from the time when they were supposed to see the hand of "Moscow" behind anything in the Third World they did not like or perceived as destabilizing.

The analysis of the strategic environment in FM 3-07, besides the aspects already mentioned ("balance of power", "nationalism", "clash of culture", "ungovernability"), highlights demographic trends, environmental risks, and propaganda. It then moves on to stress that stability and support operations "often take place in political, military, and cultural situations that are highly fluid and dynamic. Unresolved political issues, an unclear understanding or description of a desired end state, or difficulty in gaining international consensus may cause ambiguity" (US Department of the Army 2003: 1-10, 1-11).

4.5 Types of Operations in Stability Operations

Field Manual 3-0 mentions ten categories of Stability Operations, which are quite similar to the former

MOOTW categories, with the exception that Domestic Support Operations (DSO), which constitute US military forces' operation inside the US to support civilian authorities, for instance in case of a humanitarian crisis or natural disaster) and Foreign Humanitarian Assistance (FHA) are singled out as constituting Support Operations. The former categories of enforcing sanctions/maritime intercept operations, enforcing exclusion zones, ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight, and the protection of shipping that were included in the MOOTW types as defined by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (US Joint Chiefs of Staff 1995: III-1 to III-15; see also: US Department of the Air Force 2000: 9-22) are missing here. However, this is not very surprising, since as an Army manual the protection of shipping and overflight can hardly be important types of operation. Generally, there is very little difference between MOOTW and Stability/Support Operations in regard to what they include, with the minor difference that the operational types have been grouped into two categories instead of one. The following chart provides an overview of the development of operational emphasis and types of operations from Small Wars to Stability Operations. The changing political contexts are included.

**Overview: From Small Wars to Stability Operations**

	Political context	Ideology/ Legitimation	Political Emphasis	Main Types of Operations, according to Doctrine
Small Wars	imperial domination, primarily in Central America, the Caribbean and parts of Pacific/Asia	little emphasis on ideology; uninhibited sense of mission with regard to own cultural superiority	occupation or control of countries or areas, counterinsurgency	counterinsurgency, occupation, miscellaneous
LIC	final phase of cold war, Reaganism	activist anti-communism, including rhetoric of anti-communist "liberation" ("Reagan Doctrine")	pro-insurgency, counterinsurgency, briefly counterterrorism	counterinsurgency, pro-insurgency, counterterrorism, surgical conventional strikes, miscellaneous
MOOTW	transition from Cold-War to Post-Cold War era	shifting ideology, "instability", "humanitarian crises" among legitimations of force	counterinsurgency, with peace keeping and peace enforcing	16 different categories, in substance like types of LIC operations
Stability and Support Operations	Post Cold War, "war against terrorism"	fighting terrorism, Muslim extremism, supporting "freedom"	counterterrorism, counterinsurgency	12 different categories, in substance like types of LIC and MOOTW operations

4.6 Return to Traditional Military Thinking?

All things considered, MOOTW is in principle a different term for LIC, without adding much change in substance. But still there are some shifts in language and emphasis that should not be overlooked. While LIC doctrine had been introduced with some fanfare and in some degree had been pressed upon the military brass by the political leadership, MOOTW was presented in more low-key ways. In a sense, both its political importance and its political elements were stressed to a lesser degree, and it was made more digestible to traditional and conventional officers by linking it to the language and principles of traditional rules of warfare. MOOTW was less explicit and less detailed in regard to its non-military, political

aspects, especially in regard to the need and means to get involved in questions of governance in the target countries. The shift of terminology from MOOTW to "Stability Operations and Support Operations" has even strengthened this trend.

After FM 3-07 has discussed the functions and strategic environment of stability and support operations in a way that emphasized non-military factors like political, economic, social, environmental and other factors, it is somewhat surprising that in the last six pages of its first chapter the manual presents a quite conventional military approach to deal with these problems. Compared to MOOTW and even more to LIC doctrine the new concept of stability and support operations heavily draws on traditional military thinking and to a great degree ignores its own, non-military



analysis. While it does include language to stress the socio-political character of stability and support operations, few practical lessons are drawn from this, while general and conventional principles of war are put forward. These principles include *unity of objective* (which we discussed before in the context of MOOTW), the need for *offensive* (“seize, retain, and exploit the initiative”), *mass* (“concentrate the effects of combat power at the decisive place and time”), *economy of force*, *maneuver* (“place the enemy in a disadvantageous position through the flexible application of combat power”), *unity of command*, *security* (“never permit the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage”), *surprise* and *simplicity* (US Department of the Army 2003: 1-20). Also, the need for initiative, agility, depth (in regard to time, space and resources), synchronization and versatility are stressed, which all sounds nice and obvious, but is very general and does not contribute to the specifics of MOOTW or stability and support operations. The general principles of war (taken from FM 3-0 “operations”, and complemented by “Considerations for Stability Operations”¹⁸) are mechanically transferred to political and non-combat operations, which had been explicitly called “operations *other than war*” only shortly before. FM 3-07 does not resolve this contradiction, but sometimes even expresses it clearly. In some paragraphs the manual concedes that “stability operations and support operations *differ from the offense and defense* [meaning war: J.H.] in significant ways” (US Department of the Army 2003: 1-15).

But in quite a few other paragraphs the picture gets blurred. For

instance FM 3-07 states that “like all operations” (ibid: 1-3), stability and support operations are sensitive to political considerations – which obviously ignores the key differences. The manual speaks of the need to “enhance host-nation credibility and legitimacy”, but adds that this should be achieved “by demonstrating the proper respect for the host-nation government, police, and military forces” (ibid: 1-4, see also US Department of the Army 2001: 9-15). Showing this kind of respect is surely a good idea, but hardly enough, if these kinds of operations are basically political and aim at winning hearts and minds of the population, or aim to “promote sustainable and responsive institutions” (ibid: 1-14) that might not even exist.

These examples express a general trend, which is formulated quite openly: “The tenets of army operations build on the principles of war” (ibid 1-21) – which might not be a good idea in “operations *other than war*”. And Field Manual FM 3-0 “Operations” even uses the following formulation: “Conducting stability operations is identical to conducting offensive, defensive, and support operations.” (US Department of the Army 2001: 9-14) Which obviously it is not, as has been explained time and again in several relevant Field Manuals.

Also, right at the beginning of FM 3-07 it brags:

“The characteristics that make our Army a premier warfighting organization also serve it well in conducting stability operations and support operations” (US Department of the Army 2003: 1-1).

This kind of wishful thinking is hard to understand after more than twenty years of doctrine development, discussion and experiences in operations, which include counterin-

18 US Department of the Army 2001:9-14 to 9-17.

surgency, peace-keeping and disaster relief. It would be interesting to know whether the US army would repeat these boastful statements after the Iraq experience.

It is obvious that the US armed forces have serious homework to do. It would be highly advisable to finally link their often quite realistic analysis

of causes and dynamics of insurgencies to their own strategy and tactics. If strategy is not deduced from the analysis it will just develop out of bureaucratic tradition and military culture. And this implies that it is ignoring the hard reality on the ground.





5. Counterinsurgency

Up to now, we have mostly dealt with general questions of Small Wars, LIC doctrine, and MOOTW, especially with their historical and analytical development. Our next step will be to focus on Counterinsurgency (COIN), which has been a cornerstone of Small Wars and LIC then “Military Operations Other than War” (MOOTW) and “Support Operations”, during the last couple of years.

To analyze this concept of counterinsurgency, we will focus to a great extent on four official documents produced by the US Marine Corps und the US Army: “Counterinsurgency Operations”, published as Field Manual FMFM 8-2 in January 1980 (and re-named as MCWP 3-33.5 in October of 2004), “Counterinsurgency Operations” (FM 90-8 / MCRP 3-33A) of August 1986, “Counterinsurgency Operations”, published as Field Manual-Interim, FMI 3-07.22 in October 2004 (to expire in October 2006), and again “Stability Operations and Support Operations”, published as Field Manual FM 3-07 (substituting FM 100-20) in February 2003. Other material will also be considered, generally of very recent publication date.

This chapter therefore moves from providing historical background and doctrine development to outlining the current state of military thinking in regard to a key type of operation. Since this paper is aiming to present US military thinking on regional conflicts to a mostly non-military, academic audience, this chapter will extensively quote from the relevant official documents.

In regard to terminology, which again is not always clear and without

inconsistencies, “counterinsurgency” (COIN) should be considered an integrated civil-military strategy against internal insurgencies. The official US military’s definition is: “Those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency” (US Department of Defense 2001: 127).

In contrast, “Counterinsurgency” is the component of COIN dealing *militarily* with opposing guerrilla forces. When US military forces abroad participate in the military side of counterinsurgency, especially counterinsurgency operations, this is generally called “Foreign Internal Defense” (FID). Complementing counterinsurgency operations is “Internal Defense and Development” (IDAD), which does include security and military aspects, but has an emphasis on political, economic and social aspects of counterinsurgency, and sometimes is used mostly in regard to the local government’s policies. It should be noted that often the terminology is used differently. For instance, sometimes IDAD is used as a synonym to counterinsurgency.

The US Army’s FMI 3-07.22 (“Counterinsurgency Operations”) enumerates three aspects of counterinsurgency: a) Civil-Military Operations (CMO), which in turn includes activities such as civil affairs, PSYOP (Psychological Operations), humanitarian assistance, support for civil administration, and military civic action across the range of military operations; b) combat operations (generally counterinsurgency operations, even if this term is not used); and c) Information Operations (IO)

(US Department of the Army 2004: VIII).

5.1 Causes of Insurgencies from a Military Perspective

The Marine Corps' Field Manual "Counterinsurgency Operations" (1980/2004) starts with a section on the characteristics of developing nations, and with an analysis of the causes of insurgencies. On a general level of analyzing the political and socio-economic context of insurgencies, the counterinsurgency manual summarizes:

"Each developing country is unique with its own history, culture, preferences, and goals which result in a combination of problems different from those which exist for any other nation. When the problems of one of these nations become so great that the accepted government can no longer cope with them, an unstable situation is created. [...] *These economic, social, and political factors are the basic causes of the problems which must be dealt with* [Italics: J.H.]. We cannot hope to carry out successfully any mission which requires the establishment or reestablishment of law and order within a nation without a proper understanding of the characteristics which make that nation unique" (US Marine Corps 1980: 8).

It is worth quoting at length from the paragraphs on the reasons for internal unrest, violence and insurgencies:

"Insurgency is a product of unsatisfactory conditions, social change, and a broad belief in the prospects for improvement. Characteristically, the aspirations of the people are not being met by the government or ruling elite and there is an organized effort to discredit and/or dispossess the existing leadership. Conditions that encourage popular revolt are:

- (1) Social injustice. A demand for social justice by the mass of the people is one of the most common factors leading to popular revolt.
- (2) Feudalism.
- (3) Poverty.
- (4) Disease.
- (5) Low productivity.

- (6) Unemployment.
- (7) Overpopulation.
- (8) Official corruption.
- (9) Ethnic or religious discrimination.
- (10) Unstable monetary system.
- (11) Illiteracy.
- (12) Government inefficiency.
- (13) Absentee ownership or inequities in the distribution of arable land.
- (14) Colonialism and foreign exploitation also contribute to revolt, but are less common in the present period" (ibid: 3).

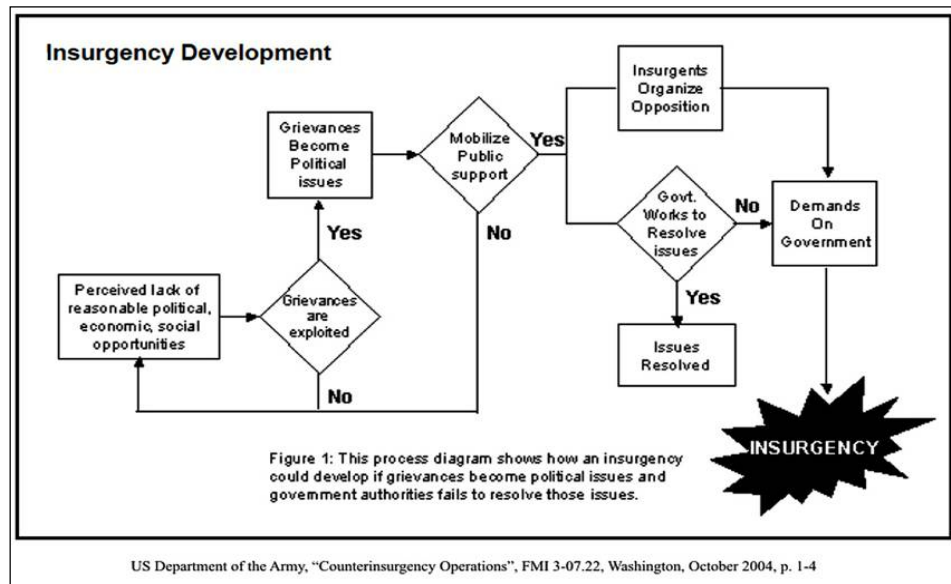
This list of causes for insurgency is quite remarkable in a military manual, since it indicates an understanding that security and military problems are the result of internal economic, social and political factors. It implies that military responses to insurgency would not be addressing the root causes of conflict. The US Air Force (as does the US Army) perceives the problem in similar terms:

"The fundamental goal is to prevent insurgency. This is accomplished by defeating the threat insurgent organizations pose, and by correcting conditions that prompted the insurgency. *Successful counterinsurgents realize that the true nature of the threat to the established government lies in the people's perception of their government's inability to solve problems.*

Counterinsurgency uses overt and covert methods in an integrated internal defense and development strategy. *This strategy focuses on building viable political, economic, military, and social institutions that respond in a timely manner to the needs of society.* [Italics: J.H.] (US Department for the Air Force 2000: 13).

The Marine Corps manual concurs by stressing key political contributing aspects, such as "aggravation by the Government", weakness of the Government, and exterior support. Among other factors it mentions social ills or grievances of the people, lack of funds, or excessive military burdens, or administrative weakness of the government and failure to maintain law and order (US Marine Corps 1980: 4 et sqq.)





The Marine Corps, with its long tradition in foreign intervention and counterinsurgency, obviously clearly understands the key socio-economic causes of political violence, and also the crucial role governments play in aggravating the situation because of their incompetence, weakness, repression or misguided policies.

These factors are discussed today by academic researchers under the headings of "governance", "weak government" or "failing states". The US Army's counterinsurgency interim manual has a slightly different approach, stating:

"These causes can range from the desire for greater equity in the distribution of resources (poverty alone is rarely, if ever, sufficient to sustain an insurgency) to a demand that foreign occupation end. Increasingly, religious ideology has become a catalyst for insurgent movements" (US Department of the Army 2004: 1-3).

It is obvious that the experience in the Middle East in general and particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq have contributed towards shaping this perception.

The counterinsurgency manual takes up these arguments and links them to the questions of ethnicity,

religion and the policies of a guerrilla movement.

"The more fragmented a society is, the greater the opportunity for dissatisfaction among the populace. The guerrilla will attempt to increase friction between different groups in society. These groups may be aligned along racial, ethnic, religious, or social lines. Language differences or tradition may also be a reason for alignment. Religious influences may play a significant role in the sociological factors that affect the guerrilla. [...] The guerrilla seeks to exploit this situation through the use of psychological operations" (US Marine Corps 1986: 2-3).

According to the analysis of the counterinsurgency manual, the socio-economic and political factors leading to an insurgency are most important, but are not sufficient to cause it.

Army Field Manual 3-07 hardly deals with causes of insurgencies at all, and does so in somewhat vague and general terms where it does, while the "Counterinsurgency Operations" manual (FM 90-8), because of its narrower and more militarily oriented focus, deals with these questions in a more general and superficial way. It is not contradicting the MC Counterinsurgency doctrine, but rarely mentions the causes for insurgencies. A few sections deal with these questions:



“There are three requirements that must exist before an insurgency can occur.

- a. *Vulnerable population.* For whatever the reasons – social, political, or economic – the population is generally open to change. The insurgents will offer hope for change and exploit dissatisfaction with the current government.
- b. *Leadership available for direction.* A vulnerable population alone will not support an insurgent movement. There must be a leadership element that can direct the frustrations of a dissatisfied populace along the lines delineated by the overall insurgent strategy.
- c. *Lack of government control.* Lack of government control may be real or perceived. The greater the control the government has over the situation, the less likely are the chances for insurgent success. The opposite is also true: the less control the government has, the greater is the chance for insurgent success” (ibid section 1-4: 1-2).

While this manual mentions a “dissatisfied populace” and social, political, or economic reasons, it does not elaborate. Also, it briefly touches upon questions of governance, but only in the context of government control, not in regard to policies or polity. The reasons for these different approaches are obvious: the counterinsurgency doctrine conceptualizes the overall problems of dealing with insurgencies, while the counterinsurgency manual deals with military means to react to it. But even from a purely military perspective a military approach is not enough, as the counterinsurgency manual makes quite clear:

“Political considerations influence the conduct of counterinsurgency operations. It is essentially a contest between the host government and guerrillas concerning political, social, religious, or economic issues. The government and its representatives must present themselves and their program as the better choice” (ibid: 3-5/3-6).

Field Manual FM 3-07 (published in 2003) takes up this point:

“Success in counterinsurgency goes to the party that achieves the greater popular support. The winner will be the party that better forms the issues, mobilizes groups and forces around them, and develops programs that solve problems of relative deprivation. This requires political, social, and economic development” (US Department of the Army 2003: 3-4).

The result of this for the military side of operations is presented in quite unambiguous terms:

“No matter how successful FID forces are militarily, the insurgency is not defeated until the political, economic, and social problems which led to it are corrected or significantly alleviated. This usually takes a considerable length of time” (US Marine Corps 1986: 3-5).

Again, this is not from a social science textbook, but states what the US Marine Corps deems important preconditions for military success.

5.2 Characteristics and Development of Insurgencies

The next step in both manuals is to describe and analyze the character of insurgencies.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that the nature of insurgencies is hardly linked to the previous analysis of its causes, but transferred into a different context. Both manuals treat insurgencies primarily as “communist” in character, despite a short disclaimer “not to imply” that “all rebellions or attempts to overthrow established governments are inspired by communists” (US Marine Corps 1980: 9).

Still, further on both texts generally treat insurgencies as communist and stress the importance of “external support”. It is obvious that the Cold

¹⁹ For a general analysis of post Cold War insurgencies see: Metz 1993; for a recent overview of past, current and future insurgencies see: Beckett 2005: 22-36.



War context has left a strong mark here. The US Army manuals FM 3-07 and FMI 3-07.22, which were completely written after the end of the Cold War and published only in 2003 and 2004, do not mention a wholesale “communist” character of insurgencies. Instead, they emphasize the role of local elites:

“Insurgencies are dynamic political movements, resulting from real or perceived grievance or neglect that leads to alienation from an established government. Alienated elite members advance alternatives to existing conditions. (Culture defines elites. For example, in most of the world educators and teachers are members of the elite; in Islamic and many Catholic nations, religious leaders are elite members)” (US Department of the Army 2004: 1-7).

Both Marine Corps manuals analyze insurgencies in three stages: the first phase is termed “passive stage (Strategic Defense Stage)” by the counterinsurgency manual, while given the name of “latent and incipient insurgency” by the counterterrorism manual. The second phase is named “Active Stage (Strategic Stalemate Stage)” and “Guerrilla Warfare” respectively, and the third one “Counteroffensive Stage” and “War of Movement” respectively in the two manuals. While the first manual is more detailed in regard to describing these stages, the texts do not differ in substance. Interestingly, this categorization of insurgencies in three stages is still a reflection of the Maoist strategy of “People’s War” – which in the Post-Cold War era often does not make much sense. It is of little surprise that some military thinkers have criticized this outmoded conceptualization of an insurgency, e.g. Montgomery McFate (McFate 2005: 27) and Steven Metz/Raymond Millen (Metz and Millen 2004: 16). US Army Field Manual 3-07 moves beyond this outdated model and puts forward a 5-stage model of insurgency develop-

ment, which includes preinsurgency, organization, guerilla warfare, conventional warfare and postinsurgency as distinct phases (US Department of the Army 2003: D-5 and D-6).

While this still is a somewhat mechanical understanding of the process, supposedly culminating in a conventional warfare stage and not completely breaking with the traditional model, this at least to some degree attempts to take recent experiences into account.

Both manuals agree on the basic starting point of counterinsurgency/counterterrorism campaigns. This cannot be a military approach of directly beating the insurgents, since they will hardly ever operate in big formations, and it would not address the root causes of the insurgency. The strategy can also not be to conquer and hold territory, because this would not defeat the insurgents but might even provide them with additional targets for ambushes and attacks. Instead, both manuals clarify that the loyalty and control of the population is the strategically most important point.

5.3 Core Strategies for Counterinsurgency

Metz and Millen of the Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, who have contributed important studies to our topic, name a key factor in counterinsurgency strategy:

“Insurgents require popular or coerced support from the people; conversely, a prerequisite to counterinsurgency success is *the separation of the dissidents from the populace*. [Italics: J.H.] The separation may be accomplished by physical or psychological means or a combination of both depending on the circumstances. Regardless of means, the target is always the same – the people” (Metz and Millen 2004: 54).



The counterinsurgency manual puts this point even more strongly:

“The government must isolate the insurgent from the population, both physically and psychologically, thereby denying him personnel, material, and intelligence support” (US Marine Corps 1986: 1-5).

and the US Army fully agrees with this approach:

“In a counterinsurgency, the center of gravity is public support. In order to defeat an insurgent force, US forces must be able to separate insurgents from the population” (Department of the Army Counterinsurgency Operations FMI 3-07.22 2004: 2-13).

FMI 3-07.22 states, “this is analogous to separating the fish from the sea.” (ibid: 1-10). In extreme cases the separation of insurgents from the population can also be organized by resettling the latter (ibid: 3-4).

Robert Tomes, recently writing in *Parameters* (the Journal of the US Army War College) provides some suggestions on how this is to be achieved:

“For example, campaign planning should include a system to account for every citizen, coordination with the political effort to designate a hierarchical network of groups headed by pro-government chiefs, and a system to monitor the activities of guerrilla sympathizers. This entails a census, the issuing of photo-identification cards, and a countrywide intelligence system. The ultimate goal is to separate the fish from the sea, leaving it exposed to the state’s spear” (Tomes 2004: 19).

Starting from this need to win over the population and separate it from the insurgent forces it again follows that military operations are only a part of counterinsurgency. The population-centered approach has several dimensions:

- as quoted, it aims to cut off the sources of material and logistical support from the insurgents;

- it aims at receiving intelligence on the insurgency from sectors of the population;
- it attempts to isolate the insurgents geographically to be better able to apply fire power and other military means against them;
- it has the aim of antagonizing the population and insurgents against each other and thereby the insurgency politically;
- and it has the aim of addressing some of the causes and justifications of the insurgency, to give the population “hope” in the future and incentives to cooperate.

These are the strategic points in counterinsurgency, while military and non-military tools just contribute to these goals. Therefore, the elements of political, social and economic reforms also have a subservient role, meant to create good-will among the population²⁰ This has been called “winning the hearts and minds” of people, time and again.

“Winning the willing support of the population to the side of the threatened government is one of the principal goals of countering an insurgent situation. There is not a more certain method of eliminating the guerrilla and the infrastructure than by turning the civilians against them. The insurgent has employed tactics designed to create doubts, bitterness, grievances, and unrest in the populace toward their government. He has been changing and modifying the attitudes of the civilian about his government in an effort to establish a suitable environment for guerrilla

²⁰ “Although the basic objective of internal development is to contribute to internal independence and freedom from conditions fostering insurgency, its immediate practical goal is gaining population support. Economic, political, and social development programs are aimed at establishing rapport between the people and the government which will result in support of the government to the detriment of the insurgency” (US Marine Corps: 1980: 27).



growth. The government must counter by establishing new faith and loyalty, and persuading the people to back their own government against the insurgents. The words and actions of all representatives of the government, whether they are members of civil agencies, of the host country's armed forces, or US Marines, must be complimentary and directed toward winning the people" (ibid: 134).

As we have seen, the combat role of the military conceptually is supposed to be complementary, protective and conducive to political, social and economic development. Interestingly, socio-political development is not presented as the core objective of counterinsurgency, but as a means to another end: to influence the *perceptions* of the civilian population. At the center of the strategy therefore are *political-psychological* goals – changing the thinking and feeling of the people in a target area. Both the developmental reform process and military combat are insufficient by themselves, but are designed to facilitate changes in the political perceptions – and therefore the behavior – of the population. The relationships between these factors are complex: without development and reform military operations can hardly succeed strategically – but without successful military operations providing security some basic preconditions for successful development and reform in a counterinsurgency context are lacking.

5.4 Civil-Military Relations, Development Policy, and Nation-Building as Tools of Counterinsurgency

As we have seen, in the context of winning over the population US military analysts often stress that “balanced development of the county” – in the sense of political,

social and economic development – is an instrument to reduce the causes of conflict, but mostly to influence the perceptions and loyalty of the people. To a big degree this is the function of the development agencies and other civilian agencies of the host country and its external supporters. Therefore civil-military cooperation with local and international government authorities, international development and relief organizations and with non-governmental organizations are key. At the same time, military units also directly contribute to this goal, in the form of “civic action”, conducting “civil affairs” (CA).

The US Army gives these examples of civilian functions in counterinsurgency operations:

“Establishing conditions favorable for the development of HN [host nation: J.H.] governmental institutions consistent with US objectives. These conditions include the establishment of law enforcement and freely elected political leaders where possible, public information, health care, schools, public works, and fire fighting capabilities” (US Department of the Army 2004: 2-2).

This again indicates the political character of counterinsurgency, especially its focus on the local state. US Army Field Manual FM 7-98, Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict (1992), which is to provide guidance to military commanders at the brigade and battalion level, names as functions of Civil Affairs Operations (CA) “assisting a host government to meet its peoples needs”, “establishing a temporary civil administration to maintain law and order” and “establishing a civil administration in occupied enemy territory”. (US Department of the Army 1992: Chapter 7 section VIII point 7.31 (b) no page)

It is clear that not just the counterinsurgency campaign as a whole, but also battalions and brigades are



supposed to strengthen, restore or even establish functions and organizational structures of government in a host country. “Establishing a civil administration” either at the invitation of a weak host government or as part of an occupation is easily recognizable as part of state-building. Therefore it is not surprising that there is a strong connection between counterinsurgency and Nation-Building in general.²¹ Field Manual Interim 3-07.22 (“Counterinsurgency Operations”, 2004) is quite explicit on this point:

“To the extent the HN [host nation: J.H.] is lacking basic institutions and functions, the burden upon the US and multinational forces is increased. In the extreme, rather than building upon what is, the US and other nations will find themselves creating elements (such as local forces and government institutions) of the society they have been sent to assist. *Military forces thus become involved in nation building while simultaneously attempting to defeat an insurgency.* [Italics: J.H.] US forces often lead because the US military can quickly project and sustain a force. This involves them in a host of current activities regarded as nonstandard, from supervising elections to restoring power and facilitating and conducting schooling” (US Department of the Army 2004: 1-10).

The Army also explains that Counterinsurgency “often involve(s) nation building. Counterinsurgency often involves nation building, but not all nation building involves counterinsurgency” (ibid: 2-2). This also implies the close coordination with other US government agencies, e.g. USAID:

“USAID is the US government agency responsible for nation building. USAID activities are coordinated through the US embassy. At the tactical level, direct coordination through the chain of command with USAID avoids duplication of effort and en-

sure adequate resources and technical assistance are made available” (ibid.: 3-2).

Indeed, many activities in counterinsurgency have a direct link to nation-building. Sometimes the provision of services to civilians, which under normal conditions would be the task of civilian government agencies, is a part of this. Also, the guarantee of basic security for the state itself and for the population should be considered in this context. But civic action and development activities in the economic and political fields belong particularly to this category. It has been mentioned before that often a big part of counterinsurgency consist of trying to make state and government structures operational or even to establish them. This is the core of any nation-building enterprise. In this context the army holds the view that “(n)ormally, NGOs, private foreign corporations, HN [host nation: J.H.] private enterprises, and US governmental activities cooperate in local counterinsurgency programs” (ibid: 3-2).

It is a significant aspect of counterinsurgencies that NGOs and businesses are a part of the campaign, even if often without knowing or without their consent. Therefore it is important for private actors to know about and reflect upon their role in this context, if they do not want to become an unwilling tool in a military strategy. The same applies to civilian development agencies, which obviously can be closely linked in substance and often in organization to counterinsurgency.

The COIN manual summarizes the “military functions” to be achieved by internal and external armed forces. As a primary function the US Marine Corps forces are supposed to “restore law and order and

21 For Nation-Building in general see: Hippler 2005b.



reestablish security in coordination with the host country". In an ancillary function they are supposed to "promote, in coordination with the civil agencies of the host country and the foreign service departments of our own government, the political, social, and economic welfare of the host country" (US Marine Corps 1980: 39).

This is an important point, which will open up more questions later on: here, the root causes of insurgencies, as developed before in many of the documents quoted, namely the social, economic and political deficits of a country, are relegated to a secondary, "ancillary function" in counterinsurgency, compared to the "primary function" of restoring security. Also, US Army Field Manual FM 7-98 ("Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict", providing guidance for battalions and brigades) deemphasizes political and Civic Action operations in some parts of its sections on counterinsurgency.

To illustrate the non-military elements of these military campaigns it may be illuminating to show how the Marine Corps is expected to deal with social development. The manual summarizes this point by specifically mentioning the areas of health, education, urbanization, population, leadership, status, citizen groups, land reforms, and housing. The reason for these activities is "to instill a personal sense of participation in a larger local and national effort" (ibid: 30).

It is easy to see that these and other civic action operations by a military force might be of practical use by themselves and might help improve the living conditions of people, especially in remote and underdeveloped areas. And it is also quite obvious that these kinds of activities, when linked to psychological operations (PSYOP)

and public affairs (PA), can be a powerful tool of propaganda and help create legitimacy (see Lord and Barnett 1989).

But we should note here the justification for these kinds of activities: it is generally creating "hope" for the population, not structural change, which implies an instrumental character to achieve psychological effects.

Focusing public attention away from the bloody operations on the battlefield and toward support for health clinics and orphanages can be very useful to avoid criticism and build good-will. Getting local and international newspapers or TV stations to report about development or social activities instead of the repressive side of a counterinsurgency campaign will help make this campaign effective.

US Army Field Manual FM 46-1 ("Public Affairs Operations") explains it in this way:

"Information is a major element in these operations. Support for the mission and perceptions of its legitimacy are greatly affected by making information available to participants, observers, supporting nations and the international community.

This is best achieved through coordinated information operations. Public affairs, civil affairs and psychological operations use distinct methods and address distinct audiences, but must all be coordinated to ensure common credibility. [...] Missions of both categories, assistance and peace operations, are media intensive. This media attention, rather than being viewed as a hindrance, is in fact an asset. Media reports are often considered more credible than official pronouncements. *They are a primary conduit for communicating Army goals, capabilities and accomplishments. Media reports contribute to perceptions of legitimacy, [Italics: J.H.]* requiring the presentation of consistent, clear messages about the operation" (US Department of the Army 1997a:40).

We can appreciate that media reporting in conflict can be an instrument of public scrutiny and control in



regard to foreign and security policy, but it also is in danger of being instrumentalized to justify military campaigns. This potential has been recognized by the US forces especially since media reporting played an important role in delegitimizing the war in Vietnam. Since then US forces have paid special attention to arranging media coverage, right up to the introduction of “embedded journalists” in the Iraq war.

5.5 The Role of Military Combat and the Goals of the Strategy

Finally we must look briefly at the military and combat roles of the US armed forces in counterinsurgency campaigns. The fact that counterinsurgency is strategically focused on political control and restoration of popular loyalty towards the local government does not imply that force, violence, and combat do not play an important role. But combat operations only make sense in close cooperation with the other elements of counterinsurgency. In the words of the US Army’s counterinsurgency manual:

“The primary objective of counterinsurgency operations is to neutralize the insurgents and, together with population and resource control measures, establish a secure environment within which political, social, and economic progress is possible” (US Department of the Army 2004: 3-8).²²

Generally, therefore, the strategy is not to directly confront the insurgent force head-on and destroy it. Whenever this might be possible US armed forces would obviously try to use such an opportunity, but any competent guerrilla or insurgent force

will make sure that it does not arise. A mature guerrilla force will only fight on its own terms and generally avoid operating in larger formations. FM 3-07, while in some regards diverting from this understanding itself, puts the core role of military forces in counterinsurgency like this:

“The regular armed forces are the shield behind which political, social, and economic development occurs” (US Department of the Army 2003: 3-6). This again clarifies that winning the war militarily is not perceived as feasible in counterinsurgency, but that the armed forces are operating in a role subservient to political and economic reform – in principle at least, because this is often disregarded on the ground.

Therefore, combat operations are supposed to serve several purposes:

- attacking and whenever possible directly destroying insurgent formations;
- harassment of insurgents to keep them off balance and reduce their chances of taking the initiative;
- defending cities, military installations and other important assets;
- providing security and protecting projects and programs that are politically or economically relevant to the stabilization of the respective country.

The last point generally is the decisive one, while the other three are to some degree contributing elements or preconditions. The military problem has three aspects. One, military operations in counterinsurgency operations are quite different from conventional ones, because firepower is much less important and combat is not primarily aimed at conquering or holding territory, but at small or mid-

²² Interestingly, this quote mentions security and the use of force as preconditions for development, not vice versa.



sized groups of hostile fighters, which are difficult to identify and to distinguish from civilians. Two, while the insurgents can select targets at will and their attacks can hardly be predicted, the local and US armed forces have a much more complex task: to protect all of the potential targets simultaneously, and also to protect political processes, not just military or other installations. Three, combat operations in counterinsurgency often have to be conducted in the context of political restrictions. They have to serve, not undermine or dominate the political aspects of counterinsurgency. Therefore, the rules of engagement have to be more restrictive than in conventional operations, e.g. in regard to firepower or targeting (“collateral damage” might undermine population loyalty or international cooperation).²³

In summary, the core strategy of modern US counterinsurgency is an approach of overcoming a political-military threat from a non-conventional enemy by using military, police, intelligence, economic, political and developmental tools in an integrated way. Since often a fully developed insurgency cannot be defeated by military means, the strategy mostly is political, while making heavy use of military instruments in a supporting role.

Metz and Millen argued:

“Because insurgents attempt to prevent the military battlespace from becoming decisive and concentrate in the political and psychological, operational design must be different than for conventional combat. One useful approach would be to adopt an interagency, effects-based method of counterinsurgency planning focused on the following key activities:

- *Fracturing* the insurgent movement through military, psychological, and political means, to include direct strikes, dividing one part against another, offering amnesties, draining the pool of alienated, disillusioned, angry young males by providing alternatives, and so forth. ...;
- *Delegitimizing* the insurgent movement in the eyes of the local population and any international constituency it might have;
- *Demoralizing* the insurgent movement by creating and sustaining the perception that long-term trends are adverse and by making the lives of insurgents unpleasant and dangerous through military pressure and psychological operations;
- *Delinking* the insurgent movement from its internal and external support by understanding and destroying the political, logistics, and financial connections; and,
- *Deresourcing* the insurgent movement both by curtailing funding streams and causing it to waste existing resources” (Metz/Millen 2004: 25 et sqq.).

Nevertheless, two things should be kept in mind. One, there are many officers who would not agree with this approach and prefer to stay with more conventional means (like maximizing firepower, relying on air superiority, etc.), because they think it is the job of a soldier to fight and win wars, and not to get mixed up in “social engineering” or nation-building. Many officers are also less than enthusiastic about the restrictions which the political considerations often have on the way they can conduct combat operations. They (or some of them) might not necessarily disagree with the political tasks, but would very much prefer them to be handled by civilian agencies. And two, even if the general approach now has the blessing of the military brass – though not always of enthusiastic character – this does not mean it is always implemented. Unforeseen

23 Some officers have complained about too narrowly defined Rules of Engagement. See Broadstone 1996.

conditions, conventional thinking, lack of preparation, misunderstanding a specific conflict or the internal condition of the respective country or

political restrictions may contribute to not seriously implementing the strategy.





6. Analysis and Critique: Counterinsurgency in the Context of LIC, MOOTW and Stability Operations

The main purpose of this paper was to familiarize the academic and interested general public with the thinking and strategizing of US military forces in regard to regional conflicts and how to deal with them. Counterinsurgency was our main focus, because it is the most important and most frequent kind of operation in this regard. Up to now we have generally restricted ourselves to presenting, summarizing and highlighting key points of the strategies. In this chapter it is in order to briefly analyse and critically assess a few crucial points which have been touched upon before. The first sub-chapter will discuss a few quite specific points of criticism coming from military analysts. Thereafter we will move on to more general analysis.

6.1 Dissenting Military Voices

Military brass and analysts have not infrequently raised points of objections in regard to LIC, MOOTW, Stability Operations and counterinsurgency. Some of them did so from a more conventional military perspective, trying to restrict the soldier's role to war fighting. Others have appreciated the importance of integrating political, social and economic tools into counterinsurgency and related operations, and have instead criticized the apparent deficits in actually doing so. This perspective gained strength after the experiences of the US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq

demonstrated impressive weaknesses in dealing with post-war situations and Stability Operations, especially in the field of civilian reconstruction and counterinsurgency. Lt.Col Patrick Donahue, for instance, raised an important point of criticism in the *Military Review*:

"In Iraq and elsewhere, the Army asks battalion and company combat commanders to conduct nationbuilding and act as civil affairs officers. Soldiers must master war-fighting skills to seize and secure terrain and towns while working peacefully with the local populace and, hopefully, persuading them that nonviolence is the best path to stability. Failing to win the hearts and minds of local people might not sound a mission's death knell, but it makes success in suppressing insurgencies and terrorism more difficult." Donahue pointedly asks: "What is the Army doing to prepare leaders for these undertakings?" (Donahue 2004: 24).

Asking this question obviously implies that the US Army is not doing enough, which after more than 20 years of LIC/MOOTW doctrine development and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq is quite an important criticism. And this neglect is not just reflected in a lack of training, but also of emphasis on these key points in MOOTW doctrine. One of the examples Donahue gives draws on a lesson learnt from Iraq, which had contributed a great deal to create the mess US forces got themselves (and Iraq) into after the war:²⁴

²⁴ For this author's perspective on the post-war situation in Iraq: Hippler 2005a: 194-200; also: Hippler 2005b: 81-97.



“Knowing how to run a city is essential to establishing safety and stability in an urban environment. The most pressing problems Army troops initially faced in Iraq were the reestablishment of electric power, and providing clean water and health care services. Soldiers must understand the basic functions of city administration and how to organize public works departments to maintain, fix, and if necessary, establish basic city services. The vitality of the local economy and the ability of citizens to buy, sell, and transport goods are essential for a return to normalcy. Freely exchanging goods and services and distributing food (outside of emergency governmental aid) are critical to security” (ibid: 26).

This point is well put and refers to the incompetence and neglect in dealing with the specific Iraqi post-war situation as well as to MOOTW doctrine, which mentions the crucial need for such civilian activities in general, but does not seriously deal with them in detail.

Staff Sergeant George Anderson is even more critical, drawing on his experiences in the Balkans. He insists on the importance of Nation-Building for stabilizing target countries and presents his suggestions:

“Unlike current civil affairs units that provide technical expertise, future nationbuilders would assist and provide governance. Soldiers need to know how to destroy targets. Nationbuilders need to know how to create good impressions and build formidable relationships. They are one part diplomat and one part soldier. [...] We want our nationbuilders to be open, approachable, and easy to communicate with. We want nationbuilders who understand and care about the locals. We want nationbuilders to dialogue first and rely on force only as a last resort” (Anderson III 2004: 50).

Again, this does not contradict MOOTW and related doctrines in principle, but is a strong criticism of their failing of not moving from general principles to specific conceptualization and implementation. Anderson stresses the importance of learning these lessons: “History is full of examples of countries that have won the

conventional war, but lost the nation-building war. In Vietnam, we learned that you do not win a person’s heart and mind by kicking him in the butt. Unfortunately, we have yet to learn the most efficient way to win hearts and minds” (ibid).

His radical suggestion is to create specific military units to deal with governance and Nation-Building and keep them apart from combat units. “Attempting to have the same people in the same uniforms perform both roles confuses those around us as well as ourselves” (ibid).

An important critic of recent US military policies is Gen. (ret.) Anthony Zinni, formerly commander of the US Central Command (which is responsible for the Middle East). Zinni had voiced a ringing attack on some basic points of US military policies and practices, which lead directly to MOOTW and COIN conceptualization and implementation. It is worth quoting at length from the transcript of a speech of Gen. Zinni, delivered to the US Marine Corps Association and the US Naval Institute in 2003.

“Right now, in a place like Iraq, you’re dealing with the Jihads [*sic*; probably “Jihadists”: J.H.] that are coming in to raise hell, crime on the streets that’s rampant, ex-Ba’athists that are still running around, and the potential now for this country to fragment: ... It’s a powder keg. ... Resources are needed, a strategy is needed, a plan. This is a different kind of conflict. War fighting is just one element of it. ... How do we cope with that? On one hand, you have to shoot and kill somebody; on the other hand, you have to feed somebody. [...] (Y)ou have to build an economy, restructure the infrastructure, build the political system. And there’s some poor lieutenant colonel, colonel, brigadier general down there, stuck in some province with all that saddled onto him, with NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and political wannabes running around, with factions and a culture he doesn’t understand. [...] The military does a damn good job of killing people and breaking things. ... What is the role of the military beyond that point? [...] What we have to ask



ourselves now is, is there something that the military needs to change into that involves its movement into this area of the political, the economic, the information management? If the others, those wearing suits, can't come in and solve the problem – can't bring the resources, the expertise, and the organization – and we're going to continue to get stuck with it, you have one or two choices."

Zinni demands that either civilian agencies get the competence and resources to get the job done, or the armed forces tackle these tasks seriously.

"What could this mean? It could mean civil affairs changes from just being a tactical organization doing basic humanitarian care and interaction with the civilian population, to actually being capable of reconstructing nations. That we will have people in uniform that are educated in the disciplines of economics, political structure, and we're actually going to go in and do that. We're actually going to be the governors. The CINCs [Commanders in Chief: J.H.] that are the proconsuls will truly be proconsuls and given that authority to do it; that you will set regional policy. This is scary stuff. ... But either get the people on the scene that can do it, get them there when they need to be there, give them the resources and the training, create the interoperability that's necessary – or validate the military mission to do it. In my mind, that's the most important question we have now" (Zinni 2003: no page).

It is clear that from the perspective of General Zinni and others the crucial point of LIC and MOOTW doctrine, that is solving specific political, social and economic problems, including reconstructing the basic mechanisms of governance in post-war situations and, especially under conditions of occupation, achieving stability and serving the US national interest, is not being implemented properly. There is a lack of planning, competence, resources and manpower. And Zinni's conclusion is that if the civilian agencies are not doing this, the only other option is that the armed forces should do it themselves – which would imply the authority and the competence to get it done.

And, according to Zinni, both are lacking, no matter what LIC and MOOTW doctrine demands in abstract terms.

6.2 One Strategy for All Contexts? – The Relationship of Ideology and Concepts

After following doctrine development from the 1940s up to the present, one aspect is striking. The period we covered has been characterized by quite different macro-political contexts. First, from the Banana Wars to World War II, US military intervention into local and regional conflicts was characterized by uninhibited and generally non-ideological imperialism. What was used for legitimizing and justifying Small Wars was basically pragmatic (like protecting US citizens and property, enforcing bilateral contracts with other countries, enforcing re-payment of debt, or restoring order) and supported by a strong sense of cultural, national and ethnic (WASP) self-confidence. To give a brief example of this early thinking we may quote US Marine Corps Major H.E. Ellis, from an article published in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in March of 1921:

"Among the progressive and altruistic members of the Community of Nations Uncle Sam undoubtedly stands preeminent in every "New Movement"; whether it be national or international, he is always to be found distinctly at the front. "Clean-up" weeks are his speciality and he will "clean up" anything or any place – a disease or a nation. Now this work of creating order out of chaos and showing small nations the way they should go is justly considered to be accomplished to the satisfaction of everybody [Italics: J.H.] if it were not for the particular attitude of the American people themselves" (Ellis 1921: 1).

The mixing of pragmatism and a feeling of a US "manifest destiny" of "showing small nations the



way they should go" was not fed by ideological confrontation against others but by a simple sense of self-centeredness. Major Ellis remarked:

"In so far as the Marines in general are concerned, they believe that in every case where the United States has taken charge of a small state it has been actuated by purely altruistic motives. ... The particular motives for the interference in another nation's affairs are many and varied. The action may be taken for the protection of lives and property of our own or foreign citizens, the establishment of a stable government in order that international obligations may be respected, the general disciplining and education of a state for its debut into the society of nations, or for any other ethical reason with the Monroe Doctrine as a background" (ibid: 1-2).

"Yes, the Marines are down in jungleland, and they did kill a man in war, and a great many people did not know anything about it. This is most unfortunate, but – the Marines are only doing their job as ordered by the people of the United States" (ibid: 15).

After World War II the US perception of Small Wars and counterinsurgency was necessarily deeply coloured by Cold War thinking. Anti-Communism was the overwhelming ideology until the late 1980s, and generally the US role in local Third World conflict was conceptually integrated into it. Small Wars and Low-Intensity Conflicts of the 1980 were mostly seen as an element of East-West confrontation and the fight against Communism. While self-centredness and a missionary moral impulse were still strong, both US self-perception and the counterinsurgency (or pro-insurgency) strategies were basically legitimized and conceptualized as anti-communist, which means ideological, crusades. Later, for a few years during the second half of the 1990s and at the very beginning of the new century, the US role in local conflicts was more diffuse: instead of the one "bear", the World now seemed to be a dangerous place because of "many snakes". For a short while the

main justification for US military policies and intervention in the Third World instead of a specific enemy were instability, "international law" (Kuwait) and "humanitarian" and related concerns. Somalia and the Balkan wars were key examples. After September 11, 2001, the new justification for US military Third World intervention became the "War on Terrorism" and the struggle against Muslim extremism. The wars and Military Operations Other Than War (and counterinsurgency) in Afghanistan and Iraq – among many other areas of operation – were put in this context. A new global and ideological confrontation has to a great degree taken the place of Cold War ideology. While there were some ideological links between these settings (like defending "American Values", "freedom", and "democracy" against alien ideologies like Communism or Muslim extremism), they are still quite different from each other.

The important point here is that while US ideologies and legitimations for Third World military involvement and intervention have been extremely variable over the last 80 years, the strategies and concepts in regard to them have been remarkably stable. Military interventions have been undertaken on a continuous basis for much more than a century, while their legitimations and ideologies have kept changing fundamentally. Also, the number of military interventions did not change with the changing ideological context. And, as this paper has demonstrated, the basic military approaches to intervening, fighting instability and insurgency and defending US interests have changed very little. While there has been some development of military doctrine in regard to military operations below the level of war because of new tech-



nological and other developments (such as increasing mobility of military units, better communications, electronization of battle, and an increased role of air power) the basic military approaches to Third World conflict have hardly changed. The terminology has been highly unstable, elements of doctrine were developed, refined (or lessons learned forgotten), but the basic principles of counterinsurgency remained the same, while counterinsurgency and related concepts were and still are the most important and most frequent types of military operations.

The conclusion we can deduct obviously is that the ideological settings coloured and influenced military thinking and strategy, but that they were of little importance compared to the stable practice of US military intervention and the approaches in carrying them out. If US interventions and their strategies hardly change over time and happen independently of their ideological context, these ideological contexts cannot explain these interventions and their character. Therefore, while the respective ideologies justifying US military policies should be taken seriously as mechanisms of legitimation, they were hardly ever the underlying reasons for interventions. They were justifications of a more deeply rooted and stable policy of interventionism, which is based on a stable set of self-interest, rarely ever discussed in military handbooks, not ideology. The common denominator is the constant desire to control and dominate a foreign country or region, while the justifications have varied widely.

6.3 The Integration of Military and Political Approaches? – The Question of Military Dominance

From Small Wars to MOOTW and “Stability and Support Operations”, doctrine has always emphasized the political character of these operations. The goals are political (stabilizing and/or controlling a foreign society); the strategies also are (e.g. separating insurgents from the population, “winning hearts and minds”, winning the “legitimacy war”²⁵), and many important operational elements and tactics are basically political (civic action, civilian operations, information operations, PSYOP, support to civilian governments or nation-building); while the key actors often are military. The result is that the line between military and civilian operations becomes blurred and that the areas of politics and the military are hard to distinguish.

In a sense this could in principle contribute towards “civilizing” military operations, because they are supposed to be integrated into a holistic approach to dealing with violent conflict. Officially it is occasionally even recognized that insurgencies and other types of MOOTW cannot be mastered militarily, but only politically, socially and economically, while military operations are in a subservient role. Such reasoning can provide military officers with an enlightened view of their own role and reduce the importance of the means and application of violence. Practically, however, the disappearing of the border be-

25 A term used by Manwaring 2001: 19.



tween the civil/political and military spheres and their melting into one often leads to the “militarization” of civilian and political activities, because they can easily become subjugated to the security and military aspects of a situation. In the words of General Zinni, quoted above, civilian operations tend to be reduced to be a “*tactical organization doing basic humanitarian care and interaction with the civilian population*” done by the military forces themselves or under the guidance of the armed forces. LIC, MOOTW and Counterinsurgency cannot be non-political. But from a practical perspective, for military planners and commanders the political dimensions have three characteristics: one, they tend to put them in a very delicate position *they cannot control* and can hardly shape or influence; two, political considerations can be a *restriction* on their own operations, reducing the means and limiting the tactics of operations, for instance by excluding the use of specific weaponry, limiting the amount of firepower, or determining or restricting targeting. Three, political, civilian activities can be *instrumental* to achieving military goals. For example, to kill insurgents efficiently soldiers are supposed to physically separate them from civilian populations, and to achieve this, political means might be employed. To be a good warrior, sometimes it may be helpful to use developmental or psychological tools. This does not transform a warrior into a politician, but it makes him more efficient.

The key question here is who is in the driver’s seat: is a potential or acute conflict in a specific country *primarily* treated as a political and developmental problem handled by the respective local and foreign civilian authorities and organizations,

which can turn to the military for support and assistance; or is the operation primarily a military one, utilizing civilian tools, concepts and organizations? Both cases exist, but there is a general tendency to give the leading role in countries of high priority to the military (or to some degree or in some respect to the CIA), as in Vietnam, Central America in the 1980s, and Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. This will happen the more easily the more difficult the security situation is in a given target country, since economic and social development, the strengthening of the structures of governance and political reform all require a minimum degree of security. And the worse the security situation is, the stronger will be the role of police, intelligence and military forces. A dominating role of the armed forces will also depend on budgetary considerations: especially in the US context it is generally much easier to get funding for the military than for civilian development and humanitarian agencies, which often tends to shift the balance of power to the former, thereby reducing the role of the latter. In such a context it is difficult to avoid reducing political and civilian elements in MOOTW to a supporting and tactical tool for security, combat and military activities.

To summarize this point: while military doctrine in regard to MOOTW and related activities often demands the primacy of political and developmental dimensions over military operations, and an integration of politics, economics, development, and military strategy into a holistic concept, this is rarely accomplished. There are several reasons for this:

- a) Military doctrine often is not serious itself about these two points and its general and some-



times vague statements in this regard are generally not followed up and transformed into specifics. If political considerations, detailed knowledge of the target country and its culture, state- and Nation-Building and winning the hearts and minds of the local population are really as important as military doctrine states, why do the respective field manuals not provide specific guidance and advice for planning in this regard?

- b) Over time there seems to have occurred a subtle shift in doctrine development to deemphasize political and development aspects. While during the last 25 years we can see a remarkable stability in doctrine, conventional military thinking has slowly recaptured lost ground.
 - c) Another aspect is the weakness of civilian agencies in many situations of LIC/MOOTW/Stability Operations: in regard to budgets, personnel, credibility, very often development agencies are in a much weaker position than military ones. While there have been quite a few cases where the armed forces are calling the shots in a target country and in counterinsurgency operations, it is difficult to imagine USAID or another developmental organization being the lead agency. There is a trend in US political circles to think “if it is important, send in the troops”. And if one calls in the troops, it is expected that they are in control.
 - d) Vague, unrealistic, propagandistic or contradictory political guidance is also undercutting civilian MOOTW and related operations. If the White House or the State Department do not formulate clear and attainable objectives and put civilian agencies in charge, the result will be that the relevant players have to sort them out themselves, muddle through in difficult situations, and will compete for influence. It is not surprising that the armed forces under such conditions will act in ways that suit their own bureaucratic culture and focus on what they can do best: military operations in a narrow sense. If the political leaders are not forcing the military to act in a political and development-oriented way, the armed forces will instinctively try not to get involved there more than necessary. They will put the non-military job on the doorstep of civilian agencies, which in turn generally do not get the political support and the funding to succeed. Getting funding for response to an acute crisis is relatively easy compared to getting it before a crisis turns violent, or for conflict prevention. And in the case of a violent crisis, the military will get the biggest part of the pie.
 - e) A final problem to assure a militarization of MOOTW and Counterinsurgency can be the security situation in a target country. If the security situation is difficult or bad, civilian agencies might not be able to work effectively. This could easily contribute to shifting responsibility to the military.
- Taken together, the result may be an unpleasant choice between either military dominance of operations, or stagnation and paralysis. But the military literature does not seem

to be interested in dealing with this structural problem.

6.4 Reform and Development – Can the Military be the Key Player?

If we have to conclude that US military forces in MOOTW and counterinsurgency operations generally call the shots in most operations that are not just routine and low-key, the obvious question is whether they are able to do what they are supposed to do and what they themselves think has to be done. In the analysis of the US Marine Corps and the US Army, as we have seen above, counterinsurgency and some other types of MOOTW and Stability Operations are caused by serious political and socio-economic grievances and a state and system of governance which is unwilling, deficient or incompetent to deal with these. The function of the armed forces in dealing with such a situation, as we have mentioned before, is described as follows: “The regular armed forces are the *shield* behind which political, social, and economic development occurs” (US Department of the Army 2003: 3-6).

Thus, the primary process to resolve potential or acute violent situations in MOOTW, Stability Operations and counterinsurgency is creating functioning systems of governance and organizing successful social and economic development. In the Field Manuals quoted sometimes the overall process necessary is called Nation-Building.

The Army and Marine Corps have and can have very little compe-

tence in these areas. The troops and officers are trained in techniques of warfare, in fighting, in organizing and applying violence, and in operations facilitating those, not in organizing political processes, building state institutions, creating jobs and implementing land reform, to give but a few examples. The obvious deficits are not just a lack of expertise, training and experience in these areas, but also a different mentality and organizational culture, and a contradiction between the roles of warrior on the one hand, and development expert, diplomat, economist, and administrator on the other. It is not a realistic suggestion to transform the armed forces into an organization capable of such an ambitious undertaking. It also would open new problems, like a further weakening of civilian agencies compared to the military, and possibly lead to an increased militarization of development.

Manwaring in a study for the Strategic Study Institute of the US Army War College has characterized the culture and tradition of the armed forces like this:

“In the tradition of the American way of war, civilian and military leaders thought that “kicking ass” and destroying the enemy military force was the goal of policy. Military violence was the principal tool” (Manwaring 2001: 5).

It is easy to understand that with a general mentality like this implementing political and economic reform is difficult. And while there have always been outstanding individual officers talented in non-military and nation-building operations, institutionally the Army and Marine Corps are at a loss there.





6.5 The Role of Development Policy and NGOs in MOOTW and Stability Operations

Development and humanitarian organizations, state and non-governmental, local, foreign and international, often find themselves in a difficult situation. Whether they like it or not, an intelligent military force in MOOTW will try to integrate them into its own strategy of pacification and counterinsurgency, and try to utilize them in a supporting role. Even if these civilian agencies are not willing to be used in that way and are sceptical about open and direct cooperation and coordination with military units, there is not very much they can do against being instrumentalized. On the one hand their role depends to a high degree on stability and security in a target country, which can invite or even force NGOs to cooperate or coordinate with the military. On the other hand their successful operation might contribute to creating basic social services, necessary infrastructure and economic development, which tends to favour the existing political framework and produce legitimacy for those in power – if it is not explicitly being done in opposition to the powers that be, which is difficult for various reasons and not always advisable. Also, very often the NGOs receive a considerable part of the funding from the very governments conducting counterinsurgency and other operations below the level of war in a given country. There are many historical examples: El Salvador in the 1980s, Afghanistan since the war and overthrow of the Taliban in late 2001 are only two well-known cases, where the US government was or is providing considerable sums of money to NGOs for humanitarian and

Nation-Building work, which fits neatly into Counterinsurgency or Stability Operations. It is difficult for many NGOs to decline the funding, but by providing it, the Government has a tool to set the agenda and gently steer NGOs into the framework of MOOTW.

NGOs are not in a strong position in this regard, and they are of little influence compared to governments and the US military in these cases. But at least civilian development agencies and NGOs should reflect upon their own direct and indirect role in MOOTW contexts, and not operate naively without understanding their intended and unintended contributions to a military campaign (Schade 2005: 125-135).

6.6 Security versus Nation-Building – Contradictions between Military and Civilian Policies

To explain one of the most important problems of counterinsurgency we first have to briefly summarize the core strategy.

The overall goal of MOOTW and “Stability and Support Operations”, especially in counterinsurgency is generally to stabilize or reconstruct a political status quo and government where this serves US interests. The decisive strategic approach to achieve this is to win the loyalty and trust of the population, to win its hearts and minds, and to “win the legitimacy war”. If this is done successfully, most other elements of counterinsurgency can also be achieved, including isolating the insurgents and beating them politically and militarily. If this strategic objective cannot be achieved, counterinsurgency can get extremely messy,

will drag on for potentially a very long time, and chances for success are dim. To win the respect and loyalty of the population, propaganda and Psychological Operations are not enough, and combat operations are of secondary importance and might even backfire, but the key to success is political, social and economic reform. The population will only support the government if it reduces the causes of conflict which feed the insurgency. The important question is which side of the conflict is being perceived as more credibly correcting the defects of the respective society. These ills can be very different in different contexts, but corruption, repression, incompetence, nepotism, neglect, unnecessary poverty and deep social and economic divides can be major factors. The role of the state and creating a functioning and responsive system of governance are crucial. We have mentioned before that armed forces are not exactly the instrument of choice for getting such a reform program in place.

What is important here is a crucial strategic dilemma. US forces involved in MOOTW cannot succeed by themselves, but need local support, or, more precisely, they need local partners (local civilian and security state institutions) to undertake such an ambitious program of reform, which they in turn can support by civilian and military means.

As long as this precondition for success is present, counterinsurgency and stability operations (and some other types of MOOTW) can be relatively easy and clean activities. But what happens when this precondition is lacking or completely absent, which it often is?

One situation where this is the case can be a context of a failed state or of military occupation of a foreign

country, like in Somalia or Iraq. If there is no functioning local state, US forces have nothing to support. Their main job then might become to govern directly and re-create an effective state, responsive to local needs, which still accepts US guidance. Besides the tremendous complexity and difficulty of this task and a lack of competence in this field another major problem often arises: The first priority for occupying forces has to be the security of their own personnel, both military and civilian – which leads to policies in contradiction to the state-building and Nation-Building job at hand. Occupation of a foreign country in failed or conquered states necessarily requires security to be the main objective of the occupying force, which undercuts the re-building of local governance, the conducting of political, social and economic reconstruction and reform. US forces will often find themselves in a dilemma to choose between the need for immediate security and stability on the one hand and medium and long-term political development. To put it bluntly: the key contradiction here is between the imperial dimension of military policies on the one hand, aiming at foreign control of the local society and the local state, and successful Nation-Building on the other, which requires local ownership of the project and political reform, institution-building, which often are restricted exactly by imperial domination and control. “Unity of objective” and a clear and non-contradictory set of goals of MOOTW are hardly possible there, which undermines a key condition for success. The problem just highlighted does not completely exclude success of US policies in favourable and special circumstances (like in Germany and Japan after World War II), but in many Third





World environments which are often fragmented it presents a formidable hurdle.

A second situation occurs when a local state does exist, but is either unwilling or unable to undertake the necessary reform – which implies self-reform – or even is the main center of the political or socio-economic problems that started and still feed the insurgency. Sometimes an inefficient or incompetent, politically non-responsive and repressive or exploitative state is the main problem which has led to the conflict and widespread resistance. To support such a government might stabilize the situation for some time, but it will also stabilize or strengthen the reasons for the insurgency. It is not a way out, but the institutionalization of a stalemate. Recognizing this point, US Army Field Manual 100-20 (“Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict”, 1990) stated quite clearly:

“The [local: J.H.] government often must overcome the inertia and incompetence of its own political system before it can cope with the insurgency against this system” (US Department of the Army and the Air Force 1990: 2-8).

Weakness and incompetence of a host government indeed can be crucial Achilles' heels of successful counterinsurgency. But it is not enough to just mention organizational and technical deficiencies, which by themselves can already cripple a campaign. Sometimes, local governments may not only lack strength and competence, but also will. They might not agree with the need for reform because of political, psychological or cultural reasons and prefer a “military solution” to an insurgency, especially when they are sure of the support of the United States. A host government might feel its power or means of corruption threatened by political re-

form, and therefore foil any attempt at change. And it is also possible that a host government is not just unable or unwilling to deal with the problems of internal instability or insurgency, but because of its policies or practices is even the root cause of the problem. A repressive, exploitative and non-responsive government might cause exactly the problems a reform program is supposed to solve.

To support such a regime puts the US military at the side of a repressive and incompetent government, and discredits the operation in the eyes of a majority of the population. Stabilisation of repression, dictatorship, or a non-responsive regime might appear to serve US national interests, but it will easily lose the “war for legitimacy” and put US troops in a very difficult situation. Generally, the US political leadership (DOS, NSC, CIA, the President or his representatives) and to some degree the US military will try to convince, influence, pressure or blackmail the local government into reform, but this is far from easy. The respective government, some of its members, or others from the political elite might resist, because it can often hurt their interests. An example of the US military trying to argue for political reform is given by Lt. Col. Charles Hasskamp:

“For example, on a US military-to-military assistance visit to Chad in 1996, the American contingent was attempting to convince the Chad armed forces leadership that they should use their country's military resources to improve Chad's social, economic, and political stability by doing public works and civil affairs. Chad military personnel, trained as traditional, elitist warriors, refused even to talk about such proposals” (Hasskamp 1998: 1).

Also, US pressure for reform will often be less than impressive, since the US might want *some* reform

to make the status quo function, but it does not want to further undermine the local government, since its goal is stability. *Too much* reform might weaken the power of the local elites, on which the US strategy has to rely for the reasons mentioned above. The key problem here is a contradiction between the interests in *stability* on the one hand, and in dealing with the *causes of instability*. While reducing the causes of instability will lead to greater stability in the long run, in the short term it might even increase instability. To tackle the causes of instability will often require shifting the balance of power in a target county, and even to weaken or take power away from a ruling elite – which can be exactly the local partner the US needs to cooperate and might want to stabilize. Therefore, a US demand for reform will often only be made halfheartedly and not be too serious, since it might be necessary in the long run, but undercut US interest in the short term.

Daniel Byman in a recent research paper has pointedly summarized our point:

“Washington must recognize that its allies, including those in the security forces, are often the source of the problem as well as the heart of any solution. [...] The nature of regimes and of societies feeds an insurgency, but the United States is often hostage to its narrow goals with regard to counterinsurgency and thus becomes complicit in the host-nation’s self-defeating behavior” (Byman 2005: V).

The documents quoted above have tried to find a way out of this dilemma. They have stressed that in the context of counterinsurgency, to win over a population it is necessary to create the *perception* of change, to inspire *hope* in the people. This obviously is different from real change and not necessarily identical with redistributing power. While some change is necessary to create hope and the perception that the situation will improve, if the US and its local allies are satisfied with changing *perceptions* instead of solving the deeper causes of resistance, the temptation will be to combine reformist rhetoric with more conservative policies. This might work for a short period of time, but after a while lead to further disappointment and resentment.





7. Concluding Remarks: Political Context and Possible Further Areas of Research

Both military analysts and academics have pointed out that over the last decades inter-state war has decreased in numbers, while intra-state violence and war has become much more frequent. It is difficult to dispute this analysis. But we have to conclude that at the same time the distinction between internal and inter-state war has become blurred. The discussion in this paper has demonstrated that the US armed forces (and with it, the US government) have long developed strategies and practices that aim at militarily supporting US interests *in the internal conflicts in foreign countries* in combat and non-combat operations. This implies that in many of these operations the organized violence is neither inter-state, nor exclusively or primarily intra-state in character, but combining elements of both. LIC, MOOTW and Stability and Support Operations do include elements of *inter-state* violence below the level of war (like unilateral, external support for insurgents, in some cases counterterrorism, and others) since US forces are foreign governmental, external actors. Other operations combine intra-state conflict or war with foreign intervention (like in counterinsurgency and other types of operations). It should be obvious that any military role of US forces in a third country by definition adds an inter-state dimension, even if the conflict had been an internal affair before. It would be advisable therefore to broaden the two categories (intra-state vs. inter state war) to at least three, to include foreign interventions

in internal violent conflicts, or an internationalization of internal war.

This paper has tried to familiarize non-military analysts with the doctrines and strategies of the US armed forces in regard to regional conflicts, providing overviews on historical Small Wars concepts, Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC), Operations Other than War (MOOTW), and Stability Operations, and especially emphasising Counterinsurgency. While it clearly is not a priority to academic research to analyse military strategies as such and for their own sake, military forces, and especially US forces, are key players in many local and regional conflicts. It is important to be aware of their strategies to realistically understand the respective dynamics of conflicts where they are involved, the policies, effects, and problems of military US interventions. It has also been shown that military concepts in some regards reflect a reasonable understanding of conflicts and insurgencies in general, while often ignoring these insights in practice. The main reason for this is not the obvious deficiency of soldiers in dealing with non-military tasks and other weaknesses, though these are important, but the contradiction between the imperial roles of an armed force serving US strategic interest abroad, and the need for political and economic development, which often runs counter to these interests.

It is important whether the US armed forces, as major actors in violent conflicts around the world, pos-

sess a realistic and mature understanding of these conflicts. It is also quite relevant whether the US military has a clear and feasible concept of how to act, free of basic contradictions and of wishful thinking. Putting highly armed troops into a potentially or acute violent context with vague or shifting objectives and without a realistic and functioning strategy is a sure road to disaster – not just from a US perspective, but especially for the population and society of a target country. Confused soldiers are dangerous and destructive. But this does not imply that clear objectives and appropriate strategies for the military are enough. On the contrary, very often, they are not. If the civilian leadership in Washington decides to undertake useless, wrong, or illegal military operations, doing them with a high degree of professionalism might be better than making them even worse by acting incompetently and contradictorily, but they still would be useless, wrong, or illegal under international law. Doing a bad or stupid thing competently and with great commitment does not make it right. For instance, it is quite obvious that the Vietnam War was waged with a lot of wishful thinking, bad strategizing, confused objectives and with a deep misunderstanding of the character of the war. Technical competence never does help against strategic blindness. But this was of secondary importance. The key points were that the war served to support corrupt, incompetent, repressive and unpopular governments in South Vietnam, that it was in several regards in disregard to international obligations, that it was basically an extension of the French colonial war, and that it was justified and explained to the international and US publics by ideological hogwash and outright lies. If the war

would have been conducted “better” and counterinsurgency doctrine applied earlier instead of conventional strategies of attrition, the war would still have been both morally and politically wrong. There is nothing military strategies and Military Operations Other than War can do about this.

Similarly, the Iraq war of 2003 was illegal under international law, and it was based on propaganda, lies, and wishful thinking. A less incompetent way of planning and implementing of the post-war occupation could have done nothing to correct this. Still, it might have reduced the suffering of the Iraqi people and reduced the danger of the country sliding into violence and civil war. Taken together, when analyzing military strategies for MOOTW and counterinsurgency, we have to keep in mind that their context is completely dependent on the political decisions of the civilian leadership, and that political context is often decisive. When US foreign and security policy is driven by imperial designs and an unilateral impulse towards “showing small nations the way they should go” (in the word of Maj. Ellis, quoted above) this is the main problem, not some positive or negative aspect in military doctrine.

Still, with this in mind it is important to understand how counterinsurgency and other Military Operations Other than War are conceptualized and conducted by the US military forces. In this paper we had to focus on some basic points of military doctrine. Many important aspects had to be ignored. It would be worthwhile to conduct further research on other elements of the strategies discussed, like Counterterrorism, Peace Operations, and possibly Humanitarian





Assistance operations and Pro-Insurgency, to deepen our understanding of US military operations in regional conflicts. It is obvious that especially after September 11, 2001 and the "Global War on Terrorism" the question of US military approaches to Counterterrorism is of high relevance, while peace operations will also remain of considerable importance. All of this is part of MOOTW doctrine, but could not be dealt with here. On a different level of analysis, it might be illuminating to have a much more detailed look at some of the concepts included in all types of operations that influence civilian activities and politics in regard to conflict, like military approaches to dealing with the local and international media, with NGOs, psychological operations, and with civil-military relations and civic action.

Academic research, humanitarian activism, and the reporting of journalists on regional conflicts, civilian peace-building and conflict prevention could benefit from a better understanding of these topics. Finally, it would be an important task to analyse the practical experiences of applying MOOTW and counterinsurgency doctrine in specific key cases, like Vietnam, El Salvador, Haiti, Afghanistan and Iraq. While there is a wealth of literature on case studies of US interventions, it would be fruitful to connect them more explicitly to the strategizing of the US military, search for the lessons learned and focus on their impact for doctrine development (see Duncan 1998). It might be an interesting question to ask why, when and how the lessons learned by US forces have not been applied or even forgotten.



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Abbreviations

AFP	Air Force Pamphlet
AO	Area of Operations
CA	Civil Affairs
CBRNE	Chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive
CINC	Commander in Chief
CMO	Civil-Military Operations
COIN	Counterinsurgency
DOS	Department of State
DSO	Domestic Support Operations
FHA	Foreign Humanitarian Assistance
FID	Foreign Internal Defense
FIDAF	Foreign Internal Defense Augmentation Force
FM	Field Manual
FMI	Field Manual, Interim
HA	Humanitarian Assistance
HCA	Humanitarian and Civic Assistance
HN	Host Nation
IDAD	Internal Defense and Development
IO	Information Operations
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JFC	Joint Forces Commander
JP	Joint Publications
LIC	Low-Intensity Conflict
LIW	Low-Intensity Warfare
MOOTW	Military Operations Other Than War



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