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**Control:
A Strategy for an Urban Counterinsurgency**

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After 4 years of reading reports, articles, and books about the war in Iraq, it was unclear to me what the strategy was that we were following. Questions posed to faculty members and students at the U.S. Army War College did not yield an answer. At dinner the night before the War College graduation, I asked a student whether the war in Iraq had been discussed in class during the year, and he replied, "Yes, numerous times." When I then asked whether he could tell me what strategy we were following, he replied, "That was never discussed." It appeared that we had not yet developed a strategy for an urban counterinsurgency.

In the larger strategic context, there was never any reason for the Sunni insurgency. It is almost unique in its lack of justification. There were no achievable objectives that justified violence. However, there was hostility and anger which grew over time. Al Qaeda was quick to exploit this in the Sunnis. As to our presence, Al Qaeda saw a target of opportunity and used it skillfully to develop the insurgency in order to build its reputation and influence throughout the Muslim world. U.S. policy failed to foresee that the Sunnis had no justification for engaging in an insurgency but simply needed to be reassured that they would not be victimized. Our policies victimized them. Now, after almost 5 years of war, there is a policy that deals with them, that reassures them. They see now what we could have shown them years earlier if we had tried that their best interests were aligned with the United States and not with Al Qaeda. We have now armed 70,000 Sunnis under the "Awakening" and are increasing that number by another 10,000. This is what is ending the insurgency.

This article deals with the issue of control in an urban counterinsurgency. It focuses on population control and movement control, especially the movement of motor vehicles. It does not discuss the huge population movement to refugee centers in Iraq and outside the country, to Jordan and Syria in particular, which together number between 2.5 and 3 million. Nor does it discuss the equally important and very large movement of people in ongoing ethnic/secular cleansing as individuals choose by violence to live with their own kind. These are affecting the demographics of the country dramatically and have many other serious consequences for the Iraqi nation

and its people. These two large issues obviously require discussion in another paper. Also not discussed here is the food ration system in place in Iraq. Historically, this is an important control issue, but it is not one that was used by U.S. forces. Similarly, the denial of electric power or gasoline to specific areas can be effective control measures but are not discussed.

What appears to have taken place over the past 4 years is the application of the tactics developed in the jungles of Vietnam. Units housed at large bases, daily venture out on patrols or raids, usually returning the same day. Like the Vietnam War, we were focused on running down and killing or capturing the insurgents. Then there were the occasional larger operations of search and destroy or cordon and search. We also seem to have borrowed some tactics and techniques which the Israelis have used against the Palestinians. Obviously Israeli strategy could not be applied as its objectives and goals are much different than those we are trying to achieve in Iraq.

As the war unfolded, questions arose as to the strategy for the use of airpower. The almost reflexive use of airpower once our units came under fire was similar to what was done in Vietnam. However, then the bombings were in the jungles, while now they were in populated built up areas. The inevitable collateral damage from the bombings and the large number of civilians killed created more hostility towards us and our cause.

It was refreshing to learn, after 4 years of warfare, that the Army and the Marine Corps in a joint effort published a new counterinsurgency manual which set out an approach to a counterinsurgency.¹ It became commercially available and was eagerly read. My view is that it is more a tactics, techniques, and procedures manual than a strategy manual. Nevertheless, it fundamentally changed how we should think about counterinsurgency in three important respects. First, the focus is on protecting the population, not chasing after insurgents; second, our fighting forces cannot live, sleep, and eat on big bases, making themselves part-time fighters, and marginalizing their combat power; and third, the fighting forces must be dispersed among the population in small bases of 30 or so soldiers throughout the communities. There, joined by Iraqi army units, soldiers would live, patrol, and fight. This adopted the CORDS' tactics followed by the Marines in the Northern provinces of South Vietnam of living in the village and working with the local military to defend the village.

Since protection of the population was to or has become the focus of the counterinsurgency effort, it is clear that there can be no protection without control of the population. The COIN manual offers but a page and a half on this subject, and instructs the reader/practitioner to perform a census, designate a head of the household, and hold the head responsible for those coming and going into the house. There would be unspecified punishments for infractions. That is it. Fortunately, much more is being done in reality. With the prospect of a drawdown in the near future, U.S. forces are anxious to build up the Iraqi capability to secure their own neighborhoods. This has meant recruiting local Iraqis in Sunni areas, so-called "Concerned Local Citizens," into local neighborhood watch groups. This group will also serve as a source

for police recruits.² This is a most beneficial step but falls well short of the recommendations set out in this paper.

From the outset, there was always a gross incompatibility between establishing a democracy, encouraging freedom of action, and fighting an insurgency. The freer the people and their ways, the more vulnerable they became to insurgent attacks and the easier it was for insurgents to conduct their operations with little disturbance. We encouraged the people to live freely, to go about their business as usual with little restriction. Perhaps it was thought that to restrict the activities of the people would undermine the goal of creating a free society. In any case, we created the ideal environment for an urban insurgency.

The thesis of this paper, then, is that to fight an urban insurgency, the movement of persons and vehicles must be tightly controlled as must be the ownership and operation of all means of transportation. This can have an adverse economic impact and restrict political rights, but control measures must be adopted and enforced. There can be no security without them.

The insurgents have control of the means of warfare. At the time of the invasion of Iraq, there were one million motor vehicles in the country. Today, it is reported there are five million. How did this great increase occur? Was it the policy to encourage more vehicles in the country to help the economy? Who brought them in and who acquired them? Apparently no effort was made to control the vehicle flow into the country or the ownership and operation of them. The free economy made it easy for the insurgents to acquire vehicles. Thus they have the means to conduct car bombings, vehicle suicides, and reconnaissance of target areas; and to transport people and things.

The land is awash with weapons and ammunition. From all the reports, there were huge unprotected quantities of weapons and ammunition. Control over them, if there was any before the invasion, was lost. Caches of arms and ammunition have been found, but they are probably but a small part of the total. The insurgency has been in operation long enough to have acquired control of many caches and to have secreted weapons to new hiding places.

The insurgency also has the means to communicate with modern cell phones. This can be disrupted, but communication is easily restored.

The insurgency has demonstrated that it has excellent intelligence. Being imbedded in the local population, insurgents can easily discern whatever can be learned from the public and the police.

The insurgency has shown a good mastery of the tactics and techniques of a low level urban insurgency. Insurgents have adopted the small cell approach to conduct their operations. These cells operate independently and are capable of employing a variety of techniques.

The insurgency has shown the capacity to replace its losses and to expand the size of its force. Initially some thought that the size of the insurgency was limited and, therefore, the insurgency would be quickly destroyed. Then the question evolved as to whether we really were killing them faster than they could be replaced. As the war progressed, we accepted the notion that the insurgency was larger than once thought

and had broader support than we had credited it with. The insurgency has shown that it can replace its losses and can control the population in which it operates. The population is either willing or intimidated.

Many believed that if we had sent a much larger force at the outset we could have controlled the population and prevented the rise of the insurgency. That may be true, but it is not clear that without a winning strategy the insurgency could have been suppressed.

Some believe that by establishing a sizeable Iraqi police force and a substantial Iraqi military force that Iraq could defeat the insurgency and establish stability. Well into the 4th year of the war, this has not been proven.

There was also the view that by having adopted a constitution and formed a government, the conflicting parties would resolve their differences through the democratic process. Thus far, the parties have not shown they can live together under the same roof.

A strategy must be adopted and implemented that can reduce the level of violence, and establish stability to the point that political, economic, and social progress can proceed in a normal manner.

A strategy of control is the best strategy for an urban insurgency. It incorporates the three fundamentals of the COIN manual but goes well beyond them. Control of the movement of vehicles is the highest priority and potentially the most disruptive to the economy. Vehicles can carry the weight of bombs and explosives and move them to the target area for explosion. How many times must the insurgents blow up a police station or a government center or a bus station or a market place before it becomes policy that "No vehicle can approach these places at any time and any attempt to do so will result in those in the vehicle being shot."

Each town, each city must be separately analyzed, and a traffic pattern established. There will be "off-limits" areas which can be several blocks in size where no vehicles will be allowed. There will be "no vehicle traffic" streets designated because of sensitivity/vulnerability of the buildings, shops, and activities. Buildings and areas will be designated as "stay away" places, marked a block away, and sealed off from vehicular traffic. Many other techniques can be used.

Larger cities must be subdivided, each area analyzed, and control measures adopted as would best apply. Coordination is then effected between the areas.

The control measures are tailored to the needs of each community as determined by the analysts. Some will have more severe measures and others less.

Movement between towns and cities must be controlled. Natural barriers can be used, and check points, and holding areas. All entrances to a town or city must have check points to determine whether a vehicle should be allowed to enter.

Since control of the movement of people and vehicles is the basis for the strategy of control, it was highly disconcerting that not a single word on vehicle control exists in the COIN manual. Either the authors missed it or did not find it important, or this author is overemphasizing its importance. This author believes that a third of the manual should have been devoted to the issue of control, methodology, and techniques.

The more difficult subject is control of population movement. Since protection of the population is the core principle in the new COIN manual, it is again disappointing to find so little about it in the manual. Population control must go far beyond COIN's instruction to take a census and to designate the head of the household as responsible for the occupants. There must be neighborhood organizations, blocks formed from the neighborhoods, and regions formed from the blocks—all with leaders, missions, and tasks. The population control measures used in Communist China in its early years of control and in the Communist Soviet Union show the many measures that can be employed and should be studied for acceptability in today's environment.

The organized population, as outlined above, must be given an active role in its own protection and in improving its quality of life. Under the policy that has been in effect these past years, the population has no role except to provide information. Everything else is perceived to be the role of the police or the military. That should change so that the population is fully engaged in its own security. A study of population control measures will help to develop a list of tasks to be performed at each command level, and the interrelationships of the population with the police and military. The control measures and the duties imposed on the population will vary from severe to lenient, depending on conditions within the specific area. As a minimum, each neighborhood, each block, each region will:

1. Control the movement of vehicles and people into and out of its area and maintain a log.
2. Record the name of the owner of each vehicle in the area, and the place it is parked or garaged.
3. Record a description of each business, commercial, or industrial entity in the area, especially noting those that could serve as bomb shops for vehicles or persons.
4. Place under special surveillance all vehicle service and repair shops and keep a log of each vehicle entering or leaving and the service rendered.
5. Keep a roll of the people in each house both at the house and at the neighborhood, block, and regional command headquarters.
6. Record all new arrivals who will remain in the area and inform the leadership hierarchy.

The list can be rather extensive, and the reporting to the higher level done more or less frequently as conditions warrant.

The critical question of arming civilians as a neighborhood or regional militia must be determined on the ground based on the policy of the overall commander.

Each level in the chain of population control will work on issues of quality of life which most concern them. This is a very broad subject but should include self-help projects that can improve living conditions, both without outside support and those that need external support, whether materials, machinery, expertise, or funds. These requests also go up the chain of command.

The COIN manual mentions punishment for violators of population control measures but does not further discuss it. Obviously the punishment of individuals is

much easier than punishment of a group, say, a neighborhood. These punishments can range from the denial of some benefit to community work. In today's legal environment, any proposals should have legal approval.

Control of the population also requires some rather detailed instructions to U.S. troops. Sensitivity training in foreign cultures is often discussed, and that is most important. But the sensitivity must be reflected in the policies of the command. The most objectionable policy permitted was to allow U.S. soldiers to enter Iraqi homes. There was never a justification for it, and there were better ways to handle the matter. Similarly, our soldiers should not have been involved in the handling of Iraqi women. Both of these tasks should have been undertaken by Iraqi soldiers or police.

It appears for a variety of reasons that we have had difficulty recruiting, organizing, and deploying Iraqi Army units and police personnel. This has required the deployment of more of our units and has brought us to an overstressed Army. While the Army has used every creative means to recruit and retain its forces, nothing suggests that it has considered the integration of Iraqi men into U.S. unit ranks. If, as the Army contends, we are in an era of perpetual conflict which could be conducted in various countries, we should study how to integrate indigenous forces into our ranks.

During the Korean War, we were able to expand our ground force capability by adopting a policy of "Koreans Attached To The U.S. Army." The Korean soldiers were known as "Katusas." About 90 were assigned per rifle company, about 60 per artillery battery. Three or four were assigned to each rifle squad. We were fighting a conventional war in which control of soldiers and units was easier, and there was no question about the loyalty or reliability of the Koreans. I recommend that indigenous men be brought into our ranks in whatever country we may be fighting. If we are deploying 30 of our soldiers in a small security base in an urban area, then up to 10 Iraqi men should be attached. In Korea, a Katusa was given about three days of training, the rest was learned on the job. The language barrier must be overcome by both sides mastering a limited number of words and phrases so they can function together. These Iraqi men would do the house searches, the handling of women, and conduct other sensitive actions.

Protection of the population is the principal objective of the counterinsurgency effort. However, the population cannot be protected unless it is controlled in what it can and cannot do, and especially in its movement. The controlled population is engaged on a daily basis in tasks, large and small, that help it protect itself and make it more secure. Everyone in the area is part of the effort and fully invested in it. The population of the area is also engaged in improving its quality of life, establishing priorities, organizing self-help projects, and requesting assistance from its higher headquarters.

The only way to end repeated vehicle bombings is by their absolute denial of access to potential target areas. Control of vehicles, in all aspects but especially their movement, is critical to protecting the population. Without that, the population is subject to random bloody attacks, which paralyze the area by fear. Traffic plans for each area must be carefully drawn, and selected streets, areas, and places designated as "off

limits.” Times of the day for authorized travel may be required. Control measures must be studied and those that are adopted rigorously enforced.

The COIN manual has given an impetus to the study of counterinsurgency warfare. The duration of the Iraqi experience has been sufficient for drawing a wealth of lessons learned—many of which can be found in the new manual. Measures such as those recommended in this paper will require more from the leaders in their application and more training in the schoolhouses.

ENDNOTES

1. Field Manual (FM) 3-24 (Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5), *Counterinsurgency*, Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, and Headquarters, Marine Corps Development Command, Department of the Navy, December 15, 2006.

2. *New York Times*, October 28, 2007, p. 8, col. 1.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.