

COIN

The USA/USMC Counterinsurgency Center:

Preparing the Force for Counterinsurgency, Stability Operations and Security Force Assistance

A quick look at U.S. military history reveals that the American armed forces have been involved in counterinsurgency (COIN), stability operations (SO) and security force assistance (SFA) since the earliest days of the nation. Unfortunately, too often the U.S. government and U.S. military have failed to institutionalize lessons learned from such operations and have forsworn long-term commitments to develop the capacity to conduct those operations on a moment's notice. Indeed, conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have required that the Army relearn and readapt to operations in irregular environments.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has stated that we must balance "between institutionalizing capabilities such as counterinsurgency and ... maintaining the United States' existing conventional and strategic technological edge against other military forces." Achieving this balance involves proficiency in COIN, SO and SFA. To assist with preparing the force for those missions, in 2006 the commanding general (CG) of the Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth, Kan., then-LTG David H. Petraeus, and the CG, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, then-Lt. Gen. James Mattis, established the U.S. Army (USA)/U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) Counterinsurgency Center at Fort Leavenworth.

By COL Daniel S. Roper

Preparing for Complex Operations

To improve U.S. ground forces' capability to operate in a full spectrum/COIN environment, the COIN Center operates across six lines of effort: integrate COIN initiatives, research best practices, improve doctrine, improve education, advise leaders and organizations, and conduct outreach to other military and civilian entities.

Integrate COIN initiatives. Monthly integration meetings include representatives from the Iraq COIN and Security Operations Center and Afghanistan COIN Center of Excellence, foreign militaries, academia and the interagency community. A monthly COIN situation report serves as a vehicle to establish and maintain a common operating picture for the COIN community of interest. It provides updates on COIN initiatives, significant events and important publications and activities.

Research best practices. The COIN Center's online publication, the *Colloquium*, features authors of original COIN-related papers. The publication also provides information on the latest COIN-related research published in both military and nonmilitary professional journals.

Improve doctrine. COIN Center personnel participate in doctrinal working groups and provide detailed input to COIN-related publications.

Improve education. In 2008, the COIN Center presented COIN leader workshops and COIN fundamentals instruction to more than 1,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and individuals from NATO allies. The COIN Center coordinates and collaborates with other institutions that address counterinsurgency issues (for example, senior service colleges, theater COIN academies, schools and centers) to ensure consistency of doctrine, training and education.

Advise leaders and organizations. COIN Center personnel have met with representatives from Iraq, Afghanistan, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada and Poland—both in the continental United States and abroad—to address immediate concerns, to suggest possible solutions based upon lessons learned from others who have faced similar issues, and to facilitate coordination among joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational (JIIM) officials to solve common problems.

Conduct outreach to military and civilian entities. The COIN Center leadership briefs foreign and U.S. military and civilian leadership to strengthen interagency and multinational COIN linkages. The COIN Center also hosts COIN "virtual brown bags," an online speaker series with prominent speakers from the COIN community. In addition, the COIN Center web site (<https://coin.army.mil>) serves as a COIN knowledge gateway that is updated daily.

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SO/SFA Proponent Offices

COIN Center efforts to help the force learn and adapt are not limited to COIN. In January 2009, the commander, Combined Arms Center, was designated the Army Force Modernization Proponent for SO and SFA.

Although their primary focus is currently on establishing the initial operating capability and concept plan, SO and SFA staff have begun to identify current efforts and initiatives as well as SO and SFA gaps and associated requirements. The current SO and SFA lines of effort are: assess, communicate, and integrate and assist.

Assess. The SO and SFA proponent offices are conducting initial coordination with all Army training organizations to gather information on programs of instruction (POIs) for the training glide path in the Army force generation process. The offices then will assess how well the POIs reflect current doctrine and address current issues.

Communicate. The SO and SFA proponent offices host monthly integration meetings, chair a biweekly "brigade-augmented for SFA" meeting, and conduct multiple video teleconferences with the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, Special Operations Command, the Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance and Army G-3/5/7. The offices release a monthly situation report that provides updates on proponenty initiatives, significant SO and SFA events, and important publications and activities across SO and SFA doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel and facilities (DOTMLPF) domains.

Integrate and assist. Future actions include integrating SO and SFA DOTMLPF actions into Army force management efforts and providing direct assistance in the implementation of these actions. The aim of these efforts is to serve as the Army's JIIM focal point for SO and SFA initiatives.

Preparing for a Balanced Approach

Operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have caused civilian and military leaders to recognize the limitations imposed on conventional forces by unconventional fighters. In early May, Michèle Flournoy, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, stated that "preparing for this [future] operating environment will pull the Army, and the military writ large, in two very different directions" and that America's conventional dominance gives incentive to its enemies to use asymmetric means to undermine U.S. strengths and exploit its weaknesses. Success against asymmetric threats will rest heavily on the nation's ability to institutionalize, in doctrine, the knowledge that the force has gained in complex operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The USA/USMC COIN Center and U.S. Army SO and SFA proponent offices are playing a critical role in preparing for a balanced approach to future contingencies.

To add your name to the COIN/SO/SFA distribution list; to participate in integration meetings, virtual brown bags or leader seminars; or to receive feeds from the COIN blog through our RSS feeder, visit <https://coin.army.mil>. ★