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Information Operations Focused Campaigns in COIN: Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Acknowledgement Statement

"I acknowledge that all of the information provided has been derived from my own experiences as a brigade PAO/ S7 Officer for the 172nd/1-25 Stryker Brigade Combat Teams.

All references are annotated in the endnotes and bibliography."

Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations are complex and can incorporate offensive, defensive, and stability activities all at the same time. COIN campaign plans are often spread out across several logical lines of operation that include security, governance, economic development, and even essential services. In Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), challenges existed in integrating, synchronizing, and executing Information Operations (IO) in a COIN environment due to the lack of doctrine, IO staff elements, and focused campaign plans.

The lack of COIN doctrine setting IO as the primary focus, trained IO staff elements, and focused campaign plans were critical factors in the delayed progress of the counterinsurgency fight in Iraq. In COIN, the general populace can be the main target audience, thus making IO the obvious choice for priority in planning and execution. David Galula, who was an expert in the study of insurgencies, wrote the following:

If the insurgent manages to dissociate the population from the counterinsurgent, to control it physically, to get its active support, he will win the war because, in the final analysis, the exercise of political power depends on the tacit or explicit agreement of the population or, at worst, on its submissiveness.¹

In order to conduct IO effectively in a COIN environment, there must be a well-thought-out unified plan. IO is not a campaign in itself like some people may wrongly state, but part of a larger plan. Early IO during OIF was difficult to integrate into campaign planning and even harder to execute operationally or tactically due to lack of doctrine and trained staff. The IO doctrine that was to set the record straight for IO and give it a foundation was Field Manual (FM) 3-13.

This FM did not even come out until months after major combat operations had already begun in 2003. Furthermore, the manual gave no description of how to synchronize IO into campaign strategies or address COIN-specific focal points. One of the early field observations made by the OIF Study Group was a lack of Joint IO doctrine. Trying to synchronize an IO

campaign across several domains without a baseline to start was labeled as illusionary.² The actual manual on counterinsurgency was not published until December of 2006. This doctrine provided focus and methodology in conducting IO in COIN.

What is doctrine without a staff to use it? In the first couple of years of the war starting at division level and down, there was a severe lack of trained IO staff, or an actual IO officer for that matter. Most units would assign personnel to fill the void. IO officers that were available usually had double duties, such as IO and Public Affairs, until trained personnel filled the positions. This lack of personnel created even more of a void in synchronizing messaging during COIN.

With inconsistency plaguing our messaging, the insurgency wasted no time in taking advantage of our lack of unity and focus. The insurgency challenged the operational environment through sensationalized propaganda tied to attacks on Coalition Forces (CF). Through national and international media, insurgent forces exploited every attack on CF as success for their cause. The insurgency blamed every Iraqi civilian death on CF and labeled the CF and government of Iraq (GOI) as infidels and apostates. Their messaging did not have to be factual or go through an extensive arbitrary staff process to go public, much like our messaging at the time. Their message did not need translation from one language to another or be culturally modified from western ideology.

Why was there consternation in our messaging efforts? The operational environment changed drastically in 2003 from a conventional fight to a complex full spectrum operation, which entailed economic, political, and security lines of operation. These lines of operation were complex and hard to synchronize. Finally in May 2003, Combined Forces Land Component Command, who later became Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), created an IO line of operation

giving much needed focus to the campaign plan. This IO strategy was not without its challenges. Getting Iraqi populace buy-in to CF credibility and legitimizing the GOI was a long difficult task considering the insurgency's IO plan was out in full force. By 2004, commanders at all levels learned the importance of IO and strove to get ahead of the insurgency's IO machine. MNF-I commander, General George Casey Jr., introduced the idea that if the CF were to succeed at IO they had to create a "drumbeat of steady progress" that would be communicated to the Iraqi population in order to inform them of CF and GOI successes.³

In September of 2004, GEN Casey created the Directorate of Strategic Communications by merging the PA and IO sections on his staff. This new directorate had five goals. The five goals are to enhance the legitimacy of the Iraqi Transitional Government, drive a wedge between the insurgents and the Iraqi people, change the Iraqi population's image of CF, get the public involved in the counterinsurgency effort, and enhance the image of Iraqi Security Force.⁴ These goals are the basis in conducting IO in a COIN environment. This unified effort in IO strategy was vital in changing the way CF conducted COIN. CF were on their way to getting at the insurgency's IO machine.

In order to assist leaders on executing COIN, a COIN Academy was established in 2005 at Camp Taji. Brigade leadership down to company commanders were now taught COIN tactics. In order to get ahead of the insurgency and reinforce MNF-I's campaign plan, these COIN tactics included IO fundamentals and tactics, techniques, procedures, and campaign design.

COIN doctrine finally emerged during the onset of an organized insurgency that emphasized IO as a major contributor and force multiplier. FM 3-24 was the first counterinsurgency manual produced in over 20 years. This manual filled an obvious doctrinal gap.

FM 3-24, chapter 5 explains the importance of IO, the necessity as a separate line of operation, and the potential for it to be a decisive logical line of operation (LLO). Conducting an aggressive IO strategy is one of the five requirements in succeeding at COIN. To narrow it down, favorably influencing host nation (HN) perceptions of a credible and legitimate government is at the top of the list. This line of thinking directly correlates primarily to why COIN is conducted. The essence of COIN is to legitimize a HN government, thus making IO an obvious choice on which commanders may focus. Although FM 3-24 states that it is an option for the commander to decide which LLO to choose, it also lists IO as the first choice from a prescribed list provided in the manual. There are more pros than cons as to reasons why keeping IO a top priority in COIN is so important.

As with any doctrine, FM 3-24 is only a guide. Commanders and staff have the option to choose what LLOs as they see fit. Their argument is that IO is incorporated into all LLOs and therefore does not need special emphasis. Another argument is that each message should be nested with its parent LLO to show symmetry and unity of effort. By displaying it in a separate LLO makes it confusing. A third argument is that IO is in everything we do, so it should not need to be briefed separately. Although these arguments may seem viable, they are potentially damaging to mission success. By eliminating an IO LLO, there is potential for no leadership focus on it at all. Things that are not briefed usually do not get any attention until it is too late.

The lack of COIN doctrine setting IO as the primary focus, trained IO staff elements, and focused campaign plans were critical factors in the delayed progress on the counterinsurgency fight in Iraq. Huge strides have been made in personnel staffing, doctrine, and campaign strategies directed at emphasizing the importance of IO and COIN. Leaders are trained on how to execute COIN and incorporate IO into campaign plans. All of these examples are viable, but

without support from commanders and continued visibility, the use of IO in COIN will falter. It is up to commanders to emphasize the importance of IO and its role in their campaign plans by keeping it a visible priority and not burying it in backup slides.

Endnotes

¹ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory And Practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006. Retrieved October 11, 2007, from Praeger Security International Online database: <http://psi.praeger.com/doc.aspx?d=/books/greenwood/C9269/C9269-739.xml> ; accessed March 28, 2010.

² COL (Ret.) Gregory Fontenot, LTC E.J. Degan, LTC David Tohn, *On Point*, Combat Studies Institute Press 2004, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. pg. 421

³ Dr. Donald P. Wright, COL Timothy R. Reese, *On Point II*, Combat Studies Institute Press 2008, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. pg. 299

⁴ Ibid. 300.

Bibliography

US, Department of the Army. *FM 3-13, Information Operations*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. November 2003.

US, Department of the Army. *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. December 2006.