

British Counter-Insurgency Doctrine and its Development since 2001

Since 1890 the United Kingdom has produced counter-insurgency (COIN) doctrine. By the 1990s it appeared that this kind of operations had become 'history' and subsequently doctrinal work ceased. International events from 2001-2007 have shown that this belief was mistaken, but the resumption of doctrinal thinking has been erratic. Previous experience has not been utilized. How did the UK respond to the evolving security environment? What is the relation between a rapidly changing doctrinal organization structure and the cooperation between UK and US Forces? The present British COIN team intends to publish a new manual in 2008.

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The United Kingdom has produced counter-insurgency (COIN) doctrine since the 1890s¹ and has published a considerable body of work, both official and unofficial, related to this subject over the last 55 years. However, by the 1990s it appeared unlikely that the British Army would ever again conduct COIN operations and all further work ceased. The events of 2001-2007 have shown that this belief was mistaken, but the resumption in doctrinal thinking has been erratic and has not taken advantage of previous experience.

The Changing Nature of COIN

This article outlines how the UK has responded to the changing security environment and

places these within the context of a rapidly evolving doctrinal organisation structure. It then analyses how COIN doctrine developed between 1995 and the appearance of a new manual in early 2008. British COIN development during this period was protracted and difficult, characterised by historical complacency, over-confidence in existing doctrine, and bureaucratic disputes that impeded a prompt response to the challenges posed by emerging insurgencies within Afghanistan and Iraq.

The publication of the new 2008 COIN manual marks a turning point and provides the basis for the development of future doctrine by a new generation of theorists with first-hand experience of countering global insurgency.

The British approach to doctrinal development

Before 1993 most British military doctrine was written in an ad hoc fashion by talented individuals or by small teams brought together for specific purposes. From 1993 until its disbandment in 2006 the Directorate General of Development and Doctrine (DGD&D) at

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¹ Colonel Charles Callwell, *Small Wars: their Principles and Practice* (London 1896).



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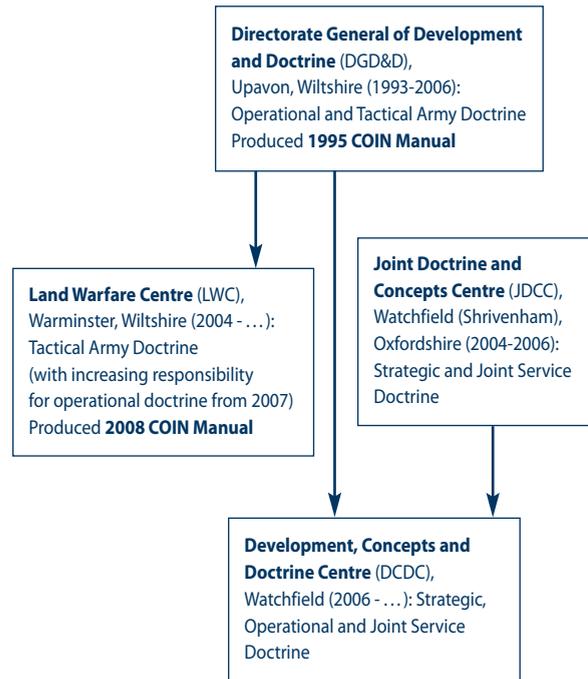
Basra International Airport is put onto a high state security alert with a suspected IED (Improvised, Explosive, Device) in a car near the airport

Upavon on Salisbury Plain in southern England was the UK's only major doctrine centre. DGD&D produced a wide range of manuals and papers relating to tactical, operational and strategic doctrine for the British Army, including counter-insurgency doctrine.

However, in 2004 its tasks were divided, with strategic and joint service doctrine becoming the responsibility of the Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre (JDCC) at Watchfield (near Shrivenham). This centre wrote high-level doctrine for all three armed services, but lasted a mere two years before being merged into a new organisation. At the same time it was decided to move Army tactical doctrine to the Land Warfare Centre (LWC) at Warminster. This organisation has become increasingly important and produces the Army's latest COIN doctrine.

It was decided in late 2005 to merge DGD&D and JDCC in April 2006 to create the Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC). This was arguably most unfortunate as the move was highly unpopular with the Army and very disruptive, with the result that urgent doctrinal work was suspended. DCDC has become responsible for all Army operational doctrine as well as the strategic doctrine work of JDCC, but it has not proven particularly successful in practice and this has led the Land Warfare Centre to wrest responsibility for COIN doctrine away from DCDC.

British Doctrine Centres 1993-2008



The Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre (JDCC) also produced a manual of doctrinal relevance to COIN in 2004, *The Military Contribution to Peace Support Operations*, which was based on the lessons of the Balkans experience and replaced the earlier *Wider Peacekeeping* manual.

After the formation of the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC) in 2006, that organisation also became involved in COIN and produced a Joint Doctrine Note on *Countering Irregular Activity*, perhaps one of the most unreadable doctrinal publications of recent years. Unfortunately, DCDC's attempts to take charge of writing a new counter-insurgency doctrine were only partially successful and delayed work on the new COIN manual that is now nearing completion. Early in its existence DGD&D started work on an over-arching five-part manual intended to introduce the British forces to the operational level of war. This was published as Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) *Operations*, which was completed between 1994 and 1998. Concurrently Brigadier Gavin Bulloch wrote

a new counter-insurgency manual during 1994. This was completed the following year under the title *Counter Insurgency Operations (Strategic and Operational Guidelines)* and was based on an enormous amount of experience. The author had served against EOKA in Cyprus and against the IRA in Northern Ireland, and the manual was firmly based on wide historical knowledge of Britain's many post-war campaigns in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Armed with this experience Bulloch established a series of principles that have underpinned recent British COIN thinking.

The British principles of COIN, 1994-2007

- Ensure political primacy and political aim
- Build coordinated government machinery (*within the UK to manage the inter-governmental response to insurgency*)
- Develop intelligence and information
- Separate the insurgent from his support
- Neutralise the insurgent
- Plan for the long term

From: *Counter Insurgency Operations* (1995)

These principles are in fact derived from earlier UK works dating back as far as 1977. In true Clausewitzian fashion, the first principle – the political aim – is regarded as the most important, with the others all being of equal status. The British see insurgency as essentially a civilian problem and hence place considerable emphasis on civil administration, on intelligence and on planning for the long term in order to produce a stable and secure society. The role of the civilian authority is paramount and this explains their preference for police primacy, with support by the Army. Despite popular belief that the British are all about 'hearts and minds' and the use of minimum force (and there is some truth in that) neither of these actually feature as British COIN principles. It would be more accurate to appreciate that these tenets imbue all the thinking about the British approach to COIN and they reflect the British approach to policing rather than military operations.

Wider peacekeeping

Having produced a comprehensive manual to deal with counter-insurgency its wide distribution to units and incorporation into Army training might reasonably have been expected. However, with the end of the Northern Ireland Troubles in 1995 and the new wars in the Balkans, attention instead turned to the pressing issue of peacekeeping and peace enforcement. The publication of *Wider Peacekeeping* in 1994 led to a hiatus in doctrine for low intensity operations, because it was increasingly assumed that the future mostly lay in peace support missions. Consequently much effort was spent on developing peacekeeping doctrine, to the extent that it became a dogma that this represented the Army's future main effort. One significant effect was that the Army decided not to issue Bulloch's new counter-insurgency manual and that all further work on COIN doctrine was suspended after 1995. At senior level there was a general belief that COIN was now irrelevant, despite the pattern of post-1945 operations. By the late 1990s COIN was seen by the Army hierarchy as being of purely historical interest, especially since, with the end of the Northern

PHOTO: MOD PRESS INFORMATION CENTRE, C. HARGREAVE



Basra, Iraq, 2005. A Chinook lands to pick up the Air Reaction Force (ARF) on a routine vehicle check point patrol. The British troops supported the Iraqi elections by providing security on an outer cordon which was manned by the Iraqi Police

Ireland campaign, it was very difficult to visualise a situation where the British would again face such a challenge. It was anticipated that any future operations outside the NATO area would either be peace support (probably under the aegis of the United Nations) or short, intensive non-combatant rescue operations to extract Western civilians from countries such as Liberia. Neither type of operation would require traditional COIN skills.

ADP Operations

Instead attention turned to the question of updating Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) *Operations*, the British Army's operational guide to fighting wars. The British Army had really only started thinking about adopting the operational level of war from the late 1980s and there was some resistance to what was seen as a foreign concept.

However, by the late 1990s understanding of the operational level idea had taken hold and this gave rise to a belief that what was really needed was a new doctrine that would allow the British Army to achieve its ultimate intellectual goal – the decisive defeat of the Wehrmacht in the manoeuvre battle. The defeats of 1940 and the problem of beating the Germans in the desert and North West Europe have remained deeply embedded in the Army's corporate consciousness and much effort was therefore placed in producing a doctrinal manual that would allow the British finally to beat Rommel at his own game². The second addition of ADP *Operations* appeared at the end

of 2004, just missing operations against the Iraqi Army, at a time when effort might have been better spent assessing the lessons of the expanding insurgency.

The other curious event in this period is the victory in Northern Ireland. It became increasingly clear after 1995 that the IRA had effectively lost its campaign to force the British out of the Six Counties and to merge the north with the Republic of Ireland. The British achieved a victory of sorts in their counter-terrorist campaign by offering the nationalists a degree of political power and seducing them with status, position and money, without actually agreeing to their main political demands.

This was a typically British compromise that seems to have been successful in ending the campaign and which is now seen as a potential model for divided countries like Iraq.

The British Army amassed great experience in Northern Ireland, so it is strange that there was no systematic study of the lessons of Operation Banner (the name given to operations in Northern Ireland from 1969 onwards) until 2006 and that these were not formally incorporated into doctrinal thinking until the COIN manual was rewritten in 2007.

British COIN doctrine in the Middle East

It is now clear that the British failed to make effective use of their previous wide experience during the first 5 years of the present century. Despite almost 60 years of success (and occasional failure), the British Army was not fully prepared for the challenges of Afghanistan and Iraq. There are several possible reasons for this.

The Army assumed that its past experiences meant that it fully understood counter-insurgency. Generations of officers had been educated about Malaya and had experienced Northern Ireland. That was believed to be sufficient, but in practice this actually proved to be a fundamental error because it gave rise to expectations about the nature of operations and the necessary response that were not necessarily borne out in practice.

² After 1945 there were essentially two British Armies: the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) in Germany, which was dedicated to slowing a Soviet armour advance and the rest of the field army that was engaged in counter-insurgency, expeditionary and peacekeeping operations around the world. Only in 1990-91 did the two combine with the deployment of 1 (UK) Armoured Division from Germany to Kuwait. BAOR effectively based its military posture on that of the Wehrmacht in 1944-45. Faced with overwhelming numerical superiority it relied on superior equipment and training (for example, the *Chieftain* tank was essentially an updated *Tiger* intended to inflict attrition at long range on the Soviet medium tanks). BAOR was to mount a fighting withdrawal across northern Germany to create the necessary pause before tactical nuclear weapons were employed. In no sense was it a manoeuvrist army like the Bundeswehr and this became obvious in the rather formal and highly pre-planned advance across the Kuwaiti desert during Operation Granby in 1991. Only during the 1990s did the British begin to take the concept of manoeuvre warfare seriously, at the very time when their heavy assets for doing so were in marked decline.

Issue of the 1995 COIN manual

Secondly, the British operation in Sierra Leone in 2001 was deceptively successful, although given that the enemy was a ragtag army interested in criminal gain rather than political ideology, this is perhaps not surprising. As a result of this operation the 1995 counter-insurgency manual was finally issued to the Army in very limited numbers in 2001.

The Army believed this the manual to be entirely satisfactory and require no further development. The manual was subsequently issued to units deployed in Iraq on Operation Telic (the codename for the British operation in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom) once the security situation began to decline from 2004.³



PHOTO ROYAL ARMY

Operation Telic, Iraq. Briefing about current mine-clearing duties

These shortcomings were compounded by the nature of the operations to which Britain was committed after the 9/11 attacks of 2001. British forces played an active role in late 2001 and early 2002 in overthrowing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, but were subsequently largely withdrawn.

It was only in 2006 that a brigade-sized force was sent back to Afghanistan to conduct peace support operations in order to help reconstruct the country. Indeed, at the time of the announcement the British Defence Secretary, John Reid, stated that he hoped that it would be unnecessary for British forces to fire a single shot. Instead they have found themselves involved in an intense COIN campaign that has been officially described as being the

most serious fighting that the British Army has experienced since the Korean War. Existing COIN doctrine, which was intended for a rather different form of low intensity operation, has not really proven as appropriate as anticipated.

COIN doctrine and practice

Similarly, in Iraq, British forces have engaged in operations that do not fully match existing doctrine. After the success of the initial invasion the British Army found itself occupying the southern four provinces of Iraq. British politicians believed that the local people would welcome them and they rather naively expected the Army would operate purely in a low-key security role to conduct a form of stability operation.⁴

It soon became clear to the Army that this was not the case and that they faced a massive security problem. The difficulty has been that the UK and its allies never deployed forces in the necessary strength to conduct COIN effectively and it was politically difficult for the British government to even admit the existence of an insurgency. It is also noteworthy that senior British commanders, rather than employing the official principles embodied in the 1995 COIN manual, preferred to look back to Malaya and to use the so-called Thompson Principles instead.⁵ The result was a period of uncertainty in the implementation of British COIN doctrine.

- 3 Operation Telic 1 was the codename assigned by the MoD to the operation that led to the occupation of Iraq. Subsequent roulements of troops from July 2003 onwards have been designated Telic 2, 3, etc (now up to Telic 9). Apart from Telic 1 and 2 each Telic has lasted around 6 months. Telic is allegedly an Arabic word, but the popular belief in the armed forces was that it really stood for 'Tell Everyone Leave Is Cancelled'.
- 4 The extent to which the British political and military leadership deceived itself about the likely Iraqi reaction to occupation is summarised in Jonathan Steele, 'Why occupying Iraq was doomed from the start', in *The Guardian*, 21 January 2008 and in his book *Defeat: Why we lost Iraq*, (London, 2008).
- 5 This point came out during interviews with senior officers during the DGD&D study *Operation Telic 2-5: Stability Operations in Iraq* (2006). This was produced for internal UK MoD use only and has not been published. A copy is held by the Netherlands Institute of Military History and is available to military and civilian personnel with security clearances. One issue that requires exploration is the extent to which senior officers conducting campaigns remain influenced by the doctrine that they were taught in their 20s. In educational theory it is recognised that students tend to remember what they are first taught and often find it difficult to update their knowledge base to reflect subsequent developments.

A failure of strategic understanding?

The extent of this confusion is perhaps underlined by the strategic failure of the United Kingdom to understand the nature of the Iraq conflict. Despite the events of 9/11 and the subsequent Afghanistan operations, the British government found itself in a difficult domestic position. While full support was given to the US Global War on Terror, it felt forced to pretend that the insurgency and terrorism was unconnected with the British invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The level of domestic political opposition to the war in Iraq, particularly among members of the Labour Party and the British Muslim population, made it important to portray Iraq as 'liberation' and to deny that there was any real popular opposition to the British presence in the country. Attacks were blamed on Former Regime Loyalists and on criminal elements. In effect there was a political refusal to admit that there was a developing insurgency that had to be countered. Because the nature of insurgency was different from anything previously experienced it was difficult for both politicians and senior officers to grasp the nature of the challenge and to appreciate the situation clearly.

Although the UK had an appropriate COIN doctrine, that doctrine was not used correctly because of the different approach taken by Coalition commanders. The British have always placed great store on the need for a realistic and achievable political aim, a single combined plan that unites all military and civilian forces, and a unified leadership in which the Director of Military Operations has an intimate relationship with the political elite.

In Iraq this could not be achieved. There was increasing British doubt about the wisdom of the political aims being pursued by the American-led Coalition Provisional Authority and its lack of a workable plan, and considerable concern that there was very little British influence on the political leadership. For example, the British had already begun to organise defeated Iraqi military forces to work



under their control when they were faced with an order by Paul Bremer to disband the Iraqi Army, a decision with which the British Army was in complete disagreement, but which they had to obey.

COIN in Southern Iraq

The British could take comfort in the belief that what they faced in southern Iraq was much more an internal security problem, than the highly organised insurgency that confronted American forces further north. This was increasingly out of line with reality, but there is some truth in the idea that the power struggle in the south was essentially between different Shia factions, rather than aimed primarily at driving out the British or the Sunnis. This was just as well because the British decided to place the emphasis on stability and peace support operations, rather than on classic counter-insurgency. Indeed, it can be argued that the UK did not attempt to engage in classic COIN operations in the south of Iraq.



PHOTO ROYAL NAVY, W. A. BARRON

A squadron conducting flying patrols around the Southern Gas, Oil, Separation Plants (GOSP's) in the Ar Rumaylah oil fields, Southern Iraq

Difficulties of operating with the USA

A final factor that caused real difficulties for the British was the experience of working as junior partner to the USA in an operation of this type. In all past COIN campaigns the British had been the senior partner. Previous British experience of fighting alongside the USA had been almost entirely in major conventional conflicts such as World War II and Korea. Apart from the unpublicised use of some special forces and a military advisory team in Vietnam, the British had never fought alongside the US Army in an unconventional conflict. They found doing so an uncomfortable experience, because the American approach seemed to lack an understanding of COIN and they were perceived as being excessively wedded to firepower. This gave rise to military tensions between the two countries that have not yet fully subsided, although it is now clear that the US has embraced the need for a very different and subtler approach to defeat insurgency.

At the heart of the problem is perhaps the British tendency to compare their successful COIN experiences in Malaya and Dhofar with the apparent American failure in Vietnam. In reality this was a false comparison. The British have been very good at forgetting their own shortcomings in Palestine, Cyprus and Aden, or their own (successful) use of draconian measures in Kenya, while at the same time failing to recognise that the US largely defeated the insurgency in Vietnam, but was prevented from capitalising on that success. This has at times led to a tendency to lecture the Americans on the correct way of winning COIN campaigns without always fully understanding the nature of the conflict they are fighting in northern Iraq. The most notable example is perhaps Brigadier Nigel Alwyn-Foster's critique in the (US) *Military Review*, which appeared in late 2005.⁶

However, the levels of violence encountered went far beyond those normally seen in peace support operations and the COIN principles were actually more appropriate and thus have been employed as a means of containing, rather than defeating the problem.

The fading of British COIN skills

Another factor that became increasingly apparent from late 2003 onwards was that the tactical counter-insurgency skills that had been built up over 30 years in Northern Ireland had begun to fade.

By the start of 2004 there were few soldiers under the rank of major or sergeant that had first hand experience of fighting the IRA and other terrorist groups. The conflict in Northern Ireland had largely finished by 1995 and much of the feel for this sort of operation had disappeared as Service personnel left the Army. There was therefore an urgent need to greatly enhance operational training to deal with such threats.

⁶ See Brigadier Nigel Alwyn-Foster, 'Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations', (US) *Military Review*, November-December 2005, pp. 2-16.



PHOTO MOD PRESS INFORMATION CENTRE, P. PUNTER

A routine foot patrol of Basrah market

On the other hand there is also some justice in the British belief that at times the Americans have ignored or snubbed their efforts to impart hard won information and techniques. US forces have sometimes dismissed British experience as being rooted in colonialism and have in particular rejected lessons from Northern Ireland on what appear to be emotional, rather than rational grounds. Nonetheless, the Americans on the whole have accepted British criticisms, not all of which have been justified, with remarkable tolerance.

British influence on US COIN development

This degree of over-confidence was perhaps encouraged by the obvious lack of a US counter-insurgency manual (and it seemed odd to British eyes that the USA had no doctrine for such operations). DGD&D supplied a great deal of assistance for the production of FMI3-07.22, the interim American COIN manual that appeared in late 2004, and this perhaps rein-

forced British complacency that, unlike the United States, they understood the nature of current COIN problems.

Ironically, although the Land Warfare Centre at Warminster was busy collecting information about operations in Iraq, there was no serious attempt to study the lessons of stability operations in Iraq until the early summer of 2005, when a small team was formed by DGD&D to examine the lessons to date.⁷ That team produced a study of operations that was in some ways quite critical of the British performance in southern Iraq.

Reluctance to revise British doctrine

It is therefore not surprising that there was considerable reluctance in some quarters to agree to the production of a new COIN doctrine for UK use. Certain senior officers felt that there was no need for an improved doctrine, while others were determined that their organisation would be the one to produce such a doctrine and were happy to block moves to create a new COIN doctrine team. This bureaucratic obstruction meant that although a DGD&D COIN team existed in late 2005, and some research was undertaken using the services of General Sir Rupert Smith, all

⁷ An initial study on Operation Telic 1 (the ground invasion of Iraq) was published in 2003, and a further study, *Operation TELIC 2-5* followed in 2006. No further work is currently being undertaken either on Operation Telic or on Operation Herrick (Afghanistan).

further work came to a halt in mid-2006 when funding was removed and personnel were reassigned. By doing this, the Ministry of Defence removed the only focal point that could collect and assimilate the lessons relating to counter-insurgency doctrine in Iraq and Afghanistan and for a period in late 2006 there was no serious research work going on at all. This led to a bitter internal debate over whether DCDC or the Land Warfare Centre should take the lead in writing a new COIN doctrine.

It is ironic that there should have been such reluctance within the army to rewrite the doctrine because there had been growing disquiet about the UK's ability to handle COIN from various quarters from mid-2004 onwards, including articles in various defence journals and newspapers. Perhaps the most detailed criticisms came from a former officer, Dr John Mackinlay, of the Department of War Studies at Kings College London. Dr Mackinlay published a short study called *Defeating Complex Insurgency* in 2005, together with a number of articles.⁸ These were highly critical of the British approach to COIN, which he felt was stuck in the 1960s, and this began to lead to internal debate within the Ministry of Defence.

This uncertainty was reinforced by a conference held in London in September 2005 between senior members of DGD&D and a group of American COIN and doctrine experts who wanted to know about the British approach. It became apparent from the comments of the Americans that they felt that the UK was being complacent about the nature of contemporary insurgency and, as a result, a study about British experiences was written and presented to audiences in the USA in December that year.

The British were also increasingly aware of the advances being made by the USA in COIN doctrine. There was contact with the US Marine Corps and the US Army about the new FM3-24 COIN manual and a proposal was made that the new manual should become a joint UK-US Army-USMC project.⁹ DGD&D was involved in commenting on its draft and thus became

increasingly aware that it was not enough to simply update the existing *Counter Insurgency Operations* manual. There was a sense of being left behind by the Americans and a feeling that urgent work was required, but all this was happening at the worst possible time, with the decision to disband DGD&D and merge its personnel into DCDC.

Producing a new UK COIN doctrine

It was initially expected that DCDC would take the lead in producing the new manual but, due to personality clashes within that organisation, the responsibility for writing it eventually fell to the Land Warfare Centre at Warminster. There were a number of false starts in 2006 but eventually, in early 2007, authority was given to make a start and a totally new COIN doctrine was written under the title *Countering Insurgency*. A small team under Brigadier Gavin Bulloch and Colonel Alex Alderson of the Land Warfare Centre was created to produce a fully updated COIN doctrine.¹⁰

This project has been in two stages. As an interim measure a revised and updated version of the existing 1995 manual was produced and distributed in early 2007 as an interim measure and work then started on a fundamental rewrite. This new COIN manual was completed in late October 2007 and, after some modifications, should be approved for distribution in February 2008. The manual is much more closely aligned to the sorts of very complex insurgencies and related irregular activities seen in countries such as Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan and is more politically sophisticated than earlier incarnations. One of the major features of *Countering Insurgency* is that the British Army has approved a revised set of COIN principles.

8 John Mackinlay, *Defeating Complex Insurgency: beyond Iraq and Afghanistan*, Whitehall Paper No 64 (London, RUSI, 2005).

9 The UK and US undertook some work jointly in 2005-06, but the project foundered because of the lack of British personnel and because of the disruption caused by the decision to merge DGD&D into DCDC.

10 A more detailed examination of the process can be found in: Alexander Alderson, 'Revising the British Army's Counter-insurgency Doctrine', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, Volume 152 No 4, August 2007, pp. 6-11.

The British principles of COIN 2008

- Political Primacy and Clear Political Aim
- Gain and Secure the Consent of the People
- Coordinated Government Machinery – a Comprehensive Approach
- Effecting Communication with the People
- Focused Intelligence
- Neutralise the Insurgent
- Plan for Longer Term Post-Insurgency Conditions

From: *Countering Insurgency* (2008)

As can be seen, there are many similarities with the earlier principles, but there are also some new aspects, such as Gain and Secure the Consent and Support of the People ('hearts and minds') and Effecting Communication.

It is quite likely that the new *Countering Insurgency* manual will be revised again in the next 3 or 4 years. We should now expect an era of regular updates and the incorporation of lessons learned from current and emerging conflicts. Despite all the work that has gone into developing *Countering Insurgency* there are still a number of areas of unresolved issues.

Continuing areas of concern

The UK has yet to properly integrate its internal counter terrorism doctrine, known as CONTEST with its external counter-insurgency doctrine. Despite the calls for 'joined-up government', the Home Office (interior ministry) and the Ministry of Defence are still tending to treat international terrorism and insurgency as two separate and barely connected subjects, while in practice they part of a single global insurgency.

Too many British ministries and departments still do not understand that they have a role to play in countering insurgency. For example, the Department for International Development tends to pursue its own agenda and is not always sympathetic to the needs of counter-insurgency. The UK lacks a central coordinating focal point to ensure that departments have to work together on such issues. It is

also noticeable that the new manual is Army-orientated and that relatively little attention is paid to the roles of maritime and air power in defeating insurgency. Neither the Royal Navy nor the Royal Air Force has developed COIN doctrines of their own and the counter-insurgency is still seen as primarily an Army problem.

Insurgency is not the only future threat or doctrinal challenge. The UK is determined to maintain forces capable of conducting major combat operations alongside her American allies, wherever they may be required. She intends to continue to deploy mechanised forces capable of fighting large-scale conventional wars and doctrinal work will be needed so that they can fight effectively within a complex, networked environment. There is perhaps a danger that counter-insurgency theory will take precedence over other areas of doctrine that also require updating.

PHOTO ROYAL NAVY, W. BARROW



Looking out for anyone trying to smuggle oil, weapons and even people, with kidnappings on the increase in the area of Basrah.

One area that requires development is the production of a doctrine of occupation that will help avoid the problems that have been generated by poor coalition decision-making in Iraq. The Iraq experience has made clear that occupation may be the transitional period between conventional warfare and insurgency – or resistance in the eyes of those who have been occupied. Whether the political will exists to grasp the implications of this remains to be seen – an earlier proposal by DGD&D to produce such a doctrine was rejected on the grounds of political sensitivity.

Time for a European COIN doctrine?

Most major NATO countries are now engaged in or have been engaged in counter-insurgency in Iraq or Afghanistan. The USA and the UK have responded by producing new doctrine to deal with this, and the French are also working on replacing their own doctrine, which dates back to the war in Algeria. However, the question arises of whether it is now time for NATO and other allied Western countries to work together to produce a single COIN doctrine, or at least a common understanding of how they will engage in such operations. There may be some merit in agreeing on a common European counter-insurgency doctrine that will allow Western forces to operate together in the most effective manner. It must not be assumed that Iraq and Afghanistan are the only insurgencies in which the West will engage. Certainly the British view is that they may face at least another 30 years of operations in Afghanistan and that global insurgents will be encountered in other parts of the world, including Europe and the UK itself.

Future COIN development

There is clearly much more doctrinal work to be undertaken on COIN, irregular activities and future conventional (networked enabled) warfare. Time and changing circumstances will always lead to the need to revise, improve and invent new doctrine. The United Kingdom looks ready to move Army operational doctrine writing away from DCDC to Land Warfare

FOTO MOD PRESS INFORMATION CENTRE, P. PUNTER



A routine patrol of Al Hayyaniya in the south of Iraq, to maintain law and order and improve relationships between the local community and coalition forces.

Centre and to effectively re-establish DGD&D there. Despite the bureaucratic problems of the last few years there now seems to be a clear way ahead. The task increasingly will be to ensure that the lessons of operational experience are rapidly analysed and included in new doctrine, while at the same time incorporating that doctrine into all levels of military education and training so that they can have the maximum impact on future operations against the West's various enemies.

Assessment

The British experience with COIN doctrine over the last 7 years has been one of complacency about past experience, a failure to properly assess current lessons, and unproductive rivalry between different organisations. That so much new doctrine has been produced reflects the very old British tradition of a small number of talented individuals striving successfully against difficult odds and, in the end, simply muddling through.

After the 2008 manual has been published the COIN team will be disbanded and the process of updating the doctrine will once again have to start from scratch when the decision is made to revise the work. It may not be the most efficient way of producing doctrine, but it appears to work for the United Kingdom and the resulting manuals seem to be equal or superior to those produced by other countries that employ far greater resources. ■