



Inspector Tun Hamzah of the Malayan Police Special Branch briefs team members before a joint police-military night operation against ethnic Chinese communist insurgents fighting the Malaysian government in 1958. (Photo from Alamy Stock Photo)

Practicing Operational Art in Countering Insurgency

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Dear Lyttelton,

Malaya: We must have a plan. Secondly, we must have a man. When we have a plan and a man, we shall succeed: not otherwise.

Yours Sincerely, (signed) Montgomery (F.M.)

24 December 1951

In the early 1950s, Britain extinguished a communist insurgency in Malaya, thereby becoming one of the few singularly successful examples of countering insurgency. The architect of this was British Gen. Sir Gerald Templer who accomplished this via a strategy known as “hearts and minds.” The aim of this article is to reexamine the British experience in Malaya, not as strategy or as tactics, but as an example of practicing operational art in a counterinsurgency campaign. Furthermore, it stands as a

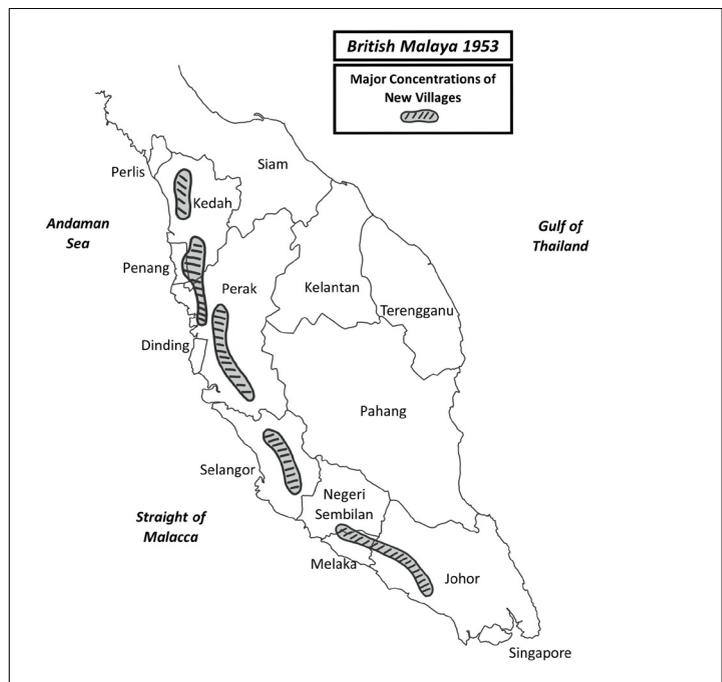
corrective to some misunderstandings about how the British went about countering insurgency in Malaya. The article informs us of how the successful British counterinsurgency campaign in Malaya was a brilliant display of creative problem solving using an operational art form that effectively balanced ends, ways, and means.

Counterinsurgency and Operational Art

Defining the term “operational art” sometimes gets in the way of understanding what it is, and this is especially true when applying this term to counterinsurgency warfare. In 1986, the U.S. Army defined operational art as “the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations.”¹ But, by 2016, the Army redefined operational art as “the cognitive approach by commanders and staffs—supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment—to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means.”² The U.S. Marine Corps defined operational art as “the application of the nine principles of war—offensive, objective, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity—to the conduct of a campaign.”³

So, is operational art the employment of forces, a cognitive approach, or an application of principles? There are a dozen other alternative definitions of the term as well. The plain truth is that operational art is a characteristic of war and, therefore changeable (rather than an enduring and unchanging aspect of the nature of war), and precision of definition is thereby impossible. A definition of operational art may only be crafted which corresponds to the ends, ways, and means (the objectives, the planned approach, and the resources) that were present at the time.

How might we conceptualize operational art in counterinsurgency at the operational level of war? The most common conceptualization represents the idea that Templer came up with, a strategy centering on the hearts and minds of the people that led to disestablishing the legitimacy of the insurgent movement.⁴ This view tends to deemphasize the subsequent



In an effort to separate ethnically Chinese guerrillas from popular support, British Gen. Sir Gerald Templer forcibly relocated hundreds of thousands of Chinese Malays from the general population and resettled them in what were called “new villages.” Then Templer successfully managed the counterinsurgency campaign by sweeping defined sectors clear of the weakened guerrillas. Most of the new villages were located in Malaya’s western provinces. (Map courtesy Lisa Johnson-DiMarco via the author)

search-and-destroy operations that led to the capture or extermination of the insurgents themselves. In another conceptualization, the U.S. Marine Corps presented the British counterinsurgency campaign in Malaya as a successful application of campaign design through an understanding of center of gravity and critical vulnerability analysis.⁵ Moreover, the Marine Corps asserted that “the British identified the center of gravity of the Communist movement as the large, impoverished Chinese minority,” and that “overall, the movement’s critical vulnerability was its ethnic isolation.”⁶ Unfortunately, by imposing modern planning processes and vocabulary on a historical event, this also perpetuates the mythology that the British counterinsurgency effort in Malaya was something other than a direct kinetic campaign to kill or disable the insurgents.

Understanding Operational Art in Counterinsurgency

The concepts of operational art in counterinsurgency are often cloaked in the clothing of tactics and are thus



Troops board a helicopter from the British 848 Naval Air Squadron at the end of a 1953 mission against insurgents in the Malayan jungle. (Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum)

frequently misunderstood. This is because the classical elements of operational art—large conventional units and large-scale maneuver operations—are absent when waging small wars against guerrillas and insurgents. As a result, it is very difficult to separate what decisions were made at the operational level or to understand how these operational decisions affected the tactical success (or nonsuccess) of a counterinsurgency campaign. As a case study, the British suppression of the communist insurgency in Malaya (1948–1957) is today generally seen as successful, and it is sometimes put forward as an example of how a strategy of hearts and minds might be used to end an insurgency on favorable terms. The Marine Corps certainly leans in this direction. However, the idea of hearts and minds was not a strategy at all but rather, in Malaya, it was the tactical application of an operational policy of population control.

The leader most associated with the Malayan counterinsurgency is Templer, who served in Malaya from 1952 until 1954 and who coined the term “hearts and minds.” It is sometimes overlooked that Templer was also responsible for the brilliant execution of a preexisting and mature plan that revolved around the killing of insurgents. The suppression of the communist insurgency in Malaya through the end of British colonial rule in 1957 owed its success not only to Templer’s operations

but also to the operational art of two men: Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Briggs, director of military operations, and Oliver Lyttelton, secretary of state for colonies. In May 1950, Briggs developed the operational design for a campaign plan centered on population control to be brought about by the massive relocation of people (called “resettlement” by the British) in Malaya. Eighteen months later, Lyttelton centralized operational command and control into the hands of a single individual (Templer). These complementary decisions enabled Templer to wield the authority necessary for the full and rapid implementation of the Briggs Plan. In execution, Templer adhered to the basic operational design envisioned by Briggs and

became famous for making tactical improvements in the treatment of people who had been resettled but largely forgotten for continuing the vigorous isolation and hunting down of insurgents. By 1957, some 1.3 million Malaysians, almost entirely of Chinese ethnicity, had been resettled in secure areas while the army and police hunted the insurgents to destruction.

The Malayan Emergency

Malaya had never been a unified British colony. Britain owed its sovereignty over the peninsula to the British East India Company, which had acquired states and established settlements there during the colonial era. By 1900, four of these were grouped into the Federated Malaya States, which absorbed an additional three settlements and five unfederated states by 1930. Malaya fell to the Japanese in early 1942 and remained occupied until the late summer of 1945. A Malayan Communist Party had existed since the 1930s and, over the course of the war, formed a Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). Liberation in 1945 by the British kicked off a wave of anticolonial nationalism, and Malaya fell into a pattern of civil disobedience similar to that in India. The Malayan Communist Party revived and reactivated itself and the MPAJA as the *Min Yuen* (Masses Organization). Incidents of violence

soon followed, and a state of emergency was declared in June 1948. The term “Malayan Emergency” was pushed on the British government by British rubber plantation and tin mine owners for the simple reason that insurance carriers (e.g., Lloyd’s of London) refused to cover losses incurred in a “war.”⁷

By 1950, the number of communist insurgents grew to over five thousand men, while the British sent in ten to twelve infantry battalions and raised a Special Constabulary of thirty thousand men. In 1948, Sir Henry Gurney became the high commissioner for Malaya and enacted a series of punitive and coercive emergency regulations in an attempt to restore order. The fall of China to Mao’s communists in 1949 accelerated the insurgency, and incidents of terrorism and lawlessness dramatically increased. By 1950, it was evident that British control of Malaya was slipping away and, rather than ask for more men, Gurney suggested that the government appoint a military officer as director of operations for Malaya. Gurney’s idea was that the director of operations would be a coordinator, rather than a military commander, and ensure unity of effort between the police, army, and civil authorities. This would, in turn, lead to more efficiencies in the employment of scarce resources (notably manpower).

Operational Design— Ends, Ways, and Means

Briggs had commanded the 5th Indian Division under Field Marshal Sir William Slim in Burma and had retired from the army in 1948. Two years later, Slim, now chief of the Imperial General Staff, asked him to return to active duty and serve as Malaya’s first director of operations. Briggs agreed; he was still only fifty-five years old when he arrived in Malaya on 3 April. He spent two weeks traveling around with a small staff and then set to work producing his plan.⁸ The clarity of Briggs’s analysis of how to go about waging an operational level counterinsurgency campaign and the creativity of his solution were remarkable.

It is true that Gurney had some suggestions to offer, but Briggs was the man responsible for initial campaign planning in Malaya. In this role, he designed the “Federation Plan for the Elimination of the Communist Organization and Armed Forces in Malaya,” which has come to be known as the Briggs Plan.⁹ The high

commissioner (Gurney) approved the plan and forwarded it to the British Defence Coordinating Committee (Far East) on 24 May 1950.

Briggs’s problem lay in the fact that he had insufficient means (the resources) in men and time to solve the matter in traditional fashion, forcing him to rebalance the ends-ways-means equation. In order to terminate the Malayan Emergency on conditions favorable to Britain (the ends), Briggs thought it would “therefore be necessary to eliminate both the Min Yuen and the M.R.L.A. [Malayan Races Liberation Army].”¹⁰ He intended to accomplish this by extending control over all populated areas, which would involve “a large measure of squatter resettlement into compact groups” and strengthening the local administration, infrastructure, and economy.¹¹ The way that Briggs saw this being done was “to clear the country step by step, from south to north, by: dominating the populated areas and building up a feeling of complete security, breaking up the Min Yuen within the populated areas, thereby isolating the bandits from their food ... and supply organization, and finally destroying the bandits by forcing them to attack us on our own ground.”¹² (Similarly to the term “emergency,” which disguised a de facto war, the British government quaintly used the term “bandit” rather than rebel or insurgent.) Briggs also considered the thorny question of means by addressing finance in two methods: the federal Malay government would raise new funds for increased operations and the Malay state governments would curtail normal expenditures and route the money saved into Briggs’s plan.

In terms of command and control, Briggs envisioned a dual operational arrangement with the civil authorities taking on the task of eliminating the Min Yuen (the communist party) and the security services (mainly the army) taking on the task of eliminating the M.R.L.A. (the communist army). He also established a small Federal War Council, chaired by himself, with the participation of the chief secretary and secretary of defense, the police commissioner, and the army and air force commanders.¹³ With the council in place, Briggs could direct strategy and effect policy, turning over detailed planning for execution to the states, police, and army. As an operational framework for moving forward, Briggs envisioned a triad composed of the police, who would fulfill police functions and provide intelligence; the army, which would cover the populated areas the police could not cover and set up

strong points and patrols; and the governmental administration, which would ensure the provision of normal social services and effective civil administration.¹⁴ How these actions would be coordinated in time and space were to be worked out by Briggs and the War Council, but as will be seen, this architecture of cooperative command proved to be the weak link in the plan.

At the tactical level, Briggs laid out explicit ideas about how to go about the execution of the plan on the ground. A key element of his tactical design was the formation of army “striking forces” in each state, “whose task will be to dominate the jungle up to about five hours journey from potential bandit supply areas.”¹⁵ The intent for these striking forces would be to dominate bandit supply routes, forcing them to flee or disintegrate. Once this was accomplished, maintenance of control would be achieved by the prevention of reinfiltration. This was tied into the resettlement program, which Briggs felt had to be financed by Britain. Civil police forces would be enhanced with additional manpower and training. Briggs set 1 June 1950 as his start date for all troops to be deployed and ready. He viewed the striking forces as the key to success, moving state to state, and possibly replacing them with paramilitary forces after the clearance of areas. There were other supporting elements of the plan including the passage of emergency regulations by the legal authorities, the implementation of a propaganda campaign, and road building.

The heart of the Briggs Plan was population control, and the resettlement of the disaffected portion of the populace into compact areas was the principal means of achieving this.¹⁶ In this regard, Briggs had an important advantage because almost all of the communist insurgents were ethnic Chinese, of whom there were about two million in the total population of five million Malaysians. This enabled the British to easily and quickly distinguish who might or might not support the insurgency, and the resettlement acquired distinctly ethnic overtones. Briggs knew that only a portion of the ethnic Chinese were supporting the insurgents, but the authorities were unsure about exactly who these individuals might be. Thus, Briggs mandated that entire villages and towns of ethnic Chinese were to be resettled in order to deny completely the insurgents access to supplies and safe havens. It is unclear whether Briggs drew on historical precedent for this idea, but population control by relocation was not a new idea.

Population Control in Context

At the dawn of the twentieth century, counterinsurgency policies based on the relocation of civilian populations emerged as viable and acceptable practices in warfare. Three wars, in particular, set important precedents for the Western world in the way in which militaries dealt with guerrillas and irregular insurgents. These wars involved Spain in Cuba (1896–1898), the United States in the Philippines (1900–1902), and Britain in South Africa (1899–1901). All three saw the evolution of similar strategic, operational, and tactical practices by the Great Powers.¹⁷

At the strategic level, these countries sought the destruction of guerrilla and irregular military forces in order to end insurgencies and, in the case of the Boers, end a conventional war that had entered a guerrilla warfare phase. Operationally, the Great Powers employed campaign designs that focused on separating the guerrillas from their principal sources of support (the friendly civilian populations), thereby enabling the military defeat of the weakened guerrilla armies. The Great Powers achieved this by the relocation of entire civilian populations in the affected areas. At lower tactical levels, military commanders isolated the guerrillas by establishing fortified lines that cut their operational areas into manageable sectors and then removed the civilian populations to concentration camps. Simultaneously, their regular and highly mobile forces swept the sectors clean of guerrillas by relentlessly pushing them to destruction against the fortified lines.

To varying degrees, these campaigns of population removal and population control were successful, with the British in South Africa achieving a complete and brutal subjugation of the Boer republics. The Ottoman Empire employed the same operational practices in 1915 against a portion of its Armenian population as did the Russians in the same year against the Jewish population of its western provinces. Spanish Gen. Valeriano Weyler called the gathering of civilians in Cuba *la reconcentración* (the reconcentration), an idea which Gen. H. H. Kitchener appropriated in South Africa, coining the term “concentration camp.” The United States called these places zones of protection, while the Ottomans called them relocation camps. Later in the Second World War, the United States relocated Japanese-Americans into internment camps (although not in revolt, the government felt they were

a potential threat to national security and preemptively took action). It is fair to say that by 1950, the forced relocation of people to separate insurgents and guerrillas from a friendly population was a well-established and effective counterinsurgency practice. In Malaya, the British would use the practice of resettlement to concentrate people into what were called “new villages.”

Lyttelton and Unity of Command

Briggs soon found that his role of operational coordinator and his framework for operational unity were unworkable. He was powerless to actually direct operations or to issue orders as a commander. Moreover, Briggs soon fell afoul of strong personalities and turf wars. According to British historian John Cloake “He could coordinate operations but not prima donnas.”¹⁸ More areas of the peninsula fell under communist control, and the situation grew more dangerous. In London, the cabinet grew increasingly concerned about the apparent lack of progress and the slow pace of getting things under control.¹⁹ Communist insurgents assassinated Gurney in a daring and well-organized ambush on 6 October 1951. Briggs, very frustrated and discouraged, ended his tour in November 1951.

On 25 October 1951, conservatives swept into power in London and two days later appointed Oliver Lyttelton as secretary of state for colonies (colonial secretary). Lyttelton had worked with the tin mining industry in Malaya since 1935, and he knew the country and its inhabitants well.²⁰ Lyttelton made Malaya his first priority and met with Malayan experts, British businessmen, and military leaders to acquaint him with the current situation.²¹ He notified the newly returned conservative prime minister, Sir Winston Churchill, that he intended to visit Malaya on a personal reconnaissance. A replacement for Gurney had not been named, but Lyttelton undertook his trip on 29 November. Arriving in early December, he found the situation there far worse than



Village residents draw food rations in a “new village” at Petaling Jaya in Selangor Province, Malaya. The phrase “hearts and minds” disguised food control and “food denial,” wherein rations were closely controlled to the extent of puncturing the lids of tin cans and sprinkling water on rice before these items were issued to new villagers. (Photo courtesy of the National Archives [UK])

he had imagined.²² Like Briggs, Lyttelton’s immediate appraisal was decisive in its clarity and compelling in its logic. Although not a military man, Lyttelton’s mind went directly to the principle of unity of command. He recommended to Churchill on 8 December that the “High Commissioner would assume entire responsibility for both military operations and civil administration. He would be called the High Commissioner and Director of Operations.”²³

Lyttelton was decisive and went on to make a public radio broadcast on 11 December in which he outlined a six-point program for Malaya.²⁴ These points were

- ◆ centralized overall direction of civil and military forces,
- ◆ reorganizing and retraining of police,
- ◆ compulsory primary education of all children,
- ◆ a high measure of protection for the resettlement areas,
- ◆ larger numbers of Chinese enlisted into the Home Guard, and
- ◆ greater assistance to the Civil Services.

These were not all Lyttelton’s own ideas, but his ability to sort through a host of recommendations by his advisors and by the people he met in Malaya was remarkably prescient. There had been talk in Malaya and in London about the centralization civil and military authority in



American Vice President Richard Nixon listens attentively to British Gen. Sir Gerald Templer during a 1953 visit to Malaya. Nixon was visiting Southeast Asia on a fact finding trip. (Photo courtesy of the Malaysian National Archives)

was commanding the II Corps as the youngest lieutenant general in the British army. He went on to command in Italy, where he was wounded, but he returned to service in the postwar military government of Germany in 1945. In January 1952, Templer was fifty-three years old and serving as the commanding general officer of the Eastern Command in the United Kingdom. He was on the fast track to high command, and many officers felt he was certain to reach the post of chief of the Imperial General Staff sometime in the future. Lyttelton spent three hours interviewing Templer and only one hour interviewing three other high-ranking general officers.

one man, but nothing had been done. On 21 December 1951, Lyttelton submitted his report on Malaya to the cabinet and conclusively explained that having “two heads at the summit” was unsound and that “the most effective single measure to be taken is the unification and concentration of command and responsibility in one man.”²⁵

Lyttelton proceeded to think about a suitable officer to take unified command in Malaya. He met with Field Marshal Bernard “Monty” Montgomery, who was then serving as deputy supreme allied commander Europe, on 23 December. Montgomery endorsed Lyttelton’s ideas and offered remarkably candid opinions about the abilities of the possible candidates.²⁶ The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter sums up Montgomery’s succinct advice about solving the problem. Lyttelton was also convinced that the person needed to fill such a role would have a background in military rather than civil service. Over the next few weeks, Lyttelton considered a number of prominent British generals, and on 4 January 1952, he settled on Templer as his choice.

Templer had a brilliant record of service; he had served in the trenches in the First World War and in Palestine in the 1930s, where he was engaged in counterterrorism operations. He graduated from the staff college at Camberley in 1929, and by September 1942, Templer

both Montgomery and Slim concurred with Lyttelton’s recommendation. Churchill, who was in Canada at that time, ordered Templer to meet him in Ottawa for further discussions. Templer met Churchill for a two-hour meeting on 11 January, leaving with the prime minister’s blessings and with certainty that he would be in full command of civil and military institutions (but uncertain about his actual mission). In subsequent exchanges of messages with Churchill, Templer demanded clarity of where he stood within the command architecture of the theater and what the political objectives were. Templer also expressed concerns about where he would fit into the wider theater command architecture with regard to Singapore as well. After deliberations and consultations with the Malaya Committee, Lyttelton provided clear political guidance that the government’s goal was to see Malaya as a fully self-governing nation with the Commonwealth and that all Malaysians should have citizenship in that country.²⁷

Templer arrived in Kuala Lumpur on 7 February 1952 and immediately met with his key subordinates. He spent the next few weeks speaking to groups of military, civil, and Malayan leaders, outlining his aggressive position on ending terrorism and the insurgency. On 28 February, he sent Lyttelton a telegram explaining his

intent to reorganize the “Government Administrative H.Q. machine” to become effective the following day.²⁸ Templer’s major change was to merge the Federal War Council with the Federal Executive Council, thus affecting centralization of military and civil policy. He was careful to maintain the existing director of Operations Committee and empowered the committee “to undertake all those controls and activities which are necessitated solely on account of the emergency.”²⁹ In doing this, Templer, who was nominally in command, insured the functional subordination of civil institutions to military authority, which cleared the way for unity of command

balance ends, ways, and means, it cannot be strategy, and it is better viewed as an approach. We know that Templer used the phrase in several speeches, but his first objective remained the restoration of law and order.³¹ In order to place Templer’s approach in the proper context, it is important to understand what he did as an operational and tactical commander.

At the operational level, hearts and minds was very much of an approach intended to create a more inclusive polity and economy. Templer’s policies to achieve this included extending citizenship to all inhabitants, creating multiracial military and police units, ex-

panding full suffrage, improving the infrastructure, and improving educational opportunities. These efforts were aimed at all Malays and not just the ethnic Chinese, who were the popular base of insurgent support. However, it is important to remember that in many ways, Templer’s treatment of the ethnic Chinese remained rooted in punitive measures throughout his tenure in Malaya.

Under Templer, resettlement of the ethnic Chinese shifted into high gear and, while it is true that Templer was moderately concerned about the well-being of these people, he was determined to bring them under control. It is well known that Templer realized life in the new villages had to be sustained at a threshold designed

to minimize hostility, and accordingly furnished them with electricity, potable water, and sanitation as well as providing villagers with schools, jobs, and local government. He also ensured external village security by trusting vetted ethnic Chinese to form armed Home Guard battalions. These measures, which were aimed at quality of life, are often advanced as evidence of a soft-power hearts and minds approach to counterinsurgency. In truth, Templer indeed aimed to normalize people’s lives, but this was always subordinate to the interests of enforcing overall population control.

It is sometimes forgotten that Templer’s velvet glove concealed an iron hand that maintained a tight grip



A bird's-eye view of a typical squatter resettlement village from a sentry tower under the Briggs Plan, ca. 1950. Every space available in the village was being cultivated. (Photo courtesy of the Federation of Malaya)

in suppressing the insurgency. Today, we would say that Templer was “double-hatted,” as his role as the civil-military head of British Malaya placed him politically at the strategic level and militarily at the operational level. But it may also be argued that in his role as director of operations, Templer was a tactical commander as well. This was a unique convergence of authority that laterally connected civil-military matters from the strategic level down to the tactical level.

The Mythology of Hearts and Minds

Much has been written about Templer’s hearts and minds strategy.³⁰ Arguably, since the phrase does not

on the ethnic Chinese population of Malaya. Some of Templer's less pleasant methods for population control included collective punishment for entire villages when a perpetrator could not be identified or when popular demonstrations broke out, collective detention of suspected supporters of the insurgency, absolute nighttime curfews, a rigorous regime of movement control using passes, food control, and "food denial" (wherein rations were closely controlled to the extent of puncturing the lids of tin cans and sprinkling water on rice before these items were issued to new villagers), and dramatic and highly publicized punishments.³² These methods were widely employed but, at times, were episodically and unpredictably applied, leading to unrest and unhappiness. These harsh measures drove some ethnic Chinese into the arms of the insurgents, but nevertheless, in the end, these punitive measures effectively isolated the insurgents from their base of popular support.³³

The British military counterinsurgency effort in Malaya remained very much an infantryman's war. In this regard, Templer's infantry strength only incrementally exceeded Briggs's infantry strength.

In January 1953, at peak strength, Templer had twenty-three infantry battalions in Malaya, while in October 1951, Briggs had commanded nineteen infantry battalions (for a net increase of four infantry battalions).³⁴ Part of the British effort involved 3 Commando Brigade (composed of 42 and 45 Commandos), which Templer committed to Perak, a 7,800 square mile state on the peninsula's northwest coast.³⁵ It is evident that the military means did not increase significantly, and the question must be asked, "How then did Templer succeed?"

As the de facto military commander, Templer's efforts at resettlement enabled him to concentrate



New Zealanders serving with Britain's 22 Special Air Service patrol the Malayan jungle searching for communist insurgents. The Briggs-Templer approach employed small units of platoon and squad size that executed deep jungle operations. These highly mobile and well-trained units hunted the insurgents, who grew progressively weaker from malnutrition and from a lack of support as the effects of population control kicked in. (Photo courtesy of the New Zealand Ministry of Defence)

his forces to clear provinces step-by-step as they were emptied of ethnic Chinese. Tactically, Templer created platoon- and squad-size units that executed deep-jungle operations. These highly mobile and well-trained units hunted the insurgents, who grew progressively weaker from malnutrition and from a lack of support as the effects of population control kicked in. Essentially, this was an attritional approach to change the relative strength of the enemy forces to the British advantage. The deep-jungle units then pursued the greatly weakened insurgents to destruction or surrender by denying them sanctuaries and secure base areas. These were basically

search-and-destroy missions carried out in the context of a tactical area within which there was no population friendly to the insurgents. Templer managed the tactical war by keeping track of a wide array of statistics and by assembling a very detailed and comprehensive database. Templer's data base measured body counts (called "eliminations"), casualties, "ratios of eliminations" of enemy dead to civilians and security force dead, contacts by type of engagement, and estimates of the performance and effectiveness of police and security force units in patrolling and ambushing insurgents.³⁶

At the operational level, Templer managed his war by the designation of geographical areas as "white areas" or "black areas." Templer began in Malacca on 5 September 1953, where the insurgents had been reduced from two hundred to less than fifty. This success encouraged the resident commissioner to suggest that emergency regulations be lifted, and Templer responded by designating it as his first white area.³⁷ The metrics generated by Templer's tactical statistics were, of course, essential to the decision to designate an area as white or retain it in the black category (where emergency regulations remained in effect). Templer cleared areas sequentially from south to north, and when he left, there were 1,336,000 Malaysians living in white areas. His successor was able to join up a series of white areas into a broad belt across the peninsula, effectively cutting the insurgency in half and cutting off many of the insurgents from external aid.³⁸ The designation of white areas has been characterized as a heavy-handed carrot-and-stick approach, but it enabled Templer to concentrate his scarce resources with greater precision and effectiveness.

The British left Malaya in 1957 with the insurgency largely suppressed. Nevertheless, the greatly reduced insurgency did continue through 1960 before the newly independent Federation of Malaya declared it suppressed. Unification with parts of the island of Borneo subsequently led to the creation of the modern state of Malaysia. It is important to note the declaration of the suppression of the emergency did not satisfy the political, economic, and social needs of the entire population, and episodes of terrorism and minor insurgency broke out again and continue to the present day.

Operational Art in Counterinsurgency

It is fair to say that Gerald Templer did not have substantially more forces available than did Henry Gurney,

and that Templer's essential political end state remained much the same as Gurney's. It is therefore arguable to advance the idea that Templer's success rested on the way that he went about conducting counterinsurgency operations in Malaya rather than in the manipulation of the ends and means. It may also be argued that Templer simply refined the basic tenants of the Briggs Plan, and that both Briggs and Templer set out to destroy the insurgents through kinetic means.

As a problem set, the British in Malaya did not have the forces available to suppress the communist insurgency using traditional approaches. This fact therefore demanded a creative solution and, at the operational level, the Briggs Plan outlined a way to achieve force ratios favorable to the resources that Britain had available. Briggs developed a campaign plan that was centered on population control through resettlement intended to separate the insurgents from popular support. Briggs coupled this with the destruction of the insurgent political party and its armed military wing in areas where they were weakened by the loss of support.

In terms of the principles of war, the resettlement of the ethnic Chinese created conditions wherein Briggs could employ fewer resources against the ethnic Chinese population in an economy of force in order to concentrate his scarce resources against the insurgent army on terms favorable to the British. This enabled Briggs to seize the initiative and conduct offensive operations with a defined objective in mind.

It is certain today that the Briggs Plan, although it was succeeding, was moving at a slower pace than the government in London desired. It is less certain today that the British government, moving at that pace, could have maintained the political will necessary to end a prolonged and increasingly expensive counterinsurgency campaign on terms politically favorable to Britain. This changed with the arrival

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of Oliver Lyttelton, who decisively altered command and control at the operational level by centralizing civil and military operations in the hands of one man. Lyttelton's directive armed Templer with the authority necessary to accelerate the pace of the Briggs Plan. Templer's principal contributions to Britain's success in Malaya then came in two forms. First, he laterally connected civil and military matters and he vertically connected the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Second, Templer managed the war effectively by establishing a system of statistical reports that enabled him to create white and black areas.

Might the British success in Malaya be seen as some sort of a template for operational art in counterinsurgency planning and practice? The answer is probably not because of the unique political, geographic, and demographic characteristics of the Malayan Emergency. However, it may be seen as an example of creative design at the operational level. Certainly, these three characteristics were essential preconditions necessary for British success. But there were many other factors that affected the outcome as well, such as the fact that Malaya was a political entity within the British Empire, and most of its inhabitants viewed its government as legitimate. Moreover, as a peninsula, Malaya was easy to isolate from outside insurgent support, external sanctuaries, and base areas. Finally, the ethnic character of the insurgency defined the population that the British had to deal with. These factors enabled Briggs, Lyttelton, and Templer to develop and execute a creative operational counterinsurgency design that balanced achievable ends, ways, and means.

Malaya was a unique case in counterinsurgency, and the operational art seen there fit the dynamics of the

situation. Since 1963, the United States has attempted to take various parts of the Briggs-Lyttelton-Templer formula and tried to mold them into its counterinsurgency doctrines. The Marines' combined action platoons in Vietnam, for example, reflected a hearts and minds approach.³⁹ However, U.S. intervention in South Vietnam, although saturated with Templer's phrases, essentially used many of the kinetic and harsh elements of the Briggs Plan (including relocation under the moniker of "strategic hamlets," of which there were eight thousand by 1963).⁴⁰ Arguably, the formula worked to the extent that, by 1973, the United States had won the war on the terms it had established for victory. The fact that South Vietnam fell to a conventional outside invasion two years later should not detract from that accomplishment.

Conclusion

Today, the United States uses a hearts and minds approach to counterinsurgency, declaring that "the people" are the center of gravity, within which we see many elements of Templer's approach.⁴¹ The U.S. used this doctrinal approach in Afghanistan and Iraq and, while the jury is still out assessing its success, it does not appear to be headed toward the conclusion the British enjoyed in Malaya. Neither in Vietnam nor in its contemporary interventions did the United States centralize command and control into the hands of one man.⁴² In the end, all that we can safely say today is politically, geographically, and demographically, South Vietnam was not, and Iraq and Afghanistan are not, Malaya. Therefore, we might observe that in reality, each case demanded original and creative forms of operational art in order to solve the thorny problem of counterinsurgency. ■

Notes

Epigraph. Oliver Lyttelton, *Memoirs of Lord Chandros, An Unexpected View from the Summit* (London: Bodley Head, 1962), 379.

1. Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986 [obsolete]), 10.

2. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2016 [obsolete]), 2-1.

3. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-1, *Ground Combat Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002 [obsolete]), 1-6.

4. See, for example, Richard Stubbs, "From Search and Destroy to Hearts and Minds: The Evolution of British Strategy in Malaya 1948-1960," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, ed. Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 120-29.

5. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-2, *Campaigning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1997), 56-58.

6. *Ibid.*, 56.

7. For an excellent summary of the Malayan Emergency, see John Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency: An Analysis of the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1954* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).

8. John Cloake, *Templer, Tiger of Malaya: The Life of Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer* (London: Harrap Limited, 1985), 196.

9. A. J. Stockwell, ed., "Report by COS for Cabinet Malaya Committee, 'Federation Plan for the Elimination of the Communist Organization and Armed Forces in Malaya' 24 May 1950, (CAB 21/1681)," in *Malaya: Part II, The Communist Insurrection, 1948–1953* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1995), 216–21.
10. Stockwell, "Outline of the Problem," para. 1.
11. *Ibid.*, para. 3.
12. Stockwell, "Outline Plan," para. 4.
13. Cloake, *Templer*, 196.
14. Stockwell, "Framework," para. 5.
15. Stockwell, "Striking Forces," para. 6.
16. John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 75.
17. For a comprehensive narrative regarding Great Power use of population removal and control, see Edward J. Erickson, *Ottomans and Armenians: A Study in Counterinsurgency* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 79–96, 189–93, and 217–28.
8. Cloake, *Templer*, 198.
19. Stockwell, "Cabinet summary of a meeting at 10 Downing Street on 26 Feb to consider the plan's slow progress, PREM 8/1406/2," 277–79; Stockwell, "Cabinet summary of a meeting at 10 Downing Street on 8 Mar to consider the plan's slow progress, PREM 8/1406/2," 307–9.
20. Stockwell, *Malaya*, 199.
21. Stockwell, "Minute by RH Scott to Mr Eden, 'Foreign office interests in and views on Malaya' 31 Oct 1951, FO 371/93011," 304–6; Stockwell, "CO record of meeting between Lyttelton and a delegation representing business interests in Malaya, 'Emergency in Malaya' 15 Nov 1951, CO 1022/39," 307–9.
22. Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare, The Malayan Emergency 1948–1960* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004), 139.
23. "Lyttelton to Churchill, 'Reorganisation of Malayan Government' 8 Dec 1951, PREM 11/639," in Stockwell, *Malaya*, 317–18.
24. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare*, 140–41.
25. Stockwell, "Cabinet memorandum by Mr Lyttelton, 'Malaya' 21 Dec 1951, paragraph 34 (The chain of command and responsibility), CAB 129/48," 318–52.
26. Stockwell, "Letter from Montgomery to Lyttelton following discussions at Chequers on 23 Dec, PREM 11/121," 353–55.
27. Stockwell, "Directive issued by Mr Lyttelton on behalf of HMG, 'Templer's instructions' 1 Feb 1952, PREM 11/639," 372–73.
28. Stockwell, "Telegram from Sir G Templer to Mr Lyttelton, 'Reorganisation of government' 28 Feb 1952, CO 1022/60," 373–76.
29. *Ibid.*
30. For example, Stubbs, "From Search and Destroy to Hearts and Minds," in Marston and Malkasian, *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*; Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 378–88.
31. Cloake, *Templer*, 477. Cloake asserted that earliest known use of the phrase by Templer was in a speech to the Malayan Chamber of Commerce on 26 April 1952.
32. See Director of Operations–Malaya, "Food Denial Operations and Methods of Searching," in *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*, 3rd ed. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1958), sec. 4, chap. IV, 9–18.
33. Stubbs, "From Search and Destroy to Hearts and Minds," in Marston and Malkasian, *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, 170–71.
34. Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 169.
35. Anthony Crockett, *Green Beret, Red Star* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1954), 15–16. It appears from Crockett's memoir that the experience of Royal Marine commandos in Malaya did not materially differ from that of army units committed there.
36. Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, tables 6.1–6.3 and appendices A and B.
37. *Ibid.*, 129.
38. *Ibid.*
39. John A. Nagl, "Counterinsurgency in Vietnam, American Organizational Culture and Learning," in Marston and Malkasian, *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare* (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2008), 139–40.
40. R. W. Komer, "The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of a Successful Counterinsurgency Effort" (Santa Monica, CA: Advanced Research Projects Agency, RAND Corporation, 1972), 83–84.
41. FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 15 December 2006 [obsolete]), 1-28–1-29.
42. In the twenty-first century, the United States employs a doctrinal concept known as a "whole of government" approach. In such an approach, the U.S. government (USG) designates an agency, for example the Department of State, as the lead agency, with the specified mission of coordinating what the USG calls "unity of effort." In this set up, the lead agency has no actual command over its associated civil and military partners and must rely on reason and persuasion to coordinate planning and operations.