



Popular Support as the Objective in Counterinsurgency

WHAT ARE WE REALLY AFTER?

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PHOTO: Locals mill about a street market in a neighborhood in Afghanistan as U.S. Soldiers pass through the area, 10 February 2009. (U.S. Army, SSG Russell Lee Klika)

COUNTERINSURGENCY (COIN) is a complex and bedeviling form of warfare, so much so that U.S. doctrine actually contains a list of apparent paradoxes Joint Force commanders are likely to face as they design operations and campaigns. The COIN operation's main objective is among the many ambiguities involved. Unlike conventional war where key terrain or enemy forces present clear, tangible objectives, in COIN the objective is often intangible: the people or their support.

This article offers a critique of COIN doctrine. It argues two points:

- U.S. doctrine vastly oversimplifies the operational environment in COIN in the way it defines the people or the population. It does not recognize the population's true complexity. Recognizing complexity will help commanders design more effective operations.
- U.S. COIN doctrine provides no model for operationalizing popular support for the counterinsurgent. Commanders would benefit from a clearer picture of what kinds of support the counterinsurgent needs to isolate insurgents.

This article draws on current research on political violence to propose a four-level framework for popular support to clarify its nature for commanders. The counterinsurgent obviously needs support to fill certain governance and security functions, but history shows this is not enough. The counterinsurgent also needs support from key individuals in the host nation's social, political, and cultural networks to isolate insurgents and tip mass opinion in his favor. Today's networked society makes these key opinion leaders high-value targets in a modern COIN campaign. This criticality has important implications for intelligence, information operations (IO), special operation forces (SOF), and operational fires.

Popular Support as the COIN Objective

"No one starts a war—or rather, no one in his sense ought to do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it."¹ In this often-quoted passage, Clausewitz describes the importance of clearly establishing the objective for any military operation at the outset. As war theorist Milan Vego writes, "Without a clearly stated and attainable objective, the entire military effort becomes essentially pointless."² Unfortunately, the conflicts in which the United States finds itself today do not seem to offer clear, decisive military objectives. In fact, the complexities of Iraq and Afghanistan have caused a reexamination of joint COIN doctrine. *The Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* (IW JOC); Field Manual (FM) 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP)

Without a clearly stated and attainable objective, the entire military effort becomes essentially pointless.

3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*; and *The Multiservice Concept for Irregular War* recognize insurgency as an inherently “complex, messy, and ambiguous social phenomenon.”³³ According to FM 3-24, counterinsurgency is an “internal war.”³⁴ It encompasses “military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.”³⁵

Clear military objectives in such a “complex, messy, and ambiguous” internal war are understandably difficult to define. The updated doctrine explicitly rejects the view that the primary objective is to destroy insurgent forces with superior firepower.⁶ There is now a growing consensus that COIN is primarily a political activity.⁷ It is a competition between insurgents and counterinsurgents for political power and a monopoly on force.⁸ As described by COIN expert Steven Metz, contemporary COIN environments are “more like a violent and competitive market than war in the traditional sense where clear and discrete combatants seek strategic victory.”⁹ Between insurgents and counterinsurgents, there are no front or rear areas, no key terrain or battle positions. The general population becomes the battlespace.¹⁰ But even more than that, because of the sociopolitical nature of insurgencies, gaining the support of the people becomes the main objective. The center of gravity for both insurgents and counterinsurgents is the people.¹¹

Some object to equating the people with a true Clausewitzian center of gravity.¹² However, the main objective in COIN is not seizing terrain or destroying enemy forces. As Galula’s “First Law” states, the main objective is to gain the support of the population.¹³ FM 3-24, too, describes the objective in terms of establishing the legitimacy of the government under attack. The authors understand legitimacy is ultimately the product of attitudes, perceptions, expectations, and confidence among the population.¹⁴ On a practical level, one can generalize all these cognitive processes as “the support of the people.” *The*

Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept defines the focus of COIN as “a relevant population,” and the purpose of COIN is to “gain or maintain control or influence over, and the support of, that relevant population through political, psychological, and economic methods.”¹⁵ In other words, the objective in COIN is gaining the support of the people.

But what, then, is this entity, “the people?” What “support” are we seeking? If the purpose of operations or campaigns is to “gain or maintain control or influence over, and the support of, the relevant population,” what is the nature of popular support, and how does it express itself? Currently, U.S. doctrine does not say. It takes us to the water’s edge on these essential questions, but leaves it unclear who or what popular support is. It provides a general, simplistic, and monolithic view of the people. At the same time, U.S. COIN doctrine provides no model for counterinsurgent popular support. It does not describe which kinds of support are the most critical to cultivate.

Who Are the People?

In defining the people, FM 3-24 quotes David Galula’s *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* nearly verbatim when it states, “In any situation, whatever the cause, there will be an active minority for the cause, a neutral or passive majority, and an active minority against the cause.”¹⁶ Other expressions of U.S. COIN doctrine define the operational environment as a triad of insurgent, counterinsurgent, and “a neutral or passive majority.” Doctrinal thinking portrays the majority as a single, monolithic block, defined primarily by its attitude about the conflict (neutral). The “active” forces then persuade those who are neutral or passive to support one side or the other. This assumption gives the problem some much-needed clarity: “Success requires the government to be accepted as legitimate by most of that uncommitted middle.”¹⁷ “Both insurgents and counterinsurgents are fighting for the support of the populace.”¹⁸ “In the end, victory comes, in large measure, by convincing the populace that their life will be better under the [host-nation] government than under an insurgent regime.”¹⁹

Is such an assumption an accurate reflection of the operational environment? COIN doctrine acknowledges that insurgent forces can be highly complex, diversified, and segmented: “Different insurgent

forces using different approaches may form loose coalitions when it serves their interests; however, these same movements may fight among themselves, even while engaging counterinsurgents.”²⁰ Galula and FM 3-24 only hint at this same complexity within the noninsurgent population. Of course, Galula and the manual are not alone in this regard. Most histories of modern insurgencies, including Mao’s description of the people as a “vast sea” that hides insurgents and drowns the enemy, also portray the people in this monolithic way.²¹ Yale scholar Stathis Kalyvas asserts that such “macro-level” accounts represent the prevailing wisdom on political violence, i.e., that “elites and populations are fused and amalgamated . . . [and] elites determine automatically and unilaterally the course of group actions and the groups are monolithic and behave as such.”²² However, this construct “fails to match the vast complexity, fluidity, and ambiguity one encounters on the ground.”²³

Taking a broader view of insurgency as a form of political rebellion, University of Chicago Political Scientist Roger Petersen also argues that the people should not be the unit of analysis because rebellious activity varies greatly at the community level and some individuals play different roles in the course of rebellion.²⁴

Commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan agree that the environment is far more complex than doctrine indicates. In Al Anbar province, Iraq, Marine Captain Michael Vasquez concludes that FM 3-24’s canonization of Galula’s axiom relies on an oversimplified dichotomy between insurgent and population. Vasquez says the FM “fails to account for the fluid nature of a population where individuals may move back and forth [between categories] on a daily basis.”²⁵ Major General Peter Chiarelli, while as a Division Commander in Baghdad, described his area of operations as “overpopulated yet underdeveloped, divided into neighborhoods with distinct demographic divergences, reliant on a social system of governance based on tribal and religious affiliations, and interconnected by modern lines of communications.”²⁶ Army Colonel Ralph Baker notes the great ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic diversity of his area of operations. When he served as a Brigade Commander, Baker criticized the view of Iraqis “as a single, homogenous population receptive to centrally developed, all-purpose, general themes and messages.”²⁷ However, neither Chiarelli nor Baker

has a better doctrinal construct for this complexity. They categorize all residents neither for nor against the Iraqi government as the “undecided,” a neutral, passive majority of “fence-sitters.”

When one lumps this middle ground of the population together into a single entity, one can no longer appreciate the “tremendous variation in rebellion activity” within it.²⁸ The counterinsurgent’s objective, popular support, becomes a national or regional entity. We see the people as with us, against us, or as leaning one way or another, when in fact, they make up a much more complex, diverse, and fractured “mosaic.”²⁹ Each micro-constituency within the people may have its own unique perspectives, interests, and agenda in the war, one that only vaguely coincides with any larger popular feeling, if it does so at all. If the counterinsurgent cannot grasp this, then he does not know his terrain. He is blind to what is really happening around him.

Consider for instance the prominent role of tribalism in current COIN strategy in Iraq. Faced with a chaotic social environment that exceeded FM 3-24’s simple dichotomy, commanders looked for ways to make sense of the insurgency, and, based on scholarship by anthropologists like Montgomery McFate, many turned to Iraq’s tribes as a possible unifying construct.³⁰ If “the tribe is the most enduring and important social structure for the Iraqi Sunni Arabs” as Iraq study group member Lin Todd and others argue, a COIN strategy based on tribal co-optation gave commanders something solid to act on.³¹ However, a similar monolithic expectation soon pervaded this approach. As military author Steven Pressfield put it, “Step one is to recognize that the enemy is tribal. We in the West may flatter ourselves that democracy is taking root in Iraq. . . . What’s happening is the tribal chief has passed the word and everybody is voting exactly as he told them to.”³² Thus, the tribe simply substitutes for the people as the monolithic bloc. “The tribe can’t be reasoned with. Its mind is not rational; it is instinctive. The tribe is not modern but primitive. The tribe thinks from the stem of its brain, not the cortex. Its code is of warrior pride, not of Enlightenment reason.”³³ Tribal sheiks thus became key power brokers for bringing whole monolithic blocs of Iraqis into line at once.

The reality on the ground is far more complex. Vasquez writes, “Because of a fundamental misunderstanding of tribal bonds within the Marine

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Corps, the principal contributing factors that led to the security gains of 2007 have gone largely unrecognized.”³⁴ Practitioners in Iraq routinely report that the tribes themselves seethe with “interpersonal rivalry, feuds...family and village quarrels...and intergroup hostility.”³⁵ Many Iraqis see the tribal sheiks “as illiterate, embarrassing, criminal, powerless anachronisms that should be given no official recognition.”³⁶ Moreover, at least 25 percent of Iraqis, including most foreign jihadist, have no relevant tribal affiliation.³⁷ Research suggests that tribes are dynamic, factional networks of competing sub-groups quite unlike the model in FM 3-24.³⁸

Defining Popular Support

Nevertheless, gaining popular support is still the objective, whether the people are a single monolithic block trapped passively between warring combatants or a shifting mosaic of subcultures and factions. The counterinsurgent’s challenge is not to find a way to move a single mass of neutrals over to his side, but to piece together a sufficiently stable coalition of factions that isolates the insurgents or cuts them off from their critical bases of support. The insurgents and counterinsurgents do not woo independent voters to win a majority over to their side; they engage in Tammany Hall-style coalition building in a cutthroat competition.³⁹ Martin Scorsese’s film, *Gangs of New York*, presents an instructive analogy.⁴⁰

Clarifying what the counterinsurgents need to do would make it easier for commanders to design campaigns that build winning coalitions. As important as this would seem, there are very few published models available. FM 3-24 offers ways to assess popular support for the insurgents, but nothing nearly as straightforward for the counterinsurgent.⁴¹ A few scholars have researched violent internal conflict and divide FM 3-24’s neutral majority into three subcategories defined by an individual’s attitude towards the government.⁴² The

stronger the person’s attachment is to the government, the higher the category of support.

However, other research shows that trying to understand popular support as the product of attitudes, beliefs, or policy preferences may not be a valid approach. Kalyvas argues that such beliefs may not even exist. U.S. political scientists have long argued that, even among the educated American voting population, “large portions of the electorate do not have meaningful beliefs.”⁴³ The political attitudes that do exist in the midst of a violent insurgency are vague, ambiguous, shifting, and nearly impossible to measure with any accuracy.⁴⁴ Kalyvas writes, “The complexities of preference formation suggest the need to shift the focus from attitudes to behavior.”⁴⁵

Thus, it may not be useful to define popular support in terms of attitudes, perceptions, or confidence, as FM 3-24 does. What the people do, rather than what they say, think, or feel may be a more appropriate guide for operational commanders. Roger Petersen offers such a behavior-based approach. He proposes a seven-point spectrum of resistance in which the middle point, the zero position, represents neutrality between insurgent and counterinsurgent, i.e., “the individual does nothing for or against the regime and nothing for or against the resistance.”⁴⁶ The +1 level represents unarmed and unorganized resistance against the government through symbolic gestures like writing graffiti on a wall or attending a demonstration. The +2 level represents direct or “active” support of insurgent operations, but still not personal armed resistance. Active fighters engaged in armed resistance inhabit the +3 level of resistance (Figure 1).⁴⁷

Like much of the literature, Petersen’s work focuses on the insurgents, not the government. However, one can easily extrapolate a similar scale for the counterinsurgents at the -1 to -3 levels. Still, the kind of support the counterinsurgent needs is fundamentally different. An influential RAND study on Vietnam argues that the insurgents “need

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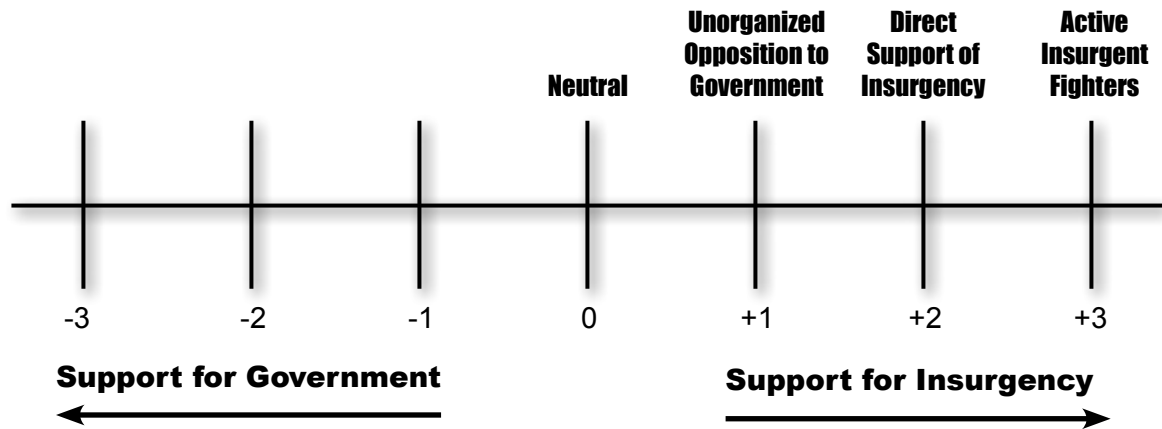


Figure 1. Petersen's spectrum of resistance.

not initially have the spontaneous support, sympathy, or loyalty of the people, not even of a significant minority of the people.”⁴⁸ In fact, the insurgents can do very well with very small numbers of active +3 fighters, if they can at least achieve a “submissiveness” that results in “nondenunciation” from most of the people.⁴⁹

In contrast, as FM 3-24 points out, the counterinsurgent needs much broader and more active support than the insurgent. Counterinsurgents' categories of support may be different from those of the insurgents. A crucial distinction Vasquez observed among Iraqi Sunni Arabs was the difference between “anonymous mobilization” and “individual mobilization.” Anonymous mobilization is “characterized by support for the counterinsurgency force that does not single out the individual or place his household under individual threat.”⁵⁰ The economic necessity of serving as one of thousands in local government security forces, for example, gives the individual a kind of social cover that is less dangerous and less likely to invite retaliation from insurgents. Individual mobilization, on the other hand, is “time-sensitive” decision making by individuals who “weigh the threat of retaliation versus the benefit of cooperation.”⁵¹ This is the level of personal commitment to the government's cause that produces leadership at the local level and the flow of intelligence that can marginalize and isolate the insurgent. The individual may have selfish motives for doing this, but the motive is much less important than its practical effect. Combining Petersen's spectrum of resistance with the anonymous/individual

distinction just discussed is a good starting point for a popular-support doctrinal framework for counterinsurgency.

Forms of popular support. Popular support for the counterinsurgent can take four forms: true neutral; anonymous passive; anonymous active; and individual active—

- A *true neutral* does nothing for or against either side. That he will not aid the insurgents makes him a distinct subset of popular support.

- *Anonymous passives* are willing to acquiesce or submit to counterinsurgent rule, obey its dictates, honor its laws, and support operations against insurgents if the risk is minimal. However, they are just as likely to do the same for insurgents if their interests change.

- *Anonymous actives* are willing, for whatever reason, to collaborate officially by doing open business with counterinsurgent forces, taking government jobs, or serving in local or national security forces.

- *Individual actives* display a personal, public commitment to the government's claim to legitimacy and COIN operations against insurgents. Formal alignment with the government in the form of employment is not necessary and one should not assume the commitment is permanent or reflects some deeper ideological agreement (although often it does). Examples of individual actives might include a citizen who provides quality intelligence to counterinsurgents, an imam who makes pro-government or anti-insurgent pronouncements, or a businessman who openly defies insurgent calls for a general strike (Figure 2).

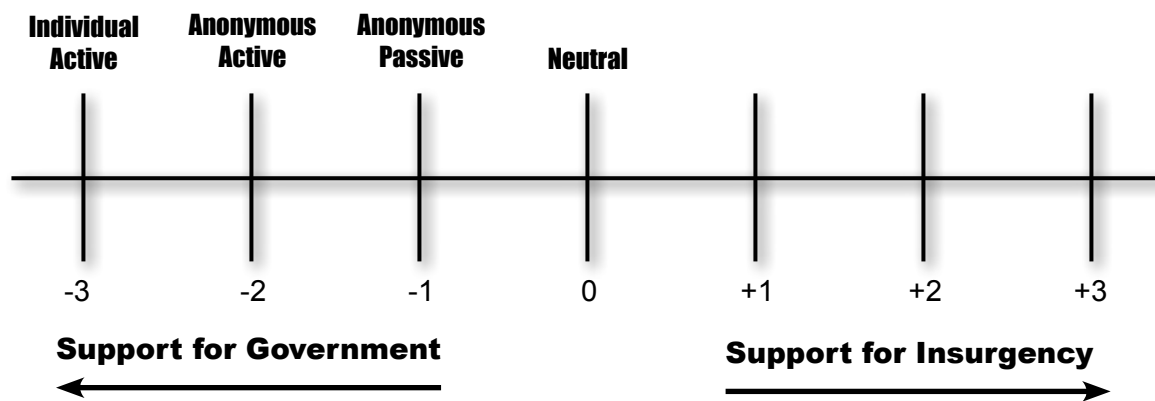


Figure 2. A categorical framework for counterinsurgent popular support in COIN.

As with any model, the fine distinctions between categories blur together at the street level. How public does a tipster have to be in order to qualify as an individual active? Is there a clear demarcation between anonymous passives and actives? In most situations, we can only answer these questions on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, as Petersen observed, the same individuals can move between categories several times throughout the conflict.⁵²

What We Are Really After

By categorizing popular support in this way, commanders can make clearer distinctions between the kinds of popular support their operations must generate. First, the history of modern COIN suggests that a population full of true neutrals and anonymous passives will more likely benefit the insurgents, so logical lines of operations aimed at achieving those effects will not ultimately support strategic success.⁵³ However, for a foreign power supporting a host-nation (HN) government in COIN, one thing that is absolutely necessary is the development of effective host-nation security forces to carry on the fight.⁵⁴ Unless the United States is willing to bear the direct burden of internal and external security indefinitely, As FM 3-24 correctly asserts, “HN elements must accept responsibilities to achieve real victory.”⁵⁵ This will require substantial *anonymous active* support. We can look to historical examples to take the guesswork out of how large such a force must be.

Historical data suggests that a ratio of at least 15 to 20 security force members to every 1,000 inhabitants is necessary to maintain basic order.⁵⁶ Additional forces for border and infrastructure secu-

rity, plus air and naval forces, will increase the total demand. Add to this the basic labor force necessary for national, provincial, and local governments to function, and one has a clear objective for the number of *anonymous actives* the counterinsurgent needs to recruit from the population.

At first, this might seem an insurmountable figure, but the history of modern COIN shows that this has rarely been the case. Few of even the most corrupt and inept governments besieged by popular insurgencies have collapsed because they literally could not hire employees while they had the money to pay them. This includes fielding local security forces. As Anthony J. Joes writes, “Loyalism has been a common, and often salient, feature of [insurgencies]. Yet it has rarely been a decisive one.”⁵⁷ Large indigenous counterinsurgent forces took the field in Vietnam, French Algeria, Indonesia, British India, Soviet Afghanistan, and Portuguese Africa.⁵⁸ So it is possible and fundamentally necessary, but at the same time, clearly not enough to produce victory on its own. As General Chiarelli writes of his experience in Iraq, combat operations and training local forces “will never contribute to a total solution.”⁵⁹

If robust recruitment of anonymous actives, while necessary, is not sufficient, then the decisive operation for winning popular support must take place among *individual actives*. As argued above, many COIN practitioners tend to view the people as a monolithic block to win over more or less *en masse*, so that they will come to believe in the legitimacy and relative goodness of the government versus the insurgents. This is the rationale of the now clichéd phrase, “winning hearts and minds,” which one RAND study summarized as “sharing



U.S. Army, SSG Adam Mancini

U.S. Army SSG Azhar Sher, right, and Pvt. Ryan Delashmit watch a group of Afghanis walk down a path while he and his team conduct a dismounted patrol mission, 17 March 2009.

public services generously” in order to prove that “the government cares.”⁶⁰ If the government practices this policy broadly enough and long enough, the assumption is that mass opinion will eventually shift in favor of the counterinsurgents.

However, a broad range of intriguing new research suggests that a “network society” is emerging globally that makes certain key opinion leaders, not the masses, the high-value targets in the fight for popular support.⁶¹ Although networks themselves are nothing new, in network society, social, cultural, economic, and political influence forms less around central state hierarchies or traditional authority structures, and more around dispersed networks of influence. A remarkable feature of these networks is the extraordinary effect that small cadres of key influencers have on others in the network. Author Malcolm Gladwell writes in *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* that all kinds of social phenomena, from fashion fads to political revolutions, often spread like viral epidemics.⁶² They obey the “law of the few,” which states that social epidemics spread through the influence of a relatively few special people with certain skills and personalities.⁶³ These people act as nodes in the network and are the catalysts for change.

The above has interesting implications for a doctrinal framework of popular support. Of course, the idea that small numbers of elite opinion leaders

deeply influence the passive, distracted masses is as old as communications studies itself and is arguably the foundational theory of modern advertising and political campaigning.⁶⁴ However, the diffusion of digital communication technology has expanded the influence and power of networks—and the key opinion leaders acting as their nodes—in ways that have left hardly any corner of the globe unpenetrated, including the underdeveloped, traditional societies where insurgencies flourish. Even in an allegedly tribal society like Iraq or Afghanistan, the individual active support of perhaps a relatively few individuals may affect a tipping point of mass opinion, and would then be the real prize on both sides for moving the people for or against the insurgency.

Counterinsurgents have already embraced the network paradigm as the best way of understanding the insurgent forces, so applying it to subgroups that comprise the population as well, is no great leap. Military author Thomas Hammes writes, “Today, insurgent organizations are comprised of loose coalitions of the willing, human networks that range from local to global.”⁶⁵ Marc Sageman describes in *Understanding Terror Networks* how many parts of the insurgencies throughout the Muslim world are themselves part of a larger global terrorist network propelled by relatively few key ideological and operational leaders.⁶⁶ FM 3-24 also recognizes the networked nature of insurgent groups and provides

an application of social network analysis as a tool for grappling with this phenomenon.⁶⁷

This dynamic raises the possibility that just as counterinsurgents must make a great effort to identify and target the nodes of the “dark networks”—the networks of insurgents, terrorists, and criminals—so must counterinsurgents seek out the “gray” networks in the uncommitted population and identify their key leaders in the same way.⁶⁸ These key leaders are the individuals that the counterinsurgents need to convert or co-opt into their coalition by eliciting their individual active support. Whether they are termed opinion elites, opinion leaders, or network nodes, these individuals have the skill or capacity to influence the true neutrals, anonymous passives, and anonymous actives to isolate the insurgents.

For commanders designing COIN campaigns, what is truly intriguing about research into the law of the few and its effect on networks is the suggestion that relatively small numbers of nodes in these gray networks need to be co-opted to have significant results in terms of mass opinion. Scholar Jonathan Farley uses mathematical simulations to test this dynamic in “Evolutionary Dynamics of the Insurgency in Iraq: A Mathematical Model of the Battle for Hearts and Minds.” Farley concludes, “How many men, women and children must you win over to your cause before victory is assured? ... Although intuition says that these numbers must be high, a certain model of public opinion based on ideas from statistical physics suggests that the answer may be smaller than one might at first think.”⁶⁹ His simulations confirm the tipping point idea that the key to mass opinion in network society is the viral influence of key opinion makers.⁷⁰ Although commanders in the field will justifiably remain skeptical of how well mathematical simulations will apply to the hard realities of war, the simulations represent yet another data point among many pointing to similar conclusions.

In many ways, current COIN practitioners are intuitively working towards this same approach, just without the doctrinal template to articulate it more clearly. In Iraq, for example, Colonel Baker recounts, “We realized we had to reach the most trusted, most influential community members: the societal and cultural leaders. We hoped to convince them to be our interlocutors with the silent majority.”⁷¹ Baker’s list of targets includes religious leaders, sheiks, tribal leaders, government officials, and

educators. “To be effective, you must tailor themes and messages to specific audiences,” not to Iraqis as a “single, homogeneous” whole.⁷² A more complete understanding of the networked but fractured nature of Iraqi society would show that there might also be many more less-obvious candidates than these; thus, there might be many more opportunities to find a decisive tipping point among the “silent majority.”

Implications for Operational Functions

Unfortunately, a full examination of the mechanisms that produce the two necessary types of support, anonymous active and individual active, is beyond the scope of this paper. In addition, each insurgency will have its own unique characteristics and require different strategies. However, this approach does have some important doctrinal implications for the commander’s use of intelligence, information operations, and fires management in the COIN environment.

Intelligence. FM 3-24 states, “Counterinsurgency is an intelligence-driven endeavor.”⁷³ But while intelligence about the population itself plays a very prominent role in FM 3-24’s adaptation of intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) for COIN, the focus of intelligence quickly shifts to the insurgents themselves—their motives, organization, and courses of action. By Chapter 3, Section III, the FM states, “The purpose of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations during a COIN is to develop the intelligence needed to address the issues driving the insurgency.”⁷⁴

Engaging the key opinion leaders in the population as a method for gaining popular support will require a significant shift in intelligence gathering and analysis effort away from insurgent targeting within the dark networks and onto the gray networks for other nonlethal engagement. As a RAND study states, not only is it sometimes difficult for commanders to believe that “isolating insurgents from the population is more efficacious than killing them,” but also it poses a daunting technical challenge.⁷⁵ How do you map a whole society? While the sheer scale of the problem is an issue, the tools exist to do it. One method is social network analysis, which receives its own appendix in FM 3-24. Using social network analysis, “decision makers can be offered better courses of action seeking to achieve

a target influence, perception, or outcome to one or more actors within the network through either direct or indirect means.”⁷⁶ Building expertise in these and other techniques and resourcing intelligence staffs for the challenge will make the commander’s efforts to elicit individual active support from the right people more efficient.

Information operations. If the problem for the counterinsurgent is not how to move mass opinion as a whole, but how to convince, convert, or co-opt key opinion elites into a contentious, but effective coalition of subpopulations, then tailored, local IO themes and messages appear more helpful than theater-level strategic communication programs in that process. Although IO at all levels of war has its place and we must synchronize it for a unified effort, Tip O’Neill’s famous maxim, “all politics is local,” is doubly appropriate for IO in COIN.⁷⁷ Pushing more authority and resources to tactical level units would better leverage organic IO capabilities. It would also give local commanders more flexibility, better response time, and more useful products.⁷⁸

SOF/Operational Fires. One can easily oversimplify the operational environment into Galula’s triad at the theater level, where an artificial gap might seem to separate insurgents from the people. Therefore, it often appears entirely appropriate to use SOF or operational assets to target insurgents independently without working with the tactical units in the area. But, the bad guy that theater level assets are tracking might in fact be a key, wavering,

...the bad guy that theater level assets are tracking might in fact be a key, wavering opinion leader close to making a deal with counterinsurgents.

opinion leader close to making a deal with counterinsurgents. Even if he is not, his elimination may have far-reaching, gray-network effects that only tactical level commanders can predict. This doubt suggests that commanders must delegate most targeting assets and authority to lower levels, or at least coordinate with the relevant tactical units prior to taking action.⁷⁹

The four-level framework for counterinsurgent popular support can help clarify how to gain support from a fractured, diverse population. Counterinsurgents need to piece together a coalition of factions that produces two specific kinds of support, each with its own effect on the campaign. Anonymous actives fill the government positions and security forces necessary to defeat the insurgents, but to move mass opinion in favor of the government, one needs to find the key nodes in the population’s gray networks and secure their individual active support. Such effort can have a viral effect throughout the society that helps marginalize and isolate the insurgents—an “isolation not enforced on the population but maintained by and with the population.”⁸⁰ **MR**

NOTES

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3. Department of Defense, Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC), Version 1.0 (Washington DC: DOD, 11 September 2007), 6.

4. U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24/MCWP No. 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office [GPO], 15 December 2006), I-5.

5. *Ibid.*, I-2.

6. Compare FM 3-24, “Introduction” and I-105 through I-161 with John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) and Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986).

7. FM 3-24, I-3, I-123; IW JOC, 1; John D. Waghelein and Donald Chisholm, “Analyzing Insurgency” (Newport, RI: United States Naval War College, 2006), 3; Max G. Manwaring, *Shadows of Things Past and Images of the Future: Lessons for the Insurgencies in Our Midst* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004), 1-7; David C. Gompert and John Gordon, *War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008).

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10. Austin Long, *On “Other War”: Lessons from Five Decades of RAND Counterinsurgency Research* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research

Institute, 2006), x.

11. Marine Corps Combat Developmental Command, A Tentative Manual for Countering Irregular Threats: An Updated Approach to Counterinsurgency (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Developmental Command, 7 June 2006), 32; Sarah Sewall, “Introduction to the University of Chicago Press Edition,” *The U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), xxv; Joseph D. Celeski, *Operationalizing COIN* (Hurlburt Field, FL: Joint Special Operations University Report 05-2, September 2005), 42, 93; Thomas Hayden, “Counterinsurgency in Iraq Started with Fallujah,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 91, no. 10 (October 2007): 83; Anthony J. Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 105; Josh White, “69 Afghan’s Families get a U.S. Apology,” *Washington Post*, 9 May 2007, <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/08/AR2007050801360.html>, (17 March 2008); Michael Ball, *Defining Success in the War on Terrorism* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 24 May 2004), <<http://stinet.dtic.mil/dticrev/PDFs/ADA426866.pdf>>, (17 March 2008), and Mark P. Krieger Jr., “Why the People are not the Center of Gravity in an Insurgency,” *Military Review* (July-August 2007).

12. Michael Ball, *Defining Success in the War on Terrorism* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 24 May 2004), <<http://stinet.dtic.mil/dticrev/PDFs/ADA426866.pdf>> (17 March 2008), and Mark P. Krieger Jr., “Why the People Are Not the Center of Gravity in an Insurgency,” *Military Review* (July-August 2007).

13. Galula actually offers two similar, but distinct, “First Laws.” The “First Law” in *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006), 246, is “The Objective is the Population.” The “First Law” in *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: A. Praeger, 1964), 74, is “The Support

of the Population is as Necessary for the Counterinsurgent as for the Insurgent."

14. By emphasizing legitimacy, FM 3-24 makes a sophisticated argument that ultimate victory in COIN only takes place when the government has succeeded in a genuine process of what one might call Weberian state consolidation, in which the state becomes a stable, orderly system "supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence" (Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," From *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. Gerth and Mills (1946), <www2.selu.edu/Academics/Faculty/jbell/weber.pdf> (17 March 2007); see also McFate and Jackson, "The Object Beyond War: Counterinsurgency and the Four Tools of Political Competition," 2007. FM 3-24 correctly highlights the role of legitimacy in achieving this final condition of peace as what one scholar called a "pattern of stability acceptable to those with the capacity to disturb the peace" (Charles Freeman, *Arts of Power: Statecraft and Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1997), 67. This perspective also supports the long-term transformation towards political liberalization and economic prosperity that are stated U.S. foreign policy goals for most societies plagued by disorder. But it must also be admitted that this ultimate consolidation will take a very long time. Few operational or theater-strategic level commanders will ever have the time or tenure to design and lead campaigns that will see it all the way through. Some have even argued that in many contexts of modern insurgency it is neither desirable nor possible for the U.S. to even strive for such lofty goals (see Metz, *Rethinking Insurgency*, 2007). One must ask, How does legitimacy serve as an operational objective for commanders? The term is so abstract and broad that it provides no better guide than, for example, "establish democracy" or "fix the societal problems that are motivating violence" as operational objectives. A careful reading of various passages implies that by legitimacy the authors mean that the people possess certain internal attitudes described in various ways. For example, I-113 through I-120 implies that when a government is legitimate, the people share a certain level of "confidence" in the government, acceptable "expectations" for societal outcomes, sufficient "perceptions" of government efficacy, and an acquiescent "vision" and "attitude" toward their government's claim to power. This article proceeds on the assertion that on a practical level we can just as easily describe all of these cognitive processes as support of the people, thus making it the primary objective in FM 3-24 as well. While an argument can be made that popular support for the host government versus support for the counterinsurgent forces represents an important distinction, from the standpoint of COIN doctrine, the immediate problem for the commanders is how these "attitudes," "perceptions," and "confidences"—i.e. the support of the people—translate into success against an insurgency.

15. IW JOC, 9.
16. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, 75-76.
17. FM 3-24, I-108.
18. *Ibid.*, I-160.
19. *Ibid.*, I-139.
20. *Ibid.*, I-39.
21. Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writings* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1966), 228.
22. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006), 10.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Roger Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.
25. Michael C. Vasquez, "Tribalism Under Fire: A Reexamination of Tribal Mobilization Patterns in a Counterinsurgency," *Marine Corps Gazette* 92, no. 1 (January 2008): 63.
26. Peter W. Chiarelli and Patrick R. Michaelis, "Winning the Peace: The Requirement for Full-Spectrum Operations," *Military Review* (July-August 2005): 6.
27. Ralph Baker, "The Decisive Weapon: A Brigade Combat Team Commander's Perspective on Information Operations," *Military Review* (May-June 2006): 117.
28. Petersen, 8.
29. For the insurgency as a "mosaic," see FM 3-24, 1-37.
30. Matthew B. Stannard, "Montgomery McFate's Mission: Can one anthropologist possibly steer the course in Iraq?" *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 April 2007, <www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/04/29/CMGHQP19VD1.DTL>, (22 March 2008); Montgomery McFate, "Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of their Curious Relationship" *Military Review* (March-April 2005), <www.army.mil/professionalwriting/volumes/volume3/august_2005/7_05_2.html>, (22 March 2008); Amatzia Baram, "Victory in Iraq, One Tribe at a Time," *New York Times*, 28 October 2003.
31. Lin Todd, *Iraq Tribal Study—Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, The Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe. Study Conducted Under Contract with the Department of Defense*, 18 June 2006, <http://turcopolier.typepad.com/the_athenaeum/files/iraq_tribal_study_070907.pdf>, (22 March 2008), 2-2.
32. Steven Pressfield, "It's the Tribes, Stupid" (October 2006), <www.d-n-i.net/fcs/pressfield_tribes.htm>, (20 February 2008).
33. *Ibid.*
34. Vasquez, 62.
35. Dawn Chatty, *From Camel to Truck: The Bedouin in the Modern World* (New York: Vantage Press, 1986), 52, quoted in Michael Eisenstadt, "Iraq: Tribal Engagement Lessons Learned," *Military Review* (September-October 2007), <www.army.mil/professionalwriting/volumes/volume6/january_2008/1_08_2_pf.html>, (22 March 2008).
36. Eisenstadt.
37. Todd, 2-38.
38. Linda Layne, *Home and Homeland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Lawrence Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality: The Construction of Social Relations in a Muslim Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Marin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992).
39. Colin Jackson, "Defeat in Victory: French Strategy in the Algerian War (1954-1962)" (Powerpoint, U.S. Naval War College, S&P Department, Newport, RI, 17 January 2008). For COIN as an electoral analogy, see Nathan Leites and Charles

Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1970), 150, which argues that a key characteristic of the "hearts and minds" model of COIN is the "conception of insurgent conflict in terms of electoral analogies, according to which the progress of each side is influenced by and reflects the prevailing affiliations of a majority, or a substantial minority, of the people."

40. Martin Scorsese, *Gangs of New York* (Miramax Films, 2002).
41. FM 3-24, 3-84 through 3-94.
42. Sidney Verda and Gabriel Almond, "National Revolutions and Political Commitment," in *Internal War*, ed. Harry Eckstein (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 210.
43. Philip Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 245.
44. Kalyvas, 92-93.
45. *Ibid.*, 100. Kalyvas also asserts that, "the search for one overriding motivation across individuals, time, and space that dominates much of the literature on rebellion" may ultimately be "a highly improbable and potentially misleading enterprise," 101. Kalyvas argues that even using behavior to analyze popular support is also fraught with difficulties and the best course is to make certain minimal assumptions about rational human behavior at the individual level to support a better general model.
46. Petersen, 9.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1970), 149.
49. "Submissiveness" is a term Galula uses as the key threshold condition the insurgents need to be successful, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, 8; see also FM 3-24, 1-108. Leites and Wolf make a similar argument using the term "nondenuciation" in *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*, 10.
50. Vasquez, 66.
51. *Ibid.*, 67.
52. Petersen, 8.
53. See Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority* and FM 3-24, 1-108.
54. FM 3-24, Chapter 6.
55. *Ibid.*, I-147, which also states, "Eventually all foreign armies are seen as interlopers or occupiers; the sooner the main effort can transition to HN institutions, without unacceptable degradation, the better."
56. Kalev I. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (May-June 2005): 9; Bruce Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004), <www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/2005/RAND_OP127.pdf>, (28 February 2008); Joes, 235.
57. Joes, 143.
58. *Ibid.*, 122-44.
59. Chiarelli and Michaelis, 8.
60. Gompert and Gordon, xxxix; Leites and Wolf, 150.
61. See Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2d ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 327-75; Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, 2.0 release (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 9-11; Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave*, reissued ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1990); Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, [electronic version], <www.rheingold.com/vc/book/intro.html>, (22 March 2008); Jan van Dijk, *The Network Society: An Introduction to the Social Aspects of New Media* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 220-23; Lane V. Packwood, "A Journey of a Thousand Miles: How Ideological Engagement Can Help Pacific Command Fill the Strategic Communication Void" (research paper, U.S. Naval War College, National Strategic Decision Making Department, Newport, RI: 2007), 5-6.
62. Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 15-30.
63. *Ibid.*, 30.
64. See Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (New York: Penguin, 1922); Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*, with a new introduction by Elihu Katz (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2005); John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Phyllis Kaniss, ed., *Politics, Social Networks, and the History of Mass Communication Research: Rereading Personal Influence*, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 608 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, November 2006).
65. Thomas X. Hammes, "Countering Evolved Insurgent Networks," *Military Review* (July-August 2006): 19.
66. Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 137-75.
67. FM 3-24, I-94, and Appendix B.
68. H. Brinton Milward and Jorg Raab, "Dark Networks: The Structure, Operation and Performance of International Drug, Terror and Arms Trafficking Networks," paper presented at the International Conference on Empirical Study of Governance Management and Performance, Barcelona, Spain, 2002.
69. Jonathan D. Farley, "Evolutionary Dynamics of the Insurgency in Iraq: A Mathematical Model of the Battle for Hearts and Minds," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, (2007): 947.
70. Gladwell's argument that people act as nodes within a system of diffuse information networks is the basis for the concept of "buzz" or "viral" marketing. See Emanuel Rosen, *The Anatomy of Buzz: How to Create Word-of-Mouth Marketing* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); Duncan J. Watts, *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003); and Seth Gordin, *Unleashing the Ideavirus* (New York: Hyperion, 2001).
71. Baker, 24.
72. *Ibid.*, 16.
73. FM 3-24, 3-1.
74. *Ibid.*, 3-121.
75. Gompert and Gordon, 15.

76. Todd Hamill, Richard Deckro, James Chrissis, and Robert Mills, "Analysis of Layered Social Networks," *IO Sphere* (Winter 2008): 32; See also Brian Reed, "A Social Network Approach to Understanding an Insurgency," *Parameters* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 19-30.

77. Thomas P. O'Neill, "Thomas P. O'Neill Quotes," <www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/t/thomas_p_oneill.html>, (24 March 2008).

78. Christopher J. Lamb, *Review of Psychological Operations Lessons Learned for Recent Operational Experience* (Washington D.C: National Defense University, 2005). Lamb writes that although tactical-level PSYOP in stability operations needs significant changes in its operating concepts and doctrine to be effective,

it is at least more effective than current attempts to use it at the theater level. Lamb writes, "theater-level PSYOP in both major combat operations and stability operations demands even greater resources and generates less visible effects. A well-coordinated national information strategy is needed in order for theater-level PSYOP to facilitate a noticeable impact. In short, improvements in theater-level PSYOP are both more costly and more difficult to accomplish" than improvements at the tactical level.

79. COL Norman L. Cooling (USMC Senior Marine Representative, U.S. Naval War College), interviewed by the author, 14 March 2008.

80. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, 77.



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