

An Open Rebuttal to Gian Gentile's Article on Counterinsurgency

Written by Terry Tucker

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TERRY TUCKER, AUG 20 2013

The bombast in the two opening paragraphs of Counterinsurgency: The Graduate level of War or Pure Hokum? conveniently ignores Presidential Directives, Department of Defense Mandates, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2009, the research and historical studies of RAND, the Defense Science Board and other documents and reports.^[1]

The implications of this are clear. It ignores a succession of Department of Defense Mandates and Instructions that raised stability operations to the level of a core military capability that “shall be given priority comparable to combat operations.”^[2] It is also clear that US Army Professional Military Education Institutions, such as USMA West Point, and the Department of Defense failed to implement and train these critical mandates.

In 1997, in recognition of the complexity of post conflict and stability operations, and to avoid repeating the mistakes made in Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti, President Bill Clinton issued Presidential Decision Directive 56 (PDD 56). This PDD called for establishing a unified strategy and training for the whole of government, collecting lessons learned from operations, and integrating these lessons into training and planning. PDD 56 used the term ‘complex contingency operations’ and called for US Government agencies to institutionalize lessons and develop and conduct interagency training programs.

On December 7, 2005, President George W. Bush issued National Security Presidential Directive 44 (NSPD 44). Although not explicitly building upon PDD 56, NSPD 44 took the approach a step further, calling for a permanent structure for stability operations that would fall under civilian leadership, and in coordination with the military. In November of 2005, DOD Directive 3000.05 was issued and raised stability operations to the level of a core military capability that “shall be given priority comparable to combat operations.” The revised and updated DOD Instruction 3000.05 of September 2009, which supersedes the 2005 directive, makes explicit that the mandate for lessons learned is to serve not only the military, but also civilian agencies.

Counterinsurgency is a wicked, complex problem that requires success to “run in packs” on multiple lines of effort in governance, security, essential services, economic development and combat operations.^[3] The lines of effort in counterinsurgency are essentially the same ones required for stability operations, the difference is the amount of targeted violence and who is the target of that violence. Counterinsurgency and stability operations require developing unique measures of effectiveness that are unique to the conflict situation. This is not the same as conventional conflict.

Counterinsurgency also requires a non-linear or conventional approach to operations. No one said that one or the other is less bloody, that is a different conversation. What has been said is that counterinsurgency is more “complex” and that is different from what is considered “complicated.” In summary, conventional war conflict is complicated, counterinsurgency and stability operations are complex.

The conventional examples illustrated in Gian’s article – WW II, the Russo-Japanese War, WW I or the Civil War – might have contained a subset of actions within those conflicts that resonate with some similarity, such as, “Bloody

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Kansas,” or the actions of the French Resistance, but conventional conflict examples are an extremely poor comparator to counterinsurgency.

The authors of the DoDD mandates, doctrine, RAND reports, the Defense Science Board and other literature never implied that conventional war is undergraduate level. What they did say is: “You cannot fight former Saddamists and Islamic extremists the same way you would have fought the Viet Cong, Moro's or Tupamaros (*Russians, Japanese, Mosby's Raiders or Quantrell*)^[4]”.

Counterinsurgency requires soldiers and Marines to employ a mix of familiar combat tasks alongside skills more often associated with nonmilitary agencies.^[6] Gian Gentile, with his own counterinsurgency experience, denies this complexity and the notion of a “special martial skill set”. In one sense he is correct. It does not require a special martial skill set – it requires much more – skill in language, culture, advisor skills, conflict negotiation, civil military agency and department integration, and an ability to synthesize this wicked, complex problem into an accumulation of many small successes on multiple lines of effort over a longer period of time to gain the perceptions of legitimacy in the minds of the population.

On the other hand, I do agree with the hokum of a genius savior general. Conventional warfare is complicated and that is why the military created the staff and staff organization. When the Prussian Military officially created the *Großer Generalstab* (Great General Staff), in 1814, it was responsible for the continuous study of all aspects of war, war plans and mobilization. At the end of the eighteenth century it was common practice to assign military experts to assist the general officers. Gerhard von Scharnhorst and August Von Gneisenau were two such gifted officers credited with the professionalization of war study and the development of the professional staff. However, strategic history seems to repeat itself as young gifted officers in select staff positions are insufficient to overcome the inefficiencies in a large organization.^[6]

I also agree with Gian's assertion that “...what mattered most were the strategic, political, and social contexts in which these wars were fought.” However, the pure hokum is the selectivity of his poor examples, and what was deliberately cast aside.

Here is what is left unsaid:

- The tactical manner in which conflict is waged and the operational and strategic choices made all have a political meaning. This is the currency conversion dilemma – converting one currency, military behavior into another, political effect.
- There is a relationship, albeit not always straight forward, between the course of military events and the political consequences; there is no automatic advantage and the advantage is always transient.” (As in the perception of success or failure in an engagement)
- In conflict / intervention, one is fighting and intervening for peace. Not just any peace, but the kind of peace that makes it (intervention) worthwhile. This maxim has two transactions.

1. The threat of force / military power to achieve an outcome
2. This power must translate to an advantage of power on the ground and into political leverage. The Difficulties of this are legion.”

- This requires a two step thought process.

1. Understand what is probable & possible consequences of the action/behavior.
2. And the consequences of those consequences.^[7]

The military has undeniably taught the art of kinetic and technological technical competence in the art of war, but it has failed in integrating essential and critical skills that build the excellence required in the interdependent complexities. “*Effective COIN practices runs in packs*”^[8] yet the DoD still does not effectively understand that counterinsurgency is about capability and putting the right capability in the right place.^[9] The misuse of, and lack of

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integration of Af/Pak Hands is one clear example of monumental fraud, waste, and squandered opportunity.

The Af/Pak Hands Program was modeled from the historical example of the old “China Hand” of the 1930’s: a group of personnel that had spent considerable time in the country and were experts in language, mores, ethics, religion and local culture. This invaluable nonmilitary skill was critical when interacting with locals, discerning correct information, gauging the local tone and sentiment, or when planning operations. Likewise, the Af/Pak hands Program was created in Sept 2009 “to develop a cadre of experts specializing in the complexities of Afghanistan and Pakistan including the language, culture, processes and challenges. The objective of the APH Program is to identify, select, train, and manage this cohort to provide greater continuity, focus and persistent engagement on Afghanistan and Pakistan. These “Hands” are able to develop close working relationships with their Afghan and Pakistani counterparts and are placed in positions of strategic influence to ensure progress towards achieving U.S. government objectives in the AFGPAK region.”^[10] The Af/Pak hands program requires 4 months of intensive language and culture training in one of two extremely difficult languages; Dari or Pashto. They are also trained in numerous other military and nonmilitary tasks and the dollar investment to train one individual is high. The fact that these trained, graduated cadre were not assigned to positions that they were intended to fill and in many cases not used at all^[11] shows a clear squandered opportunity.

Not really understanding what the Human Terrain Teams (HTT) could deliver in terms of consequence understanding or avoidance is another. The Human Terrain Team program employed personnel from the social science disciplines – such as political science, sociology, anthropology, and regional studies to provide military commanders and staff’s with an understanding of the local population. This information was fed to operations centers and staff’s to improve military operational and tactical decision making in the context of that local knowledge. Commanders routinely dismissed the reports from the HTT as useless. On the other hand there is serious controversy about the professionalism and ability of the teams but it is my personal experience with the HTT’s that they could provide valuable cultural insights and information that could impact operational planning that could, and did, mitigate fatal consequences of not understanding the local operating environment.^[12]

The ability to engage in multiple and mutually supporting lines of operation simultaneously, that required complex decision making, that considered the consequences of its “engagements” over time, and what political and legitimacy perceptions could be accumulated with those engagements were absent. Not at all times and places, but sufficient to tip the dynamic of perceived legitimacy and local key village elder engagement success away from US Forces. US Forces, created as many accidental guerrillas as it attempted to remove^[13]. In too many cases to count, it was the absence of crucial specialized skills, such as Af/Pak Hands, language and culture capability at the small unit level, not understanding doctrine, failing to collaborate with key non-military agencies, and the neglect of HTT cultural information in military decision making and planning that created the consequences of the consequences of US Forces actions- actions which in many cases created additional insurgents because of the neglect or abuse of essential nonmilitary skills. The rise in Green on Blue attacks since 2008 is a clear metric of this failure and cannot be strictly attributed to enemy infiltration of the ranks.

The pure application of modernization theory, throwing money at development, coupled with implementation of a cost-benefit approach in the metrics it developed, meant it never overcame the inability to gain traction in the legitimacy of its forces or the government.^[14] In defense of the DoD, this was not just a tactical or operational issue, it was strategic as well. Counterinsurgency is a technique, it is not a strategy and the failure to have a strategy rippled down to the operational and tactical levels of the operation.^[15]

Even by 2010, while I was a COIN instructor and adviser, large numbers of personnel, more than 50% of those I was training and assisting in theater, had never read the doctrine or the counterinsurgency tactics Manual.^[16] In defense of those that did read the doctrine, FM 3-24 has a very few short paragraphs on the key principal of “Social Capital” in COIN. It might have been better had the authors left it out because not understanding the concepts of social capital in relation to doctrinal guidance in the context of a “traditional” society was a fatal flaw. This is an absolute required complexity that must be understood in the context of the operating environment that Gian’s essay also ignores.

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The realm of strategy is a relational one, ultimately, the enemy has to be beaten by somebody, somewhere.^[17] It is an error to believe that tactics are more important than strategy, that tactics do not shape and create some form of “currency,” or “currency conversion,” or that tactical competence in soft skills is not what makes strategic effect. Clausewitz is relevant here: “The political object-the original motive for war-will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires” (On War, 1976, p.81) The remaining portion of that paragraph is also relevant to counterinsurgency:

“The political object cannot, however, in itself provide the standard of measurement....The political object can elicit differing sections from different peoples. We can therefore take the political object as a standard only if we think of the influence it can exert upon the forces it is meant to move” (Clausewitz, On War, 1976, p.81)

This was never understood in connection with DIME (Diplomatic, Informational, Military, Economic) actions and PMESII (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Informational, Infrastructure) effects when integrating and assessing information and data for planning considerations and capabilities.

In fact this was never completely understood in two Administrations, or at all levels of the Force: that the “engagement” was where the “currency” of success was created. Additionally, the emphasis on technology and over-modernization is closely related and relational to tactical and operational mentality. The real truth is that there were tactical, strategic, political, and diplomatic failures at all levels from top to bottom.^[18] There was never any real consideration for the “consequences of consequences.” The failure was not embracing a doctrine, the failure was not understanding how to integrate and implement the multiple layers and levels of complexity required of that doctrine.

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^[1] *Victory has a Thousand Fathers, Sources of Success in COIN*, RAND; *Victory has a Thousand Fathers, Detailed Counterinsurgency Case Studies*, RAND; *War by Other Means, Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency*, RAND; *Understanding Human Dynamics*, DSB, 2009; *A Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility*, Jeffrey Bordin, Ph.D; *Decade of War, Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations, Vol One Report*, JCOA, 2012

^[2] See PDD 56; NSPD 44; DODD 3000.05 dated 2005 and revised DoDD 3000.05 dated Sept 2009, See also National Defense Authorization act of 2009.

^[3] Ibid footnote 1. See especially the volume RAND study, *Victory has a Thousand Fathers*.

^[4] Emphasis is mine to convey the sense of conventional war examples that the author uses.

^[5] from the Foreward of Field Manual (FM) 3-24, Dec 2006, italic emphasis is mine.

^[6] *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945*, Walter Goerlitz, Translated by Brian Battershaw, Praeger, 1959.

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^[7] These four bullet points are from *Modern Strategy*, Colin S Gray pp 1-80

^[8] Victory has a Thousand Fathers, Sources of Success in COIN, RAND

^[9] One example of the right capability in the right place includes Sir General Templar and Sir LTG Briggs of the Malayan Emergency of 1948 to 1960 ; The US Military also considers T.E Lawrence invaluable for his 27 articles as advice to advisors. Lawrence was also the right capability in the right place.

^[10] US Navy AfPak Hands and Supporting Documents; accessed 16 Aug 2013, http://www.public.navy.mil/BUPERS-NPC/CAREER/LANGUAGE_CULTURE/Pages/AFPAKHands.aspx; see also this link accessed 16 Aug 2013, <http://smallwars.org/jrnl/art/move-the-af-pak-hands-out-of-dod>

^[11] See this article from 2011, accessed again on 16 August 2013. http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/07/lament_of_an_afpak_hand_ive_been_abandoned_and_misused_in_kandahar.

Also, I was a principle lessons learned integration analyst for DoD until 2012. I was assigned this position because of my 4 tours in Afghanistan as a trainer and advisor to tactical units, USAID and Coalition Political officers. The reports I received on misuse, and nonuse of these specialists grew. Additionally, the military is unsure if it will sustain any of the trained skill sets of this cadre of specialists. By 2012, there were over 400 trained Af/Pak hands cadre and less than 50% of them were placed into the strategic influence positions that they had been trained to fill.

^[12] These articles accessed 16 Aug 2013, still cast doubt on a program that has cost taxpayers about \$600million U.S.Dollars. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/02/17/human-terrain-system-iraq-afghanistan/1923789/>; <http://www.usatoday.com/story/nation/2013/08/11/human-terrain-system-afghanistan-war-anthropologists/2640297/>;

This article from the Daily Beast is especially good, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2013/08/16/the-human-terrain-system-sought-to-transform-the-army-from-within.html>

^[13] See these by David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla; Counterinsurgency Redux; Counterinsurgency*. It is also interesting to note that Dr Kilcullen was a Department of State Counterinsurgency Advisor yet we have an entire Special Operations Command of about 17,000 personnel yet Department of State could not request a counterinsurgency advisor, or that Department of Defense and SOCOM could second one individual to State?

^[14] Pick the report or reports of your choice from the SIGARS web site, there are multiple instances going back years, <http://www.sigar.mil/>

^[15] See these two sources for two differing looks at the failure of a strategic view in Afghanistan.

<http://csis.org/publication/afghanistan-death-strategy> ; <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/coins-failure-afghanistan-7409>

^[16] I left in March of 2010. I had spent 5 years in Afghanistan and was deeply familiar with the all aspects of the operations and plans. I was training and advising coalition and afghan tactical units, police, civilian agencies and advising political officers at several coalition embassy's.

^[17] Ibid Colin S Gray, footnote 6

^[18] A couple of examples include: *Wanat, Combat Action in Afghanistan*, 2008, CSI Press; and the *Decade of War Enduring Lessons Learned, Volume One Report*.

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