



Applying Principles of Counterinsurgency to the Fight Against Sexual Assault in the Military

Countering the Insurgency within Our Ranks

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AFTER OVER A decade of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan combating a violent insurgency of extremists, the U.S. military is now facing a new fight with another violent enemy—one hidden within our own ranks. Failures in leadership and the lack of personal accountability within our formations ensure this enemy's survival. Leaders fail to create a culture of respect and professionalism, provide an environment that is safe and supportive of victims, deliberately investigate accusations, and ruthlessly prosecute offenders. While the battlefield and enemy have changed, the principles of warfare remain the same. The Army should use the lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan to more effectively combat the current war against sexual predators in the Armed Forces.

Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations are very complex and have been the topic of numerous books, articles, and debates over the last decade. There are six fundamental principles of COIN that apply to all counterinsurgency operations. Examining these principles and applying them in conjunction with lessons learned in Afghanistan may help the military to end sexual assault.

Fundamental Principles of COIN

Department of the Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, defines COIN as military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency.¹ COIN is a combination of offensive, defensive, and stability operations spanning multiple agencies. To be successful, COIN requires cooperation on all levels. Just like COIN, the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) program includes multiple organizations, such as the Army Community Service, Family Advocacy Program, and the Criminal Investigations Division.

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FM 3-24 devotes an entire chapter to discussing the importance of integrating civilian and military activities into counterinsurgency operations.² It also investigates how insurgents strive to disguise their intentions, and when successful, make COIN operations extremely difficult. Insurgencies take many different forms, and while each is unique, they tend to share certain commonalities.³ Although the structure, level of organization, and goals of each insurgent group may vary, fundamental COIN principles are applicable to all insurgent groups.

- Identify insurgent motivations and depth of commitment.⁴
- Identify likely insurgent weapons and tactics.⁵
- Identify the operational environment in which insurgents seek to initiate and develop their campaign and strategy.⁶
- Stabilize the area of operation to facilitate the local government's ability to provide for the local populace.⁷
- Conduct education and information operations targeting insurgents, victims, and potential victims.⁸

- Train the indigenous government and security forces to conduct effective COIN operations independently.⁹

Identify insurgent motivation and depth of commitment. An insurgent's level of commitment and drive correlates to various motivating factors. For example, a hardline Islamic extremist who is motivated by a convoluted view of religious duty, a hatred for Western culture, and disgust of the basic concept of freedom will not negotiate.¹⁰ However, myriad factors motivate large numbers of the local population in Afghanistan to cooperate with insurgents. In many cases the Taliban intimidate the local populace and coerce them into action by providing or limiting certain resources or services. In many villages, the Taliban demand cooperation and support from the population—resistance results in threats to destroy homes, crops and livelihood, or even death. Another motivating factor is economic necessity. Afghan families typically depend on the men for survival. Many of the men have no ideological commitment to the insurgent cause, but monetary



Afghan National Policemen and U.S. Army soldiers from Task Force 3-66 Armor, 172d Infantry Brigade, from Grafenwoehr, Germany, conduct training on small unit tactics at their joint combat outpost in Paktika, Afghanistan, 23 April 2012.

compensation is incentive enough to convince them to plant improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or become an informant for the Taliban.¹¹ Analysis of the insurgents' motivation and strategy will shape counterinsurgency operations.

Identify likely insurgent weapons and tactics.

Understanding the potential weapons and tactics a unit is likely to encounter is vital to planning effective COIN operations. While one area of operations may primarily face the threat of remote control or pressure plate IEDs, another may be more vulnerable to dismantled IEDs, rocket-propelled grenades and small arms attacks. Some insurgent groups utilize cell phones, while others primarily rely on two-way radios for communication. If a commander can identify specific weapon systems or tactics used to target his soldiers, he can request the proper assets to effectively target the enemy and ensure his soldiers receive the proper training to identify potential threats and avoid becoming an easy target.

Insurgents routinely attempt to sow discord among the people, planting seeds of doubt relating to the ability of the government to provide a safe environment for the people. If insurgents can show that the government cannot protect the people, the government loses credibility and victims will be more hesitant to report insurgent abuses.¹²

Identify the operational environment in which insurgents seek to initiate and develop their campaign and strategy. Insurgents are most successful when they can operate on their own terms, and will always attempt to operate in an environment that provides them a distinct advantage. Insurgents capitalize on weaknesses in the local government and attempt to manipulate the populace by spreading intimidation and fear. They often attempt to camouflage themselves among the local populace or security forces. In many cases, even the indigenous forces cannot recognize the imposters. Despite this challenge, U.S. and coalition forces continue to treat all security forces with dignity and respect, while simultaneously enacting preventative controls and procedures designed to serve as a safeguard against potential attacks from within.

Col. Timothy K. Deady, in a *Parameters* article he wrote in 2005, contends that America's strategy in the Philippines was successful because the United States "effectively targeted both the insurgents' strategic and operational centers of gravity. The oft-repeated

observation of Mao Zedong, arguably the most successful insurgent leader of the 20th century, bears repeating: 'The people are the sea in which the insurgent fish swims and draws strength.' . . . As American garrisons drained the local lakes, the insurgent fish became easier to isolate and catch."¹³

Ultimately, the success of COIN operations is dependent on many factors, but is specifically linked to the capability of the local government and security forces and the level of support the insurgents receive from external sources and the local populace.¹⁴

Stabilize the area of operation to facilitate the local government's ability to provide for the local populace. FM 3-24 notes that platoon and squad-size elements execute most COIN operations. Commanders must train leaders at the lowest echelons to act intelligently and independently—then trust them.¹⁵ Insurgents succeed by sowing chaos and disorder anywhere, while the government fails unless it maintains a degree of order everywhere.¹⁶ Stability is the bedrock of counterinsurgency operations—without it no other aspects of COIN can be successful. After stabilizing a region, U.S. and coalition forces can shift the focus to providing training and education to the local government and security forces.

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Conduct education and information operations targeting insurgents, victims, and potential victims. Mobilizing popular support is vital to the success of any COIN operation. Information operations (IO) capabilities include collecting, controlling, exploiting, and protecting information. All levels of the service components should integrate information operations. One key element of IO is counterpropaganda. Insurgents rely on manipulating the local populace into distrusting the local government.¹⁷ Many local nationals are not informed and do not realize what their government and host security forces are doing to combat the insurgency.

Education is vital to the success of COIN operations. Local governments must provide a safe environment, free of intimidation, for victims or potential victims of insurgent intimidation. Without that guarantee, they will continue to act in survival mode with self-preservation being their only goal. Only after they feel comfortable with the security of their new situation will they embrace the government.

Train the indigenous government and security forces to conduct effective COIN operations independently. In *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, Seth G. Jones explores the importance of how the local government and its security forces ultimately determine the success of an insurgent group. “Counterinsurgency requires not only the capability of the United States to conduct unconventional war, but, most importantly, the ability to shape the capacity of the indigenous government and its security forces. Most COIN campaigns are not won or lost by external forces, but by indigenous forces.”¹⁸ He concluded, “successful COIN requires an understanding of the nature of the local conflict and the ability to shape the capacity of indigenous actors to conduct an effective counterinsurgency campaign.”¹⁹ The quality and competency of the host nation government and security forces left behind after U.S. and coalition forces have departed will determine the success of COIN operations.

Using the Principles of COIN to Combat Sexual Harassment/Assault

“Sexual assault is a crime that has no place in the Department of Defense (DOD). It is an attack on the values we defend and on the cohesion our units demand, and forever changes the lives of victims and their families.”²⁰ The *Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, Fiscal Year 2012* assesses the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the active duty force. The survey distinguishes between three categories of sexual offenses:

- Unwanted sexual contact (i.e., rape, or any unwanted sexual physical contact).
- Unwanted gender-related behaviors (i.e., sexual harassment and sexist behaviors).
- Gender discriminatory behaviors and sex discrimination.²¹

While the severity of a crime might vary, there is no room for any form of sexual misconduct within

the Armed Forces. Recent events brought to light some problems that were festering beneath the surface of our organizations, and resulted in leaders taking these issues seriously. SHARP is becoming the primary mission of the Armed Forces as we begin to transition from a decade of counterinsurgency operations.

Principles of COIN applied to SHARP. As the United States is working to improve COIN, starting in Iraq and continuing to Afghanistan, certain principles emerge that may apply to the war to eradicate sexual predators from within our ranks. The principles of COIN directly correlate to the fight to prevent sexual assault in the military, and apply at the lowest levels of command.

Identify sexual predators’ motivation and depth of commitment. As with any insurgency, understanding what drives your enemy to act is vital. With a clear understanding of what drives them to act, coupled with effective preventative measures, some potential perpetrators can be convinced to adjust their lifestyle in ways that would ultimately prevent them from committing these terrible acts. Of course this may not apply to the most violent and deviant sexual predators who are devoted to committing these crimes, leaving a trail of lives in ruin along the way. We can, however, implement effective policies and regulations that have the potential to influence the lives of many service members.

Identify likely predators’ weapons and tactics. Like any hunter, sexual predators utilize the most effective weapons available to attack their prey. The substance most widely used to assist in these criminal undertakings is alcohol. There are 362 references to alcohol in the first volume of the DOD Report. The second volume states that for active duty personnel, “overall, 6.1 percent of women and 1.2 percent of men indicated they experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2012.”²² The term “unwanted sexual contact” means intentional sexual contact that was against a person’s will or which occurred when the person did not or could not consent. This also includes completed or attempted sexual intercourse, sodomy, penetration by an object, and the unwanted touching of genitalia and other sexually-related areas of the body.²³ The report states that of the 6.1 percent of women who indicated experiencing unwanted sexual contact,

47 percent indicated they or their offender had been drinking alcohol before the incident.²⁴ Additionally, of the 1.2 percent of men who indicated experiencing unwanted sexual contact, 19 percent indicated they or their offender had been drinking alcohol before the incident.²⁵ Many perpetrators capitalize on the diminished judgment of the victim, using coercion to achieve their objective.

A more deliberate weapon used in sexual assaults is a date rape drug, which quickly incapacitates the victim, eliminating the victim's ability to resist any unwanted sexual advances. Understanding the weapons and tactics used can help identify effective preventative measures.

Assailants attempt to discredit their victims, hoping the fear of potential shame and embarrassment associated with assaults of this nature will prevent victims from pressing charges. Other predators attempt to intimidate their victims by undermining the command structure and convincing the victims that any attempt to report abuse would have serious repercussions.

If the chain of command doesn't demonstrate that it can and will hold violators of SHARP accountable and protect its soldiers, sexual harassment and assault victims will be less likely to report abuse, promoting a culture of intimidation and corruption.

Identify the operational environment in which sexual predators seek to initiate and develop their campaign and strategy. The same way insurgents attempt to blend in among the local populace or security forces, sexual predators often stay near their peers. There is no "rapist"-tab worn on the left shoulder to identify sexual predators. Assailants are frequently stellar, married soldiers, often highly regarded by their chain of command, and whose accusation comes as a great surprise. As leaders, it is crucial to recognize that competence does not equal character. Throughout our Armed Forces, you can find many individuals who are proficient at their jobs, but morally corrupt.

Understanding how these individuals think and operate is the first step in countering the threat and



(DOD)

creating effective risk mitigation policies. Just as counterinsurgents strive to establish an environment that fosters the good governance for the population, our SHARP efforts should foster an environment that is intolerant of sexual misconduct, eliminating the threat and simultaneously increasing trust in the chain of command to address future issues effectively and fairly. Service members must continue to treat one another with dignity and respect, but must also remain vigilant to ensure they are not vulnerable to attacks from within their own ranks.

Implementing risk mitigation policies does not imply that a potential victim is in any way at fault because of their own actions; however, the fact remains that these predators do exist. This does not mean we must live in a perpetual state of fear, but we must put safeguards in place to decrease the possibility of these crimes being committed. I would have never allowed one of my soldiers to walk alone through a village in Afghanistan. While the majority of Afghans in the village may not harbor any negative feelings toward U.S. soldiers, there are a select few individuals who have nefarious intentions and are lying in wait for an opportunity to strike. The same principle holds true in a garrison environment. The buddy system is a policy created for a very specific reason: for service members to protect one another. We are stronger together.

Leadership is fundamental in creating an environment that is not conducive to sexual misconduct. An unprofessional, undisciplined environment can facilitate sexual assault or harassment. Tolerating inappropriate conversations or activities in the workplace undermines the chain of command's ability to instill respect and professionalism in the daily operating environment. The success of SHARP programs depends on the capability and involvement of the chain of command, coupled with support provided by outside sources and other service members within our formations.

Stabilize the force to allow commanders to provide for their individual formations. Victims of sexual crimes often know the perpetrator before the assault. It could be a date, acquaintance, co-worker, boss, family member, ex-partner, or neighbor. Commanders should insist on a professional work environment. Inappropriate social interactions outside of a traditional work environment can have negative consequences. A proper respect

for command structure is vital to a professional environment. Fraternalization increases the potential for the unprofessionalism. This is very dangerous. Conversations become less guarded and can begin to include off-color jokes and comments that some may find particularly offensive.

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Unfortunately, even today there remains an underlying fear of repercussions for those soldiers who are trapped in a hostile or unprofessional work environment.²⁶ We should empower service members of all ranks and positions to intervene and protect those in danger, without fear of repercussion. Junior noncommissioned officers and enlisted soldiers should understand they have a professional and moral obligation to intervene when inappropriate behaviors occur. Leaders should not force service members to endure a degrading, offensive atmosphere in the workplace because a complacent command climate allows such behavior to continue uninhibited.

Through all levels of the military, officers and senior noncommissioned officers must ensure that they do not tolerate fraternization, but instill discipline in their subordinates and demand a respectful, professional work environment.

Conduct education and information operations targeting perpetrators, victims, and potential victims. The DOD Report stresses the need for commanders to ensure soldiers understand, for example, that “the consumption of alcohol can impair the judgment of both parties, and the consequences of an alcohol-related sex crime can have a significant and long-lasting impact” on the victim, the offender, unit cohesion, and the readiness of the force.²⁷

Sexual predators and potential perpetrators must understand the severe consequences that accompany sexual misconduct. Every member of the Armed

Forces should be able to identify the different types of offenses and the contributing factors, such as irresponsible use of alcohol, which can serve as a catalyst in certain situations. This is where personal responsibility is vital. Some wonder if renewed pressure concerning the prosecution of military commanders for sexual offenses will result in cases being tried, despite a lack of evidence to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.²⁸ Despite the question of fairness involved, the fact is that when alcohol and sexual activity are combined, the parties involved have exposed themselves to claims of sexual misconduct. Effective educational programs will persuade some would-be offenders to act more responsibly, ultimately preventing future assaults.

Recent attention to the growing issue of sexual misconduct has highlighted the need for confidential, safe, and reliable services for victims—services that were unavailable in the past. Now there are numerous services available to provide support to those in need, and it is the responsibility of leaders on every level to ensure their subordinates are aware of the available

resources. Victims will only come forward after they are confident their chain of command can be trusted to protect them.

We must empower the victims and potential victims of sexual assault to protect themselves, provide healing, and reprimand the perpetrators.

Train and equip the force with the necessary skills to combat sexual assault from within each formation in the Armed Forces. Just as the Armed Forces have adapted to the ever-evolving operational environments in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last 12 years, they too must adapt a counter to an even more insidious threat—sexual assault and sexual harassment. We must continue to provide training and mentorship to each soldier, sailor, airman, and marine, to not only recognize inappropriate behavior, but to have the knowledge, experience, and moral fortitude to stand up for what is right and change the atmosphere within our ranks. The Army's portion of the DOD Report disclosed that 97 percent of alleged offenders were male and 59 percent were E1-E4.²⁹



(U.S. Army, Staff Sgt. Teddy Wade)

U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond T. Odierno gives his remarks at the Sexual Harassment/Assault Prevention Summit in Leesburg, Va., 8 May 2012.

While commanders are responsible for creating a command climate that exudes professionalism and encourages respect, the lower echelons of leadership will win the war at the platoon, squad, and individual levels. SHARP Stand-Down Days are important to educate and initiate discussion on the topic, but they alone are not enough. Leaders must rigorously enforce the principles of SHARP at every formation, function, office, motor pool, and flight line on a daily basis. Commanders must provide a safe environment for their subordinates. In no way should this be confused with an environment that lacks discipline or encourages laziness. This is about the commander addressing misconduct within the formation. Strong senior leaders must empower strong subordinate leaders to ensure they are setting the proper example and creating an atmosphere conducive to trust and open communication without fear of intimidation or repercussion for doing what is right.

Creating a Culture of Respect

The U.S. Armed Forces is the most adaptable, successful, and morally anchored force in the world. It is national news when senior military leaders fail to uphold certain core values and principles in their daily lives. I am proud to be part of an organization that demands the highest level of moral fortitude from leaders at every

level. Frankly, if a leader cannot uphold the high ethical standards expected of officers and senior noncommissioned officers, then they have no place in this organization. How can one be trusted to instill order, discipline, respect, and resilience into their subordinates when they fail to display those qualities in their own lives? We have seen a recent strategic surge to end a problem that is poisoning our formations, but ultimately, the success of this strategy is dependent on the quality of the implementation at the lowest levels. Because of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the agile and adaptive leaders throughout our Armed Forces maintain a certain skill set that can apply at the lowest levels. Commanders must ensure a fair, deliberate process to determine the guilt or innocence of any individual accused of an offense.

The atmosphere within our units must change—complacency must end. Leaders at every level have a professional and moral obligation to become more involved in the lives of their subordinates. This begins by strictly enforcing a professional work environment, but also extends to social situations. We are professionals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, and must conduct ourselves accordingly. By applying these fundamental principles, we can reshape our approach to SHARP as we continue to promote dignity, respect, and integrity in the fight to end sexual assault in the Armed Forces. **MR**

NOTES

1. Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2006), 1-1.
2. *Ibid.*, chap. 2, "Unity of Effort: Integrating Civilian and Military Activities."
3. *Ibid.*, 1-11.
4. FM 3-24, 1-5.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, 1-21.
8. *Ibid.*, E-2.
9. *Ibid.*, 1-26, 5-13.
10. *Ibid.*, 1-15.
11. John Nagl, debate on Counterinsurgency and the Future of Afghanistan, 22 April 2013, at Grinnell College, between Col. Gian Gentile and Dr. John Nagl. Video from: <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/debate-on-counterinsurgency-gentile-vs-nagl>>.
12. FM 3-24, 1-9.
13. Timothy K. Deady, "Lessons from a Successful Counterinsurgency: The Philippines, 1899-1902," *Parameters*, XXXV (Spring 2005): 58.
14. Seth G Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), 8.
15. *Ibid.*, 1-26.
16. *Ibid.*, 1-2.

17. *Ibid.*, E-3.
18. Jones, 9.
19. *Ibid.*, 10.
20. *Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, Fiscal Year 2012* (Washington, DC: DOD, March 2013), vol. 1, 1, available at <www.sapr.mil/index.php/annual-reports>.
21. *Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, Fiscal Year 2012* (Washington, DC: DOD, March 2013), Volume II, *2012 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members*, 3, available at <www.sapr.mil/index.php/research>.
22. *Ibid.*, 2.
23. *Ibid.*, 1.
24. *Ibid.*, 3.
25. *Ibid.*, 4.
26. *Ibid.*, 3. Of the 67 percent of women who did not report USC to a military authority, the main reasons they cited were: they did not want anyone to know (70 percent), they felt uncomfortable making a report (66 percent), and they did not think their report would be kept confidential (51 percent).
27. DOD Report, vol. 1, 72.
28. Lindsay L. Rodman, "Fostering Constructive Dialogue on Military Sexual Assault," *Joint Force Quarterly* 69 (2013): 26, retrieved from <<http://ndupress.ndu.edu/military-sexual-assault.html>>.
29. DOD Report, vol. 1, 40.