



PKSOI Perspective

Nation-building, Stability Operations and Prophylactic COIN **05 May 2010**

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The Army is abuzz with the concepts surrounding counterinsurgency (COIN), stability operations and other irregular warfare as the United States contends with a complex international environment. The following will examine these concepts doctrinally and then suggest another way to look at them.

Doctrine is simply a mental model that the military uses to organize and understand its environment and its activities, and then to build a shared understanding of those among service members. The value of a particular mental model—in this case, a doctrine—is not really whether it is right or wrong, but whether it is useful; useful in aiding understanding and in prompting an appropriate institutional response to the environment. An alternative mental model is not necessarily a contradiction of doctrine; it may be merely another useful way of looking at things.

Summary of Doctrine

Field Manual (FM) 3-0 *Operations*, the Army’s capstone doctrinal publication, organizes the environment the Army faces in large part by the intensity of violence found in it. The spectrum of conflict—stable peace, unstable peace, insurgency, and general war—is a mental model for describing this environment.

Operational themes describe “the character of the dominant major operation being conducted at any time,”^[i] and “correspond broadly” to ranges within the spectrum of conflict. FM 3-0 identifies operational themes as Peacetime Military Engagement, Limited Intervention, Peace Operations, Irregular Warfare, and Major Combat Operations. Under each operational theme, the Army has grouped examples of “joint military operations” that have common characteristics to aid doctrinal development. Graphic depictions of this summary can be found in FM 3-0, pages 2-4 and 2-5.^[ii]

The following will focus on irregular warfare. Of the joint military operations that fall under irregular warfare—foreign internal defense, support to insurgency, counterinsurgency, combating terrorism, and unconventional warfare—only counterinsurgency is likely to require a large commitment of “general purpose” U.S. forces.

Army doctrine specifies that all operational themes and all joint military operations may be addressed by a variety of activities that provide great flexibility to military commanders. These are termed “full spectrum operations,” and are a balance of four types of

operations—offensive, defensive, stability, and civil support—conducted together in order to reach desired endstates. The balance among these types of operations varies according to the environment, by operational theme, and indeed, by the individual situation within an area of operations.

The Army understands offensive and defensive operations very well. These are inherent and timeless parts of warfighting, and the Army has given them great doctrinal attention over its history. Stability operations, generally conducted overseas, and civil support operations, generally conducted domestically, on the other hand, have received relatively little doctrinal attention until Department of Defense (DoD) Directive 3000-05 made stability operations a “core U. S. military mission” with a “priority comparable to combat operations.”

According to Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations*, “stability operations” is “An overarching term encompassing various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide **essential** governmental services, **emergency** infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.”[\[iii\]](#)

Despite Max Boot’s documentation of a significant American small wars tradition[\[iv\]](#) and frequent deployments to conduct stability operations, the military generally prefers to conduct offensive and defensive operations in keeping with what Robert Cassidy called the “big war paradigm” [\[v\]](#) and Russell Weigley termed the “American way of war.”[\[vi\]](#) Some policymakers have demonstrated a similar attitude. One conspicuous example is then-presidential candidate, George W. Bush, who said, “I don't think our troops ought to be used for what's called nation-building. I think our troops ought to be used to fight and win war.”[\[vii\]](#) Even FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, observes that the “purpose of America’s ground forces is to fight and win the Nation’s wars.”[\[viii\]](#)

Interestingly, FM 3-24 continues, “Throughout history, however, the Army and Marine Corps have been called on to perform many tasks beyond pure combat”[\[ix\]](#) because stability operations are critical to the achievement of policy goals, without which the military cannot claim success. Unfortunately, the success of major combat operations, an unambiguously **military** activity, does not ensure a lasting, sustainable peace. In fact, barring genocide, no recent major war has led to lasting peace without a significant period of reconstruction and stabilization—stability operations—following a peace agreement. Even World War II, the epitome of the use of military force to compel enemies to do our national will, did not result in lasting peace without a sustained stabilization effort. On the other hand, the lack of a clear, adequately-resourced stability plan for Iraq fed the insurgency that has consumed far more lives and money than the major combat operations that toppled the former regime.

Arguably, joint doctrine recognizes this fact in the “phasing model” of campaign planning. The phases, in order from zero to five, are shape, deter, seize initiative, dominate, stabilize, and enable civil authority. Phase IV, Stabilize, is “required” when there is “limited

or no functioning, legitimate civil governing entity present,” and the “joint force **may be** required to perform **limited** local governance.”[\[x\]](#)

Qualifiers such as “may be” and “limited” here, and “essential” and “emergency” above, indicate the general military reluctance to engage in these tasks if other options exist. Too often they do not, and service members have to step up. Therefore, “**military** missions, tasks, and activities,” specified in the definition of stability operations, does not mean those that require **military** force, which are basic **military** competencies, but rather all necessary tasks that are performed by **military** personnel, in the absence of qualified civilians. Thus, stability operations often have grown beyond the limited vision suggested in doctrine.

Nation-building and Stability Operations

James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, and Beth Cole DeGrasse describe nation-building as involving “the use of armed force as part of a broader effort to promote political and economic reforms with the objective of transforming a society emerging from conflict into one at peace with itself and its neighbors.”[\[xi\]](#) Francis Fukuyama adds that we achieve this end by “creating or strengthening such government institutions as armies, police forces, judiciaries, central banks, tax-collection agencies, health and education systems, and the like.”[\[xii\]](#) This institutional infrastructure enables a weak state to govern, and therefore, to provide security, opportunity and services to its population.

Despite the military’s reluctance to nation-build, the DoD led two very large nation-building efforts for most of the past decade, and committed significant resources to five others-- Kuwait, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo—since 1991. Dobbins *et al* pointed this out when they posited that “stability operations” is the military’s name for nation-building. The proof is in the definitions: stability operations seek to “maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief” (JP 3-0) while nation-building attempts “transforming a society emerging from conflict into one at peace with itself and its neighbors” (Dobbins *et al*) by “creating or strengthening such government institutions as armies, police forces, judiciaries, central banks, tax-collection agencies, health and education systems, and the like” (Fukuyama). Stability operations use the same methods to achieve the same goals as nation-building. Stability operations, as the military practices them currently, constitute nation-building.

Is nation-building an appropriate use of military resources? While FM 3-24 observes that the purpose of the military is to fight and win wars, the reality is the war is not won until the peace is also won. Stability operations—military-executed nation-building—are required to win the peace.

A broad American interest in a stable orderly world indicates a need for nation-building. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report acknowledges a need for

DoD to “support broad national goals of promoting stability in key regions, providing assistance to nations in need, and promoting the common good.”[\[xiii\]](#) In other words, current DoD leadership perceives that nation-building activities are in U.S. interest.

Additionally, nation-building can be justified on humanitarian grounds. The 2005 Human Security Report observed that since 1992, the number of wars in the world has declined by half, and the number of persons killed, wounded, or displaced by conflict has declined by a greater proportion.[\[xiv\]](#) Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler argue that post-conflict relapses into violence make up about half of civil wars around the world, and conclude that improved interventions in post-conflict situations are the most cost-effective way of reducing violence and the resulting human suffering. [\[xv\]](#) Dobbins *et al* argued that international military interventions are often the only means to prevent post-conflict society from slipping back into violence. Only the military has the ability to stop the fighting and enforce order.

Stability Operations and Counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency is “military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.”[\[xvi\]](#) Under the full spectrum operations model, COIN employs offensive, defensive, and stability operations in pursuit of desired endstates, and the balance among these three changes largely “depending on the security situation.” [\[xvii\]](#) This is a useful model because it highlights the need for activities that are unambiguously **military**—offensive and defensive operations—employed alongside others—stability operations—which are **military** mainly because too few qualified civilians are around to do them. The doctrinal recognition of the importance of stability operations in FM 3-24 changes the behavior of military personnel toward the population in a way that increases the likelihood of success in COIN. [\[xviii\]](#) Under the full spectrum operations model, stability operations are a subset of counterinsurgency (or for that matter, any other joint military operation).

Yet, FM 3-24 makes it clear that the “primary objective of any COIN operation is to foster development of effective governance by a legitimate government”[\[xix\]](#) and the U.S. does this primarily through “creating or strengthening such government institutions as armies, police forces, judiciaries, central banks, tax-collection agencies, health and education systems, and the like” (Fukuyama) as “part of a broader effort to promote political and economic reforms with the objective of transforming a society emerging from conflict into one at peace with itself and its neighbors” (Dobbins *et al*). The ultimate goal of successful counterinsurgency is the same as nation-building.

A Different Model

Therefore, consider an alternative mental model that might also be useful. Weak, failing, and failed states all need nation-building, but not all of these have descended into violence, and so do not require counterinsurgency. In other words, all counterinsurgency situations

require nation-building, but not all nation-building situations require counterinsurgency. Since “stability operations” is DoD’s term for nation-building, it is possible to consider COIN to be a subset of stability operations. COIN is simply nation-building in a violent environment.

There is some precedent for this alternative view: we know that stability operations may be conducted across all operational themes; that stability operations may include “lethal” operations; and that “stability operations” is “an overarching term.”

The test of a mental model is its usefulness. There are several reasons this model is useful:

1. Calling a thing what it is might lead to strategic clarity. Nation-building and counterinsurgency share strategic goals, and these are pursued with many of the same techniques. The greater violence encountered in a COIN environment simply requires additional techniques—offensive and defensive operations—but does not change the nature of the endeavor—to “foster development of effective governance.”
2. The larger category—stability operations or nation-building—is the one concerned with the strategic goal—“effective governance by a legitimate government” while “actions... to defeat insurgency” are means to that end.
3. A broad view of an interagency response to a complex environment liberates the Army from a paradigm which suggests that large-scale, population-centric COIN is the key tool in coping with the 21st century world,[\[xx\]](#) and makes possible alternative paradigms that assist host nations in conducting their own counterinsurgency campaigns [\[xxi\]](#) or that shore up weak states before violence breaks out.
4. The Army has expertise it is underutilizing. Some Army organizations have studied stability operations and associated peace operations, and have established interagency ties we can leverage to our advantage. The Army currently focused on COIN, that conducts stability operations primarily as a means to “winning” in COIN, is “seeing the trees.” An Army that appreciates that these stability operations actually achieve the strategic ends of an intervention in a weak state is “seeing the forest.”
5. In counterinsurgency, our interagency partners are not available to help us as often as they should be, possibly because counterinsurgency **warfare**, a variety of irregular **warfare**, is, to the civilian bureaucratic mind, **military**, rather than **interagency**, business. Despite the proliferation of government and think tank documents, like the *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*,[\[xxii\]](#) advocating the whole of government approach, the civilian surge is yet to materialize in the numbers required, and U.S. policy goals are not pursued as effectively as they should be. Not correctly calling COIN what it is, nation-building, lets other government agencies off the hook. If COIN is recognized as nation-building, which is interagency business, perhaps our partners will bring more to the table.
6. Other government agencies own nation-building, but may lack the capacity or resources to succeed. DoD’s acknowledgment that interagency goals in nation-building in a permissive environment may become DoD’s goals in COIN, if

our interagency partners fail, encourages DoD to ante up sooner to ensure interagency success. This achieves policy goals much more cheaply than a shooting counterinsurgency because nation-building in a permissive environment requires fewer bubbas; they don't need body armor, tricked-out M4s, night vision or MRAPs; they don't fire hugely expensive precision munitions; and most importantly, their families don't collect Serviceman's Group Life Insurance pay outs.

7. Shifting much of the burden for nation-building to other agencies and resolving potential conflict in weak states while it is still potential allow the military to husband itself for more intense conflict.
8. Constituencies, both in the U.S. and abroad, that cannot support "counterinsurgency" for reasons of conscience or political perspective, often can support nation-building. Domestic support is our center of gravity, while international support greatly legitimatizes our efforts and shares the load.
9. The military likes to concern itself primarily with Phase III of the phasing model, but has learned that, without some planning attention, and without commitment of resources and expertise to Phase IV, unhappy local national or transnational actors can render the gains made in Phase III irrelevant.
10. Ultimately, owning a piece of nation-building lets DoD get "left of boom"—military slang for "before something violent happens." Once we admit that nation-building serves American security interests and recognize that nation-building may prevent the disintegration of a weak state, the military can bring its strengths to bear on the problem during Phase 0. [\[xxiii\]](#) DoD may be able to do more to assist states to develop effective governance without a commitment to a long, painful and expensive counterinsurgency campaign.

Getting strategically "left of boom" is critical because the U.S. cannot sustain the expenditure of money and commitment of service members that a shooting counterinsurgency requires. If we try for too long, we risk breaking the military, exhausting our domestic support, and emptying our treasury. It is better to anticipate problems in weak states and mobilize a robust interagency response, perhaps led by the Department of State, to prevent the situation from becoming violent. DoD can chip in early to ensure interagency success, thereby practicing prophylactic COIN.

[\[i\]](#) Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008, p. 2-3.

[\[ii\]](#) *Ibid.*, p. 2-4 and p. 2-5.

[\[iii\]](#) Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008, p. GL-25

[\[iv\]](#) Max Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 2002.

[\[v\]](#) Robert M. Cassidy, "Winning the War of the Flea: Lessons from Guerrilla Warfare," *Military Review*, September-October 2004, pp. 41-46.

[\[vi\]](#) Russell F. Weigley, *American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973.

[\[vii\]](#) Quoted in Francis Fukuyama, "Nation-building 101," *The Atlantic Monthly*, January-February 2004, available

from <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/print/200401/fukuyama>, accessed March 10, 2008, para. 1.

[viii] Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006, p. 1-19.

[ix] Idem.

[x] Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, 2008, p. IV-28.

[xi] James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, and Beth Cole DeGrasse, *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-building*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, p. xvii.

[xii] Fukuyama, 2004, para. 4.

[xiii] Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010, p. iii.

[xiv] Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century*, New York and Oxford, 2005.

[xv] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "The Challenge of Reducing the Global Incidence of Civil War," Copenhagen Consensus Challenge Paper, 2004, available from http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/Files/Filer/CC/Papers/Conflicts_230404.pdf, accessed October 17, 2007.

[xvi] FM 3-24, p. 1-1

[xvii] Ibid, p. 1-19

[xviii] Bing West made this argument in *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq*, New York: Random House, 2008. See p. 120-121.

[xix] FM 3-24, p. 1-21.

[xx] Colonel Gian A. Gentile has made this argument, among others, in "A Strategy of Tactics: Population-centric COIN and the Army," *Parameters*, Autumn, 2009, pp. 5-17.

[xxi] FM 3-24 discusses "Limited Support" on p. 5-25. Additionally, I have seen a published argument that the limits placed on U.S. military intervention in El Salvador were conducive to COIN success there because these limits prevented the U.S. from taking over the war against the rebels. Unfortunately, I cannot recall who I need to credit. I apologize.

[xxii] United States Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009.

[xxiii] Joint doctrine actually makes this point. See Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, p. xxi.