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# Reconstruction Under Fire

Unifying Civil and  
Military Counterinsurgency

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## Summary

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The purpose of this study is to find ways to improve security for civil counterinsurgency (COIN)—essential human services, political reform, physical reconstruction, economic development, and indigenous capacity-building—in the face of insurgent threats. It was motivated by the authors' concern that postponing or curtailing civil COIN because of security risks can deprive the overall COIN campaign of the benefits of such efforts in weakening insurgency.

Before we present the analysis and findings, clarification of some basic concepts used in the study is in order. Insurgency is an armed internal challenge to a government that appeals to and exploits the support of important segments of the population. COIN is a government's effort to keep the contested population from bowing to fear or embracing the promises of the insurgents. COIN has both military and civil sides. The former consists of using force to defeat insurgents directly and to show that the government can and will protect the population. Civil COIN combines the direct provision of services and the improvement of government in order to weaken insurgency's appeal among the population.

The United States may support COIN abroad for two reasons: to produce an outcome that is advantageous to U.S. interests or to leave in place a state that is worthy of and acceptable to its people, thus less susceptible to continued insurgency. Although military and civilian leaders agree that COIN's civil side is at least as important as its military side, the situations in Iraq and Afghanistan show that the United States is better at the latter than at the former.

There are two main problems with U.S. civil COIN: lack of resources and danger from insurgent violence. While acknowledging the first problem, this study tackles the second. It proposes four enhancements to civil COIN under fire:

- a concept for setting priorities among civil COIN measures
- an improved way to allocate security forces among various civil COIN activities, as well as between them and other COIN security missions (e.g., direct operations against insurgents)
- new integrated concepts of operation (ICONOPS) that military and civilian leaders could employ during COIN campaigns to manage risk and produce best results for COIN as a whole
- general requirements for capabilities and corresponding investments to secure civil COIN, derived from ICONOPS.

These enhancements are based on a network model for securing civil COIN, which is informed by three cases: Iraq's Al Anbar province, Nord-Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Nangarhar province in Afghanistan. The cases suggest how conducting civil COIN during active insurgency can help turn a population against insurgents by improving the effectiveness, legitimacy, and reach of government.

We distinguish among four types of civil COIN:

- *indigenous capacity-building*: public-sector reform and institution-building, civil-service training, infrastructure refurbishment, human-capital development, and training public-service providers (e.g., teachers, doctors)
- *public-service gap-filling* (as indigenous capacity is being built): public education, population-security functions, public-health services, justice and correction services, and administration
- *emergency humanitarian-relief delivery*: supplying those in dire need with food, water, shelter, sanitation, and urgent medical care, whether by international or local agencies
- *economic development to create livelihood opportunities*: job training and placement of ex-combatants, fostering direct investment,

and facilitating marketplaces, production areas, and distribution links.

Of these, building capacity and creating livelihood opportunities are crucial when an insurgency is either young and relatively weak or old and relatively weak. When insurgency is at or near full throttle, gap-filling may be necessary if it will take longer to overhaul the indigenous government than it will for insurgency to succeed. Emergency humanitarian relief may be required when order, safety, and government services collapse to the point that large numbers of people are at risk of death or displacement.

Because civil COIN activities are distributed in order to reach the population, they are inherently vulnerable and thus pose serious security problems. This is especially so because insurgents strategically target government efforts to win over the population. Indeed, the frequency with which insurgents attack schools, government offices, courthouses, pipelines, electric grids, and the like is evidence that civil COIN threatens them. Still, it is important to conduct civil COIN while insurgents remain active and dangerous rather than waiting until they are defeated by force alone.

The reluctance to conduct civil COIN in the midst of active insurgency does not reflect on the courage of the civilians involved. Rather, organizations and governments charged with civil COIN often choose not to place their people at risk. Limited efforts are being made to address this problem. The use of COIN provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), with mixed civilian and military personnel, is an important, if small, step toward securing civil COIN under fire. But the PRT does not encompass the facilities, assets, government services, and indigenous personnel that must be involved and eventually take over civil COIN, much less the access of the local population for whom services are intended. To protect PRTs is to protect only a thin crust of the total civil effort, leaving unsolved the problem of securing civil COIN in the large.

Establishing priorities can help secure civil COIN by providing a basis for the allocation of security forces. Priorities depend on the history and culture of the country or province under threat; the insur-

agency's aims, maturity, strength, and level of violence; the gravest deficiencies in the effectiveness, legitimacy, and reach of government; and the services and corresponding capacity-building efforts that ought not be postponed until territory is secure. From Al Anbar, Nangarhar, and Nord-Kivu, a number of exemplary, high-priority civil COIN focus areas have been identified: land reform and arbitration, primary education, building and repairing roads, planting and operating orchards, creating industrial parks, improving electricity service, and reconstructing justice services.

Examination of these areas reveals operational patterns of civil COIN that can inform concepts to reduce their vulnerability. As one might expect, efforts to serve people with disparate needs throughout a given territory tend toward a pattern of distributed, dynamic, complex *networks*, consisting of the following:

- nodes: e.g., schools, clinics, training sites, production spaces, administrative offices, lower courts, and marketplaces distributed throughout and at the network's periphery
- hubs: e.g., universities, hospitals, transportation hubs, ministries, and higher courts at national or provincial centers
- links and movements: e.g., personnel augmentation, refreshing of supplies, response to unforeseen needs, and special services.

Conducting civil COIN in the midst of insurgency depends on securing such networks, which differs operationally from securing whole expanses of territory in which these networks function. The key to this is to integrate civil COIN activities and security measures. For this, creating a vocabulary common across civil COIN and between civil COIN and security is critical. Whatever their purposes—health, education, economic enterprise—most civil COIN endeavors can usually be stated in practical terms to which security planners and forces can relate: people, facilities, locations, supplies, links, and movements.

As networks, civil COIN can be performed before securing an area completely, by accepting, managing, and lowering *risk*. Risk is the product of threat, vulnerability, and consequences. Eliminating risk by eliminating insurgent threats is a purely military mission—difficult

to achieve in the absence of civil COIN and, in any case, outside this study's scope. The formula for securing civil COIN networks in territory where threats persist is to reduce risk by reducing the vulnerability of those efforts that contribute most to the effectiveness, legitimacy, and reach of the government. In turn, reducing the vulnerability of a network of activities in a territory is potentially easier than eliminating the threat throughout that territory, especially against insurgents who are themselves networked and mobile. It can be done through a combination of adapting the way civil COIN is done and tailoring security to it.

Because security forces are likely to be involved in other COIN missions (e.g., direct operations against insurgents and training local security forces), they should be allocated in a way that maximizes the payoff to COIN as a whole, taking into account that effective civil COIN can weaken insurgency and dampen violence. While allocating forces across COIN missions is a responsibility of force commanders, it must be done in concert with their civilian counterparts. These challenges demand an integrated approach at the operating level.

One way to reduce vulnerability, and thus risk, is to lessen the complexity of civil COIN by co-locating activities in nodes—e.g., schools, clinics, courts, markets, and production activities—in the same area or compound. This will take flexibility and ingenuity on the part of those who plan and conduct civil COIN. Of course, co-location may attract threats because of the concentration of services and assets. Still, it can ease security requirements appreciably.

Aided by co-location, securing civil COIN requires protection of local nodes, hubs, and movements among them. Currently, only protection of hubs—i.e., activities centralized at the national and provincial levels—is adequate. Local security is especially demanding because of the numbers and geographic distribution of nodes and the fact that this is where the population is directly served and at greatest risk. Local nodes can be secured by stationary indigenous police and guards who are backed by justice systems to convince the population that local forces are governed by the rule of law.

At the local level, population security and civil COIN security are both needed and may be closely connected. The former is critical if the

government is to convince the people of its ability and will to protect them; the latter is critical to enable the same people to get essential services (e.g., health, schools, justice, and access to markets), the need for which does not vanish when insurgent threats exist. In the midst of insurgency, securing access to essential services is a way of improving population security. Requiring people to travel long distances to obtain such services at centralized hubs is, generally speaking, responsive neither to their needs nor to their safety. Accordingly, the security of local nodes must include measures to protect the people who enter, use, and leave them, which may be the hardest aspect of civil COIN security.

Movement security may be provided by fast, motorized forces. The complexity of movements can be reduced, and security enhanced, by close coordination of travel and supplies across all civil COIN activities—like co-location, but in motion. Depending on the difficulties and risks, international forces may have to provide for movement security until indigenous forces can.

Critical to monitoring, managing, and lowering risk to distributed civil COIN activities is a combination of advanced information networking and quick-reaction forces (QRFs) to defeat unanticipated threats that exceed local security capabilities. Information sensing and sharing among civil and military authorities, both indigenous and foreign, is important for the coordination of civil COIN movements, integration of civil and security operations, alerting commanders to changes in threat level, and calling in QRFs. QRF capabilities are most likely to be furnished by international forces, at least initially, in that they have more advanced training, air mobility, command and control, and readiness. The better the QRF and information networks, the more reasonable the demand for forces to secure nodes and movements.

In securing civil COIN, standard ways of engaging and defeating insurgents and of clearing territory will not suffice. Implementing complex and dynamic civil COIN activities in a distributed network with reduced vulnerability requires ICONOPS, as noted earlier. The use of embedded forces, movement security and QRFs, the frequent interaction among such forces, their relationship to civil activities, the allocation and adjustment of forces according to priorities and risks, and the

response to threats demand operating concepts that are not either civil or military but both.

In light of the reliance of civil COIN on security, the demand for ICONOPS, and the need to enhance certain capabilities (e.g., information networks and QRFs) for these purposes, the military should clearly designate civil COIN security as one of its principal COIN missions, as opposed to an implicit collateral duty. By elevating the importance of securing civil COIN, the military can, in turn, go a long way toward convincing organizations and governments involved in civil COIN to allow their people to work in dangerous areas.

Similarly, civilian agencies involved in COIN ought to accept the principle of managed risk and adopt practices that facilitate security. Setting priorities and co-locating services are critical civilian responsibilities. Civil agencies need to work with the military in devising and implementing ICONOPS. Because civil COIN can help end hostilities, enabling it to take place during hostilities is a powerful argument for a more integrated civil-military approach.

From these findings, we recommend that the U.S. government and others concerned with COIN consider adopting the following principles:

- It is important to conduct civil COIN where the population resides and despite the persistence of violence.
- Civil COIN priorities should be based on what contributes most to the effectiveness, legitimacy, and reach of the indigenous government and thus on the weakening of insurgency and reduction of violence.
- Population security and civil COIN security should be pursued in conjunction with one another.
- Civilian and military leaders should direct their planners and operators to develop ICONOPS to manage and lower risks to the nodes, hubs, and movements of civil COIN networks.
- Civil COIN security should explicitly be made one of the principal missions of COIN security forces.

- Civil authorities should recognize the contribution of civil COIN to reducing insurgent strength and violence and should pursue ways to enable it to proceed despite risk.
- Co-locating civil COIN activities should be explored by civil agencies to facilitate security.
- Allocating security resources among missions should be done by civilian and military leaders together and should be based on where the greatest benefit to COIN as a whole lies.
- Capabilities crucial to ICONOPS but currently inadequate should be enhanced or developed.
- Information should be openly shared among the civil and military, indigenous and international agencies responsible for securing civil COIN.
- Securing civil COIN, like civil COIN itself, should be, and be seen as, chiefly the responsibility of local government and forces, especially at points where the people are being directly served.

Because this study was only an initial inquiry, there is a need for additional research and analysis of the following topics at least:

- priorities, patterns, and practicalities of civil COIN
- feasibility and options for co-locating civil COIN activities
- options and requirements for local security, movement security, and QRFs
- information requirements, architecture, and infrastructure
- the adequacy of U.S. civilian and military institutions—doctrine, organizations, training, leader development and education, and personnel policies—for ICONOPS.

We have not tested this study's proposals in specific cases; nor have we specified ICONOPS in detail. It is important to work through analytically how these concepts and corresponding capabilities would apply in a given country, province, or district. Beyond that, it could be valuable to identify districts in Iraq or Afghanistan where ICONOPS may be tried by U.S. and local civil and military authorities. Such experiments could follow the disciplined process of identifying civil COIN

priorities; establishing a common civil-military practical-operational vocabulary; planning securing for local nodes, central hubs, and movements; creating integrated information networks; organizing concerted civil-military decision-making; and identifying gaps in capabilities and procedures.

We do not claim that this study's findings are the final word on security for civil COIN—far from it. Rather, we hope that they will spur greater attention to meeting the need for a more integrated, balanced, and effective way of defeating insurgency.