

**Counterinsurgency:
Can It Be Used To Combat Domestic Crime?**

by

Martin Pilcher

Elk Grove Police Department

December, 2010

Command College Class 48

The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training
Counterinsurgency:

Can It Be Used To Combat Domestic Crime?

In the space of 11 days in 2009, seven people were murdered in Salinas, California. Each killing, like most of the other record 25 homicides in 2008 was related to gang warfare. This meant the homicide rate in the city of 140,000 people rose to three times that of Los Angeles (Senick, 2010). In an effort to curb this violence, Mayor Dennis Donohue called upon an unusual source; the U.S. military.

COIN

Starting in February 2009, veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began advising the Salinas Police on counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics they could use to combat the gang violence problem. Fifteen faculty members and students from the Naval Postgraduate School in nearby Monterey came to Salinas to apply what they had learned in Baghdad and Fallujah (Vick, 2009). The members of this group did not bring military firepower to Salinas, but first hand experience combating those who would disrupt the peace and safety of a resident population. Those involved saw a significant overlap between battling insurgents and dealing with a city under siege from criminal gangs.

The use of such tactics raises a number of questions. What is counterinsurgency and how could it be adapted at a local level? How do COIN tactics compare to existing law enforcement strategies such as community policing? Lastly, what would a counterinsurgency initiative aimed at curbing domestic crime look like? Before we answer those questions, we must first understand what counterinsurgency is and how it has evolved in recent history.

What is Counterinsurgency (COIN)

Insurgency is defined as “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict”. Counterinsurgency is “military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency” (Petraeus & Amos, 2006). Modern military counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics possess a number of primary characteristics, with the legitimacy of the government and its role in political, social

and economic development as a primary objective. A legitimate government derives its just powers from the governed and competently manages collective security and political, economic, and social development. In Salinas some citizens do not recognize their local government as having the ability to provide these services. As an example; in 2007 when SPD hosted a community meeting to help residents determine whether their children were in gangs, not a single citizen attended (Vick, 2009).

History of Insurgent & Counterinsurgent Movements

By the beginning of the 20th century most insurgent movements had become revolutionary in origin; emerging from civil wars; or the collapse of nations destabilized by military or economic events, or a combination of the two. Insurgencies flourish in the power vacuum created by such events (Moyar, 2009). Since the rise of the mujahidin in Afghanistan in the 1980's, revolutionary ideologies have been replaced by extreme religious or ethnic causes (Kaplan, 2001).

Prior to its involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan the United States has been involved in a number of prominent insurrections. These include the Philippine Insurrection (1899-1902), and the Vietnam War. Though the Vietnam War ended with a conventional military invasion of South Vietnam by regular North Vietnamese forces, much of the conflict had involved insurgent tactics. When General Creighton Abrams assumed command in 1968, he ordered U.S. forces to operate in smaller units, often in cooperation with South Vietnamese forces (Sorley, 1999). Further, Abrams believed that American combat units should focus more effort upon providing population security. This fell in line with the directives of the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS), a pacification program begun in 1967.

CORDS placed military and civilian resources under one adviser at the provincial or district level. It strengthened civil-military cooperation and improved the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations (Moyar, 2009). By early 1970 the number of "relatively secure" villages in South Vietnam had risen 20 percent, covering 93 percent of the population (Petraeus & Amos, 2006). Insurgency ceased to be a major component of the North Vietnamese strategy by 1971. Prior to that time the North

Vietnamese strategy had included both conventional and the infiltration of insurgents. In both the 1972 Easter Offensive and the final invasion of 1975, North Vietnam used conventional military forces and formations to gain final victory.

Though each insurgency is unique, most can be placed within a list of common approaches used to advance the insurgency such as means used to generate popular support and resources used to maintain it. Identifying these elements can assist counterinsurgents to develop successful programs that counteract the insurgent's methods.

How Counterinsurgency Works

Unity of effort on the behalf of the counterinsurgents through communication and liaison with those responsible for the nonmilitary elements of power is imperative (Petraeus & Amos, 2006). Connecting with joint, interagency, coalition and indigenous organizations is important to ensure that objectives are shared and that actions and messages are synchronized. Political, rather than military, objectives must retain primacy. The majority of the population must recognize the legitimacy of the government and either actively support or at the least not hinder the efforts of the counterinsurgents (Petraeus & Amos, 2006). Analyzing the effect of any operation is impossible without understanding the society and culture within which the COIN operation occurs. All operations must be shaped by carefully considered actionable intelligence gathered and analyzed at the lowest possible levels and disseminated and distributed throughout the force.

Isolating insurgents from their cause and support is more effective than killing every insurgent (Petraeus & Amos, 2006). Security must be provided under the rule of law. Security provided by a recognized legal system will produce a greater level of governmental legitimacy. A commitment to a long-term effort must be made and communicated to the populace. An insurgent wins by not losing; by drawing into question the legitimacy and effectiveness of the government. Information about the COIN effort and clear expectations of its results must be communicated to the populace. This process is dependent upon the venue within which the COIN operation is conducted.

In a local civilian context, the governmental agency could, for instance, communicate their efforts and expectations from its websites and the media. Information and expectations are related, and a skillful counterinsurgent must carefully manage both. To limit discontent and build support, a counterinsurgent and host government must create and maintain realistic expectations among the populace (Petraeus & Amos, 2006). Any use of force generates a series of reactions, so, it is best to use the minimum possible force in resolving any situation. A COIN force must be a learning organization (Petraeus & Amos, 2006). The organization and its members must display systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, a shared vision and team learning (Senge, 1990). This will allow the organization to transform itself in reaction to changes in its responsibilities, or in the case of COIN, in response to changes in the tactics of its adversaries. This learning process must go on at every level of the COIN effort.

Urban insurgencies have been undertaken by the Irish Republican Army, groups in Latin America and most recently in urban centers in Iraq. Terrorist tactics are used in urban areas to sow disorder, incite sectarian violence, weaken the legitimate government, intimidate the population, kill government officials and leaders of any opposition, intimidate law enforcement and military personnel and drive the government to act in a repressive manner that will create support for the insurgency (Petraeus & Amos, 2006). This type of insurgency requires little or no popular support. As societies have become more urbanized, this approach has become more effective. In locations with well run security forces, urban insurgencies take on a cellular structure that works along lines of close association such as family, religion, political party or social group (Hammes, 2004). This insurgent model is similar to a domestic criminal street gang.

COIN and COP

Counterinsurgency and current law enforcement practices possess some similarities. Community policing, COMPSTAT and intelligence-led policing have attributes employed in COIN; conversely, COIN uses some tactics similar to these law enforcement techniques. A 2007 study by

George Mason University found that 60% of municipal and county agencies with more than 100 sworn officers considered community policing a major part of the organization's operations. The same study indicated that 31% of the same survey group considered COMPSTAT a major part of the organization's operations (Mastrofski, S. & Willis, J. 2007).

Community policing is defined by the U.S. Department of Justice as "...a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systems use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, and the fear of crime" (United States, 2004). Community policing is the most widely used term for a loosely defined set of police philosophies, strategies, and tactics. Instead of merely responding to emergency calls and arresting criminals, community policing officers devote considerable time to performing social work and working independently and creatively on solutions to the problems on their beats. They make extensive personal contacts, both inside and outside their agencies. All of this flies in the face of a police culture that values crimefighting, standard operating procedures, and a paramilitary chain of command (International, 2007).

Further, identifiable similarities between community policing and counterinsurgency exist. COIN stresses the need for decentralized command, flexible response to problems, coordination between a wide range of organizations and the establishment of relationships with the citizenry with which military personnel interact. All of these techniques are aspects of community policing (Mastrofski, S. & Willis, J. 2007). These techniques are used to increase citizen satisfaction, reduce fear and respond to neighborhood problems in a flexible fashion, as opposed to a one size fits all manner. While community policing holds the community as central to the mission, COMPSTAT identifies the community as peripheral to the fundamental mission of lowering crime rates (Mastrofski, S. & Willis, J. 2007).

COMPSTAT is an acronym for "computer statistics" or "comparative statistics". It was developed by Jack Maple of the New York Transit authority and implemented in the New York Police

Department in 1994 by Chief William Bratton in an attempt to lower crime (Henry, 2002). Proponents of the program credit it with dramatic reductions in crime and similar systems are now in use in numerous large police agencies throughout the United States. COMPSTAT is not a standalone computer application; but a system of gathering information through reports of crime and crime mapping, coupled with weekly meetings designed to forecast future criminal activity. These meetings include not only upper level managers but also representatives from other parts of the agency including; Internal Affairs, the District Attorney's Office, local School, Housing and Transit Police as well as Code Enforcement and the Parole and Probation Departments (Henry, 2002). Because high level representatives from a wide variety of agencies are present these units can commit resources and coordinate activities quickly to address identified problems.

COMPSTAT and COIN are similar because they both require the acquisition and interpretation of information to direct future activities. Both techniques place great importance upon the coordination of the effort of a wide group of resources for one task, the reduction in crime or violent acts of insurgents. Each places expectations upon commanders while providing them the flexibility to address the problem in the manner that best suits that particular geographic area. It is the best elements of COMPSTAT and COIN that were attractive to City leaders in Salinas as they sought help to combat their gang violence problem.

Model Plan

Until recently, Salinas used traditional enforcement-based approaches to combat the ongoing gang violence (K. McMillan, personal communication, September 20, 2010). In 2010, Salinas PD, with the assistance of other law enforcement agencies, conducted two large-scale anti-gang operations that resulted in the arrest of dozens of gang members and the seizure of guns and narcotics (Lopez, 2010).

Dr. Hy Rothstein, a Senior Lecturer at the Naval Post Graduate School (and a 26 year veteran of the US Army) volunteered to assist the City of Salinas by introducing counterinsurgency tactics to

combat an increasing gang violence problem. Along with other aspects of this initiative, he determined the tactics to be employed should be developed prior to a discussion of what technology should be used in the operation (H. Rothstein, personal communication, September 16, 2010). If specific decisions were first made concerning supporting technologies, he felt it might drive tactics. This would run counter to the best practices for creating an effective counterinsurgency program.

Dr. Rothstein also recommended that a clear course of action must be identified and agreed upon by all involved parties prior to implementation. This procedure includes the identifying what agency would be the “lead actor” in the process (Rothstein, 2010), and determines if the effort would prioritize suppression of crime (law enforcement) over intervention (social services). Whatever course of action would be chosen, it is important for all parties involved to understand what process is to be used to reach the stated goal. This then allows for a coordinated plan to reach the stated goals to be formed.

The planners expect that counterinsurgency techniques can be a useful method to address crime at the local level. Its effective implementation would require a coordinated effort by a wide range of public resources. This would include the melding of community oriented policing and intelligence efforts, the support of not only the law enforcement agency itself, but the lead governmental entity, and a concerted change initiative that was robustly supported. This led to the formal recommendation in October 2010 to City leaders to adopt one of three possible courses of action to combat chronic gang crime.

Salinas Today

The plans presented to Salinas government leaders ranged from a traditional crime suppression-focused effort led by law enforcement to a course of action led by social services agencies targeting intervention with support from law enforcement. According to Deputy Police Chief K. McMillan, the City chose the social services approach (personal communication, November 17, 2010). This will entail the use of a gang prevention task force similar to that used by San Jose, California. The task force

consists of a wide range of groups including: law enforcement, social services, schools, faith based organizations, healthcare, parents and community organizations. The goal of the group is to not merely suppress gang activity and violence, but to intervene in the gang's ability to gain members. Law enforcement will play a supporting role in this effort.

Salinas PD itself will continue to make a number of changes to its structure and programs to improve its effectiveness (Fetherolf, 2009). To that end, SPD has created a new Deputy Chief's position and Public Information Officer. Operationally, a resource allocation survey identified a shift overlap period that could be created to address the highest call for service period of the day. Programs using assistance from allied law enforcement agencies have also been implemented and an intelligence gathering and dissemination program examined. An increase in intelligence gathering ability and crime trends reporting to staff has begun. Further, a focus on criminal activity in smaller geographic areas, neighborhoods, as opposed to the community as a whole for resource deployment was begun.

Lastly, a technology component was included in as part of the NPS recommendations. These are: GPS on patrol vehicles, surveillance cameras and social mapping (H. Rothstein, 2010). The GPS will provide the ability to more efficiently deploy units, while cameras provide the capacity for persistent surveillance. The mapping of social networks links persons, events, contacts and arrests and improves and is a staple of intelligence gathering. The steps taken by the City and the SPD are important aspects of a COIN initiative. They include: a unity of effort between law enforcement and civilian organizations, support from political organizations, an effort to understand the environment within which the initiative will operate through the acquisition of intelligence, the isolation of the gangs from their support through gang membership intervention techniques and a long-term commitment.

Salinas is a test case for the use of counterinsurgency techniques by local law enforcement. It is using aspects of community policing and COMPSTAT coupled with other non-law enforcement resources to combat an entrenched gang culture that possesses many similarities to an insurgency. The City of Salinas expects this initiative to curb gang violence through a long term reduction in

membership and effective suppression activities. If effective, these results could be duplicated elsewhere.

References

Fetherolf, L. (2009). *180 day report to the community: An action update*. Salinas Police Department.

Hammes, T. (2004). *The sling and the stone: On war in the 21st century*. St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press.

Henry, V. (2002). *The COMPSTAT paradigm*. Flushing, NY: Looseleaf Law Publication.

International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2007). *Award-Winning Community Policing Strategies (1999-2006)*. Washington, DC: Carlos Fields.

Kaplan, R. (2001). *Solder of god: With Islamic warriors in afghanistan*. NY: Vintage Books.

Lopez, D. (August, 31 2010). *Dozens of norteño gang members arrested in operation street sweeper*, San Jose Mercury News. Retrieved September, 25 2010 from:
http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci_15956854.

Petraeus, D., & Amos, J. (2006). *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. Kissimmee, FL: Signalman Publishing.

Mastrofsky, S. & Willis, J. (2007). *Compstat and community policing: Are they compatible?* U.S. Department of Justice. George Mason University. Retrieved March 8, 2010 from
<http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/willismastrofski%20.pdf>

Moyar, M. (2009). *A question of command*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Senge, P. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline*. London: Century Business.

Senick, T. (2010, Winter) *The surge comes to Salinas*. City Journal

Sorley, L. (1999). *A better war: The unexamined victories and final tragedy of america's involvement in vietnam*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Vick, K. (2009, November 15) *Iraq's lessons on the home front*. The Washington Post