

**IMPLEMENTING  
COUNTERINSURGENCY (COIN)  
LESSONS IDENTIFIED/LEARNED IN  
COUNTER-TERRORISM (CT)**

COE-DAT WORKSHOP  
24-25 September 2013  
Ankara, Turkey

**After Action Report**

## AFTER ACTION REPORT

### COE-DAT WORKSHOP “IMPLEMENTING COUNTERINSURGENCY (COIN) LESSONS IDENTIFIED/LEARNED IN COUNTER-TERRORISM (CT)”

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#### 1. GENERAL

a. The Centre of Excellence – Defence Against Terrorism (COE-DAT) in Ankara, Turkey held a workshop on 24-25 September 2013 on the topic of “Implementing Counterinsurgency (COIN) lessons identified/learned in counter-terrorism (CT)”. It was COE-DAT’s first activity dedicated to this current and challenging topic.

b. The goals of the workshop were to:

- **Analyze NATO and national perspectives on COIN and CT doctrine, highlighting their similarities and differences;**
- **Share lessons identified/lessons learned from recent COIN operations;**
- **Examine whether and/or how COIN lessons identified/learned can be implemented in CT;**
- **Analyse and discuss future trends in COIN and their possible implications on CT;**
- **Propose feasible solutions for improving NATO’s and national capabilities in coping with these significant irregular threats for the near future.**

c. The workshop brought together 38 attendees, including 10 lecturers from 6 countries (Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania, Turkey, and the United States) and 28 participants from 9 NATO member nations (Belgium, Canada, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Turkey, and the United States), generating a great deal of formal and informal discussion throughout the event. The lecturers were specialists in counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism, academics, and practitioners representing NATO countries and NATO Headquarters. The participants were mostly representatives of the military, but civilians, professors, representatives from Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkish National Security Council, and the Turkish National Police were also present.

d. The workshop consisted of three main panel sessions, each with a number of presentations followed by discussion. The three sessions dealt with 1) “**The Theory: COIN and CT a Doctrinal Missing Link?**”, 2) “**The (Good) Practice: COIN Lessons Identified/Learned**”, and 3) “**Possible Solutions: Rewording or Rethinking COIN and CT?**”. Each panel is presented in greater detail below. The workshop’s conclusion involved a summary of the topics presented and discussion and recommendations on the way forward.

e. Prior to the first session, the keynote address was given by **Drs. Martijn W. Kitzen** (The Netherlands National Defence University) on the topic “**The link between COIN and CT in contemporary and future expeditionary campaigns**”. He set the tone for the workshop and for the following discussions with a comprehensive, innovative, and dynamic presentation that covered extensively the links between COIN and CT. Drs. Kitzen made initially a conceptual

and comparative analysis of insurgency and terrorism, concluding that even though they are distinct forms of irregular warfare, there will always remain “grey areas” between them. Focusing primarily on recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Drs. Kitzen expressed his opinion that CT has become a fundamental part of a modern COIN campaign, thus leading sometimes to mutual benefits and support. Nonetheless, he emphasized that most of the time they interfere with each other, creating negative influences and spoiling each other’s effects in domains such as targeting, intelligence exploitation, operational security, STRATCOM, and continuity of effort. As far as future campaigns are concerned, Drs. Kitzen outlined several characteristics of what he called “**global insurgency**”, **a potentially dangerous phenomenon which could link globally acting terrorists to local insurgencies**. In the context of diminished resources at the disposition of NATO/Allied Countries and shorter duration COIN campaigns that might be conducted in the future, it will be paramount to improve targeting, to strengthen the narrative, to combine information operations/STRATCOM engagement with conventional targeting, and to accept the local standards of legitimacy. Drs. Kitzen’s main conclusion was that **CT and COIN are of a different nature, but they would remain tightly intertwined, with even a larger emphasis on CT and measures** to prevent negative interference in order to create mutually reinforcing effects.

## **II. WORKSHOP MAIN TOPICS**

### **1. The Theory: COIN and CT a Doctrinal Missing Link?**

a. The panel’s first briefer was **Lieutenant-Colonel Josef GREIPL (DEU Army), the Chief of Concept Development at COE-DAT**, who gave a comprehensive presentation on “**NATO’s Approach to Counterinsurgency (COIN) and Counter-terrorism (CT).**” In his introduction the lecturer compared the definitions of Irregular Activities, Terrorism, and Insurgency by identifying common aspects and showing the close relationship between the three terms. LTC Greipl then presented **NATO’s Direct and Indirect Approach**, as described in NATO’s COIN Doctrine. He highlighted how NATO’s **Direct Approach** is defined as actions against insurgents/terrorists to neutralize an imminent threat and/or degrade the operational capability of the organization, while the **Indirect Approach** includes actions to influence the Operational Environment within which COIN & CT operations are conducted. He examined the specifics of NATO’s approach to COIN at strategic, operational and tactical level, highlighting the increasingly important roles of **Human Factors** and **Strategic Communications**. LTC Greipl stressed several **crucial aspects of NATO’s approach to COIN**, including:

- The importance of constant, rapid, and adaptable learning, complemented with appropriate training and education;
- The need for a Comprehensive Approach;
- The must for political primacy in COIN operations;
- The necessity to increase the legitimacy and acceptance of the HN, while improving the credibility of NATO forces.

The lecturer ended his presentation with some critical open-ended questions. He raised concerns about the applicability of the Comprehensive Approach in COIN & CT operations. He asked whether COIN’s focus on governance and development assistance is helpful for a successful COIN campaign, or whether it contributes rather to instability, corruption, and abuse. Finally, he

questioned if STRATCOM might be too complex to be executed successfully, and whether or not NATO's COIN Doctrine (AJP-3.4.4.) is really helpful in executing COIN operations.

b. The next briefer was **Mr. Tod Langley (US Army)**, representing the US Army's **Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG)**, who gave a lecture on "**US Army COIN and CT Doctrines**" and "**Attack the Network Theory**". He started his presentation with COIN principles, accumulated from a decade of lessons learned by the US Army in COIN operations. Some of the key components of these lessons include:

- Be population-focused;
- Follow an integrated approach to achieve comprehensive effects;
- Seize and maintain the initiative;
- Gain situational understanding;
- Be present in key population areas;
- Maintain the trust and respect of the host nation populace;
- Reinforce host nation accountability and legitimacy;
- Enable host nation solutions, partner as equals, promote host nation credibility;
- Win the battle of perceptions.

He next detailed the US Army's Attack the Network theory, which has been developed by the AWG over the last seven years. This theory begins by admitting that **complete and sole targeting of only threats does not achieve the overall objective of influencing the population in a complex COIN environment**. Mr. Langley gave an overview on how the theory was developed, its complex processes, and steps that have led to an improved modeling of the nuanced interactions among different actors in the Area of Operations. **He emphasized the role of the local population and its connection with insurgents, criminals, Host Nation officials, friendly forces, and economic actors**. The AWG Attack the Network model can help commanders and staffs visualize the necessity for balancing both lethal and non-lethal targeting via direct and indirect approaches.

c. The last briefer of the first panel was **Dr. Mária Bordás (Hungary)** who gave a lecture on "**Legal Framework of Counterinsurgency and Counter-terrorism**". Dr. Bordás presented sources for the law of warfare, such as the provisions of the Law of War (Hague Conventions), the Law of Humanitarian Treatment (Geneva Conventions), the United Nations Charter, the Washington Treaty, treaties on human rights, international criminal law, and rules of engagement. Then the presentation analyzed how the characteristics of international law determine the application of the law of warfare in the practical reality of COIN and CT. She stressed that there is still a need for an improved legal framework in order to make a clear distinction between terrorists and insurgents, which would in turn assist in determining if the laws of war or laws of civil enforcement should be applied. Dr. Bordás analyzed new developments in counter-terrorism, and expanded on themes such as the prevention of terrorism through economic and social development, ethnic tolerance, sufficient border management, and international cooperation. She ended her presentation with some proposals on the sufficiency and adequacy of the use of force in military COIN & CT operations, the application of non-lethal weapons, the need for new legal regulations on detention, and the issue of compensation for civilians.

d. The first panel ended with a discussion, conclusions, and recommendations period. The moderator of this panel was Drs. Kitzen, who initially asked the audience about whether they think NATO should have a counter-terrorism/defence against terrorism doctrine or not. LTC Greipl explained briefly the current status of this issue within NATO, concluding that the way forward is not very clear as to what kind of document should cover this topic. LTC Greipl also noted the possibility to change the terminology from defence against terrorism to counter-terrorism (in accordance with UN approach, which is the leading authority for this domain), as well as whether ACT or IMS should lead the process of updating/rewriting MC 472. The participants expressed different opinions on this issue, but the majority of the audience agreed on the benefit of having a NATO CT Doctrine, believing that it would give a better conceptual and procedural interoperability amongst the Allies. The question of the military's future involvement and role in CT & COIN generated a great deal of discussion, both at national level and NATO level. **In the vast majority of NATO countries, CT activities and operations are led by law enforcement agencies and are considered a national problem. The military plays a supporting role, when and if required by the leading national authorities. But this approach is suitable for local and homegrown terrorism. It was agreed that the military role will be much more important in countering international and transnational terrorism (as it was and it is the case of Al Qaeda), and that there is a need for a different approach.**

## **2. The (Good) Practice: COIN Lessons Learned/Identified.**

a. The second day of the workshop was opened by **Captain John Matthew Solomon (USA) and Mr. Todd Langley (USA)**, both from the US Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG), who jointly gave a presentation on "**Focused operations and fusion cells : best practices in COIN and CT**". The presentation started by emphasizing some "**staff friction points**" observed during recent American COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. These friction points included challenges during the Attack the Network concept, operations/intelligence integration, enabler integration, partnering, rule of law, civilian-military integration, and information superiority. In order to overcome this friction, one viable solution might be to apply focused operations to the targeting cycle, and furthermore to develop and implement the **Fusion Cell concept, which represents the integration and synchronization between operations and intelligence. The presentation suggested some viable solutions for integration between operations and intelligence for both current and future operations, as well as inside planning cells.** Fusion cells ensure integration and synchronization of separate functional elements by making timely recommendations to the commander, taking immediate action to resolve problems to help achieve the commander's end state. The presentation ended with some **lessons learned from 10 years of US Army COIN operations.** Amongst the most important lessons that Mr. Langley mentioned, he emphasized that:

- The population is the Center of Gravity in COIN;
- Understanding the Complex Operating Environment, including the Human Networks, is critical to developing effective strategies;
- Intelligence and Operations must be integrated and synchronized at all levels (tactical, operational, and strategic);
- Partnering with and developing the Host Nation (HN) security forces and local-regional government needs to happen as soon as there is enough security and is key to transition;

- Targeting approaches that balance lethal and non-lethal operations are important;
- Information Superiority is critical;
- Interagency partners help forces gain situational awareness and contribute to the Joint Force Commander's situational understanding;
- Fusion Cells are an effective technique for integrating both Agency partners and the HN.

b. The next briefer was **Brigadier General Adrian Ciolponea (Romanian Army), the Commander of the Romanian Special Operations Brigade**, who gave a presentation on “**The Romanian COIN experience in Afghanistan**”. His presentation was both a comprehensive overview and a critique of Romanian Special Operation Forces COIN operations in Afghanistan since 2005. He emphasized at the beginning of his presentation the so called “Magic Diamond Model” of Gordon McCormick, which in his opinion should have been better applied during the planning, execution, and evaluation phases of Afghanistan COIN operations. **BGen Ciolponea presented some characteristics of COIN in Afghanistan, underlying the importance of population control/influence and local security forces effectiveness, along with an array of social, economic, political, administrative effects on long term stability.** Soldier preparation, to include cultural and religious awareness training, is key to successfully understand the Afghan population, and this should be complemented by contributing to the training of local security forces. **The General outlined some unsuccessful COIN practices, such as the preference for conducting large scale operations, focusing excessively on Special Forces raids, not prioritizing quality trainers/advisers/mentors, not closing the borders, and ignoring rule of law and good governance.** BGen Ciolponea emphasized the following as some of the most important successful COIN practices for the Romanian Special Forces in Afghanistan:

- The necessity to work from the bottom up;
- Focusing on basic needs of the population;
- Isolating insurgents from the populace;
- Strong political and military cooperation;
- Information sharing.

The General ended his presentation by mentioning successful aspects of Romanian Special Forces COIN operations in Afghanistan. These included having a thorough understanding of the local society and culture, emphasizing intelligence operations, using the appropriate level of force, balancing short term tactical gains with longer term negative reactions, decentralizing operations, and ensuring a comprehensive handover.

c. The next briefer was **Superintendent Mustafa Cosar UNAL (Turkish National Police)**, who gave a presentation on “**The PKK and Popular Support: Countering a Terrorist Threat that has Insurgency Characteristics**”. He opened his presentation by making a short comparative analysis between insurgency and terrorism from criteria such as methods, directness of challenge towards state or non-state actors, specificity of goals, organizational structure, population support (active/tacit), targets, and the nature and purpose of violent acts. He presented a short history of the PKK, emphasizing the frequent changes in their political goals, as well as in their strategies and tactics in conducting violent actions against Turkish National Authorities or private

institutions/people. Superintendent Unal next discussed the way in which Turkish authorities have tried to permanently adapt their policies, procedures, and coordination in containing and fighting against the constant threat of PKK violence. Those policies impacted, in turn, the public's support for the PKK, the ethnic consciousness of Kurdish population within Turkey, as well as new tactics and procedures adopted by the PKK. The briefer concluded that while the PKK is a terrorist organization, it also has in its nature some characteristics of an insurgent movement. At the end of his presentation, superintendent Unal drew some conclusions regarding how national authorities should deal with a terrorist organization with an insurgency nature. He emphasized and suggested:

- The necessity of addressing the core grievances of a population and not just defeating insurgents;
- The leading role of civilian agencies and the necessity to use Joint Task Force capabilities;
- Political objectives must guide the military approach;
- The primary objective of a government should not be to deter violence, but to restore the effectiveness and legitimacy of the political authority;
- The psychological isolation of insurgents rather than the physical one;
- The need to consider the anticipated effects on the population's perception for every policy under consideration, and that perceived justice is the most important determinant of people's hearts and minds.

d. The second panel ended with a discussion, conclusions, and recommendations period. The moderators of this panel were Dr. Kalev Sepp and Superintendent Unal. Mr. Langley answered the first question, offering clarification concerning staff frictions and explaining that the model of fusion cells and focused operations can also be applied at strategic level, with some particularities. Superintendent Unal answered a question related to predicting the potential outcome of the alleged ongoing negotiations between Turkish authorities and the PKK. Superintendent Unal felt that it is almost impossible to make predictions, emphasizing that the situation depends also on external factors such as on-going events in neighboring countries. He stressed the necessity for authorities to permanently adapt policies, strategies, and tactics against an insurgency, offering some practical examples for Turkish authorities to contain and counter PKK actions. Superintendent Unal further elaborated on the concept of perceived social justice, emphasizing its pivotal role to influence and reduce popular support to PKK, especially within the Kurdish populace of Turkey. Many comments were made concerning the COIN experience in Afghanistan. BGen Ciolponea further elaborated his viewpoints, insisting on the necessity of continuity in NATO projects as well as proper coordination amongst relevant international actors at all levels. The General proposed the integration of NATO SOF forces into a specially designed, trained, and equipped SOF high readiness unit able to deploy at very short notice. Mr. Langley also added on the topic of continuity, explaining US principles and procedures for rotating troops in Afghanistan.

### **Panel 3. The (Possible) Solution: Rewording or Rethinking COIN and CT?**

a. The panel's first lecturer was **Dr. Christopher M. Schnaubelt (USA), from the RAND Corporation**, who gave a lecture on **"COIN and CT – strategic and operational challenges**

**for NATO.”** Introducing briefly the necessity of a Comprehensive Approach as a framework for analysis, Dr. Schnaubelt elaborated upon the differences between COIN and CT. He noted that even though both present collective action problems for NATO with regards to burden sharing, the particularities of each approach must still be taken into account, common practices should be adopted, and specific tasks should be apportioned. The briefer specified that while COIN efforts should be holistic and its success requires protecting and controlling the population while addressing their grievances, military CT efforts are focused upon neutralizing the terrorist. Also, while COIN is resource intensive, military CT is often conducted by covert, clandestine, or low visibility means, often by special operations forces. Last but not least, **he highlighted that COIN requires a Comprehensive Approach, involving political, civilian and military instruments, whereas in domestic CT law enforcement is dominant among NATO members, with a limited role for the military.** In Dr. Schnaubelt’s opinion, there are nevertheless important common issues in both COIN and CT, such as solid understanding of the operational environment, a thorough analysis of adversary systems, and prioritizing the use of resources. Dr. Schnaubelt suggested for NATO to use a tool called “Updated Center of Gravity (COG)” analysis to better deal with both COIN and CT. After introducing key terms for updated COG analysis, the briefer offered an algorithm for performing this complicated process at the strategic and operational level, giving practical and useful examples during each step. Dr. Schnaubelt ended his presentation by proposing some candidate areas for Al Qaeda COG analysis. This included leadership, ideology, popular support, middle managers, funding, and networks.

b. The second briefer of this panel was **Dr. Kalev Sepp (USA), Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California** who gave a presentation on “**The Military’s changing role in COIN and CT**”. Dr. Sepp outlined initially the American context of COIN, including its experiences during the Civil War, the Indian wars, the anti-establishment movements of the 1960s, Vietnam, and El Salvador. According to the briefer, the main lesson learned from those operations is “don’t fight their wars for them, get them to fight”. **He elaborated on new types of security threats such as cyber attacks and cyber terrorism, the connection between terrorism and organized crime, and possible access to Weapons of Mass Destruction by terrorist groups.** He mentioned that Al Qaeda, despite heavy losses over the last decade, is currently resurgent (particularly in Yemen, Mali, Mauritania, and the Horn of Africa). The RAND Corporation recently released a publication titled “Paths to Victory”, which is a composite of 71 empirically-based case studies on COIN. It highlights several keys to “winning an insurgency”, including: overmatch in conventional warfare (getting the insurgents to fight a guerrilla war), avoidance of ‘iron-fist’ COIN, and using six years as the minimum time-frame threshold for success. Dr. Schnaubelt ended his presentation by outlining the common, yet biased, perception amongst many security analysts that the current Afghanistan campaign is the prototype of future COIN campaigns. Military COIN and CT should equate to protection of the homeland and national interests abroad. This is a relevancy issue that needs to be translated to political leadership. Parliaments in NATO countries need convincing that continued military COIN and CT functions and capabilities are required after the campaign in Afghanistan.

c. The panel’s last briefer was **Mr. J. P. Morgan (USA), Senior Adviser for COMISAF COIN Advisory and Assistance Team, Jorge Scientific Corporation**, who gave a presentation on “**Influence operations countering the Afghan insurgency**”. He opened his presentation outlining some characteristics of the Afghan insurgency, the main insurgent groups, their area of operations and tactics, and the key leaders of the insurgents. In ISAF’s opinion, Pakistan is now the COG for the Taliban in Afghanistan. Pakistan in turn views Afghanistan through a broader



national security lens, so the situation in both countries is mutually interdependent. The Haqqani Network is estimated to be the “last one standing” of the various terrorist and insurgent organizations operating in Afghanistan. While the target audience for the Taliban’s electronic Information Operations (IO) campaign is very broad and international, the ISAF IO campaign is doctrinally limited to the area of operations. Mr. Morgan highlighted the main ongoing ISAF IO campaign efforts. These include:

- Key Leader Engagements;
- Establishing media dominance;
- Promoting host nation security forces;
- Setting conditions to increase commercial media;
- Building host nations IO capabilities;
- Synchronizing GIRA and ISAF Voice efforts.

The ISAF IO campaign has been supporting Special Operations Forces raids, with positive results. The IO campaign was also used to sow division amongst the various insurgent groups. This was done using the “informer theory”, in which there were spies in and amongst the groups. A key IO priority for ISAF is the support for the current reintegration program, which has seen the re-assimilation of around 7,100 former Taliban fighters into civil society. **Mr. Morgan ended his presentation by expressing his opinion that Pakistan is the key to conflict resolution in Afghanistan, and that the prognosis for stability in Afghanistan after the ISAF withdrawal for the next 5 years is cautiously optimistic.**

d. The third and last panel of the workshop also ended with a discussion, conclusions, and recommendations period. The moderator of this panel was Dr. Schnaubelt. The first question was about the definition of success in Afghanistan and the odds of achieving it. Mr. Morgan answered that what happens in Pakistan will significantly influence events in Afghanistan. According to Dr. Sepp, reconstruction efforts are more difficult in Afghanistan than combat operations. Violence will continue in Afghanistan after the withdrawal, and that the resistance is not unified. Therefore the measurement of success will depend on how the United States and NATO allies believe their national objectives have been achieved in the campaign. Nobody can say for certain whether Afghanistan will become a terrorist safe haven again. Dr. Schnaubelt pointed out that violence in Afghanistan is ongoing and there is a 50/50 chance of success in Afghanistan, dependent on Afghan unification and effort. The larger question is how to prevent safe havens, and the “cross-contamination” effect. In the case of Afghanistan, many attacks originate from across the border in Pakistan. The pursuit of insurgents across national borders is contentious and requires careful calculation. Mr. Morgan expressed his thoughts that the role of STRATCOM and Information Operations is paramount to the success of COIN in Afghanistan. One of the workshop participants asked the lecturers to elaborate on COIN lessons identified/learned in Afghanistan. The discussions following this question were quite long, touching on the importance of implementing lessons identified in Afghanistan in determining future COIN prospects, the key role of military academic and training institutions (such as COE-DAT) for understanding the complexity and interagency nature of COIN, and the fact that the military is often more adept to learn its lessons than other governmental agencies.

### III. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion 1.** The workshop was perceived as very useful and productive, as it helped to better clarify the relationship between COIN and CT from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The main conclusion was that CT and COIN are of a different nature, but would remain tightly intertwined. CT is becoming a fundamental part of modern COIN campaigns, leading sometimes to mutual benefits and support. The majority of the time, though, the two efforts interfere with one another, creating negative influences and spoiling or diminishing each other's effects.

**Recommendation 1:** This AAR shall be distributed amongst the main NATO and national stakeholders, in order to share the most relevant outcomes of the workshop.

**Conclusion 2.** The results of the workshop proved to be useful for the simultaneous NATO COIN Doctrine Writers Team Conference, with the idea of linking those two COIN related events being very productive.

**Recommendation 2:** The most relevant findings of the Workshop should be incorporated in the ratification draft on NATO COIN Doctrine – A.J.P. 3.4.4.

**Conclusion 3.** Even though NATO and its member states have accumulated a great deal of experience and expertise in the domain of COIN, there is still a need for better sharing of lessons identified, as one of the important pre-requisites for them becoming lessons learned.

**Recommendation 3:** All the relevant academic and military institutions both within NATO and NATO countries should be involved in a project to create, update and share relevant lessons identified/learned with regards to COIN.

**Conclusion 4.** Planning, conducting, and evaluating COIN requires a Comprehensive Approach, involving political, civilian and military instruments.

**Recommendation 4:** COE-DAT should analyze the possibility to host another training event related to COIN, with the participation of relevant international organizations.

**Conclusion 5:** COIN will remain an important topic for the Alliance for the near future.

**Recommendation 5:** COE-DAT should further build on the experience gained through this Workshop, by organizing a 5-day course in 2015.