

Principles for the Savage Wars of Peace

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While the Pentagon pursued a transformation agenda based on a futuristic vision of Information Age conflict, we have actually returned to an earlier era, that of Small Wars. Thus the subject of this essay has great salience today. Small Wars, or what Rudyard Kipling called the Savage Wars of Peace, involve campaigns in which at least one side of the conflict does not employ regular forces as its principal force, and does not fight conventionally.¹ Such wars may involve protracted and extremely lethal conflicts of the most savage and persistent violence, and cannot be classified as small in scale or by arbitrary distinctions between high-, medium-, or low-intensity conflict.² Small Wars can result in the defeat of major powers, destabilize governments, or result in extended and expensive campaigns with great loss of lives and treasure.

Future opponents will avoid direct and conventional conflicts with America's overwhelming military power and purposely seek novel and asymmetric combinations of irregular warfare. Thus, it is important that we grasp the nature of this aspect of war and understand the fundamentals that guide its conduct. Thus, the purpose of this essay is to define the basic principles that should be employed to guide the design and conduct of Small Wars.

¹ This does not exclude examples of compound conflicts where irregular elements are used behind enemy lines (WW II) or in adjacent theaters (Peninsular campaign, Nathan Greene in the American Revolution, Lawrence with the Arab Revolt, and Mosby's Rangers in the U.S. Civil War). Thomas M. Huber, ed., *Compound Warfare: That Fatal Knot*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2002.

² One distinguished contributor to this volume calls these "absurd distinctions." Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 274.

Wars between regular and irregular forces fill many pages in the annals of military conflict including: classic imperial actions, policing or stability expeditions, revolutionary or people's wars, guerrilla actions, insurgencies, and terrorism. Most great empires have extensive experience with this form of conflict. Roman, British, and American examples abound. Observers of Fourth Generation Warfare and non-trinitarian conflict need to look further back into history and re-qualify their distinctions.³ The tactics may be "irregular" to stubbornly conventional forces, but irregular conflicts have been with us for some time, and will undoubtedly continue into the future.⁴ In fact, most analyses anticipate an increase in internal and irregular conflicts due to America's conventional dominance and a "perfect storm" of ethnic unrest, religious violence, and demographic youth bulges.⁵ In this respect, in frequency but not in kind, we may indeed be facing a generational change in conflict.⁶

Governments and military institutions unprepared to take the study and conduct of Small Wars seriously invite defeat or at least expose themselves to a series of costly disappointments.⁷ While the basics of counter-insurgency, terrorism and guerilla warfare are well founded in the annals of history, one strategist argues "the plentitude of actual violence contrasts sharply with a dearth of profound theory."⁸ It may be more accurate to note that the study and appropriate application of existing theory, no matter how profound,

³ William S. Lind, Keith Nightengale, John F. Schmitt, Joseph W. Sutton, and Gary I. Wilson, "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Dec. 1989, pp.22-26; Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, New York: Free Press, 1991. For the latest and most detailed exposition, T. X. Hammes, *The Sling and Stone*, Regency, 2004.

⁴ Data indicates that intra-state conflicts are far more frequent than interstate wars. See Richard Cincotta, et al, *The Security Demographic: Population and Civil Conflict after the Cold War*, Washington, DC, 2003, p. 22.

⁵ National Intelligence Council, *Mapping the Future*, December 2004 accessed at http://www.cia.gov/nic/NIC_globaltrend2020_s4.html.

⁶ Antulio J. Echevarria, "The Problem With Fourth Generation Warfare," Army War College, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Center at www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi/newsletter/opeds/2005feb.pdf.

⁷ Colin Gray, *Modern Strategy*, p. 279.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

has been sorely lacking. It is not the lack of a theoretical framework or historical experience with irregular foes that confounds the U.S. military today. The American military's experience is quite extensive. More accurately, it is the disposition of Western militaries, especially that of the United States, to ignore this portion of the conflict spectrum or consign it to niche units. The American military culture has pathologically resisted learning from its own experience or the experience of others.⁹ The American military prefers clean and conventional conflicts, with opponents who conveniently play by the same rules.

The American conception of conflict reflects a sports analogy, with similarly equipped opponents showing up at the appointed time and place, confining the contest to agreed upon rules and the defined field of play. Our illusion makes neat demarcations between acceptable and illegal modes of fighting, as well as between combatants and spectators. We expect a common agreement on objectives--the goal posts at the end of the field—and rules of the game --with referees to throw yellow flags for infractions. This perspective is not useful in a second Small Wars era.

Today's enemies are more protean or chameleon-like, and infinitely less predictable than those of the Cold War. We face not a static monolithic foe, but a constantly varying admixture of participants, the very antithesis of the past.¹⁰ In the past, we focused on an opponent who was state-based, homogeneous, rigid, hierarchical, and resistant to change. But today's enemies are "dynamic, unpredictable, diverse, fluid, networked, and constantly

⁹ Bruce Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq*, Washington, DC: RAND, June 2004, p. 7.

¹⁰ It should be noted that some Cold War era adversaries, like the Viet Cong, were more dynamic and less predictable.

evolving.”¹¹ Such opponents do not lend themselves to an ingrained Order of Battle mentality and nice neat templates. Our new enemies play to their strengths, not ours.¹² Abetted by alchemists of military theory and own myths, we focus on the fights we want to conduct and have fallen in love with the wrong revolution.¹³

Small Wars have unique characteristics and attributes. The Marines’ seminal *Small Wars Manual* of 1940 concludes, “Although Small Wars present a special problem requiring particular tactical and technical measures, the immutable principles of war remain the basis of these operations, and require the greatest ingenuity in their application.”¹⁴ Yet, a close reading of the particular tactical and technical measures outlined in this historically grounded document suggests that the so-called immutable principles have to be turned on their head by the ingenious practitioner. Irregular conflicts, in fact, present unique problems and require unusual solutions that diverge from conventional conflicts. In fact, most failures are attributable to the rote employment of conventional rule sets. As the British author Colonel Charles Callwell noted at the turn of the last century, “... the conditions of small wars are so diversified, the enemy’s *mode of fighting is often so peculiar*, and the theatres of operations present such singular features, that irregular warfare must generally be carried out on a method totally different” from conventional wars.

Accordingly, one would expect to find different fundamentals or principles applicable to the conduct of such conflicts. The remainder of this essay is devoted to the delineation of these principles. This list was built by a detailed study of Callwell and the Marines’ *Small Wars Manual*. Working deductively from the litany of successful and

¹¹ Brian Michael Jenkins, “Redefining the Enemy,” *RAND Review*, Spring 2004, p. 17.

¹² Thomas X. Hammes, “4th Generation Warfare,” *Armed Forces Journal*, Nov. 2004, p. 40.

¹³ Ralph Peters, *Fighting for the Future; Will America Triumph?*, Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1999, pp. 22, 30.

unsuccessful examples in Algeria, Vietnam, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Malaya, and from current American Joint Doctrine, a set of eight principles has been developed.¹⁵ This set expands and modifies current American doctrine for two reasons. Current Joint doctrine for what American military officers call Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) is predicated upon cases and lessons drawn primarily from peacekeeping operations.¹⁶ This experience is still relevant but insufficient for the nature of today's networked insurgency and post-modern Warrior Class.¹⁷ Past peacekeeping operations represent, in this author's view, a narrower subset of Small Wars and do not reflect the myriad and messy challenges of the 21st century.

Eight Principles

The set of principles presented here represent a framework for education and for higher-level planners approaching the study of a particular irregular problem. They should not be set as a prescriptive list or a set of inviolable principles to be rigidly applied. Anyone looking for a science or strategy, "replete with principles that are both immutable and deeply meaningful, only indicate by that desire a basic misunderstanding of their subject."¹⁸ The conduct of war is best understood as both art and science. The crucial element of its artistic application is recognizing unique contexts, the contingent factors, and the opportunities to create advantage purposely by *violating* principles or rules when needed. As Mahan understood, art accepts the existence of principles and rules; but only as

¹⁴ U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, Government Printing Office, 1940, p. 8.

¹⁵ The foundation for the study of principles begins with but should not end with Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*, New York: Praeger, 1966.

¹⁶ The term "MOOTW" is an oxymoron. Joint Publication 3-07, *Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War*, 16 June 1995, pp. II-1 to II-8. These principles are also included in Marine and U.S. Army doctrine.

¹⁷ Ralph Peters, "The New Warrior Class Revisited," in his *Beyond Baghdad: Postmodern War and Peace*, Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 2003, pp. 44-60.

guides. Each case has its own features—which modify the application of the rule, and may even make at times wholly inapplicable. It is for the commander to apply (or adjust) the principles and rules in each case, using what Mahan called “the greatest ingenuity in their application.”¹⁹

The spectrum of missions that may be assigned to military forces in a Small War, and the continuously adaptive nature of today’s adversaries, preclude employing overly simplistic solutions. As in conventional conflicts, the professional judgment of a highly educated and experienced commander, aided by a similarly well-informed staff, is required. As stated in the Small Wars Manual, “to a greater degree is each small war somewhat different from anything which has preceded it.”²⁰ Once again, context matters.

Commanders and their planners must consciously look for both similarities and distinctions in applying historical precedents.

UNDERSTANDING

Oft quoted, but rarely understood, the wise Clausewitz once stressed, “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesmen and commander have to make is to establish ... the kind of war on which they are embarking.”²¹ This particular judgment on the part of civilian and military leaders is difficult to establish for numerous reasons. Commanders and planners who are examining a potential contingency need to assess the nature of the conflict in very detailed terms, often with limited time to access experts or databases. Contingencies can spring up suddenly, or occur in unexpected lands,

¹⁸ Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics*, New York: MacMillan, 1973, pp. 450-451.

¹⁹ A. T. Mahan, quoted by Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 70.

²⁰ *Small War Manual*, p. 9.

far from home. Sometimes, the Statesman or the commander are confused or blind as to the true nature of the war, preferring to see the future in terms of past battles. Often, political and military leaders fail to understand each other. But more often the real problem is a lack of understanding about the nature of the opponent.

Too often, military commanders focus in symmetric terms, defining the problem and the opponent's options in purely military terms. We rarely widen our scope though to include a broader assessment of the adversary's culture. An influential strategist once observed "good strategy presumes good anthropology and good sociology."²²

Fundamentally, war involves an iterative competition between peoples whose behavior patterns are a result of a complex combination of factors including history and geography. Our intelligence bureaucracies have experts on the strategic and military cultures of potential adversarial states. We can name all their major formations and quantify their principal weapons. We are Order of Battle oriented, focused on studying what is quantifiable and predictable about opponents in neat templates.²³

In contrast, what is more important in Small Wars is a very comprehensive examination of the culture of the society or country that is the source of the conflict. Because Small Wars usually are interventions in an internal conflict and require efforts to reconstruct or establish political, social and economic institutions and mechanisms, an acute understanding of the society and its culture is essential. Small Wars are generally culture intensive conflicts, and the battleground, properly understood, includes the

²¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

²² Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics*, p. 332. Brodie goes on to add, "Some of the greatest military blunders of all time have resulted from juvenile evaluations in this department."

political and psychological elements of the population and culture. We need to gain a deep and nuanced understanding of the conflict we are about to embark on and acquire as thorough a grasp of the nature of the adversary as possible. This includes becoming well informed about the adversarial culture and social system, not just estimates of fielded forces.

The combination of national history, myth, geography, beliefs, ethnic backgrounds and religion we know as *culture*. Culture is the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and thought characteristic of a community or population. Culture is a complex aggregate that includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a member of society. It works at many levels, sometimes overtly, other times covertly. As Michael Howard stressed years ago, wars are not tactical exercises on a larger scale. Major wars are conflicts between societies, and can be fully understood only by understanding the nature of the social systems involved. Victory is often not defined on the battlefield itself but in political, social, or economic factors.²⁴

This is not news. Again the *Small Wars Manual* notes, “The campaign plan and strategy must be adapted to the character of the people encountered.”²⁵ It is impossible for U.S. forces to succeed without an intimate appreciation of the local culture. Success requires a framework and educational background to generate an ability to think in terms of culture and to see things from the perspective of others. As one veteran of several interventions observed a decade ago:

²³ Anthony C. Zinni, in “Non-Traditional Military Missions: Their Nature, and the Need for Cultural Awareness and Flexible Thinking,” in Joe Strange, *Capital “W” War: A Case for Strategic Principles of War*, Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 1998, p. 266.

²⁴ Michael Howard, “The Use and Abuse of Military History,” *Parameters*, Spring, 1980, p. 9.

What we need is cultural intelligence. What I need to understand is how these societies function. What makes them tick? Who makes the decisions? What is it about their society that is so remarkably different in their values, in the way they think compared to my values and the way I think?²⁶

One can see the need for cultural intelligence and understanding in almost every phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Numerous stories and anecdotes have emerged about the pervasiveness of the effects of culture and the additive complexity it brought to the battlespace. Young officers and NCOs found the Iraqi culture utterly foreign and overwhelmingly complex. Others were surprised at the importance of religion to daily life in a foreign culture.²⁷

Cultural ignorance has been a challenge in the past for U.S. forces. The American-led intervention in Somalia in 1992/1993 was severely undermined by a limited understanding of the clan and political framework in that impoverished country. The degree of social disintegration and infighting extant in this starving East African state was beyond the grasp of almost all who were involved. This lack of understanding curtailed the design and implementation of appropriate solutions within the time and resources the international community was willing to bear.²⁸

This is why there is great merit in recent calls for cultural-centric warfare in which our soldiers and sailors are prepared with an acute degree of cultural awareness and the need

²⁵ *Small Wars Manual*, p. 13.

²⁶ Zinni, "Non-Traditional Military Missions: Their Nature, and the Need for Cultural Awareness and Flexible Thinking," in Strange, p. 267.

²⁷ Leonard Wong, *Developing Adaptive Leaders: The Crucible Experience of Operation Iraqi Freedom*, Carlisle, PA: Army War College, July 2004, pp. 7-8.

²⁸ For a concise overview see Lynn Thomas and Steve Spataro, "Peacekeeping and Policing in Somalia," in *Policing the New World Disorder: Peace Operations and Public Security*, Robert Oakely, M. Dziedzic and Eliot Goldberg, eds., Fort McNair, DC: National Defense University, 1998; F. G. Hoffman, "Somalia: Ten Years After," *Naval Institute Proceedings*, Jan. 2004.

for “global scouts” to advance our interaction with foreign societies.²⁹ The military and educational reforms suggested by these recommendations are wide reaching, but germane to the problems we face in the 21st century and critical to new Joint operational concepts like Effects Based Operations.³⁰

In short, the nature of Small Wars places a premium on an equally in depth knowledge base of the host nation’s societal culture. Good intelligence is always a precious commodity in Small Wars, largely due to the remote nature of the host country, the inadequacy of infrastructure, and the lack of familiarity with the native population. But because Small Wars mandate an in-depth appreciation of the local culture, that is where intelligence and understanding should begin. Thus, understanding is the first fundamental of Small Wars.

***Understanding:** Craft military strategy and operations based upon a detailed understanding of the enduring nature of military conflict and the specific context (cultural, social, political, military, and geographic) in which force is to be applied. The application of military force in all dimensions must reflect the particular character of the social system being engaged.*

END STATE

The most universal principle of war across time and international variations is the principle of the objective or aim.³¹ Current U.S. Joint doctrine and the annals of military history in both conventional and unconventional conflict are similar in this regard.³² The government should have a clear political objective, and this overarching political objective

²⁹ Robert H. Scales, “Culture-Centric Warfare, *Naval Institute Proceedings*, Oct. 2004, pp. 32-36.

³⁰ Joint Warfighting Center, *Operational Implications of Effects-based Operations (EBO)*, Norfolk, VA: Joint Forces Command, November 2004.

³¹ The most comprehensive study of principles of war, including an international perspective, is John I. Alger, *The Quest for Victory: The History of the Principles of War*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1982.

³² Joint Pub. 3-07, p. II-1 to II-2.

or aim must remain paramount and always in focus. Further, the objective should be clearly understood and credibly attainable by the ways and means allocated to the task. Agreement and understanding of the objective helps create conditions that foster unity of effort among coalition and interagency partners. Clarity also facilitates development of subordinate objectives, missions, and tasks for military planners and other participants as well. When this overarching objective is not first in the minds of all participants, there can be a tendency to adopt short-term measures in reaction to insurgent or terrorist activity.

History suggests that political objectives are not always well defined, and that the translation of political to military objectives is frequently mishandled.³³ One former American commander has said, “It’s not nice and neat – for openers, you don’t get a clean hard mission that tells you exactly what you’re supposed to do.”³⁴ Continued and interactive discourse between senior policy makers and military officials is warranted to clarify the intentions of policy in order for military planners to translate the aim into concrete military objectives and missions. Our understanding of the nature of war underscores defeating the will of the opposing commander and his means to resist, military planners are used to defining military objectives, and frequently do so in terms of either defeating the enemy’s main combat force, or by seizing defined physical objectives. Rarely can victory be defined in purely military terms, and less frequently in Small Wars. Yet the translation of political to military objectives is a poorly understood and largely overlooked aspect of operational art. It is even less understood by civilian policy makers

³³ Gray, *Modern Strategy*, pp. 57-64. See also B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, New York: Meridian, 1991, pp. 338-339.

³⁴ General Anthony Zinni, “Its Not Nice and Neat,” *Naval Institute Proceedings*, August 1995, p. 30.

who defer to the purported technical expertise and professionalism of their military advisers.³⁵

In Small Wars, neutralizing irregular forces and securing and holding specific geographical areas or cities may be necessary. But they rarely are sufficient. It may be better to think in terms of an *end state* rather than objective. End state has a very definitive connotation. In conventional warfare, defeat of the opponent's military force is a clear-cut end state, but the requirement in Small Wars is (usually) to establish a certain set of conditions conducive to stability, local governance, and economic growth. This is why irregular warfare is often described as 80% political and 20% military. The military may be only a supporting instrument, responsible for creating and maintaining a security environment, and for providing logistical support to other government agencies.

While an objective might be misconstrued in the physical sense, an end state in Small Wars is something that has to be created or reconstructed over time. It is a long-term condition to be established and sustained. The end state includes functioning institutions including political and security elements, legitimate processes for transparent and accountable governance, and public participation. An end state should not be confused with a preordained exit strategy, tied to a fixed and announced schedule. Such a device is a certain hindrance to success.

An end state to a Small War also includes an alteration in attitudes and perceptions. Both the general population and the disaffected element that resorted to violence must accept the new end state as an acceptable political outcome. There may be a distinct military objective in the conflict, but success will be determined largely in the political and

³⁵ See Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, New York: Free Press, 2002.

psychological sphere and it is best to define our objectives in those terms to ensure compatibility with overall policy. From this, planners must craft a campaign plan that links military objectives and supporting actions to concretely and effectively contribute to the attainment of the desired end state. Thus, the study and successful prosecution of Small Wars must establish *end state* as a key fundamental.

End State: *The assigned political aim defined in terms of the particular set of attitudes, conditions and capabilities that must be created or attained to provide governance, public services and security for the local population and the host nation.*

UNITY OF EFFORT

Unity of command is another important principle in U.S. military doctrine. In Small Wars it may be entirely impracticable and beyond attainment. Not surprisingly, existing Joint doctrine emphasizes unity of effort instead.³⁶ Unity of effort will take on added importance because of the complexity inherent in balancing the military with the political dimension. It is also further complicated by the extensive participation of various nations, other government agencies and international participants. The Small Wars battlespace may include numerous parties including Other Governmental Agencies, Non Governmental Organizations, International Organizations and Private Volunteer Organizations. It may also include numerous private commercial entities supporting either side of the conflict as well.³⁷ Not all of these parties will share U.S. interests or priorities, although they may support the desired end state and they may provide crucial resources, skills, and information to the overall effort. Many organizations will desire to overtly distance themselves from U.S. policy and want to make their political independence clear.

³⁶ Joint Pub. 3-07, p. II-3.

³⁷ Peter W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003

Few will accept a clear-cut chain of command and a set of missions or assignments for which they are accountable.

Harnessing the efforts and capabilities of myriad entities toward a common goal is one of the biggest challenges and opportunities for the commander that is unique to Small Wars. An inability to establish unity of effort elongates the mission, exposes the intervening forces to additional risks and burdens, and may undermine the entire mission.

There are a variety of techniques for achieving unity of effort. The international community or the United States government may designate and empower a senior official to coordinate an international response as was done in Somalia and in Bosnia. A U.S. ambassador may employ a variation of the Country Team approach to manage and integrate the various national and international participants in a Small War, as the United States did in El Salvador. It is possible that in some security situations a Regional Combatant Commander or Joint Task Force (JTF) commander may be designated as overall executive for a coalition. This approach was employed in previous U.S. nation-building endeavors in Japan and Germany, as well as in Iraq. Eventually, this approach transitions to some civilian official.

No matter what methodology is selected, extensive coordination is necessary. Interagency coordination and cooperation are essential to achieving effective unity of effort and synchronizing the coherent application of all elements of national power. Political, economic, diplomatic, military, and informational efforts must be effectively balanced and coordinated. The success of the British involvement in the Malayan Emergency is an example that supports this conclusion. There, subordination of the military to the civilian and the resultant unity of effort was the key to British success. There is perhaps no better

example of how a clear and logical organizational chart can have decisive results on unity of effort. Sir Harold Briggs was appointed director of operations, and recognizing the need for unified command, established a War Council that included civil, police, and military representatives and acted as a coordinating committee.³⁸ Coordinating committees were also established at state and district levels. These committees provided for unity of effort, reduced duplicative operations, and facilitated the rapid exchange of intelligence, thereby significantly improving operational results.³⁹ Unity of effort was essential to British success there although it took some time to create. British lessons learned from its imperial past seemed to have been misplaced after World War II.⁴⁰

The failure to establish unity of effort between military and pacification programs early in Vietnam was a significant contributor to America's lack of success there.⁴¹ Likewise, the same can be claimed for U.S. efforts in Iraq in 2003.⁴² In this regard, the lessons of Bosnia may have much to offer to future practitioners.⁴³

Unity of Effort: Achieve coherency of actions by all parties involved to attain the desired end state by common efforts and purpose.

CREDIBILITY

³⁸ Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History*, New York: Doubleday, 1975, p. 568.

³⁹ Richard Clutterback, *The Long, Long War – Counter-Insurgency in Malaya and Vietnam*, New York: Praeger, 1966, pp. 57-9.

⁴⁰ John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, Praeger, 2002.

⁴¹ Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

⁴² Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003, pp. 493-557. See also James Fallows, "Blind into Baghdad," *Atlantic Monthly*, Jan./Feb., 2004.

⁴³ See Richard L. Layton, "Command and Control Structure," in *Lessons from Bosnia; The IFOR Experience*, Larry Wentz, ed., Ft. McNair: National Defense University, 1998.

Current American and British doctrine for peace support operations and counterinsurgency stresses the importance of legitimacy. Without any doubt, legitimacy is a vital principle at the strategic level. The perceived legitimacy of the indigenous government the military has been directed to support must be reestablished and maintained. But legitimacy is too often equated to approval by an international organization like the United Nations or the international community writ large.

Within the conduct of Small Wars, legitimacy is not a precondition but a product or result. It is a description of the end state to be achieved. The acceptance of a political solution and the establishment of political institutions as representative to maintain it must be perceived as legitimate in the eyes of the local population. A lasting peace and the reintegration/reharmonization of former insurgents and opposition forces will be impossible to achieve if the political solution is not perceived to be legitimate. Thus, legitimacy remains a strategic objective but it does not provide significant guidance to the employment of the military instrument.

At the operational level in Small Wars, however, *credibility* becomes fundamental. All actions must serve to create and sustain credibility in the eyes of the supported populace or government. The military must pose a credible force to the opposing insurgents or when we are supporting one element of an internal conflict, we must exert our influence to establish that side as a credible military force. The force size and dispositions of our intervention force must be robust enough to be credible. When challenged, the commander must employ sufficient force to reduce the threat to the local population or his own forces, consistent with the nature of that threat and without undue collateral damage or risk to non-combatants. Both the insurgent and the local population need to perceive that

the intervening military forces are, in the classic words of the 1st Marine Division Commander's guidance before Operation Iraqi Freedom, "no better friend and no worse enemy."⁴⁴

Credibility extends to the entire governmental effort, not just military forces. Commanders should ensure that all military operations, especially civil-military actions, deliver as promised. Relationships and trust are built upon credibility. Trust and mutual respect between our forces and the host nation and its representatives reinforce this credibility. At the end of the day, providing the required level of security and providing for the welfare of the population will go far towards establishing relative credibility over an insurgent group, and setting conditions for success.

Credibility is also reinforced when the interventionary force acts in consonance with internationally accepted values and legal obligations. Operating within the law and our own guidelines reinforces our credibility with local leaders and the population. Regardless of the outrages committed by the insurgent or terrorist, our response must always be within lawful bounds. Governments which do not act consistently and in accordance with their own legal system automatically lose the right to demand that its' people comply with the law.⁴⁵ The same is true for military forces. A failure to follow signed treaties and international law with regard to the employment of force, or the handling of prisoners, gives ammunition to the opposition in the fight for the hearts and minds of the indigenous population. Ultimately, success in Small Wars is tied to the generation of an overwhelming impression of credibility. This perception pulls the local

⁴⁴ On the conduct of the Marines in the offensive phases of the war see Williamson Murray and Robert H. Scales, *The War in Iraq*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard/Belknap, 2003; and Bing West and Ray L. Smith, *The March Up, Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division*, New York: Bantam, 2003.

population to their own government, and helps convince the irregular combatants that their cause is doomed. Once that tipping point is achieved, success is assured.

Credibility. *The consistent and legal application of force and the regular provision of services and assistance towards the assigned end state, and consistent support towards the host country in accordance with agreements.*

DISCRIMINATE FORCE

One of the key fundamentals of this form of conflict is the concept of minimizing the use of blunt military force. It is possible to conduct a brilliant series of tactical actions with overwhelming force and firepower and lose the larger strategic goal. “In small wars caution must be exercised and instead of striving to generate the maximum power with forces available,” advises the *Small Wars Manual*, “*the goal is to gain decisive results with the least application of force and the consequent minimum loss of life.*”⁴⁶ Time and time again, history shows that a lack of rectitude or an excess of violence can lead to prolonged conflict.⁴⁷ This is has been codified into U.S. doctrine as the principle of restraint.

The excessive application of military firepower, or an imprudent ill-advised act can significantly alter the strategic situation. Firepower intensive operations may antagonize both external and internal parties that are neutral to the insurgent, swinging support and resources to the opponent. Excessive collateral damage, or accidental injuries to noncombatants will undermine the credibility of U.S. efforts to assist the Host Nation, and make our intervention longer and more costly. The French experience in Algeria is one example of this concern, as were aspects of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In Algeria, the French employed raids, reprisals and interrogations that produced a series of tactical

⁴⁵ Clutterback, p. 52.

⁴⁶ *Small Wars Manual*, p. 32.

successes. However they failed to gain the support of the populace in the long run, and lost popular support at home at the same time.⁴⁸ The Soviets also employed more firepower than necessary, and did not adapt their tactics in Afghanistan, and then repeated their own mistakes in Chechnya.⁴⁹ In Vietnam, U.S. forces inappropriately applied technological superiority and firepower, frequently in a manner at odds with American policy objectives.⁵⁰

The principle of restraint does not adequately capture the degree of discipline and force application needed to succeed in Small Wars of the 21st Century. The concept of restraint may be very appropriate for some kinds of Small Wars, especially peacekeeping operations or when U.S. forces are conducting post-conflict stability operations. Care must always be taken to preserve life, minimize casualties among noncombatants, and reduce property damage. This is a moral and legal imperative, albeit difficult in practice.

However, modern Small Wars pit U.S. forces against acutely agile opponents with no qualms about killing innocents by the thousands. Such opponents recognize no bounds, and are not easily deterred, nor can they be deflected by clever appeals to their conscious. Today's warrior class cannot be argued into submission.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History And Politics Of Counter- insurgency*, University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

⁴⁸ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*, New York: Penguin, 1987 (*revised ed.*). See also Asprey, *War in the Shadow*, pp. 903-931.

⁴⁹ Lester Grau, ed., *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan*, Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1996; Anatoly S. Kulikov, "The First Battle of Grozny," in Russell Glenn, ed., *Capital Preservation: Preparing for Urban Operations in the Twenty-first Century*, Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001.

⁵⁰ See Robert H. Scales, Jr. *Firepower in Limited War*, Novato, CA: Presidio, 1997. Scales concludes his chapter on Vietnam by noting, "If a single lesson is to be learned from the example of Vietnam it is that a finite limit exists to what modern firepower can achieve in a limited war, no matter how sophisticated the ordnance or how intelligently it is applied." *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁵¹ Ralph Peters, "The New Warrior Class Revisited," in his *Beyond Baghdad: Postmodern War and Peace*, Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 2003, pp. 44-60. See also Ralph Peters, "In Praise of

An element of attrition exists in most forms of combat, and has always been present in Small Wars. The requirement to present a credible threat of force, or even apply deadly force if and where needed, is a regrettable necessity. Some elements in today's world cannot be persuaded or deterred from violence. The fundamental guidepost that should steer us in preparing military personnel for the dynamics of modern Small Wars is *discriminate force*. The issue is not restraint or holding back as much as finding the right balance between force and restraint based on the facts on the ground.⁵²

We need to prepare our Soldiers and Marines, by their training and by the use of appropriate rules of engagement, to recognize those situations in which the context and the commander's intent, requires the application of military force. When they recognize that the situation requires the application of deadly force, they should ensure that each firefight or engagement is carried through to resolution. When the situation calls for standing down or withdrawing, the small unit leader should feel empowered to take that action. The development of non-lethal technology is very relevant to this balance, affording the commander more options for quelling a potentially disruptive situations short of employing the full weight of his traditional combat power.

Lethal force must always be applied in consideration of the wider mission and the local context in Small Wars. We need to establish in their mental skill sets, the ability to properly *discriminate* between situations, within the context of the chaos and uncertainty of deadly combat. Military training and educational programs must create and sustain the necessary degree of confidence and professional judgment required to apply force

Attrition," in his *Fighting for the Future; Will America Triumph?*, Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1999.

⁵² Sam Mundy, "No Better Friend, No Worse Enemy," *Naval Institute Proceedings*, April, 2004.

appropriately in Small Wars. This will require changes in current military training programs which only focus on how to employ firepower more efficiently.

Discriminate Force. *The disciplined application of the appropriate amount and type of military force to the specific nature of the contingency and the tactical situation, within the overall intent of the commander and the rules of engagement; a product of extensive training, education and discipline.*

FREEDOM OF ACTION

Security has been a well-recognized principle of war for some time. It is usually thought of in terms of securing one's base of operations or lines of communication. The purpose of underscoring security is to ensure that one's own force is not surprised by any enemy initiatives. Because of the nature of guerrilla operations and the propensity for the weaker side to resort to raids and ambushes against outposts, detachments and convoys, this principle is highly relevant to Small Wars. However, the purpose of gaining security has been often misunderstood. It is not just to prevent surprise or to achieve such a position of force protection that the accomplishment of the mission is sacrificed on the altar of "security at any cost."

The objective is to obtain and sustain a position of advantage in order to prevent the enemy from interfering with our main effort. The whole purpose of security is to preserve or enhance our freedom of action. We do this by reducing the vulnerability of our force to undue influence or interference, in both the physical and informational domains. Thus the aim of creating firm bases, convoy operations, security patrols, check points, etc is not security per se but to sustain our freedom of action *vis-a-vis* the government and the population we are supporting.

Of note, this principle should not be used as an argument for developing an isolated bastion that separates our forces from its coalition partners, its interagency

teammates or the indigenous populace. A cantonment out of touch with the local population may offer secure basing arrangements and an opportunity for our forces to rest between missions. But if it allows the adversary to control key elements of the population or critical resources, or to operate with impunity, it does not contribute to mission success. Close contact and saturation patrols may afford more force protection than intensive fortifications. The improved situational awareness and intelligence gathered through close interaction and cooperation with the populace is one way to establish security and stability for both our forces and the general populace. The coalition or JTF will always have to balance its force protection with its mission. The concept of prudent risk will guide commanders as they seek to achieve this balance.⁵³

Freedom of action has a psychological benefit that is at least as important as the material gain because it gives tangible evidence of success in the minds of the populace. Most people want to be on the winning team, and if we are unable to secure a home base and freely operate throughout the AOR, it is unlikely we will be successful in convincing a wavering population that we can extend the necessary security to them. Likewise, our ability to operate at will sends a signal to the populace that it should support the side of the conflict we have joined.

Freedom of Action. *Those measures designed to economically provide for freedom of action for friendly forces to maneuver freely throughout the operational area and to retard the movement or actions of non-friendly forces. This allows the Joint force to*

⁵³ American forces have been accused in both Bosnia and in Afghanistan of establishing excessively large and isolated fortresses, and employing force protection measures (body armor, tanks, and pointing weapons) that antagonize rather than generate calm among the local population. In Bosnia, some U.S. officers have openly stated that force protection was more important than mission accomplishment. Some of this derives from a low appreciation of so called peacekeeping operations, and the rest is attributed to a risk adverse culture among military officers. Don M. Snider, John A. Nagl and Tony Pfaff, *Professionalism, the Military Ethic, and Officership in the 21st Century*, Carlisle, PA: Army War College, Dec. 1999.

preclude surprise or interference, retain the initiative and exploit opportunities to maneuver temporally or spatially anywhere at a time and place of its choosing.

ENDURANCE

One of the principles in American doctrine is perseverance. It is defined as “the measured, protracted application of military capability in support of strategic aims.”⁵⁴ This principle acknowledges that Small Wars are rarely short affairs. The asymmetric nature of small wars often forces the weaker power into strategies that rely upon protracting the conflict in hopes of capitalizing on an asymmetry of wills. If we demonstrate through either word, deed, or policy that we do not have the stomach to stay for the long haul, our adversaries employ a strategy of exhaustion to sap our will. Osama bin Laden claimed that the rapid withdrawal of American forces from Somalia in early 1994 represented a weakness in the U.S. capacity to sustain an effort.

But persistence and perseverance are attitudes. We may want to persevere but lack the national will or the institutional capacity to operate within a foreign country for the protracted nature of the conflict. We may have the will, but lack the physical endurance to sustain our forces, and operate in austere operating environments, or lack sufficient expeditionary forces to cover the assigned area of responsibility. This is more than just persistence, for a force can persistently apply the wrong tactics or persistently insist on employing firepower intensive operations instead of discriminate force. We must apply both will *and* capacity to succeed in Small Wars, and must do so over an extended period of time.

For these reasons, endurance is a more appropriate fundamental than persistence. Rapid results are rare in Small Wars. We need to apply the approach of

competitors like Lance Armstrong in events like the Tour de France. This grueling competition contains many different forms of racing; including time trials, sprints, long distance flat rides, and punishing mountain climbs. It also includes individual and well as team events, analogous to our efforts with other agencies to achieve U.S. national interests. The right tactics, good equipment, and arduous training must complement the mental perseverance of the rider. Preparation, mental, material and physical are at the heart of endurance. Likewise, in Small Wars, coalitions and JTF must employ the right combination of tactics in different types of competition, they must employ their equipment and leverage the capabilities of the entire team, including the interagency and humanitarian relief agencies, if they are to succeed.

Endurance. *The combined institutional and individual capabilities that facilitate the resolute commitment of national and military resources over a protracted period.*

AGILITY

Small Wars place a premium on agility at three levels; mental, organizational and operational. Yet, agility is not defined as a principle for either conventional or irregular warfare. Small Wars have usually required a special mindset—akin to what the U.S. Marines call their expeditionary mindset and cultural ethos--constantly prepared for immediate deployment overseas into austere operating environments, bringing the minimum necessary to accomplish the mission, ready to adapt to new situations, and mentally agile enough to create and implement innovative solutions to unanticipated circumstances, in cultural contexts that may be completely foreign. This is a tall order.

Mental agility is formed by the study of history, frequent exercises and simulations that test one's professional judgment against thinking opponents in tough situations.

⁵⁴ Joint Pub. 3-07, p. II-4 to II-5.

Professional military institutions need to develop and reinforce individual and collective learning for such situations. Agility is based on mental alertness and conditioning, and improves the ability to move swiftly and change direction or mode of operation on short notice based upon pattern recognition and training.

Agility lies at the heart of the “Three Block War” construct, describing the tactical complexity of having to conduct offensive, peacekeeping, and humanitarian tasks consecutively or even simultaneously.⁵⁵ Within each of these blocks, military personnel must recognize the need to adapt their tactics, techniques and procedures on the fly. Each block requires different skill sets and different methods, and the military leader has to seamlessly alter his approach and tactics as the context changes.

In Small Wars, the enemy is extremely elusive, employs irregular tactics, and disperses to avoid destruction by our technological superiority. Success in these contests requires great creativity, better situational awareness, autonomy, and increased freedom of action at lower tactical levels. This enables subordinate commanders to compress decision cycles, seize the initiative, exploit actionable intelligence, and take advantage of fleeting opportunities. Small unit actions are guided by mission tactics and decentralized means of command and control. Decentralization pushes decision-making authority and responsibility down to the lowest level necessary.

Operational agility is abetted by decentralized and distributed operations to deal with ambiguous threats and help commanders fill in the blanks that technology alone cannot resolve with the persistence, granularity, and discrimination we need for unconventional opponents.

⁵⁵ This construct is identified with General Charles C. Krulak, USMC, (ret.).

Today's conflicts are the ultimate small unit or squad leader's war, and demand greater levels of agility and preparation at each level. Adaptive threats will be met and overcome by an agile and distributed network of small unit leaders who have been trained, educated and empowered to lead.⁵⁶ This exploits one of our strongest but less exploited strengths, our human capital, and accelerates operational speed and tempo of operations.

At the operational level, Small Wars present the same challenges and the need to shift from offensive operations to stability and support operations. At the same time, we need to be alert to changes in the enemy's methods and recognize that the nature of conflict is dialectal--the opponent has a vote too. He may not respect the American penchant for thinking of conflict in phases, our phased approach, and we need to be prepared to shift back and forth between operating modes. The United States has had problems adapting to changes in context in situations in both Beirut and Mogadishu. In these cases a lack of agility proved fatal.⁵⁷ The situation must be constantly evaluated for changes in context that may change the mission, required resources, or operations.

Organizational agility is inherent to emerging Joint doctrine in the United States. The ability to rapidly reconfigure combined arms teams for deployment and employment augurs well for future Small Wars. The adaptive, task-organized nature of Joint Task Forces, and the ability to re-aggregate or disperse based upon the situation is a classic example of organizational agility or flexibility. Given the dynamic, adaptive nature of the threat, it is likely that an effective countering strategy will require an equally dynamic

⁵⁶ The Marines are exploring this idea with a new operating concept called Distributed Operations. See BGen Robert E. Schmidle, "Distributed Operations From the Sea," *Marine Corps Gazette*, August, 2004.

⁵⁷ See F. G. Hoffman, *Decisive Force; The New American Way of War*, Westport, CT; Praeger, 1996, pp. 39-60, on Beirut. On Mogadishu, see Jonathan Stevenson, *Losing Mogadishu: Testing U.S. Policy in Somalia*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995.

and multi-disciplinary organizational structure which will vary from mission to mission. In such situations, armored columns may not be at the fore. There will be times where either a Civil Affairs or Engineer unit must serve as the main effort, with more traditional maneuver units in support. Other times, the JTF or subordinate units may lead or be subordinated to an Interagency Task Force with members of the Justice Department, State Department, or intelligence community represented. The Provincial Reconstruction Team approach used in Afghanistan and Iraq is an example of such organizational agility.

Agility: *The purposeful adaptation of organizational structure, mode of operations and mentality to the unique complexity, ambiguity and context of the particular contingency at hand.*

Conclusion

In this Second Small Wars era, military professionals will have to dust off some of the more obscure military classics, as well as throw off anachronistic conceptions about war. Dog-eared copies of Clausewitz will still be relevant, but Charles Callwell and T. E. Lawrence have much to offer to today's student of war.⁵⁸ American students of war would do well to understand the founding of their own country and their own participation in the Savage Wars of Peace.⁵⁹ Americans have quite a bit of experience to draw upon, but are prone to quickly shrug off these irregular experiences as interest from civilian leaders waxes and wanes, and return to its prevailing Big War paradigm.⁶⁰

The purpose of these principles should be clear. The conundrums and complexities inherent in the conduct of war can never be resolved by a list of fundamentals. Models and

⁵⁸ In particular, T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, New York, 1991. See also Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Colonel Lawrence: The Man Behind the Legend*, Halcyon House, 1937.

⁵⁹ Starting with Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, Perseus Books, 2002; Anthony James Joes, *America and Guerrilla Warfare*, University Press of Kentucky, 2000.

frameworks are only the starting point for an analysis of a contingency. There are no formulas for successfully outlining a strategy or artfully conducting a war, whether conventional or irregular in nature.⁶¹ This is especially clear in regard to the latter in this new century. The nature of today's more primitive Small Wars and more adaptive enemies suggest that formulaic approaches could be extremely fatal.

⁶⁰ The author is indebted to Dr. Wray Johnson, Marine Corps University for this point. See also Metz and Millen, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, p. 22.

⁶¹ Williamson Murray and Mark Grimsley, "Introduction: On Strategy," in Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein, eds., *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 1.