

# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

*Form Approved*  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 27-10-2010		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> FINAL		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b>	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> How can political campaign strategy be adopted to support information operations In a counterinsurgency campaign?				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b>  LCDR Andrew K. Ledford, USN  Paper Advisor (if Any): PROF Mark Vaughn				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b>  Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b>				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> A paper submitted to the Naval War College faculty in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b>  As Karl von Clausewitz noted, war is a continuation of political activity by other means and counterinsurgency provides one of the best examples of how this is true. The contest for support of a population is a contest not about the people but for their allegiance. U.S. political campaign theory developed over many decades of local, regional and national elections is about influencing the population to support one side or another. Political campaign strategy can provide a valuable and appropriate mindset for all COIN forces in addition to numerous useful practices to benefit the informational campaign within counterinsurgency because it also targets the population's allegiance in the same manner. This paper will present a framework based on political campaigns theory for both the Joint Task Force Commander down to the lowest tactical members of the COIN forces to take the offensive in the message war within counterinsurgency. It will also present a few of the many common political campaign practices such as benchmark polls, focus groups, development of messages and political campaign targeting and demonstrate how they can serve the counterinsurgency effort. Finally the paper makes recommendations in its conclusion on how the counterinsurgency forces could implement this model throughout the force.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Political Campaigns, Counterinsurgency, Information Operations					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> UNCLASSIFIED			Chairman, JMO Dept
				23	<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)</b> 401-841-3556



**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE**  
**Newport, R.I.**

**How can political campaign strategy be adopted to support Information Operations in a Counterinsurgency campaign?**

**by**

**LCDR Andrew Ledford, USN**



**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

**27 October 2010**

## Contents

<b>Introduction.</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Why political campaign strategy is needed.</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The mindset of a political campaign within COIN.</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Getting started with benchmark polls.</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>General polling and focus groups.</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Political campaign targeting.</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Some benefits of political campaign messaging.</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Isn't this just psychology 101?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Recommendations in conclusion.</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>19</b>

## **Abstract**

*How can political campaign strategy be adopted to support Information Operations in a Counterinsurgency campaign?*

As Karl von Clausewitz noted, war is a continuation of political activity by other means and counterinsurgency provides one of the best examples of how this is true. The contest for support of a population is a contest not about the people but for their allegiance. U.S. political campaign theory developed over many decades of local, regional and national elections is about influencing the population to support one side or another. Political campaign strategy can provide a valuable and appropriate mindset for all COIN forces in addition to numerous useful practices to benefit the informational campaign within counterinsurgency because it also targets the population's allegiance in the same manner. This paper will present a framework based on political campaigns theory for both the Joint Task Force Commander down to the lowest tactical members of the COIN forces to take the offensive in the message war within counterinsurgency. It will also present a few of the many common political campaign practices such as benchmark polls, focus groups, development of messages and political campaign targeting and demonstrate how they can serve the counterinsurgency effort. Finally the paper makes recommendations in its conclusion on how the counterinsurgency forces could implement this model throughout the force.

*It is clear that war is not a mere act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means.*

-Karl von Clausewitz, *On War*<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

Karl von Clausewitz's statement that war is a continuation of political activity by other means can provide no better example than in counterinsurgency. It is commonly stated in counterinsurgency (COIN) theory that the population is the prize between the local government forces the United States is assisting and the insurgents.<sup>2</sup> Both sides are vying for support of the population which either allows or denies insurgents sanctuary amongst the people. As Mao Tse Tung would claim, "the guerilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea." The contest for support of a population is a contest not really about the people but more accurately for their allegiance. Most insurgent forces are advocating for either a new form of government altogether or at the very least, separation from the current government in order for self-rule of a section of the population. The essence of this is a political contest for control of the government in which the population is not voting solely on one specific day but every day of the year.<sup>3</sup> In a very similar manner, U.S. political campaign theory is about influencing the population to support one side or another. With this similarity in mind, the major facets of political campaign strategy can provide a valuable and appropriate mindset for all COIN forces in addition to numerous useful practices to benefit the informational campaign within counterinsurgency.

The value of a political campaign mindset would not be to replace an existing theory or doctrine but rather provide an easily understood framework that would overlay all COIN operations to some degree. In addition to a new paradigm, just a few of the common political

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 75-89.

<sup>2</sup> Colin Jackson, "The Chameleon War: Iraq 2003-2010." (lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 10 May 2010.)

<sup>3</sup> Marc Genest, "Winning the War of Ideas: The Strategic Communication Battle in the Long War." (lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 24 May 2010).

campaign practices with many decades of considerable research will be discussed in regards to COIN to demonstrate how this theory can be of benefit in counterinsurgency. An examination of benchmark polls, focus groups, the development of messages and themes and political campaign targeting should demonstrate the value of this model for the counterinsurgency forces. Due to the constraints of this paper, only a few of these practices will be considered in this approach although there are many more that are applicable and useful. The notion of using the model of a political campaign in considering each action of the COIN force along with the explanation of these political campaign techniques within the realm of counter-insurgency should demonstrate the value of this concept.<sup>4</sup>

### **Why Political Campaign Strategy Is Needed**

The true operational skill in counterinsurgency relies heavily on information operations.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately for the United States, publications on Information Operations (IO) such as Joint Publication for Information Operations 3-13 (February 2006) typically do not provide an overarching framework for the common soldier or marine whose actions can either significantly support or destroy the *message* to the population. The opening paragraph of JP 3-13 states that its purpose is “to provide joint force commanders and their staffs guidance” in information operations.<sup>6</sup> The strategic corporal has an effect on national policy and strategy because he is sending a message to an audience that most often is different from what the message submitted at the strategic level.<sup>7</sup> Much of both publications deal with the explanation of the information environment and elements in addition to some planning

---

<sup>4</sup> Marc Genest, “Winning the War of Ideas: The Strategic Communication Battle in the Long War.” (lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 24 May 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Information Operations*, Joint Publication (JP) 3-13 (Washington, DC: CJCS, 13 February 2006), ix.

<sup>7</sup> Marc Genest, “Winning the War of Ideas: The Strategic Communication Battle in the Long War.” (lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 24 May 2010).

considerations mostly for units assigned specific IO functions. What is lacking in IO manuals is an overall understanding of how information operations can be utilized by every member of the force whether they are the flag officer providing operational leadership or the lead breacher of an assault force at the micro-tactical level. The lack of a commonly understood thread that ties all COIN actions together for the COIN forces to understand and pass along to the population is the void that political campaign strategy would fill. It is the concept that every mounted or unmounted patrol, every engagement with insurgent forces, indeed every event of everyday in the COIN world is a political campaign event that either pushes the population to vote one way or the other. The votes are not permanent as they are in an election but if the majority of daily votes in a given year are one way, there is a very good chance that mind of the population has been made up. Every day is a battle for that vote.<sup>8</sup>

An additional benefit in using political campaign strategy is that it is an extremely well researched topic with decades and decades of experience in local, regional and national campaigns influencing human cognitive functions and actions. The enormous amount of effort and money that has been spent on the subject is readily visible during each election season. Although some techniques are more relevant to the American population from which these American political campaign procedures were developed, a majority simply work because of a commonality of human interaction and thought process that is applicable not only in foreign elections but also conducting COIN with foreign populations.

There is a considerable amount of advice in political campaign management books read under the COIN lamp that provide ample ammunition for considering this concept

---

<sup>8</sup> Marc Genest, "Winning the War of Ideas: The Strategic Communication Battle in the Long War." (lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 24 May 2010).

viable. Small points such as “protect home base first - if you have a strong base of support, protect that first, then go after other votes,”<sup>9</sup> as well as “dominate the dominant medium”<sup>10</sup> in regards to message vehicles all have deep meaning within COIN. In a section titled “112 Lessons learned from a Career in Politics”, the #1 lesson which certainly would rank #1 with COIN as well is that “strategy is the single most important factor in political campaigns – if you cannot write it down, you do not have a strategy.”<sup>11</sup> These lessons learned over many, many years by a legion of political campaign consultants and managers who have dedicated entire careers and vast sums of money to this purpose can have enormous benefits to information operations and counterinsurgency when used appropriately.

The assumption in this discussion is that the COIN force is working to address the grievances of the population. Whether it is services, land reform or basic security, if there is not a considerable effort to address the root cause of the population’s complaints, the efforts of the COIN force will be in vain.<sup>12</sup> The Rhodesian military from 1965 to 1980 were well trained in counterinsurgency with many lessons learned recently from the British campaign in Kenya against the Mau-Maus. Due to a lack of understanding and attention to the main complaint of the largely Zimbabwean nationalists desiring self-rule, the Rhodesian security forces fell into “the classical dilemma of all counterinsurgents: victory in every tactical battle with guerrilla forces in the field, but loss in the vital strategic battle to win over the „hearts and minds“ of the population.”<sup>13</sup> The concept of using political campaign theory

---

<sup>9</sup> Ronald A. Faucheux, ed., *Winning Elections* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003), 29.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>12</sup> John Waghelstein, “Guerrilla, Partisan, Irregular or Unconventional Warfare as an Adjunct to Conventional War” (Lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 2 Sep 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Michael Evans, "The Wretched of the Empire: Politics, Ideology and Counterinsurgency in Rhodesia, 1965-80," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 176.



within COIN, although able to provide a considerable advantage for the COIN forces, cannot be a substitute for addressing the grumblings of the population and catalyst of the insurgency.

### **The Mindset of a Political Campaign Within COIN**

The primary beneficiary of these lessons learned from political campaigns within COIN is the host nation. It is their government that is to rule the people and it is their contest with the insurgents over the support of the population. The United States military and state department should not even be considered as campaign managers because it is not a U.S. campaign to manage only to consult.<sup>14</sup> The U.S. players available to assist the foreign government with COIN are the political consultants who can assist with message development and delivery. As political consultants, the U.S. forces must reinforce the campaign plan of the host government and advise on how to make it better. Every action by U.S. and coalition forces should be to continually reinforce this campaign. The Joint Publication for Counterinsurgency Operations states that “there are a range of operational approaches to COIN”<sup>15</sup> from direct, balanced to indirect but more often than not, the United States will merely be working by, with and through a host government and it will be their campaign to execute with U.S. assistance.

The concept of “by, with and through” is already fairly prevalent within counter-insurgency thinking.<sup>16</sup> Using the common understanding of how a political campaign is organized and conducted can provide an easy model for a framework for the COIN force. “The political campaign is never about the consultants or campaign managers. It is always

---

<sup>14</sup> Marc Genest, in discussion with the author, 16 September 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24 (Washington, DC: CJCS, 05 October 2009), III-8.

<sup>16</sup> Admiral Eric T. Olson, “Testimony,” Senate, *The Posture of Special Operations Forces: Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 110<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2008, 6.

about the candidate which in this case is the host government.”<sup>17</sup> Understanding and utilizing this idea should make it relatively clear in the minds of every member of the COIN force that the purpose of their actions must always be traced back to *selling* the host government and their ability to govern, whether that is local, regionally or nationally.<sup>18</sup> This means that the success of the COIN force must outwardly demonstrate a success of the host government in order to truly be of merit to the political campaign. If the COIN force captures or kills the #1 insurgent and receives the credit rather than the local forces or government, the success is only limited. While the leader of the insurgent organization was eliminated, another will be in his place and the event will merely bolster the *need* for outside intervention to maintain the legitimacy of the host government.

The Joint Task Force commander is the lead political consultant who should not be seen as leading the COIN effort but rather advising the local government and forces. The best example of how this type of relationship should exist was in the Philippines during the Huk Rebellion in the 1950’s in which the Philippine forces were led by Ramon Magsaysay and U.S. assistance was provided by General Edward Lansdale.<sup>19</sup> General Lansdale was always working within the shadows providing constant consultation, and the main figure seen by both the population as well as the enemy was the Philippine Secretary of National Defense, Ramon Magsaysay.<sup>20</sup> This is the mindset that political campaign strategy reinforces at all levels allowing for the host nation, not the U.S. or Coalition forces to take credit for any success.

---

<sup>17</sup> Marc Genest, in discussion with the author, 16 September 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Marc Genest, “Winning the War of Ideas: The Strategic Communication Battle in the Long War.” (lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 24 May 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Colonel John Waghelstein, “Huk Rebellion” (lecture, Naval War College, Newport RI, 16 Sept, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

## Getting Started With Benchmark Polls

The essential element of both political campaign strategy and influencing a population “by, with and through” our foreign counterparts is a clear understanding of the population. It is the consistent criticism offered from many senior Al-Qaeda leaders after nine 1-year deployments of U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan. The most common method for incoming units to *understand* the population merely consists of getting a turnover brief from the previous unit. While the lessons learned are important to be gathered and passed along, a true understanding of the population is seldom accurately captured in this method by the incoming unit.

Political campaigns face the same dilemma with a new campaign every two to four years. Because the population and their needs change even within this period, most campaigns begin with a benchmark poll. Benchmark polls in politics begin by “looking at the incumbent’s vulnerabilities” and “open ended questions that find out the most important problems in a local community.”<sup>21</sup> It will also ask general and specific questions about momentum and election interest. This poll will “show you the lay of the political land on various issues and the overall political environment.”<sup>22</sup> The information gathered during this polling will help develop “elements of your image to stress, attitudes of various groups, and overall strategy.”<sup>23</sup> Obviously as stated earlier, the key product will be information to develop the overall operational direction. It must start with the benchmark poll to adequately determine the course one will take. This course can change as new information becomes apparent but a benchmark poll provides the initial roadmap the campaign will use to get to the destination. Because an essential component of the COIN problem is the perception and

---

<sup>21</sup> Ronald A. Faucheux, ed., *Winning Elections* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003), 163.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 163.

<sup>23</sup> Karen Johnson-Cartee and Gary Copeland, *Inside Political Campaigns*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 133.

needs of the people, without using a benchmark poll as a reference point, operational direction becomes more of a trial and error exercise based on the experience passed along from previous units.

Counterinsurgency forces that do not conduct this type of broad polling of the population either assume that the previous unit's road map was accurate or even worse, just start driving without a map. The problem faced by most units is that by the time they understand the population more from personal experience over their deployment, it is time to redeploy. Conducting a benchmark poll is somewhat similar to an assessment utilized by Civil Affairs units but on a much broader scale that can represent a full snapshot of the population. It is labor intensive and is best when brought "down to the local level whenever possible."<sup>24</sup> This broad look will help paint a picture of what strategy is needed to combat insurgent forces for the support of the people. It will demonstrate what really matters to the people and where COIN forces can target their efforts in development and diplomacy.

Security and population willingness is bound to be a concern when considering benchmark polls and polling in general. This is a problem that is similarly already overcome when gathering intelligence on the enemy. Human intelligence collection has demonstrated that it is possible to gather this information although it must be done discreetly and through local support. Done in a similar manner, benchmark polling, a staple of most political campaigns, can likewise provide an enormous advantage to incoming units with understanding their population first and foremost before attempting to influence them.

### **General Polling and Focus Groups**

Polling, also known as survey research, does not end with the benchmark poll. It is a continuous process that constantly refines what issues are important, how the population is

---

<sup>24</sup> Ronald A. Faucheux, ed., *Winning Elections* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003), 163.

shifting and the impact of the messages and events. It plays a considerable part of the every political campaign which “as a general rule, should expect to spend from 5 to 10 percent of its budget on survey research.”<sup>25</sup> It is such an important tool that most political campaigns hire professional polling organizations rather than attempting to do it themselves. It is a major business within campaign consulting firms that uses quantitative tools and statistical analysis to provide a broad understanding of the population. The author of *Napolitan’s Rules: 112 Lessons From A Career in Politics*, Joseph Napolitan, one of the founders of the political consulting industry, stated “I will not run a campaign without adequate polling – but neither will I place total dependence on the polls.”<sup>26</sup> It is an essential element to understanding the population but cannot be considered a political campaign or COIN panacea. Polling, when used appropriately, can be an exceptional instrument in guiding operational direction of COIN forces to get the biggest bang for their buck.

Another tool that is common within political campaigns is the use of focus groups. While polling is a quantitative tool that looks at a broader picture with numbers, focus groups are a qualitative mechanism to determine the nuances of public perception, test campaign messages and ideas as well as determine the impact of events.<sup>27</sup> Focus groups often utilize one-way mirrors and participants’ expressions, body language as well as emotions are captured for analysis.<sup>28</sup> This type of information is helpful in fine-tuning an approach or message as well as using interaction to discover deeper issues and root causes. It will not typically give a representation of the broad demographic and chances are there could be

---

<sup>25</sup> Ronald A. Faucheux, ed., *Winning Elections* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003), 173.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Biemer (Governatorial Campaign Manager for John Robitaille), e-mail message to author, 8 Oct 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Ronald A. Faucheux, ed., *Winning Elections* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003), 176.

greater disparity between results but if used along with polling, focus groups can be an extremely effective tool in the information operations campaign within COIN.

This need for background and a deeper understanding of the population can be demonstrated with the military's more recent quest to bring anthropologists into the COIN tent. There could be considerable resistance from the anthropology field in assisting the military in this endeavor for fear of affecting the amount of cooperation and acceptance these social scientists receive from the population they are studying. The field's wariness in associating with the military strengthens the need for the military to collate this kind of information for itself. Focus groups may be one way to satisfy this need in addition to providing a litmus test for new ideas and messages. The point of this analysis of political campaign theory for COIN is not to describe in detail how to conduct polling and focus groups but to suggest that their use within information operations can provide a significant understanding of the population and advantage in COIN operations.

### **Political Campaign Targeting**

The information that polling gives you is only the first step of the process. As in COIN, campaign funds are typically very limited. As in counterinsurgency, there is not enough of a political war chest in most campaigns to run television ads on every station or send campaign advertisements to every household. "These are the reason why a campaign needs to place a high priority on taking advantage of the multiplier effect of professional targeting in directing a message that appeals to those most likely to respond favorably."<sup>29</sup> Political campaign targeting refers to making the most out of the limited resources and manpower that is available in order to affect the greatest amount of population that can be

---

<sup>29</sup> Ronald A. Faucheux, ed., *Winning Elections* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003), 224.

influenced. How you attempt to influence is equally as important as who you attempt to influence.

The typical classification of targeting methods in political campaigns is “individual, household, group and geographic.”<sup>30</sup> Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. Individual targeting is the most important but requires extensive manpower and resources to accomplish. Household targeting attempts to conserve resources and is a more efficient method. Group targeting and geographic targeting are not nearly as capable although both have certain advantages.<sup>31</sup> Group targeting allows key issues widely agreed upon by the group to be used as a stepping stones to other matters. Another advantage of group targeting is that there is cost value in typically only having to address the leadership of the group. Influencing the leadership most often leads to influence of a good portion of the group. The oldest method utilized in political campaigns is geographic targeting which is the least preferred and efficient. It often wastes resources and manpower on voters who cannot be influenced. Regardless of how homogenous a local group may appear, each individual and household is on a movable scale of their propensity to be influenced. The very nature of human individuality suggests that there are differences within geographic groups. The geographic method is often used when there is a lack of data regarding the characteristics of the population. The more data gained through polls, census, and previous elections, the less likely a campaign will resort to using geographic targeting.<sup>32</sup> The database of individual, household, group and geographic profiles are extremely valuable to both political and COIN campaigns. They are centralized within a party headquarters that allows local, regional and national campaigns to make use of the data. Similarly, COIN forces should seek to combine

---

<sup>30</sup> Ronald A. Faucheux, ed., *Winning Elections* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003), 225.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 226.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 227.

such data that can be utilized in message and theme development for local, regional and national products. Without of seamless integration of local nuances with big picture messages about the primary customer, the host nation government, there will be great difficulty for the COIN forces in winning the vote on a consistent basis.

### **Some Benefits of Political Campaign Messaging**

Polling, focus groups and political campaign targeting should all serve to reinforce the central theme or message of the campaign. This theme and message should spell out definitively why the population should support one group over the other. It is applicable at the local, regional and national levels. “A campaign message isn’t an empty slogan or catchy sound bite – although you can use slogans and sound bites to explain them to voters. A campaign message is about substance, it is about real things that matter to voters.”<sup>33</sup> That will differ by local areas and ethnic groups requiring a clear understanding of what is important locally to the people. As with state and national elections, issues that matter to one electorate may not matter as much to another. All units conducting COIN need to understand what *message* resonates best with the local population they are dealing with. All actions of the COIN forces need to support that local message somehow in addition to supporting the national theme.

A method used in political campaigns to keep the message at the forefront of all actions and events is the use of a *message box*.

“A simple diagram that is divided into quadrants, explaining (a) what your campaign will say about your candidate, (b) what your campaign will say about the opposition, (c) what you expect the opposition to say about themselves, and (d) what you expect the opposition to say about you.”<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Ronald A. Faucheux, ed., *Winning Elections* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003), 68.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 68.



The message box is not simply a product used only by information officers. In a COIN environment, it is so important that it should be known and carried by each member of the force in the same manner Rules of Engagement cards are. It is the crib sheet to winning the vote of the population. If COIN forces have an understanding of the population through polling and focus groups but fail to apply the right messages or counter the enemy's message, improvement of the situation will be practically impossible. In operational art terms it allows each member of the force to understand and attempt to address an enemy's critical vulnerability in addition to emphasizing the COIN forces' own strengths.

Another aspect of the message box and theme development involves a willingness to include negative messages about the opposition. This is a lesson that was learned many years ago in the political campaign field. "Years ago, campaigns often took pride in ignoring the opposition. They refused to „dignify“ their rivals by even mentioning them. But 21<sup>st</sup> century message-based campaigns rarely ignore the opposition."<sup>35</sup> Almost every local, state and national campaign today uses negatives messages to some degree. These messages do not translate to negative campaigning in the modern sense. It is simply a method to proactively address the differences between the two groups on issues that are important to voters. Just as COIN forces would not voluntarily draw attention to their own mistakes and weaknesses, the insurgency likewise will not highlight their own the flaws with their intentions to govern the population. It is only by using negative messaging that a full comparison can be made for the population. It is not enough to simply speak to the positive aspects of why the population should *vote* for your side.

---

<sup>35</sup> Ronald A. Faucheux, ed., *Winning Elections* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003), 69.

The enemy takes full advantage of negative messaging continually putting COIN forces on the defensive.<sup>36</sup> This is a lesson learned over many decades of political campaigning and one that COIN forces should learn quickly. Only in football will the “defense win football games but staying on the offense wins wars and political campaigns.”<sup>37</sup> The implied message of this statement is that the only way to win an election is to campaign proactively in the offense. If one side only campaigns defensively in reaction to events or announcements by the other side, the chances of winning are slim. Similarly, a counterinsurgency force that continually reacts to information events by the enemy can never expect to win the population’s vote in a message war. The posture of U.S. forces in Afghanistan over the past nine years has been primarily defensive in the information battle. Without a transition in the information campaign to the offense by providing a full comparison to include negative messaging about the insurgents, progress will be difficult.<sup>38</sup>

### **Isn’t this just Psychology 101?**

Some would argue that the benefits described in using political campaign strategy are just a derivative of psychology and understanding human nature which are already a major component within Information Operations with Military Informational Support Operations (formerly known as PsyOps). While understanding the population and the elements that affect their behavior are admittedly already important in IO, this does not provide an effective umbrella of guidance for the entire counter-insurgency force. The IO operators may understand what is important to the population and how certain actions may affect them but unless there is a common understanding amongst all COIN players in recognizing this. The

---

<sup>36</sup> Marc Genest, “Winning the War of Ideas: The Strategic Communication Battle in the Long War.” (lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 24 May 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Ronald A. Faucheux, ed., *Winning Elections* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003), 69.

<sup>38</sup> Marc Genest, “Winning the War of Ideas: The Strategic Communication Battle in the Long War.” (lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 24 May 2010).

psychology and knowledge of human nature solely residing within the IO field is simply not enough. The evidence in this statement is that after nine years in Afghanistan, there are still good portions of the U.S. forces that do not understand that the population is extremely important to overall success.<sup>39</sup> Political campaigns are an easily identifiable concept that every member of the COIN force has had some exposure to. It can provide a concept that is quickly understood and implemented.

Another concept sometimes argued to be of use in developing a common thread within information operations is social/product marketing strategy.<sup>40</sup> It also uses an understanding of human nature to influence a population to think a certain way about a certain product and affect their actions. Although loosely similar in theory, there are several reasons why product marketing falls short as a useful model when compared to political campaign advertising, many of which have been documented in several studies referenced in various political campaign books. There is a much *higher expectation*<sup>41</sup> of the target audience with political advertising than with product advertising because the stakes are significantly higher. The decisions addressed in political advertising similar to COIN, affect the jobs, schools and entire way of life of the population rather than just what type of soap they use or drink they prefer. The advertising methods used because of this higher expectation are vastly different. Political campaign advertising also has much *higher persuasive goals*<sup>42</sup> than product advertising. An article regarding public relations and presidential campaigns stated, “a commercial program can be a great success if it „sells“ 5 percent of the market. A political program will probably fail if it does not „sell“ more than 50

---

<sup>39</sup> Marc Genest, “Winning the War of Ideas: The Strategic Communication Battle in the Long War.” (lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 24 May 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Colin Jackson, in discussion with the author, 7 October 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Karen Johnson-Cartee and Gary Copeland, *Inside Political Campaigns*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 45.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

percent of the electoral market.”<sup>43</sup> Finally, a political campaign, as well as a COIN campaign, must be very responsive in nature. “Unlike the usual long-term product advertising programs, political advertising requires responsive strategies that are able to react and respond to breaking news events, public pronouncements, and opposition advertising.”<sup>44</sup> As with a political campaign, information operations within COIN must be able to address circumstances as they happen. Often, the first story told is the only one remembered, requiring 24/7 attention by the political campaign and COIN staffs. The use of political campaign strategy as a model for COIN is the only method that relates the greatest significance of the information in addition to maintaining the flexibility and responsiveness required in COIN.

### **Recommendations in Conclusion.**

The similarity in theory between political campaigns and information operations within the COIN construct can be easily demonstrated by the numerous military terms used in campaign management books. The book *Winning Elections* has an entire chapter entitled “War Without Blood: Military Roots of Political Strategy” in which the principles of mass, objective, offense, simplicity, economy of force, strategic maneuver, unity of command, surprise and secrecy are all discussed in how they are essential in political campaigns.<sup>45</sup>

The similarity is derived from an overall goal in political campaigns to influence the population in order to choose one individual or another much in the same manner that COIN forces desire the population to support the host government over the insurgency. Winning the vote of the population allows COIN forces to successfully isolate insurgent leaders and elements. The use of the political campaign mindset by the entire COIN force to include the

---

<sup>43</sup> Karen Johnson-Cartee and Gary Copeland, *Inside Political Campaigns*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 43.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>45</sup> Ronald A. Faucheux, ed., *Winning Elections* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003), 97.

joint task force commander and below can provide the right framework to address an indirect approach to COIN of influencing the population to deny safe haven to the insurgency. It is a framework that is lacking and often misunderstood by the COIN forces. The understanding that the U.S./coalition forces are consultants aiding the local forces in the execution of their own campaign plan is a nuance that can mean success or defeat in the long COIN battle. Implementing this framework beginning with the JTF commander recognizing that his role is the consultant and not the lead of the COIN effort is the first step. The entire COIN force must then understand the political campaign they are waging to include what messages they are supporting as well as the enemy's message they are working against. Because the importance of this mindset is so critical to an offensive attitude in the message war, ensuring the entire COIN force carries a message box card along with their ROE card is one manner in which this framework can be presented and remembered.

In addition to this mindset, many individual practices of political campaigns can also be applied with great success to the informational campaign within COIN. As a national election would require a grassroots campaign involving both national and local headquarters to influence the population, the operational commander as well tactical commanders would use the concepts of benchmark polls, polling and focus groups, messaging and political targeting in their COIN campaigns. The joint task force commander (JTF) should work with the host nation to provide the spark and main themes that are echoed and reinforced all the way down to the tactical levels. The understanding and influence of the local population seamlessly integrated locally, regionally and nationally through the JTF commander should serve to reinforce the value of the host government in the minds of the population. Political campaign theory and practices provide an easily understood vehicle for COIN forces to

appropriately address the insurgent's critical vulnerability of popular support and ultimately eliminate the threat of the insurgency. Implementing this mindset and the practices of political campaigns throughout the COIN force would transform informational operations from a component that typically resides only amongst information officers and units to one that included every member of the COIN force. The security battle is one that the military knows well. As Clausewitz suggested less than 200 years ago however, politics within warfare is inseparable and in the message battle, especially within counterinsurgency, the military still has much to learn. A thorough study of decades of political campaign experience can provide one of several lessons required for successful military counterinsurgency operations.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amend, Kurt, "Counterinsurgency Principles for the Diplomat." *Orbis* 54, no. 2 (April 2010): 215-231.
- Andrade, Dale, "Westmoreland Was Right: Learning The Wrong Lessons from the Vietnam War." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no. 2 (June 2008): 145-181.
- Ballard, John R. *Homeland Security Maritime Command and Control*. Newport Papers, no. 22. Newport, RI: US Naval War College, 10 Oct 2001.
- Clausewitz, Karl von, *On War*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- Collings, Deirdre and Rafal Rohozinski. "Shifting Fire." *Military Technology*, November 2008, 110-114.
- Emery, Norman E. "Irregular Warfare Information Operations: Understanding the Role of People, Capabilities, and Effects." *Military Review*, November 2008, 27-38.
- Evans, Michael, "The Wretched of the Empire: Politics, Ideology and Counterinsurgency in Rhodesia, 1965-80," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 175-192.
- Faucheux, Ronald A., ed. *Winning Elections*. New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 2003.
- Galula, David, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1964.
- Genest, Marc, "Winning the War of Ideas: The Strategic Communication Battle in the Long War." Lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 24 May 2010.
- Grey, Judge Lawrence, *How to Win a Local Election*. Lanham, MD: Michael Evans, 2007.
- Jackson, Colin, "The Chameleon War: Iraq 2003-2010." Lecture. Naval War College, Newport, RI, 10 May 2010.
- Johnson-Cartee, Karen and Gary Copeland, *Inside Political Campaigns*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997.
- Kilcullen, David, *The Accidental Guerrilla*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- Killebrew, Robert B. "Trenchant Analysis of Counterinsurgency Warfare." *Army* 56, no.4 (April 2006): 84-85.
- Lawrence, T.E. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. New York, NY: First Anchor Books, 1991.
- Mansoor, Peter and Mark Ulrich. "Linking Doctrine to Action: A New COIN Center-Of-Gravity Analysis." *Military Review*, September 2007, 45-51.
- Marks, Tom, "Colombian Army Counterinsurgency." *Crime, Law and Social Change* 40, no. 1 (July 2003): 77-105.
- Melshen, Paul. "Mapping Out a Counterinsurgency Campaign Plan: Critical Considerations in Counterinsurgency Campaigning." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 665-698.
- Nagl, John A. *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Ollivant, Douglas A. and Eric D. Chewning. "Producing Victory: Rethinking Conventional Forces in COIN Operations." *Military Review: Special Edition: COUNTERINSURGENCY READER*, October, 2006, 159-168.
- Olson, Eric T. "U.S. Special Operations: Context and Capabilities in Irregular Warfare." *Joint Force Quarterly : JFQ*, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2010, 64-70.
- Rosenau, William, "Counterinsurgency: Lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan." *Harvard International Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 52-56.
- Sepp, Kalev I. "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency." *Military Review: Special Edition: Counterinsurgency Reader*, October 2006, 8-12.
- U.S. Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Information Operations*, Joint Publication (JP) 3-13. Washington, DC: CJCS, 13 February 2006.
- Waghelstein, John, "Guerrilla, Partisan, Irregular or Unconventional Warfare as an Adjunct to Conventional War." Lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 2 Sept 2010.
- Wagelstein, John, "Huk Rebellion" Lecture, Naval War College, Newport RI, 16 Sept, 2010.
- Waghelstein, John. "What's wrong in Iraq? Or Ruminations of a Pachyderm." *Military Review* 86, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 112-117.
- U.S. Congress, Senate, *The Posture of Special Operations Forces: Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 110<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2008.