

# ***MCDP 1, Warfighting, Revisited***

Sometimes it's difficult to see the forest because of the trees.

by Maj Adam T. Strickland

**A**s anyone serving with or under the Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC) umbrella can confirm, concept development consumes a considerable portion of our limited resources, as countless personnel are tasked with ensuring that our force remains ready and able to face any global challenge—present or future. To this end, commands, such as U.S. Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) and MCCDC, employ hundreds of contractors (most of whom are retired military)—in addition to active military personnel—to develop concepts addressing issues such as seabasing, effects-based planning, and distributed operations. While this type of forward thinking is necessary to ensure that we remain the finest fighting force, it tends to unnecessarily take us further away from our foundation in small wars and warfighting-maneuver warfare that is the bedrock of our current operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and needlessly hemorrhage limited resources trying to reinvent ourselves. As the saying goes, “dance with the girl you brought,” and for the Marine Corps, this means maneuver warfare.

## **Reinventing the Wheel**

While the U.S. Army has just produced a 150-page manual on counterinsurgency and the brightest at USJFCOM worked on a stability operations operating concept—both of which consumed thousands of man-hours and countless thousands of dollars—and were only able to produce such insightful recommendations as develop local intelligence, emphasize information operations, and concentrate on elimination of the insurgents and not terrain objectives, as Marines, all we need to know is found in Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (*MCDP 1*), *Warfighting*. The answer to “what ails us” is not always as elusive as it may seem; however, it may simply be obscured by those unwilling to admit that technology, expensive toys, and new joint concepts cannot eliminate the nature of warfare and the validity of maneuver warfare in any environment, to include a nontrinitarian or fourth-generation warfare scenario.

From cover to cover *MCDP 1* outlines operational considerations for conducting small wars, counterinsurgency operations, and information operations. When reviewed with the 1940 *Small Wars Manual* or 2003 *Addendum*, one finds critical information necessary for effective operations in environments such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Liberia, Haiti, the Philippines, Chad, and Niger and, thus, can accurately conclude that many of the current/ongoing projects on asymmetric warfare concepts simply try to reinvent the wheel and waste limited resources. We need

**‘The sole justification for the United States Marine Corps is to secure or protect national policy objectives by military force when peaceful means alone cannot. . . . This requires a concept of warfighting that will help us function effectively in an uncertain, chaotic, and fluid environment—in fact, one with which we can exploit these conditions to our advantage.’**

—*MCDP 1*

“how-to guides,” not more of the avalanche of concepts, equations, or theories in line with confrontation analysis or complexity theory. If one is familiar with the *Small Wars Manual*, *MCDP 1*, and military operations other than war principles, then one is equipped with the “know how” to conduct operations in Iraq and not in desperate need of further theory. This is not to say that continued professional military education (PME) is not valuable; it is essential. In fact, those who have a fundamental understanding of Mao Tse Tung, the civil operations revolutionary development support (CORDS) program in Southeast Asia, Operation PHOENIX, and the civil war in El Salvador in the 1980s tend to have a different understanding and perception of the merits and shortfalls of current U.S. operations. When discussing scenarios such as the asymmetric threat that presents itself in Iraq and Afghanistan, *MCDP 1* states:

The Marine Corps concept for winning under these conditions is the warfighting doctrine based on rapid, flexible, and opportunistic maneuver. The essence of maneuver is taking action to generate and exploit some kind of advantage over the enemy as a means of accomplishing our objectives as effectively as possible. That advantage may be psychological, technological, or temporal as well as spatial. Especially important is maneuver *in time*—we generate a faster operating tempo than the enemy to gain a temporal advantage.

A “rapid, flexible, and opportunistic” (three block war) response is certainly consistent with Marine Corps policies in Iraq, as well as our attempts to exploit the insurgents’ inability to sustain a high operational tempo. Through superior technology and overwhelming advantage in resources available, Marines were quickly able to exploit gaps by conducting precision strikes in conjunction with psychological maneuvers pursued through speed, violence, humanitarian assistance (drinking water/subsistence items), and civil affairs, satisfying basic human needs, such as generating a feeling amongst the Iraqis of being safe in person and property, thus denying insurgents much needed popular support; supporting information operations (IO) goals; and satisfying a criti-

cal counterinsurgency principle of keeping as many indigenous personnel as neutrals or procoalition as possible. Unfortunately, this rapid response can and did lead to a “revolution of rising expectations” amongst the Iraqis, but that is the product of success and high expectations.

Our ability as Marines to see maneuver warfare in non-spatial terms is exactly what makes us different from others and in step with organizations such as the British Royal Marines. While other forces do many things exceptionally well, counterinsurgency and small wars in general are not amongst these, with the notable exception of certain British and French units. Many have unfortunately learned the hard way that vehicle assets provide mobility and spatial maneuver but don’t always equal maneuver warfare. While motorized and mechanized assets provide increased mobility and firepower, their widespread utilization adversely impacts IO by sending the wrong message, influencing the population in a manner that is unwanted, and keeping troops who are desperately needed to interact with locals cocooned in vehicles. These vehicles have become the target of increased attacks and are further signs of an occupation—not a sign of cooperation when used for routine policing and patrolling—a lesson learned previously by the British in Northern Ireland and the Israelis in the West Bank. In Iraq, this rapid, flexible, and opportunistic maneuver allows Marines to influence and inform (IO basics) indigenous personnel, whether friendly, neutral, or hostile, and thus shape the battlespace in a manner consistent with our commander’s intent. This type of maneuver by small units, led by capable company grade officers, staff noncommissioned officers, and noncommissioned officers, allows Marines to develop intelligence, develop census information necessary for properly understanding our battlespace, and influence the populace in a manner consistent with themes such as “no better friend, no worse enemy.” In fact, *MCDP 1* dedicates entire sections to shaping operations (IO) and the combined arms effects (IO). Thus, while IO has become the new “cure-all,” it is certainly not a new process or idea.

**“[Defeating an asymmetric threat] requires a concept that takes into account the moral and the mental as well as the physical forces of war. . . . It requires flexibility of mind to deal with fluid and disorderly situations.”**

—*MCDP 1*

Again, *MCDP 1* warns us that we must influence and address human needs when combating asymmetric threats in order to successfully prosecute the campaign. Was capturing Fallujah tactically significant because of the terrain, or was it because of the message it sent other or potential insurgents throughout the area of operations (AO)? Destroying the insurgency in Fallujah is significant for many reasons, not the least of which is the impact it had on the “moral and mental” forces in Iraq. Other than through conventional operations, one does this through

influencing the population through civil-military operations by achieving a unity of effort with other agencies, to include private volunteer organizations. Immediately after the regime change in Iraq, 150 nongovernmental and private volunteer organizations were operating within the country, thus the coalition had a wealth of resources to assist in achieving this end. Utilizing non-military or nonstandard organizations requires our warfighters to remain flexible.

As Marines, *MCDP 1* tells us that mental flexibility is essential. “We should not assume that every enemy thinks as we do, or has the same values or objectives.” While some may disagree, this tends to be the one warning that most non-Marines and nonservicemembers ignore. *MCDP 1* warns us that words that are clearly defined to us may not be accurately defined when utilized in other cultures, to include Middle Eastern environs. What may be considered lawful or legitimate to us may not be so to Sunni Albu Issa tribesmen operating in Ramadi and Fallujah. What we may perceive as a show of restraint may be perceived as a sign of weakness among indigenous peoples in Najaf. What some consider unacceptable collateral damage in the battles in Fallujah may be perceived by indigenous persons as the acceptable and nat-

**“It is not enough that the troops be skilled infantry men or artillery men of high morale; they must be skilled water men and jungle men who know it can be done—Marines with Marine training.”**

—Earl H. Ellis, *MCDP 1*

ural reaction to an overt hostile act by insurgents. Our warfighters must be pseudopsychiatrists and understand the mindset of those affected.

As Col Christopher C. Conlin (former Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF)) writes in his article, “What Do You Do for an Encore?” (MCG, Sep04), “Marines must be prepared to influence the battlespace by serving as civil administrators, public affairs spokespersons, police forces, and humanitarian assistance workers.” Since every Marine is a rifleman and expected to understand basic infantry fundamentals and the need for human interaction in postconflict environs, the Marine Corps is more capable of transforming personnel that normally serve as artillery or tank personnel into infantrymen, where others continue to find difficulty finding tactical success with noninfantry troops.

**“It is because of this dynamic of human interaction that fortitude, perseverance, boldness, spirit, and other traits not explainable by art or science are so essential in war.”**

—*MCDP 1*

*MCDP 1* tells us that “war is an extreme test of will,” and Marines know, based on their PME and familiarity with the Southeast Asian conflict, that conflicts are more than conventional fights. We understand that you can

win the battle and still lose the war. Marines understand Vo Nguyen Giap's assertion that "you will kill ten of mine for every one I kill of yours, but in the end, it will be you who tire of it." Because of this we understand that the most committed in a conflict wins. We train to operate at a marathon runner's pace through our warfighting fundamentals, not a sprinter's pace, and thus are able to gain a psychological and temporal maneuver advantage.

**"War is an extreme trial of moral and physical strength and stamina."**

—*MCDP 1*

Because of these things, the Marine Corps, like the British in Northern Ireland, have been able to sustain casualties, yet separate the part from the whole and not punish all Iraqis for the acts of the insurgents. This is why we are able to walk down the same stretch of road day after to clear improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and show the insurgents that we are patient, will outlast them, and impose our will—that will being a secure environment.

**"We thus conclude that the conduct of war is fundamentally a dynamic process of human competition requiring both knowledge of science and the creativity of art but driven ultimately by the power of human will."**

—*MCDP 1*

While technological resources and joint operating concepts/doctrine should be explored, it should be done in a manner that seeks to augment our current warfighting capabilities and not by reinventing the wheel. While casualties in OIF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM have turned many into risk-averse champions of technology and a new way of thinking, in the end, the nature of warfare has not changed and so maneuver warfare remains the correct course of action. New technologies and publications have not been able to magically locate IEDs in Iraq, detect potential car bombs at Iraqi police stations, or help the Israelis locate suicide bombers; however, maneuver warfare can do all three.

#### A Sample of 'How To'

In an attempt to demonstrate what we need more of, I provide the following how-to list for counterinsurgency and foreign internal defense. These are but some of the many ways to operate that satisfy both the blue and green forces' need for security and further counterinsurgent activities.

*Establish appropriate expectations.* This is the essential first step to any successful counterinsurgency. Failing to establish appropriate or measurable expectations can create a situation in which no matter how well one's forces are doing, they appear to be failing due to unrealistic expectations. Should one have expected people who had been beaten, tortured, and intimidated for 34 years suddenly to be infused with a spirit of invention, initiative, and cooperation? If one has no realistic expectation that citizens of the United States living in "rougher" inner-city

neighborhoods will cooperate with law enforcement officials by providing human intelligence, should we expect foreign nationals with no civil law enforcement protection to do so? When utilizing nonactive duty components of our Services, one must establish appropriate expectations for them. Should we expect the same outputs and utility from National Guard and Reserve units that train 24 to 36 days a year as we do from our active duty units? If these are appropriate expectations, why have a large active duty force?

*Remember the basics.* Too often our leaders do feel as though they have not been properly trained to succeed in an insurgency. What all need to recognize is that insurgencies are less about some "skill set" that can be taught and more about leadership and influence. Counterinsurgencies require that leaders utilize their leadership more than in any other type of conflict. Counterinsurgencies demand professional leaders capable of outmaneuvering opponents in other than spatial terms. You must be able to outthink your opponent.

*PME.* As noted above, PME is essential and, for the most part, an integral part of training. Where we continue to fail is in the manner in which we absorb or modify our behavior based on lessons observed. Lessons observed or insights never become lessons learned until we achieve a change in behavior. In the counterinsurgency environs in which we operate today in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is much discussion about the need of interagency coordinating groups and civil affairs, and how these should affect our military operations. While we continue this debate, we neglect the example of past lessons and examples, such as CORDS in Southeast Asia. While most officers have digested works on Field Marshall Erwin Rommel and MG Thomas J. Jackson, few have read Mao or Ho Chi Minh, and thus are not in a position to recognize the phases of the insurgency they face. They continue to pursue operations in an attempt to force a decisive action, yet they fail to understand that in an insurgency, insurgents dictate decisive points and engagements. Ho and Mao would argue that insurgents only become engaged in decisive acts if it is on their terms. In addition, students of counterinsurgency utilize works by General Sir Frank Kitson, Roger Trinquier, and Sir Robert Thompson, which are all 20 to 40 years old, and further acknowledge that the British and French are much better at these operations than the United States. These students understand that patience is the key. They are fully aware that the Vietnamese and Chinese fought insurgencies that lasted over 30 years and thus do not have unrealistic expectations. Those who best understand counterinsurgency are those who also best understand certain social phenomena, and understand how best to influence behavior.

*Determine security needs.* This determination should be made by the unit leader on the ground, and no one else—which might put it at odds with higher headquarters. The unit leader will determine both physical and psychological security needs for both host nationals and blue forces.

We must answer the questions, do the people feel safe, and if not, what will make them feel safe? From this sense or perception of security all else grows. Determine how to influence peoples' sense of security. Metal detectors are a very good way when the threat is hidden weapons and bombs. Whether they work or not is not as important as making people think that you are out looking with an advanced technology. The key is to try to be in as many different places as possible from day to day and week to week, thus giving people the impression that you could always be right around the corner. Always maneuver in a dispersed fashion, which gives people the impression you are much larger than you truly are. Always remember that their security needs are no different than U.S. citizens living in the continental United States. Why won't those afflicted by threats of physical violence and intimidation in our urban settings come forward to tell police who has threatened them? The answer is that they don't feel safe. This perception or sense of security is the same in Detroit as it is in Najaf.

*To what will the people respond?* As a sign of good faith, unit leaders must decide what need is not being met that if met would greatly improve the level of cooperation between blue and green forces. In underdeveloped nations these needs could be abundant; however, subsistence needs usually are the first to be satisfied. By providing the basics, such as water, or basic cooking implements, such as flour or rice, one's security situation is greatly enhanced. The old saying is "don't bite the hand that feeds you." Violence associated with humanitarian assistance is also a good indicator of the level of resistance or character of the resistance in an area. When providing subsistence items, such as water bottles, have labels printed with a procoalition message or information that will be useful to the host nationals, such as how much money is being offered for information or weapons turned over. Families tend to respond to things like family pictures or clothes/shoes. Children obviously respond to items like soccer balls. People do not respond to armored HMMWVs in a manner consistent with their needs, but do respond to foot-mobile infantry. Remember that security and occupation are not congruent. In addition, remember the old saying, "ring the doorbell with your elbow," meaning always have something in your hands to give to the locals.

*Establish metrics or measures of effectiveness.* How do you know that you are winning or that the people are responding to you? These metrics need to be based on the individual unit and not absorbed from some higher headquarters list. Fewer casualties or enemy engagements are not sound metrics.

*Establish a lawful/legitimate security presence.* It is imperative that all actions taken are done so in a lawful manner and as honest brokers. Clearly demonstrate that the ladder of law has no top or bottom and that all are to be treated equally and with the same respect that we would treat U.S. citizens. Establish rules—that all host nationals know they will have to abide by—through whatever civil

administration may be present. Avoid empowering individuals, such as tribal elders or sheiks, while remaining culturally sensitive. However, as noted earlier, what is legitimate may not be lawful, and what is lawful may not be legitimate. While Operation PHOENIX and the utilization of paramilitaries in El Salvador remain very controversial and misunderstood, both proved to be highly effective. While both were/were not entirely lawful when viewed through a Western liberal democracy prism, they were legitimate acts that achieved the desired effects. For young men who have witnessed 34 years of violence, violence is seen as a legitimate way to achieve goals. This phenomenon is no different in many U.S. urban settings.

*Create local "yellow/white pages" or a census.* A unit leader cannot effectively provide security if he does not understand who he is securing. Set up nonevasive operations, such as vehicle checkpoints, where the main object is not searching vehicles but rather collecting information. To keep a steady flow of traffic, limit interaction to two questions—what's your name, and what do you do for a living? On another occasion ask, where do you live, and who is your sheik or leader? On a third occasion ask, where do you attend religious services (mosque), and who is your Imam? One can quickly establish a sound picture of the

***The key is to try to be in as many different places as possible from day to day and week to week, thus giving people the impression that you could always be right around the corner.***

AO. During these stops provide water and take pictures. If possible, have a generator with a printer hooked up to provide prints from past family photos to "regulars" whom you see daily. On advanced searches, have interpreters speak with host nationals simply to "listen for inappropriate accents" denoting either foreign fighters or folks not from that area.

*Always remember the hierarchy of needs: security, subsistence, infrastructure, and interpersonal wants/needs.* Be mindful that all flows from security; therefore, one cannot try to meet the other needs first because they are easier. In addition, providing infrastructure needs to people who cannot feed themselves is insensitive and adds fuel to the fire that, as Westerners, we think money and material possessions are the answer to everything. School supplies are great influencers, but you cannot eat them. These items quickly find themselves sold or traded for subsistence needs. Guard against a revolution of rising expectations by not promising what you cannot accomplish. Always promise less and deliver more.

*When engaged by enemy personnel, remain sensitive to the locals and do not treat all as hostiles.* It is essential that you remain respectful of persons and property at all times.

Make appropriate compensation payments for damaged property or harm done to local nationals. If engaged, it is essential that one maintain the ground. Never pull back once engaged, only move forward. A unit leader must demonstrate that his will is the strongest.

**"Positions are seldom lost because they have been destroyed, but almost invariably because the leader has decided in his own mind that the position cannot be held."**

—Gen A.A. Vandegrift, USMC(Ret), *MCDP 1*

*Money does not solve every problem.* We must understand that money is not a cure-all, and in fact, it tends to create more problems. Host nationals working aboard U.S. installations and witnessing numerous sport utility vehicles, air-conditioning, chow halls, and trailers with porcelain toilets are sure to wonder why they have no electricity, water, or health care. U.S. efforts to continue to provide school supplies are well-received; however, people require basic necessities like food. Remain sensitive to the fact that *everything* shapes the battlespace and insurgency.

*MCDP 1* gives us all of the guidance we need and, therefore, makes many of the ongoing projects at places such as USJFCOM or MCCDC unnecessary, or at a mini-

mum in need of a serious rudder change. It is imperative that we do not try to reinvent ourselves in a manner that takes us further away from that which we do better than all others—warfighting. Our positions in Iraq and Afghanistan are difficult; however, we are prevailing. Hopefully, our commanders will not decide that the positions cannot be held.



>Maj Strickland is assigned to the Wargaming Division, Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, Quantico.



MARINE CORPS ASSOCIATION  
**SEMPER FI**  
*Travel*

**Book your next  
travel with MCA  
Semper Fi Travel!**

**[www.mca-marines.org](http://www.mca-marines.org)**

**We're Always Faithful.**

*\*This new and unique partnership with nuTravel will make it possible for the association to pass along exclusive savings to members, subscribers, and their families. nuTravel works with a multitude of popular, industry-leading travel vendors and inventory providers, identifying opportunities where they can work together and offer excellent exclusive deals to the MCA.*

**In partnership with nuTravel, Inc.\*,  
a leader in online travel  
management, the Marine Corps  
Association proudly announces  
a complete online leisure travel  
reservation system offering  
exclusive discounts to MCA  
members and subscribers.**

This addition to the MCA benefits package is designed to provide MCA members, subscribers, and their families the benefit and savings of booking flights, hotels, rental cars, vacations, and cruises at MCA exclusive discounted rates not available anywhere else! Semper Fi Travel will be entirely web based and accessible via any web browser right from the MCA web site.