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AMOS PERLMUTTER PRIZE ESSAY

Countering Insurgents through Distributed Operations: Insights from Malaya 1948–1960

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ABSTRACT This article examines the emerging US Marine Corps concept of 'Distributed Operations' (DO) and its applicability to counter-insurgency. DO involves dispersing the force and empowering decentralised units so as to create a network of mobile, agile and adaptable cells, each operating with a significant degree of autonomy yet in line with the commander's overall intent. This concept's applicability to irregular campaigns is assessed with reference to the Malayan Emergency, in which the British and Commonwealth forces employed dispersed and decentralised small-unit formations to great effect. The article teases out the conditions that allowed DO to succeed in Malaya, and comments on the requirements and implications for the use of DO today in the prosecution of the 'Long War'.

KEY WORDS: counter-insurgency, Distributed Operations, Malayan Emergency, US Marine Corps

The US Marine Corps (USMC) has a long history of conducting 'small wars'.¹ It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that it has reacted quickly to the new strategic context of the War on Terror and developed concepts

¹This article draws in part upon work conducted for a US Dept. of Defense (Office of Force Transformation) – UK Ministry of Defence (Command and Battlespace Management/J6) project on network-centric warfare and the British approach to low-intensity operations, for which the present author contributed a chapter on the Malayan Emergency. See 'The British Approach to Low-Intensity Operations', Network Centric Operations Case Study, *Transformation Case Studies Series*. The article was produced in September 2006 and does not take into consideration any refinements or changes made to the concept of Distributed Operations since that date.

to suit the operational realities faced in Afghanistan and Iraq. One of the more promising concepts is that of 'distributed operations' (DO), an emerging approach to war-fighting that promises to apply the transformational capabilities developed by the US military to the irregular battlefield.

A USMC concept paper defines DO as 'an operating approach that will create an advantage over an adversary through the deliberate use of separation and coordinated, interdependent, tactical actions, enabled by increased access to functional support, as well as by enhanced combat capabilities at the small-unit level'.² The concept involves dispersing the force and empowering decentralised units so as to create a network of mobile, agile and adaptable cells, each operating with a significant degree of autonomy yet in line with the commander's overall intent. While physically 'distributed', these small units remain connected through high-technology communication links and are therefore able to re-aggregate or call in joint fires as required. The concept thus combines the advantages of dispersion with the traditional benefits of mass.

DO is not an entirely new concept: it builds on the USMC's Hunter Warrior series of experiments, which examined the ability of networked small units to take on a conventional force from within enemy territory. DO also holds much in common with the notion of 'swarming', defined by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt as a 'coordinated, strategic way to strike from all directions' through 'the deployment of myriad, small, dispersed, networked maneuver units'.³ Much like its conceptual predecessors, DO is predicated on 'transformational' or network-centric capabilities, which enable the physically separated cells to communicate, aggregate or otherwise synchronise their actions.⁴

What distinguishes DO is its close association with *irregular* conflict. Though the concept's proponents emphasise that DO will be applicable across the spectrum of operations, it is most commonly presented as a means of combating irregular adversaries.⁵ DO thus differs from the

²USMC, *A Concept for Distributed Operations* (Headquarters USMC: Washington DC, 25 April 2005), I.

³John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Swarming and the Future of Conflict* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 2000), vii.

⁴While DO and network-centric operations rely on similar type of technology, DO places a heavier emphasis on decentralised decision-making. See Lt. Col. Edward Tovar, 'USMC Distributed Operations', *Proceedings of DARPA Tech 2005*, 9–11 Aug. 2005, 22.

⁵See the foreword of Gen. M.W. Hagee, USMC, *A Concept for Distributed Operations*. See also Brig. Gen. Robert E. Schmidle, USMC and Lt. Col. Frank G. Hoffman, USMC (Ret.), 'Commanding the Contested Zones' *Proceedings*, Sept. 2004; 'Questions and Answers About Distributed Operations', March 2005, p. 1, available at <www.mcwl.usmc.mil/SV/DO%20FAQs%2016%20Mar%2005.pdf>; or Lt. Brian

majority of network-centric concepts, which have focused predominantly on conventional campaigns, or remained mute on the nature of the anticipated adversary. Indeed, DO can be seen as an attempt to stretch the applicability of the US military's network-centric capabilities to the realms of irregular combat – to bridge the gap between the ideal form of warfare anticipated by transformation enthusiasts and the real type of campaigns encountered on the ground in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

Several leading strategic thinkers have commented upon the potential benefits of dispersion in irregular settings. Writing in 1967, B. H. Liddell Hart noted that 'dispersion is also a necessity on the side opposed to the guerrillas, since there is no value in a narrow concentration of force against such elusive forces, nimble as mosquitoes, and the chance of curbing them lies largely in being able to extend a fine but closely woven net over the widest possible area'.⁶ Similarly, the late Colonel John R. Boyd, US Air Force (Ret.), the mind behind the OODA-loop concept, noted in 1986 that to counter a guerrilla movement, the opposing force must launch 'relentless military operations that emphasize stealth/fast-tempo/fluidity-of-action and cohesion of overall effort'.⁷

The hope is that network-centric technology will take the traditional benefits of dispersion one step further and help create a distinct advantage in today's irregular campaigns. In so doing, DO would mount a strong challenge to those who perceive transformational concepts and capabilities as utterly misplaced in this new strategic environment. Indeed, some defence intellectuals have argued that the concept is *specifically* suited to the lower end of the conflict spectrum. Sean J. A. Edwards notes that 'swarm units deployed as a network will be more capable of finding and finishing elusive guerrillas', as 'it takes elusiveness to counter elusiveness'.⁸ In a similar vein, Arquilla and Ronfeldt argue that a distributed force would be able 'to keep the peace by maintaining a swarming presence' and by "'blanketing" the potential trouble spots throughout the country with their deterring presence'.⁹

P. Donnelly, 'Commandant signs off on Distributed Operations concept', *Marine Corps News*, 21 July 2005.

⁶B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (London: Faber 1967), 378.

⁷John Boyd, *Patterns of Conflict* (Dec. 1986), 108. Available at <www.d-n-i.net/boyd/pdf/poc.pdf>. OODA denotes an 'observe-orient-decide-act' decision-making cycle.

⁸Sean J. A. Edwards, *Swarming on the Battlefield: Past, Present and Future* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 2000), 83. To Edwards, a swarmed force would also be more capable of 'reacting to suspected areas of insurgent activity when needed; and [of] constantly gathering human intelligence'.

⁹Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *Swarming and the Future of Conflict*, 79.

Yet while there is substantial theory underlying the use of DO in irregular campaigns, the concept is still being trialled by the Marine Corps.¹⁰ It is therefore difficult to theorise about the applicability of this concept to low-intensity conflicts without engaging in a degree of speculation. One means of approaching the topic is by considering historical examples where DO or a similar tactic has been employed to combat an insurgency movement. To that end, this article seeks to comment on the applicability of DO to low-intensity conflict by considering Britain's campaign against the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA) in 1948–60, also known as the Malayan Emergency.

The Malayan Emergency provides a valuable case study for the use of DO within the context of an irregular campaign. First, the Emergency is a prime (and also rare) example of a successfully prosecuted counter-insurgency strategy and can provide an indication of how these notoriously complex operations may be tackled. More importantly, the military *modus operandi* developed in Malaya relied precisely on dispersed and decentralised small unit formations – this is how the British and Commonwealth forces managed to locate, track and close in on the jungle-bound rebels.¹¹ Technological assets have of course progressed tremendously since the 1950s, but – as demonstrated below – this does not invalidate the many strong parallels to be drawn between Britain's experience in Malaya and the US military's attempts to transform itself for today's irregular campaigns. Other common criticisms of the use of Malaya as a case study – that the insurgency was confined to one ethnic community,¹² that the MRLA received no outside support and that the role of the media has since been revolutionised – should all be borne in mind, but they do not render inadmissible the use of this campaign as an informative study of distributed operations in a counter-insurgency campaign.

¹⁰By way of experimentation, the USMC has trained and equipped a platoon in Afghanistan to conduct DO. According to Gen. Michael W. Hagee, Commandant of the Marine Corps, the experience has been an overall success. See Matt Hilburn, 'The Future Course', *Sea Power* 49/7 (July 2006); 'Onto the Battlefield', *Sea Power* 49/8 (August 2006).

¹¹R.W. Komer, *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of a Successful Counterinsurgency Effort*, R-957-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 1972), 49–51.

¹²That the insurgency was limited to the ethnic Chinese community did of course simplify the task at hand. Nonetheless, the British and Commonwealth forces still faced the formidable task of separating ethnic Chinese guerrillas from ethnic Chinese civilians. And while the British authorities had valuable long-standing links with Malaya, it had been significantly less successful in forming relations and understandings with the ethnic Chinese community. The campaign therefore required the sophisticated counter-insurgency strategy that was ultimately developed and for which the Malaya campaign is now known.

A caveat is nonetheless in order: to focus exclusively on the military mode of operations in Malaya is not to suggest that this was the dominant or deciding component of the counter-insurgency effort – it was not. This component does however warrant our attention: albeit subordinate, the military strategy must be right, lest it undermine the unified effort that it is intended to support. Accordingly, the question examined here is not whether the use of DO was what allowed Britain to succeed in Malaya, but whether this mode of engagement was an effective means of tackling the military component of the wider counter-insurgency effort. The article thus purposefully shies away from exclusively political matters, which are relevant to the analysis only in so far as they contributed to the effectiveness of DO.

This leads to a second caveat: to use Malaya as a case study is not to suggest that the campaign can provide a ‘master key’ for future counter-insurgency operations. Though much can be learnt from observing the use of DO in Malaya, particular modes of operations are not to be transplanted through time and space but must be adapted to suit the specific conditions of each theatre. Indeed, it is an underlying argument of this article that the effects of tactical and operational modes of engagement have little meaning unless they complement and are complemented by the overall strategic direction of the specific campaign.

This premise informs the structure of the article, which is divided into three sections. The first section elaborates on the emergence of DO in Malaya and assesses how the successful application of this mode of combat produced military dominance. The second section teases out the specific conditions that allowed DO to succeed in Malaya; as will be argued, these ‘enablers’ need to be identified and engaged with before this mode of engagement can be successfully applied to other low-intensity campaigns. The third and concluding section draws parallels between the use of DO in Malaya and its potential role in the prosecution of today’s ‘Long War’ against terrorism.

Distributed Operations in Malaya

The British came to experiment with what may today be termed ‘distributed operations’ through a process of trial and error based on the particular environment of the Malayan campaign. The learning process prompted the Army to break up into platoon- or section-sized units, disperse the force over a wider geographical area and rely more heavily on decentralised and intelligence-driven operations. Tracing this process reveals the specific contribution of troop dispersion to the military success experienced in Malaya and the possible role of DO in current and future counter-insurgency campaigns.

Most of the fighting in Malaya took place in the jungle, an inhospitable terrain and one in which the MRLA had the advantage. The rebel cadres were for the most former 'squatters': members of the ethnic Chinese community who had been forced out of the villages during the Japanese occupation in the 1940s and set up settlements in cleared areas of the jungle. They were therefore adept at jungle survival and aware of the risks and opportunities of the terrain. By contrast, the British and Commonwealth forces were on the whole unfamiliar with jungle warfare. Despite having experienced this form of combat as part of World War II, the British Army had lost much of its acquired expertise by the time of the Malayan Emergency.¹³

The Army's predilection toward conventional war led to a period of squaring circles, where the British forces launched large sweeps against an unconventional adversary and in a highly unconventional setting. These sweeps yielded limited returns in the early phase of the insurgency when the rebels were still operating in large units and from camps holding up to 300 cadres. Nonetheless, the sweeps were noisy, high-profile affairs, which made it virtually impossible to catch the communists by surprise, particularly following 1951 when the MRLA began operating in smaller units.¹⁴ Like most guerrilla forces, the MRLA cadres would avoid open battle, and flee along known jungle trails whenever engaged. During the early years of the campaign, the British forces therefore found it difficult to ascertain whether the enemy had been eliminated or simply melted away to return at a later date.

The guerrillas' elusiveness and the inhospitableness of the jungle together denied the British forces any means of locating, closing in and defeating the enemy. Riley Sunderland cites Major E. R. Robinson, a rifle company commander, who in 1949 'spoke out bluntly against the large operation. The bigger operation... and the higher the level at which it was planned, the less its chance of success; the buildup and the preparations were impossible to conceal; it was difficult to control troops in the jungle, and the guerrillas simply vanished'.¹⁵

It was in response to this operational conundrum that the British and Commonwealth forces began breaking up into smaller and

¹³This institutional amnesia was in part a product of the post-war demobilisation of the units involved in jungle warfare and the declaration of Indian independence in 1947, which resulted in the loss of several Gurkha regiments.

¹⁴Clutterbuck notes that 'we seldom met them after 1952 in parties of more than 30; most often, they numbered a dozen or less'. See Richard Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War: The Emergency in Malaya 1948-1960* (London: Cassell 1967), 122.

¹⁵Riley Sunderland, *Army Operations in Malaya, 1947-1960* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 1964), 133, referring to an article by Maj. E.R. Robinson, 'Reflections of a Company Commander in Malaya', *Army Quarterly* 61 (Oct. 1950), 80-7.

decentralised units that could disperse over a wider area. Through an ad hoc process of adaptation, various regiments began experimenting with 'saturation patrolling' or the deployment of 'small (ten-man) parties [for] several days at a time in widely separated sectors of the jungle'.¹⁶ Though the term would not have been used at the time, the approach ultimately devised in Malaya can be seen as an informative prototype of today's concept of distributed operations, relying as it did on a network of semi-autonomous cells dispersed over a wide geographical area. The approach connoted several immediate and overlapping advantages:

Tactical Discretion

One of the most immediate benefits of the dispersion of troops related to the greater ability of small units to move silently through the jungle. The terrain and the MRLA's tendency to melt away whenever engaged put a high premium on achieving tactical discretion: it enabled the government forces to close in on the rebels without informing them of their presence and engage them without warning. Whereas 'the major effect of the...mass movements of troops was to telegraph their advance so that the guerrillas were alerted well before the troops arrived', the smaller units were able to manoeuvre discreetly and without compromising their location.¹⁷

Theoretically, the breaking up of the force would have rendered the individual cells more vulnerable to ambush and attack. There is however little evidence that the shift to small units substantially compromised force protection. Instead, these cells were through their discretion and size able to retain the initiative and could therefore choose when to engage the guerrilla cadres. Furthermore, though radio connections within the jungle were unreliable, it was possible to call in reinforcements or air support as needed. It should also be stressed that, like many guerrilla groups, the MRLA most commonly sought to avoid open engagements with the counter-insurgency force.

Operational Agility and Reach

The small unit approach enabled the force to conduct protracted jungle operations, which became increasingly critical to the counter-insurgency campaign. Since the ground patrols could only carry a

¹⁶See Sunderland, *Army Operations in Malaya*, 132–3 for more information on this shift.

¹⁷Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948–1960* (Singapore: OUP 1989), 71.

week's worth of food and materiel, longer stays in the jungle were dependent on supplies brought in by air.¹⁸ While this system would have faced difficulties sustaining a larger unit, the small cells were ideally suited to the task: their logistical and material requirements were more manageable, allowing for less regular airdrops as well as faster movement in the jungle. In the end, 'air supply' made these units 'completely independent' – they could 'operate in deep jungle and stay there as long as circumstances demanded'.¹⁹

The cooperation achieved between the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the ground troops was predicated on maintaining the type of tactical discretion alluded to above. Comparatively little emphasis was placed on offensive air operations: despite devising ways to enhance bombing precision, aerial raids were deemed too slow, too indiscreet and, thus, too inefficient to produce results.²⁰ The RAF instead focused on supplying the ground troops, whose subsequent reach and precise offensives were likely to yield a greater dividend.

Rather than mass troops for brief in-and-out patrols of the jungle, the small units went out for prolonged stays in which they learned how to obtain tactical information from the environment through tracking and effective jungle reconnaissance.²¹ With experience, the British forces spread out in company-sized camps throughout the jungle, which boosted the soldiers' local intelligence and allowed each cell to operate with enhanced agility within a specific area. The greater geographical reach thus obtained enabled the British and Commonwealth forces to pursue the rebels in the areas previously used by the MRLA as sanctuaries. The Army's special force units used a similar approach. Following the introduction of troop-carrying helicopters in 1953, small teams of special forces were deployed deep within the jungle, where they were able to win over the indigenous population (often by providing medical care) and thus deprive the guerrillas of one of their last sources of support.

Decentralisation

The shift to small units helped decentralise decision-making, which made the Army more responsive to the particular context and

¹⁸Air Commodore P.E. Warcup, CBE, RAF, as cited in A.H. Peterson, G.C. Reinhardt and E.E. Conger (eds.), *Symposium on the Role of Airpower in Counterinsurgency and Unconventional Warfare: The Malayan Emergency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 1963), 26.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 158. Bombardment was however used to harry rebels out of a particular area or to keep them 'on the move'.

²¹Ibid., 52.

environment in which it was operating. In the early years of the campaign, the Army had suffered from an overly centralised command structure: the collection of information and decision-making was conducted at federation and state levels rather than in the districts, where policies had greater effect and information could be put to more immediate use. This system made it virtually impossible for junior officers to make quick decisions or act autonomously; 'the patrol leader who needed information had to visit some half-dozen people before he took out his patrol'.²²

In contrast, as the force disaggregated, each company or platoon was given greater autonomy over its area. This was in part a deliberate shift, but also a side-effect of the dispersion of troops. The approach developed into the 'framework plan' that gradually gained prevalence in Malaya, by which 'battalions, companies and platoons were spread out in a network of locations, and, in theory, given time to get to know their areas, to build intelligence contacts and develop their own tactical plans to meet local needs, rather than being concentrated in special operations under the direction of Generals'.²³

Force Synchronisation

The above benefits of decentralisation were augmented by the cells' ability to synchronise their respective activities and coordinate joint operations as needed. Clear channels of communication between units were emphasised from the outset; already in 1948, telephones had been installed in each outlying police post to create a rudimentary network. By placing hourly phone-calls between the posts, Army units could react quickly to any disturbance or irregularity and each base had a stand-by party for just such a contingency.²⁴

Such unit-to-unit synchronisation became increasingly sophisticated. Rather than communicate during the operation – as might be the case today – the networked planning between cells tended to occur prior to deployment. As the MRLA would typically disperse when attacked, the Army needed to coordinate between various units to pre-empt and intercept the fleeing rebels. By studying the topography and the jungle terrain, the Army could anticipate the rebels' escape route and coordinate a two-part attack, whereby one cell would ambush and

²²Riley Sunderland, *Antiguerrilla Intelligence in Malaya, 1948–1960* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 1964), 17 – based on Quarterly Historical Report, 1st Battalion, Devonshire Regiment, 31 March 1950.

²³Donald Mackay, *The Malayan Emergency, 1948–60: the Domino that Stood* (London: Brassey's 1997), 166, fn.2.

²⁴Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 49.

another would be poised to pick off the rebels as they fled along identified jungle paths. In other instances, one cell would patrol a certain area and others would mount ambushes along the insurgents' likely escape routes. Pre-deployment planning and coordination also allowed various cells to grant each other 'clearance', meaning that anyone encountered within a certain area was sure to be hostile.

Re-aggregation

The emphasis on close coordination between small units meant that the force could aggregate at will. This allowed the British and Commonwealth forces to mass troops in one area and mount joined-up engagements following prolonged periods of operating as dispersed cells. Furthermore, the ability of the Army cells to communicate and coordinate contrasted with the MRLA's very slow decision-making cycle and made it possible 'to shift whole battalions (sometimes enough to triple government strength in a given area), leave only sentries at the posts vacated, carry out an operation, and return to home stations before the guerrillas could respond'.²⁵

Aggregation was used for a variety of reasons. It was necessary to mass troops during the relocation of the 'squatter' population into the new settlements and during the 'federal priority operations' of the mid-1950s, in which troops were concentrated in one or two specific districts to flush out the local MRLA presence there.²⁶ Aggregation was similarly used to good effect in the campaign's food-denial operations, in which Army units were concentrated in particular sectors so as to harry the guerrillas toward a designated and seemingly unprotected area.²⁷

Enabling Distributed Operations

The above analysis points to some of the tactical and operational benefits of breaking up the force in the pursuit of an elusive enemy in an inhospitable environment. These findings have relevance to current and future operations conducted against irregular armed groups that use their familiarity with the terrain and ability to melt away to avoid the reach of the counter-insurgency force. And as seen, DO is, for several reasons, specifically suited to combating this type of enemy.

²⁵Sunderland, *Army Operations in Malaya*, 119.

²⁶Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 113.

²⁷Harry Miller, *The Communist Menace in Malaya* (New York: Praeger 1954), 99–101.

To stop the analysis here would however be to provide an incomplete and in some ways misleading picture. It would indeed be fallacious to assume that the concept of DO could be exported wholesale to other counter-insurgency campaigns and achieve the startling results witnessed in Malaya. A deeper study of the effectiveness of distributed operations in Malaya reveals that this mode of engagement was very much *the vanguard* of a larger counter-insurgency system, which in itself provided the foundations necessary for the military campaign to succeed. In other words, the successful application of DO in Malaya depended on and cannot really be considered in isolation from certain critical systemic 'drivers'. What were these drivers?

Institutional Adaptability

The first driver was the willingness of the Army as an institution to accept the shift to small unit operations – this was in itself a force multiplier in the use of distributed operations. Though this is a seemingly obvious point, the actual process was far from self-evident; it required a fundamental reworking of the military modus operandi and a concomitant shift in attitudes.

As seen, the shift to small unit operations in Malaya was a bottom-up and ad hoc initiative based on low-level frustration with the large sweeps advocated by the senior ranks. Although this shift clearly connoted inherent advantages, it was resisted by the Army leadership, which was often reluctant 'to upset the whole organisation and training of [a] battalion just to chase a lot of [rebels] around the jungle'.²⁸ Senior Army officers instead favoured the large unit sweeps and argued for the deployment of more troops to 'finish the job'.²⁹

An important step in changing this mindset was the appointment of Lt.-General Sir Harold Briggs as Director of Operations in March 1950. With previous experience of jungle warfare in World War II, Briggs gradually came to realise the urgent need to decentralise and disperse the force in order to outfox (rather than outgun) the elusive guerrillas. As he commented, 'the brigadiers and battalion commander [will] have to reconcile themselves to war being fought by junior commanders down to lance-corporals who will have the responsibility to make the decision on the spot if necessary. We've got to look for the communists now, send small patrols after them...Flexibility of operations in the jungle must be the keynote.'³⁰ By the end of his

²⁸Brig. J. M. Calvert, cited in John Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport, CT: Praeger 2002), 195.

²⁹Mackay, *The Malayan Emergency*, 71.

³⁰Miller, *The Communist Menace in Malaya*, 72.

tenure in November 1951, Briggs had formally designated the small unit approach as the dominant mode of operations and begun to change attitudes within the senior ranks. Increasingly, the Army was encouraging the shift to small unit operations and sought whenever possible to consolidate its benefits through top-down initiatives.

Training and Doctrine

The shift in attitude among the higher echelons of command boosted the effectiveness of the small unit engagements. The critical enabler underlying this turnaround was of course the trust invested by senior commanders in their subordinates, who were now given unprecedented autonomy and responsibility. This trust was a product of the Army's overall training, discipline and competence, attributes without which a distributed force would have problems functioning, never mind prevailing.

The Army came to reach the required standard through its pre-existing familiarity with jungle warfare and 'small wars'. While the *institutional* recollection of jungle warfare had dissipated by 1948, the British forces were helped by those individuals who had previous experience of this form of combat.³¹ Carefully targeted training modules and the setting up of jungle-warfare schools also pushed the force toward high standards of performance. In 1948, the Far Eastern Land Forces Training Centre (FTC) was set up by Lt.-Colonel Walter Walker, a veteran of the jungle campaign in Burma. Three years later, Briggs established a Jungle Warfare School at Kota Tinggi in Johore. The training increasingly emphasised long-term immersion in the jungle, discretion, jungle craft and small unit operations. With time, the remit of the FTC expanded and it began offering specialist courses in all aspects of jungle warfare, including radio communications and weapons evaluation.³² Training in skills applicable to the jungle environment subsequently became routine and the FTC curricula also came to be the foundation of subsequent campaign-specific jungle-warfare manual.

Intelligence-Gathering

The Malayan Emergency illustrates that the successful application of distributed operations relies to a large degree on the availability of

³¹Interview with Lt. Ian Rae, 16 Nov. 2005.

³²Raffi Gregorian, "'Jungle Bashing' in Malaya: Towards a Formal Tactical Doctrine', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 5/3 (Winter 1994), 347.

relevant intelligence on rebel positions and plans. In the early years of the campaign, when the intelligence picture of the British Army was still underdeveloped, the troops frequently complained that they found it impossible to locate the jungle-bound rebels. In April 1950, General Sir John Harding, Commander-in-Chief, Far Eastern Land Forces, identified the problem at hand: 'Our greatest weakness now is the lack of early and accurate information of the enemy's strength, dispositions and intentions. For lack of information an enormous amount of military effort is being necessarily absorbed on prophylactic and will o' the wisp patrolling and jungle bashing and on air bombardment.'³³

This assessment is echoed in the statements of various commanders involved in the early phase of the campaign. The description of a 1948 operation by a Gurkha battalion commander is wholly representative: 'we had no information about anything in the area... apart from the generally-accepted fact that the haystack did contain a needle or two; then, to carry the simile a little further, the only thing to do was to disturb the hay and hope at least to get our fingers pricked'.³⁴ Lieutenant Ian Rae, 1st Singapore Regiment Royal Artillery, who served in Malaya from 1951–53, commented that most of the patrols in 1951 involved 'a lot of guesswork [and] were fruitless'; 'there was only really a remote chance of an encounter so it was more a matter of marching and looking while cutting your way through secondary jungle'.³⁵

Frustrated with the lack of information, the Army developed its own means of acquiring intelligence. The dispersion of the force had in itself improved the Army's capacity for intelligence-gathering; gradually, the soldiers learned how to follow footprints, to track and to 'read' the jungle for signs of rebel activity.³⁶ However, the individual cells soon required more detailed and readily available information to help target its operations, particularly as the MRLA dispersed and became more careful.

With time, Army efforts at intelligence-gathering were complemented by the gradual emergence of Special Branch and the police force as competent intelligence agencies. From 1950 onward, greater use was made of surrendered enemy personnel (or SEP, as they became known). Amnesties and generous rewards were announced for any information leading to the capture of a guerrilla leader, and the military launched an

³³As cited in Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948–1960* (London: Muller 1975), 229–30.

³⁴Sunderland, *Antiguerrilla Intelligence in Malaya*, 10 – based on Appendix C, Quarterly Historical Report, 1st Battalion, 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles, 31 Dec. 1948.

³⁵Interview with Lt. Rae, 16 Nov. 2005.

³⁶Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 52.

effective psychological-operations campaign to lower the morale and induce betrayal within the MRLA ranks. The surrendered guerrillas were interrogated by Special Branch and the information thus gleaned was fed to the Army, which was then able to dispatch a nearby unit to set up an ambush or a targeted attack. As Richard J. W. Craig, a British police officer who served in Malaya from 1948–64, explains, ‘The army always had a unit on immediate standby and if you got the intelligence you did in fact act within minutes.’³⁷ At other times, the SEP would physically lead the security forces to their former camp.³⁸ In either eventuality, speed was of the essence, as the Army had to move before the rebels realised that they had been compromised and, in this regard, the decentralisation and dispersion of the Army connoted an immediate advantage.

While the effects of the SEP system were cumulative, it was also a victim of its own success: the guerrillas gradually became more cautious, fuelling a mounting need for a more imaginative means of intelligence-gathering.³⁹ It became necessary to acquire intelligence on the *future* location of rebel cadres so as to ensure an encounter by one of the Army’s small units. This type of information was to be found within the MRLA’s support structure, as the group’s suppliers would be aware of the rebels’ meeting points, personnel and routines.

Tapping this network required close supervision of suspected suppliers and a tactful combination of sticks and carrots so as to induce cooperation. The task was greatly facilitated with the construction of ‘New Villages’, settlements built in the early 1950s and to which the Chinese squatter population was relocated. These villages were fenced off and heavily guarded, which enabled sustained surveillance of potential suppliers. Furthermore, identity cards had been issued in the early days of the Emergency, when each person over 12 years of age had been registered. These measures allowed the police and Special Branch to analyse social relations, establish patterns in

³⁷Lambeth, United Kingdom, Imperial War Museum, Sounds Archive, London, Accession No. 10175, Richard Joseph Wauchope Craig, 11 April 1988.

³⁸Because the MRLA relied so heavily on indoctrination, a break of loyalty would often be absolute. Only a complete shift of loyalty would be psychologically manageable and the SEP would therefore often happily give away the position of his erstwhile comrades. See Lucian W. Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning* (Princeton UP 1956).

³⁹In a dispatch dated 26 Jan. 1955, the High Commissioner Sir Donald MacGillivray notes a drop in the surrender rate from a monthly average of 31 in 1953 to a level of 17 in 1955. Dispatch found in A.J. Stockwell, *Malaya: Part III: The Alliance Route to Independence, 1953–1957*, British Documents on the End of the Empire (London: HMSO 1995), 83–9.

behaviour and thereby identify suspected suppliers. As with the SEP, the aim was co-option, not punishment, though blackmail was occasionally used to compel cooperation. The police would first observe the suspected supplier and collect sufficient evidence for a foolproof case. Finally, the supplier would be approached – discreetly – and accused of cooperating with the rebels. Presented with the incriminating evidence, the supplier would be given a stark choice: arrest, detention or covert recruitment as an agent.

As the intelligence became more detailed and more readily available, the British and Commonwealth forces were able to target their operations so as to guarantee a successful encounter. Writing in January 1955, High Commissioner Sir Donald MacGillivray noted that ‘most of the successful Security Force contacts with the terrorists have been the result of information, rather than chance encounter’.⁴⁰ Sunderland illustrates the point: ‘In 1952, odds of achieving a contact on the strength of information were 1 in 10 for an ambush and 1 in 17 for a patrol, and the absence of information reduced these odds to 1 in 33 and 1 in 88, respectively.’⁴¹ What one witnesses through this analysis is the critical role played by intelligence in the effective application of DO within the context of a counter-insurgency campaign.

Intelligence-Sharing

The Army’s commitment to intelligence-gathering, the exploitation of SEP and the construction of the New Villages were but some of the means that helped generate the information superiority necessary for the effective prosecution of the DO military campaign. For this intelligence to have purpose, it also had to be timely. In other words, the right information had to reach the right cell and at the right time so as to enable immediate action while the intelligence was still fresh and before the MRLA had the possibility to react.

This was achieved through the construction of an intelligence network, which relied heavily on dispersion and empowered decentralisation, thus mirroring the military’s mode of engagement. In an effort to enhance intelligence-sharing, General Briggs had in April 1950, within two weeks of his arrival in Malaya, set up the Federal War Council along with several state and district war executive committees (DWECs and SWECs).⁴² These councils were organised into a horizontal and vertical network across the country and were all

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Sunderland, *Army Operations in Malaya*, 145.

⁴²See Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 58, for a detailed table on the civil, military and police representatives in these committees.

represented by an interagency staff. 'Each committee was composed of the chief military, police, and government representative of the region, with the senior civilian as chairman, and was empowered to direct the counterinsurgent effort in its area of jurisdiction by giving orders to police, military, and civil organizations within those boundaries.'⁴³

The committee system worked in tandem with the Army's use of distributed operations, as both systems emphasised decentralisation, dispersal and relative autonomy over decision-making at the local level. The committee system contributed to the efficacy of distributed operations in two ways: first, the interagency representation resulted in a shared awareness and exchange of information that cut across the traditional stovepipes. As Sunderland puts it, 'this picture of police and military working together in the same room twenty-four hours a day, surrounded by fresh information and at the center of first-rate communications... was very different from the informal, spasmodic, uncertain cooperation of 1948-1950'.⁴⁴ It meant the Army's small units were privy to greater volumes of information, which they used to target their patrols, set ambushes and ensure successful encounters in the jungle. Second, the geographic dispersion of the committee network enabled decentralised decision-making, as each committee could focus on the issues most relevant to its state or district, where it could also link in with the local Army cells to achieve more immediate results.

This system was complemented by a clear division of labour vis-à-vis intelligence work. With time, a clear remit and communications channels were established for and between all agencies dealing with intelligence in Malaya. The system reached its acme under the leadership of High Commissioner Lt-General Sir Gerald Templar, who in 1952-53 restructured Special Branch and made it the lead agency for all matters related to the acquisition and analysis of intelligence. Intrinsic to this structure was the representation of military advisers at Special Branch, who could relay the intelligence in the manner most appropriate and useful to the military. This formalisation underlined the centrality of intelligence in the prosecution of Army operations, which in turn contributed to greater military effectiveness. Through the exploitation of new means of acquiring intelligence, Special Branch was by the later stages of the campaign familiar with the MRLA order of battle, its locations and its movements. The information became more precise and, through the network of

⁴³Riley Sunderland, *Organizing Counterinsurgency in Malaya* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 1964), vii, 15, 27.

⁴⁴Sunderland, *Antiguerrilla Intelligence in Malaya*, 49. See Sunderland, *Organizing Counterinsurgency*, 46-8, for information on the structure and workings of the operations rooms of the various committees.

interagency committees, its dissemination would be timely, resulting in successful and precise intelligence-enabled operations.

Separation of Combatants and Civilians

A fifth driver behind the successful use of distributed operations in Malaya relates to the physical separation of combatants and civilians. This remarkable feat was achieved through the construction of New Villages and the raising of an ultimately well-trained and substantial Home Guard that could monitor and protect the new settlements. Importantly, the New Villagers were constructed not as concentration or labour camps, but as progressive communities, where the Chinese villagers could own land, work, engage in local politics and move freely (though certain restrictions and Emergency regulations were only dropped as the insurgency waned). The set-up had two positive effects on the prosecution of DO.

First, the construction and management of the New Villages effectively minimised the incidence of ‘collateral damage’ – an inflammatory and counterproductive feature of most counter-insurgency campaigns. The villagers were allowed out in the jungle only at selected hours and were constantly surveyed by the police or by one of the many paramilitary civil-defence forces formed in the early months of the campaign. This greatly facilitated the work of the Army cells: henceforth anyone encountered in the jungle could reasonably be suspected to be hostile.

Second, the separation of combatants and civilians made the MRLA more desperate and therefore easier to spot. Denied access to the civilian population, the MRLA found it increasingly difficult to attract fresh recruits, particularly as the political and economic opportunities afforded to the inhabitants of the New Villagers had removed the primary incentive to join the guerrilla ranks. Furthermore, by screening entry-and-exit to the New Villages, the British and Commonwealth forces were able to disrupt the rebels’ supply lines, which forced the MRLA to establish new contacts.⁴⁵ As the MRLA grew more desperate, it had to be less careful, and there was also no assurance that its new suppliers would be trustworthy. In many ways, the MRLA’s attempts to rebuild a support network were therefore likely to provide the military with valuable intelligence, which would in turn allow for more effective operations.

⁴⁵Lambeth, United Kingdom, Imperial War Museum, Sounds Archive, Accession No. 10120, Peter Eric Harry Maule-Ffinch, 16 Feb. 1986.

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The above analysis of the use of DO in Malaya reveals that the concept is in many ways ideally suited toward irregular warfare. Much as advertised in USMC concept papers, academic treatise and published articles, DO has the potential to empower the individual soldier, adapt decision-making to the local level, increase the geographical spread of the force and its ability to gather tactical intelligence.⁴⁶ If close coordination between units can be achieved – either through modern communications technology or pre-deployment synchronisation – the force can combine these benefits of dispersal with the typical strengths of mass. The concept thus seems ideally suited to combating dispersed and elusive adversaries who use the terrain and their irregular nature to melt away and avoid detection and engagement.

Yet, as seen, the successful use of DO in Malaya hinged on at least five necessary prerequisites, or systemic ‘drivers’. These enabling factors must be engaged with and somehow reproduced before this mode of operations is applied to other counter-insurgency campaigns. The point here is not to replicate the particular systems or organisational structures in place in Malaya, but to formalise arrangements that can achieve a similar or equivalent effect. This has critical implications for the use of DO in irregular warfare.

Institutional Adaptability

The first and most basic implication is that for DO to work, the concept must be embraced by the entire force as the most effective means of prosecuting the particular campaign. In this regard, the largest hurdle relates to force protection. Because breaking up the force appears to expose each cell to greater risk, the concept has reportedly fallen out of favour with some senior US commanders.⁴⁷ In Malaya, the heightened risk factor was accepted, partly because the enemy was known to avoid open battle, partly because of the possibility of calling in reinforcement and partly because there appeared to be no more efficient means of achieving the set military objectives. A similar calculation would have to be made before DO is applied elsewhere. In so doing, it is important not to let the apparent security of massed formations thwart the benefits afforded through troop dispersion, particularly if the cells can

⁴⁶See USMC ‘Marine Corps Operating Concepts for A Changing Security Environment’, March 2006, 64. See also USMC Combat Development Command, *Tentative Manual for Countering Irregular Threats: An Updated Approach to Counterinsurgency Operations*, Quantico, VA: MCCPC, 7 June 2006, 24–5.

⁴⁷Christian Lowe, ‘Nowhere to Hide’, *Marine Corps Times*, 22 May 2006, 14.

be protected by other means (by maintaining a low profile, by sending reinforcements, or by calling in joint fires if necessary).

On a more general level, the optimal implementation of this concept requires a wholehearted commitment toward the necessary changes in training, doctrine and structure. This presents a problem, in that military institutions are typically slow to embrace change, at least according to the literature on organisational learning. In what appears to be an attempt to co-opt sources of institutional resistance, the DO concept is sold as an 'additive' capability – one that adds to the service's existing range of capabilities without affecting or otherwise threatening the status quo. According to a USMC fact-sheet, 'Distributed Operations will not change how Marines fight; it will improve it.'⁴⁸ This, of course, is a contradiction in terms, illustrating the tension inherent to the internalisation of the concept, a process that will undoubtedly require a degree of change in the service's working methods and resource allocation. Selling DO as an 'additive' capability may therefore be to wish away the need to achieve attitudinal change and institutional consensus. It would be wiser to engage closely with the sources of institutional restraint so that the concept, when implemented, can function optimally. In this regard, the Malaya campaign demonstrates the fundamental role of leadership in inspiring an institution to embrace change: the course of the campaign changed radically during Briggs' tenure as Director of Operations and the progress thus enabled was only accelerated in 1951–53, under the remarkable and inspired leadership of Templar.

Training and Doctrine

An additional institutional challenge relates to the reluctance of senior commanders to decentralise decision-making. Again, this comes down to the need for the military institution to accept change, but higher-rank commanders must also feel that they can trust their subordinates to cope with the increased autonomy, power and responsibility bestowed to them through the use of DO. Ultimately, it is a matter of training the force before empowering and decentralising it. Malaya illustrated the value of prior familiarity with small unit operations, and the need to disseminate such knowledge through effective training programmes.

It is therefore promising that the USMC has from the outset stressed the centrality of training to the prosecution of DO. The DO concept paper emphasises that 'one of the principal requirements for development of a distributed operations capability will be the further

⁴⁸USMC, 'Questions and Answers About Distributed Operations', 1.

enhancement of training and professional education for small-unit leaders and individual Marines'.⁴⁹ It then proceeds to detail the type of training that should be made available for the application of DO. It is difficult to underplay the value of such preparation: the individual soldier must have a level of initiative, intelligence and discipline to mirror the scale of the task at hand. However, it is also difficult to see how this training will fit into the USMC's already full training cycle, or how the service will recruit and retain the required personnel, the 'strategic corporal', in General Charles C. Krulak's words, who have the initiative, maturity and discipline to lead decentralised units into battle.

Intelligence-Gathering

In one sense, distributing the force is indeed a process of replacing mass with information. Intelligence helps locate the typically elusive insurgents and thereby grants the cells the initiative, which enables them to shed mass without exposing themselves to greater risk. The centrality of intelligence to the proper application of DO raises some questions as to what type of information is needed and how it can be obtained.

The intelligence effort in Malaya was predominantly geared toward the acquisition of human intelligence (Humint) and recollections from the campaign consistently cite SEP, agents or tip-offs as the most valuable sources of information.⁵⁰ Gaining Humint was however a labour-intensive process: the tapping of defectors and of the group's support structure required the establishment of a sophisticated intelligence capability geared toward effective surveillance and agent-running. Gaining information from the wider population was a yet more ambitious undertaking, requiring the provision of security, of services and of a political strategy deemed largely legitimate by the populace and as worthy of support.

The theory behind the DO concept recognises the fundamental role of Humint in irregular campaigns. It does not however anticipate the setting-up of the large types of organisational structures that helped acquire Humint in Malaya. Instead, it is expected that with the dispersal of troops, each cell will be able to gather its own intelligence.⁵¹ As seen in Malaya, small units are indeed more adept

⁴⁹'A Concept for Distributed Operations', v.

⁵⁰The troops were also helped by the aerial reconnaissance of the RAF, whose planes could recognise signs of rebel activity (harvesting, habitation) in the jungle. With time, however, the MRLA became more cautious and learned how to camouflage their presence so as to avoid being spotted from the air.

⁵¹'A Concept for Distributed Operations', vii.

at generating tactical intelligence, and today's soldiers would have a further advantage in this regard in that they can call upon a wider range of intelligence-gathering capabilities, including unmanned aerial vehicles, drones, sensors and surveillance equipment. Information thus gathered should, in turn, allow for more effective DO.

It is however debatable whether this type of intelligence-gathering will provide the detail necessary to prosecute DO effectively. The operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have illustrated that irregular adversaries often learn to evade the gaze of high-technological surveillance capabilities. Meanwhile, individual cells may not have the relevant linguistic and intelligence-related skills to acquire the necessary level of Humint. Agent-running and the tapping of surrendered or captured combatants would more likely require an intelligence agency along with basic police infrastructure – staff, offices, perhaps even detention facilities, all of which seems to jar with the light footprint anticipated through DO. And it is uncertain why the general population would feel compelled to compromise the insurgents if they are provided with no protection, no assistance and no winning strategy to support. Though it is entirely possible to read too much into Malaya, it was only after the ethnic Chinese squatters had been relocated and protected from the MRLA that they felt comfortable talking to the security forces.⁵² Furthermore, the opportunities provided in the settlements gave the villagers an actual incentive to support what they could perceive as a legitimate side, which prompted greater cooperation and information-sharing.

The use of DO therefore seem to present a paradox. The concept is clearly geared toward speed, manoeuvre warfare and achieving a lighter footprint. Yet at the same time, it would appear that the concept's effectiveness requires accurate Humint, the acquisition of which typically demands a heavier footprint, either in the form of massed security forces in civilian centres or an infrastructure to interrogate and detain captured combatants and run agents. This tension must be acknowledged and addressed.

Intelligence-Sharing

Aside from the need for human intelligence, DO is equally reliant on effective intelligence-sharing; this is the means by which whatever intelligence is acquired reaches the right cells and at the right time, thus enabling swift and effective action. In this regard, today's network-centric technologies have much to offer, as it is now possible to transmit large chunks of information instantaneously and across the

⁵²Sunderland, *Army Operations in Malaya*, 61.

network. Such capabilities would seem to obviate the type of inter-agency committees seen in Malaya, which were responsible for intelligence-sharing in that campaign.

Challenges nonetheless remain. First, on a purely technical level, the use of high-technological communications equipment requires consistent and reliable interoperability between services and agencies. It is imperative that the relevant institutions and security forces are able to share information as necessary and over secure lines of communication. Second, the use of network-centric technologies does not answer the critical question of how to distribute the information. The committee system in Malaya worked well because it was decentralised to the district level, so the small units in that location were fed information relevant to their specific area of operations. At the same time, the system also involved federal and state-level structures, which allowed intelligence to flow up and down the network as needed.

The implication for today's use of DO is that though technological innovations have greatly facilitated information-sharing, there is still an urgent need to manage that very process, lest individual cells are burdened with too much information, or with information that is not relevant to their location. Put differently, 'when it comes to intelligence, we run the risk of asking commanders to drink from a digital fire hose'.⁵³ The point here is that information-sharing is not an a priori good, but depends on the usefulness of that intelligence to its recipient at a particular point in time. The process of perfecting this arrangement is still human in nature.

Separation of Combatants and Civilians

The separation of guerrillas and civilians in Malaya dramatically reduced the incidence of collateral damage, which helped nurture better relations with the ethnic Chinese community. At the same time, the isolation of the rebels in the jungle is not an achievement that is easily reproduced. This has significant implications for the implementation of DO in other contexts.

First, it is more than likely that DO would have to be conducted in urban or populated environments, in which insurgents deliberately intermingle with civilians and soldiers face the distinct possibility of alienating their support base by inadvertently causing civilian casualties. Not only is urbanisation a global phenomenon,⁵⁴ but the

⁵³Tovar, 'USMC Distributed Operations', 23.

⁵⁴See Population Division of the Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision* and *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision*, available at <esa.un.org/unup>.

complexity of the urban environment also offers sanctuary, targets and business opportunities to the would-be insurgent.⁵⁵ DO was not initially designed for urban operations, though the USMC has since worked on extending the applicability of the concept to this terrain.⁵⁶ Such work must be accelerated. Nonetheless, while the urban environment should not invalidate the benefits of DO, it does restrict its usefulness, particularly if there is no concomitant effort to acquire the type of Humint alluded to above, which would help distinguish the enemy from the general populace.

There is, however, a more critical dimension to the separation of guerrillas and the civilian population. While DO does seem to provide a workable concept for the elimination of insurgents, it is a well-known fact that non-state armed groups often succeed in attracting new fighters. Through close proximity with the population, the rebel groups will either coerce or co-opt fresh recruits and thereby refill its ranks – this was also the case in Malaya prior to the construction of the New Villages from 1950.⁵⁷ The implication for DO as a counter-insurgency concept should be clear: while it does indeed provide a means of killing insurgents, it may in itself be too narrow to defeat an insurgency. The latter objective requires that DO is plugged into a wider counter-insurgency system, involving the types of non-kinetic measures purposefully *not* discussed in this article: a political, social and economic strategy that serves to alienate the guerrillas, minimise their support base and prevent them from attracting fresh recruits. Though seemingly separate from the military campaign, such measures are what enable the attrition of the insurgency group and the thinning of its ranks – these non-military measures are thus what allow the benefits of DO to gain meaning.

Conclusion

The article has demonstrated that DO connotes key advantages in the prosecution of a low-intensity military campaign. Some of these advantages are intrinsic to the dispersal of troops: individual cells are able to move more discreetly, acquire more intelligence and achieve a greater geographical reach. Decision-making is effectively decentralised so that individual cells are able to base strategy on local conditions. Meanwhile, the cells remain connected, which ensures that they pursue

⁵⁵See Frank G. Hoffman, 'Small Wars Revisited: The United States and Nontraditional Wars', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28/6 (Dec. 2005), 923–4.

⁵⁶'Questions and Answers About Distributed Operations', 5.

⁵⁷Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War*, 55–6.

a coherent strategy and are able to re-aggregate and synchronise their activities and movements.

However, to be fully effective DO must be complemented by at least five drivers. First, institutional adaptability is required to carry through the associated changes in resource allocation and operating procedures. Second, the force must be adequately experienced and well trained, particularly as the concept relies on the empowerment of decentralised units, or the pushing down of decision-making authority to the lower ranks. Third, the concept should be underpinned by an effective intelligence-gathering system, ideally one able to obtain reliable human intelligence on the location and activities of the insurgency group(s). It is questionable whether the intelligence gathered by individual cells will be sufficiently detailed, and it may have to be complemented by a specialised intelligence organisation or a more sophisticated ‘hearts-and-minds’ strategy. Fourth, intelligence-gathering must be fused with a smooth system of dissemination, so as to provide each individual cell with information relevant to its sector and at the right time. Lastly, the low likelihood of separating guerrillas from the civilian populace will complicate the use of any military mode of engagement, including DO, and calls into question whether the level of success experienced through the use of DO in Malaya can realistically be reproduced in other ‘low-intensity’ campaigns. Furthermore, the military successes achieved through DO will tend toward irrelevance unless a wider political and strategic system is put in place that prevents the insurgent group from refilling its ranks or maintaining its support.

The identification and recognition of these drivers should have a bearing on the evolution of the DO concept. It would for example be erroneous and unwise to misinterpret DO as a stand-alone or strategically decisive concept for counter-insurgency campaigns. Instead, as an *enabling* concept geared exclusively toward the security component of the campaign, it is critical that DO complements and is complemented by a wider counter-insurgency strategy. Not only is there, as emphasised in several USMC papers on irregular warfare, a distinct limit to what can be achieved by military means alone.⁵⁸ More importantly – to this context, at any rate – the effectiveness of DO and the significance of its results rely on non-military policies. It is therefore critical that DO is not perceived as a means of fighting the ‘Long War’ with a light footprint. Nor should it in any way be interpreted as

⁵⁸This classic lesson of irregular warfare is a *leitmotif* in a series of recently released USMC publications on the topic. See USMC Combat Development Command, *Tentative Manual for Countering Irregular Threats*; ‘Marine Corps Operating Concepts for A Changing Security Environment’; USMC, *Small-Unit Leaders’ Guide to Counterinsurgency*, June 2006.

reducing the need to engage with the traditional imperatives of counter-insurgency. Instead, greater attention should be paid to how this concept can be integrated as part of the USMC's broader strategy for countering irregular threats.

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