

THE COUNTER INSURGENCY OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: *The basis for the successful use of the relevant power tools that produce the effects needed to accomplish the end state is to understand the operating environment. Operating environment represents a composite of the conditions, circumstances and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander. This is an environment directly affected by the crisis. Each operating environment has its own character, a number of specific features resulting from a particular crisis. The intent of the article is by the analysis of the operational variables (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure, Physical, Time - PMESII-PT) to present the specifics of the operating environment that is affected by the insurgency.*

Keywords: Operating Environment, Operational Variables, Insurgency, Counterinsurgency

1. Introduction

Operating Environment (OE) presents “a composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander” [1].

It is an environment directly affected by the crisis in which individual power tools are applied. It is made up of elements such as the physical and non-physical environment (terrain and climate environment, land, maritime, air, space, informational and cyber space), threats and risks (irreplaceable factor that still remain at the beginning of the 21st century is also combat power) [13], aggressive non-state actors, e.g. insurgents, but also inadequate economics, crime, diseases, natural disasters, etc., local populations and other actors (governmental agencies, non-governmental and international organizations, police and security forces, etc.).

OE forms opportunities, influences capabilities and limits all activities of

friendly, neutral and hostile actors operating in the area of operation.

2. Operational variables

To achieve the detail of the analysis and the subsequent assessment of the conditions, circumstances, impacts of individual OE elements, the so-called operational variables (Figure 1) are utilized at the operational level. These include political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical and time variables (PMESII-PT). [2]

2.1. Political

This “sub-environment” describes the quality of the governmental system, the interconnectivity of elements, the distribution of responsibility and the power at all political levels in a specific OE. At the same time, it includes the types and extent of the problems, but also the possibilities and the degree of willingness to deal with them. The political bearing of the host

country is a crucial part of the insurgency suppression.

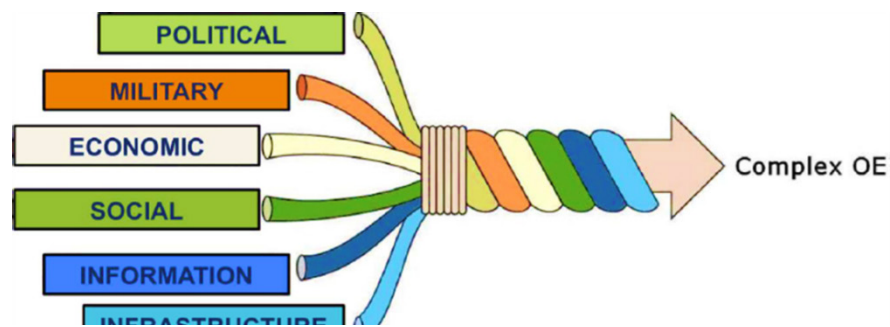


Figure 1: Operational variables [2]

The attention of coalition forces must not be devoted only to an official political system represented by political parties but also to unofficial political groups (tribes, local councils, ethnic groups and other power centers).

These groups can be important actors in the distribution of political power, especially at the local level, because they usually have the ability to influence the behavior of indigenous people. Tribal and social castes can influence local populations by openly presenting whom they perceive as legitimate authority on a particular territory. On the other hand, official political apparatus can also create the identity of each social group through education and information campaigns. A typical example is a training program that in the youngster population has a patriotic sense, which can be a powerful tool for shaping a personal identity and consequently whom this entity perceives as a legitimate authority.

However, this identity or perception of legitimacy is not unchangeable. Decreasing the levels of impact on the population, for whatever reason, means the immediate profit of the adversary side. [9]

Long-term success in COIN operations is clearly based on political efforts. This is also documented by the current developments in crisis situations that arise without warning, and the response of the international community may not be immediate or adequate. [11]

Understanding the political aspects of OE,

knowing the level of political perception by individual groups of the local population and constantly monitoring changes in the political environment is relevant to all actors involved in COIN.

2.2. Military

The military factor explores the military capabilities of all relevantly acting armed actors (enemy, friendly and neutral forces) in a specific OE.

Variety of friendly forces, such as coalition forces and other armies, host nation security forces (army, national and local police, border guards and others), local and private security forces, units of other international organizations (e.g. UN), the former but now demilitarized forces of the host country, and the quantum of hostile actors with the ability to use military force, operate in the COIN environment.

Coalition forces must analyze and consider following quantitative and qualitative aspects of hostile, friendly and neutral armed actors [7]:

- a position in the national and local governmental structure,
- an organization, training and conceptual component of combat power,
- an economical factor,
- a recruitment system
- a role (prediction, responsibility),
- a relationship with local population,
- an impact on the other international forces in the specific area.

Not all of these components have sufficient distinguishing features which are

identifying membership to particular military component. As a result, the military environment may paradoxically become undistinguishable, which may adversely affect the local population.

2.3 Economic

Fragile states are usually affected by a severe economic crisis (widespread poverty, high rate of unemployment, etc.). The low standard of living and the desire for economic reforms can be the cause of anger directed at the established government. This state may be a foundation for the rise and development of the insurgency or the cause of dissemination of demonstrations, civil unrest and criminality. It can also provide a significant source of recruits for insurgent forces, especially from the young and unemployed population.

The awareness of the coalition forces about the state of the economic environment helps them to identify and subsequently apply appropriate projects stimulating the economic area of the host country.

Supporting the economy in the early stages of COIN campaign involves immediate re-establishment of basic civil services including the supply with drinking water, access to primary health care and education. These economic activities should be designed to respond to those economic areas where insurgents critically point to the inability of the host country's government to spread its "story". [2]

Long-term programs addressing the development of infrastructure, industry, education, commerce must be set up to support the host country's willingness to implement key reforms, reduce dependence on foreign supporters, and support the ability to manage acquired assets to maintain the long-term stability of the host country.

2.4 Social

The social variable factor describes society, individual social groups, their cultural, religious and ethnic differences or beliefs, as well as divergent perceptions of values

of habits and behaviors in society. It includes direct (national, ethnic, religious, cultural, gender and other groups, and other factors) and indirect participants of the conflict (non-governmental organizations, international, local private companies, private security companies, etc.), who can influence decisions of commanders and the fulfillment of COIN tasks.

This factor represents the most important area of the total OE because the COIN measure of success is directly related to the degree of support from the host nation population. Indigenous peoples in COIN become the center of gravity of both adversary sides. Ongoing challenge for the "mind and heart" of the host country population is in place. [9]

The knowledge of historical, cultural, social, political, ethnic and religious beliefs helps to understand the behaviors of the local population, to understand their needs and values. Population in the area of interest is a key element for the adversary sides of the conflict and this fact has a major impact on the overall outcome of the operation. Commanders of coalition forces must therefore understand each of these actors, their motivation, aspirations, interests and relationships.

The perception of the society's situation is not unchangeable in AOO. It is constantly developing and may vary rapidly depending on the results of the ongoing operation. Therefore, for the practical implementation of COIN, the approach and level of action of coalition units is very crucial. These behaviors greatly positively or negatively affect the perception and attitude of the local population, which can affect the outcome of the operation itself. [15]

2.5 Information

The information variable describes the nature, sphere, properties and effects of individuals, organizations and systems that collect, process, disseminate or use information.

The information "sub-environment" consists of three dimensions, from

cognitive, informational and physical. The cognitive dimension includes minds, individual and collective ones, perception, visualization and decision making. The information sphere is the area where information is displayed, collected, processed, stored, disseminated, and even protected. Physical dimension is a tangible, “real world” that consists of systems, people, and companion infrastructures that enable to create effects within the air, land, maritime and cyber space. [8]

Ongoing technological revolution brings in reality enormous implementation of information and communication technologies brings many benefits that lead to the development of information society, acceleration of communication and the development of services. [3] This state offers a number of unique options for outspreading of the information that can be sold almost in real time.

Cyber resources such as the Internet, television, radio, or social networks allow psychological operations to influence the attitudes of the population. [14] These sophisticated operations are conducted through targeted information campaigns that are thematically oriented to different target groups. They can be applied to a wide range of recipients, including rebels, friendly but especially neutral populations.

The insurgents in their propaganda and disinformation campaigns abuse military mistakes and failures of their enemies to persuade the local population to support their interests while undermining the credibility of the government and coalition forces.

Allowing insurgents to gain an advantage in the informational environment, where supporting civilian oriented operations are executed, is a significant failure. The success of COIN operations therefore requires the application of unconventional measures that do not primarily focus on the physical destruction of the enemy but on gaining the loyalties from the indigenous population, in other words, the “main fires are informational

rather than conventional” [5].

2.6 Infrastructure

The infrastructure “sub-environment” is created by the basic facilities and services needed for the functioning of the society. The availability of local infrastructure significantly influences the capabilities and effectiveness of COIN efforts.

Promoting initial restoration of services and facilities has a decisive impact on achieving stability. It represents the restoration or establishment of roads, railways, ports, airports, drinking water supply, power facilities, delivery of humanitarian aid, etc.

It usually falls under non-military authorities’ responsibility. The military role is to carry out support activities in the re-establishment of essential services (in particular areas through military engineering and medical units), but specifically to contribute to the overall reconstruction of a safe and stable environment. [7]

These activities help to the local population to return to normal life but also make a significant contribution to positive attitudes and moral support for other military activities.

2.7 Physical environment

Physical environment, as a basic element of OE, consists of terrain and climatic conditions including multiple environments (arctic, mountain, seaside, jungle, desert, forest, open savannah or urban environment). This “sub-environment” represents one of the most remarkable aspects of OE.

The impact and challenges of the physical environment for conducting the operation differ for each particular climatic and geographical environment. Aspects of terrain and weather affect the feasibility of deployment of the human power, the usability of technology, equipment and weapons, but also tactics in place.

The insurgents are well aware that the open and uninhabited terrain is a great advantage for modern armed forces, and therefore they are trying to eliminate this advantage, in

particular by bringing the fight into the urban areas among the civilian population and the international media reach. [12]

Most people nowadays associate the term of “urban warfare” with events in Afghanistan, Syria, and possibly in Ukraine and other military outbreaks. However, such a perspective must be considered to be very narrow, far from defining the entire spectrum, especially military activities in the urban environment. [6] Execution of the COIN operations in the built-up areas is far more challenging than conducting operations in other areas. The severity is caused mainly by the variability and complexity of the physical environment and the associated threats that reflect the specificities of the environment.

Therefore, “prior collective training and preparation for deployment is one of the crucial operational planning requirements before deployment takes place. Modern training simulation techniques and assets do support preparedness of those units planned for deployment by aligning and synchronizing interoperability of their activities. One of such techniques - Blended simulation can realistically generate a wide range of situations with exact imitation of activities to practice the ability of different types of units to the declared capabilities across the broad spectrum of tasks”. [4]

2.8 Time

Time factor describes the timing and duration of OE activities, events, or circumstances. Population, insurgents and coalition forces perceive the factor of time differently.

While the deployment of coalition forces in COIN operations is limited by its own national targets and allocated resources or public opinion of the population of the deployed countries, the time factor is considerably less important for insurgents. The insurgents perceive the factor of time as their advantage and time is working against coalition forces. [7]

3. Conclusions

Each OE has its own features, a number of specific features resulting from a particular crisis. OE affected by the insurgency is characterized [9]:

- by the presence of many different local, regional, national and international actors and hard-to-recognize enemies, who are usually hidden among indigenous peoples,
- by the deep opinion disintegration of the local society (while part of the population may be willing or be forced to support insurgents, other part can co-operate with coalition forces),
- by limited capability of local security forces to suppress violence or to protect the population, private or public property or cultural values and many other characteristics.

Analysis of individual operational variables (PMESII-PT) will enable coalition commanders to obtain a detailed picture of a complex OE directly related to their capability [10]:

- to find-out the true nature of the problem,
- to specify feasible military and other goals,
- to establish an operational approach that is relevant to the nature of the conflict, appropriate for AOO and resource-efficient,
- to identify lines and allocate necessary resources to achieve predefined goal and others.

The perception of the conditions, contexts, functions, interrelations, and influences of the various factors involved in the OE affected by the insurgency creates a prerequisite for understanding the causes of the rise and existence of the insurgency. Understanding OE (“mindset”) is the determinant of creating lines of effort and strategic principles for the success of COIN operations.

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