

# Upside down

Counterinsurgency experts stress rethinking traditional war fighting

By Kelly Kennedy  
STAFF WRITER

When people talk about the new counterinsurgency field manual, they speak of how counterintuitive it is:

■ The more you're protected, the less safe you are.

■ What you do is less important than the perception of what you do.

■ Allowing the locals to do something tolerably well is better than Americans doing something well.

■ The most important decisions are not made by generals.

Turning tradition on its head is necessary, said Conrad Crane, author of the new manual.

"The force structure has to change," said Crane, director of the U.S. Army Military History Institute and author of the field manual due out in November.



SPC. JASON DANGELL/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESS VIA GETTY IMAGES

"There's some fiefdom out there — a fear of pushing things down and losing control."

Crane spoke with other coun-

terinsurgency experts Oct. 10 at the Association of the United States Army's annual conference. The new manual takes the old way of doing things — from the top down — and turns it upside down by telling lower-ranking soldiers and Marines to make decisions based on immediate intelligence rather than waiting for orders from above.

That approach — giving greater decision-making powers to troops in the field — is similar to the counterinsurgency model used in the Vietnam War.

After that war, Crane said, the U.S. returned to big-war planning.

"After operations in Somalia, the Balkans and Haiti, along with the beginnings of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," Crane said, Lt. Gens. David Petraeus and James Mattis decided counterinsurgency needed to change.

## How fighting should look

Lt. Col. Chris Hickey, who led 2nd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, through two tours in Iraq, used his experiences in Tal Afar from May 2005 to February 2006 to show those at the conference how fighting the insurgency should look, according to the manual — and that it takes time to make progress.

First, Hickey said, his leaders figured out key points in their mission: the October referendum and the December election.

"We knew we needed to improve Iraq security operations," Hickey said. "For the first month in Tal Afar, we were hit every day."

Hickey and his soldiers looked at the problems with the rules of counterinsurgency engagement

The new counterinsurgency doctrine holds that decisions should be made on the ground as soldiers gather intelligence. Here, a platoon sergeant with 2nd Infantry Division communicates his search team's progress during a cordon-and-search operation with Iraqi national police in southern Baghdad.

in mind: What do the locals need?

"It's key to focus on people and their needs and security," said Kalev Sepp, assistant professor of national defense at the Naval Postgraduate School. U.S. soldiers have to provide enough security so that the local government can operate to take care of people's needs, such as food, water, electricity and safety, he said.

In the beginning of the war, Hickey said, he saw a Shiite police force "holed up in a castle" and too frightened to deal with the mostly Sunni population. The power worked for a few hours a day. The police chief and the mayor "hated each other." The food distribution system was "broken."

"The police were too frightened to go out on patrol, and when they did go out on patrol, they conducted sectarian attacks," Hickey said. "We had an average of about five attacks a day, so you can see what our lives looked like."

Hickey and his soldiers tried recruiting more locals for the police force. "We had 150 more Shi'a and three Sunni show up," Hickey said. "We knew something was up."

As it turned out, their lives had been threatened. So Hickey imported Sunni police from Mosul. "We had instant credibility."

From there, the U.S. and Iraqi soldiers and the local police worked the city 24 hours a day.

Then, they moved into a castle in the middle of the city where they were accessible — and passed out hundreds of cards with cell-phone numbers on them so Iraqis could call U.S. forces directly.

Then, they moved the police force and the mayor into the castle.

"We lived right next to the governor, the mayor and the chief of police," Hickey said. "What we

saw was a dramatic change of the situation in the city."

Soon, Hickey said, they had patrol bases off by themselves throughout the city. "It's almost counterintuitive that I had all these patrol bases throughout the city, but we felt more protected," he said.

"The enemy lost their ability to hide in plain sight."

Hickey talked about improving schools, allowing the Iraqi army to seek information after attacks and getting to know the names of civilians' children.

And, he said, if his soldiers got in trouble, he could send in tanks or more troops instantly, rather than waiting for someone higher up to approve it.

Col. Chris Short, commander of the Counterinsurgency Academy in Iraq and in the audience at the symposium, said the manual, as well as information specific to each area in Iraq or Afghanistan, is being disseminated to troops as they arrive in theater.

That's important, because each unit faces a different kind of war, Crane said.

Some soldiers are running defense, some are maintaining secure areas and some are in full battle mode trying to recover areas lost to insurgents. Each possibility is covered in the manual.

## Thousands educated

The first class at Short's academy began in November, and 3,000 to 4,000 American soldiers have gone through, Short said.

The academy also sends trainers out to the field so they can gather information and prepare the next group of students that is headed to that particular area of Iraq.

In the fall, the academy staff hopes to offer the class at the graduate level, he said, and concentrate instruction on the specific area leaders will encounter.

The course is also online, as is the downloadable field manual, which will be updated every eight to 10 months, Short said.

But he said people shouldn't wait for updates: "If we wait to send information down from command, it's too stale," he said.

Short used a Soviet-era battle plan to demonstrate what he said shouldn't happen in today's wars.

"The insurgency is not an institution. They do not have doctrine. They can change their way of doing things from one street corner to the next. And that's while we're waiting for the Russians to come through the Fulda Gap."

A draft of the manual is available at [www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24fd.pdf](http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24fd.pdf). □

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