Chapter 4

Designing Counterinsurgency Campaigns and Operations

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish…the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

This chapter describes considerations for designing counterinsurgency campaigns and operations. For Army forces, this chapter applies aspects of command and control doctrine and planning doctrine to counterinsurgency campaign planning. While campaign design is most often associated with a joint force command, all commanders and staffs need to understand it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CAMPAIGN DESIGN

4-1. In chapter 1, insurgency is described as an organized, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control. Ultimately, the long-term objective for both sides in that struggle remains acceptance by the people of the state or region of the legitimacy of one side's claim to political power. The reason an insurgency forms to challenge the existing order is different in each case. The complexity of insurgency presents problems that have incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements. The solutions to these intensely challenging and complex problems are often difficult to recognize as such because of complex interdependencies. While attempting to solve an intensely complex problem, the solution of one of its aspects may reveal or create another, even more complex, problem. The purpose of design is to achieve a greater understanding, a proposed solution based on that understanding, and a means to learn and adapt. For a U.S. military commander directed to counter an insurgency, knowing why an insurgent movement has gained support and the purpose of American involvement is essential in designing a counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign. Failure to understand both factors can have disastrous consequences, as illustrated by Napoleon's experience in Spain.

Campaign Assessment and Reassessment

During Napoleon's occupation of Spain in 1808, it seems little thought was given to the potential challenges of subduing the Spanish populace. Conditioned by the decisive victories at Austerlitz and Jena, Napoleon believed the conquest of Spain would be little more than a "military promenade." Napoleon's campaign included a rapid conventional military victory but ignored the immediate requirement to provide a stable environment for the populace.

The French failed to analyze the Spanish people, their history, culture, motivations, and potential to support or hinder the achievement of French political objectives. The Spanish people were accustomed to hardship, suspicious of foreigners and constantly involved in skirmishes with security forces. Napoleon's cultural miscalculation resulted in a protracted occupation struggle that lasted nearly six years and ultimately required approximately three-fifths of the Empire's total armed strength, almost four times the force of 80,000 Napoleon originally designated.

> The Spanish resistance drained the resources of the French Empire. It was the beginning of the end for Napoleon. At the theater level, a complete understanding of the problem and a campaign design that allowed the counterinsurgency force to learn and adapt was lacking.

4-2. Design and planning are qualitatively different yet interrelated activities essential for solving complex problems. While planning activities receive consistent emphasis in both doctrine and practice, discussion of design remains largely abstract and is rarely practiced. Presented a problem, staffs often rush directly into planning without clearly understanding the complex environment of the situation, purpose of military involvement, and approach required to address the core issues. This situation is particularly problematic with insurgencies. Campaign design informs and is informed by planning and operations. It has an intellectual foundation that aids continuous assessment of operations and the operational environment. Commanders should lead the design process and communicate the resulting framework to other commanders for planning, preparation, and execution.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESIGN AND PLANNING

4-3. It is important to understand the distinction between design and planning. (See figure 4-1.) While both activities seek to formulate ways to bring about preferable futures, they are cognitively different. Planning applies established procedures to solve a largely understood problem within an accepted framework. Design inquires into the nature of a problem to conceive a framework for solving that problem. In general, planning is problem solving, while design is problem setting. Where planning focuses on generating a plan—a series of executable actions—design focuses on learning about the nature of an unfamiliar problem.

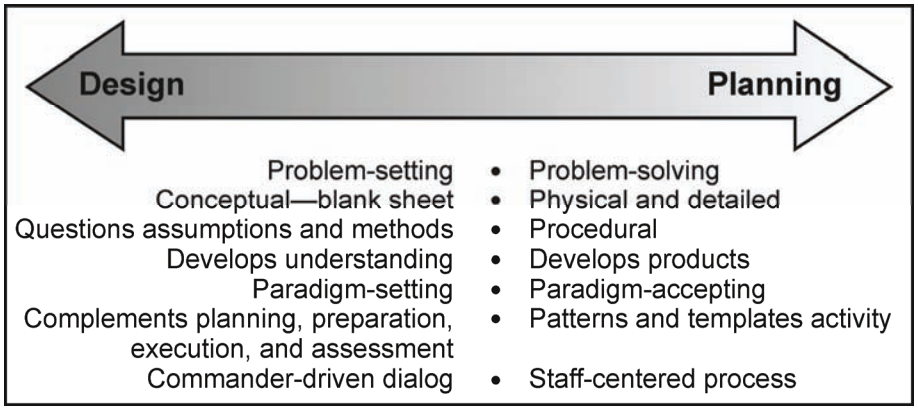

Figure 4-1. Design and planning continuum

4-4. When situations do not conform to established frames of reference—when the hardest part of the problem is figuring out what the problem is—planning alone is inadequate and design becomes essential. In these situations, absent a design process to engage the problem's essential nature, planners default to doctrinal norms; they develop plans based on the familiar rather than an understanding of the real situation. Design provides a means to conceptualize and hypothesize about the underlying causes and dynamics that explain an unfamiliar problem. Design provides a means to gain understanding of a complex problem and insights towards achieving a workable solution.

4-5. This description of design at the tactical level is a form of what Army doctrine calls commander's visualization. Commanders begin developing their design upon receipt of a mission. Design precedes and forms the foundation for staff planning. However, design is also continuous throughout the operation. As part of assessment, commanders continuously test and refine their design to ensure the relevance of military action to the situation. In this sense, design guides and informs planning, preparation, execution, and assessment. However, a plan is necessary to translate a design into execution. (FM 6-0, paragraphs 4-17 through 4-25, discusses commander's visualization.)

4-6. Planning focuses on the physical actions intended to directly affect the enemy or environment. Planners typically are assigned a mission and a set of resources; they devise a plan to use those resources to accomplish that mission. Planners start with a design (whether explicit or implicit) and focus on generating a plan—a series of executable actions and control measures. Planning generally is analytic and reductionist. It breaks the design into manageable pieces assignable as tasks, which is essential to transforming the design into an executable plan. Planning implies a stepwise process in which each step produces an output that is the necessary input for the next step. (FM 5-0 contains Army planning doctrine. MCDP 5 contains Marine Corps planning doctrine.)

THE NATURE OF DESIGN

4-7. Given the difficult and multifaceted problems of insurgencies, dialog among the commander, principal planners, members of the interagency team, and host-nation (HN) representatives helps develop a coherent design. This involvement of all participants is essential. The object of this dialog is to achieve a level of situational understanding at which the approach to the problem's solution becomes clear. The underlying premise is this: when participants achieve a level of understanding such that the situation no longer appears complex, they can exercise logic and intuition effectively. As a result, design focuses on framing the problem rather than developing courses of action.

4-8. COIN design must be iterative. By their nature, COIN efforts require repeated assessments from different perspectives to see the various factors and relationships required for adequate understanding. Assessment and learning enable incremental improvements to the design. The aim is to rationalize the problem—to construct a logical explanation of observed events and subsequently construct the guiding logic that unravels the problem. The essence of this is the mechanism necessary to achieve success. This mechanism may not be a military activity—or it may involve military actions in support of nonmilitary activities. Once commanders understand the problem and what needs to be accomplished to succeed, they identify the means to assess effectiveness and the related information requirements that support assessment. This feedback becomes the basis for learning, adaptation, and subsequent design adjustment.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DESIGN

4-9. Key design considerations include the following:

- Critical discussion.
- Systems thinking.
- Model making.
- Intuitive decision making.
- Continuous assessment.
- Structured learning.

4-10. Rigorous and structured *critical discussion* provides an opportunity for interactive learning. It deepens shared understanding and leverages the collective intelligence and experiences of many people.

4-11. *Systems thinking* involves developing an understanding of the relationships within the insurgency and the environment. It also concerns the relationships of actions within the various logical lines of operations (LLOs). This element is based on the perspective of the systems sciences that seeks to understand the interconnectedness, complexity, and wholeness of the elements of systems in relation to one another.

4-12. In *model making*, the model describes an approach to the COIN campaign, initially as a hypothesis. The model includes operational terms of reference and concepts that shape the language governing the conduct (planning, preparation, execution, and assessment) of the operation. It addresses questions like these: Will planning, preparation, execution, and assessment activities use traditional constructs like center of gravity, decisive points, and LLOs? Or are other constructs—such as leverage points, fault lines, or critical variables—more appropriate to the situation?

4-13. The Army and Marine Corps define *intuitive decision making* as the act of reaching a conclusion which emphasizes pattern recognition based on knowledge, judgment, experience, education, intelligence,

boldness, perception, and character. This approach focuses on assessment of the situation vice comparison of multiple options (FM 6-0/MCRP 5-12A). An operational design emerges intuitively as understanding of the insurgency deepens.

4-14. *Continuous assessment* is essential as an operation unfolds because of the inherent complexity of COIN operations. No design or model completely matches reality. The object of continuous assessment is to identify where and how the design is working or failing and to consider adjustments to the design and operation.

4-15. The objective of *structured learning* is to develop a reasonable initial design and then learn, adapt, and iteratively and continuously improve that design as more about the dynamics of the COIN problem become evident.

DESIGN FOR COUNTERINSURGENCY

4-16. Through design commanders gain an understanding of the problem and the COIN operation's purpose within the strategic context. Communicating this understanding of the problem, purpose, and context to subordinates allows them to exercise subordinates' initiative. *Subordinates' initiative* is assumption of responsibility for deciding and initiating independent actions when the concept of operations or order no longer applies or when an unanticipated opportunity leading to the accomplishment of the commander's intent presents itself (FM 6-0). (Subordinates' initiative is discussed in FM 6-0, paragraphs 2-83 through 2-92.) It facilitates decentralized execution and continuous assessment of operations at all levels throughout the campaign. While traditional aspects of campaign design as expressed in joint and Service doctrine remain relevant, they are not adequate for a discussion of the broader design construct for a COIN environment. Inherent in this construct is the tension created by understanding that military capabilities provide only one component of an overall approach to a COIN campaign. Design of a COIN campaign must be viewed holistically. Only a comprehensive approach employing all relevant design components, including the other instruments of national power, is likely to reach the desired end state.

4-17. As noted above, this description of campaign design is a form that Army doctrine calls commander's visualization. Design begins with identification of the end state, as derived from the policy aim. (Joint doctrine defines the *end state* as the set of required conditions that defines achievement of the commander's objectives [JP 1-02]). The end state provides context and logic for operational and tactical decision making. Consequently, strategic goals must be communicated clearly to commanders at every level. While strategy drives design, which in turn drives tactical actions, the reverse is also true. The observations of tactical actions result in learning and greater understanding that may generate modifications to the design, which in turn may have strategic implications. The COIN imperative to "Learn and Adapt" is essential in making the design process work correctly. Figure 4-2 illustrates the iterative nature of COIN campaign design and the large number of factors involved.

COMMANDER'S INTENT AND VISION OF RESOLUTION

4-18. Guided by the campaign's purpose, commanders articulate an operational logic for the campaign that expresses in clear, concise, conceptual language a broad vision of what they plan to accomplish. The operational logic is the commander's assessment of the problem and approach toward solving it. Commanders express it as the commander's intent. Ideally, the operational logic is expressed clearly and simply but in comprehensive terms, such as what the commander envisions achieving with various components or particular LLOs. This short statement of the operational logic helps subordinate commanders and planners, as well as members of other agencies and organizations, see the campaign's direction. It provides a unifying theme for interagency planning.

4-19. In addition, commanders also issue a form of planning guidance called the vision of resolution. The vision of resolution is usually expressed in the form of LLOs. LLOs for a counterinsurgency may include the following:

- Conduct information operations.
- Conduct combat operations/civil security operations.
- Train and employ HN security forces.

- Establish or restore essential services.
- Support development of better governance.
- Support economic development.

This list is an example only. Commanders determine the LLOs appropriate to the situation based on their assessment and their dialog with the leaders of other participating organizations.

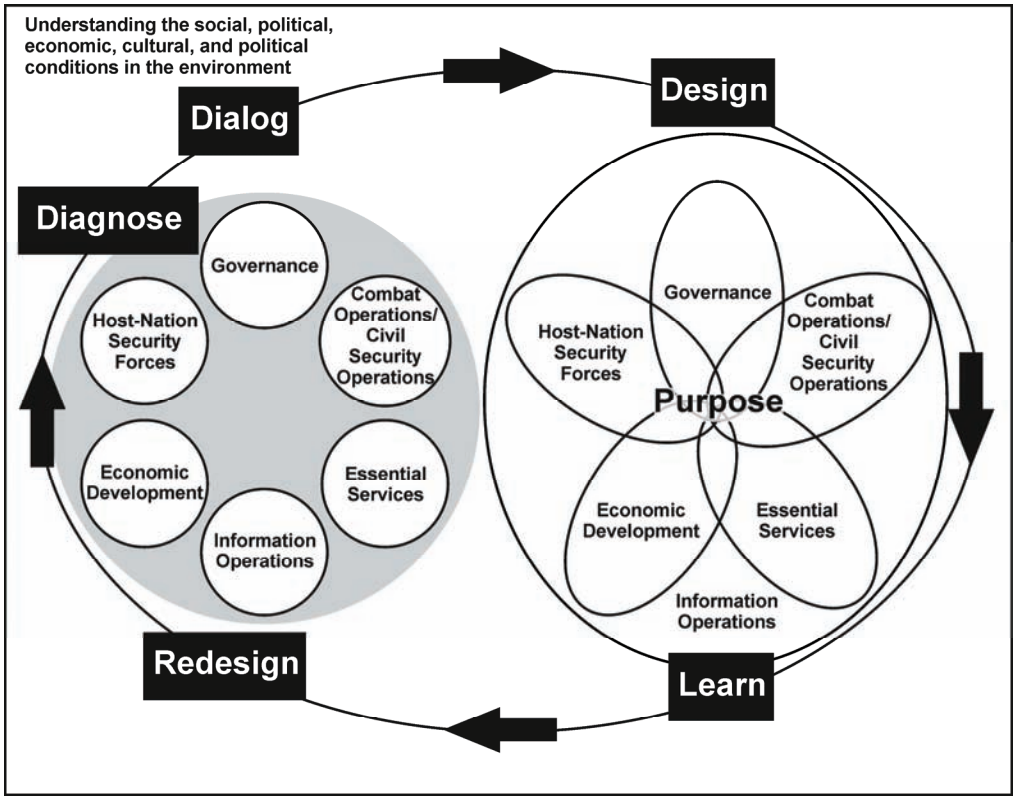

Figure 4-2. Iterative counterinsurgency campaign design

4-20. LLOs like those listed in paragraph 4-19 are not intended as a "success template." Selecting and applying them requires judgment. The mosaic nature of insurgencies and the shifting circumstances within each area of operations (AO) requires a different emphasis on and interrelationship among the various lines. The situation may also require that military forces closely support, or temporarily assume responsibility for, tasks normally accomplished by other government agencies and private organizations. By broadly describing how the LLOs interact to achieve the end state, commanders provide the operational logic to link the various components in a comprehensive framework. This framework guides the initiative of subordinate commanders as they establish local conditions that support achieving the overall end state. It also promotes unity of effort among joint, interagency, multinational, and HN partners.

LOCAL RELEVANCE

4-21. Informed by the commander's intent—including the end state and vision of resolution—subordinate commanders tailor and prioritize their actions within the LLOs based on the distinct and evolving circumstances within their respective AOs. Military forces are accustomed to unity of command; however, the interagency and multinational nature of COIN operations usually makes such arrangements unlikely. All participating organizations do share attitudes and goals. General cooperation on matters of mutual concern, established through informal agreements, may be the most practicable arrangement. Therefore, effective commanders empower subordinate leaders to perform the coordination, cooperation, and innovation needed to achieve unity of effort and execute operations in the manner best suited to local

conditions. The design—consisting of the commander's intent, vision of resolution and other guidance issued as the campaign unfolds, and end state—provides the framework within which subordinates exercise this form of initiative.

LEARNING IN EXECUTION

4-22. Before commanders deploy their units, they make every effort to mentally prepare their Soldiers or Marines for the anticipated challenges, with a particular focus on situational awareness of the anticipated AO. *Situational awareness* is knowledge of the immediate present environment, including knowledge of the factors of METT-TC (FMI 5-0.1). COIN operations require a greater focus on civil considerations—the C in METT-TC—than conventional operations do. This situational awareness is only the beginning of an understanding of the AO that will mature as operations progress. However, commanders use it to begin to establish a common frame of reference.

4-23. Design begins based on this initial awareness. Aspects of the problem and means of resolving them do not remain static. Conditions are seldom consistent throughout any AO and continue to change based on actions by friendly, enemy, neutral, and other involved organizations. Rather than being uniform in character, the operational environment is likely to display a complex, shifting mosaic of conditions. To be effective, commanders—and indeed all personnel—continually develop and enhance their understanding of the mosaic peculiar to their AO. Observing tactical actions and the resulting changing conditions deepens understanding of the environment and enables commanders to relearn and refine their design and implementation actions.

4-24. Initially, situational awareness will probably be relatively low and the design will, by necessity, require a number of assumptions, especially with respect to the populace and the force's ability to positively influence their perception of events. The design can be viewed as an experiment that tests the operational logic, with the expectation of a less-than-perfect solution. As the experiment unfolds, interaction with the populace and insurgents reveals the validity of those assumptions, revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the design.

4-25. *Assessment* is the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the current situation and progress of an operation (FMI 5-0.1). Effective assessment is necessary for commanders to recognize changing conditions and determine their meaning. It is crucial to successful adaptation and innovation by commanders within their respective AOs. A continuous dialog among commanders at all echelons provides the feedback the senior commander needs to refine the design. The dialog is supported by formal assessment techniques and red-teaming to ensure commanders are fully cognizant of the causal relationships between their actions and the insurgents' adaptations. Accordingly, assessment is a learning activity and a critical aspect of design. This learning leads to redesign. Therefore, design can be viewed as a perpetual design-learn-redesign activity, with the commander's intent, vision of resolution, and end state providing the unifying themes.

4-26. The critical role of assessment necessitates establishing measures of effectiveness during planning. Commanders should choose these carefully so that they align with the design and reflect the emphasis on and interrelationship among the LLOs. Commanders and staffs revise their assessment and measures of effectiveness during the operation in order to facilitate redesign and stay abreast of the current situation. Sound assessment blends qualitative and quantitative analysis with the judgment and intuition of all leaders. Great care must be applied here, as COIN operations often involve complex societal issues that may not lend themselves to quantifiable measures of effectiveness. Moreover, bad assumptions and false data can undermine the validity of both assessments and the conclusions drawn from them. Data and metrics can inform a commander's assessment. However they must not be allowed to dominate it in uncertain situations. Subjective and intuitive assessment must not be replaced by an exclusive focus on data or metrics. Commanders must exercise their professional judgment in determining the proper balance.

GOALS IN COUNTERINSURGENCY

4-27. In an ideal world, the commander of military forces engaged in COIN operations would enjoy clear and well-defined goals for the campaign from the very beginning. However, the reality is that many goals emerge only as the campaign develops. For this reason, counterinsurgents usually have a combination of

defined and emerging goals toward which to work. Likewise, the complex problems encountered during COIN operations can be so difficult to understand that a clear design cannot be developed initially. Often, the best choice is to create iterative solutions to better understand the problem. In this case, these iterative solutions allow the initiation of intelligent interaction with the environment. The experiences of the 1st Marine Division during Operation Iraqi Freedom II illustrate this situation.

Iterative Design During Operation Iraqi Freedom II

During Operation Iraqi Freedom II (2004-2005), the 1st Marine Division employed an operational design similar to that used during the Philippine Insurrection (circa 1902). The commanding general, Major General James N. Mattis, USMC, began with an assessment of the people that the Marines, Soldiers, and Sailors would encounter within the division's area of operations. The area of operations was in western Iraq/Al Anbar Province, which had a considerably different demographic than the imam-led Shia areas in which the division had operated during Operation Iraqi Freedom I.

Major General Mattis classified provincial constituents into three basic groups: the tribes, former regime elements, and foreign fighters. The tribes constituted the primary identity group in western Iraq/Al Anbar Province. They had various internal tribal affiliations and looked to a diverse array of sheiks and elders for leadership. The former regime elements were a minority that included individuals with personal, political, business, and professional ties to the Ba'ath Party. These included civil servants and career military personnel with the skills needed to run government institutions. Initially, they saw little gain from a democratic Iraq. The foreign fighters were a small but dangerous minority of transnational Islamic subversives.

To be successful, U.S. forces had to apply a different approach to each of these groups within the framework of an overarching plan. As in any society, some portion of each group included a criminal element, further complicating planning and interaction. Major General Mattis's vision of resolution comprised two major elements encompassed in an overarching "bodyguard" of information operations. (See figure 4-3, page 4-8.)

The first element and main effort was diminishing support for insurgency. Guided by the maxims of "first do no harm" and "no better friend–no worse enemy," the objective was to establish a secure local environment for the indigenous population so they could pursue their economic, social, cultural, and political well-being and achieve some degree of local normalcy. Establishing a secure environment involved both offensive and defensive combat operations with a heavy emphasis on training and advising the security forces of the fledgling Iraqi government. It also included putting the populace to work. Simply put, an Iraqi with a job was less likely to succumb to ideological or economic pressure to support the insurgency. Other tasks included the delivery of essential services, economic development, and the promotion of governance. All were geared towards increasing employment opportunities and furthering the establishment of local normalcy. Essentially, diminishing support for insurgency entailed gaining and maintaining the support of the tribes, as well as converting as many of the former regime members as possible. "Fence-sitters" were considered a winnable constituency and addressed as such.

The second element involved neutralizing the bad actors, a combination of irreconcilable former regime elements and foreign fighters. Offensive combat operations were conducted to defeat recalcitrant former regime members. The task was to make those who were not killed outright see the futility of resistance and give up the fight. With respect to the hard-core extremists, who would never give up, the task was more straightforward: their complete and utter destruction. Neutralizing the bad actors supported the main effort by improving the local security environment. Neutralization had to be accomplished in a discrete and discriminate manner, however, in order to avoid unintentionally increasing support for insurgency.

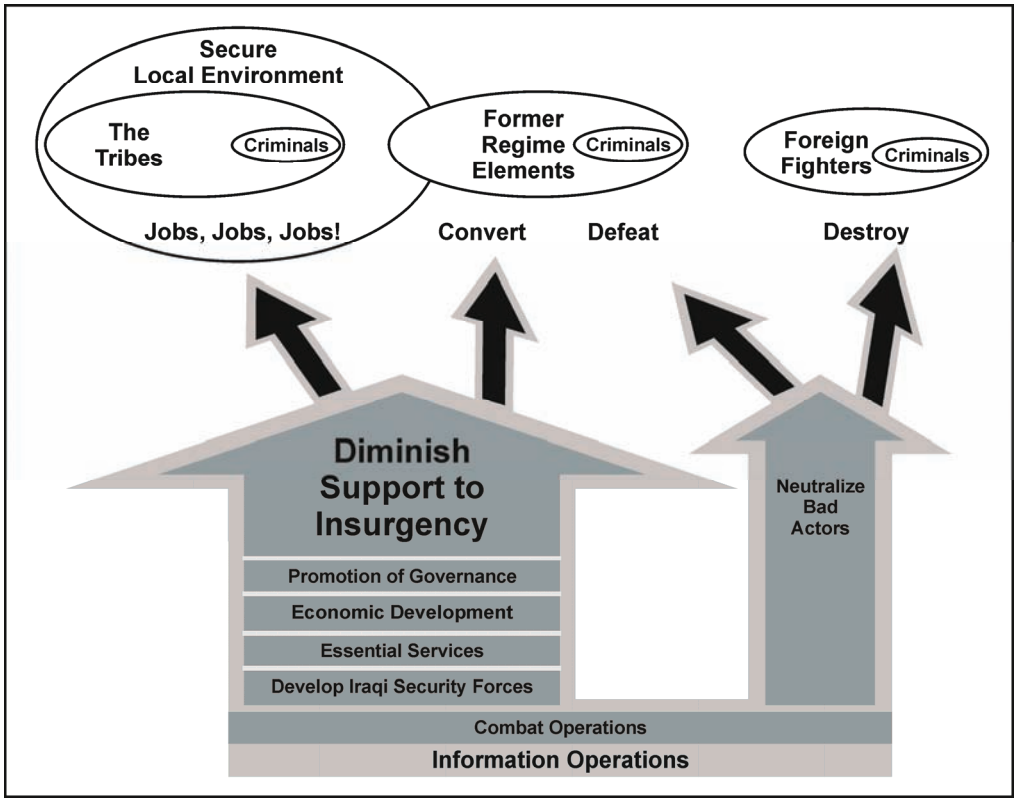

Figure 4-3. 1st Marine Division's operational design for Operation Iraqi Freedom II

Both elements described above were wrapped in an overarching "bodyguard" of information operations. Information operations, both proactive and responsive, were aggressively employed to favorably influence the populace's perception of all coalition actions while simultaneously discrediting the insurgents. These tasks were incredibly difficult for a number of reasons. Corruption had historically been prevalent among Iraqi officials, generating cynicism toward any government. Additionally, decades of Arab media mischaracterization of U.S. actions had instilled distrust of American motives. The magnitude of that cynicism and distrust highlighted the critical importance of using information operations to influence every situation.

In pursuing this vision of resolution, the 1st Marine Division faced an adaptive enemy. Persistent American presence and interaction with the populace threatened the insurgents and caused them to employ more open violence in selected areas of Al Anbar province. This response resulted in learning and adaptation within the 1st Marine Division. The design enabled 1st Marine Division to adjust the blend of "diminishing support for insurgents" and "neutralizing bad actors" to meet the local challenges. Throughout the operation, 1st Marine Division continued learning and adapting with the vision of resolution providing a constant guide to direct and unify the effort.

SUMMARY

4-28. Campaign design may very well be the most important aspect of countering an insurgency. It is certainly the area in which the commander and staff can have the most influence. Design is not a function to be accomplished, but rather a living process. It should reflect ongoing learning and adaptation and the growing appreciation counterinsurgents share for the environment and all actors within it, especially the insurgents, populace, and HN government. Though design precedes planning, it continues throughout planning, preparation, and execution. It is dynamic, even as the environment and the counterinsurgents' understanding of the environment is dynamic. The resulting growth in understanding requires integrated assessment and a rich dialog among leaders at various levels to determine the need for adaptation throughout the COIN force. Design should reflect a comprehensive approach that works across all LLOs in a manner applicable to the stage of the campaign. There should only be one campaign and therefore one design. This single campaign should bring in all players, with particular attention placed on the HN participants. Design and operations are integral to the COIN imperative to "Learn and Adapt," enabling a continuous cycle of design-learn-redesign to achieve the end state.

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