

A Tale of Two Manuals

BY RAPHAEL S. COHEN

On January 13, 2009, in the waning days of the George W. Bush administration, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Henrietta Fore unveiled the *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*. The guide was the first of its kind—an attempt at an inter-agency doctrine reaching across civilian and military agencies in the U.S. Government. It sought to create unifying principles for the counterinsurgency fight and to unite the involved agencies through a common game plan to “achieve synergy among political, security, economic and information activities.”¹ Coordinated by the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs at the Department of State, the guide was coauthored by all the major government stakeholders in the counterinsurgency fight: USAID; the Departments of State, Defense, Justice, Treasury, Homeland Security, Transportation, and Agriculture; and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Moreover, the guide’s creation brought together some of the leading counterinsurgency strategists from across the U.S. Government and drew upon current experience. Seemingly, the finished product was well poised to shape the way the U.S. Government thinks about and conducts counterinsurgencies.

And yet, more than a year and a half after its publication, the guide has languished in relative obscurity with little apparent impact on interagency planning, strategy, or operations in Iraq and Afghanistan or elsewhere. The result is particularly surprising in historical context, given the great success of two other doctrinal guides in shaping counterinsurgency strategic thought. The 1940 U.S. Marine Corps’ *Small Wars Manual* is still widely read by military and civilian government officials alike more than 70 years after its publication. Moreover, the U.S. Army/Marine Corps Field Manual (FM) 3–24, *Counterinsurgency*, written by many of the same authors as the *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, has already achieved almost canonical status in the counterinsurgency literature.² Almost as soon as it was published, FM 3–24 joined the ranks of David Galula’s

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Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice, Robert Thompson's *Defeating Communist Insurgencies*, and other iconic studies of counterinsurgency. FM 3–24, in contrast to the U.S. *Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, is widely read, taught, and quoted among policymakers and military strategists, prompting the question: Why did one manual take off, while the other did not?

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This article is a tale of two manuals—FM 3–24 and the U.S. *Government Counterinsurgency Guide*—and their relative impacts. It briefly tells how each document came into being. Next, it wrestles with how we measure the impact of doctrine. Third, it explores a series of possible reasons for why the two had dramatically different impacts. Finally, it asks what this indicates for the future of complex operations within the whole-of-government approach and interagency counterinsurgency doctrine. Ultimately, this tale highlights the limitations of doctrine in shaping institutional behavior in a civilian interagency environment. In addition, it shows how people can overcome parochial questions of agency authorship to look for guidance, demonstrating that a document does not need to be a joint publication to have an interagency impact.

Writing the Manuals

The story behind the making of the two manuals is nested within a broader intellectual history of the American rediscovery of counterinsurgency doctrine in the post-Vietnam era.

Although not the first U.S. counterinsurgency, Vietnam has come to define the challenges of this form of warfare, trying to win over an often ambivalent local population while hunting an elusive, at least partially homegrown enemy.³ In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, many took the “never again” approach to counterinsurgency. The war, after all, had scarred the military, divided the country, and cost over 58,000 American lives. For many, the lesson of Vietnam was that the United States “should have clearly defined [its] political and military objectives” before going to war and “should know precisely how [its] forces can accomplish those clearly defined objectives.”⁴ Vietnam in particular and counterinsurgency more broadly, however, came to epitomize war done wrong, never to be repeated. Unsurprisingly, counterinsurgency remained a painful subject for the U.S. Government, and certainly not one to be institutionalized in doctrine.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, highlighted the need for counterinsurgency doctrine. In “Constructing the Legacy of Field Manual 3–24,” an article recently published in *Joint Force Quarterly*, John Nagl, one of FM 3–24's authors, recounts the story of the making of the manual.⁵ In late 2005, with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan well under way, then-Lieutenant General David Petraeus was appointed to head the Army's Combined Arms Command at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and soon thereafter set in motion the drafting of the manual. What followed was, at least according to Nagl, unparalleled in the world of doctrine writing. Although not officially an interagency publication, FM 3–24 brought together a mix of serving and retired military officers and a handful of civilian military scholars. After they fleshed out many of the major concepts, they published an interim article in *Military Review*

seeking additional comments.⁶ As Nagl writes, “No previous doctrinal manual had undergone such a public review process before publication or provided so many opportunities for comment to both those inside and outside the Army/Marine Corps tent.”⁷ Ultimately, after much review, the manual was officially published in December 2006.

A few months before FM 3–24 was published, a parallel effort to produce a U.S. Government-wide version got under way. The consensus for this manual came out of a State Department-led interagency conference held in Washington, DC, in September 2006. Drawing on principles from FM 3–24 and lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan, the participants recognized that counterinsurgency requires a range of assets from across government agencies, not just from the military.⁸ As a result, they felt that counterinsurgency would require an interagency doctrine where all the government agencies with equities in the effort would be included in drafting the guide from the start, not in the ad hoc fashion that characterized the drafting of FM 3–24.⁹ Furthermore, the guide would be written in a style more readable and accessible to civilians than was FM 3–24. Like its military counterpart, the drafters of this new manual published an interim report. In October 2007, *Counterinsurgency for U.S. Government Policy Makers: A Work in Progress* was published as an interim effort to allow for comments.¹⁰ Although not greeted with the same fanfare as FM 3–24, the interim manual did garner some press: it was mentioned on a number of blogs and cited favorably in military professional journals.¹¹ And a little over a year later, the *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* was published in January 2009.

Ultimately, from a process standpoint, the two manuals followed similar trajectories. Both

were collaborative efforts to varying degrees; both published their initial interim findings relatively quickly; and both interim reports were—for the most part—well received. True, the guide took longer to produce than FM 3–24—well over 2 years for the former, as opposed to a little over 1 for the latter. Given the novelty of civilian-military interagency doctrine and the number of participants involved, this was to be expected. If anything, the guide’s longer production schedule should have heightened the collective anticipation of its release, and yet, as we shall see, the converse was true.

Measuring the Impact of Doctrine

The first critical question of this analysis is how to measure the impact of doctrine on organizations. In the military context, observing doctrine’s impact is fairly straightforward. Doctrine has long been a staple of the American military’s—and particularly the U.S. Army’s—culture. Practically speaking, from the moment Soldiers enter initial training, they are surrounded by doctrine. Be it FM 7–8, *Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad Tactics*, FM 3–0, *Operations*,

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or FM 3–24, *Counterinsurgency*, doctrine is drummed into Soldiers’ heads—they memorize, quote, and practice doctrine throughout training. And lest they forget, Soldiers will return to the military schoolhouse at regular intervals throughout their careers to relearn it. In the civilian context, by contrast, the impact of doctrine is far less visible. With a less regimented educational system and a more fluid

polymaking context, there are fewer natural inputs for doctrine to impact a civilian agency's culture or operations. Three metrics, however, may be employed to observe doctrine's effect: who reads it, who quotes it, and what policies, strategies, or operations substantively change because of such doctrine.

Who Reads It? Perhaps the most basic question to ask about any document—including doctrine—is whether it gets read, particularly by its target audience. Here, the impact of FM 3–24 is demonstrable. Unsurprisingly, the military reads doctrine in part because it is assigned to read it and required to abide by it, and FM 3–24 is widely taught within the military educational system. More surprisingly, however, is FM 3–24's ability to reach beyond the American military audience. Within a month of its posting in December 2006, it was downloaded 1.5 million times.¹² While this may not mean that 1.5 million people actually read the manual in the first month, it does imply substantial interest in and popularity of FM 3–24. And not only Soldiers read the manual: FM 3–24 was published by a civilian press (the University of Chicago) and can be purchased in commercial book stores.¹³ As an additional demonstration of its crossover

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appeal, FM 3–24 was reviewed in the *New York Times*,¹⁴ *Foreign Affairs*, and other mainstream media outlets.¹⁵

By contrast, the extent to which the *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* was read

is harder to assess. While the guide is readily available on the State Department's Web site, there are no easily available comparable statistics on the number of times it has been downloaded.¹⁶ Unlike FM 3–24, the guide has not been commercially published. Moreover, the extent to which the guide actually is read or assigned inside government is unclear. In one recently conducted survey of returning military and civilian Provincial Reconstruction Team members, for example, only 16.7 percent of the respondents reported using "Parent Agency Documents/Guide Books."¹⁷

Who Quotes It? A second metric of doctrine's success is how often it is quoted and in what forum. After all, the preface states that the *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide's* purpose is to serve as "a stimulus to disciplined, but creative thought."¹⁸ While assessing thoughts—much less creative ones—is an elusive metric to capture, one proxy measure of a work's influence is how widely it is referenced in academic literature. A search using the academic search engine Google Scholar reveals that FM 3–24 is overall about 10 times as likely to be cited in academic work as its interagency counterpart (517 to 45 references, respectively), about 6 times as likely to be cited in an academic publication (35 to 6, respectively), and about twice as likely to be cited in think tank and civilian government agency publications. To be fair, this is an imperfect metric of "creative thought": the search does not wholly capture internal publications and briefings and only imperfectly captures less formal publications (policy papers, blog posts, and so on), but it does give at least a rough gauge of the impact of the two works.¹⁹

Does It Substantively Change Anything? Finally, we need to measure the extent to which doctrine has substantively shaped policy, strategic planning, and operations. Drawing a causal

Academic Citations per Guide

Where Cited	Search Term	
	<i>U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide</i>	FM 3–24, <i>Counterinsurgency</i>
Military	26	414
Civilian government agency	1	2
Think tank	9	20
Academic	6	35
Other (foreign citations)	3	46
Total	45	517

Source: Author's Google Scholar search conducted on June 17, 2010.

relationship between doctrine and outcomes, much less trying to quantify this relationship, often proves difficult. For instance, common wisdom attributes some of the success of the Iraq surge to the implementation of FM 3–24's precepts.²⁰ The basics of the narrative—that FM 3–24 was written under General Petraeus's guidance, that he later took command of forces in Iraq, and that the Iraq surge worked—are now reasonably well accepted. However, the relationship between FM 3–24 and the success in Iraq is hotly contested. For example, U.S. Military Academy professor Colonel Gian Gentile, USA, argues that the linkage between FM 3–24 and the turnaround in Iraq is at best incomplete, if not false.²¹ Meanwhile, Nagl and others continue to be strong proponents of the manual's success.

If proving the impact of FM 3–24 is controversial, then finding the right way to judge the substantive impact of the guide is even trickier. Some experts, for example, argue that the guide's impact can be measured by the commitment of the civilian agencies to the counterinsurgency efforts. Adam Schilling of the Army Center for Analysis remarked, "Despite the proliferation of government and think tank documents, like the *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, advocating the whole of government approach, the civilian surge is yet to materialize in the numbers required, and U.S. policy goals are not pursued as effectively as they should be."²² For Schilling, at least, the lack of a "civilian surge" is prima facie evidence of the failure of the guide to significantly impact the civilian counterinsurgency fight.

Others take a more measured view of the guide's impact. One USAID representative who worked on the development of programs to support counterinsurgency stated that he "read the

COIN [counterinsurgency] Manual (FM 3–24, *Counterinsurgency*) shortly after it came out. The first five chapters were really the main ones relevant to the softer side of counterinsurgency.” As for the U.S. *Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, he said, “It was published after I had already been working on the issues for a while, so I reviewed it and saw no surprises.”²³ In his experience, even civilian practitioners refer to FM 3–24 more often than the guide, but while doctrine provides the context for the program, neither FM 3–24 nor the guide is the primary influence on actual development of program design—which tends to be shaped more by

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core development principles, personal experience on the ground, and more detailed reports specific to the country and sector. Ironically, the representative said, in his experience, the State Department and USAID representatives were more likely than their military counterparts to have read FM 3–24.²⁴

The impact of the guide on the State Department has been similarly tepid. One State Department official, currently posted to the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stability, commented, “From my rather limited experience, I have not run into the U.S. *Government Counterinsurgency Guide* either in the field or in DC. Some of that may be my own fault, as I have not actually read the final product (I reviewed some earlier drafts) but to date I have not heard the Guide cited or referenced in day to day work.”²⁵ While such a reflection is anecdotal, the story seems to echo the more

quantitative metrics: the guide appears to have faded into relative obscurity.

Why the Differences?

There are a number of possible reasons why the two manuals have varied so dramatically in their impact. Some have to do with the impact of doctrine itself, others with more systemic variables such as timing. Both have an element of relevance, but ultimately a large part of the explanation must point to bureaucratic culture.

Doctrine Does Not Matter for the Current Fight. Perhaps the first possible reason for the guide’s lack of a direct impact on operations is simply that doctrine does not matter to current conflicts. These proponents note that militaries typically train to fight the last war, and as a result, doctrine often tends to be one war behind the current conflicts.²⁶ Washington, according to this view, is a far cry from war zones, so whatever is written there almost certainly will be outdated by the time it reaches the battlefield. This is not strictly an American phenomenon: when the Soviets entered Afghanistan in 1979, they did so with a doctrine better suited to a conventional war in Europe than a counterinsurgency and were never able to adapt a new doctrinal model despite over 9 years of operations.²⁷ Even if the time and conceptual lag could be fixed, doctrine—like any other plan—almost certainly will not live up to the “first five minutes of contact with the enemy.” Doctrine of any type, according to this view, is bound to be an impotent document: to expect anything else is plain naiveté.

The history of interagency counterinsurgency and stabilization planning seems to lend some credence to this point of view. As Colonel Lew Irwin, USAR, professor of political science at Duquesne University, noted, “There is no shortage of interagency guidance.”²⁸ In fact,

since as early as 1997, when the Clinton administration issued National Security Presidential Directive 56, “Managing Complex Interagency Operations,” there has been a steady stream of Presidential and agency guidance for stability and counterinsurgency operations.²⁹ No matter how much guidance is given and how many documents are published, the effects so far have been uninspiring: as difficult as it was to shift the military into a counterinsurgency mindset, seemingly, reforming the interagency process to account for these operations has proven even more challenging.

Another variant of the “doctrine does not matter” argument is that doctrine’s purpose is not to change current policy—which is inherently a fluid process, especially among civilian political appointees—but rather to document and institutionalize changes that have already been made. According to this argument, doctrine is a reflective exercise, capturing the lessons learned by one generation and providing a starting point for future generations. This concern to capture institutional memory and learn from past actions has existed for generations, particularly in counterinsurgencies where soldiers and civilians rotate in and out of country. In his classic study *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*, Robert Kromer notes that American interagency efforts suffered from this lack of institutional memory, as personnel in country changed: “We have devised a unique sort of bureaucratic machine which tends . . . to ensure that our operation in Vietnam will always be vigorous, will never grow tired, but will also never grow wiser.”³⁰ Doctrine, rather than being an instrument for proactively setting policy, would be a mechanism for combating institutional memory loss in fluid environments.

Some military writing on doctrine’s relationship with lessons learned reflects this

viewpoint. In fact, a memorandum of instruction from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff argues that one of the desired endstates of lessons learned is changes to doctrine.³¹ This concept is not unique to the military. For example, a State Department employee, reflecting on how his Provincial Reconstruction Team was structured in Baghdad, stated, “What I think we need to do with that model is to codify it and put it into doctrine, so this is a concept that people understand that we can use in other places. That way we do not need to reinvent the wheel.”³² Following this argument, it should be unsurprising that the guide has not had a direct impact on today’s counterinsurgency effort; after all, the guide should be geared to preventing institutional memory loss and preserving the lessons of today’s wars for future generations long after today’s practitioners move on.

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And yet the “doctrine does not matter” argument seems incomplete. While it may explain why the guide has failed profoundly to alter today’s counterinsurgency strategy or operations, it does not answer why it has had dramatically less of an impact than FM 3–24. Moreover, the premise that doctrine cannot shape the current fight is, at the very least, a controversial one. Although the causal logic is difficult to prove, the conventional wisdom attributes the turnaround in Iraq to a new commander, more troops, and a political shift brought about in part by a new counterinsurgency doctrine. Even Gentile’s critique does

not deny that FM 3–24 has critically shaped the debate about the current counterinsurgency strategy. And finally, if doctrine primarily serves as a historical record of lessons learned, there is no indication that the guide will serve this function any better than it has stimulated creative thought about counterinsurgency today. Indeed, if the guide is largely marginalized in its own generation, why would future generations be any more likely to rediscover it?

It Is All About Timing and Politics. A second possible reason why the guide has not had the same impact as FM 3–24 is timing and politics. For doctrine implementation, the argument goes, it requires powerful backers at the top of the organization to break the bureaucratic inertia and ensure it is put into practice and successfully shapes policy. In this case, the guide was released at the tail end of the George W. Bush administration. A week later, the United States had a new President, Secretary of State,

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and national security team. By contrast, FM 3–24 was released in December 2006, midway through the second Bush administration, and backed by already established senior civilian and military leaders with sufficient time in office to ensure that the new doctrine was internalized. As a result, FM 3–24 was well positioned to shape the military in ways the guide was not.

Another variant of the timing argument looks less at internal government dynamics and more at the timing of the publications relative to world events. FM 3–24 was the

first major U.S. doctrinal work on counterinsurgency published in the post-9/11 world. Moreover, FM 3–24 was published in the runup to the Iraq surge. As a result, the manual owes its success to being original at the time of its publication and being tacitly associated with a last-ditch attempt to turn around the war in Iraq. By contrast, the guide was not as novel in substance nor was it directly associated with a major policy shift in the wars in Afghanistan or Iraq, and as a result has not garnered the same public attention.

While there is an element of truth to both the internal and external timing arguments, however, the explanation is not wholly convincing for four reasons. First, while there were significant personnel changes between the two administrations, there were also key elements of continuity—most notably Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, as well as the career civil servants and military personnel who worked on the guide. And while the latter may not make policy, they could have at least ensured that the guide was not forgotten. Second, although the final version came out in the last week of the Bush administration, a draft version of the guide had been published in October 2007, well before the change in political leadership. Third, in terms of external timing, the guide represented a new approach: it was one of the first attempts at broad-based civilian interagency counterinsurgency doctrine and could easily have been associated with the new push in Afghanistan and the so-called “civilian surge.”³³ Finally, and most important, the guide’s influence should have transcended administrations because the U.S. counterinsurgency strategy has not changed much. Indeed, even many of the buzz words remain the same. For example, the motto of the U.S. Interagency Counterinsurgency

Initiative, prominently displayed on the cover of the guide, is *whole of government; whole of society*, which dovetails nicely with the 2010 National Security Strategy’s emphasis on “Strengthening National Capacity—A Whole of Government Approach.”³⁴

Bureaucratic Culture. As James Q. Wilson famously remarked, “Every organization has a culture, that is, a persistent, patterned way of thinking about the central tasks of and human relationships within an organization.”³⁵ And while every large organization—public or private—has a set way of doing things, not all of them are equally open to accepting formal doctrine. For the military, doctrine is enshrined in its bureaucratic culture, almost to a fault. As Wilson stated, “Some SOPs (standard operating procedures), such as those that seem central to the mission of the organization, continue to exert an influence even though they are actually getting in the way of producing good outcomes.”³⁶ He cites the U.S. Army in Vietnam clinging to doctrine better suited for conventional wars in Europe as an example par excellence.³⁷

While the military may hold doctrine in the highest regard, the reverse can be said of the State Department, USAID, and other government bureaucracies. While each Government agency has its procedures, none of them is as regimented as the military, and for good reason. These civilian organizations—smaller than any of the individual Armed Forces and not having responsibility for large-scale, highly complex, life-or-death operations—have less of a need for rigid doctrine to ensure they march in the same direction. Moreover, one can argue that the very success of the other agencies’ core missions hinges on a degree of individualism and flexibility—tailoring diplomacy to individuals and development to specific problems and contexts. And as Wilson noted, while government

agencies may be willing to change peripheral missions, they will resist tooth-and-nail changes to their “core tasks or altering their organizational culture.”³⁸

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The story, however, is more complex than simply arguing that civilian government agencies do not “do” doctrine, whereas the military is a slave to it. Indeed, many civilians do read doctrine, perhaps not on esoteric, military-specific subjects, but certainly on hot-button issues such as counterinsurgency. After all, if civilians did not read doctrine, why would a major university press publish FM 3–24? Conversely, few soldiers will follow doctrine by the letter and look for textbook solutions to the answer for any tactical problem. The difference, however, is how civilians, as opposed to their military counterparts, use doctrine—less as a roadmap and more as background information.

This contrast between the civilian and military outlooks can be seen in how the two frame their recommended professional education reading lists. The U.S. Army Chief of Staff’s reading list is intended to facilitate “a deep understanding of the Army and the future of the profession of arms in the 21st Century.”³⁹ In this context, a comprehensive grasp of doctrine provides the framework for gaining this depth of knowledge of military affairs. While doctrine may not provide the answers to the given problem per se, it does provide the template for a possible solution. By contrast, the aim of the Foreign Service Officer’s reading list

emphasizes breadth of knowledge, including knowledge of international affairs, economics, and history, but also of American society and culture.⁴⁰ While civilians may read doctrine to gain this breadth of knowledge, it will not hold the same central role it does for the military. Doctrine may shape the debate as other references do, but it will not provide the same overarching framework for operations and serve as the same jumping-off point for discussions as it does for the military.

Moreover, military doctrine may provide a different benefit for civilians—a degree of insight into the U.S. military as an organization. Paradoxically, given the guide’s broad-based, intentionally interagency authorship, FM 3–24 might in fact be more useful to civilians than the guide. Though some civilians worked on FM 3–24, there is no denying the manual’s distinctly military tone—from substantive issues such as its focus on “lines of operation,” command structure, and intelligence to its choice of jargon and complicated graphics. Indeed, this is one of the central themes in Samantha Power’s *New York Times* book review of FM 3–24. Power highlights

the very fact that the guide was an interagency product may have decreased its value

Harvard Kennedy School professor (and former Defense Department official) Sarah Sewall’s introduction to the University of Chicago Press edition of FM 3–24, and argues that the manual serves not simply as a guide to operations but rather as a means to “understand the huge demands effective counterinsurgency will place on the military and the voting public.”⁴¹

In other words, FM 3–24’s importance reaches beyond being a textbook on how to fight one kind of war to serve as a window into understanding the military as the dominant institution in that fight.

By contrast, the very fact that the guide was an interagency product may have decreased its value. As a result of the amalgamation of authors from a variety of agencies, the guide is more of a neutral document, reflecting a brokered consensus rather than a singularly distinct point of view. It therefore cannot serve this double function: while it may be able to inform operations, it cannot provide the same insight into any one institution or even the civilian interagency as a whole as can FM 3–24.

Lessons of the Tale

At the end of the day, the *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* has made only lackluster impact on policy. In practically every metric, be it readership, citations, or apparent impact on planning or operations, it has lagged behind its military counterpart, FM 3–24. There are several reasons that help explain the differences in impact on policymaking and planning: some are due to the nature of doctrine itself and the timing of when the guide was released, but much has to do with the nature and culture of the bureaucracies themselves. While the military may be culturally receptive to doctrine, civilian agencies view it in a different light—as just another resource, and oftentimes not crossing between Presidential administrations. For civilian agencies, doctrine provides background information, topics for discussion, and perhaps a window to understanding the military institution. It does not, however, serve as a roadmap or even provide guidance in quite the same way that doctrine does for the military.



U.S. Air Force (Efren Lopez)

Soldiers conducting counterinsurgency mission in Zabul Province dismount Stryker armored vehicle

Perhaps three major lessons can be gleaned from the fate of the *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*:

- ❖ Doctrine has its limits. First, the limited impact of the guide shows that doctrine has its limits for civilian agencies and is not the magic bullet for institutional change. In fact, doctrine rarely works independent of other factors—a supportive leadership, pressing need, and an accepting organizational culture. The bottom line is just because something is written in a document does not make it gospel truth for civilians, especially in civilian agencies where rigid doctrine is an anomaly.
- ❖ Interagency authorship does not equal significance or impact on interagency decisionmaking. Although one purpose of broad-based authorship is to stimulate “buy-in” by fellow stakeholders, it does not necessarily translate immediately into a broad-based embrace by the participating agencies. Despite the fact that the guide included many more stakeholder agencies in the drafting process than FM 3–24 and took more than 2 years to build interagency consensus over its verbiage, this has not guaranteed its acceptance within and across the agencies. There are multiple reasons to explain this phenomenon. Those who actually write the doctrine may be separated from their parent agencies’ true decisionmakers, and even if they do have the support of their own agency’s leadership, this may not assure buy-in from other agencies. As a result, the final verbiage often represents considerable

compromise and possibly the “lowest common denominator”—less a true consensus and more an aggregate of concessions.

- ❖ More guidance is not always more value added. Paradoxically, the success of FM 3–24 and the relative lack thereof for the guide can be viewed as a sign of successful interagency cooperation. After all, it shows that people will read whatever is useful, even if their agency is not officially a cosponsor. If this is the case, it should at least raise an important question: Are the benefits of coauthorship worth the cost in time and resources? The guide, after all, took over 2 years and countless man-hours to produce with little real change to show for it in the end. Might it not have been more effective to simply push for State Department and USAID employees to read the military’s FM 3–24 and conversely, to have military officers read State and USAID literature on diplomacy and development, rather than to create specifically joint doctrine? Anecdotal evidence indicates that at least some civilians already do this independently. Thus, it might be more cost effective to encourage this trend rather than duplicate the effort and produce specifically interagency guidance. In an era of resource-strapped bureaucracies, the question is at least worth posing.

In some ways, this tale of two manuals tells a larger story than just an attempt to improve interagency counterinsurgency efforts. It is a story of bureaucratic culture, institutional change, and limits of mandating change from the top down. Most important, it teaches a basic lesson: if the future of complex operations rests on a whole-of-government approach, the path to this endstate may not be through whole-of-government manuals. **PRISM**

Notes

¹ U.S. *Government Counterinsurgency Guide* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 2009), 4.

² For example, the preface of the U.S. *Government Counterinsurgency Guide* is written by State Department Counselor Eliot Cohen, who also was one of the authors of FM 3–24, *Counterinsurgency*. Similarly, counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen, one of General Petraeus’s advisors for the surge in Iraq, is identified as one of the leading contributors to the guide.

³ For one account of Vietnam-era attempts at population-centric counterinsurgency, see Bing West, *The Village* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972).

⁴ Caspar W. Weinberger, “The Uses of Military Power,” speech to the National Press Club, Washington, DC, November 28, 1984, available at <www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Documents/2004/January%202004/0104keeperfull.pdf>.

⁵ John A. Nagl, “Constructing the Legacy of Field Manual 3–24,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 58 (3^d Quarter, 2010), 118.

⁶ See Eliot Cohen et al., “Principles, Imperatives, and Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review* (March–April 2006).

⁷ Nagl, “Constructing,” 118.

⁸ John A. Nagl, “The Evolution and Importance of Army/Marine Corps Field Manual 3–24, *Counterinsurgency*,” *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), available at <www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/841519foreword.html>.

⁹ These agencies were USAID; the Departments of State, Defense, Justice, Treasury, Homeland Security, Transportation, and Agriculture; and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

¹⁰ Greg Grant, “Defense, Diplomatic Agencies Collaborate on Counterinsurgency Guide,” December 6, 2007, available at <www.govexec.com/dailyfed/120607g1.htm>.

¹¹ For references of the interim report, see Daniel Roper, “Global Counterinsurgency: Strategic Clarity for the Long War,” *Parameters* 38 (Autumn 2008). It was also mentioned on the popular online Small Wars Journal and the Council on Foreign Relations blogs.

¹² Peter Bergen, “Petraeus, the Ph.D. Warrior, Faces Big Test,” June 24, 2010, available at <www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/06/24/bergen.petraeus.afghanistan/index.html?hpt=T2>.

¹³ As of June 28, 2010, a softcover copy was still available for purchase on Amazon.com.

¹⁴ Samantha Power, “Our War on Terror,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 2007, available at <www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/books/review/Power-t.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1>.

¹⁵ See Colin Kahl, “COIN of the Realm: Is There a Future for Counterinsurgency?” *Foreign Affairs* (November–December 2007), available at <www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63036/colin-h-kahl/coin-of-the-realm>.

¹⁶ A Google search for “counterinsurgency guide” and “download” produced no results, nor did any secondary source articles reference these statistics either.

¹⁷ Other formal guidance documents were similarly rarely utilized. The State Department’s *Office of Provincial Affairs Planning and Assessment Guide*, for example, was used only by 20 percent of those surveyed. “Preliminary Survey Results: U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq,” Center for Complex Operations, April 6, 2010. Unpublished.

¹⁸ U.S. *Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, preface.

¹⁹ By contrast, a Google search on June 18, 2010 (which would include less formal publications) for the “U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide” and “FM 3–24 Counterinsurgency” yielded 1,180 results for the former and 105,000 for the latter—a factor of 100 times the number.

²⁰ For example, see “‘Big Ideas’ Key to US Surge Success in Iraq: Petraeus,” Agence France-Presse, May 6, 2010, available at <www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5j-hgypUT8z0SQ58ZUvoJyDdn1JwQ>.

²¹ Gian P. Gentile, “Time for the Deconstruction of Field Manual 3–24,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 58 (3rd Quarter, 2010), 116–117. Additionally, see Gian P. Gentile, “Eating Soup with a Spoon: Missing from the New COIN Manual’s Pages is the Imperative to Fight,” *Armed Forces Journal* (September 2007).

²² Adam Schilling, “Nation-building, Stability Operations and Prophylactic COIN,” *PKSOI Perspectives*, May 5, 2010, available at <<http://pksoi.army.mil/PKM/publications/perspective/perspectivereview.cfm?perspectiveID=10>>.

²³ Interview with a USAID employee currently posted to Baghdad, June 30, 2010.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Interview with a Department of State employee, Washington, DC, July 14, 2010.

²⁶ See Paul Yingling, “A Failure in Generalship,” *Armed Forces Journal* (May 2007), available at <www.afji.com/2007/05/2635198>.

²⁷ Scott McMichael, “The Soviet Army, Counterinsurgency, and the Afghan War,” *Parameters* 19 (December 1989).

²⁸ Lew Irwin, “Filling Irregular Warfare’s Interagency Gaps,” *Parameters* 39 (Autumn 2009), 69.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Quoted in R.W. Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1972), 67.

³¹ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3150.25A (October 2000), B-1, available at <www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/cjcsd/cjcsi/3150_25a.pdf>.

³² Taken from an anonymous respondent in a Center for Complex Operations–sponsored survey of Provincial Reconstruction Team members, conducted in winter 2010.

³³ Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” Address at United States Military Academy at West Point, December 1, 2009, available at <www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>.

³⁴ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 2010), 14–16, available at <www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf>.

³⁵ James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 90.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 225.

³⁹ National Defense University, “The Professional Military Reading List,” available at <www.ndu.edu/Library/index.cfm?secID=217&pageID=126&type=section>.

⁴⁰ Department of State, “Suggested Reading,” available at <www.careers.state.gov/resources/reading.html>.

⁴¹ Power.