

Peacekeeping and Counter-insurgency – Two of a Kind?

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This article demonstrates that there are more similarities between peacekeeping and counter-insurgency (COIN) than often recognized. In today's 'war among the people', the counter-insurgent cannot succeed with offensive military capabilities alone and must seek to apply also non-kinetic and defensive methods; whereas the peacekeeper often is forced to apply 'robust' and kinetic means to implement a mandate. As a result, the two concepts seem to be converging and share some commonalities. The article compares the UN DPKO 'capstone doctrine' and the US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual to argue that the two doctrines share similarities in six areas: 1) a focus on civilian solutions; 2) a need for protection of civilians; 3) international coherence; 4) host-nation ownership; 5) use of intelligence in support of operations; 6) limitations of the use of force. The article suggests areas where the two doctrines could mesh with each other.

Peacekeeping and counter-insurgency (COIN) operations appear at first glance to be at opposing ends on a spectrum of military force. The popular conception of the former is of an impartial lightly-armed force overseeing a peace agreement with the consent of the warring parties. Force is hardly used, except for force protection. COIN operations on the other hand, are often associated with war-fighting, where significant force is used to counter the attacks from insurgents that are attempting to topple the authorities.

However, UN peacekeeping has evolved significantly since the end of the Cold War, and while impartiality remains a key facet, the nature of today's wars requires a different approach. Intra-state wars account for proportionately more conflicts than inter-state wars. The mandates of peacekeeping missions are now

typically under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which creates space for the use of force to achieve or protect a peace. COIN doctrines also represent a step away from the traditional state-to-state war-fighting. While not excluding the use of offensive kinetic force, a new emphasis on caution and restraint is evident.

Despite this, the two concepts are rarely compared. Students of UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding tend to stay analytically within separate circles, contributing to different literatures and publishing in different journals. Put bluntly, 'UN-studies' are about 'peace' whereas 'strategic studies' are about 'war'. In the same vein, the main troop contributing countries to the UN are non-Western, and international COIN operations mainly Western.¹ There is thus limited awareness among military officers in the West about the UN and limited experience among UN troop contributors with Western doctrines.

This article demonstrates that there are more similarities between peacekeeping and COIN than often recognized in academic as well as practitioners' circles. The nature of today's 'war among the people',² where criminals, spoilers³ and ideological extremists represent the main security threat, the counter-insurgent with offensive military capabilities cannot succeed with these means alone and must seek to apply non-kinetic and defensive methods; whereas the peacekeeper is often forced to apply 'robust' and kinetic means to implement a mandate.⁴ As a result, the two concepts are converging on each other and share more in common than is often recognized.

I explore this by comparing the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) 'capstone doctrine' and the US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual, as well as related theoretical and field experience-based articles. For simplicity, I label them the COIN and the UN doctrines. I argue that they share similarities in six areas:

- a focus on civilian rather than military solutions;
- a stress on the need for protection of civilians;
- a need for international coherence (unity of effort and an integrated approach);
- the importance of host-nation ownership;
- the use of intelligence in support of operations;
- acknowledgement of the limitations of the use of force.

Obviously there are important differences between COIN and UN operations, in terms of mandates, political foundation, equipment, rules of engagement and so on.

However, the trends at the time of writing are towards greater convergence rather than divergence of these concepts. The article compares doctrines and operations, not mandates and political motivations triggering the operations. Sometimes though, the mandate impacts directly on the doctrine, and in those cases it will be addressed. The purpose here is to highlight the often-ignored similarities between the two concepts.

COIN Doctrine

A Western military evolution since the end of the Cold War has been to move away from mass armies towards smaller professional and specialized units. Stabilization operations in the Balkans required mobile and flexible forces which could deploy quickly and be prepared to handle civilian demonstrators as well as armed attacks. The experience of facing an insurgency rather than a conventional war in Iraq and Afghanistan reinforced this trend and resulted in a need to rethink the traditional doctrines. Unsurprisingly, the United States, UK and France dominated new thinking about military engagement in theatres where unconventional warfare was conducted. Most Western states began following suit by shifting to small, flexible units, under the rubrics of 'asymmetric warfare', 'irregular warfare' and 'counter-insurgency'.⁵

A new US COIN doctrine was adopted in 2006 in the *US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*.⁶ A range of articles and books accompanied its publication, including *The Utility of Force* by a retired UK general, Rupert Smith.⁷ Although historical in his approach, Smith also addresses the significantly changed role of the military in current conflicts compared to the past confrontations with states. As Smith argues, in an era of insurgencies, guerrilla tactics and terrorism, even the most powerful army in the world has to reconsider its approach. John Kiszely describes this as 'post-modern warfare', whereby

war and peace are not easily delineated; 'defeat' and 'victory' require definition. The enemy is not obvious, nor easily identifiable, literally or figuratively, and may change on an almost-daily basis; success depends not on destruction of the enemy, but on out-maneuvring opponents – in particular depriving them of popular support, and winning it oneself.⁸

The objective of a COIN operation is to prevent a volatile security situation from deteriorating further. It would be an exaggeration to claim that this has been fully implemented in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nonetheless, as shown below, significant changes have been made to the way the military conducts operations in these theatres. Nathaniel Fick and John Nagl have summarized the key COIN tenets as: '[A] Focus on protecting civilians over killing the enemy; assume greater risk; use minimum, not maximum force'. Furthermore, they stress the paradoxes that distinguish COIN from many traditional military doctrines:

Some of the best weapons do not shoot; sometimes the more you protect your force, the less secure you may be; the hosts doing something tolerably is often better than foreigners doing it well; sometimes the more force is used, the less effective it is; sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction.⁹

In short, they point towards less use of force, the importance of political rather than military processes and a shift to local ownership.

Civilian Primacy and Protection of Civilians

An insurgency as defined as 'an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict'.¹⁰ A counter-insurgency is conducted by the authorities to defend their institutions and political system. International actors engaged in a theatre would usually be there to support the host government in this endeavour.¹¹ Furthermore, the doctrine states that 'political power is the central issue in insurgencies and counter-insurgencies; each side aims to get the people to accept its governance or authority as legitimate'.¹²

The so-called 'centre of gravity' in COIN (where effort needs to be concentrated) is therefore the civilian population, not the source of momentum or strength of the enemy, as in traditional military doctrines. From hunting the enemy, the focus is shifted to building political support for host authorities. As a result there are no military solutions to a COIN campaign, only part-solutions. According to one of

the classical writers, David Galula, a COIN strategy is 80 per cent civilian and 20 per cent military.¹³ The military cannot win a war in traditional sense; all it can achieve is to control the situation by suppressing insurgents to such an extent that others (civilians) can build a positive peace process. This approach is often summarized by the slogan: 'clear–hold–build'. The military aims to clear an area of insurgents, then keeps it safe while civilian actors secure a sustainable peace by providing the population with essential services, reconstruction and development. This way, host-nation authorities are supposed to be able to expand their authority and support to new regions previously controlled by the insurgents.

The doctrine stresses that the military has to take extreme caution while conducting kinetic operations, as errors or collateral casualties will undermine the overall strategy of gaining popular support. On the contrary, persistent physical presence among the population is stressed as crucial: 'living among the population in small groups, staying in villages overnight for months at a time ... it's the only way to protect the population effectively'.¹⁴

Strikingly, however, while the centre of gravity is the civilian population, operationalized through protection of civilians, this is not based on a moral imperative of protecting human rights or on notions of human security, as in the UN context, as we shall see below. Rather, it is a means to an end; to reduce popular support for insurgents. Nevertheless, the changing of the focus from an 'enemy' to a 'population' is a fundamental aspect of COIN: 'military effectiveness is not limited by taking protection [of the civilians] into consideration; it is based upon it'.¹⁵

Coherence – 'Unity of Effort'

Stemming logically from the focus on the civilian primacy, the doctrine particularly stresses the need for 'Unity of Effort'. Integration of civilian and military efforts is crucial to successful COIN operations, it claims, acknowledging also the value of 'political, social and economic programmes' in addressing 'root causes of conflict'.¹⁶ Through what is described as Logical Lines of Operations (LLOs), such as governance, essential services, economic development, the various instruments of power are supposed to be coordinated. A COIN operation therefore entails all these aspects and achieving popular support for the authorities requires careful coordination of actions undertaken along all LLOs.

Gen. David W. Barno, summarizing his 2003–05 experience in Afghanistan, also stresses the need for a complex and comprehensive COIN doctrine.¹⁷ The COIN strategy which he led was based on a ‘unity of purpose’ model consisting of five pillars: defeat terrorism and deny sanctuary; enable Afghan security structure; sustain area ownership; enable reconstruction and good governance; and engage regional states. The centre of gravity was defined as the Afghan people. His success, according to himself, was due to close integration with the US civilians (the embassy), but also an open approach to international and host-nation actors in developing the strategy.¹⁸ Gen. David H. Petraeus, who led the US forces in Iraq, also contends that ‘everyone must do nation building’, illustrating how it would have been impossible to carry out large scale reconstruction, such as re-opening a huge university, without the support of the military *and* all the relevant host-nation ministries.¹⁹ Lastly, the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF), Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, stresses the importance of unity of effort and the need to improve coordination within ISAF and with the international community, stating that ‘poor unity of effort among ISAF, UNAMA, and the rest of the international community undermines their collective effectiveness’.²⁰

Despite these experiences, COIN doctrine is undeveloped when it comes to understanding the multinational environment in the theatre. ‘Unity of Effort’ is primarily a ‘US–Whole of Government’ approach, whereas other actors typically present in the field; NGO’s, coalition partners, international organizations and developmental agencies, are not addressed systematically (as shown in Fig. 1).

[Fig 1 about here]

Figure 1. Example of COIN LLOs (The U.S. Army/Marine Corps, *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007:156)

Host-Nation Ownership

Realizing that outsiders cannot succeed alone in a COIN operation, the doctrine emphasizes the host nation and its security forces to: 'defeat insurgents or render them irrelevant, uphold the rule of law, and provide a basic level of essential services and security for the populace'.²¹ The host nation's security forces are thus a crucial element in the success of a COIN operation, and an important part of US doctrine is devoted to the training and support of the host's military, police, correction personnel and border guards.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the training and equipping of local security forces have gradually become a major task for the international forces. The Iraq security forces have been trained for several years and are in 2008 were about 600,000 strong. This is widely considered as one of the reasons for the improved security situation.²² Gen. Petraeus stressed that '[e]mpowering Iraqis to do the job themselves has, in fact, become the essence of our strategy we began asking, when considering new initiatives, projects, or programs, whether they would help increase the number of Iraqis who felt they had a stake in the country's success'.²³ In Afghanistan, the aim was to build up a 400,000-strong police and army force, a significant increase from the 170,000 in 2009.²⁴

Given the focus on the political aspect of the struggle, the idea of Fick and Nagl cited above that 'the host nation doing something tolerably is normally better than us doing it well', is a logical consequence. US COIN doctrine is primarily about supporting a weak or failing state and it assumes that sustainable peace can only be achieved by the indigenous society, not by the intervening parties. Still, the COIN doctrine is rather narrow in that it does not consider the wider security apparatus – the judiciary and corrective institutions, the legislative and the rule of law in general, not to mention human security aspects such as human rights.

Intelligence Supported Operations

Intelligence is a cornerstone of US COIN doctrine. An entire chapter is dedicated to it in FM 3-24, stating that counter-insurgency is 'an intelligence-driven endeavor. The function of intelligence in COIN is to facilitate understanding of the operational environment, with emphasis on the populace, host nation, and insurgents'. Furthermore, '[i]ntelligence in COIN is about people. U.S. forces must understand the people of the host nation, the insurgents, and the host-nation (HN) government.

Commanders and planners require insight into cultures, perceptions, values, beliefs, interests and decision-making processes of individuals and groups'.²⁵

Whereas intelligence is important in any military operation, its focus in COIN is less on the traditional capabilities and intentions of the enemy and more on a wider understanding of the cultural terrain and the civilian population. Cultural awareness and local understanding are crucial when the campaign objective is to affect the political leanings of the population. Knowledge of local concerns, attitudes and values is of utmost importance, with intelligence focusing not only on the insurgent but on the entire population and the locale. This also requires different kinds of skills in the intelligence community.

Hence, intelligence is described as an important part of the 'Unity of Effort'. Knowledge of other actors and the establishment of a cooperative relation with them are stressed:

Knowledge of these organizations [non-Department of Defense (DOD) agencies, multinational forces, nongovernmental organizations, and host-nation organizations in the AO] is needed to establish working relationships and procedures for sharing information. These relationships and procedures are critical to developing a comprehensive common operational picture and enabling unity of effort.²⁶

Despite these intentions, experience in the field is often divergent. Intelligence sharing remains a sensitive issue, constrained by both prejudices and legal obstacles. But the fact that the intention of sharing is stated in the doctrine indicates a way of thinking. As a successful COIN campaign is dependent upon a wide range of socio-economic intelligence, improved liaison and communication with civilian actors should become a necessity and pave the way for changes also in this sector.

Restrictive Use of Force

Last but not least, the doctrine stresses the importance of applying the appropriate level of force. Given the potentially severe consequences of collateral damage, it features paradoxes like 'sometimes the more force is used, the less effective it is'; 'sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction', which may seem counter intuitive but

reflects the political nature and the centre of gravity of missions.²⁷ The need to keep the longer-term goal of gaining political, rather than military, victory is clear in statements such as: '[a]n operation that kills five insurgents is counterproductive if collateral damage leads to the recruitment of fifty more insurgents'.²⁸ Collateral damage is much more damaging than in traditional warfare, because the focus is on the support of the local population. The use of air strikes is acknowledged as particularly problematic, since it is largely indiscriminate.²⁹ Losses inflicted on insurgents is only an indication of 'success' to the extent that it has a bearing on local perceptions.

The restrictive use of force is perhaps the area where US COIN doctrine differs most significantly from conventional warfare, and also where practice most frequently deviates from the theory. As argued next, UN doctrine stresses the same restrictiveness, albeit from a different starting point.

UN Doctrine

In January 2008 the DPKO launched, for the first time, a doctrine document on peacekeeping.³⁰ It defines peacekeeping as 'a technique designed to preserve peace, however fragile, where fighting has been halted, and to assist in implementing agreements achieved by the peacemakers'. It explicitly distinguishes this from: conflict prevention ('the application of structural or diplomatic measures to keep intra-state or inter-state tensions and disputes from escalating'); peacemaking ('includes measures to address conflicts in progress and usually involves diplomatic action to bring hostile parties to a negotiated agreement'); peace enforcement ('the application, with the authorization of the Security Council, of a range of coercive measures, including the use of military force'); and peacebuilding ('a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all level of conflict management, and to lay the foundation for peace and development').³¹ However, the lines between these categories are blurred:

While United Nations peacekeeping operations are, in principle, deployed to support the implementation of a cease-fire or peace agreement, they are often required to play an active role in

peacemaking efforts and may also be involved in early peacebuilding activities. United Nations peacekeeping operations may also use force at the tactical level, with the authorization of the Security Council, to defend themselves and their mandate, particularly in situations where the State is unable to provide security and maintain public order.³²

[Figure 2 about here]

Figure 2. *Linkages and Gray Areas (UN DPKO 2008:19)*

In practice, as witnessed in most UN missions deployed over the last decades and illustrated in Figure 2, there is overlapping. The end of war and beginning of peace are often processes that last for years. In the same vein it would be too neat to separate COIN and peacekeeping in terms of stages of a conflict. The grey zones and the similarities between the two are also significant.

Civilian Primacy

The UN doctrine focuses on so-called 'multi-dimensional' peacekeeping operations, 'typically deployed in the dangerous aftermath of a violent internal conflict and may employ a mix of military, police and civilian capabilities to support the implementation of a comprehensive peace agreement'.³³ The doctrine thereby envisages a broad role for peacekeepers, including: creating a secure and stable environment and strengthening the state's ability to provide security; facilitating the political process and supporting the establishment institutions of governance; ensuring that all international actors pursue their activities at the country level in a coherent and coordinated manner.³⁴ Multi-dimensional peacekeeping is therefore doing more than filling a power vacuum. It is generally acknowledged that conflicts require long-term commitments in terms of peacebuilding and that a political settlement and political stability are core issues. As a result, increased attention has also been paid to the related areas of institution building and statebuilding.³⁵

In short, this all reflects an incorporation of non-military tasks into the doctrine. The basic premise is that sustainable peace requires stability and security but also a

political process and a wide spectrum of peacebuilding activities. The tasks are illustrated this way:

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Figure 3. The Core Business of Multi-dimensional UN Peacekeeping Operations (UN DPKO 2008:23)

Despite the different starting points, this illustration (Fig. 3) bares significant similarities with the COIN illustration above (Fig.1). Both envisage a range of 'tools' for achieving the same goal, and both recognize that a safe and secure environment is only a part of a wider solution. The security element (peacekeeping) therefore needs to be integrated with, and supportive of, the political peacebuilding processes.

Protection of Civilians

The protection of civilians is a key principle of the UN doctrine. It is based on Security Council resolution 1674 'On the protection of civilians in armed conflict', and the subsequent attention it received in the UN system.³⁶ The background to the resolution may be traced back to the Rwanda and Srebrenica disasters and the way these experiences were interpreted in the 'Brahimi Report'.³⁷ Consequently, 'most multi-dimensional United Nations peacekeeping operations are now mandated by the Security Council to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence'.³⁸ In the UN context this is a moral imperative. and reaffirmation of the Human Rights Declaration, stressing state responsibility towards its population and a peacekeeping mission's duty to look after rights in a post-war situation. The motive for the protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping thus differs from the motive for protection civilians in the COIN doctrine, in that the latter seeks to protect civilians as a means to an end (to win over the population, so as to prevail in the war), while in UN doctrine protecting civilians is an end in itself.

From the perspective of the population in a war-torn society, however, it may not make much difference, as legitimacy is established on the basis of the way the international actors behave. Improved security will, in most circumstances, be welcomed by the civilian population. Furthermore, the two doctrines both emphasise

the importance of civilians as an integral part of a security complex and a cornerstone to sustainable peace and security.

Coherence – Integrated Approach

It is widely recognized that there is potential for better coordination between various international agencies and donors in crisis management.³⁹ It is not only a question of resource management but necessity, because without coordination, few if any actors are likely to achieve their objectives in laying the foundations for a sustainable peacebuilding process.

The main initiative in the UN system has been the so-called ‘Integrated Approach’.⁴⁰ According to the Guidelines of the UN Secretary-General’s ‘Guidelines’, ‘an integrated mission is based on a common strategic plan and a shared understanding of the priorities and types of programme interventions that need to be undertaken at various stages of the recovery process’.⁴¹ Organizationally, it has meant that the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and the Resident Coordinator (RC) of the development agencies also are part of the peacekeeping mission structure as Deputy SRSG (DSRSG/RC/HC). Although implementation varies between missions, the integrated approach has become a key principle for enhancing coordination.

Nonetheless, while there has been progress in UN-internal coordination, the ambition that the UN should also take the lead in coordination with other actors, appears to be implemented to a lesser degree (with the exception of humanitarian coordination). The tools and mechanism for doing so are undeveloped and the doctrine is not very sophisticated in addressing challenges related to it and questions of leadership, priorities, mediating conflicting mandates, and level of ambition regarding coordination remain unanswered.⁴² Despite these shortcomings, the recognition that UN peacekeeping cannot be conducted in a vacuum and that a comprehensive, multi-dimensional and integrated approach is required, resembles the COIN doctrine’s similar stress on civilian efforts to achieve the objectives.

Host Nation, Local Ownership

The UN doctrine stresses the need for local ownership to secure legitimacy and sustainability of operations:

In planning and executing a United Nations peacekeeping operation's core activities, every effort should be made to promote national and local ownership and to foster trust and cooperation between national actors. Effective approaches to national and local ownership not only reinforce the perceived legitimacy of the operation and support mandate implementation, they also help to ensure the sustainability of any national capacity once the peacekeeping operation has been withdrawn.⁴³

Besides elaborating on the more general principles of local ownership and mentioning challenges, such as resistance to change, the doctrine is not very specific on concrete tasks. However, in development and peacemaking discourses, local ownership has been a key concept since the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD–DAC) began emphasising it in 1995: 'For development to succeed, the people of the countries concerned must be the "owners" of their development policies and programmes'.⁴⁴ Taken up by NGOs the UNDP and even the World Bank, 'local ownership' is also intrinsic to the programmes and activities of multi-dimensional peacekeeping.

Nevertheless, it is also recognized that local ownership is a cosmetic device. There are numerous practical challenges – who are the legitimate local stakeholders, to what extent shall they be empowered, at what stage and so on – that often leads to reluctance on the part of the UN to make the concept meaningful.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, local ownership, even if an empty signifier, remains a key concept in the peace building and development language. There can be no sustainable peace process if the local institutions do not develop the capacity to sustain the peace process. Local ownership is therefore both a moral and pragmatic ideal and is a prerequisite for any exit strategy, irrespective of whether it is a COIN or UN peacekeeping mission.

Intelligence Supported Operations

The UN has also begun introducing intelligence branches to support its operations. This was traditionally considered 'contrary to the open nature of the UN system and

therefore absolutely forbidden'.⁴⁶ Also, many (but not all) of the traditional peacekeeping operations did not need much intelligence as force protection was of limited concern.⁴⁷ However, lessons from Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s revealed a need for intelligence, on both tactical and strategic levels.⁴⁸

As 'robust' mandates and threats from 'spoilers' have become more common and the missions are increasingly integrated and multi-dimensional, there has also developed an acceptance that intelligence support is required to implement the mandate. Thus, all UN peacekeeping missions are required to establish a Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) at the HQ level. Their tasks are described this way:

Multidimensional peacekeeping missions conduct a wide range of mandated activities in fluid and unpredictable environments. This demands an enhanced operational capacity to monitor developments and to understand the operational environment on a continuous basis. Missions must be able to identify, prevent and/or respond to threats or emerging threats. Senior mission leaders must be informed of and understand developments on the ground, their likely consequences and the possible impacts of decision options for mandate implementation and for the security of UN personnel and facilities.⁴⁹

The tasks thus go beyond basic tactical-level force protection. Information gathering and analysis need to go beyond risks associated with spoiler groups and include all risks that may be associated with the consolidation of a peace process.

A resemblance to intelligence in US COIN doctrine is obvious. The focus is socio-political; it is an integral part of the planning and execution of operations and an important asset to understand the operational environment. The ambition to reach out across to other agencies is also shared. Intelligence in multidimensional peacekeeping, as in COIN, thus focuses on the entire theatre, not just spoilers or violent threats.

It should be recognized though, that there still is significant resistance to JMACs in some UN circles and huge variations between missions on its purpose and focus. As a result they are organized differently and used for different purposes. Typically, JMACs end up being a tactical-level asset for mission leadership rather than a contributor to long-term planning and strategies.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the

introduction of JMACs is a novelty, and the nature of the multidimensional operations makes it likely that they will develop in the future.

Minimal Use of Force

It is on questions of force that similarities with COIN doctrine become most apparent. Experience in several peacekeeping missions, such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Haiti, shows that peacekeepers have been willing to use force to protect civilians and to implement a mandate. 'Robust peacekeeping' reflects a trend that moves away from unarmed, or lightly armed, ceasefire monitoring. Missions are instead tasked to consolidate a peace process by engaging with all levels of the host-nation in order to support and build their capacity to sustain the peace process. However, in most cases UN peacekeeping environments are 'characterized by the presence of militias, criminal gangs, and other spoilers who may actively seek to undermine the peace process or pose a threat to the civilian population.' Security Council resolutions thus authorize Chapter VII missions to 'use all necessary means' to fulfil a mandate.⁵¹ The rationale resembles US COIN doctrine in stating that: '[t]he ultimate aim of the use of force is to influence and deter spoilers working against the peace process or seeking to harm civilians; and not to seek their military defeat'. Furthermore: 'The use of force by a United Nations peacekeeping operation should always be calibrated in a precise, proportional and appropriate manner, within the principle of the minimum force necessary to achieve the desired effect'.⁵²

The approach is similar to COIN doctrine in stressing minimum force. The main difference is that COIN doctrine puts these principles into a political strategic framework (prevailing in the war by strengthening the legitimacy of host-nation authorities), whereas in the UN doctrine this is more subtle. The provisions are based on ethics rather than on tactics, but in practice, when force is applied, the difference may not be that significant.

For example, when the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) has used force to support the DRC authorities to disarm armed groups, it has included the use of artillery, heavy weapons and air support, the apparent the distinction between COIN and UN peacekeeping at times can be more semantic than substantive.⁵³ Not unlike the eastern DRC rebels, the Taliban are trying to disrupt the political process in Afghanistan, topple the elected government and the state

institutions, attack civilians and undermine law and order. The ISAF's counter-insurgency struggle against the Taliban in Afghanistan could therefore fit into the description of a UN 'robust mandate'. In this context there is no principle difference.

Despite this, even if a COIN operation and a robust UN peacekeeping operation appear similar in many respects, there are also significant differences. The US-led COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan use sophisticated surveillance and intelligence-gathering equipment, unmanned drones and infrared vision, and are generally much more tuned towards offensive military operations than the UN probably ever will be. The point is rather that the UN needs to define the appropriate use of force, at what level and at what times.

Conclusion

This article has suggested that the UN and COIN doctrines share some crucial features. They both focus on civilian – not military – solutions, both stress the need for protection of civilians, for international coherence (unity of effort, integrated approach), for the importance of host-nation ownership, the use of intelligence in support of operations and the acknowledgement of the limitations of the use of force.

These elements are all important for success in both doctrines, even if the rationale for them often differs. Interestingly, some of the shortcomings are also shared. Neither is very sophisticated in dealing with other actors in the field to engage in a multi-agency comprehensive approach. Both stress the need for host-nation ownership, but tend to ignore the challenges this entails.

It is important to stress though that the origins and foundations of the doctrines differ significantly. COIN doctrine is based on the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and in former imperial states on experiences in colonial wars. The military operations are therefore explicitly geostrategic and linked to the objective of a state or a coalition of states. UN peacekeeping in contrast, is considered to have few direct strategic interests for the troop contributors. UN engagements are usually more focused on peace *per se*, a peace process or the preparation for such a process. Still, when multifunctional and robust peacekeeping missions are deployed, they tend to be in volatile, uncertain environments. With UN engagement in a wide variety of sectors, including the security sector, the UN also becomes politically involved. Consequently, the UN is more of a political player now than in traditional peacekeeping, but it is still

less so than the United States in Afghanistan. The nature of each mission will determine 'how' political a UN or a COIN operation will be regarded by the host population. The point here is that these have not been fixed positions, and in the field the difference between UN and COIN may not be as significant as one might expect when comparing the different starting points. One way of illustrating this process could be this:⁵⁴

[Figure 4 about here]

Figure 4: *The Convergence of Peacekeeping and War-fighting*

The question is whether there are valuable concepts and lessons that can be inferred from comparing the two concepts? For the UN it is rather obvious that the traditional type of politically impartial peacekeeping is largely gone, or at least is not the only kind of peace operation anymore. It is likely that future peacekeeping operations will face spoilers, non-compliant actors, criminals and proxy armies, and respond with the use of force, within their 'robust mandates'. In theory UN could leave these the 'grey area' operations, to other actors like NATO or EU.⁵⁵ However, in practice there is no guarantee that the UN would be shielded from dilemmas in the use of force, as its doctrine recognizes.

The challenge for the UN is that the use of force is political by definition, even for a self-declared impartial actor.⁵⁶ This becomes even more pertinent when force is applied to protect civilians or counter spoilers for whom the targeting of civilians is often a part of a political struggle.⁵⁷ However, the UN Guidelines does not really give military guidance on use of force: it is left to the field commander to decide what is appropriate. 'Robust peacekeeping' remains an elusive concept and not well-defined by DPKO, and guidance is needed on when and how to apply force.⁵⁸ As things stand, there is a danger that the UN could become increasingly dragged into the violent politics of a conflict without having a doctrine or resources. It risks both becoming a part of a conflict and at the same time too weak to prevent mass atrocities against the civilian population. The attack by rebels on the AU peacekeepers in Darfur in 2007 is a case in point.⁵⁹

The UN could address some of these shortcomings by learning from the US COIN doctrine. First, DPKO could develop practical field manuals like the FM 3-24 to

assist commanders in deciding rules of engagement and the use of force. With limited resources, restraint is a key, but this can be very challenging in practice if it implies lack of civilian protection. Second, to be true to the local ownership commitment, the UN could build on US COIN doctrine and become more explicitly focused on training local security forces. Systematic training of security forces, including on international law and rules of engagement, would in most cases be the most sustainable contribution external troops could provide. Third, the complexity of multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations requires improved intelligence; not only about the spoilers but also about the people to be protected.

COIN doctrine on the other hand is under pressure for being over-ambitious. The civilian capacities required for stabilizing a situation requires a period that typically goes well beyond military campaign planning. Furthermore, the COIN approach is vulnerable because it fails if military efforts not are matched by a sufficient level of civilian efforts. The success of this predominantly military doctrine depends on non-military contributions, which sometimes may not be provided, for political reasons for instance. Hence, that is a kind of out-sourcing which is likely to create frustrations in military establishments. When civilian contributions do not deliver expected results critics of COIN have promoted a return to the enemy-focused counter-terrorism campaign instead.⁶⁰ While it is unlikely that the COIN-doctrine will be abandoned, the weaknesses need to be addressed, shall it manage to remain relevant. In this regard a few experiences from the UN could prove relevant.

First, while the UN integrated approach is far from implemented, and takes place within one system, COIN doctrine is too focused on military means alone, despite the acknowledgement of its limitations. COIN operations would probably benefit from a stronger civilian involvement in the leadership and by being part of a comprehensive peace strategy, with an organisational structure that could be borrowed from the UN. Second, COIN needs to develop a better system for coordinating with other actors in the theatre. One cannot plan for several lines of operation without taking into account what other actors are doing in the same sector. Third, COIN puts significant effort on supporting host nation authorities, and presupposes that these are legitimate. Experience from Afghanistan illustrates the dilemma when this is not the case. The fraudulent 2009 elections became a setback for the COIN strategy there since the legitimacy of the authorities became

questionable. The UN doctrine and tradition, on the other hand, usually places more emphasis on peace agreements, processes and institutions, and less on supporting one of the parties in a conflict. This makes it arguably less vulnerable to actions of the host nation which run counter to UN standards. It is not uncommon that host nation authorities fail to abide by commitments during or after a violent conflict.

These examples indicate where better understanding across the communities of academics and practitioners engaged in the UN and military studies may occur. While there are likely to remain fundamental political differences between UN peacekeeping and COIN, there are also sectors where the challenges and dilemmas are shared.

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NOTES

¹ 'DPKO Factsheet' (at: www.un.org/Depts/dpko/factsheet.pdf), 10 Oct. 2009.

However, several non-Western countries have been engaged in COIN-like operations in their own countries. Pakistan in the Swat and Waziristan regions represents an interesting case because it is also the major UN troop-contributing country.

² Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: the Art of War in the Modern World*, New York: Knopf, 2007.

³ See Stephen John Stedman, 'Spoiler problems in Peace Processes', in Paul C. Stern and Daniel Druckman (eds), *International Conflict Resolution After the cold War*, Washington DC: National Academy Press, 2000, pp.178– 224.

⁴ See e.g. Denis M. Tull, 'Peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Waging Peace and Fighting War', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2009, pp. 224–5.

⁵ In the US context, COIN is a part of 'Irregular Warfare', but for sake of simplicity, I focus only on COIN here.

⁶ The U.S. Army/Marine Corps, *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

⁷ Smith (see n.2 above).

⁸ John Kiszely, *Post-Modern Challenges for Modern Warriors*, Shrivenham: UK Defence Academy, 2007, p.7.

⁹ Nathaniel C. Fick and John A. Nagl, 'Counterinsurgency Field Manual: Afghanistan Edition', *Foreign Policy*, 25 Mar. 2009 (at: www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4587). See also David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009; ISAF HQ, *Tactical Directive 6 July 2009* (at: www.nato.int/isaf/docu/pressreleases/2009/07/pr090706-tactical-directive.html), 17 July 2009.

¹⁰ FM 3-24 (see n.6 above) p.2.

¹¹ Obviously there are many other instances of insurgency and counterinsurgency. The classical writers drew on their experience as imperial rulers fighting liberation movements. In modern-day war theatres like Iraq and Afghanistan, intervention has had a different origin. However, there is nothing in the US COIN doctrine that presupposes an occupation; on the contrary, the focus is on assisting and strengthening a host nation. Nevertheless, it might be a more political or bilateral engagement than a UN peacekeeping operation.

¹² FM 3-24 (see n.6 above) p.2.

¹³ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare; Theory and Practice*, New York: Praeger, 1964.

¹⁴ Fick and Nagel (see n.9 above).

¹⁵ Ståle Ulriksen, *Power to Protect? The Evolution of Military Structures and Doctrine in Relation to the Responsibility to Prevent and Protect*, Responsibility to Protect no. 7, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2008, p.29.

¹⁶ FM 3-24 (see n.6 above), p.54.

¹⁷ David W. Barno, 'Fighting "The Other War". Counterinsurgency Strategy in Afghanistan, 2003-2005', *Military Review*, Sept.–Oct. 2007, pp.32–44.

¹⁸ The degree of 'success' in the early years of the Afghanistan operation is contested. See Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*, New York: Viking Adult, 2008.

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- ¹⁹ David H. Petraeus, 'Learning from Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq', *Military Review*, Jan.–Feb. 2006, pp.2–12.
- ²⁰ See COMISAF's Initial Assessment, (at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/21/AR2009092100110.html), 30 Nov. 2009.
- ²¹ FM 3-24 (see n.6 above), p.199.
- ²² 'Iraq's Army grows in numbers and readiness', *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 Sept. 2008 (at: www.csmonitor.com/2008/0915/p06s01-wome.html), 24 Mar. 2009.
- ²³ Petraeus (see n.19 above), pp.3–5.
- ²⁴ 'U.S. Plans Vastly Expanded Afghan Security Force', *International Herald Tribune*, 18 Mar. 2009 (at: www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/us/politics/19military.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=19%20march%202009%20afghanistan&st=cse).
- ²⁵ FM 3-24 (see n.6 above), pp.79–80.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.83.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.48ff.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.45.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.365. The sharp increase in the use of air strikes by ISAF and the increase in civilian deaths are by many observers considered to be one of the main reasons for the strengthening of the Taliban in Afghanistan. See Adam Roberts, 'Doctrine and Reality in Afghanistan', *Survival*, Vol.51, No.1, 2009, pp.29–60.
- ³⁰ UN DPKO, 'United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines', New York, 2008 [also reproduced in *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.15, No.5, 2008].
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.17–18.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p.19.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p.22.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.23.
- ³⁵ Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk (eds), *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*, London: Routledge, 2009. Note also the critique of the liberal peacebuilding and its merger with state building, for example, Oliver Richmond and Jason Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions: Between Statebuilding and Peacebuilding*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009; David Chandler, *Empire in Denial: the Politics of State-building*, London, Pluto Press, 2006.

³⁶ 'Protection of civilians in armed conflict', UN doc., S/RES/1738, 2006.

³⁷ UN 'Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations', UN doc., A/55/305 – S/2000/809, 2000.

³⁸ UN DPKO (see n.30 above), p.24.

³⁹ Cf. Cedric de Coning, *The United Nations and the Comprehensive Approach*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS, 2008; Karsten Friis and Pia Jarmyr (eds), *Comprehensive Approach: Challenges and Opportunities in Complex Crisis Management*, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2008.

⁴⁰ Originally labelled 'integrated missions'. Kofi A. Annan, 'Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions from the Secretary-General', 2006. See also *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.15, No.4, 2008.

⁴¹ Annan (see n.40 above), p.2.

⁴² This is particularly evident in missions where there are no or few UN troops. The appropriate role of the UN in, e.g. Afghanistan, is continuously debated, and also in Kosovo, where coordination between the UN, NATO, OSCE and EU has been *ad hoc* and not anchored at the strategic (HQ) level.

⁴³ UN DPKO (see n.30 above), p.39.

⁴⁴ OECD, cited in Simon Chesterman, 'Ownership in Theory and in Practice: Transfer of Authority in UN Statebuilding Operations', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol.1, No.1, 2007, p.7.

⁴⁵ Cf. Timothy Donais, *Local Ownership and Security Sector Reform*, Geneva: DCAF/LIT Verlag, 2008; Annika Hansen and Sharon Wiharta, *The Transition to a Just Order – Establishing Local Ownership after Conflict – A Practitioners' Guide*, Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2007; Chesterman (see n.44 above).

⁴⁶ Frank van Kappen, 'Strategic Intelligence and the United Nations', in Ben De Jong, Wies Platje and Robert David Steele (eds), *Peacekeeping Intelligence: Emerging Concepts for the Future*, Oakton, VA: Open Source Solutions International Press, 2003, p.3.

⁴⁷ National contingents did, however, sometimes have their own 'military information' units with intelligence-like capacities. The UN operation in Congo in the 1960s was also an exception. See Walter A Dorn and David J. H. Bell, 'Intelligence and Peacekeeping: The UN Operation in the Congo, 1960–64', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1995, pp.11–33.

⁴⁸ Ben de Jong et al. (see n.46 above).

⁴⁹ UN DPKO, 'Joint Operations Centres and Joint Mission Analysis Centres', DPKO Policy Directive POL/2006/3000/4, New York: UN, 2006, p.2.

⁵⁰ Jacob Aasland Ravndal, *Developing Intelligence Capabilities in Support of UN Peace Operations. An Institutional Approach*, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2009.

⁵¹ UN DPKO (see n.30 above), p.34.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.35.

⁵³ Tull (see n.4 above); Stian Kjeksrud, 'Matching Robust Ambitions with Robust Action in UN Peace Operations – Towards a Conceptual Overstretch?', Oslo: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2009.

⁵⁴ Thanks to one of the peer reviewers for suggesting this table.

⁵⁵ Peter Viggo Jakobsen, 'The Emerging Consensus on Grey Area Peace Operations Doctrine: Will It Last and Enhance Operational Effectiveness?', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.7, No.3, 2000, pp.36–56

⁵⁶ For a discussion about neutrality and new impartiality in the UN context see Hikaru Yamashita, "'Impartial" Use of Force in United Nations Peacekeeping', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.5, No.5, pp. 615–30.

⁵⁷ Stedman (see n.3 above); Ulriksen (see n.15. above).

⁵⁸ Tull (see n.4 above); Report of the Secretary-General 'Implementation of the Recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations', A/60/640, 29 Dec. 2005, para.33.

⁵⁹ 'AU attack blamed on Darfur rebels', *BBC News*, 1 Oct. 2007 (at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7022586.stm>).

⁶⁰ 'Obama Considers Strategy Shift in Afghan War', *New York Times*, 22 Sept. 2009 (at: www.nytimes.com/2009/09/23/world/asia/23policy.html?_r=1&ref=world).