

A COMPARISON OF COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS  
AND ANTI-GANG INITIATIVES

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The Iraqi insurgency continues to exact significant tolls on coalition forces. A number of groups hostile to the American occupation wage paramilitary, psychological, and informational campaigns against coalition forces on a daily basis. Interestingly, the characteristics of Iraqi insurgent groups are in some ways quite similar to criminals of a more homegrown variety: American street gangs. In fact, a review of the literature of anti-gang initiatives and counterinsurgency operations (COIN) reveals many parallels between these types of endeavors. First, this research paper will examine the definitions of these groups, as well as their origins, membership, and strategic, operational and tactical goals. Of course, there is an intuitive difference between a street gang and an insurgent group. Nevertheless, this examination will show that the broad contours of insurgent groups and gangs are remarkably similar, as are the strategies and techniques used to combat them.

### **A Comparison of Insurgent Groups and Street Gangs**

To best understand the similarities and differences in COIN and anti-gang strategies, a comparison of the two groups themselves is in order. A detailed evaluation will elucidate those characteristics shared by both groups, thus enabling a comparison of the strategies used to combat them. This paper will examine six characteristics of these organizations: definitions, origins, membership, strategies, operations, and tactics.

#### *Definitions*

What exactly are gangs or insurgency groups? Concerning gangs, the question is surprisingly difficult to answer with clarity. For example, the US Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention – OJJDP, the government office charged with gang prevention – uses this definition. A gang is “a self-formed association of peers, united by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership and internal organization, who act collectively or as

individuals to achieve specific purposes, including the conduct of illegal activity and control of a particular territory, facility, or enterprise.” (OJJDP 2000, 1) This definition is quite broad. It could apply to any number of organizations, including legitimate yet unscrupulous businesses. Other attempts at defining a gang are equally ambiguous. The North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety claims a gang is a “self-formed group, united by mutual interests, that controls a particular territory, facility, or enterprise; uses symbols in communications; and is collectively involved in crime.” (NCDCCPS 2000, 3) Again, this definition has a certain ambiguity; white supremacist groups or international drug traffickers could also fall into this category. The exact definition of a street gang, then, is extremely difficult to pin down.

Some definitions of gangs classify them according to what they *do* rather than what they *are*. One police source states “the main goal of gangs is to gain money through drug sales and other criminal acts.” (Redwood City Police Department 2006) Adding this to the definitions stated above, a clearer picture of gangs begins to emerge: they are criminal organizations whose primary focus is financial gain. This definition will suffice for the purposes of this paper. Although it does not necessarily exclude other organizations like international drug cartels, an exhaustive search for an exact definition of a gang would be too lengthy a process to conduct here.

Similarly, the military’s definition of an insurgency focuses on its actions, not its composition. The final draft of the Army and Marine counterinsurgency manual defines an insurgency as “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict” (Field Manual 3-24, 1-1).

### *Origins*

Gangs and insurgencies have complex, yet very different root origins. Some research indicates that socioeconomic factors motivate gang creation and participation. One study conducted in Los Angeles revealed a strong correlation between income/employment factors and

gang participation. (Kyriacou et al, quoted in JPI, 7; Levitt and Venkatesh, 755) Another study has showed an inverse relationship between neighborhood unemployment rates and gang-related homicides. (Krikorian 1997, quoted in JPI, 7) Indeed, one local gangster from the Trey Deuce gang attributes at least part of his gang participation to the low-income housing project where he grew up. (Turf 2005) Of course, other factors like peer pressure and a sense of inclusion also contribute to gang participation. The same local gangster told potential recruits that Trey Deuce gangsters “would always have homies at their back and money in their pockets.” (Ibid) Reverend Leon Kelly, a gang counselor in Denver, says that gangs can fill a social need. “To them, this is their family, their sense of security, their sense of identity, what they think will help them survive.” (Ibid) Both sociological and economic factors appear to contribute to gang participation.

By contrast, insurgent groups have different origins. Political change lies at the heart of every insurgent movement, thus perceived political injustices and desired political change are the catalyst for the creation of insurgent groups. However, other factors contribute to the formation of such groups. In Iraq, such factors could include a sense of humiliation from the speedy coalition military victory, a potent Arab nationalism and a popular form of political Islam. (Eisenstadt and White 2006, 34) Sometimes the catalyst for an insurgency could be something even more basic. Some Iraqi insurgents were motivated simply by a lack of essential sewage, water, and garbage services. (Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24, 1-7)

### *Membership*

Membership in gangs and insurgencies is remarkably similar. First, membership in both insurgent campaigns and gangs is overwhelmingly male. The OJJDP estimates that anywhere from 66-90% of gang membership is male. (OJJDP 2000, 3) Similarly, the Iraqi insurgency so far is carried out almost exclusively by males. Women traditionally have played supporting roles such as smuggling food or providing medical assistance, although a September 2005 suicide

attack by a female insurgent might indicate greater participation by females in combat roles. (Keath 2005)

Furthermore, gangs, like insurgent movements, may be constituted along ethnic lines. The Iraqi insurgency, for example, is carried mostly by Arabic Sunni fighters. A full 85 percent of insurgent attacks in Iraq are carried out in Sunni-majority provinces, the so-called “Sunni Triangle.” By comparison, the Kurdish provinces in the north experience very little insurgent activity. (Biddle 2006) Gangs, too, are often formed along ethnic lines. As their name suggests, the Latin Kings – a nationwide gang which traces its origins to Chicago – tends to limit membership to people of Hispanic origin.

Gangs and insurgent groups also benefit from a small but noticeable influx of members from outside the immediate area. In the US, “gang migration” occurs, but only in small numbers with little noticeable affect on crime rates. (Maxson et al, 27) Iraqi insurgents, too, have accommodated foreign fighters wishing to wage war against the American army. However, the number of these fighters is small and the insurgency remains predominantly Iraqi in nature. (Pincus 2006)

### *Strategic Objectives*

Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24 defines strategic objectives as the desired end state of affairs (page 1-12). As might be expected, gang and insurgent strategic objectives closely match the causes which spawned the group. Employment and economic opportunities are prime motivators for gang creation. Correspondingly, a street gang’s strategy is to maximize financial revenue, usually via illegal activity.

Insurgent groups in Iraq certainly gain financial revenue through criminal activity like kidnappings. However, financial gain is not the end objective. Insurgencies are inherently political movements. Financial gain serves only as a means to the ultimate, political end. This is where gangs and insurgent groups differ significantly: gangs have little interest in political change (written as *\_political structure*), whereas the entire *raison d’être* of an insurgent group is to effect political change.

Although Iraqi insurgents generally share a common interest in political change, the insurgency should not be viewed as a homogenous entity. In reality, the insurgency is comprised of a broad array of groups with differing long-term goals. The Counterinsurgency Manual describes eight types of insurgent groups in Iraq:

- Anarchists, who desire no political authority at all
- Egalitarians, who seek a central government which distributes benefits equitably
- Traditionalists, who seek a rigid, often religion-based government structure
- Pluralists, who seek a liberal, Western-style democracy
- Secessionists, who seek to withdraw from the current state
- Reformists, who attempt to change violently the existing political structure
- Preservationists, who try to maintain the status quo
- Commercialists, who seek economic gain. (FM 3-24, 1-5)

Interestingly, the commercialist group does not seek political change and thus is closer to the concept of a gang than of a true insurgent group.

The various components of the Iraqi insurgency shows great disparity in strategic objectives but share many operational objectives, which are the subject of the next section of this paper.

### *Operational Objectives*

Having outlined their respective strategic objectives, gangs and insurgent groups identify those operational objectives necessary for achieving those ends. The vast differences in strategic objectives – political change vs. financial gain – necessitate different operations.

For many gangs, illegal drug operations fill their coffers full of cash. In the 1980s, crack was the local drug of choice in Denver. Local Crip and Blood gangs funneled in crack from California bosses. The gang bosses then siphoned out a large chunk of the profits, but not before local gangs took a cut. More recently, one former gangster reported earning \$2,000 in as little as five hours of slinging crack rock on the corner of 25<sup>th</sup> and Clarkson. (Turf 2004) Controlling the trade in illegal drugs remains a key facet of a gang's operational objectives.

Central to acquiring a large share of the illicit drug market is achieving territorial control. Gangs stake out sections of a city in which to conduct sales of illicit drugs. In Denver during the high rolling 80s, a local gang named Trey Deuce claimed a stretch of the Five Points

neighborhood from Lawrence to Downing; a branch of the Crips gang controlled the section from Downing to Colorado; while the local Blood chapter staked out the streets from Colorado to Quebec. Disputes with rival gangs over territory could escalate to lethal violence. (Ibid) Territorial behavior is a central aspect of gang operations, and crucial to achieving financial rewards.

Of course, black market exchanges and territorial control are only possible if law enforcement does not interfere. Hence another prime operational objective for a gang is to remain under the radar of local police. “The days of gangsters in colors blatantly standing on the corner selling rock have faded as gang members have learned to keep more low-key.” (Ibid) Gang operations, being directed toward financial goals, usually do not include direct combat with legitimate security forces. This is a crucial distinction which separates gang operational objectives from insurgent operational objectives.

Iraqi insurgent groups have a number of important operational goals designed to achieve political change. One of the common themes is the expulsion of coalition forces from Iraqi soil. To this end, insurgent groups include direct combat with legitimate security forces among their most important operational objectives. “We’re unpopular with everyone,” agrees Stephen Biddle, a senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations. “The only difference polls show is how soon they want us to leave.” (Beehner 2006)

Of course, forcing coalition troops out of Iraq is only one of a host of operational objectives. Insurgent groups require a great deal of materiel and funds, so such groups often engage in “standard” criminal practices like kidnapping to raise the bottom line. However, unlike gangs, financial gain is not the final strategic objective; rather, it is a means to a political end. The Counterinsurgency Field Manual notes that insurgencies also develop psychological operations to intimidate the general populace, rendering them afraid to aid the insurgency. Other examples of insurgent operative goals might include an information campaign to discount the government’s legitimacy and win new recruits for their cause. (Counterinsurgency Field Manual, various pages).

Besides working toward financial gain, gangs and insurgents share a crucial operational goal: to coax the populace to support their endeavors, or at least to not interfere with their endeavors. It has been demonstrated that gangs flourish in economically depressed areas; another factor influencing gang development is community organization. Neighborhoods which lack a high degree of communication between law enforcement officials, parents, and schools may put themselves at a higher risk for gang activity. (*Gangs*, 39) Similarly, insurgencies rely heavily upon a disengaged populace to conduct their activities. Mao Zedong captures this dynamic with his famous statement “Guerrillas are like fish, and the people are the water in which fish swim. If the temperature of the water is right, the fish will thrive and multiply.” (Kirstein 2005) The Army’s Counterinsurgency Field Manual notes that in any insurgency situation, there is an active minority supporting the insurgent’s cause, a passive majority, and a minority actively opposing the insurgent’s cause. (Field Manual 3-24, 1-16).

### *Tactical Objectives*

If strategy defines the overarching goals, and operations describe the general plans, then tactics are the techniques and initiatives used to put the general plan into action. Of course, tactics employed by gangs and insurgent groups are necessarily quite different.

Gangs attempt to achieve their strategic and operational objectives of achieving financial gain through the drug trade via a number of creative tactics. Due to their operational objective of avoiding detection by local authorities, deception tactics feature prominently in their behavior. Trey Deuce, the local Denver gang, used profits from crack sales to rent several townhouses. Different amounts of crack were dealt from each one to minimize foot traffic and keep a low profile. Gangsters would own several cars to prevent a single vehicle from becoming noticed. Some gangsters went so far as to wear women’s hats and sunglasses while driving in an effort to confuse police. Other tactical objectives including placing pushers directly on street corners to better sell their illicit drugs. But to do this, they had to scale back on gang colors. “The days of gangsters in colors blatantly standing on the corner selling rock have faded as gang members



have learned to keep more low-key.” (Turf 2005) The Trey Deuce gang’s emphasis on deception would make Sun-Tzu himself proud. Deception tactics allowed the Trey Deuce gang to achieve the operational objective of avoiding police, thus permitting them to realize their strategic objective of financial gain.

Iraqi insurgents engage in a sweeping array of tactical maneuvers designed to achieve their strategic and operational objectives. The most visible of these tactics are military tactics, which fall into two broad categories: conventional attacks directed against legitimate security forces, and terrorist attacks directed against civilian targets.

Coalition forces are the central target for insurgent military attacks. A report from the General Accounting Office, released earlier this year, catalogs insurgent attacks in Iraq based on the target (Iraqi government officials, infrastructure, Iraqi security forces, civilians, or coalition forces). By a very large margin, the data show that the bulk of insurgency attacks are aimed at coalition forces. (Christoff 2006, 6) One observer notes “[i]n other words, as much as was the case a year or two ago, the Iraqi insurgency is primarily an anti-occupation insurgency.” (Kaplan 2006) The most prevalent attack tactic is the improvised explosive device (IED). The Counterterrorism Field Manual gives an alphabetical list of some of the other common insurgent combat tactics: ambushes, assassination, arson, hostage taking, infiltration and subversion, kidnapping, armed attacks on facilities, and sabotage.

Terror attacks on civilian targets are the most grisly tactical weapons in an insurgent’s arsenal. The Army defines terrorism as “The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.” (*Military Guide to Terrorism*, 5) “Terrorism, like a play, can be viewed as a deliberate presentation to a large audience in order to spotlight a message and hold attention.” (Ibid, 1-1) Though the Iraqi insurgents have used terror frequently, nothing about an insurgency strictly necessitates the use of terror tactics. However, terror tactics have proven extremely effective. The National Counterterrorism Center estimates that between 1 January 2004 and 31 March 2006 alone, over

5,500 incidents of terrorist violence have occurred in Iraq. (National Counterterrorism Center 2006) Examples of such terrorist attacks include bombings of police stations and suicide attacks bombs in crowded markets. While an insurgency conducted according to established principles of humanitarian law may be considered a “legal” insurgency, terrorist tactics are universally outlawed around the globe.

Like gangs, insurgencies are also practiced in the art of deception. True, an insurgency’s strategic goals involve political change, a strategic objective which necessitates overt public action. But insurgent groups take full advantage of deception tactics. For example, few insurgents dare to wear a clearly identifiable uniform. Conducting attacks in street clothes allows an insurgent to melt back into a crowd following an attack.

The above comparison of definitions, origins, membership, strategies, operations, and tactics is an incomplete yet helpful account of the similarities and differences between insurgencies and gangs. Gangs can be defined as criminal organizations seeking financial gain, whereas an insurgency seeks sweeping political reform. While many factors contribute to gang participation, economic factors appear to be the prime motivator. By contrast, the Iraqi insurgency is fueled by perceived political injustice catalyzed by the collapse of Hussein’s regime and the arrival of coalition occupation forces. Membership in both groups is overwhelmingly male, and the groups can be sometimes split along ethnic lines. The strategic objectives of a gang, naturally, are primarily economic. By contrast, the Iraqi insurgency is comprised of a patchwork of various ideologies and long-term goals, some of which are completely incompatible. Gang operations focus primarily on controlling territory, dealing in illicit drugs, avoiding interference by the law, and intimidating the local populace. The Iraqi insurgencies operational goals include ousting coalition forces from Iraq, disseminating information, and, like gangs, gaining the support, indifference or coercion of the people. Broadly speaking, insurgents and gangs share the following similarities:

- Groups of people, primarily males, united by common strategic objectives
- Armed and willing to use violence to achieve their ends
- Motivated, at least in part, by economic gain

- Ability to conduct operations depends heavily upon the support, indifference, or coercion of the local populace

Of course these groups have vastly different strategic objectives, but enough similarities exist between the groups to allow general comparison of counterinsurgent and anti-gang initiatives.

### **COIN and Anti Gang Strategies**

The first half of this paper examined qualities of gang activities and insurgent movements. Despite some sweeping differences, the two groups share many commonalities. These commonalities allow certain techniques used in counterinsurgency to be applied in anti-gang initiatives. This paper addresses four of these techniques, which are described in depth in the Counterinsurgency Field Manual: unity of effort, understanding the environment, the importance of intelligence, and isolating criminal elements from their support base. Naturally, these techniques fit into an overall scheme of strategic, operational, and tactical objectives.

#### *Strategic Objectives*

COIN efforts in Iraq have both short term and long term strategic objectives. The long term goal is “to foster the development of effective governance by a legitimate government.” (Field Manual 3-24, 1-16) The manual names five qualities of effective governance.

- Frequent selection of leaders in a manner considered just and fair by a substantial majority of the population.
- A high level of popular participation in or support for the political process.
- A low level of corruption.
- A culturally acceptable level or rate of political, economic, and social development.
- A high level of regime acceptance by major social institutions. (Field Manual 3-24, 1-17)

While these goals certainly are the end result of COIN efforts, coalition forces in Iraq have a parallel, more pressing strategic objective: the elimination of the violent Iraqi insurgency.

Strategic objectives in anti-gang initiatives are similar to those in COIN. The first objective, halt all current illegal gang activity, is more immediate. The second objective,

remedying the causes which lead to gang membership, is more long term. The strategic objectives for COIN and anti-gang initiatives thus share two commonalities. Both strive to impose legitimate rule and governance on an unruly population, while simultaneously rooting out armed criminals and addressing fundamental causes for their existence.

### *Operational Objectives*

The Army's Counterinsurgency Field Manual offers a comprehensive list of operational objectives in counterinsurgency. Most of these objectives can be translated directly to gang suppression and management. A select list is outlined below.

“Unity of effort is essential.” (1-18) In COIN, government organizations, non-government organizations (NGOs), and military personnel must work in concert to achieve maximum results. Like COIN operations, anti-gang initiatives require the coordinated efforts of numerous actors, including development groups, police officers, religious organizations and schools. (*Gangs*, 39)

“Understand the environment.” (Ibid) Clausewitz would nod his sage head in approval at the recognition that understanding the situation on the ground is vital to success. Counterinsurgents must discern the key societal relationships and communication systems unique to the environment. Likewise, police gang units and other anti-gang groups must know the interests of the neighborhood to best combat gang activity.

“Intelligence drives operations.” (1-19) Sun Tzu could not have said it better. “Without good intelligence, a counterinsurgent is like a blind boxer, wasting energy flailing at an unseen opponent and perhaps causing unintended harm. With good intelligence, a counterinsurgent is like a surgeon, cutting out cancerous tissue while keeping other vital organs intact.” (Ibid) To be effective, police gang units must know which gangs are operating in their cities, what their motivations and objectives are.

“Isolate insurgents from their *cause* and *support*.” (Ibid, emphasis added) This is perhaps the most crucial yet difficult aspect of COIN and anti-gang initiatives. Certain elements

of the Iraqi insurgency – specifically, religious fanatics who seek to use Iraq as a base to export fundamental Wahabi Islam around the planet – will never be convinced to abandon their cause. However, their *support* base can be eroded. Similarly, certain gang members will never be convinced to leave the mean streets behind them. But if the neighborhood populace ceases to remain neutral in gang conflicts, then a gang’s activities will be curtailed severely.

### *Tactical Objectives*

How exactly do these four operational objectives – united effort, understanding the environment, good intelligence, and isolating groups from support elements – translate into actual practice? This is the real meat and potatoes of both COIN and anti-gang initiatives.

COIN specialists take the concept of unified effort to heart. Organizations known as Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JICG) seek to “establish operational connections between civilian and military departments and agencies that will improve planning and coordination within the government.” (United States Joint Forces Command 2006) By establishing a single agency to facilitate communication among the various branches of coalition forces, COIN specialists hope to coordinate efforts for maximum effect.

Anti-gang activists have also seized upon the concept of concerted, unified effort. Numerous publications encourage parents to get involved with community organizations to combat gang participation. Institutions like the local PTA, Boys and Girls Club, and other community groups serve as hubs for addressing gang issues. On the national level, the OJJDP assumes chief responsibility for anti-gang initiatives. However, on a local level, no single institution in Denver organizes all anti-gang efforts. True, the Denver Police Gang Bureau attempts to foster a “cooperative relationship with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies for the purpose of exchanging credible information about gang related activity.” (Denver Police Gang Bureau 2006) Other Denver groups like the Open Door Youth Gang Alternatives act as a liaison between police and gangs. (Turf 2005) But unlike in the military, no single group like the JICG exists in Denver to coordinate efforts of all interested anti-gang

parties. The creation of a single organization to coordinate anti-gang efforts would be a valuable addition to such programs.

Counterinsurgents aim to achieve an understanding of the environment in a number of ways, but cultural and language learning play major roles. American counterinsurgents in Iraq must conduct their operations in an alien culture and language. By contrast, insurgents have a distinct advantage in their knowledge of local culture and customs. Coalition troops rely heavily upon native interpreters to guide them through the social structures of Iraq. Successful counterinsurgents must possess a thorough grounding of the environment in which they work to be successful.

Similarly, anti-gang activists also require a thorough understanding of gang culture and language. In Denver, nobody understands these things better than Reverend Leon Kelly founder and executive director of the Open Door Youth Gang Alternatives. Kelly grew up in Denver and played basketball in a semi-professional league until his cocaine habit inspired him to sell drugs full time. After serving a prison term for aggravated robbery, he turned his life around, became an ordained minister and began working with gangs. He has worked directly with city administrators to inform them about the gang situations in Denver. (Turf 2005) An experienced, knowledgeable resource like Kelly is an important asset to law enforcement agencies and helps contribute to an understanding of the environment.

Intelligence proves crucial to both COIN and anti-gang initiatives. “There is nothing more demoralizing to insurgents than to realize that people inside their movement or trusted supporters among the public are providing information to the state authorities.” (Field Manual 3-24, 1-15)

The manual notes further that it is far easier to “turn” a current insurgent to your side than it is to infiltrate an insurgent group with spies. This tactic has been used with some success in Iraq. In one particular example, military forces photographed over 200 men from a local village. 34 of them were later identified by a turned informant as being part of a local insurgent group.

(Wilson 2004) However, cultivating informants remains difficult as insurgent retributions are swift and violent.

This same difficulty in cultivating informants is found in anti-gang initiatives. One local Trey Deuce gangster was shot in the stomach at point-black range. He survived the attack but, citing the code of the street, refused to divulge the name of his assailant to police. However, this gangster subsequently “turned” and began working with Reverend Kelly’s Open Door Youth Gang Alternative program. (Turf 2005)

The final resemblance between COIN and anti-gang operations – isolating criminal elements from their cause and support – is the trickiest yet most important tactical objective. The task is infinitely more difficult for the counterinsurgent than for the anti-gang activists. This difficulty stems from a number of factors. First, insurgents aim to use lethal force against legitimate security forces, so security forces often respond in kind. But a single disproportionate or indiscriminate use of coalition force could create dozens of new insurgent enemies who further solidify community support for the insurgency. “An operation that kills five insurgents is counterproductive if the collateral damage or the creation of blood feuds leads to the recruitment of fifty more.” (Field Manual 3-24, 1-21) Coalition forces use carefully measured force as a tactic to avoid collateral damage, thereby attempting to reduce hostility.

Police officers, too, must use measured force when dealing with the populace. Of course, officers are bound by law to adhere to very stringent standards in force. But should police force be perceived as disproportionate or indiscriminate, the results can be deadly. One example of this is the Rodney King case. In 1992, after four police officers were acquitted of beating King disproportionately, riots broke out across the Los Angeles. 55 people were killed, over 2000 were injured and nearly 8000 were arrested. (CNN 2001) Police gang bureaus must be exceptionally careful not to stir up hostilities during anti-gang efforts.

## **Conclusion**

This examination of COIN and anti-gang initiatives reveals a number of interesting similarities between the two groups, as well as the techniques used to manage them. Both gangs and insurgencies are organized groups engaging in violent or illegal activity to achieve a strategic objective. Their membership is dominantly male-based. To a certain degree, both gangs and insurgencies are interested in gaining financial security. For an gangs, financial gain *is* the strategic objective, whereas for insurgencies financial gain is simply another operational objective.

Great similarities exist in combating the two groups. First, unity of action is essential. The Army and Marine have created Joint Interagency Coordination Groups to facilitate concerted action. Although anti-gang initiatives are led at the national level by the Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, no single agency at the local level in Denver coordinates the activities of all the various interest groups. Local anti-gain activists should take a cue from the military and create such a group to improve efficiency and coordination among actors. Both COIN and anti-gain programs appreciate the need to understand the environment. In the military, cultural and linguistic specialists are in high demand. In Denver, former gangsters like the Reverend Leon Kelly inform communities and city administrators about contours of the gang landscape. Intelligence, while difficult to come by, is also crucial for gang and COIN suppression efforts. Fear of retribution is a major obstacle to “turning” insurgents and gang members, but those who have “turned” have contributed substantially to security forces’ objectives. Finally, both groups understand the need for measured use of force while conducting operations. Failure to use force discriminately can result in bloodshed and a decrease of legitimacy for security forces. In sum, counterinsurgency strategies, operational goals and tactics are remarkably similar to those of anti-gang programs.



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