

Published in the Halifax Chronicle Herald, Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2008

## Counterinsurgency operations can be won

By John Boileau



There is a popular conviction among the anti-Afghanistan mission crowd that counterinsurgency operations cannot be won. Although this is simply not true, many individuals continue to blithely parrot this so-called "fact."

While counterinsurgency operations – or COIN operations, to give them their military acronym – are among the most difficult type of warfare to conduct, they are not impossible to win. History is replete with several examples of effective COIN campaigns. The Malayan Emergency is often held up as a prime example of one.

At the end of the Second World War, Malaya, like many other colonies, wanted its independence. Rather than being nationalist-inspired, however, its independence movement was led by communist insurgents. During the war, communist guerrillas – many of them from the country's ethnic Chinese minority – operated from bases along the edge of the jungle against the Japanese. The British even supplied the insurgents with weapons.

Sixty years ago, in February 1948, when the British created the Federation of Malaya, the Chinese objected and began an insurgency campaign. They intimidated workers on rubber plantations and in mines and factories, and then started to kill British rubber planters.

The aim of the communist terrorists – known as CTs – was to create liberated areas, which they would then join together as a liberated country. The final phase would be an attack on cities and towns to break down law and order so they could seize power.

The British declared a state of emergency and quickly sent army and police patrols into the jungle to hunt down the CTs. Although they had limited success, they could not stop the rise in terrorist incidents. By April 1950, these were running at 400 a month.

Senior military officers soon realized that villagers living on the jungle fringes provided the guerrillas with substantial material support. To counter this, a project was initiated to move the people to new, protected villages away from jungle.

Then, on Oct. 6, 1951, the emergency reached its nadir when Sir Henry Gurney, the high commissioner for Malaya, was ambushed and killed. His replacement, General Sir Gerald Templar, inherently understood that the war could not be won without the support of the people.

Templar initiated a so-called "hearts and minds" policy, designed to protect the peasants and improve their quality of life through such methods as engineering projects, like wells. It was a policy that the Americans later adopted in Vietnam, where it was poorly utilized – and failed.

The COIN campaign against the CTs was a total effort, not just involving the military and police.

Committees consisting of army, police and civil government representatives were established at every level to control and co-ordinate operations against the insurgents.

Despite this total effort, military and civilian authorities realized that a successful COIN campaign was going to take a long time, even with large numbers of soldiers. By 1954, there were 45,000 British, Australian and New Zealand troops in Malaya – twice the number of 1948 – as well as police and local forces.

Gradually, the combined government forces were able to drive the insurgents deep into the jungle and the incident rate decreased.

When Malaya became independent in August 1957, the Emergency continued. It officially ended in July 1960, when the surviving CTs left Malaya and crossed into Thailand. Casualties included 6,705 rebels killed and 1,286 wounded, while another 2,696 surrendered. Government troops suffered 2,384 killed and 2,400 wounded.

From their sanctuaries across the border in Thailand, communist insurgents continued their guerrilla activity. Malaysian (Malaya became the Federation of Malaysia in 1963) and Thai forces agreed to cooperate against the terrorists and conducted several joint COIN operations against them.

By late 1983, many insurgents had had enough and surrendered. But a hard core carried on the fight. By 1989, even they had had enough and the communists called it quits. The remaining 1,200 guerrillas laid down their arms, ending the insurgency.

The communist insurgency in Malaya/Malaysia was one of the longest-running guerrilla campaigns in history. It lasted for 41 years before it was finally and decisively defeated.

The lessons learned during the Malayan Emergency – and there are several – have direct application to the COIN campaign being waged in Afghanistan today. Hopefully, someone in Canada is studying them for implementation by our task force there.

Counterinsurgency operations can be won. Don't let anyone try to tell you anything different.

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