New Zealand Army's Experience in Defeating Irregulars and the Future of Influence Activities[1]

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T he New Zealand approach to countering irregular activity goes back to the inception of the New Zealand Army. Our small size and unique cultural composition has brought together two worlds of military thought – the professionalism of the British Army combined with the unconventional method of fighting of the traditional Maori warrior. The nature of the Anglo-Maori conflict (1845-72) that brought rise to the New Zealand Army meant it always had a predisposition toward understanding irregular conflicts. Furthermore, our relatively small size meant close civilian integration was an important force multiplier and contributed to our force protection. The intention of this paper is to provide an overview of the New Zealand Army's experience in countering irregular activity and identify key traits that contributed towards the New Zealanders' success. With this historical experience in mind, the paper will touch on key points for the effective application of influence activities in a 'multi-irregular' environment.

Attention will be focused on the Army's experience in the New Zealand Wars, Malaya, Vietnam, East Timor, Solomon Islands, and Afghanistan. While we do have experience in other corners of the globe, these conflicts provide a cross section of a range of conflicts and an array of irregulars the Army has had to deal with. These conflicts have been divided into different strategic categories for defeating irregulars. The New Zealand Wars are a prime example of divide and conquer – the exploitation of internal differences. Malaya and Vietnam placed particular emphasis on stealth and out manoeuvring the enemy – or as described here, out-guerrilla the guerrilla. The third strategy, 'hearts and minds', while still employed to a certain extent in the other examples, really came to the fore in East Timor (now Timor Leste), Solomon Islands, and currently in Afghanistan. These three strategic approaches illustrate the importance of exploiting internal differences and the application of force, physically out manoeuvring the irregulars, and winning key population centres.

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[1] Declassified version of a similar paper presented at the New Zealand-based 2008 Army Experiment.
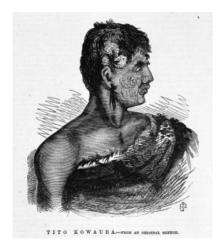
The second section will discuss the *mental models* that will be required in future irregular environments. While the New Zealand Army has proven its worth in countering irregular activity, significant adjustments will be required in the future irregular urban mission space. Of particular note, are modifications in the area of influence activities and how a new mental model is required for its successful application.

Divide and Conquer

The New Zealand Wars

Although the New Zealand Wars were primarily regular engagements, there are a number of lessons when confronted with a tribal and irregular opponent. The early government effectively employed a strategy of divide and conquer during the New Zealand Wars. This included a military campaign against Maori forces, raising local militias and exploiting tribal rivalries to undermine Maori strategic cohesion.

It was not until the war with Maori warrior Titokowaru (July 1868-January 1869) that the government had to contend with a truly irregular opponent that also employed information operations. Titokowaru employed a psychological aspect to his operations, spreading the rumour throughout the Wanganui region that his warriors would eat the Imperial troops and pro-government Maori. This was a deliberate influence activities campaign by Titokowaru to incite fear within the government forces and the pro-government Maori, making them reluctant to engage in combat for fear of being taken captive and eaten. The local settlers of Wanganui also began to fear they would fall victim to Titokowaru. The government at the time had no answer to this influence campaign and began to contemplate abandoning a stretch of land from Wanganui to the south of New Plymouth; a significant stretch of coastline. It was only until the myth and secrecy surrounding Titokowaru proved to be a fallacy, purely by accident, that his movement was destroyed and the government was actually saved.

The New Zealand Wars provided the first experience in countering an irregular opponent. Although the Maori warriors primarily constructed 'pā' (a traditional Maori fort), a

regular method of war fighting, there are a number of key lessons that can be deducted when fighting a tribal-based opponent. This includes the necessity to focus on a political objective, rather than military outcome. Second, internal differences were exploited to undermine the overall performance of the irregulars. For example, in preparation for the invasion for the Waikato War 1863-1864, a Peace and War Policy were simultaneously implemented to essentially achieve a whole-of-government effect. The Peace Policy focused upon the extension of *"European-style administrative and judicial institutions into the Waikato on the one hand, and political manoeuvring to isolate the Kingite tribes and undermine the King as a Maori figurehead"*.[2] Third, the need to isolate the irregular from its source of sustenance. Against modern era irregulars this could include external financial transactions, political support, or other external actors. The government experience against Titokowaru also provided an initial experience against an irregular opponent employing psychological operations to influence military forces and the civilian population. The failure of the government to respond illustrates another important lesson; never abandon the information environment to the irregular and always stay on the offensive in the information domain.

Out Guerrilla the Guerrilla

Malaya

The New Zealand Army's experience in irregular warfare was called upon during its deployment to Malaya in 1955. There, the Special Air Service was given the task of going deep into the jungle and to win the confidence of the local population. Particular attention was focused on winning the support of the locals and depriving the irregulars a source of sustenance. Food was identified as the irregulars' critical weakness and attention was focused on depriving them of this critical resource. Controlling this resource would effectively shape the environment and force the irregulars to either dissolved or confront the New Zealanders.

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[2] Richard J Taylor, *British Logistics in the New Zealand Wars, 1845-1866,* Doctor of Philosophy in History, Massey University, 2004, p. 129.

The equal mix of Maori and European troops within the New Zealanders' ranks was important when it came time to establishing relations with the locals. This projection of cultural integration within our own military was a key enabler when dealing with the locals and to elicit intelligence. Supplemented by military defeats inflicted on the irregulars, the locals not only believed, but could also see, that the New Zealanders were winning. Captured irregulars mentioned the constant patrolling, deep cultural integration, and denial of food sources was having a profound psychological effect and caused a surge in defections.

Vietnam

While the New Zealand experience in Vietnam was primarily focused on a military resolution to the conflict, it would nonetheless have had a marked impact on the Army and its approach to irregular conflict. Vietnam required the New Zealand forces to counter a unique blend of regular and irregular opponents, including local militia, Viet Cong (VC), and eventually North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars. Emphasis was placed upon minimising the logistical support, in particular the need for aerial resupply, for fear that this would reveal the New Zealanders' position. Great use was made of deception operations to counter Vietcong human intelligence sources. As in Malaya and Borneo, tracks were avoided and stealth was of utmost importance to maintain the deception plan, allowing the New Zealanders to strike the Vietcong where they least expected.

In their base area the Vietcong were perceived as being careless and providing a lot of sign . For example, cut saplings were an indication of a Vietcong presence as they were used for camouflage and roofing.[3] Technical intelligence was perceived as being of limited use in comparison to the 'mark-one-eyeball'. Aerial photography and other more sophisticated means of intelligence collection were of limited utility, especially in the jungle-terrain of Vietnam. Based on initial intelligence and follow-on sign, the New Zealanders would generally patrol in platoon strength for weeks at a time and aim to minimise external logistical support for fear of revealing their location. While the Vietcong used the jungle for cover, the New Zealanders also used the jungle for concealment to prepare their ambush, sometimes waiting for days for the enemy to re-emerge along a detected trail.[4]

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[3] Discussion with retired officer May 20 2008.
[4] Discussion with retired officer May 20 2008.

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The jungle-based nature of the insurgency meant that interaction with the local population outside of the hamlets and major towns was rare.[5] The relationship with the local population was consequently one of neutrality. While the populace may have supported the New Zealanders' efforts to eliminate the Vietcong, the constant fear of reprisal discouraged any in-depth cooperation. This resulted in an unfortunate lack of local intelligence. It was primarily during cordon-and-search operations that any encounters with the locals took place. These operations were conducted with much care and almost sympathy for the villagers. It was an unfortunate fact of reality and one that still plagues contemporary operations, that not all areas could be secured. Some population centres had to be abandoned to the influence of the Vietcong so that other areas could be secured.

The fact that the New Zealand contribution was a professional military force instead of a conscript unit significantly aided in its success. For example, every individual was trained and familiar with the weapon systems in the company. The New Zealanders' experience in Malaya and Borneo had also refined their counter-insurgency tactics, in particular, the tracking of guerrillas in jungle terrain. These basic skills would be required in irregular conflicts after the Cold War.

Hearts and Minds

East Timor

The New Zealand commitment to East Timor in 1999, and again in 2006, reflected a number of recurring and traditional counter-insurgency techniques that still hold relevance. While relatively new strategic assessments highlight the emergence of militia activity, criminals, and refugees in the contemporary operating environment, the New Zealand Army has had to contend with them on a regular basis. For example, during the initial deployment to East Timor in 1999, the first Battalion Group as Hayward states:

> *"had seen the division of Timorese society, evidence of massacre, militia activity, and refugee exodus to West Timor. The second deployment countered armed militia attempting to infiltrate back into the country, while more recent contingents had experienced large numbers of refugees filtering and sometimes flooding back into*

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[5] Discussion with retired officer May 20 2008.

East Timor as word spread that a secure environment had been established and relative order restored".[6]

Criminals also used the border to avoid capture, and groups termed 'Issue Motivated Groups' (IMG), were using kinetic and non-kinetic effects to influence sections of the local community.[7] The lack of infrastructure and poverty was exploited by 'clandestino' groups to gain the support from disenfranchised and disillusioned men. These groups are viewed as nothing new but a natural response by the local community to act as a safety valve against central authority.

In answer to these security responses, considerable effort was placed on developing a joint approach to governance. As Hayward contends, *"[n]ational security, judicial, law and order, customs and immigration, corrections, health, education and agricultural initiatives were established with the help of UN agency, NGO and unilateral government to government contributions".[8]* The New Zealand Battalions actively assisted all agencies to establish a functioning state and adopted a holistic approach to security. Reconstruction tasks provided a useful medium to influence local authorities and establish trust with the community. Particular attention was paid to reconstruction projects that require relatively limited output but provide significant benefits. Non-government organisations were also included to minimise any chance of duplication of effort.

An effective influence campaign was of utmost importance in all operations. This included constant patrolling along the border reinforced by an information operation (IO) campaign to gain influence among the local population. An active patrolling programme achieved positive security and psychological benefits for the local population. As Hayward observes, *"[c]ontinued patrolling along the border served not only to create a hard surface capable of countering any future armed militia activity but also to reassure local villages that their security was of paramount importance".[9]*

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[6] Lieutenant Colonel A. M. Hayward, 'East Timor: A Case in Humanitarian Intervention', *Military Studies Institute, Occasional Paper Studies,* (2003), p. 7.

[7] *ibid*, p. 8.

[8] *ibid*, p. 9.

[9] *ibid*, p. 11.

Solomon Islands

The New Zealand Army's experience since 2003 as part of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) would again highlight its irregular operations experience. Prior to the intervention of RAMSI, the Solomon Islands was experiencing ethnic animosity and greed that erupted into violence in 1998. As Russell Glenn states, *"[m]ilitas, gangs, and an ever more corrupt police force used rape, murder, theft, and destruction to intimidate opposition or achieve retribution"*.[10]

Although there is debate as to whether the Solomon Islands was experiencing an insurgency, the initial show of force upon the arrival of RAMSI while near simultaneously being approachable to the local population, deterred the outbreak of any insurgent activity.[11] RAMSI soldiers exited the first Hercules in combat mode but were able to rapidly adjust their posture depending on the response of the local population. This reflected the message that RAMSI was a combat force and yet not overly intimidating. Within 10 days of the mission, the first open day was held to establish relations with the local population and the potential military capability of the RAMSI force. Rumours circulated among the locals that the New Zealanders could look into their minds and determine if they were having 'bad thoughts'. In this particular instance it was useful to let the rumour mill work to our advantage.

Projecting a universal message from all segments of RAMSI was of utmost importance to reflect an image of cohesion and competence to the local population. The compactness of RAMSI facilitated the development of a unified message. Shaping the environment through an effective influence campaign would not have been possible without accurate information. In-depth information on the irregular opponent and local population was crucial to understand their weaknesses and which components of society represented the greatest threat to the RAMSI mission.

Afghanistan[12]

The 9/11 attacks against the United States and subsequent invasion of Afghanistan has presented an exceptionally difficult and complex irregular environment that has vigorously

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[10] Russell W Glenn, *Counterinsurgency in a Test Tube: Analyzing the Success of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI),* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2007), p. xi.
[11] Discussion with officer, June 2008.
[12] This section is derived from 2006 presentation to the Australian Land Warfare Conference on New Zealand's Civil-Military experience.

tested traditional counter-insurgency techniques. In response to the new era of irregular activity, the New Zealand Defence Force contributed to the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the province of Bamyan Central. Although Bamyan is unique in its composition (it was the site of the famous Bamyan Budda statues that the Taliban destroyed in March 2001), it does nonetheless provide an insight into the New Zealand approach to countering modern irregular activity. The PRT concept is unique to the Afghan environment and may not necessarily be the template for future operations, but it nonetheless illustrates the conceptual importance behind the necessity to co-ordinate civilian and military initiatives for a unified strategic purpose.

The New Zealand PRT (NZPRT) called upon the great depth and experience of the Army from previous stability and support operations when deployed to Afghanistan. As in previous irregular environments, the close integration of military and civilian efforts was the primary focus of the NZPRT. Particular attention was given to maintaining positive relationships with the humanitarian organisations via military involvement in the Provincial Coordination Forums. The development of the local Government Provincial Strategic Plan, sponsored by the NZPRT, also sought to integrate humanitarian efforts and minimise any opposition to military involvement. All 'quick impact' projects are carefully planned by the NZPRT to ensure they don't provide a foundation for future discontent. Numerous non-government organisations (NGOs) have also compiled a significant database of the social composition and core requirements of numerous villages. Information sharing between the NGOs and the NZPRT is crucial to ensure the precise application of reconstruction efforts. Furthermore, no NZPRT reconstruction initiative was undertaken in isolation but integrated to form a part of the 'reconstruction system' to ensure projects reinforced each another.

Strategic focus was placed upon the need for a political end-state, not a military one. The promotion of local governance was considered a central pillar of this strategy and the NZPRT went to great pains to avoid being viewed as a separate agency or administration. This was achieved by ensuring local officials were involved in the decision-making process,

serving as liaison officers for central government, and by employing local contractors. Any request for development assistance had to be passed through the local shura (community consultative group), District Sub Governor and Provincial Government for endorsement/approval in accordance with the Provincial Plan, subsequently involving the local capacity building as much as possible.

Out in the field, the New Zealand patrols conducted regular meetings with local government shura. The tribal nature of Afghanistan and the prestige placed upon local elders meant that these meetings were not necessarily conducted with elected officials. The New Zealand PRT also sought to consolidate good governance through regular meetings with government institutions. This included district sub-governors, judges, prosecutors, mayors, village elders, community councils, chiefs of police, education department officials and health authorities. Local government officials and security services were often reported to be corrupt, incompetent, or both. Corrupt officials could not be summarily removed as they were often important political icons at the local level. The NZPRT conducted meetings with key figures, corrupt or not, to gain greater situational awareness and to understand the tribal linkages throughout their area of operations.

Reconstruction projects required a high degree of security to ensure the construction, repair and utilisation of infrastructure, ranging from roads to irrigation systems. Well-functioning infrastructure and an inclusive political system also provided an indirect means of force protection. The NZPRT, like our other coalition partners, believed security patrols and Civilian Military Assistance (CMA) activities were mutually reinforcing. Significant efforts were made to ensure NZPRT civil-military integration was effective with attention devoted to ensuring security/presence patrols were coordinated with humanitarian assistance/reconstruction work of the Development Group. The Development Group met regularly to coordinate and align their activities with the security operations Commander's guidance, in line with the pillar strategy and their individual donor/agency guidance.

The Role of Influence Activities

The New Zealand Army has a rich and deep history in countering irregular activity from the inception of our military to the present day in the hills of Afghanistan. There has been no intentional influence activities strategy; the unique cultural composition of the Army,

combined with preference for small unit patrols and a 'soft' approach, inadvertently projected an influence theme; there was no concerted effort to undertake a well-defined influence strategy.

Although this paper has identified three strategic paths the New Zealand Army employed, it should be noted that there is no one size fits all approach to countering irregulars. This paper has illustrated that the New Zealand Army has employed a holistic and combined approach – from exploiting tribal divisions, an integrated political-military solution, and projecting a 'soft' side of the Army – to gain popular support and consequently intelligence.

Neither avenue of approach is superior to the other. All must be employed near simultaneously under a master strategy to achieve a particular effect. The New Zealand Army, as well as many other nations' militaries, have more than enough experience in the art of countering irregular activity. International militaries now need to understand how to orchestrate all the various tools at their disposal, both military and civilian, to project a particular message. For instance, as shown by the New Zealand experience in Malaya, the denial of critical food resources combined with aggressive patrolling by highly mobile and small units, projected a message to the irregulars. Although not influence activities in the traditional sense, our actions were nonetheless telling the irregulars that their lives would be made highly uncomfortable. Herein lies an important lesson; influence activities is everything we do on the modern mission space – it is not restricted purely to media campaigns or television adverts. Influence activities are actually the glue that should bind all efforts, from military operations to civilian instruments of power to project a singular message. Projecting a message should be the guiding principle when determining the commander's intent, and from there the correct tool can be employed.

As shown, the New Zealand Army is more than a component in the physical destruction of irregulars. We have a proven ability to effectively make the lives of irregulars highly uncomfortable and short-lived. However, in the realm of influence activities significant work still remains. The future mission space is likely to take place in complex terrain; most notably urban environments of the developing world. Maintaining a degree of stealth, which has been the hallmark of New Zealand operations in the jungles of South East Asia, will be near impossible in an urban environment.

As stipulated, influence activities are not a separate operating system but the overarching strategy that guides all operations. In the future urban mission space it will be necessary to develop a range of influence approaches to contend with the plethora of actors. Any future force will therefore need to be careful how its actions may impact on the higher system and the second order implications of any influence activities.

Countering an irregular actor's influence activities strategy is certainly a huge challenge. However, inaccurate reporting in Western media is another grave concern. It reinforces the irregular opponent's message, thus creating an aura of invincibility with the local and domestic population, which they may not deserve.[13] The experience of the New Zealand Army and other Western militaries in countering irregular activity, has shown that no insurgency is purely holistic. Irregulars have their own internal contradictions, personal rivalries, and conflicting strategic preferences. Highlighting these differences and encouraging moderate local leaders to denounce the use of violence, and emphasise the ineptitude and barbarity of the irregulars, may provide them a significant win. However, creating the message is just the initial challenge, being able to effectively market it, and review its effect on the target audience, is probably even greater.

Mental Models for Influence Activities

Conflict has always included a range of irregular actors. The New Zealand Army Future Land Operating Concept (FLOC) acknowledged that the conflict environment has *"almost always included state militaries, terrorists, rural guerrillas, bandits, tribal fighters and mercenaries"*,[14] but that other groups are emerging to further complicate the 'irregular ecosystem'. Such examples include, *"criminal elements, multinational corporations, private military companies, environmental groups, rioters, militias, pirates, religious sects and urban guerrillas"*[15] to create a highly complicate irregular environment.

The mental model to contend with this environment needs to be highly adaptive and openly accept a constant state of flux. The future environment is an irregular ecosystem that will evolve and adjust depending on what actions we take and against what particular actor.

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[13] For additional information see: Audrey Kurth Cronin, *Ending Terrorism: Lessons for defeating al-Qaeda,* (Abingdon: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2008).

[14] New Zealand Army, *Future Land Operating Concept,* (Force Development: Wellington, 2007), p.1-7.

[15] *ibid*.

Irregular groups will emerge, splinter and then morph into something entirely different with new tactics, techniques and procedures, to counter our actions both militarily and politically. It is a given that we will encounter an opponent which our actions have created and one that we are not prepared for. This is no cause for alarm or intellectual paralysis. It merely illustrates the need to adapt ever faster in a highly fluid environment. Close attention to detail, intelligence that covers off on military and political issues, and a political mastermind at the helm are important traits necessary to ensure any future force can out-think any irregular.

It should be noted that in such an environment the New Zealand Army has never attempted to control all actors. Such a feat is impossible. Retaining the initiative and staying one step ahead of the irregulars is exceptionally hard. However, by the fine application of force and supplemented by political and social activities, it may be possible to shape the influence mission space. If it is impossible to control the irregular mission space, it may be possible to make some of the actors irrelevant and encourage their evolution into responsible political actors.

Repetitively we are told of the need for military, political and social tools to counter irregulars. What we are failing to understand is the need to orchestrate them, together, near simultaneously, under a combined civilian-military leadership to deliver a one-two punch to irregulars. There should be no division between hard (military) and soft (civilian) tools – as the mere title suggests an element of superiority for military force. All tools under the government's control are equal in shaping perceptions and gaining influence. The difficulty arises in determining what tool, when and against which actor; while also preparing for any backlash. Determining this chess-like game is the role for a master strategist; an individual who will need to be highly comfortable with ambiguity and resilient against failure

The irregular actors in the ecosystem should not be instantly labelled as threats. It is probably best to describe them as competitors or opponents, as essentially all elements within the irregular ecosystem are vying with each other for the allegiance or domination of key population centres. Some irregulars can probably only be counted by force, others by 'soft' power techniques. The difficulty is determining which options are the most appropriate. The New Zealand FLOC recognises that not all irregular actors are 'threats' in the sense of armed opposition, but they may have the potential to influence, disrupt or dislocate military

operations.[16] As a result, different strategies need to be devised to counter or reinforce various irregulars, including both military and non-military avenues. The complication emerges when different strategies for various actions may inadvertently reinforce the popularity of another irregular actor or possibly create a new irregular competitor. Counter-irregular strategies will therefore have to be exceptionally agile to compensate for any negative consequences it may have on the irregular ecosystem.

Conclusion

Irregulars are far from invincible. We can track them down, locate them, and turn the civilian population against them and ultimately destroy them. The New Zealand Army has successfully neutralised irregular actors throughout its institutional life. Western militaries are, however, their own worst enemy. The unblinking eye of social media and the ability of any event to have strategic implications has provided modern-day irregulars a significant boost in terms of clout, prestige and undeserved competence.

Every action is now open to scrutiny and media manipulation; consequently fuelling a domestic population's doubt in the ability of the counter insurgents to bring peace and stability. Herein lies a key lesson; every action, both military and civilian, must be closely co-ordinated to achieve not just a particular effect but a message to a target audience. Everything can now be harnessed to tell part of the story to influence the irregular ecosystem.

Such strategic foresight is no mean feat and will require the ultimate master and commander; part social scientist, military officer, and political master-mind, to know what tool to use and where to apply it to deliver a particular message to shape the perception of key population centres.

Future peace and support operations in highly irregular environments will need to be viewed more as 'armed social media campaigns', rather than traditional peace support operations. We need to change our mental models and perspective on the application of force and the message this projects if we are to have any chance of future success.

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[16] *ibid*.

Images accessed: 10/10/2012

- Titokowaru image: http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/miscpics/0/0/1/im/mp001551.jpg
- Malaya COIN campaign:
  http://i602.photobucket.com/albums/tt104/vor033/New%20Zealand%20Defence%20Force/malaya-helicopterfullsize.jpg
- NZ soldier in Afghanistan: http://www.abc.net.au/news/image/4209296-3x2-940x627.jpg

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