

# Hunter-Killer Teams: Attacking Enemy Safe Havens



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Hunter-Killer Teams: Attacking Enemy Safe Havens

Celeski



Joseph D. Celeski  
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### **On the cover**

Typical American frontiersmen garb worn by independent companies of Rangers when conducting hunter-killer operations.

The figure shown here, on display at the Kings Mountain National Military Park museum in South Carolina, has a homespun cotton shirt, a large-brimmed hat to keep the rain and sun off, fringed overcoat and leggings. Rangers also wore Indian-style leggings and wore and carried spare moccasins. Rangers were equipped with knives, hatchets or tomahawks, and either flintlock-fired muskets or rifles using lead ball and black powder. Powder was kept dry in a powder horn. A haversack was used to carry food and forage items.

All photographs are by Joseph D. Celeski.





*Hunter-Killer Teams:  
Attacking Enemy  
Safe Havens*

Joseph D. Celeski

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# Foreword

The concept of hunter-killer operations deep within enemy territory evokes a sense of excitement and adventure, especially for those of us familiar with the exploits of Robert Rogers' Rangers of the 18th century or the operations of Special Forces and Rangers in Afghanistan today. In this monograph, Colonel Joseph D. Celeski (U.S. Army, Ret.), argues that hunter-killer teams be routinely established as part of our standing Special Operations Forces (SOF). He states that guidelines for their employment should be included in counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine, and Celeski further advises that the use of such forces should be a routine part of the overall COIN effort. The idea is to aggressively pursue the enemy within his own sanctuaries, disrupt his operations and sustainment, and neutralize or destroy the adversary before he can threaten a friendly host government or project extremist operations onto the world stage.

Celeski's operational concept for hunter-killer operations bolsters the command vision of U.S. Special Operations Command, which seeks to develop a force capable of "distributed operations, within an environment characterized by irregular warfare and asymmetric challenges."<sup>1</sup> The hunter-killer organization, with its strike units and teams, would be reinforced with indigenous forces, much as we saw during the Vietnam War and the early phases of the Afghanistan war. This kind of force could contribute toward achieving the U.S. SOF mission to act with "... speed, aggression, and lethality to achieve tactical through strategic effect."<sup>2</sup>

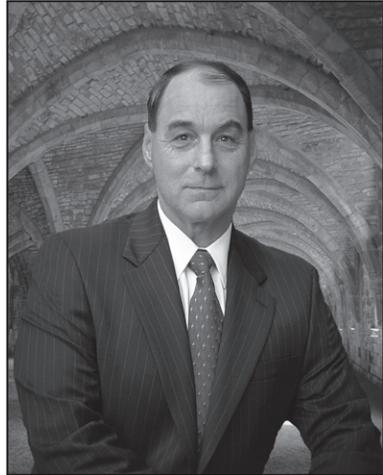
Today U.S. national security is threatened by violent extremist groups operating from sanctuaries in hard to reach areas of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and similar areas in the Pacific Rim and Latin America. It seems probable that there will be a marked increase in our need to disrupt and destroy enemy forces in multiple sanctuaries around the globe as we proceed to march through the 21st century. Celeski's paper provides a vision of the future SOF wherein hunter-killer teams could have a significant role to play in finding, disrupting, and destroying the enemy.

Kenneth H. Poole  
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department



## About the Author

**M**r. Joe Celeski is a senior fellow with the JSOU Strategic Studies Department. His current research focuses on irregular warfare/unconventional warfare (IW/UW) with a specialty on counterinsurgency (COIN), terrorism, political warfare, urban warfare, joint SOF warfighting, and senior leader competencies. Retired from active duty with the U.S. Army as a Special Forces colonel, he served in a variety of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and staff positions for over



20 years of his 30-year Army career. Prior to retirement, he commanded the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina (May 2002 to June 2004) and commanded coalition and joint SOF for two tours in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. He was a fully qualified joint specialty officer. Additionally, he is a Middle East area expert, trained in the Arabic language, and has served throughout the Middle East and the Horn of Africa regions. In his capacity as the chief of staff and deputy commander for the U.S. Special Forces Command at Fort Bragg, Colonel Celeski was the project officer for force modernization initiatives, development of the command's Program Operating Memorandum input, and the UW transformation initiatives. He was awarded the St. Philip Neri Bronze Award from the Special Forces community in 2002 for his career work.

Mr. Celeski is a graduate of the Defense Language Institute (Modern Standard Arabic), the U.S. Army Command and Staff College, the U.S. Air Force Command and Staff College, the Marine Amphibious Warfare Course, the Army Force Management School, and the U.S. Army War College. He has a B.S. in Political Science from Columbus College in Georgia, a Master of Public Administration (MPA) from Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania, and a Master of National Security Issues from the U.S. Army War

College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He will begin work toward his Ph.D. in History from the University of Georgia in the spring of 2010.

Mr. Celeski has published works on the Somalia conflict and on the use of Special Forces in Joint Urban Operations in UW in the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School journal, *Special Warfare*. He has submitted his first draft of “Special Forces History in Somalia Conflict, 1992-1995” for inclusion into Army SOF in Somalia 1992-1995, a fiscal year 2010 proposed publication sponsored by the U.S. Army Special Operations Command historian. In addition, Mr. Celeski has been a keynote speaker at a variety of forums, including the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD SO/LIC) symposium, the Association of United States Army (AUSA), Royal Canadian War College, the Naval War College, and the Joint Forces Staff College on matters of leadership, urban operations, and UW. He has also lectured in a variety of international forums to include the Polish National Defense University regional SOF symposium, the Special Operations Command Korea (SOCKOR) United Nations SOF symposium in Seoul, and in a variety of JSOU-sponsored joint mobile education teams (JMETs) for combating terrorism conducted in Chile, Jordan, and Croatia. His prior JSOU Press publications are *Operationalizing COIN in the 21st Century* (September 2005) and *Policing and Law Enforcement in COIN—the Thick Blue Line* (February 2009).

# Hunter-Killer Teams: Attacking Enemy Safe Havens

## 1. Introduction

Regular forces, indeed the most elite of highly professional regular forces, Special Operations Forces (SOF), can wage war in an irregular, unconventional way. In fact, the history of warfare shows quite clearly that if regulars are to prosper in campaigns against irregulars, they are obliged to adopt at least some of the characteristics, including the *modus operandi*, of the irregular enemy.<sup>3</sup>

— Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*

**D**uring September 2008, public reporting in American and Pakistani press told of U.S. commandos purported conduct of large-scale raids into the Pakistani border tribal region—presumably authorized by the President of the United States—with unrestricted rules of engagement not requiring U.S. regional command approval or acquiescence of the Pakistani government. The intent of the raids, as reported, was to penetrate into the previously inaccessible safe haven enjoyed by Taliban militants and Al Qaeda terrorists to destroy and disrupt their training bases and to kill or capture their key leaders. U.S. military leaders and Afghan President Karzai praised the action—that is, the solution to a long-standing safe haven problem and to weak efforts heretofore on behalf of the Pakistani security forces. Unfortunately, raids of this nature are of short duration and not designed for persistent presence. Although they can be highly disruptive to the enemy, they also can contribute to the adoption of a whack-a-mole tactic to deny safe havens. Eventually, the enemy will adjust to this tactic and make it harder for future raids to achieve success. The best counter safe

haven line of operation involves a series of measures to achieve relentless pressure; the line of effort has presence and persistence as attributes.

The most challenging strategic and operational dilemma currently facing the U.S. military in both Operations Enduring Freedom and in the Horn of Africa region stems from the enemy's ease of withdrawal to inaccessible areas, where he can operate from established safe havens and create operational bases to reform, refit, recruit, and relaunch attacks against coalition forces. Adoption of counter safe haven measures should include the employment of hunter-killer teams as one of the options to challenge insurgent perception of safety and invulnerability afforded by the inaccessibility sanctuary offers them. When guerrillas or insurgents are challenged in their own space, they are forced into a tempo of the friendly forces' making and often must abandon their base areas in order to survive. In addition, the fear of U.S. hunter-killer teams persistently operating in and amongst one's perceived safe space provides its own psychological effect against one's will to continue the fight.

In any counterinsurgency (COIN) security line of operation, counterinsurgent activities are required as an offensive maneuver to throw off insurgent attempts to occupy space and create alternate governance. Among the first steps in any government response to an insurgency is holding and clearing insurgent activities in the most vulnerable spots; this activity generally requires the government to spread their resources in static holding positions, thus negating their freedom of maneuver to take on the insurgents head-to-head. Simultaneously, it is at precisely the same time the government is attempting to expand its security forces—military, paramilitary, and police—to overmatch the insurgents and achieve a favorable ratio of forces to reach a tipping point of security for its population. Conversely, insurgent movements use this window of opportunity to tie down government forces, thereby allowing time to build up their own armed action forces or build forces for a move to the final, conventional offensive that would overwhelm the government response. Thus at the operational and strategic levels it becomes a race between the contestants—where the side that can prevent the growth of a measurable combat response on the part of their enemy, while maintaining legitimacy and the will to fight, may ultimately win.

The government response is often multidimensional—for example, holding and securing vulnerable portions of the country, maintaining legitimacy, and solving grievances while simultaneously taking the offensive to the

guerrillas. In taking the fight to the enemy, COIN practitioners adopt counterinsurgency operations (a security line of operation). This means taking the fight to the guerrillas, wherever they may be found, by raising the contact rate between government forces and the insurgents. Against the insurgent political arm, counterorganization measures are conducted to eliminate enemy leadership and political organization. This includes manhunting techniques. At the tactical level, aggressive patrolling operations to search out guerrillas still form one of the best means for conventional forces. Combined with raids, the enemy is kept off balance and denied the opportunity to choose the time and place of his engagements, spoiling his opportunities to protract or prolong the fight. Counterinsurgency patrols, however, may not reach into inaccessible areas where insurgents seek to build their bases and establish safe havens. Although conventional maneuver forces (normally at company and battalion level) can conduct operations deep into enemy-occupied territory, these often have a sweeping effect and conclude after a short duration.

Insurgents enjoy the most freedom of maneuver in their safe havens (bases), along their lines of communication, and in strategic rear areas, relatively unhindered by the day-to-day activities of counterinsurgency operations. It is within that shroud of security the guerrillas take the opportunity to recruit, train, refit, and grow their forces, including developing the structure for the establishment of a main force army. Unhindered by government security forces interference, complacency about security and defense on the part of the insurgent will begin

to set in, providing the opportunity for specialized COIN forces to operate. An outstanding reference on this aspect of irregular warfare is the 2007 publication edited by Michael

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*One proven method of disrupting insurgents or terrorists enjoying safe haven has been the employment of hunter-killer teams.*

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Innes, *Denial of Sanctuary: Understanding Terrorist Safe Haven*. One proven method of disrupting insurgents or terrorists enjoying safe haven has been the employment of hunter-killer teams.

The purpose of this monograph is to examine the characteristics and attributes of safe havens, explore options for counter safe haven measures, and then focus the analysis on the historical and contemporary U.S. military employment of one of those measures—hunter-killer team operations. The monograph explores previous doctrinal attempts to describe the

employment of U.S. military units conducting counter safe haven measures to derive a proposed definition for COIN hunter-killer operations. It also examines the American historical use of predominantly specialized, light infantry employed as counter guerrillas with the mission to penetrate and operate deep into enemy safe havens.

The overarching lessons gleaned from the American military employment of hunter-killer operations will form the basis for principles required for doctrinal employment of hunter-killer operations in COIN and other irregular warfare scenarios. The research of the monograph concludes with a proposed recommendation on the specific forming and use of hunter-killer organizations as a viable measure for counter safe haven activities in any conflict with irregular warfare adversaries for doctrinal inclusion in future revisions of COIN or irregular warfare literature. Additionally, the monograph provides recommendations for the establishment of formal hunter-killer organizations, at least within the USSOCOM component capability, under the operational art of unconventional warfare (UW).

If seen as viable, the hunter-killer concept deserves inclusion into future revisions of irregular warfare doctrine. Currently, doctrine is lacking on the specific proscription of counter safe haven measures that can be conducted by specialized forces in hunter-killer configurations (procedures on the attack and harassment against adversary morale, their sustainment system [war-making capabilities], and their source of strength and support—a witting populace). These activities are important to the COIN force because they can contribute to the exhaustion and erosion of insurgent forces while they are in their safe havens.

The research thesis is to answer the question: Is the employment of hunter-killer operations, as a counter safe haven measure in COIN, a sound doctrinal concept for the U.S. military? The research did not explore foreign concepts unless they were useful to the development of U.S. doctrine, nor the concept of hunter-killer operations used by conventional forces against conventional force adversaries, although they may be unorthodox (such as operations to detect German U-boats in World War II). This monograph also does not include the common usage of technological hunter-killer operations—the so-called *sensor-to-shooter* concept (such as observer aircraft hunting for enemy tanks, then directing the efforts of the killer)—in order to focus uniquely on COIN counter safe haven requirements.

Logic abounds in the annals of warfare on the military dictum to take the fight to the enemy. Irregular warfare is no different. Its defensive component—the use of irregulars as auxiliary—is used to augment the maneuver of conventional force or provide economy-of-force options. Its offensive component resembles a variety of tools in a toolkit for irregular warfare employment: counter guerrilla operations, counter organization operations, counter safe haven operations, pseudo-operations, manhunting, and the most feared by irregular warfare adversaries, the employment of *hunter-killer* teams.



## 2. Background, Definition and Doctrine

In the guerrilla areas, the governing authorities should commence what we shall call a territorial offence. As in the cases of territorial defence and consolidation, territorial offence will require assignment of small military detachments to a large number of specific zones. Although these detachments should establish local operational bases, they should not be garrisoned in posts. Rather, they should continuously ‘nomad’, using ‘whirlwind’ (*tourbillon*) type tactics—as the French describe them.<sup>4</sup>

— John J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War*

To be considered as military doctrine a warfighting concept should be accepted by military professionals as an agreed upon means of practical and common usage of employing military resources. The concept should generally solve a dilemma posed by the nature of war—for example, offense to defeat a defense, amphibious operations to gain lodgment in enemy territory, and interdiction to deny the enemy lines of communication. Finally, the intended action should be grounded in some theoretical aspect of war that has stood the test of time (a belief).

An objective of this monograph is to explore why hunter-killer operations against enemy safe havens have had little doctrinal capture, particularly as the Department of Defense (DoD) shifts its military art in recognition of the Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept. As a framework for this discussion and after conducting the research, the following definition is proposed:

Hunter-killer operations are prolonged operations conducted in irregular warfare by a unique and specifically organized force, in conjunction with an indigenous force, against irregular warfare adversaries by operating behind the lines or in hostile, safe haven, or semipermissive environments, employing unorthodox tactics, for the sole purpose of achieving attrition and punitive actions predominantly against the personnel, leadership, and resources of the enemy.

This definition has as its base a UW solution to an unconventional problem. The unconventional problem is the lack of access into insurgent safe

havens due to political factors, military limitations, and/or geography (and could also include seasonal weather).

Insurgency theorists (most notably Robert Taber, *War of the Flea*) discuss the requirement on the part of the insurgent to juxtaposition one's time, space, and will—elements of strategic art—against the competing actions of the government. For space, insurgents draw strength from having bases and safe areas to operate from, essential to the building and development of an action arm, a political process (alternate governance), and the ability to hide from security forces, thus contributing to the protraction of the conflict (and to ensure survival).

Protraction of conflict has its roots in war of *exhaustion* and war of *erosion* theories, made famous by the writings of Mao. Time can be on the side of the irregular warfare adversary if used with other strategic initiatives. The body of conflict theory is also clear that war is a clash of wills; at the military level, using force successfully against the enemy's force becomes one of the paths to achieve strategic objectives.

In most COIN theory, no one course of action chosen from elemental truths about the conduct of this type of irregular warfare will guarantee success; rather, the COIN leader becomes a virtuoso of applying contextually agreed upon COIN measures, hopefully with the right mix and balance, to achieve the political ends of the struggle. In the aggregate, these measures historically (and doctrinally) include not only political and psychosocial activities but also some form of the often mentioned *clear, hold, build* and *find, fix, destroy*. To clear and hold in COIN requires a static force (the defensive). To find and fix, then destroy requires an active force, basically consisting of offensive components, which include counterinsurgency forces and other specialized forces whose purpose is to help improve the contact rate and raise the attrition level of the insurgent to buy time for other populace security and political solutions to work.

Insurgents often enjoy the ability to operate at “the time and place of their choosing”; when they do, COIN forces now know where they are and their capabilities. In these cases, casualty rates tend to favor the conventional, government forces. The larger challenge, if counterinsurgents are to defeat or neutralize the action arm and to destroy the insurgent's base of support (bases and safe havens), is to take offensive actions to thwart insurgent moves to operate between the seams of a country's vital infrastructure and its population centers, while enjoying the ability to retreat to safety.

Properly conducted, the military line of operation in a COIN effort becomes the blend of antimeasures, countermeasures, and offensive measures. There is a range of measures available to the counterinsurgent; however, most of these measures remain at the tactic, technique, and procedural level of handbooks rather than incorporated into our doctrinal knowledge of irregular warfare. Table 1 shows a range of operations consistently agreed upon and utilized during irregular warfare—a belief of how COIN forces approach attacking insurgent *time, space, and will* while simultaneously providing force-on-force options to attrit the enemy.

**Table 1. Irregular Adversary Essential Strengths**

Strength	Friendly Forces Counter
Time (protractedness)	Counterguerrilla operations COIN/FID/IDAD/UW * Counterterrorism Operation tempo
Space (e.g., sanctuary, bases)	Countersanctuary (raid, interdiction) Community policing Computer network attack Border interdiction Hunter-killer operations
Will (ideology, endurance)	Countermotivation Counterinfluence operations Counterrecruitment PSYOPs Propaganda Combat attrition
Legitimacy (alternate governance)	Political warfare Unconventional operations Counterorganization (manhunting) Countermobilization
Criminal business enterprise (support)	Policing and law enforcement Counternarcotics Counterfinancing

\* FID Foreign Internal Defense  
 IDAD Internal Defense and Development

Insurgency theory posits the strategic balance of time, space, and will arrayed against government strengths as a means to achieve a political victory, all based on theories of war to exhaust or erode populace support for the government. In the modern context, legitimate and criminal business enterprise (or external support mechanisms that may replace lack of

external state sponsorship) are also critical to the viability of any insurgency. Friendly military options are a mix of anti, counter and offensive measures to spoil these five strengths. These can be used to keep the enemy off balance while the political and civil measures of an effective IDAD plan take time to work.

This discussion rests on the offensive components of COIN and to some extent broader applications in other irregular warfare scenarios. Hunter-killer operations are one of the options used by COIN forces to go on the offensive against insurgents, particularly as a counter safe haven measure. Because there are a variety of options that can be confused with pure hunter-killer concepts, a brief discussion of their characteristics will distinguish them from the COIN hunter-killer term—a useful point for doctrinal distinction. Each option discussed below embodies a particular effect; hunter-killer operations differ in that most of these effects can be combined to achieve a synergy aimed toward one objective—cumulative activities over time that contribute to the erosion or exhaustion of the insurgent:

- a. **Raid** is a tactical action conducted behind enemy lines (or in enemy-controlled areas) by conventional infantry or elite or “shock” infantry with a specific purpose in mind. (These elite units are often considered commandos.) The raid may have tactical, operational, or strategic value. Raids generally do not achieve *coup-de-main* status. Raids are intended to be short duration missions whereby the raiding force immediately withdraws after the operation back to its own friendly lines; the survival of the raiding force is often predicated on this extraction before enemy forces respond. Raiders can hold ground momentarily, but often require a linking-up action by larger conventional forces if the ground, or objective, is to be secured for friendly forces. Larger, deep-penetration raids by conventional forces can also be conducted as punitive operations.
- b. **Interdiction** targets enemy lines of communication and support structure in order to deny war-making capability. Interdiction operations include various targeting methodologies, combined with detailed intelligence and confirming reconnaissance, to increase measures of success. Interdiction can be performed with direct action, airpower, or with standoff capabilities. Sabotage of war materials is one of the unconventional measures to conduct interdiction.

- c. **Manhunting** is the specific targeting of leadership and key personnel within an enemy organization. It is a counterorganization technique. In military parlance, manhunting is characterized by all the activities to conduct high value target (HVT) operations against *individuals* to decapitate an organization. Manhunting techniques often resemble law enforcement measures used to bring a criminal to justice. Manhunting is human-intelligence (HUMINT) intensive.
- d. **Counterorganization** is the means used to defeat the insurgent political arm and its organizations. In insurgency, the enemy may attempt to establish alternate governance with their political arm, first as a competing option to the populace's loyalty, then as a mechanism to assume the trappings of state and secure power once victory is achieved. In these cases, political and front organizations are created to counteract the legitimate symbols of state, at all levels. The insurgent political arm is also a necessary means to mobilize the populace. Insurgent politics may ultimately require the ability to handle diplomacy at the international level. Counterorganization measures consist of actions to identify, penetrate, and neutralize insurgent political organizations. Subversion, apprehension, or neutralization of members of the enemy's political arm, combined with a counterideology campaign, are just some of the activities taken by a government threatened by *shadow* governments. Many of the successful counterorganization campaigns adopted the combination of military, intelligence, and policing in joint task-force organizations to achieve unified action on this front. Counterorganization should not be confused with countermobilization (denying the form of alternate governance) and counterguerrilla actions (securing the populace and isolating them from the insurgents).
- e. **Pseudo-operations** are most often paramilitary police operations conducted to gain intelligence on the enemy. Pseudo-organizations adopt the appearance of the guerrilla in order to gain access to the enemy's operational area. While combat may occur, this is not the intended purpose of the operation. The best pseudo-operations are those that incorporate *turned* insurgents.

The usefulness of hunter-killer operations is they could achieve many of these results within the objective of denying the enemy space and destroying

his will through erosion and exhaustion. Hunter-killer operational utility derives from employing an effective economy-of-force option, achieving persistence by operating in the same space and conditions of the enemy, while achieving a military and psychological impact out of proportion to its size (operational or strategic performance is achieved).

U.S. irregular warfare doctrine has never quite pinned down this concept in detail. COIN doctrine and emerging irregular warfare doctrine quite adequately address the need to deny insurgents access to safe havens and support (tacit/unwitting; internal/external) but lack in specifics for principles and application of the measures needed. Notwithstanding, good counterinsurgents have always devised a means for attacking the enemy in safe havens. Either these were on the spot, intuitive, individual decisions or derived from lessons passed from earlier practitioners without adoption into doctrinal literature, even though some doctrinal writings throughout history have at least come close to describing the role of hunter-killer teams.

The earliest attempt to capture hunter-killer concepts evolved from Benjamin Church's personal memoir of his *ranging* activities with specially formed militia into hostile territory during King Philip's War (1675 to 1676). These written experiences were incorporated into techniques used by Robert Rogers, who in the French and Indian War developed his now-famous rules for the conduct of deep reconnaissance raids.

Much of what early counterinsurgents understood about offensive operations against irregulars in inaccessible territory may have been derived from reading Colonel C. E. Callwell's monumental work *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practices*, which he published in final, revised form in 1899. Callwell described a "doctrinal" approach of flying columns (superior maneuver and mobility to the irregular) and specified the purpose of raids in irregular warfare ("... kill them or to wound them, or at least to hunt them from their homes and then to destroy or carry off their belongings"<sup>5</sup>), combined with the need to match the enemy and adapt. However, U.S. irregular warfare experts largely relied on the personal experiences and accounts of previous practitioners through the venue of lessons learned passed on generationally. U.S. Army operations against the Southwest Indians, the Texas Rangers experiences against the Plains Indians, and the COIN experience from the Philippine War lost doctrinal capture and appeal in the shadow and subsequent deployment for World War I.

It took the cumulative experience of the U.S. Marine Corps, over many years, to codify military activities conducted deep in enemy territory in its *Small Wars Manual*, published in 1940. Much of Callwell's work appears to have made its way into the *Small Wars Manual*, which also set the standard for utilizing task-organized conventional forces to conduct these specialized operations, such as deep raids. (Specially organized hunter-killer forces to conduct this task were still far in the future.)

The *Small Wars Manual* developed a variation on Callwell's theme; there would be a variety of means to challenge guerrillas on their turf: flying columns, mobile columns, and roving patrols (all still comprised of conventional forces). The mobile column differed from a flying column only in its range and reliance on a base of supply. Of interest was the roving patrol concept, the clearest capturing of doctrinal employment of hunter-killer teams:

- a. A roving patrol (at 5-21 in the manual) is a self-sustaining detachment of more or less independent nature. It usually operates within an assigned zone and as a rule has much freedom of action. As distinguished from other patrols, it is capable of operating away from its base for an indefinite period of time. Missions generally assigned include a relentless pursuit of guerilla groups continuing until their disorganization is practically complete.
- b. This method is particularly applicable when large bands are known to exist and the locality of their depredations is approximately known. Such patrols are often employed in conjunction with other methods of operations.

Of course, World War II diminished the fascination with small wars. By World War II, the American militia and independent volunteer system was gone (which eliminated the U.S. pool of outdoorsmen adept at *ranging*) to be replaced by National Guard and Reserve structures tailored for conventional war (because armies were required to fight armies). World War II also shifted the emphasis of elite and specialized military unit employment from ranging to one of reconnaissance, shock infantry, and raiding (e.g., Rangers, U.S. Marine Corps Raiders, and 1st Special Service Force). Finally, the American military was not confronted with an irregular warfare enemy in World War II, so it came out of the experience with an overall penchant for

conventional warfare, even though much had been learned by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) conducting guerrilla warfare activities.

Prior to the Vietnam War, it was the doctrine of other nations that expounded on offensive activities to challenge insurgent space. While not American doctrinal solutions, these examples did provide some framework for further U.S. military doctrinal approaches to COIN techniques. Roger Trinquier's treatise, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, Sir Robert Thompson's work, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, and David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* contain examples for offensive actions within insurgent territory to attack bases and attrit the enemy (e.g., intervention units, some form of pursuit commandos, pseudo-organizations, and Ranger-type organizations).

One of the first uniquely American-derived doctrinal approaches to antiguerrilla activities after World War II involving hunter-killer operations was offered by Lt Col Edward G. Lansdale during the early 1950s, when he served as an UW liaison officer to Ramon Magsaysay, the Philippine Secretary of National Defense. Lansdale assisted in COIN efforts to defeat the communist-inspired Hukbalahap insurgency. From observations and front-line experience, Lansdale consolidated his thoughts on effective, antiguerrilla operations. While the document, "Operations Against Guerilla Forces" (undated), was supported by the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) chief of the U.S. embassy in Manila, its restricted nature prevented widespread sharing among military professional and doctrinal institutions. Thus its tenets for offensive COIN, by forming specialized antiguerrilla units, did not become mainstream. Lansdale called for the creation of special antiguerrilla units to penetrate and destroy insurgent personnel and infrastructure, arguing for small-unit, broadly scoped missions and specifically warned of the need to maintain and support special antiguerrilla units to increase their viability for extended operations (the caveat was against retasking conventional infantry for this purpose).<sup>6</sup>

COIN doctrine developed by the U.S. during and after the Vietnam War still did not address offensive actions into enemy sanctuaries as anything other than pursuit, reconnaissance, interdiction, or raids (e.g., the actions of Special Operations Group and the U.S. Special Forces B52 organization). However, it was still apparent to counterinsurgents that denial of safe havens (the term sanctuary was used in most military literature of that day) was a key component of COIN success. The Department of the Army released

Field Manual (FM) 3-07.22 *Counterinsurgency Operations* on 1 October 2004. Perhaps a limiting political factor in modern COIN may have unintentionally affected doctrinal approaches, then and now: the diplomatic repercussions of violating the sovereignty of another country.

The one clear approach for taking the fight to enemy-dominated territory emanated from UW approaches developed by the U.S. Army Special Forces. Still not explicitly stating a unique role for hunter-killer operations, FM 31-21, *Guerrilla Warfare and Special Forces Operations* (Headquarters, Department of the Army, September 1961) came close in its page 130 discussion of attrition measures and interdiction operations conducted by irregular, indigenous forces:

Section III. Interdiction. 117. General

- a. UW forces use interdiction as the primary means of accomplishing operational objectives. Interdiction is designed to prevent or hinder, by any means, enemy use of an area or route. Interdiction is the cumulative effect of numerous smaller offensive operations such as raids, ambushes, mining, and sniping. Enemy areas or routes that offer the most vulnerable and lucrative targets for interdiction are industrial facilities, military installations, and lines of communication.
- b. The results of planned interdiction programs are.
  - Effective interference with the movement of personnel, supplies, equipment, and raw material
  - Destruction of storage and production facilities
  - Destruction of military installations; for positive results, attacks are directed against the primary and alternate critical elements of each target system.
- c. Profitable secondary results can be obtained from interdiction operations if they are conducted over a wide area; when the UW force employs units in rapid attacks in different and widely spaced places, it
  - Makes it difficult for the enemy to accurately locate guerrilla bases by analyzing guerrilla operations
  - Causes the enemy to overestimate the strength and support of the guerrilla force
  - May tend to demoralize him and lessen his will to fight.

Although UW doctrine was specifically developed to employ Special Forces in consort with an indigenous resistance movement, the U.S. Special Forces during the Vietnam War adapted this doctrine for use in security force assistance operations and created Mobile Guerrilla Forces (auxiliary) to take the fight to the Viet Cong in their base areas. Between this approach, borrowing of foreign doctrine, and the earlier thoughts of the U.S. Marine Corps on roving patrols, the elements for development of hunter-killer operations in irregular warfare doctrine could have been framed.

COIN's resurgence in doctrinal appeal came to the forefront with the involvement of U.S. forces after 9/11 in the two insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. (We can also add Operation Enduring Freedom in the Philippines.)

The U.S. collective doctrinal approach to COIN is now embodied in FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. Chapter 1 clearly describes not only the benefits that sanctuary (now referred to as *safe haven*) provides insurgents but also the doctrinal prescription: "Effective COIN operations work to eliminate sanctuaries."<sup>7</sup> Further in the chapter (section I-98), the following is offered: "Timely, resolute counterinsurgent actions to exploit poor enemy base locations and eliminate or disrupt good ones can significantly weaken an insurgency." The field manual is also quite clear that the preferred method to achieve this disruption is through the offensive actions of land forces and an effective targeting system. However, there exists little discussion on the role of employing hunter-killer teams or indigenous hunter-killer teams as part of these disruptive options. Even less are any works on the analysis and appreciation of the framework and characteristics of safe havens.

To achieve the level of doctrinal acceptance for hunter-killer operations, the concept must be recognized as an American way of war; it certainly has its historical antecedents. There must be a set of unifying principles for its employment, and key to doctrine, an agreed upon definition of its nature; this monograph supports that requirement. A thorough understanding of the characteristics and attributes of safe havens and their impact on friendly forces is necessary to develop counter safe haven measures; see chapter 3. To refine this thesis, a review of the American historical approaches in the employment of hunter-killer operations is warranted, primarily to ascertain their advantages and disadvantages, utility and to define the boundaries for the development of operating principles. This work examines the American historical approaches on the use of hunter-killer methodologies during its

wars by the analysis conducted in chapter 4; consolidating these examples into derived principles is covered in chapter 5.



## 4. Safe Havens

... it's very clear to us that Al Qaeda has been able over the past 18 months or so to establish a safe haven along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas that they have not enjoyed before, that they are bringing operatives into that region for training, operatives that wouldn't attract your attention if they were going through the Customs line at Dulles with you when you're coming back from overseas.

— LTG Michael Hayden, CIA director, 30 March 2008

**T**he ability of terrorists and other irregular warfare adversaries to conduct operations from a sanctuary—hereafter referred to in more common usage as *safe haven*—increases the potential success of the insurgent or terrorist in their struggles against government forces. Denying safe haven, therefore, is an essential part of any counterstrategy. For instance, the use of Pakistan's tribal areas as a safe haven by the Taliban and Al Qaeda present allied forces with a large strategic dilemma if not addressed (the protraction of the war and the weakening of the government will to prosecute the campaign). The most imposing future security threat may not be rogue or strong states, but rather the emergence of weak and failing states that can ultimately be used as safe havens by our enemies—such as we are now seeing in the Horn of Africa region, Somalia and Yemen. Worse, the linking together of multiple safe havens creates a network of imposing challenges to security forces charged with protection of national sovereignty.

Current methodologies for the creation of campaign plans have now recognized the need for a commander's appreciation to frame the problem prior to any staff entering the military decision-making process to develop the architecture of the campaign plan. This chapter provides a way of looking at the problem of enemy safe havens when conducting initial assessments.

### The Role of Safe Havens

This aspect of the generational challenge—persistent conflict against violent extremism—posed by transnational threats operating from safe havens was clearly identified in the findings of *The 9/11 Commission Report*:

A complex international terrorist operation aimed at launching a catastrophic attack cannot be mounted by just anyone in any place. Such operations appear to require the following:

- a. Time, space, and ability to perform competent planning and staff work
- b. A command structure able to make necessary decisions and possessing the authority and contacts to assemble needed people, money, and materials
- c. Opportunity and space to recruit, train, and select operatives with the needed skills and dedication, providing the time and structure required to socialize them into the terrorist cause, judge their trustworthiness, and hone their skills
- d. A logistics network able to securely manage the travel of operatives, move money, and transport resources (like explosives) where they need to go
- e. Access, in the case of certain weapons, to the special materials needed for a nuclear, chemical, radiological, or biological attack
- f. Reliable communications between coordinators and operatives
- g. Opportunity to test the workability of the plan.<sup>8</sup>

After *The 9/11 Commission Report*, the U.S. Department of State (DoS) conducted a refined study of the desired attributes that may or may not make a *place* a safe haven in order to formulate a working definition of safe havens. That definition would be useful for the conduct of diplomacy when considering threats to national sovereignty. The DoS definition additionally highlighted places where the enemy could operate in relative security and perform the functions noted above. Regardless of the definitional sources on the safe haven phenomenon, the following definition offered by the Interagency Intelligence Community on Terrorism (IICT) serves best for the purpose of this monograph (and expanding the definition to include insurgents):

*A safe haven* is ‘... an area where terrorists are able to gather in relative security and in sufficient numbers to engage in activities that constitute a threat to U.S. national security. Such activities include attack preparations, training, fundraising, and recruitment often conducted in unsecured or undergoverned geographic areas.’<sup>9</sup>

## Features of Safe Havens

What are the desired features making a location attractive as a safe haven or a potential future safe haven? One of the key, critical vulnerabilities of insurgent and terrorist organizations is the need for secrecy and security in order to operate. Counter safe haven operations are often aimed at exposing or dislodging irregular warfare adversaries in these two areas—secrecy and security—to create a third vulnerability—movement. Another important vulnerability is the enemy's need for the support of the populace, making isolating the populace from the enemy an often-considered COIN and combating terrorism tool. Thus, preferred features of the safe haven must include the ability to hide in plain sight (even better if the position is near the area of operations), to be located where it is physically nonaccessible by government security forces, and with the ability for the enemy to operate in a secure manner—free from police, intelligence operatives, and legal systems.

A supporting populace is also highly desirable in order to provide venues for recruitment as well as needed logistical and financial support. However, the enemy can still operate in a safe haven without popular support; a population can be terrorized and intimidated into acquiescing to the demands of the enemy or at least not turning the enemy over to government forces.

Another desired feature is the ability to get into and out of the safe haven to conduct operations, requiring nonrestrictive transit routes and transportation assets. This feature is further enhanced by establishing the safe haven near porous borders and along illicit *rat lines* already in use for smuggling and other criminal activities where the participants are adept at evading law enforcement and customs agents. A final highly desired feature would be having connectivity to cyber systems.

## Framing the Environment

Prior to consideration of any counter safe haven operation, the safe haven area should be thoroughly analyzed with regard to its composition. Is it an ungoverned or undergoverned area? Is it truly a safe haven that provides sanctuary, or is it merely a base of operations? Is the area an ethnic, separatist region or is it part of the country-wide insurgency? Or like the FARC operations in Columbia, is it an area for a criminal business enterprise? Clear understanding of the environmental makeup of the safe haven and

the motivations of its actors will assist in the shaping of the counter safe haven plan.

Safe havens can also be categorized by function and by geography. Functional safe havens include refugee camps, prisons, diasporas, academia, and ideology (a supportive, cultural affinity to support the terrorists or insurgents). Geographical types (physical spaces) of safe havens include urban, rural, and virtual.

During their analysis, counterterrorists and counterinsurgent planners identify issues that may place restrictions and limitations on their ability to conduct counter safe haven operations. Imposing physical terrain and issues of sovereignty can limit operations to only the fringes of the safe haven area. Security forces may be nonindigenous to the area and even further hampered by rules of engagement. The skills and capabilities of the security forces require review to ascertain the correct *ways* and *means* to achieve the *ends*. As an example, brute force and repression can be used to clear a safe haven if the security forces do not have finesse; the second and third order effect, however, may result in huge refugee populations and a devastated area now requiring an expensive rebuild. Clearing a safe haven could end up as a protracted operation—the government must have the will and time needed to outlast the enemy and see the operation to its conclusion.<sup>10</sup>

## Counter Safe Haven Approaches

The following approaches to denying or countering adversaries operating in safe havens were derived from historical examples of irregular warfare conflicts since the end of World War II. One may wish for the case where the indigenous population within the safe haven rises up against the terrorists or insurgents, but this rarely happens. The framing of the safe haven environment during assessment and analysis will often dictate the approach considered. The following are common approaches that can be used as a line of effort within campaign plans (individually, or in the aggregate):

- a. Isolate, manage, and contain the safe haven (includes border interdiction)
- b. A policing, law enforcement, and intelligence approach
- c. Brute force intervention (invasion, interdiction, sweeping)
- d. International diplomacy to put pressure on the supporting country
- e. Unconventional warfare.

The best approach, historically, is one in which the host nation with the problem solves it without external assistance.

### **Counter Safe Haven Techniques for Security Forces**

The following measures should be considered for development of a counter safe haven plan. The plan will be multidisciplinary, with the combination of several of the measures applied in consort with one another:

- a. Enhance border control, customs, and immigration services.
- b. Prepare human terrain databases and social-cultural mapping, apply additional population control measures (e.g., control of resources, biometrics, and identification cards), and co-opt the local populace and solve grievances to isolate population from the enemy.
- c. Conduct counterorganization, counterrecruitment, and counter-motivation operations in the safe haven.
- d. Simultaneously attack any criminal business enterprises.
- e. Develop and employ specially trained forces (e.g., border interdiction, hunter-killer teams, and pseudo-operations teams).
- f. Employ an interdiction and targeting plan throughout the safe haven.
- g. Consider adoption of additional laws and legal measures to enhance security force and law enforcement operations.
- h. Engage in regional initiatives for combating terrorism and law enforcement enhancements.
- i. Own and control the narrative and information operations in the safe haven; counter cyber threats and capabilities of the enemy.
- j. Border barriers and fences in conjunction with interdiction measures (kinetic).

During the Algerian War, the French recognized the insurgent use of sanctuary across the borders in Tunisia and Morocco. The French applied various techniques to isolate the National Liberation Army (ALN) inside the safe havens through the building of an effective barrier system: the *Morice* Line along the Tunisian border and the *Pedron* Line along the Moroccan border. The barriers—*barrages*—consisted of wire fences augmented with lights and minefields and were eventually very effective in stopping enemy infiltration with a kill rate of over 85 percent. Over 40,000 troops were assigned to static posts along these barriers supplemented with mobile

columns to react to penetrations. In consort with the border *barrages*, French naval forces implemented a campaign of coastal surveillance and high seas interdiction to close down arms smuggling. These measures taken collectively forced the ALN to continue only with guerrilla operations while thwarting attempts to conduct more aggressive, mobile warfare operations.

## Summary

Countering an adversary safe haven is a multidimensional problem, often with no single solution. Correctly framing the problem of safe haven (its characteristics and environment) helps to identify the approaches and techniques required to effectively achieve its elimination or at best, denial to enemy forces. Some of the key vulnerabilities of terrorists and insurgents who operate within safe havens are organizational security, physical security, and often the need for a supporting populace. Government legitimacy, effective security forces, and countermobilization of the population to separate them from the threat are among the most effective tools in eliminating or denying safe haven creation.

A wide variety of military, policing, and law enforcement measures are available to the counterterrorist and counterinsurgent to achieve the desired effects on adversary safe havens. One of those measures discussed here is the employment of hunter-killer teams within the safe haven. Historically, the U.S. military has employed some form of this technique based on the demands of the irregular warfare environment and yet failed to adequately codify this approach in doctrine. Chapter 4 reviews American military employment of hunter-killer type formations throughout U.S. history to derive the advantages and disadvantages of their use, to capture key lessons learned about their operations, and to synthesize the best practices observed and employed to capture hunter-killer team employment principles (chapter 5). An understanding of these principles will support the formulation of future COIN and counterterrorism doctrinal input on this subject, particularly in the wider area of counter safe haven operations.

## 4. The American Historical Experience in Hunter-Killer Operations

Scouts without a peer, superb in woodcraft, the Indians fought the total warfare of the barbarian hordes of the past and of the 'civilized' nations of the futures. Such was the military legacy of the Indians to the garrison of Fort Stanwix, as to their forefathers before them and to the soldiers who would come after them, an invaluable bequest for all our later wars through Korea. The art of using cover, of infiltration, of ambush, and sudden surprise attack, of mobility.... Ranger companies before and during the Revolution practiced Indian tactics to the hilt, as would their counterparts on into the twentieth century. In no small measure the Indian Wars made the American Army the effective fighting force it became.<sup>11</sup>

— Fairfax Downey, *Indian Wars of the U.S. Army 1776–1865*

**D**octrine can be informed by historical experience. In most scenarios where the American military was faced with an irregular warfare adversary, some form of ranging or hunter-killer units were employed as a response to take the fight deep into enemy territory. A review of those experiences in various irregular wars fought by America can establish the acceptance and utility of employing hunter-killer operations as part of any American way of irregular warfare.

The U.S. military hunter-killer team employment and counter safe haven experiences can be divided for study between the preindustrial period of colonial and early American era to post-World War II and beyond. Some reasons for the break and the differences between the two periods follow:

- a. Rules of engagement became more restrictive and humane to limit harm against noncombatants (unorthodox and brutal tactics in irregular warfare begin to become scorned by more professional military leaders).
- b. Irregular warfare engagements by the U.S. dwindled.
- c. The militia and volunteer system for the American military was replaced by the Reserve and National Guard systems, drying up the pool of independent volunteers with the necessary independent

attributes to *range* and conduct hunter-killer activities as ad hoc formations.

Of most consequence, World War II changed the role of irregular *ranging* skills of elite light-infantry units to creation of special raider and commando-style units patterned upon European doctrine (even though the U.S. Army still retained Ranger-type formations). Unfortunately, the ranging skill of the light infantryman (independent units adopting enemy tactics and operating for extended periods in nonpermissive areas) becomes lost in the conventional nature of the war as they soon become shock infantry, raiders, and long-range reconnaissance units.

### **Colonial and Early American Period of Hunter-Killer Operations**

The American military experience with hunter-killer operations in enemy safe havens began in a world in which we find ourselves today. It was during a clash of civilizations throughout the 1600s and 1700s where expanding, foreign imperialism crashed into indigenous populations and culture; indigenous cultures were manipulated by contending states to provide irregular warriors for the fight. It was a conflict between liberally governed societies, ruled under a sense of recognized legitimacy, against substate and tribal warriors. Competing ideologies of refined culture versus savagery and barbarism formed the backdrop of warfare amongst combatants and noncombatants alike. Whole populations lived in terror of massacre, beheadings, torture, wretched imprisonment if captured, and the destruction of homelands and economies.

These conditions created a unique way of early-American war on the frontier and fostered the employment of *ranging* tactics as hunter-killer operations against irregulars in their safe havens. The operational style of ranging initially consisted of patrolling between frontier forts (to detect enemy activities) as well as scouting and raiding if warranted. Thus the name for these early hunter-killer type militia units: Rangers. The following examples illustrate various roles and missions of the early Rangers and the pros and cons of their employment as hunter-killer units. The most comprehensive work on this way of war and a complement to any library on irregular warfare is John Grenier's book, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier*. Hunter-killer methods became the most effective mode of early American irregular warfare military art. Those tasks

required long-range penetration into enemy territory and a laundry list of destructive measures to accomplish once there, all contributing to the attritional nature of wars of exhaustion against irregular warriors.

Attacking and destroying Indian noncombatant populations remained the American, particularly frontiersmen, preferred way of waging war from the early sixteenth through early nineteenth centuries, even after the formation of the regular American Army and its attempts to move toward the eighteenth century European norm of limited war.<sup>12</sup>

**King Philip's War, 1675 to 1676.** The expanding land desires of the early settlers in southern New England (Massachusetts Bay Colony, Swansea, Plymouth Colony, Rhode Island, Connecticut), combined with growing disdain on the part of colonists for the incompatibility with European culture and values of the various indigenous Indian tribes populating the region, led to the first outbreak of formal military operations. It reached campaign scale during King Philip's War, fought between 1675 and 1676, against the backdrop of Europe's 30 Years War.

King Philip (with the Wampanoag Indian name of Metacom) led the eastern American Indian tribes of the Wampanoag, Narragansett, Nipmuc, and others in an attack against the colonists in June 1675, in the southern border region of the Plymouth Colony. Before the war ended, thousands of towns, settlements, and homes of American settlers were destroyed, over 800 lives lost amongst the settlers and approximately 3,000 losses amongst the Native American populace (resulting in the decimation of the eastern-American Indian tribes).<sup>13</sup>

Early colonial military defense consisted of a basic self-reliance on an armed populace and the establishment of a mutually supporting colonial militia system, all backed up with a series of fortified houses and blockhouses stretching across the frontier. If attacked, the citizenry would rally into the fortified positions and allow the militia to patrol and roam between them in an attempt to clear away the Indians. American militias were trained in accordance with European military tactics involving lines of infantrymen delivering volley fire. The Indians used guerrilla-like tactics, first raiding, then disappearing into forests and swamps as refuge and sanctuary.

As in all insurgency-like conflicts, the enemy's elusiveness plagued efforts to bring on decisive military battle. In recognition of the need to

take the fight to the Indian warriors, Governor Winslow (Plymouth Colony) appointed Benjamin Church as the commander of the first full-time, independent company of Ranger militia. Comprised of both expert frontiersmen and Indian volunteers (initially about 60 Englishmen and 140 Indian irregulars), Benjamin Church employed his unit as the first officially sanctioned American ranging unit with a clear mandate for a hunter-killer type of operation:

... a force specially designed to search out the remnants of the enemy wherever they may lurk and beat them at their own tricks of forest warfare.<sup>14</sup>

Captain Church was well known—a famous Indian fighter—and had a vast knowledge of the frontier territory. His unorthodox leadership style, with a flair for the dramatic, made him a perfect leader for an autonomous hunter-killer unit. Benjamin Church employed ranging tactics to conduct a variety of offensive strikes against enemy safe havens. Benjamin Church took the ranging concept to the next level, employing his Rangers deep into enemy territory for long periods (over weeks of time) with the express mission of destroying the hostiles and their safe haven support system. The Rangers fought by copying the style of Indian forest fighting and swamp-fighting tactics.

Church's unit almost single-handedly turned around the war effort with a string of successes against the hostiles. His unit accounted for the death of King Philip; the capture of Philip's supporter, Annawon; and a devastating winter raid (conducted as a combined operation with other colonial militia units on 19 December 1675) against a fortified camp of Narragansett near present-day South Kingston, Rhode Island. Dubbed the Great Swamp Fight, this action eliminated any further serious involvement of the Narragansett Indians during the remainder of the war.

Benjamin Church used mixed militia and indigenous forces to his advantage along with the frontiersmen knowledge of the outdoors, adoption of Indian *skulking* tactics, and well-armed units to overmatch his adversaries. He adapted to the enemy by learning the intricacies of swamp warfare in order to expand his operations into that safe haven. His disadvantages were limited mobility (same as his adversary—foot) and lack of means to sustain his forces during bad weather.

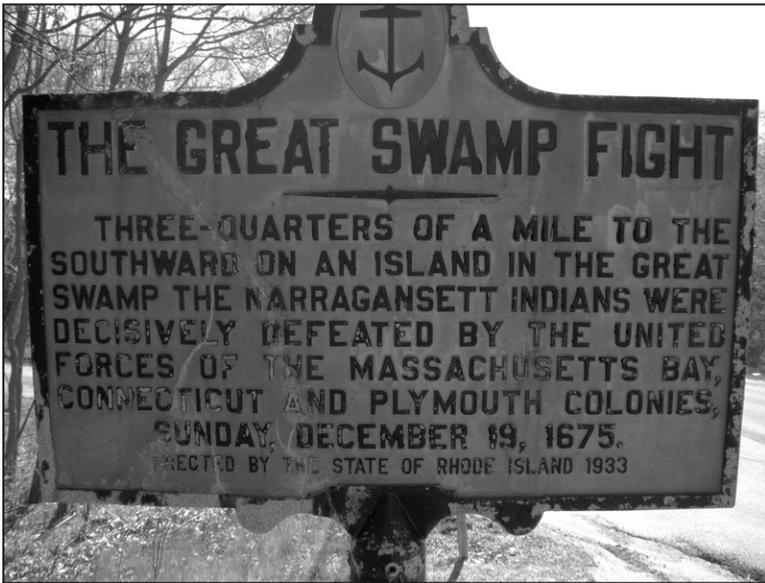


Figure 1. Rhode Island State historical marker near the location of the Great Swamp Fight where Colonel Church and his Rangers participated in a decisive winter raid against the sanctuary of the Narragansett Indians (near present-day South Kingston, Rhode Island)

Church derived early principles from his warfare exploits utilizing hunter-killer methodologies. His written experiences in hunter-killer types of operations were passed on and incorporated into the style of ranging and hunter-killer operations made famous by Robert Rogers during the French and Indian War. Although Rogers' exploits form the lore of modern Ranger history, Benjamin Church should rightly have the title of the father of the first American military operations employing Rangers as unorthodox military.

**French and Indian War, Rogers' Rangers.** Major Robert Rogers began his ranging career as a 14-year-old Indian fighter and went on to become the most famous, although certainly not the first, Ranger of the American frontier. Rogers perfected the art of offensive ranging with his hunter-killer units by conducting deep penetration raids and reconnaissance missions for the British forces stationed along the upper state waterways of New York during the French and Indian Wars. Rogers capitalized on integrating indigenous forces into his units. They served as scouts, knowing the land well. He raised

volunteers who were physically hardy and superb outdoorsmen, and adopted unorthodox fighting techniques similar to the hostile Indians. With these units he led missions into enemy territory—harassing French and Indian lines, gathering intelligence, and capturing prisoners.

His most notable hunter-killer type operation was the raid against the Abneki village on 4 October 1759, located at St. François in the St. Lawrence River valley. Traveling over 150 miles with 142 Rangers and indigenous Indian irregulars, the village was ruthlessly attacked. Many of the Abneki warriors and noncombatants were killed or scattered, and then the whole village was burned.<sup>15</sup>

Rogers would go on to command a Ranger contingent during the Revolutionary War, unfortunately on the side of the British. He is most remembered for his *Rules for Ranging*, promulgated as a result of his experiences. Rogers' expedition typified the first derived and applied principles of hunter-killer and ranging operations to ensure success. His men were handpicked, including the Mohican scouts. The rangers wore sturdy, frontier clothing to protect them from the elements and to blend in with indigenous populations found in his operating area. The Rangers were armed well enough to match or overmatch their adversaries. Weapons skill and care of weapons were enforced constantly.

The Rangers traveled fast and light (carrying extra moccasins for long-range patrols) and often used canoes or boats to increase their mobility. During winter, skates were used to rapidly transit frozen lakes and rivers, and snowshoes were used to negotiate the effects of snow on the trails. Combined with a cultural and geographical knowledge of their area of operations and the ability to live off the land and travel long distances behind enemy lines, the Rangers became the most effective, specialized force in the northeast.

Conversely, the failing attribute of Rogers' operational style was that he was not constrained by rules of engagement when conducting his operations against combatants and noncombatants alike; if prisoners impeded his movement, they were usually killed. Noncombatants were killed along with warriors. This tactic was scorned by the conventional British Army regulars, and Rogers was later rebuked for this operation. The British had made great propaganda against the French when they employed these tactics with their Indian irregulars; the high moral ground was lost and the French continued to allow their indigenous allies to commit atrocities.

**Operational Maneuver, Strategic Effect: The Battle of Kings Mountain 1780.** There are very few examples of early American military operations involving hunter-killer teams in achieving a strategic effect based on the operational maneuver of its irregular forces; most hunter-killer operations are tactical engagements. This effect might only be accomplished if the hunter-killer operations are employed as the main element of a war-of-exhaustion strategy; by the prolonged operations of hunter-killer teams to wear down enemy insurgents; or the insurgent force is so decimated that victory is achieved.

The Battle of Kings Mountain in 1780 pitted the irregular forces of the back-country colonists—the Overmountain Men from Tennessee and militia from the western districts in North Carolina—against the proxy, provincial irregular forces of Loyalists commanded by Major Patrick Ferguson.<sup>16</sup>

After stalemate in the North against Washington's forces during the Revolutionary War, British strategy shifted to reliance on a perceived loyal Tory population in the southern states to defeat the Americans. The English war cabinet, in consort with its generals, believed it would be possible to subdue the rebels in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia using irregulars provided from the Loyalists. After the attack on Savannah, British forces overran Georgia, and then captured Charleston on 12 May 1780. From this position of strength, British forces spread military detachments to the countryside to consolidate their gains. In response, the American General Gates reacted in August of that year—maneuvering with the Continental forces at Camden, South Carolina—and was heavily defeated. With the absence of an American Army to thwart British gains, American patriots turned to partisan and guerrilla warfare operations to continually harass the British.

Ferguson commanded a large, irregular force of about 1,100 Loyalists (which included Rangers). He was ordered by the British command into western South Carolina (to the fort named “96,” a star, earthen-work fortification guarding a trade route), prepositioned to continue operations against American Partisans in North Carolina. He soon moved his forces north, scattering the Partisans in his wake, with the intention of linking up with British forces in Charlotte. Ferguson believed the back country area would provide him with a loyal populace, provisions, and terrain to support his maneuver—safe haven characteristics.

In response, militia commanders Colonels Isaac Shelby and John Sevier mustered the largest hunter-killer operation in early American history at Sycamore Shoals (near modern Elizabethton, Tennessee) on 22 September 1780. With the addition of 200 Virginians under Colonels William and Arthur Campbell, the force of militia and irregulars let loose from the Shelving Rock rendezvous point as a *flying column* to search out and destroy Ferguson. The column split at Catawba in order to gather more Partisans and grew to approximately 1,400 men (later dubbed in folklore as the “Ghost Legion”).

Ferguson soon had word from local spies of this irregular force hunting for him and stopped at Kings Mountain to gather more reinforcements. Kings Mountain was a poor choice for a defensive position being isolated and with very little water. Unbeknownst to Ferguson, none of his messages calling for reinforcements were getting past the hostile population.

The American hunter-killer force slowed to the pace of its foot soldiers. In frustration at the pace of movement, the force was reorganized into a mounted column, leaving the foot soldiers at Cowpens, and pushed ahead to Kings Mountain with about 900 horsemen on 6 October. Local Tories captured along the way provided intelligence, and much of the population provided provisions for the force as it pushed forward (to include the drawing of maps).

Ferguson was soon surrounded. The Americans, using Indian tactics, were repulsed from the top of the mountain several times. Soon, Loyalist muskets could not compete with the accuracy and killing rate of American rifles; they were defeated after Ferguson was killed. American losses were about 30; the Loyalist force of approximately 1,100 was decimated (about 150 killed, commensurate number wounded, and over 800 taken prisoner). The American victory ensured the British would never operate in force again across the southern back country. The victory also dampened the enthusiasm for Loyalist support for England for the remainder of the war—a strategic victory.<sup>17</sup>

The attributes of the hunter-killer operation lending to the success of American irregulars came from their superior firepower (rifle technology vs. musket), superior mobility on horseback, knowledge of the terrain and populace, the innate ability of the American irregular to live off the land, the hardiness of the physical condition of the irregulars, and the reckless, brave, charismatic and audacious leadership provided by the militia colonels, most



Figure 2. Ferguson's men defended from the top of the terrain, and the American irregulars and volunteer militia surrounded the heights and fought uphill to defeat the British Loyalists

with warfighting experience. The rules of engagement were unrestrictive, but American irregulars spared the wounded, treated them as best they could, and moved the hundreds of prisoners to places of captivity. (The rules of engagement allowed for the abuse and capture of noncombatants given the American sentiments against the Loyalist factions of the population and abuses on the British side.) Detractors were the ad hoc, inexperienced level of the various irregular militia units, who had never conducted coordinated operations with one another (although this did not limit their effectiveness when finally forming for battle). Although slowed by the speed of foot infantry, the hunter-killer force adapted the flying column to horseback and prevailed in reaching Ferguson's force before he could maneuver away.

The ranging tradition spread to other states, and a variety of Ranger militia units continued to conduct hunter-killer operations for the remainder of the 18th century. After the creation of a standing U.S. Army, most operations into the irregular's safe havens and homelands consisted of conventional military efforts of long-range penetration under the design of a punitive

expedition or as limited long-range patrols (e.g., Indian Wars in the West, Texas Rangers, and Philippine COIN campaign). During the Civil War, a variety of colorful units were formed to track down the elusive Confederate irregulars of Mosby and Quantrill, but these suffered in effectiveness from being formed ad hoc out of conventional cavalry units, who were not much better in the tactics, arms, and skills of their counterparts.

The tradition of conventional punitive columns culminated in General Pershing's expedition to Mexico in the early 20th century. Although specific, small-unit hunter-killer operations (e.g., Ranger units) were no longer the norm, the small-wars era continued after World War I and did at least continue to provide hunter-killer-like skills and experiences to the U.S. military as a COIN technique. This would improve American hunter-killer operations in the future: the use of indigenous forces, increased mobility platforms to travel further in rougher terrain, modern and over-matching weaponry, and technology enhancements (the advent of the airplane and the radio).

## **World War II and Beyond**

World War II irregular warfare experiences did not expand the American way of war in the realm of COIN techniques, primarily because the U.S. did not face an Axis insurgent or guerrilla threat. (The U.S. conducted guerrilla and partisan warfare against conventional Axis forces.) It was in this adversary realm of irregular warfare—actually participating as sponsors and enablers for guerrilla warfare (e.g., Yugoslavia and the Philippines)—where much of American doctrinal approaches to UW were formed. Either by necessity as stay behind forces, or through British tutelage under the Special Operations Executive, Americans performed capably as insurgents and guerrillas in their own right. Other SOF were created for the purpose of raiding or for use as elite infantry, influenced by the European military design of commandos. Unfortunately, the ranging and hunter-killer ethos of the American infantry would be transformed when Army Rangers were employed as shock infantry, tactical raiders, and battlefield reconnaissance assets.

**World War II.** Several specialized infantry formations were created during World War II. For the Army, it was the combined U.S.-Canadian 1st Special Service Forces and the U.S. Army Rangers, neither of which were used to

their full potential to conduct hunter-killer operations. In the Pacific, the U.S. Marine Corps sponsored the formation of the famous raider regiments, which became renowned for their exploits while conducting raids on Japanese-held islands.

The 1st Special Services Force conducted a series of operations from Alaska to Italy and finally southern France, but it was used primarily as a conventional, light-infantry maneuver regiment. The Rangers were misutilized as vanguard, shock-infantry in Italy where they were all but destroyed. The long-tradition of ranging behind enemy lines could not be accomplished in the large, conventional and linear battles fought throughout the war in Europe.

Two contributions to the art of hunter-killer operations against irregular adversaries did occur, however, as a result of the war:

- a. The first was in technological leaps, which would enable future hunter-killer operations.
- b. The second was in German antipartisan operational experience, where hunter-killer teams were used both against the Soviet partisans and against the Partisans in the Balkans.

In technology, long-range naval and aviation assets now provided platforms for insertion of hunter-killer teams deep into enemy territory, as well as their extraction. Supplies allowing hunter-killer teams to remain behind the lines could now be parachute delivered or delivered over the shore by stealthy submarines and small water craft. The off-road, all-terrain capabilities of motorized vehicles also enabled hunter-killer teams to navigate in previously inaccessible areas. Efficient and smaller machine guns, mortars, and antitank weapons ensured future hunter-killer teams could take on irregulars with staying power, precluding the need for extraction or rescue by larger forces. But it was the long-range radio that by far enabled specialized forces to remain much longer in enemy territory. No longer were mobile or flying columns limited to what they could carry; with the radio, a reach-back capability existed to call for more forces, weapons, or logistics as the situation demanded. With the radio also came access to higher intelligence on the activities of adversaries as well as a capability to achieve effective and coordinated operations with larger conventional forces conducting antiguerrilla operations.

The second contribution for future hunter-killer operations was a result of extensive study by the U.S. Army of German antiguerrilla techniques to learn and synthesize military requirements for counter guerrilla doctrine:

Inspired by the German Army's World War II *jagdkommando* anti-partisan doctrine, the U.S. Army's 1951 FM 31-20, *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces*, prescribed the organization, training, and functions for a prototypical indigenous counter guerrilla unit of platoon size. Intended to operate independently for prolonged periods, specialized antiguerrilla units were to be armed with light automatic weapons and radios for night operations such as raids and ambushes. This manual also recommended that antiguerrilla units should consider masquerading as guerrillas to deceive irregular adversaries.<sup>18</sup>

Earlier German experiences with antipartisan measures were based on the requirement to protect rear area assets from partisan sabotage attacks and were primarily designed as limited tactical operations of small-unit patrolling as a defensive measure. As partisan activities grew from small attacks by disaggregate bands to heavier, well-organized attacks by companies and battalions, new measures were needed. The German high command issued a directive for all units to build *hunter-killer* teams, *jagdkommandos*, with enough firepower and endurance to move into guerrilla areas and destroy them. Partisans operating against the German forces, like all smart guerrillas, avoided set piece battles and were extremely adept at eluding German forces' attempts to surround them; their intimate knowledge of the battlefield allowed them to escape into rough terrain or melt into the population, time after time.

As in earlier French and British colonial experience against irregulars, German forces adopted the use of mobile columns to penetrate into guerrilla-held territory. Mobile, heavily armed, and operating at the company size, German *jagdkommandos* consisted of specially trained forces, drawn from existing manpower of elite units who eschewed the need for a long logistics tail (they lived off the land) and often dressed and equipped themselves to look like the very guerrillas they were attempting to destroy. The *jagdkommandos* also used indigenous personnel as scouts and guides and included in their ranks soldiers who could speak local languages and dialects.

The primary role for the *jagdkommando* was to seek out and destroy guerrilla bases. These units by 1943 became very effective at offensive

antiguerrilla operations, particularly in the Balkans. The German army even created an antipartisan badge, the highest award in gold, which became competitively sought after by members of these organizations. In his book, *Hold the Balkans*, Robert M. Kennedy briefly described their role:

A highly effective offensive weapon was found in the *Jagdkommando* (ranger detachment), designed to seek out and destroy guerrilla bands. Personnel of the detachments were usually young and combat-wise veterans of German campaigns on other fronts. Physically hardy and trained to live in the open for extended periods of time, they depended little on supply columns and could pursue the guerrillas, often burdened down with wounded, families, and impedimenta, into the most inaccessible areas. When the situation required, the rangers would put on civilian clothing, disguising themselves as Chetniks or Partisans, to work their way closer to their wary enemy. In the event they came upon major guerrilla forces, the ranger detachments, seldom more than a company in strength, would keep them under observation and inform battalion or higher headquarters. While awaiting reinforcements, they would attempt to gather additional information on the guerrilla strength and dispositions. As successful as they were in many small-scale operations, however, the ranger detachments were not numerous enough to affect decisively the outcome of the antiguerrilla campaign.<sup>19</sup>

Advantageous lessons learned were in the need for mobility to outmaneuver the partisans, how to overmatch their firepower, how to effectively blend with the insurgents through altered appearances, and using locals for intelligence. Airpower increased the longevity of the force by providing resupply, close air support, and MEDEVAC. Decentralized command and missions of broad scope were the norm. The *jagdkommando* concept distracter was common to totalitarian militaries: loose rules of engagement resulted in brutality and repression of noncombatants as well as severe treatment for captured insurgents. These activities nullified local population support for the Germans.

**Post-World War II Era.** After World War II the American military had limited experiences in COIN for promulgating doctrinal approaches to counter guerrilla and counter safe haven methodologies, specifically hunter-

killer employment. For operational art on the subject, they were mostly reliant on the experiences of other nations. The post-World War II irregular warfare era was characterized by revolutionary, anticolonialist national movements, and communist people's war. U.S. knowledge of COIN techniques under these types of war was gleaned from British and French COIN operational art—now changed in character with the advent of a new technology: increased mobility via helicopters.

In the Korean War, Americans once again faced no threat from Chinese or North Korean guerrillas to a sufficient extent; thus, they had little impetus to further refine and develop U.S. COIN techniques, preferring to conduct specialized operations much like their World War II experiences—employing unconventional forces as guerrillas and espionage operatives against the enemy. While they could have developed skills relevant to hunter-killer operations, Rangers were once again used predominantly as light infantry, mostly as tactical reconnaissance units, capable of small raids, and deep battlefield scouting units (intelligence gathering) under the Army Corps structure.

The U.S. involvement to assist Greece against their internal communist insurgency immediately after World War II could have furthered evolution of U.S. COIN doctrine, but in the mainstream was security assistance, within the parameters of a host-nation IDAD plan. No major COIN forces were deployed during this advisory effort. The American military would not conduct hunter-killer type operations until its involvement in the Vietnam War.

**Vietnam War.** The American way of war in COIN was heavily influenced by its involvement in the Vietnam War, challenging the doctrinal approach to fighting irregular warfare adversaries at a scale not seen in American military history. Every possible approach to fighting irregulars and a mainstream, revolutionary people's army was attempted during the conflict. The Vietnam War was also the impetus for transcending the nature of how the American military viewed special operations. The SOF heritage is a long historical one of ad hoc experiences gained throughout the nation's wars, but today's SOF owes much of its operating style and mission sets to World War II and the Vietnam War, defining the strategic utility of SOF, and to the relevance of its tactical operations in achieving operational goals and objectives.

In World War II, the U.S. military came away with some limited experience in UW, commando-style raiding techniques, and guerrilla warfare. In Vietnam, specialized warfare grew to include unique COIN skills for FID, prisoner of war rescue, long-range and strategic reconnaissance, direct action with specialized assets, and foreign advisory and assistance skills. Without a doubt the most transcendent act was the creation of Green Berets (the Army Special Forces) in the early 1950s, later supported by President Kennedy as a means to answer irregular adversaries with America's own version of guerrillas.

In Vietnam, hunter-killer techniques were adopted by both the conventional Army and within the Army Special Forces. Although having a long tradition of historical use of Rangers to conduct ranging operations deep into enemy territory in the early colonial era, the Rangers once again were used in the role of long-range reconnaissance assets to support conventional unit tactical intelligence-gathering operations (similar to their role in World War II). Other specialized units, like the Special Operations Group (SOG) formations, again found roles in conducting strategic reconnaissance operations deep into enemy territory as their primary mission. This is not to say that Ranger operations and SOG operations did not achieve effects desired in creating mayhem in enemy-held territory while contributing to counter-organization successes. It is rather to highlight that they were specifically formed as intelligence-gathering and reconnaissance assets, not hunter-killer units for long-duration operations in enemy safe havens.

Of the attempts to employ hunter-killer teams, two are noted here: one was the U.S. Army retailoring its conventional infantry, and the other was Special Forces specifically mission-purposed. The conventional forces attempt to employ hunter-killer teams in the Vietnam War COIN environment illustrates a lesson not learned in the Army's earlier attempts to employ hunter-killer teams during the Civil War: the failure rate when adapting conventional formations to this requirement was high.

In November 1965, the then Major David Hackworth was instrumental in creating an organization, guerrilla-like in nature, to fight the Viet Cong. It was a derived, personal philosophy based on his wartime experience. Within the 101st Division, the new *Tiger Force* hunter-killer concept was adopted to create platoon-sized units from hand-picked soldiers across the division. One became a hunter killer, based on attributes gleaned in command interviews: months of combat experience, psychological propensity to have

hunter-killer instincts, and of course, audacity. Once picked, the soldier joined the elite Tiger Force and was issued a set of tiger-striped fatigues to distinguish him from normal infantry units.

The Tiger Force units conducted small-unit actions and were designed to operate in the field for weeks and take the fight into the jungle to hunt and kill Viet Cong, based on the member's ability to conduct effective jungle warfare. During population resource and control operations, the Tiger mission was to look for Viet Cong and food caches, then destroy them. The Tiger Force hunter-killer concept was used throughout 1967 in operations near Dak To, Duc Pho, and Chu Lai, in the Central Highlands campaign. Most of the Tiger Force became reconnaissance platoons at the brigade level and never achieved the goal of conducting deep, long-duration operations against the enemy. Nor were they afforded the assets or independent authorities required to be effective hunter killers.

Over a period of time the units were looked on with distrust. Senior officers felt their operations caused too many friendly casualties (they were almost wiped out in June 1966 while pursuing North Vietnamese Army main-force regiments), and the unit was soon accused of committing atrocities during their operations. The unit was disbanded after claiming almost 300 enemy kills, some of a suspect nature.

Although adopting enemy tactics, selecting hand-picked personnel, and providing aggressive and audacious leadership, the concept failed from lack of discipline, hierarchal command and control mechanisms, and little autonomy to conduct effective operations. The unit was ad hoc in forming and was an attempt to convert conventional infantry into specialized irregulars.

The use of an organized hunter-killer formation came with the formation of the Mobile Guerrilla Force trained and led by U.S. Army Special Forces for the purpose of complementing indigenous Vietnamese tribal mobile strike force units (MIKE Force). Responding to the need for quick reaction forces for the various U.S. Special Forces base camps involved in the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program, Green Berets soon became adept at conducting counter guerrilla operations with indigenous forces who were not placed under the control of the South Vietnamese Army—in essence, their own autonomous maneuver force. Unfortunately, this autonomy also created isolation and distrust from conventional units

when it came time to seek their reinforcement during battle. (To resolve the issue, the Green Berets created the mobile strike formations to quickly back up beleaguered CIDG outposts.) Taking the concept one step further, the Green Berets realized sitting in base camps awaiting enemy attack was not a creative use of indigenous forces. To become more offensive in nature, the Green Berets created company-sized Mobile Guerrilla Forces to take the fight to the enemy in his sanctuaries and safe havens. Thus the first, and maybe the only, professional hunter-killer unit in Vietnam was created.

The Mobile Guerrilla Force concept was developed in late 1966 by Colonel Francis J. Kelly. He envisioned his concept as forming COIN hunter-killer teams using clandestine counter guerrilla techniques to infiltrate into guerrilla areas of operation for the purpose of engaging enemy forces, destroying their logistics, interdicting their lines of communication, and creating a psychological climate of fear within the enemy's mind as to his safety while operating within his base areas. This action would also force the enemy to defend his bases and logistical centers, allowing the hunter killers to control the pace and tempo of the operation. These company-sized units were intended to conduct 30-to-60-day operations and were led by a U.S. Special Forces team.<sup>20</sup>

The creation of the Mobile Guerrilla Force in October 1966 provided an active measure to seek out and destroy Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars enjoying safe haven and sanctuary in the III Corps Tactical Zone. Named War Zone D, (and the Forbidden Zone by the enemy) this territory was used by Viet Cong and NVA forces to establish base camps and logistics areas within South Vietnam at the terminus of the Ho Chi Minh trail; since this area was almost devoid of friendly force control, the enemy could preposition and prepare for further attacks into South Vietnam. Without sufficient American and South Vietnamese forces to counter this buildup, the concept to employ U.S. Army Special Forces and their indigenous assets from static base camps (along with light counter guerrilla security patrolling) into a guerrilla force easily won favor with General Westmoreland.

Initially, Cambodian CIDG soldiers of Khmer Serei ethnicity were recruited to form the company under the command of Captain James "Bo" Gritz. In his first meeting on the concept, Colonel Kelly described what he desired:

... a company-sized force capable of conducting guerrilla operations in War Zone D for periods ranging from 30 to 60 days. This light infantry company would have to operate without artillery support or chance of reinforcement. The unit's sole support would consist of a single forward air control aircraft, tactical air strikes, and parachute drops of food, supplies, and ammunition every 4 days.<sup>21</sup>

The Mobile Guerrilla Force consisted of about 160 to 170 men, organized into a headquarters platoon, reconnaissance platoon, and three or four maneuver platoons, depending on the tactical operation. The force was equipped with the standard U.S. equipment for weaponry and radios. After initial training at the Ho Ngoc Tao Special Forces camp (home of project SIGMA—Special Forces and indigenous long-range Corps reconnaissance teams), the ready company deployed to the Special Forces camp at Duc Phong to begin missions in War Zone D.

The Mobile Guerrilla Force conducted numerous operations in War Zone D against the Viet Cong 9th Division and other NVA main force regiments. These missions were labeled “Blackjack” (Colonel Kelly’s nickname) followed by a two-number designation denoting the Corps, then the mission



Figure 3. A Vietnam War era AC-47 gunship on display at the historical Air Park, Hurlburt Field, Florida. These aircraft, along with other models of gunships, provided the long-range interdiction and close air support fires for teams operating without artillery support at long distances within enemy safe havens and base areas.

sequence (e.g., Blackjack 31 and Blackjack 32). Their missions focused on the destruction of the enemy forces, his base camps, and enemy logistics throughout the zone while also providing updated intelligence to the 1st Infantry Division and other friendly conventional forces.

The employment of the Mobile Guerrilla Force lasted until late 1967 when the unit's manpower was rolled into the larger mobile strike force units and the reconnaissance projects SIGMA and OMEGA. The Mobile Guerrilla Force project represented one of the American military's best attempts to employ hunter-killer teams in a COIN environment. It also served as a model for the contemporary evolution of COIN hunter-killer teams. The doctrine from these hunter-killer operations, combined with increasing levels of modern transport and technology to enhance these operations, would form the basis of future success by SOF hunter-killer teams when Operation Enduring Freedom changed from a guerrilla warfare scenario into a COIN effort.

The guarantee of the Mobile Guerrilla Force success in hunter-killer operations was in adhering to the following principles of their employment:

- a. Use of indigenous and SOF small units as a purpose-built organization
- b. Knowledge of the terrain
- c. The role unconventional and audacious leadership plays in the use of the hunter-killer team
- d. Increased mobility with the use of helicopters
- e. Wide latitude to conduct independent operations
- f. Modern resupply methods and a logistic system to support the unit
- g. Overmatch in firepower (with the inclusion of close air support assets) to compensate for the unit's lack of heavy weapons
- h. A supportive quick reaction force to reinforce beleaguered units.

Conversely, this COIN hunter-killer concept suffered the historical fate of *different* units—not enough of them, not everywhere, and not long enough—to have made an appreciable difference at the operational level of war.

**Post-Vietnam War, the 1980s and 1990s.** Although the post-Vietnam War period was rife with insurgencies around the world, the American military distanced itself from any future entanglements in COIN environments, losing much of the operational art and COIN acumen amassed from the Vietnam War. As the conventional military repaired and rebuilt itself to

once again handle the major war spectrum, much of the necessary skills needed to fight in irregular warfare devolved to the special operations community.

Soon a more imposing threat entered the world scene: terrorism. To remain viable, special operations began a narrow focus of mission sets to conduct counterterrorism operations. However, with few deployments into this irregular warfare playing field as a result of political constraint and public reluctance, Special Forces returned to FID and security assistance activities. This shift reinforced a notion amongst Green Berets that if you cannot fight wars, get involved in teaching other people how to fight wars in order to sustain your skills.

While a few brush wars occurred during this period (e.g., Grenada and Panama) along with the major conventional war Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, America was not challenged with an irregular warfare adversary requiring the employment of U.S. forces to conduct COIN mission sets. At best, U.S. Army Special Forces trainers were able to maintain COIN hunter-killer knowledge when used as advisors in Venezuela, specifically in the training of *cazadores* (hunter-killer) battalions and training hunter-killer battalions in the El Salvadoran Army.

One other initiative during this period, although not originally conceived as a hunter-killer concept, was more than prescient in ensuring America would have purpose-built hunter-killer teams when the need eventually arose. In 1984, Colonel James Guest—commander of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne)—hereinafter referred to as “the Group”—transferred an experimental Special Forces company known as B-500 to Fort Bliss, Texas to develop the tactics, equipment, and operating principles for a desert, long-range, and mobile Special Forces capability.

**B-500, Purpose-Built Hunter-Killer Team.** B-500 was established in the early 1980s by Colonel Guest to address the needs and requirements of the Group for conducting desert warfare in accordance with their war plans in the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) region. The overall program for execution was named the Desert Mobility System, comprised of weapons, soldier equipment, and mobility platforms (to include high altitude parachutes) needed by the Special Forces soldiers for conducting long-range, long-duration missions in a desert environment. In essence, B-500 was a test-bed unit for the Group.



Figure 4. B-500 on a long-range mounted patrol in the desert near Fort Bliss, Texas

The mobility platform requirement was based on future combat scenarios, which required the Group to conduct a variety of missions involving extreme infiltration/exfiltration ranges. The desire for a vehicular infiltration method was based on the shortage of airlift and special operations aviation assets at the time, which could effectively hamper the employment of the Group assets in a major war. Thus the parameter for 500 miles in and 500 miles out without resupply (and be able to operate up to 10 days) became the standard for a vehicular-mounted Green Beret team (the Special Forces Operational Detachment–Alpha, the “ODA”).

By January 1985, B-500 moved from Fort Huachuca to Biggs Army Air Field in El Paso, Texas with the following tasks:

- a. Build a mounted capability for an entire B-team with the 1,000-mile range without resupply, as the goal; serve as a test bed for experimental vehicles, which could be utilized in long-range desert operations
- b. Develop tactics, techniques, and procedures and manuals for the conduct of mounted operations to serve as the basis for eventual adoption as doctrine in the Special Forces

- c. Test a variety of weapons, communication gear, personal clothing and tentage, parachutes, and so on for their usefulness to conduct operations in a desert environment under extended duration.

The unit discarded the previous mobility platforms of one-quarter ton jeeps for modified M880 trucks and added homemade trailers to carry the logistics and motorcycles required to conduct long-range desert operations. Later the unit adopted the Army HMMWV variant as the preferred mobility platform and conducted a series of 1,000-mile missions to gain experience. These early trips provided an abundance of lessons learned for mounted movement, and the unit wrote its first mounted handbook to pass on for use to other members of the Group. Along with the vehicle tests, the unit also experimented for the first time with satellite communications and navigation (SATCOM and SATNAV) systems. The Mk-19 and the .50-caliber machine gun were also used in testing.

As a result of the positive feedback from team members, the HMMWV was chosen as the vehicle of choice for mounted teams. Initially each team was equipped with two M1025s (clamshell with ring mount and winch) and two M998s (cargo version). During the testing period a great partnership and association with the border patrol developed, and the border patrol transferred some trucks and about 15 dirt bikes (350cc) to the unit (these were contraband seized from drug raids and considered federal property).

When the entire Group was relocated to Fort Campbell, Kentucky the B-500 unit reverted back to A Company, 1/5th and returned home to the Group. Much of what B-500 accomplished would contribute to Special Forces hunter-killer capability after 9/11 as a *force in being*.

**Operation Enduring Freedom.** In the summer of 2002, the reemergence of the Taliban as insurgents dictated a COIN response from allied and coalition forces. However, the expected war with Iraq meant continuing operations in Afghanistan would be as an economy of force, which ceded vast portions of Afghan rural areas to the insurgents. Afghan security forces were scarce. Counter guerrilla techniques used by the coalition were limited to close proximity security patrolling; occupation of key, forward-operating bases to maintain a presence; and battalion sweep operations conducted by the various allied and U.S. conventional infantry forces. The predominance of SOF assets, both U.S. and coalition, focused on counterorganization missions to hunt down remaining Al Qaeda and senior Taliban leadership while

simultaneously utilizing indigenous security forces to protect key pockets of the population and interdict enemy efforts.

While hunter-killer concepts cannot work in isolation from the myriad of counterinsurgency techniques used by COIN forces, this situation provided the exact environment for the employment of U.S. Special Forces mounted teams to conduct hunter-killer missions as part of the effort to erode and exhaust the Taliban during 2002 and after.

U.S. and coalition SOF, particularly those units with self-contained mobility and firepower, were used on a variety of missions to roam in semi-permissive and nonpermissive areas of Afghanistan. The purpose was to harass the enemy or find, fix and destroy the enemy either with organic firepower and close air support or in conjunction with larger conventional reaction forces.

Based on intelligence, local information, and terrain analysis, Special Forces mounted teams were employed across vast areas of “gridded” terrain to ascertain enemy activities and strength within each grid. If successful, enemy caches were destroyed, enemy safe houses cleared, and sanctuary areas (safe havens) were put at risk for Taliban occupation. Most clashes with Taliban forces were successful in eliminating or capturing enemy fighters.

Hunter-killer teams remained highly mobile with organically tailored vehicles. All patrols were designed for long-range operations in suspected enemy territory, and although scarce resources in helicopters for these unique operations could have limited the duration of hunter-killer team deployment, a system of bundle and cargo drops for resupply guaranteed increased time of the teams in the field. Mission durations ranged from a couple of weeks to a 6-week operation by a coalition SOF contingent. Close air support (CAS), either with fixed-wing or rotary-wing assets, provided long-range, heavy firepower because artillery was not prevalent in the first years of the COIN period. Maneuvering with all terrain, heavy bed vehicles afforded increased weapons platforms (.50-caliber, light machine gun, AT-4s, and MK-19 grenade launchers) to give the hunter-killer team’s firepower overmatch against the Taliban.

Just as in the Vietnam Mobile Guerrilla Force concept, hunter-killer teams were optimized with indigenous, irregular forces in company strength. Their vast knowledge of tribal affairs, local language, combined with their intimate knowledge of the terrain, contributed to the overall success of many of these patrols.

An operation in one of the central provinces during the summer of 2003 illustrated the effectiveness of the hunter-killer concept. During their earlier war with the Soviets, the Afghan mujahideen made much use of the mountain ranges near Kandahar as an inner safe haven and stronghold to train, recruit, resupply, and refit. This area is comprised of harsh, high desert mountains with very narrow valleys and small, isolated villages. A variety of indicators by the late summer of 2003 showed that the Taliban were regrouping in this area by the hundreds, presumably to affect the upcoming fall elections scheduled throughout Afghanistan.

The Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - Afghanistan directed coalition and U.S. hunter-killer teams to conduct a probe into the area in order to ascertain the extent of the Taliban's activity. After one contact between a coalition SOF patrol and suspected guerrilla force occurred, a robust U.S. Special Forces hunter-killer unit was deployed along with approximately 150 irregular forces provided by the governor of Kandahar,



Figure 5. Hunter-killer teams in Afghanistan employed the SOF ground mobility vehicle (modified HMMWV) to conduct long-duration and long-range counter safe haven and interdiction operations against Taliban forces

in anticipation of combat operations. As they drove deeper and deeper into the mountain sanctuary, many of the villagers warned them of a large presence of enemy. Contact soon occurred by enemy ambush, which surprisingly was professionally executed by the Taliban and included the use of mortars and snipers.

Three days of fighting ensued; the hunter-killer unit was reinforced by a Quick Reaction Force from the Kandahar-based Special Forces battalion, while conventional forces readied for insertion to create a classic hammer-and-anvil maneuver. As the fight progressed, hundreds of Taliban were either killed or captured as air support assets were added to the battle. Sensing defeat, the remaining Taliban elements attempted to exfiltrate the area, but most were destroyed in continued engagements by AC-130 aircraft. Estimates of enemy strength hovered around 500 insurgents. The enemy was defeated, the sanctuary denied, and the fall elections were successfully conducted without the interference of the Taliban. It serves as one of the 21st century's most successful hunter-killer operations on the part of U.S. forces to date.

This overall achievement was due to operating within the principles of hunter-killer operations, employing special purpose units, and leveraging both technological enablers and the use of local, irregular forces in a COIN environment. The hunter-killer unit was a standing organization, specially trained for the task. The ground commander enjoyed broad scope in the mission to conduct autonomous operations. As the battle grew, firepower overmatch was achieved. Resupply was immediate via rotary-wing assets or fixed-wing bundle drops.

## Summary

While U.S. forces also fought irregulars and insurgents in Iraq, that insurgency is predominantly urban in nature and requires manhunting and counterorganization skills to counter the enemy. Few situations during the war in Iraq have afforded American forces the need to conduct hunter-killer operations into enemy safe havens on the scale as they have in Afghanistan (although the isolation, containment, and reduction of enemy forces in the Fallujah urban safe haven provide valuable lessons).

Whether in the horse-and-musket period or in the period of contemporary irregular wars, hunter-killer operations are one of the options to present the enemy a series of dilemmas during counter guerrilla operations. As is

evident in the historical experiences, Americans have effectively employed some form of hunter-killer operations when faced with irregular warfare adversaries. From this body of knowledge we can derive unifying themes and principles for doctrinal adoption.

## 5. Principles of Hunter-Killer Team Employment during Counter Safe Haven Operations

Whenever you are ordered out to the enemy forts or frontiers for discoveries, if your number be small, march in a single file, keeping at such a distance from each other as to prevent one shot from killing two men, sending one man or more forward and the like on each side at the distance of 20 yards from the main body, if the ground you march over will admit of it, to give the signal to the officer of the approach of an enemy, and of their number...<sup>22</sup>

— Robert Rogers' Rules or Plan of Discipline

In principle, hunter-killer operations afford sound tactics to create havoc against irregular warfare adversaries by operating in their space for sabotaging and destroying their war-making assets and killing their action arms—the guerrilla forces and auxiliary forces—in order to create a loss of enemy combatants, lowering of morale, and sowing of dissension and weariness. Counter safe haven hunter-killer operations are conducted by small unit, specialized organizations who adopt the enemy's style and tactics in order to operate as effective counter-guerrillas. In that respect, U.S. hunter-killer teams allow the COIN forces to deny the enemy the chance to continue protracting the conflict.

Hunter-killer operations are one of the active measures in COIN to attack enemy organizations as part of the war of exhaustion and contribute to the attrition of enemy combat power. A byproduct of hunter-killer operations is first-hand information and intelligence-gathering capability while operating in enemy territory.

Hunter-killer operations can vary in length, area of operations, and by type unit conducting hunter-killer activities against irregulars, but its main operating principle is its purpose and aim: attrition of the irregular warfare enemy. This requires a second operating principle to be considered for any COIN-derived hunter-killer operation: they are conducted by penetrating insurgent safe haven space, whether the space is denied or semipermissive territory.

Hunter-killer operations have been conducted in combination with punitive expeditions, but if employed in this manner, can quickly degrade into

using the hunter-killer force for security of flanks or for the conduct of reconnaissance missions for the larger conventional force. General Pershing's expedition into Mexico against Pancho Villa's irregulars illustrates this approach.

Hunter-killer forces should never be formed as a result of converting conventional infantry forces, as the historical examples from the Civil War and the Vietnam War illustrated. Hunter-killer forces are not line infantry nor shock or raiding infantry. Rather they are uniquely tailored *special* infantry. Specialized infantry formed as hunter-killer units generally cannot achieve decisive blows, tactically or operationally, when employed for short duration raiding purposes. They are also not pseudo-organizations, nor counterorganization units, although effects achieved in these two types of operations can be a byproduct of hunter-killer employment. More important, however, hunter-killer operations should contribute to the attainment of strategic and operational objectives.

Additional principles of employment derived from the historical analysis of the use of hunter-killer operations by the American military are helpful to review for formulating doctrine and include:

- a. **Environment.** Hunter-killer teams are best employed during irregular warfare environments where the adversary confronting the U.S. and its allies consists of insurgent forces of sufficient size to field a guerrilla action arm, a supporting auxiliary, and a perceived safe haven for sanctuary believed to be free of friendly forces. The ground commander has made the conscious decision to conduct *territorial offense* type operations for achieving desired counter safe haven effects.
- b. **Command and control.** Hunter-killer operations require independent maneuver in enemy territory; measures to deconflict fratricide issues are paramount when they are ongoing friendly operations. Graphic control measures, such as unconventional warfare operational areas (UWOAs), and Blue Force tracker technology will assist in limiting fratricide. Consideration should be given to the creation of *free-fire* zones or *forbidden* zones in order to increase the flexibility of the hunter-killer force. Unique passage-of-lines techniques are required if the hunter-killer force resembles enemy insurgents. Tailored rules of engagement should be considered to give the hunter-killer force the widest latitude to take on enemy forces. Command and control

is flattened and decentralized to the commander of the hunter-killer force. As an operating concept, hunter-killer forces should be under the operational control of a special operations headquarters reporting directly to the joint force commander.

- c. **Composition of the hunter-killer force.** Hunter-killer forces should not be formed ad hoc; standing, specialized forces with the inherent characteristics for conducting hunter-killer operations are requisite for success in the irregular warfare environment. Hunter-killer organizations will be one of nontraditional organization and task organized based on the context of the insurgency and irregular warfare environment. Care should be taken to ensure the higher command supports and sponsors its nontraditional employment. Hunter-killer units should not be organized as commando or raiding forces. In forming hunter-killer units, a small footprint is desired. Individuals chosen to man hunter-killer units should be specially selected, self-reliant, and capable of adaptation to the environment and to the enemy's tactics and style. They must be independent in thinking, masters of the ambush, and have a psychological make-up for operations that can be ruthless and lethal. Cultural and language skills for the operational area are highly desired. They must have a natural ability to work with indigenous forces as part of the organizational structure. Hunter-killer organizations will be amoeba-like with self-organizing traits to maintain their adaptability. Due to the high endurance operations, the force must be in superior physical shape and be skilled in living off the land.
- d. **Irregulars and indigenous forces.** Hunter-killer operations can achieve increased performance when they incorporate indigenous forces into their organization (as in General Crook's use of Indian scouts during his southwestern U.S. campaign against hostile Indians). This may be through the use of turned enemy combatants (former adversaries who now work for friendly forces to find insurgents), informants, local scouts, or larger auxiliary forces. Of most utility would be the training and equipping of foreign and indigenous hunter-killer units to enhance partner capability; these forces could even be employed as partner or proxy paramilitaries when U.S. involvement is not desired or must be discrete (covert and clandestine).

- e. **Leadership.** Leadership above the hunter-killer organization's level of command must be highly supportive to ensure the survivability of an unorthodox and unconventional organization within the U.S. military structure. Specialized units enjoying a limited amount of control, wide latitude for independent operations, and a high freedom of maneuver very often risk the ire of traditional, formal militaries; they are often perceived as outliers with lack of discipline. Within the hunter-killer organization, the leadership must be chosen for their vast knowledge of unconventional operations (understanding of the employment of unorthodox operations), audacity, and the ability to be independent and decisive. Leaders must be proven as capable of conducting innovative and nonconventional tactics. Successful leaders of hunter-killer operations have tended to be highly charismatic and aggressive.
- f. **Specialized training.** Hunter-killer units require specialized training in enemy tactics and weaponry, long-range endurance operations, infiltration and exfiltration techniques, and combat techniques most useful to the irregular warfare fight. Advanced training in subversion and sabotage techniques, along with how to conduct psychological action measures, will be required. Because hunter-killer operations will be extended operations, sufficient cross training of combat skills is required in order to maximize the skill sets of each person, considering that personnel replacement opportunities may be limited. All training should be done to the realistic conditions the hunter-killer unit may expect to encounter.
- g. **Mobility.** The hunter-killer force requires equal or superior maneuverability and mobility to the enemy in order to succeed. The force will require speed to outmaneuver the enemy in his territory and if required, speed to escape any counter attempts to destroy the hunter-killer force. The highly preferred method is to mount the force in all-terrain vehicles that allow for increased range, can carry sufficient supplies for long duration, and provide platforms for additional fire-power. Aviation mobility is a key hunter-killer enabler; consideration should be given to a direct support relationship between aviation units and the hunter-killer unit for matters such as transport, resupply, medical evacuation, and liaison.

- h. **Firepower.** Along with organic firepower, with necessary overmatch to any known insurgent capability in order to achieve local superiority, the hunter-killer unit will require the integration of reinforcing fires if the effects of combat with the enemy begin to severely endanger or attrit the hunter-killer force. Long-range artillery (although this may have some limitations at deeper ranges), CAS, or fires from persistent, armed unmanned aerial vehicle/system (UAV/UAS) platforms are programmed as part of the hunter-killer operation. Larger quick reaction forces, notably with a raiding capability, form part of the backup or can reinforce escalation of force as needed during planned hunter-killer operations.
- i. **Technology enablement.** Hunter-killer units should be provided the latest in technology to improve their combat performance, endurance, and force protection. Hunter-killer doctrine for employment should change as technology changes to maintain the efficacy of the find-fix-destroy combat template. This will require an equipping process to take advantage of rapidly emerging technologies. Additionally, hunter-killer forces should be equipped with the latest sensor/countersensor capability to expand their operational reach or to allow them to conduct economy-of-force operations.
- j. **Intelligence.** Hunter-killer operations will require an unusually high amount of intelligence on the enemy and the geography of the operating area. Dedicated platforms and intelligence support, combined with the intelligence-gathering capacity of the hunter-killer operation, can help to achieve intelligence dominance within insurgent safe havens.
- k. **Sustainment.** Hunter-killer operations must be capable of tailored long-range, long-duration missions, often outside the scope of friendly lines of communication. Limitations on combat service support must be factored into the planning. In earlier periods of irregular warfare, this involved knowledge of living off the land and having the ability to be self-sustaining (foraging or capturing enemy supplies). While these efforts are still viable, technology-enabled hunter-killer teams equipped with mobility platforms will require a logistics system to support uniquely American gear if the force is not totally equipped to look like the enemy. Air support is the most important resupply capability for hunter-killer operations, whether it comes from manned

or unmanned aerial resupply vehicles. The hunter-killer organization will also require innovative funding to conduct operations in enemy territory (e.g., enemy script, gold, and barter materials) as well as reliable funding mechanisms to support their organization. A dedicated maintenance capability for the myriad of small arms, vehicles, and radios can provide a reach-back capability once the unit is employed. The hunter-killer organization needs an organic rapid equipping capability for off-the-shelf items and procurement of the latest logistics assets to enhance the fight.

These principles capture unifying concepts to provide a framework for the doctrinal employment of hunter-killer operations. As irregular warfare operations continue around the world, the experiences and growing knowledge of hunter-killer activities will add to COIN and irregular warfare literature. For instance, how do we conduct hunter-killer operations on a hybrid war battlefield? How should we conduct hunter-killer operations in an urban environment?

The American *way of war* in irregular warfare includes hunter-killer operations to varying effect—they are the asymmetric version of search and destroy behind enemy lines or in their safe havens. It should be a clear concept embodied in U.S. COIN manuals. However, to date there is little doctrinal capture of hunter-killer units in COIN doctrine and a corresponding absence of guidelines on how to employ them.

## 6. Conclusion

But now the need for the other kind of right stuff—the hunter’s eye and ear—was making itself indispensable.... This was a war in which everyone realized that enemy headquarters might at any moment be visited, and not by noisy frontal formations making themselves heard 10 miles away but by silently delivered, soot-face marauders or by hunter-killer teams flying out of the sun or stepping from suburban hedgerows. Just as the wholesale slaughter of civilians reasserted itself in war, professional courtesy was breaking down into a practice of targeting individuals—by ‘band of chosen and picked young men... sworn to stick together’—that might as well have come out of Utopia, or at least the Dark Ages.<sup>23</sup>

— Derek Leebaert, *To Dare and To Conquer*

**A**ll effective COIN and counterterrorism security operations are an orchestration of offensive and defensive measures to thwart the insurgent action arm’s or the terrorist organization’s ability to choose the time and the place of violence against the state. Offensive actions allow friendly forces to control the operations tempo of the fight, throwing the insurgent force off balance and preventing the protraction of the conflict. Offensive actions allow counterinsurgents and counterterrorists the ability to get inside the enemy’s decision cycle. Offensive actions necessitate plans that consider denying irregular warfare adversaries their base areas, support systems, and safe havens and erode or exhaust their will and manpower. These are enemy strengths, but they also have associated vulnerabilities. While a variety of defensive counterinsurgency options afford COIN forces time to neutralize, isolate, contain, or even manage areas ceded to the insurgents, the most effective measure is to take the offense to the enemy using some application of the find-fix-destroy model. Hunter-killer operations are offensive in nature and one of the means to find, fix, and destroy.

Hunter-killer operations, combined with other counter safe haven measures, are the most feared by insurgents. Hunter-killer operations invade insurgent space and destroy the myth of inaccessibility and security. Fighting the enemy on his own turf disrupts his attempts to recover and refit, and if handled effectively, can isolate supporting populations from the irregular

warfare adversary. Conducting operations at a friendly time and place of choosing creates a psychological effect of fear within the insurgents, who never know if they are safe. Hunter-killer operations also erode and exhaust the enemy through attrition, raising the contact rate between friendly forces and the enemy.

Irregular warfare history is consistently illustrative of the employment of some type of hunter-killer unit to interdict, harass, and track down insurgents in their territory. Since the colonial militia era in America, hunter-killer operations have been included in personal writings, recommended rules for tactical operations, or in U.S. doctrine, although the exact term escapes capture. The early military legacy on this subject was formed in the ranging experiences of independent Ranger companies. The small-wars period introduced mobile columns, flying columns, punitive expeditionary columns, and long-duration roving patrols. After World War II, as American experience in contemporary insurgency grew, these counter guerrilla activities became raids, special operations, unconventional operations, and interdiction tasks. Finally, in Operation Enduring Freedom, U.S. and coalition SOF once again employed formal hunter-killer operations to find-fix-destroy Taliban insurgents. These operations were a morphing of ranging and deep penetration raid techniques.

Employing hunter-killer operations is a doctrinally sound COIN technique proved by historical experience and also found in some form over the years within our irregular warfare doctrine, although not in any comprehensive manner. The set of unifying principles for hunter-killer operations derived in this paper may serve as a useful framework to develop future doctrinal approaches on the employment of hunter-killer teams as a viable counter safe haven measure.

In 2008 the Joint Chiefs of Staff sponsored a futures war game with a hybrid war scenario pitting the U.S. and its allies against technologically enhanced irregulars. One of the options the participants chose to disrupt enemy space was a form of U.S. hunter-killer teams. It is time to include the employment of hunter-killer operations into American irregular warfare doctrine and clearly in the next revision of the COIN field manual.

What would a hunter-killer unit look like? Of course it must be designed within the context and requirements of the irregular warfare scenario, but the Figure 6 organizational chart is proposed merely as a point of departure for further discussion and development, based on the past experiences of

U.S. hunter-killer operations. Inherent in this organization is the organic mobility platforms of the strike teams to infiltrate, operate for long duration, and exfiltrate from the operational area. Strike teams include a reconnaissance and heavy weapons element. Indigenous forces are attached to the strike teams to provide linguists, scouts, or fighters, based on the nature of the hunter-killer operation. When required, conventional units can be placed under the operational or tactical control of the hunter-killer unit commander to facilitate task force and joint operations.

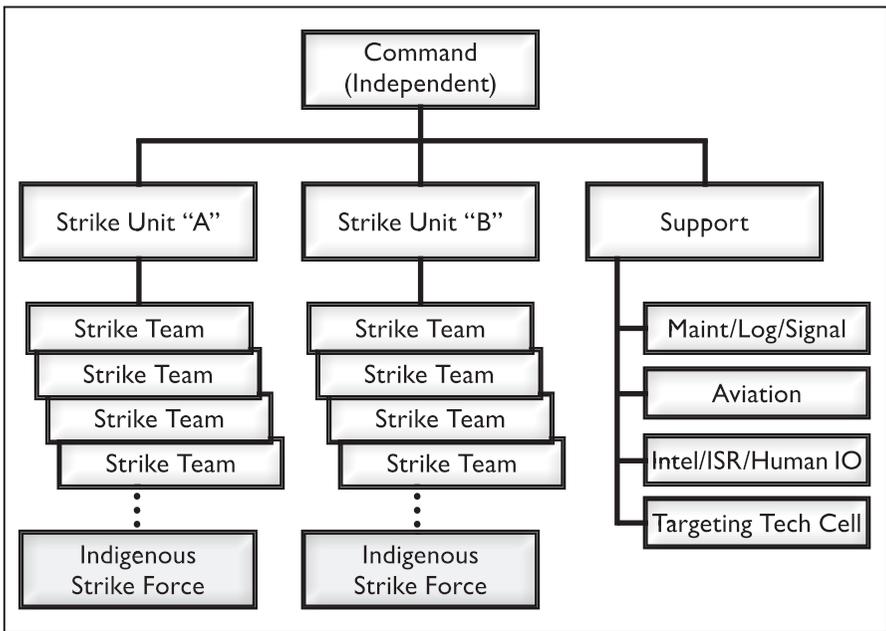


Figure 6. Provisional Hunter-Killer Organization

Results of this study suggest that the SOF community should:

- a. Continue to capture tactics, techniques, and procedures of ongoing U.S. hunter-killer operations for updates to doctrine and continue to expand our understanding of the features and attributes of safe havens. We can broaden our knowledge on this subject through a larger, comprehensive study of foreign hunter-killer practices in enemy safe havens to identify best practices the U.S. military could put into use. The analysis derived from these measures should form the basis

of additions to the next doctrinal revision of COIN and irregular warfare publications.

- b. Explore the feasibility for the establishment of formal hunter-killer organizations within the U.S. military. Currently, the U.S. Special Forces perform this role as a result of specialized training and its organic long-range mobility teams. Historically, effective hunter-killer units fail when they are organized in an ad-hoc manner or task-organized on the spot. They also are ineffective when they are merely converted conventional units. Hunter-killer units require specialized training, equipment, autonomy, unconventional leadership, and freedom of action supported by the senior maneuver commander. One measure could be to enhance the ranging concept in our Ranger formations; another measure might include the development of hunter-killer teams within the U.S. Marine Corps' Special Operations Command units. A third measure could include the designation of selected light infantry units to perform hunter-killer operations. The success of any of these additional measures relies on adherence to the derived principles in the previous chapter.
- c. Ascertain the impact of new technology enablers in aviation and unmanned aerial vehicle systems, remote logistics, firepower, communications, and sensor and surveillance systems that would enhance the capabilities of hunter-killer units and extend their endurance, persistence, and presence.
- d. As part of the shifting strategy to enable partners' capability and capacity, doctrine and procedures should be developed for provisions in Security Force Assistance to create, build, equip, and employ foreign and indigenous hunter-killer units.
- e. Explore the dynamics of employing hunter-killer operations in consort with human influence operations in order to implement psychological action activities and to achieve desired behavioral effects on indigenous populations, enemy leadership, and external or tacit supporters of any insurgency.

Hunter-killer operations are an offensive component of irregular warfare. Employing hunter-killer units in a doctrinally sound manner, with adherence to relevant operational principles, allows irregular warfare forces a means to strike the deep, strategic rear of insurgent bases. Hardcore

insurgents, ideologically driven, do not go away because they have been separated from the populace. Successful insurgent strategy allows for them to revert to a reconsolidation phase in an area safe for their operation. COIN offensive forces—the hunter-killer teams—will still be needed to range deep into the enemy’s domain to disrupt and destroy him. ↑



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