



Checking vehicles for contraband.

Civil-Military Operations

Joint Doctrine and the Malayan Emergency

By JOEL E. HAMBY

How should the Armed Forces organize to work with civil authorities in military operations other than war (MOOTW)? The British experience during the Malayan Emergency from 1948 to 1960 was a case in which doctrine was wanting; yet the deficiency was offset by innovation and common sense. Success in countering the

communist insurgency in Malaya can be attributed to many factors, especially civil-military relations that were forged over time by military, police, and civil leaders. These officials cultivated linkages through hard work under trying conditions. Even though the doctrine found in Joint Pub 3-07, *Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War*, had not been written at the time, the British approach embraced similar principles. In a sense, events in Malaya anticipated the current doctrine. Both the government and security forces were crucial in Malaya, and how political

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insurgent movement. At the time the government focused on hunting guerrillas and not on its own organization, which might have resolved the crisis. One aspect of counterinsurgency as iterated by a noted expert highlighted this point: “[The] government must give priority to defeating political subversion, not the guerrillas.”² To succeed, counterinsurgency efforts must meet the true grievances of the people better than the insurgents. A mission analysis to aid in understanding and defining the problem seems critical. The first two years of the Malayan Emergency were spent in making such an assessment.

Despite a long tradition of subordinating military action to civil authority, relations between soldiers and civilians in Malaya were ineffective. A solution began to emerge with a concept that was drafted by Lieutenant General Sir Harold Briggs, Director of Operations, who issued what is known as the Briggs Plan in June 1950 (see insert). The scheme reorganized the government to handle the insurgency and temper the unrest from which the communists gained support. He believed there were “two key goals to accomplish in order to end the insurgency—first, to protect the population, and second to isolate them from the guerrillas.”³ The reorganization delineated the roles of both police and military and established a structure for coordination between executive committees, consisting of a chief federal agency and subordinate state and district war executive committees (SWECs and DWECs). As a study found, “The entire government effort—patrols, ambushes, intelligence, and population and food control—was directed by the war executive committees.”⁴ Although progress was not apparent until General Sir Gerald Templer was named as high commissioner in 1952, the basis for operations was established for the next decade. Effective civil-military relations ensured that the Briggs plan worked.

The Political Objective

“The government must . . . establish a free, independent, and united country which is politically and economically stable and viable.” This was the first axiom of counterinsurgency that was espoused by the Permanent Secretary of Defence for Malaya, Sir Robert Thompson. His idea anticipated current joint doctrine. Britain had a clear political objective throughout the Emergency. Malaya would contribute to its upkeep and assist in postwar recovery. Appeal to self-sufficiency gradually evolved into a promise of independence within the Commonwealth. This objective also denied the insurgents one of their

and military leaders defined their roles and synchronized operations led to a British success.

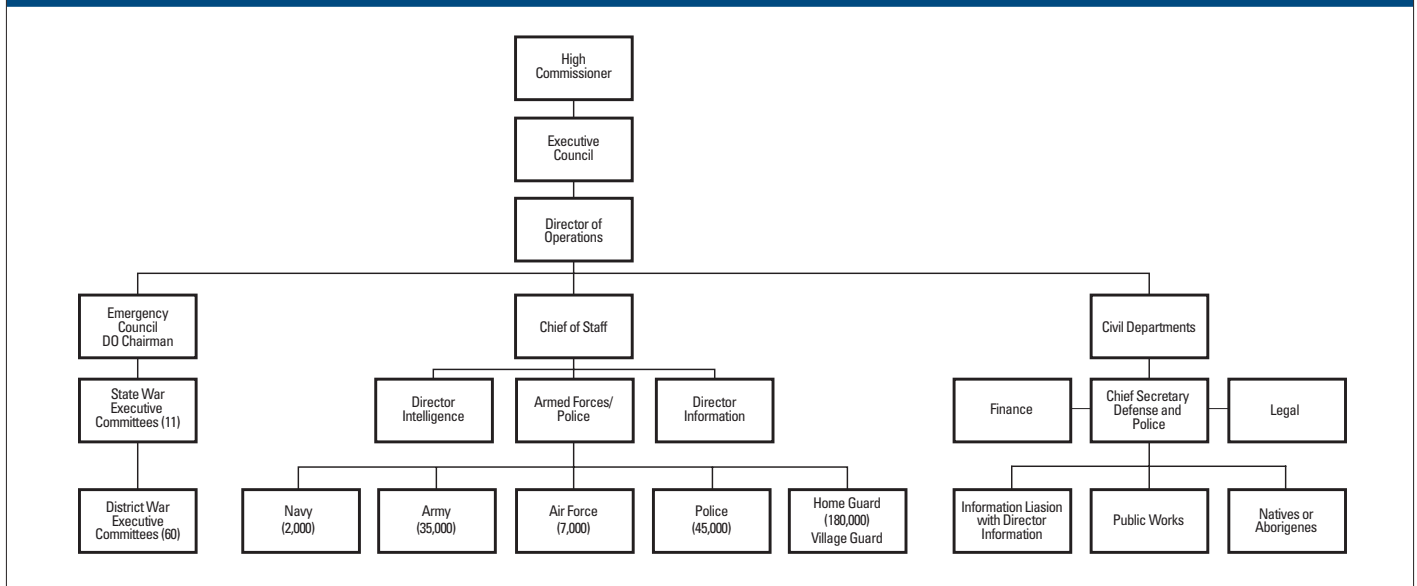
The principles of MOOTW are objective, unity of effort, legitimacy, security, restraint, and perseverance. The first three were critical in sup-

pressing the Malayan Communist Party, and their application enabled the other three objectives, and was built on strong civil-military relationships. Nonetheless it took twelve years to resolve the conflict, which began

with the failure to appreciate counterinsurgency and measures required to win. “Although the British possessed a superior ‘map knowledge’ of the Malayan terrain,” observed one report, “they initially lacked an understanding of the manner in which communist activities were adapted to the language, customs, and thought patterns of the population.”¹ The army filled the void until a police infrastructure could effectively counter the

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Briggs Plan Organization



Source: Riley Sunderland, *Organizing Counterinsurgency in Malaya: 1947–1960*, RM-4171-ISA, prepared for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, September 1964), p. 34.

best propaganda themes—*independence*. As one analyst noted, “By deeds as well as words, the British managed to convince most of the people that Malaya was on the road to early independence. The visible progress in this direction—culminating in August 1957—certainly helped limit the insurgency’s appeal.”⁵

The viability of the government and loyalty of the people were decisive in fostering civil-military relations. A majority of Malays, Chinese, and British eventually embraced a common goal that allowed them to work together. According to one study, “This was not a situation, therefore, in which British administrators were giving orders to a subservient oriental population . . . as early as 1948, there was one chance in three that the senior administrator was himself Malayan. Persuasion and negotiation were the order of the day.”⁶ A unifying objective is decisive to synergy in a civil-military operation. Whatever the objective happens to be—stopping ethnic violence or providing disaster relief—it must be clearly and consistently defined by both civil and military players.

Unity of Effort

The Briggs Plan provided the civil-military effort with a sense of unity, but it did not go far enough. No one was put in full charge of the Emergency. As Director of Operations, Briggs had no formal control over the military and police. “He could only direct his intentions through the

[general officer commanding] Malaya and the commissioner of police, and the executive impotence of this arrangement retarded the real effectiveness of his office.”⁷ Although the framework for combating the insurgency was set, the situation was not under control, and operations were not synchronized toward the established goal. Briggs left Malaya at the end of 1951 after laying the foundations for success: the police were being strengthened, resettlement of Chinese squatters was well underway, efforts against the insurgents were better organized under the committee system, and the general population was being swayed by the government information campaign. But Briggs recommended more power for his successor, such as executive control over the military and police. Both the largest tactical success and perhaps the greatest strategic failure for the communists occurred in October 1951 with the ambush of the High Commissioner of Malaya, Sir Henry Gurney. His murder shocked the entire colony and justified the extraordinary measures suggested by Briggs.⁸

The government chose Templer to lead the effort. Following the investigation of Gurney’s death, the Secretary of State for the Colonies concluded that overall direction was lacking, stating “there must be one man in charge of both military affairs and . . . he would have to be a general.”⁹ Templer combined the positions of high commission and director of operations, providing the only instance of centralized control during the Emergency. Templer was a dynamic leader who used his influence to good effect without

Armored vehicles in
jungle convoy.



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abusing it. His success was both quantifiable and laudable, but he did not change course. He adhered to the Briggs approach, wielding wide powers to force results when nothing else worked, reaffirming the goal of independence for Malaya.

The impact that Templer had on civil-military relations was striking. Through the committee system, he applied pressure

on an ill-prepared and poorly supported enemy. The civilian members of the committees far outnumbered the military except on the federal level.

With counterinsurgency largely consisting of police work, the security forces spent most of their time on such tasks. Even when the army handed back this responsibility, the danger was real; police losses were double those of the military over the 12 years of the Emergency. This led to a lack of coordination in 1948–51. Templer introduced coherence and a

sense of urgency. As one observer declared, “Now warfare by committee is positive anathema to the soldier . . . [but] the ponderous committee system was forced on us by the fact that in Malaya the army was acting merely in support of, and not in place of, the civil administration.”¹⁰ Interestingly, these organizations were action groups; component members were commanders or their representatives who could directly task subordinate units.

Over time this close relationship would create an organization that recognized its capabilities and used them synergistically. Partial proof was the fact that most units formed their headquarters in a joint operations room usually run by the police. “This close cooperation between the military and the police was the secret of all successful operations . . . it depended also on the personal relationships between us and the police,” recounted one participant.¹¹ Rather than an independent

rather than an independent military intelligence chain, the government used the police special branch



African Rifles
searching hut.

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military intelligence chain, the government used the police special branch, which had unique public access as well as insights into Malay and Chinese society. The military provided liaison officers to this organization who translated police information into actionable intelligence. The Briggs Plan as emphasized by Templer allowed the system to function well.

“Any idea that the business of normal civil government and the business of the Emergency are two separate entities must be killed for good and all,” Templer said. One of his first directives to the governor stated that “The two activities are completely and utterly interrelated.”¹² The unity of effort that Templer contributed to the Briggs Plan permitted the government information effort to succeed in demoralizing the communists, emphasizing democracy, and improving morale. Before he arrived the campaign was flagging because of a lack of centralized direction. But in the right hands it took off, contributing in no small way to ending the Emergency.

Templer also emphasized the primacy of civic action, which included women’s organizations, care of new villages, and emphasis on education that led to increased enrollment. He grasped the crux of the problem: “[It] was not enough for the government to do, and be, good; to be persuasive, it had also to appear good in the eyes and minds of the people.”¹³ Incidents were averaging over 500 per month when he arrived but dropped to under a hundred by the time of his departure. Civilian casualties fell precipitously, and insurgent strength was halved and their recruitment efforts sharply curtailed. Once Templer left, the roles of high commissioner and director of operations were again separated.

While less efficient, such means were no longer needed. The backbone of the insurgency was broken, and the committee system had enough experience to continue mopping up the enemy.

Legitimacy

Other efforts in support of the Emergency would have been in vain without maintaining the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the people. After the murder of three planters in 1948, regulations were passed giving the police extra powers, in effect suspending *habeas corpus*. While these steps were severe, the British exercised restraint in enforcing them. However, most Malays and Chinese, because of the diligence of the government information campaign, came to recognize this fact. As one participant stated, “A state of Emergency is quite different from martial law. . . . The civil government—federal, state, district, and village—excised control throughout. The army acted in their support and always under their direction.”¹⁴

Operating under these rules, published for all the population to see, the security forces were able to establish the perception that their actions were honorable, legitimate, and right for Malaya. Safeguards such as judicial appeal and the view of a benevolent hand in charge of the Emergency simplified the task of convincing the people that the government was acting in their best interests. When Templer imposed a 22-hour curfew and tight food controls on a village for failing to provide intelligence and succoring the insurgents in its midst, he did so under established rules. Searches and cordons were conducted appropriately during the Emergency. Although such measures were harsh, most local people understood and accepted the legitimacy of the government and supported efforts against the communists. While the security forces did at times violate the regulations, these instances were few, and offenders were harshly punished when their crimes came to light.

Further helping the government win credible coercive power in combating the communists was the fact that the information campaign was waged from a centralized headquarters. The enemy on the other hand was forced to rely on weakening communications and was separated from target audiences as resettlement plans got underway. The information war became more effective as the communists appealed to the use of terror to influence the people. It was also integral to the SWEC–DWEC system, which enhanced the legitimacy of the government. A.D.C. Peterson, Director of Information under Templer, considered his

The Briggs Plan

To establish proper administrative control in Malaya, the plan called for:

- rapid resettlement of squatters under surveillance of police and auxiliary police
- regrouping local labor in mines and on estates
- recruitment and training of criminal investigation and special branch personnel
- a minimum level of troops throughout the country to support police and concentrate forces for clearing priority areas
- police and army operating in complete accord, with joint operational control on all levels and close integration of police and military intelligence.

It went into effect on June 1, 1950, and created state and district war executive committees (SWEC and DWEC) whose members made joint decisions and issued orders to subordinates through service chains of command to ensure complete integration of actions to support the civil power at all times

The Briggs Plan was intended to be thorough and long-term, with no expectation of speedy and decisive results. It envisaged clearing the country from south to north, leaving behind strong police and civil authorities once an area was secure. It also sought to isolate insurgents from rural populations to enable them to come forward with information. Moreover, it aimed at depriving the communists support and forcing them into the open to be dealt with by the security forces.

a handbook entitled *Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*. The measures became an effective set of rules of engagement that was well understood by military and civilians alike. For example, police were required to clear areas where the army was to operate to ensure that noncombatants were not accidentally injured. Similarly, the military could operate in cleared areas and, when appropriate, engage insurgents within their boundaries. The emergency regulations outlined in the handbook and the SWEC-DWEC system provided an organizational framework that facilitated close liaison which made government efforts effective.

Protecting the populace from the insurgents was accomplished by a series of measures that eventually made resettled people responsible for their own security. The Briggs Plan called for the formation of a home guard in new villages. It operated on three levels, closely monitored by the police. With the stick and carrot style of leadership carried out by Templer, insurgent incidents fell dramatically. Security followed common sense precautions, increasing the perceived legitimacy of the government. As communist activity ceased the British declared areas as white (pacified) and eased the emergency regulations, giving a distinct and achievable goal to local people. The transfer of power was slowly but visibly maintained. The Malaya Regiment was formed and led by Malay officers, and civil positions were opened to all ethnic groups including the Chinese. The loyalty of the people to British authority and a strong government structure contributed to this success.

Perseverance in the face of an insurgency is no easy task, but Britain handled it well and on the cheap. Without resources to wage large-scale operations after World War II, London was forced to be efficient. Persistence was incorporated into this low-cost structure because there were few short-term alternatives. Economic options took a long time to become effective. In addition, it was obvious that there would be few decisive battles and no roadmap for success. Victory would only be judged in hindsight.

Positive results through the vigorous application of the previously discussed five principles made it relatively easy to gird the population for the long haul once the organizational foundation was settled. The Briggs Plan, as executed by Templer and his successors, forced the civil-military relationship to work over a decade with constant results. Gradual milestones gave the government the freedom to destroy the communist movement.

Source: *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya* (Federation of Malaya, 1958), p. III-5-6.

programs of more use than psychological operations since the former also eventually reached the insurgents. As one analyst indicated:

[Peterson] benefitted by the communists' dilemma as to the use of terror, a problem they never solved. Terror was the most effective means of attracting attention and exacting obedience from the people. Yet [they] also wanted and needed popular support. If they used terror, they risked alienating the people; if they did not use terror, they risked being ignored.¹⁵

With the Briggs Plan (see insert above), the government seized the mantle of legitimacy while the insurgents found it slipping away. That allowed the civilian and military authorities to further isolate the communists from the population and increase their marginalization.

Restraint, Security, and Persistence

Most success derived from achievements elsewhere. Restraint, or using appropriate force to accomplish the mission, was realized with some of the same sources that constituted the bedrock of legitimacy. The military and police conducted operations in consonance with guidance found in

RAF Hornets being refueled in Singapore.



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Civil-Military Relations

The model presented in Joint Pub 3-08, *Interagency Coordination during Joint Operations*, differs from the approach adopted in Malaya. Current

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doctrine assumes that the military will retain autonomy as a joint task force (JTF) or combatant command and organize civil-military operations centers (CMOCs) to coordinate activities. This does not necessarily suggest tasking authority, for unless they are assigned forces, such centers only have coordination authority. Their composition relies on the mission and commander but presumes that the military is the senior partner. Centers can be formed on any level deemed appropriate while larger organizations

(such as JTFs) are maintained. Although Joint Publication 3-08 lacks consistency in this area, it envisions that the military will be preeminent because of the absence of a functioning government, like Somalia and Kosovo. This approach may work in chaotic situations when nongovernmental organizations provide the bulk of aid. However, civil-military relations must be synchronized differently when governments remain functioning entities, even under grave circumstances. Though joint doctrine directs that maximum flexibility and cooperation must be used to deal with governmental or nongovernmental partners, it confounds more than enlightens.

The British committee system was similar in composition to the CMOC model proposed in joint doctrine. The committee was the hub of activities within a given region. It coordinated and rendered larger organizations such as the division into force providers. Operational decisions were made through the war executive committees, un-



like existing doctrine. Such bodies coordinated and synchronized operations and other forms of civil and military affairs. Information operations were also executed through them, with overall guidance and assets provided by higher authorities. Daily meetings of the executive committees, commonly known as morning prayers, functioned along similar lines to a joint targeting coordination board, using intelligence to alter and synchronize operations on the ground. The current model does not provide effective unity of effort in situations when civil governments remain even marginally effective, such as in Malaya.

British forces were subordinated to the operational efficiency of the Briggs Plan. "As far as I can see," Thompson claimed, "the only thing a divisional commander has to do in this sort of war is to go around seeing that the troops have got their beer."¹⁶ Although the military was uneasy about the arrangement until tangible results were achieved, it made the committee structure meet its objectives. Existing organizations were tailored to fit the committees and eliminate redundancy. Parochialism was overcome. The Malaya Emergency serves as a model for operations conducted by an established government which retains its legitimacy. Yet it should be remembered that each MOOTW occurs within a discrete environment.

Although CMOC as described in Joint Pub 3-08 will work in certain situations, in the end it is simply a technique, like the British approach in Malaya. Joint forces must be tailored to achieve overall strategic objectives. The flexibility and initiative to do whatever works should be carefully

considered in forming organizations. An effective and credible mission analysis is a prerequisite, since one cannot prevail over what one does not understand. The principles of MOOTW combine with common sense to provide a basis for such operations. And the organization introduced under the Briggs Plan supplements the guidance found in current joint doctrine. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ James E. Dougherty, "The Guerrilla War in Malaya," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, vol. 84, no. 9 (September 1958), p. 46.

² Robert G. Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 55.

³ Jerome F. Bierly and Timothy W. Pleasant, "Malaya—A Case Study," *Marine Corps Gazette*, vol. 74, no. 7 (July 1990), p. 48.

⁴ Riley Sunderland, *Organizing Counterinsurgency in Malaya: 1947–1960* (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, September 1964), p. viii.

⁵ Robert W. Komer, *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of a Successful Counterinsurgency Effort* (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, February 1972), p. 64.

⁶ Sunderland, *Organizing Counterinsurgency*, p. 11.

⁷ John Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency: An Analysis of the Malayan Emergency, 1948–1954* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), p. 95.

⁸ Noel Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs: The Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1971), pp. 130–32.

⁹ Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, p. 111.

¹⁰ Richard Miers, *Shoot To Kill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 39.

¹¹ Anthony Crockett, "Royal Marines: Action in Malaya," *Marine Corps Gazette*, vol. 39, no. 1 (January 1955), p. 31.

¹² Sunderland, *Organizing Counterinsurgency*, p. 64.

¹³ Riley Sunderland, *Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People of Malaya: 1948–1960* (Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation, September 1964), pp. 29–32.

¹⁴ Richard L. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 36.

¹⁵ Sunderland, *Winning the Hearts and Minds*, pp. 30–32.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, p. 61.