REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)*	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)*
11-05-2015	Research	Oct 2014 - Apr 2015

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE
Assisted Small War Missions: Low Profile Options Without Foreign Policy Commitment

5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
N/A

5b. GRANT NUMBER
N/A

5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
N/A

6. AUTHOR(S)
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5d. PROJECT NUMBER
N/A

5e. TASK NUMBER
N/A

5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
N/A

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
USMC School of Advanced Warfighting
Marine Corps University
3070 Moreell Avenue
Quantico, VA 22134-5068

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
N/A

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
N/A

10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
N/A

11. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER
N/A

12. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES
N/A

14. ABSTRACT
In the future, Small Wars should not be considered diminutive in duration, intensity, or strategic implication: they should be considered small only in the willingness of the USG to fight them. The United States approach to small wars should be adaptable. Like larger scale conflicts, the nature of small war is immutable; however the characteristics of every small war are unique. Every small war problem is different. Commensurately, American military responses should be tailored to a specific solution. Tailored solutions to small wars require a specific task organized force capable of executing a difficult task.Although small wars are fought at the tactical level, they are won at the operational and strategic level. Instead of building a small war force from the bottom up, it should be designed from the top down. A Small War Advisory Headquarters would advise a host nation military in an expeditionary Security Force Assistance role, leveraging inherent planning and command and control capabilities, in a low profile posture without constituting irreversible foreign policy commitment.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Small Wars, Irregular Warfare, Heaquarters

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE	UU		Marine Corps University / School of Advanced Warfighting
Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified			19b. TELEPONE NUMBER *(Include area code)* (703) 432-5318 (Admin Office)

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FUTURE WAR PAPER

Title:

Assisted Small Wars Missions: Low Profile Options Without Irreversible Foreign Policy Commitment

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF OPERATIONAL STUDIES**

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APPROVED:
DATE: 15 Apr 2015

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Introduction: Understanding the Future with an Eye on the Past

Small wars are fought at the tactical level but they are won at the operational and strategic level. Instead of building a small war force from the bottom up, it should be designed from the top down. Although it is tempting to use existing units and provide additional training for small wars missions, such an ad hoc approach would yield similar "pick-up game" results that the last twelve years of conflict have brought. A Small War Advisory Headquarters should be established to advise the host nation (HN) in an expeditionary Security Force Assistance role, leveraging inherent planning and command and control capabilities, in a low profile posture without constituting irreversible foreign policy commitment.

The initial phases of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) were an effectively executed mission in a small war environment. United States Special Operations Forces (SOF) and other government agencies (OGA) conducted successful Unconventional Warfare (UW) missions that efficiently deposed the Taliban in a matter of months. However, since that time, operations in Afghanistan, and later Iraq, became costly in terms of American lives, treasure, and political capital. Unfortunately, the requirement for United States military forces to fight small wars will not diminish in the future despite limited resources and flagging political will.

In the future, Small Wars should not be considered diminutive in duration, intensity, or strategic implication: they should be considered "small" in the willingness of the USG to fight them, the amount of resources to be expended, and the political capital to sacrificed by policy makers. The fallout of history shapes future conditions of fighting small wars. In this way, those military forces planning, preparing, and executing small

wars will be limited in terms of future possibilities by the success or failure of recent military actions. Linking ends, ways, and means becomes increasingly difficult when resources and political will are lacking.

The United States approach to small wars should be adaptable. Like larger scale conflicts, the nature of small war is immutable, however, the characteristics of every small war are unique. Every small war problem is different. Commensurately, American military responses should be tailored to a specific solution. Tailored solutions to small wars require a specific task organized force capable of executing a difficult task. Military leaders should understand from the lessons of OEF and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) that the Vietnam-era dictum that any good soldier can handle a guerrilla is misguided.[1]

Learning Lessons from the Past: Small Wars of the Twentieth Century

For small wars, the past is prologue: the nature of small war has not changed. The *Small Wars Manual* sets the stage for describing small wars of the future. This seminal manual promulgated what is understood today: small war is not a measure of the intensity of the conflict; small wars are not limited to their size, nor in the extent of neither their operations, nor their cost in property, money, or lives.[2] Small wars should be understood in specific context before embarking on a solution. As Clausewitz stated, "the first, the supreme, the most far reaching act of judgment that the statesman and the commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first all strategic questions and the most comprehensive."[3] This is especially true in

small wars: "the essence of a small war is its purpose and the circumstances surrounding its inception."[4]

In almost every small war occurrence, the root cause of the conflict requires a solution that is not purely military. However, in recent years, the Department of Defense has often been the only executive department postured to solve the problem. The intensity of future small wars will be fought relative to the political will pursue the political objective. The *Small Wars Manual* asserts, "it is the duty of our statesmen to define a policy relative to international relationships and provide the military and naval establishments the means to carry it into execution."[5] Clausewitz concurs: political ends focusing small war strategy, "the political object – the original motive for the war – will thus determine both the military object to be achieved and the amount of effort it requires."[6]

A look back at historical examples of United States involvement in small wars provides valuable insights in guiding future efforts for pursuing political objectives in small wars. Political ends guided U.S. Marine Corps efforts in Central America and the Caribbean. Objectives varied from preventing foreign involvement in counties where U.S. political interests were present (Haiti and the Dominican Republic) to ensuring elections favorable to the USG (Nicaragua). While the circumstances changed by country, objectives were always political. The means used by the Marines to achieve their objectives varied as well. Frequently, the implementation of a solution was ad hoc. Competing priorities (World War I, for example) and limited resources made for near insurmountable tasks. Out of necessity, Marines involved in the small wars of decades

between the two world wars invariably used adaptation, innovation, and learning in their approaches to small war.

Adaptation, innovation, and learning should characterize any organization fighting a small war. For the Marines of the interwar period, adaptation, innovation, and learning were manifested in being able to understand the context and circumstances of each small war situation and being able to implement the correct solution. In Haiti, for example, adaptation meant installing Marine Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) in the Haitian Gendarmerie. In Nicaragua, innovation meant using emergent aviation capabilities to carry ballot boxes. Following these conflicts, in 1940, learning manifested itself in cataloging much of the military and civil lessons learned into the *Small Wars Manual.*

Learning Lessons from the Present: Security Force Assistance in the Twenty-First Century

For a Geographic Combatant Commander (CCDR), a way to achieve the desired future state set forth in a Theater Campaign Plan is Security Force Assistance (SFA). SFA is the Department of Defense's (DoD) contribution to the USG Security Sector Reform (SSR) program, and, as such, SFA is designed to improve Foreign Security Forces (FSF) capability and capacity.[7] U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is the DoD lead entity for SFA but both SOF and conventional forces (CF), as well as the civilian expeditionary workforce (CEW), and contractor personnel participate in SFA activities.[8] Although the acme of effective SFA is winning without general-purpose U.S.

military forces being required to fight, SFA activities occur across the spectrum of conflict, from stable peace to general conventional war.[9]

The U.S. Military has a long history of executing SFA missions across the spectrum of conflict. Often SFA is conceptually blurred between with other operations like Foreign Internal Defense (FID), Counterinsurgency (COIN), Unconventional Warfare (UW), and Stability Operations. Primarily, DoD conducts SFA activities to assist a HN to defend itself against internal and transnational threats to stability.[10] However, SFA activities may have an external focus as well: assisting partner nations (PN) to defend themselves against external threats; assisting the PN to contribute to coalition operations; or assisting the PN to organize, train, equip military forces and/or supporting institutions. This study will focus on SFA activities assisting PN military forces to plan, prepare and execute operations against internal, transnational, or external belligerents. These SFA actions will be called Assisted Small War Missions (ASWM).

Elements of ASWM have been occurring through out OEF and OIF. Coalition efforts under Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq (MNSTC-I) trained Afghan and Iraqi Security Forces. Concurrently, ISAF and MNF-I fought conflicts that varied in intensity from unstable peace to irregular warfare to general conventional war. Like efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, future small wars will offer diverse problems for those fight them. Despite the inadequacies of holistic efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, there will be a recurring future requirement of the United States to participate in SFA and potentially fight small wars.

The requirement to fight small wars is not diminishing despite reduced funding and limited political will. In the wake of OEF and OIF, CCDRs face multiple threats and reduced options in SFA. Given the frequency of small wars – 43 percent of all international conflicts between 1816 and 1980 – and the effectiveness of small wars since the end of World War II, it would be a mistake to dismiss OEF and OIF as an anomaly. The prevalence of small wars coupled with their flawed execution bodes ill for the future and often leads to strategic defeat, political hesitancy, and potential resultant isolationism.

Political Considerations in Future Small Wars

In considering options for fighting small wars of the future, policy makers will increasingly consider political realities. In an environment characterized by limited political will, Clausewitz's point about "the amount of effort it requires" could be expanded to mean the amount of effort politically feasible. If the political will is extant but not enough to commit American *ground* forces, then an assisted intervention is possible. 'Boots on the ground' is a tired cliché but the concept resonates with policy makers. As stated in the *Washington Post*, "it has everything to do with politics and little to do with the imperatives of strategy or security."[11] An uncertain political environment necessitates an adaptable method of achieving political objectives.

The political object of any war will determine the resources expended and the sacrifices endured. However, political leaders will experience heightened sensitivity to the choices they make regarding interventions, especially in the examination of voting records. Issues like the 2003 Iraq War vote made contemporary politicians cautious regarding the 2014 intervention in Iraq against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

(ISIL). Although sixty percent of Americans supported air strikes against ISIL (thirty one percent opposed the strikes), only forty percent supported using ground troops in Iraq against the group (fifty four percent opposed ground forces' involvement).[12] The absence of a designed force capable of executing a successful intervention – a small war – against groups like ISIL further limits policy makers' options.

Effective, multi-dimensional non-state actors like ISIL and Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) will require consideration in SFA missions and could comprise opponents in small wars of the future. Like the revolutionary groups and movements of the twentieth century, these insurgent groups capitalize on the power of the idea through organizational diversification, but primarily through exploitation of the HN populations. The Marines who wrote the *Small Wars Manual* understood this: "any profound understanding of a revolution necessitates a knowledge of the mental soil in which the ideas that direct its course have to germinate."[13] This should be a guiding principle for any small war advisory force assisting a HN government in a SFA role. As a logical progression, the creation of strategy and consequent operational art should logically flow from the principle of defeating the insurgent idea. Operational art guides the creation of the small war campaign plan.

Future small war advisory efforts should be centered on the defeat of the insurgent idea through effective campaign planning. While the circumstances in each small war will vary, the means to pursue the objective should be constant. The element assisting the HN in a small war effort should be organized in deployable, task-organized standing headquarters that is manned, trained, and equipped to assist HN governments fight small wars. The recent Afghanistan and Iraq ad hoc US approach to advising HN

militaries in Small Wars has been costly in human resources, materiel, time, and political commitment. Advisory efforts in OEF and OIF were focused on fighting and countering insurgent groups at the tactical level. Operational art at the CSTC-A and MNSTC-I levels were less an integrated effort than a collection of tactics at the local level. This is not intended to slander previous, hard-won successes, only to incorporate lessons of recent experience.

Building the Case for a Small War Advisory Headquarters

A Small War Advisory Headquarters (SWAHQ) enables the lessons of past experience to be institutionally retained. The Marines who fought the small wars during the decades between the world wars captured the hard won experiences in the *Small Wars Manual*. Keith Bickel writes in *Mars Learning,*

> In the case of the Marines (of that time), the institution protected those who were focused on the mission of the *past* while slowly focusing greater effort on the landing operations that might make up *future* warfare. In the case of future warfare, each of the services has the opportunity to maintain its institutional focus on the *current* (maybe past) style of warfare while allowing some of its members to experiment with *future* concepts of warfare.[14]

The incorporation of institutional learning is especially important regarding the historical context of small wars. Due to the USMC focus on amphibious operations against Japan, many of the lessons of small wars in the interwar period were lost a little more than a decade after World War II.[15] In *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, John Nagl writes of a Marine Officer creating the 1960 USMC training manual, *Anti-Guerrilla Warfare*, who did not know that the *Small Wars Manual* existed.[16] A standing headquarters with the sole mission of advising PN governments and militaries on the

conduct of a small war would enable institutional knowledge to be archived and purposefully employed.

Through institutional knowledge, a SWAHQ commander and staff would effectively internalize the tenets of the *Small Wars Manual*. A foundational small war precept mandates understanding the essence of the conflict's purpose and the circumstances surrounding its inception. A unit solely devoted to planning, preparing, and advising HN governments regarding the execution of small wars would have the tools necessary to understand the nature of the conflict as well as its characteristics and the means and ways to succeed against the threat. In small wars, understanding that the power of ideas matter, and that circumstances vary greatly, is vital to effective planning, preparation, and advising the execution of small wars.

In planning, preparation, and advising the execution of small wars the implementation of operation art is vital. However, this conception of operational art needs to be a cooperative venture between the American conception of operational art and a HN understanding. Simply overlaying a foreign (i.e. US) approach to a host a host HN would ignore a decade of small war experience. In this regard, the British experience in Malaya should instruct our approach to ASWM. At the operational level, the British Army approached the Malayan Emergency in an evolutionary manner. From 1948 to 1951, it used more conventional methods, focusing primarily on the enemy Malayan Communist Party (MCP). From 1952 to 1957, the British Army adapted its approach to an evolving understanding of the conflict. Thereby, operational level solutions, like the food denial program that isolated communist party districts, were uniquely suited to the

host nation problem. In this way, the British Army was able to understand cultural characteristics of the Malayan problem and apply specific solutions to it.

A nuanced cultural understanding of the host nation and its military force is imperative for a SWAHQ. Cultural understanding in the ASWM paradigm includes but transcends the counterinsurgency (COIN) lessons learned by coalition forces during OEF/OIF. The ASWM notion of cultural understanding addresses HN military organization, training, and equipping relative to fighting a small war. It includes and appreciation to what degree a HN military is a power-player in the politics of a given HN government. Moreover, a SWAHQ needs to understand the crafting of HN policy, strategy, and operational art. A SWAHQ needs to synthesize the specific cultural characteristics of a HN military with its own capabilities in order to attain maximum effectiveness.

For maximum effectiveness, a SWAHQ should be the integral connection from the strategic level to the tactical level. CSTC-A and MNST-I efforts in OEF and OIF attempted to bridge this gap, but small wars require more organizational continuity at the operational level. Arguably, tactical level OEF and OIF advising efforts were more successful than efforts to link them to operational art or coherent strategy. There is still a demonstrated need for advisory elements at the tactical, strategic, and operational levels. A February 2015 Government Accountability Office report highlighted the need for a Ministry of Defense Advisor (MODA) program that would partner DOD civilian experts with foreign defense and security officials to build core competencies in key areas such as strategy and policy, human resources management, acquisition and logistics, and

financial management.[17] A SWAHQ would include and link the tactical advisory expertise to the MOD level advisory effort.

A standing SWAHQ should function as a cohesive unit rather than an ad hoc element. The permanency of a standing headquarters enables the continuity of competency in advising the planning, preparation, execution, and sustainability of small wars and HN forces fighting them. A standing SWAHQ allows for the retention of institutional knowledge from the *Small Wars Manual* era to present day, the implementation of operational art, the persistency of cultural understanding, and the connection from the tactical to the strategic level. A small, standing SWAHQ provides flexible responsive options at the most crucial inception period of COIN.

In order to be militarily relevant in the current, and likely future, political atmosphere, a SWAHQ needs to have a small footprint. Even if the opponent's strategy in a small war is not the attrition of US political will, it should always be remembered, "the guerrilla wins if he does not lose."[18] In the same regard, Mao Tse Tung believed that countries with legislative bodies simply cannot take a war of attrition, either financially or, in the long run, psychologically.[19] This is especially true of the US Congress and its voting constituencies. As the US DoD moves further away from the legacies of Afghanistan and Iraq, it will need to find increasingly efficient ways of projecting power. A SWAHQ is a potential way ahead.

Recommendations for a Small War Advisory Headquarters

- Commanded by US Army/USMC Colonel
- Organized as a standing Joint Force Headquarters under a Functional Combatant Command with global responsibilities: USSTRATCOM or USSOCOM
- Manned with individuals who are rotated from conventional and SOF units, from Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard Forces
- Sized as a battalion, as a minimum, to advise a HN Corps with approximately 1000 officers/SNCOs and NCOs.
- Manned with Combat Arms MOS, Military Police, Civil Affairs, Intelligence, and Combat Service Support MOS
- Staffed with interagency representation
- Aligned internally along regions based on Global Combatant Command Areas of Responsibility
- Focused on HN solutions through HN solutions (processes and operational art) to problems (local/regional understanding)

The mission of the SWAHQ would be to advise HN corps-level formation on the planning, preparation, and execution of a small war. In order to maximize on the broad influence and global responsibility of a Functional Combatant Command, the SWAHQ should be organized as Joint Force Headquarters assigned to either USSTRATCOM or USSOCOM. Internally, the SWAHQ should aligned along regions of primary interest: USCENTCOM, USAFRICOM, USPACOM, and USNORTHCOM/USSOUTHCOM. Each regionally aligned subdivision (company-sized, discussed below) would focus on HN problems through HN solutions while leveraging the capabilities of the US DoD and US Joint Force.

Staffing the SWAHQ is the key to success. To borrow from a statement from Field Marshall Montgomery to Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttleton during the

Malayan Emergency, "when we have a man and plan, then we shall succeed: not otherwise."[20] The man and the plan in the instance of the SWAHQ is its commander. The commander should be at least a O-6 in either the US Army or the USMC. He should be of a combat arms background, likely infantry. His experience should have a mature understanding of advising at multiple levels, from the tactical to the operational. He should know how to speak to those individuals advising at the strategic level. Commensurate with the commander, the staff and advisors need to have the right experience.

The SWAHQ should be sized as a 1000 individual strength battalion, staffed with primarily officers, SNCOs, and senior NCOs. A headquarters and service company (H&S) and three or four advisor companies would comprise the battalion-sized SWAHQ organization. Each advisor company would contain personnel to advise the varying levels of a HN division. Advisor companies would be staffed with individuals of MOS representing all HN functional area requirements. Additional, with H&S company, there should be representation from appropriate interagency partners: US Department of State DoS), US Agency for International Development (USAID), US Treasury Department, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), National Security Agency (NSA), Defense Intelligence Agency, etc. The intent of the advisor companies would be to enable HN forces at the division level and below plan, prepare, and execute a HN campaign plan in a small war environment.

Conclusions for ASWM: Implementation of a SWAHQ-assisted, HN campaign plan

A SWAHQ-leveraged HN campaign plan should have an overarching campaign goal driving that campaign plan toward successful realization of a political objective. In many cases, the political objective should be the resolution of grievances toward the ultimate ends of conflict termination and long-term stability. History dictates that long-term stability will likely not be a pure military solution. In this manner, interagency representation and connection to MOD level strategic advisory efforts will enable conflict resolution and more realistic expectations of stability. In the interim, a SWAHQ should focus on a campaign plan with short-term, mid-term, and long-term campaign objectives.

Short-term objectives should be focused on creating tactical space for HN forces. It is possible, if not likely, that by the time a SWAHQ is inserted into a HN small war, a crisis for the HN will have evolved. Therefore, it is imperative to give the HN military, and by extension, the HN government some tactical space against an opponent. This is important for a variety of reasons: provide the HN military the ability to focus combat power against the enemy, build some confidence in the HN forces relative to the enemy, provide the HN government political legitimacy, and prevent or mitigate the suffering of the HN population. The chief military capability by which this will be effected is defensive airpower.

If a HN does not possess the ability to conduct air operations, options for small war airpower should first be a third party regional power. An example of this paradigm is the United Arab Emirates' employment of its air force in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. By leveraging a regional power-player, the US mitigates the stigma of large footprint military involvement, increases HN legitimacy, and furthers regional partnerships.[21] While outside the scope of this paper, leveraging partnerships

like the one with UAE not only increases regional cooperation, it builds security cooperation between the US and the third party nation, like UAE. In the absence of such an arrangement, US air power will be necessary to provide tactical space for the HN. Once tactical space is created through defensive airpower, mid-term objectives can be addressed.

Mid-term objectives include the implementation of the HN campaign plan against the small war opponent and improving the quality of HN security forces. Improving the quality of HN security forces is the realm of organizations like CSTC-A and MNSTC-I. The role of the SWAHQ is to integrate the efforts of those organizations into the HN campaign plan. Additionally, as a recommendation, the possibility of US Military Officers' and SNCOs' secondment in the HN military should be explored. Historical successes like the USMC leading the Haitian Gendarmerie and Brigadier John Akehurst leading the Omani Sultan's forces in the Dhofar Brigade are valuable and could provide immediate tactical HN successes. Once potentially lengthy efforts to improve HN Security Forces are successful, the SWAHQ can focus on long-term objectives.

Long-term objectives should focus on sustainability in equipment and processes conducive to HN success. In each category – equipment and processes – the solution needs to have a HN face for HN success. It is incumbent on the SWAHQ to understand the implementation of the solution, as well as its necessary manning training and equipping requirements. For example, if the HN largely operates former Warsaw Pact weapons and equipment, the sustainability solution should revolve around that equipment set, rather than US military equipment. It is assumed this paradigm has national security

implications and legal ramifications. Nevertheless, for long-term HN security and stability, issues like these will need to be addressed.

Endnotes

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