

Haitians alongside U.S. service members with Joint Task Force-Haiti and members of U.S. Agency for International Development unload humanitarian aid off a CH-47 Chinook in Jeremie, Haiti August 28, 2021. (U.S. Army photo)



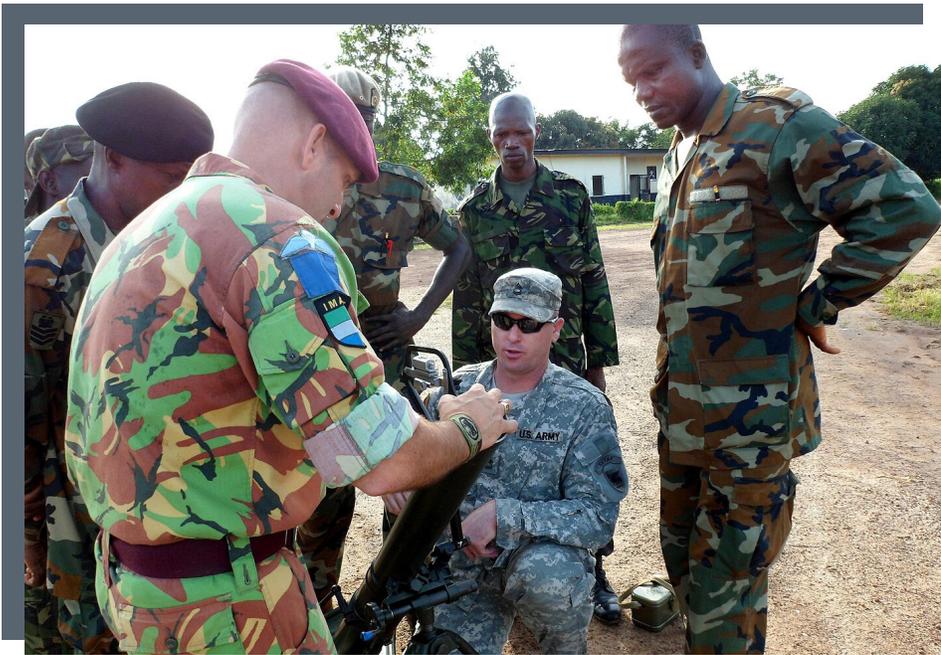
A Model for Western Interventions in Small Wars

by Lieutenant Colonel John Georg

Introduction

Small wars, also referred to as limited conflicts, occur between forces of disparate capabilities; however, these encounters can span a wide range of human conflict. For example, humanitarian aid workers clashing with local criminal gangs in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake¹, and on the opposite end of the spectrum, in 1989, United States forces engaging the smaller military forces of Panama during Operation Just Cause². Most would agree that small wars exclude hostilities between nation states of comparatively equal capabilities, such as what occurred during both World Wars.

Colonel Callwell, a British military officer with 19th century colonial war experience, attempted to define small wars. He assessed that a small war is any military operation not involving regular forces of near similar capabilities.³ In his book, *Small Wars Their Principles and Practice*, he cited the late 19th century Sino-Japanese war as an example of the extreme edge of small wars. The Chinese imperial army was a large, but outdated, regular fighting force in comparison to the smaller, modern Japanese capabilities. At the time of the conflict, both China and Japan were modernizing their forces; however, Japan's rapid modernization efforts outpaced those of the Chinese imperial army. Though smaller in sheer numbers, Japan's abilities created an overwhelming capability mismatch that ultimately won the conflict for Japan. This capability mismatch is the factor that places the conflict into the small war category.⁴



In 2011, British and American servicemembers training Sierra Leonean soldiers to use a mortar as part of the United Kingdom's International Military Assistance Training and the U.S. Department of State's African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program. (U.S. Army photo)

Modern Interventions

By this definition, modern western interventions in Africa are also small wars because the western forces face irregular forces or regular military forces of inferior capabilities. Since World War II, western military forces often fail to meet their strategic objectives despite having a large capability overmatch. This is especially evident when western forces engage in long-duration stability operations. Long-term stability operations over time degrade western force's legitimacy on the world stage, in the domestic political arena, and in the host nation. Legitimacy is the western intervention force's center of gravity. Therefore, they must protect it.

Western military forces can best achieve and maintain this legitimacy when supporting local governments and United Nations (U.N.) forces with short-duration, high-intensity operations followed by smaller footprint support missions. Western militaries should capitalize on capabilities unique to their forces, such as high-intensity combat operations, mobility, airpower, intelligence, and forced entry. Once the initial objectives are met, they can then transition to support capabilities, such as logistics, training, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) that bolster host nation and U.N. forces conducting stability operations. During the support phase it is crucial for the larger and more capable western powers to de-couple from day-to-day combat operations, leaving those operations to the U.N. and the host nation. This is the model for success in future small war military interventions.

A Successful Western Military Intervention in Africa

The British military intervention in Sierra Leone accomplished its objectives by using western forces to conduct high-intensity,

intelligence-driven operations that transitioned to a support role focused on intelligence, logistics, and training support for stability operations led by the U.N. and host nation forces. This article will illustrate how this western military intervention can serve as a template for limited conflicts in Africa and other geographic command areas.

In 2000, the civil war in Sierra Leone turned in favor of the brutal Revolutionary United Front (RUF), supported by the dictator in neighboring Liberia. The host nation and U.N. forces on the ground were incapable of defeating the RUF. The British chose to intervene and rapidly deployed an operational reconnaissance and liaison team to answer tactical and operational level intelligence requirements in preparation for an intervention force.⁵ This included coordinating aerial reconnaissance missions

and deploying British special forces behind RUF lines in long-range reconnaissance missions. Additionally, British national intelligence significantly increased its collection and analysis of the area of interest. Through these efforts, the British identified that diamond and other mining operations were the main source of the rebel forces funding.⁶ This created an opportunity for national and international targeting operations to prepare the battlefield for military intervention and to suppress the RUF supply lines.

Shortly thereafter, the intervention force conducted a rapid entry operation, seizing a staging area to serve as a base of attack against the RUF. British forces were able to rapidly concentrate an overwhelming capability and launch Operation Palliser, which used a small but very capable task force to engage and defeat the RUF.⁷ The British exploited their mobility and intelligence advantages to rapidly seize key terrain throughout Sierra Leone while the U.N. and host nation forces deployed to liberated areas to conduct stability operations. The intent was for the British to defeat the RUF and for the U.N. and host nation forces to consolidate the gains.

Once the British forces defeated the main formations of the RUF, they rapidly transitioned to a support role for the U.N. and host nation forces. The focus for the British was on training and advising the host nation forces. Their combat units returned to secure areas that they could easily supply, and if necessary, from which they could again project combat power. The British established and supplied training sites that the host nation units rotated through prior to deploying to the liberated areas. This allowed the host nation forces to develop capacity and then obtain territory from U.N. forces to maintain. The U.N. forces could then move to other areas

in need of more robust stability operations. Additionally, the British forces established liaisons with U.N. units and headquarters, augmented the U.N. forces' staff, and provided intelligence and logistics support.⁸ This greatly aided the U.N.'s ability to operate in the country while reducing the British forces engaged in combat operations. It also created greater situational awareness for the British through U.N. and host nation reporting in combination with their own intelligence collection.

To further support the military operation, the British used other elements of national power against the enemy's center of gravity—the dictator in Liberia, Charles Taylor. National power refers to the tools a country uses to influence other countries and is a combination of a country's diplomacy, information and intelligence, and military and economic strength, also referred to as DIME.⁹ Diplomatically, the British isolated the Liberian dictator in the U.N. and within West Africa, resulting in little to no outside support. Informationally, the British used intelligence assets and arrangements to identify targets for economic sanctions. Economically, the British led a global effort to cut off diamond shipments by enforcing sanctions on blood diamonds.¹⁰ The unified effort to leverage DIME against this main center of gravity reduced the RUF's effectiveness and led to military and political victory. These national and international efforts effectively employed intelligence to drive their targeted operations.

The outcome was that the British intervention was a resounding success. First, it defeated the military threat. Second, it avoided a protracted conflict. Third, it returned Sierra Leone to a normal state, which is now growing economically with major foreign investment.¹¹ And finally, the British intervention was successful from an information operations perspective. The population of Sierra Leone is so appreciative of the British intervention that many citizens jest that former British Prime Minister Tony Blair could run for office any day and he would win.¹² The intervention had international, domestic, and host nation legitimacy that provided a unique western capability without the British getting mired in lengthy stability operations.

A Model for Success

The British intervention in Sierra Leone is a model for successful operations in small wars in Africa and other hotspots around the globe. Western powers harbor unique advantages in firepower, mobility, and maneuver. Their skill sets in logistics, staff work, and especially ISR capabilities amplify those advantages. The Sierra Leone model recognizes that western forces require significant degrees of international, domestic, and host nation legitimacy for successful operations. It capitalizes on the strengths of western militaries as well as those of allied, U.N., and host nation forces.

The British used a small but highly capable force to rapidly deploy into the area of operations and seize a staging area for further operations, enabling logistics and mobility. Next, they leveraged ISR capabilities to identify enemy forces and defeat them using superior maneuver and the lethality of western equipment. Last, using intelligence and maneuver assets, they identified and seized key terrain to establish a base for the stabilizing operations. The British followed this up with training, enabling U.N. and host nation forces to relieve the British forces and conduct the stability operations. The British forces could then downsize to an element merely meant to support the U.N. and the host nation.

This model maximizes the advantages of western forces while reducing the risks and weaknesses they face from long-term stability operations. It relies on host nation and U.N. forces that are less susceptible to the loss of legitimacy associated with long-term missions. Their contributions to multiple long-running U.N. peacekeeping missions attest to this strength. However, these same forces rarely excel at western style warfare, which aims to reduce civilian casualties, operates at relatively high speeds, and is empowered with logistical capacities capable of sustaining high-mobility forces and ISR to map and analyze enemy formations.

In less-developed nations, host nation forces are often nonexistent or not as capable, as was the case in Sierra Leone. They are nonetheless vital to a successful small war intervention. This highlights the need to rapidly develop the skill sets of such a force or identify a suitable equivalent force. Western forces will struggle, at great expense, to conduct multiyear operations as they rotate units on short-term deployments while viewed as an occupying force. On the other hand, a trained local force can conduct the day-to-day requirements of securing a territory and collecting intelligence on the ground. Therefore, combining western military force capabilities with those of the U.N., or some other multinational force, and the capabilities of a host nation force are critical to successful western interventions in limited conflicts. Each element brings different abilities to the fight and reduces the level of risk for the others.

Lessons for Military Intelligence Professionals

The British experience in Sierra Leone, highlights several lessons that many western militaries, the United States included, can learn. Western militaries have a great ability to find, fix, finish, exploit, and assess enemy concentrated forces, but they struggle with the invisible enemy encountered in protracted counterinsurgency fights. We need to maintain our ability to rapidly deploy military intelligence teams to develop the intelligence picture while the main force is still assembling. This requires language capabilities for coordination with U.N. and host nation forces and sharing of collected information and

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intelligence products with partner nations. We also need to plan for intelligence capabilities and other support assets to remain in country after the main force has withdrawn. These assets need to collect intelligence that can be disseminated to the partnered force, be it U.N. or host nation forces. This might require a shift in mindset for U.S. and other western intelligence professionals to rely on other information collection assets, like reconnaissance and security operations, instead of traditional intelligence operations.

Conclusion

Western forces are challenged by judgements from home, the host nation, and the world creating a formidable influence when engaging in limited conflict. Maintaining legitimacy of purpose for an intervention force during conflicts is a significant factor of mission success or failure. British actions in Sierra Leone provide an example of how western powers can integrate the U.N. and host nation forces for ultimate success. Western forces must develop a clear intelligence picture of the area of operations through a thorough intelligence preparation of the operational environment process. Executing a DIME strategy, ensures a full spectrum of effort that erodes threat support, bolsters intervention force support, and

provides for the swift transition to stability operations by U.N. and host nation forces. Targetable intelligence, rapid action, and well-executed transitions strengthen the legitimacy of intervention, stability, and host nation forces. ✨

Endnotes

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