OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT VARIABLES

Discuss the eight variables of PMESII-PT and expand on the one(s) that applies to your lessons. Explain that the Army doctrine uses eight interrelated operational variables to analyze the operational environment. Known as PMESII-PT, the eight operational variables are:

1. POLITICAL

a. The political variable describes the distribution of responsibility and power at all levels of government. Since an insurgency is fundamentally a struggle for political power, the political environment in the HN country is critical. Attention should be paid not just to the formal political system (such as political parties and elected officials) but also to informal political systems (such as political parties and elected officials) but also to informal political systems (such as tribes, ethnic groups, and other centers of power). Long-term success in COIN is ultimately based on political efforts; all counterinsurgents must focus on the political impact of their actions. Therefore, tactical leaders may be expected to broker local political solutions.

b. Host Nation (HN), US and coalition political considerations drive the conduct of COIN operations. This is especially true concerning the involvement of the US Government and US public opinion. A major goal of most insurgencies is to influence US public opinion against US involvement as a counterinsurgent force. Successful counterinsurgents must therefore not only prevent insurgents from obtaining this goal, but also actively work to influence public opinion for the COIN mission.

c. Commanders must be prepared to operation within a broad range of political structures. The Host Nation’s form of government may range from a despotic dictatorship to a struggling democracy. Commanders at all levels, including platoon leaders and company commanders, need to recognize the importance of establishing and reinforcing the HN as the lead authority for all operations. This reinforces the legitimacy of the HN government.

2. MILITARY

This variable includes the military capabilities of all armed forces. Most COIN units will need to analyze the insurgency’s military forces (guerrillas), local militias, and the Host Nation security forces. Commanders should consider qualitative aspects, such as conscription of recruitment systems, economic basis (to include appropriations system), and position of forces in national and local government structure. Additional qualitative considerations are general organization, training and doctrine, efficiency, rapp01t with population, and the police role in the nation’s internal security. For example, a typical US brigade in Iraq might have to analyze a Shia guerrilla force, a Shia guerrilla force, an Iraqi National Police brigade, and Iraqi Army brigade, the Iraqi local police, and a Sons of Iraq militia unit.
3. ECONOMIC

a. The economic variable consists of the general economic categories of an Area of Operations (AO), such as energy; raw materials; government development policy; distribution of labor and labor policies; income distribution; national food distribution; free market or socialist interface and functions; consumption patterns; external investment, taxation policy; port authorities; movement of goods; consumer issues; border controls; foreign trade; tariffs; and graft or corruption.

b. A low standard of living and a desire for economic reform may be a cause of resentment toward the government. Generally, the counterinsurgents plan their operations to minimize damage to the economic structure of an area to avoid causing adverse psychological and economic impacts and to support economic development.

4. SOCIAL

a. The social variable describes societies within an operational environment. A society is a population whose members are subject to the same political authority, occupy a common territory, have a common culture, and share a sense of identity. Both insurgents and counterinsurgents need the support of the population to be successful. Most insurgencies attempt to increase friction between different groups in a society and to gain or increase support from any group that shares common elements with the insurgency. These groups may be aligned along racial, ethnic, religious, or social lines. Language similarities or tradition can also be a reason for alignment. Religious influences often play a major role in the sociological factors that affect the insurgent.

b. To be successful against insurgents in a particular area and to avoid alienating the populace, counterinsurgents must understand the local environment. This includes local social issues and national issues that effect the local environment. For instance, Afghanistan units may interact with groups of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Nuristani across their AO.

5. INFORMATION

a. The information variable involves the collection, access, use, manipulation, rapid distribution, and reliance on data, media, and knowledge systems—both civilian and military—by the global and local communities. Insurgents seek to control and manipulate how the local, regional, national, and international community perceives its cause and events within their operational environment. To achieve this, they try to control, manipulate, and distribute information.

b. Understanding the existing communication system is important because it influences local, regional, national, and international audiences. Media coverage, in particular, influences US political decision-making, popular opinion, and the sensitivities of coalition member, while the local teahouse may control the community's opinion and the "word
on the street." Leaders must use information engagements to fully achieve their tactical goals.

c. Insurgents observe the actions of both government and COIN forces. Insurgents often use propaganda to gain credibility and legitimacy with the population, while simultaneously undermining their opponents. Successful insurgents strive to seize the moral high ground on counterinsurgent mistakes, both real and perceived. This includes political, military, economic, social, religious, cultural, or legal errors. They will use all available means, including the media, nongovernmental organizations, and religious and civic leaders, to get their information out to all audiences.

6. INFRASTRUCTURE

The infrastructure variable includes the basic facilities, services, and installations needed for a community or society to function. The state of the infrastructure determines the resources required for reconstruction. Typical key infrastructure includes sewers, water, electrical, academic, trash, medical facilities, safety, and other considerations (also known as SWEAT-MSO). The degradation or destruction of infrastructure will negatively affect both the Host Nation and its population. Thus, the degradation or destruction of infrastructure often helps the insurgency, especially with respect to propaganda and the population's perception of the HN.

7. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical environment variable is often the most noticeable aspect of an operational environment. Terrain affects people, equipment, trafficability, visibility, and the employment of many weapons. The terrain aspects of each area of operations must be evaluated to determine the impact on both insurgent and counterinsurgent forces. For COIN operations, terrain is categorized as either rural or urban. Weather and climate influence insurgents, the population, and counterinsurgents, who analyze the weather to determine its effect on the population's well-being and operations. They pay particular attention to trafficability, visibility, and equipment. Despite weather extremes, most insurgents have an advantage, since they are usually native to the climate.

8. TIME

Time affects everything and influences all decisions. However, the population, the counterinsurgent, and the insurgent often view time differently. Insurgents may design operations with the intent to influence the American political process or elections. In contrast, counterinsurgents must understand that popular support for extended operations may diminish over time.