

How to Train Death Squads and Quash Revolutions from San Salvador to Iraq

Released by Wikileaks: Sensitive 219 page US military counterinsurgency manual.

By [Global Research](#)

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How to covertly train paramilitaries, censor the press, ban unions, employ terrorists, conduct warrantless searches, suspend habeas corpus, conceal breaches of the Geneva Convention and make the population love it

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Wikileaks has released a sensitive [219 page US military counterinsurgency manual](#). The manual, *Foreign Internal Defense Tactics Techniques and Procedures for Special Forces* (1994, 2004), may be critically described as “*what we learned about running death squads and propping up corrupt government in Latin America and how to apply it to other places*”. Its contents are both history defining for Latin America and, given the continued role of US Special Forces in the suppression of insurgencies, including in Iraq and Afghanistan, history making.

The leaked manual, which has been verified with military sources, is the official US Special Forces doctrine for Foreign Internal Defense or FID.

FID operations are designed to prop up “friendly” governments facing popular revolution or guerilla insurgency. FID interventions are often covert or quasi-covert due to the unpopular nature of the governments being supported (“In formulating a realistic policy for the use of advisors, the commander must carefully gauge the psychological climate of the HN [Host Nation] and the United States.”)

The manual directly advocates training paramilitaries, pervasive surveillance, censorship, press control and restrictions on labor unions & political parties. It directly advocates warrantless searches, detainment without charge and (under varying circumstances) the suspension of *habeas corpus*. It directly advocates employing terrorists or prosecuting individuals for terrorism who are not terrorists, running false flag operations and concealing human rights abuses from journalists. And it repeatedly advocates the use of subterfuge and “*psychological operations*” (propaganda) to make these and other “*population & resource control*” measures more palatable.

The content has been particularly informed by the long United States involvement in El Salvador.

In 2005 a number of credible media reports suggested the Pentagon was intensely debating “the Salvador option” for Iraq.[\[1\]](#) According to the New York Times Magazine:

The template for Iraq today is not Vietnam, with which it has often been compared, but El Salvador, where a right-wing government backed by the United States fought a leftist insurgency in a 12-year war beginning in 1980. The cost was high — more than 70,000 people were killed, most of them civilians, in a country with a population of just six million. Most of the killing and torturing was done by the army and the right-wing death squads affiliated with it. According to an Amnesty International report in 2001, violations committed by the army and associated groups included “extrajudicial executions, other unlawful killings, ‘disappearances’ and torture. . . . Whole villages were targeted by the armed forces and their inhabitants massacred.” As part of President Reagan’s policy of supporting anti-Communist forces, hundreds of millions of dollars in United States aid was funneled to the Salvadoran Army, and a team of 55 Special Forces advisers, led for several years by Jim Steele, trained front-line battalions that were accused of significant human rights abuses.

The same article states James Steele and many other former Central American Special Forces “military advisors” have now been appointed at a high level to Iraq.

In 1993 a United Nations truth commission on El Salvador, which examined 22,000 atrocities that occurred during the twelve-year civil war, attributed 85 percent of the abuses to the US-backed El Salvador military and its paramilitary death squads.

It is worth noting what the US Ambassador to El Salvador, Robert E. White (now the president for the Center for International Policy) had to say as early as 1980, in State Department documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act:

The major, immediate threat to the existence of this government is the right-wing violence. In the city of San Salvador, the hired thugs of the extreme right, some of them well-trained Cuban and Nicaraguan terrorists, kill moderate left leaders and blow up government buildings. In the countryside, elements of the security forces torture and kill the campesinos, shoot up their houses and burn their crops. At least two hundred refugees from the countryside arrive daily in the capital city. This campaign of terror is radicalizing the rural areas just as surely as Somoza’s National Guard did in Nicaragua. Unfortunately, the command structure of the army and the security forces either tolerates or encourages this activity. These senior officers believe or pretend to believe that they are eliminating the guerillas.[\[2\]](#)

Selected extracts follow. Note that the manual is 219 pages long and contains substantial material throughout. These extracts should merely be considered representative. **Emphasis** has been added for further selectivity. The full manual can be found at [US Special Forces counterinsurgency manual FM 31-20-3](#).

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[...]

Counterintelligence

[...]

Most of the counterintelligence measures used will be overt in nature and aimed at protecting installations, units, and information and detecting espionage, sabotage, and subversion. **Examples of counterintelligence measures to use are**

- Background investigations and records checks of persons in sensitive positions and persons whose loyalty may be questionable.
- Maintenance of files on organizations, locations, and individuals of counterintelligence interest.
- Internal security inspections of installations and units.
- Control of civilian movement within government-controlled areas.
- Identification systems to minimize the chance of insurgents gaining access to installations or moving freely.
- Unannounced searches and raids on suspected meeting places.
- **Censorship.**

[...]

PSYOP [**Psychological Operations**] are essential to the success of PRC [**Population & Resources Control**]. For maximum effectiveness, a strong psychological operations effort is directed toward the families of the insurgents and their popular support base. **The PSYOP aspect of the PRC program tries to make the imposition of control more palatable** to the people by relating the necessity of controls to their safety and well-being. PSYOP efforts also try to create a favorable national or local government image and counter the effects of the insurgent propaganda effort.

Control Measures

SF [US Special Forces] can advise and assist HN [Host Nation] forces in developing and implementing control measures. Among these measures are the following:

- **Security Forces.** Police and other security forces use PRC [Population & Resources Control] measures to deprive the insurgent of support and to identify and locate members of his infrastructure. Appropriate PSYOP [Psychological Operations] help make these measures more acceptable to the population by explaining their need. The government informs the population that the PRC measures may cause an inconvenience but are necessary due to the actions of the insurgents.
- **Restrictions. Rights on the legality of detention or imprisonment of personnel (for example, habeas corpus) may be temporarily suspended.** This measure must be taken as a last resort, since it may provide the insurgents with an effective propaganda theme. PRC [Population & Resources Control] measures can also include curfews or blackouts, travel restrictions, and restricted residential areas such as protected villages or resettlement areas. Registration and pass systems and control of sensitive items (resources control) and critical supplies such as weapons, food, and fuel are other PRC measures. Checkpoints, searches, roadblocks; **surveillance, censorship, and press control**; and **restriction of activity that applies to selected groups (labor unions, political groups and the like)** are further PRC measures.

[...]

Legal Considerations. All restrictions, controls, and DA measures must be governed by the legality of these methods and their impact on the populace. In countries where government authorities do not have wide latitude in controlling the population, special or emergency legislation must be enacted. **This emergency legislation may include a form of martial law permitting government forces to search without warrant, to detain without bringing formal charges, and to execute other similar actions.**

[...]

Psychological Operations

PSYOP can support the mission by discrediting the insurgent forces to neutral groups, creating dissension among the insurgents themselves, and supporting defector programs. **Divisive programs create dissension, disorganization, low morale, subversion, and defection within the insurgent forces.** Also important are national programs to win insurgents over to the government side with offers of amnesty and rewards. Motives for surrendering can range from personal rivalries and bitterness to disillusionment and discouragement. **Pressure from the security forces has persuasive power.**

[...]

Intelligence personnel must consider the parameters within which a revolutionary movement operates. Frequently, they establish a centralized intelligence processing center to collect and coordinate the amount of information required to make long-range intelligence estimates. Long-range intelligence focuses on the stable factors existing in an insurgency. For example, various demographic factors (ethnic, racial, social, economic, religious, and political characteristics of the area in which the underground movement takes places) are useful in identifying the members of the underground. Information about the

underground organization at national, district, and local level is basic in FID [Foreign Internal Defense] and/or IDAD operations. Collection of specific short-range intelligence about the rapidly changing variables of a local situation is critical. **Intelligence personnel must gather information on members of the underground, their movements, and their methods. Biographies and photos of suspected underground members, detailed information on their homes, families, education, work history, and associates are important features of short-range intelligence.**

Destroying its tactical units is not enough to defeat the enemy. The insurgent's underground cells or infrastructure must be neutralized first because the infrastructure is his main source of tactical intelligence and political control. **Eliminating the infrastructure within an area** achieves two goals: it ensures the government's control of the area, and it cuts off the enemy's main source of intelligence. An intelligence and operations command center (IOCC) is needed at district or province level. This organization becomes the nerve center for operations against the insurgent infrastructure. Information on insurgent infrastructure targets should come from such sources as the national police and other established intelligence nets and agents and individuals (informants).

The highly specialized and sensitive nature of clandestine intelligence collection demands specially selected and highly trained agents. Information from clandestine sources is often highly sensitive and requires tight control to protect the source. However, tactical information upon which a combat response can be taken should be passed to the appropriate tactical level.

The spotting, assessment, and recruitment of an agent is not a haphazard process regardless of the type agent being sought. During the assessment phase, the case officer determines the individual's degree of intelligence, access to target, available or necessary cover, and motivation. He initiates the recruitment and coding action only after he determines the individual has the necessary attributes to fulfill the needs.

All agents are closely observed and those that are not reliable are relieved. A few well-targeted, reliable agents are better and more economical than a large number of poor ones.

A system is needed to evaluate the agents and the information they submit. The maintenance of an agent master dossier (possibly at the SFOD B level) can be useful in evaluating the agent on the value and quality of information he has submitted. The dossier must contain a copy of the agent's source data report and every intelligence report he submitted.

Security forces can induce individuals among the general populace to become informants. **Security forces use various motives (civic-mindedness, patriotism, fear, punishment avoidance, gratitude, revenge or jealousy, financial rewards) as persuasive arguments.** They use the assurance of protection from reprisal as a major inducement. Security forces must maintain the informant's anonymity and must conceal the transfer of information from the source to the security agent. The security agent and the informant may prearrange signals to coincide with everyday behavior.

Surveillance, the covert observation of persons and places, is a principal method of gaining and confirming intelligence information. Surveillance techniques naturally

vary with the requirements of different situations. The basic procedures include mechanical observation (wiretaps or concealed microphones), observation from fixed locations, and physical surveillance of subjects.

Whenever a suspect is apprehended during an operation, a hasty interrogation takes place to gain immediate information that could be of tactical value. The most frequently used methods for gathering information (map studies and aerial observation), however, are normally unsuccessful. Most PWs cannot read a map. When they are taken on a visual reconnaissance flight, it is usually their first flight and they cannot associate an aerial view with what they saw on the ground.

The most successful interrogation method consists of a map study based on terrain information received from the detainee. The interrogator first asks the detainee what the sun's direction was when he left the base camp. From this information, he can determine a general direction. The interrogator then asks the detainee how long it took him to walk to the point where he was captured. Judging the terrain and the detainee's health, the interrogator can determine a general radius in which the base camp can be found (he can use an overlay for this purpose). He then asks the detainee to identify significant terrain features he saw on each day of his journey, (rivers, open areas, hills, rice paddies, swamps). As the detainee speaks and his memory is jogged, the interrogator finds these terrain features on a current map and gradually plots the detainee's route to finally locate the base camp.

If the interrogator is unable to speak the detainee's language, he interrogates through an interpreter who received a briefing beforehand. A recorder may also assist him. If the interrogator is not familiar with the area, personnel who are familiar with the area brief him before the interrogation and then join the interrogation team. The recorder allows the interrogator a more free-flowing interrogation. The recorder also lets a knowledgeable interpreter elaborate on points the detainee has mentioned without the interrogator interrupting the continuity established during a given sequence. The interpreter can also question certain inaccuracies, keeping pressure on the subject. The interpreter and the interrogator have to be well trained to work as a team. The interpreter has to be familiar with the interrogation procedures. His preinterrogation briefings must include information on the detainee's health, the circumstances resulting in his detention, and the specific information required. A successful interrogation is contingent upon continuity and a welltrained interpreter. A tape recorder (or a recorder taking notes) enhances continuity by freeing the interrogator from time-consuming administrative tasks.

[...]

Political Structures. A tightly disciplined party organization, formally structured to parallel the existing government hierarchy, may be found at the center of some insurgent movements. In most instances, this organizational structure will consist of committed organizations at the village, district province, and national levels. Within major divisions and sections of an insurgent military headquarters, totally distinct but parallel command channels exist. There are military chains of command and political channels of control. The party ensures complete domination over the military structure using its own parallel organization. It dominates through a political division in an insurgent military headquarters, a party cell or group in an insurgent military unit, or a political military officer.

[...]

Special Intelligence-Gathering Operations

Alternative intelligence-gathering techniques and sources, such as doppelganger or pseudo operations, can be tried and used when it is hard to obtain information from the civilian populace. These pseudo units are usually made up of ex-guerrilla and/or security force personnel posing as insurgents. They circulate among the civilian populace and, in some cases, infiltrate guerrilla units to gather information on guerrilla movements and its support infrastructure.

Much time and effort must be used to persuade insurgents to switch allegiance and serve with the security forces. **Prospective candidates must be properly screened and then given a choice of serving with the HN [Host Nation] security forces or facing prosecution under HN law for terrorist crimes.**

Government security force units and teams of varying size have been used in infiltration operations against underground and guerrilla forces. They have been especially effective in getting information on underground security and communications systems, the nature and extent of civilian support and underground liaison, underground supply methods, and possible collusion between local government officials and the underground. Before such a unit can be properly trained and disguised, however, much information about the appearance, mannerisms, and security procedures of enemy units must be gathered. Most of this information comes from defectors or reindoctrinated prisoners. Defectors also make excellent instructors and guides for an infiltrating unit. **In using a disguised team, the selected men should be trained, oriented, and disguised to look and act like authentic underground or guerrilla units.** In addition to acquiring valuable information, the infiltrating units can demoralize the insurgents to the extent that they become overly suspicious and distrustful of their own units.

[...]

After establishing the cordon and designating a holding area, the screening point or center is established. All civilians in the cordoned area will then pass through the screening center to be classified.

National police personnel will complete, if census data does not exist in the police files, a basic registration card and photograph all personnel over the age of 15. They print two copies of each photo- one is pasted to the registration card and the other to the village book (for possible use in later operations and to identify ralliers and informants).

The screening element leader ensures the screeners question relatives, friends, neighbors, and other knowledgeable individuals of guerrilla leaders or functionaries operating in the area on their whereabouts, activities, movements, and expected return.

The screening area must include areas where police and military intelligence personnel can privately interview selected individuals. The interrogators try to convince the interviewees that their cooperation will not be detected by the other inhabitants. They also discuss, during the interview, the availability of monetary rewards for certain types of information and equipment.

[...]

Civilian Self-Defense Forces [Paramilitaries, or, especially in an El-Salvador or Colombian

civil war context, right wing “death squads”]

When a village accepts the CSDF program, the insurgents cannot choose to ignore it. To let the village go unpunished will encourage other villages to accept the government’s CSDF program. The insurgents have no choice; they have to attack the CSDF village to provide a lesson to other villages considering CSDF. In a sense, **the psychological effectiveness of the CSDF concept starts by reversing the insurgent strategy of making the government the repressor. It forces the insurgents to cross a critical threshold- that of attacking and killing the very class of people they are supposed to be liberating.**

To be successful, the CSDF program must have popular support from those directly involved or affected by it. **The average peasant is not normally willing to fight to his death for his national government. His national government may have been a succession of corrupt dictators and inefficient bureaucrats. These governments are not the types of institutions that inspire fight-to-the-death emotions in the peasant.** The village or town, however, is a different matter. The average peasant will fight much harder for his home and for his village than he ever would for his national government. The CSDF concept directly involves the peasant in the war and makes it a fight for the family and village instead of a fight for some faraway irrelevant government.

[...]

Members of the CSDF receive no pay for their civil duties. In most instances, however, they derive certain benefits from voluntary service. These benefits can range from priority of hire for CMO projects to a place at the head of ration lines. **In El Salvador, CSDF personnel (they were called civil defense there) were given a U.S.-funded life insurance policy with the wife or next of kin as the beneficiary.** If a CSDF member died in the line of duty, the widow or next of kin was ceremoniously paid by an HN official. The HN administered the program and a U.S. advisor who maintained accountability of the funds verified the payment. **The HN [Host Nation] exercises administrative and visible control.**

Responsiveness and speedy payment are essential in this process since the widow normally does not have a means of support and the psychological effect of the government assisting her in her time of grief impacts on the entire community. These and other benefits offered by or through the HN government are valuable incentives for recruiting and sustaining the CSDF.

[...]

The local CSDF members select their leaders and deputy leaders (CSDF groups and teams) in elections organized by the local authorities. In some cases, the HN [Host Nation] appoints a leader who is a specially selected member of the HN security forces trained to carry out this task. **Such appointments occurred in El Salvador where the armed forces have established a formal school to train CSDF commanders. Extreme care and close supervision are required to avoid abuses by CSDF leaders.**

[...]

The organization of a CSDF can be similar to that of a combat group. This organization is

effective in both rural and urban settings. **For example, a basic group, having a strength of 107 members, is broken down into three 35-man elements plus a headquarters element of 2 personnel. Each 35-man element is further broken down into three 11-man teams and a headquarters element of 2 personnel. Each team consists of a team leader, an assistant team leader, and three 3-man cells. This organization can be modified to accommodate the number of citizens available to serve.**

[...]

Weapons training for the CSDF personnel is critical. Skill at arms decides the outcome of battle and must be stressed. Of equal importance is the maintenance and care of weapons. CSDF members are taught basic rifle marksmanship with special emphasis on firing from fixed positions and during conditions of limited visibility. Also included in the marksmanship training program are target detection and fire discipline.

Training ammunition is usually allocated to the CSDF on the basis of a specified number of rounds for each authorized weapon. A supporting HN government force or an established CSDF logistic source provides the ammunition to support refresher training.

[...]

Acts of misconduct by HN [Host Nation] personnel

All members of training assistance teams must understand their responsibilities concerning acts of misconduct by HN personnel. Team members receive briefings before deployment on what to do if they encounter or observe such acts. Common Article 3 of the four Geneva Conventions lists prohibited acts by parties to the convention. Such acts are-

- Violence to life and person, in particular, murder, mutilation, cruel treatment, and torture.
- Taking of hostages.
- Outrages against personal dignity, in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment.
- Passing out sentences and carrying out executions without previous judgment by a regularly constituted court that affords all the official guarantees that are recognized as indispensable by civilized people.
- The provisions in the above paragraph represent a level of conduct that the United States expects each foreign country to observe.

If team members encounter prohibited acts they can not stop, they will disengage from the activity, leave the area if possible, and report the incidents immediately to the proper in-country U.S. authorities. The country team will identify proper U.S. authorities during the team's initial briefing. **Team members will not discuss such matters with non-U.S. Government authorities such as journalists and civilian contractors.**

[...]

Most insurgents' doctrinal and training documents stress the use of pressure-type mines in the more isolated or less populated areas. They prefer using command-type mines in densely populated areas. These documents stress that when using noncommand-detonated mines, the insurgents use every means to inform the local populace on their location, commensurate with security regulations. In reality, most insurgent groups suffer from various degrees of deficiency in their C2 [Command & Control] systems. Their C2 does not permit them to verify that those elements at the operational level strictly follow directives and orders. In the case of the Frente Farabundo Martí de la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in El Salvador, the individual that emplaces the mine is responsible for its recovery after the engagement. There are problems with this concept. The individual may be killed or the security forces may gain control of the area. Therefore, the recovery of the mine is next to impossible.

[...]

Homemade antipersonnel mines are used extensively in El Salvador, Guatemala and Malaysia. (Eighty percent of all El Salvadoran armed forces casualties in 1986 were due to mines; in 1987, soldiers wounded by mines and booby traps averaged 50 to 60 per month.) The important point to remember is that any homemade mine is the product of the resources available to the insurgent group. Therefore, no two antipersonnel mines may be the same in their configuration and materials. Insurgent groups depend to a great extent on materials discarded or lost by security forces personnel. The insurgents not only use weapons, ammunition, mines, grenades, and demolitions for their original purpose but also in preparing expedient mines and booby traps.

[...]

A series of successful minings carried out by the Viet Cong insurgents on the Cua Viet River, Quang Tri Province, demonstrated their resourcefulness in countering minesweeping tactics. Initially, chain-dragging sweeps took place morning and evening. After several successful mining attacks, it was apparent that they laid the mines after the minesweepers passed. Then, the boats using the river formed into convoys and transited the river with minesweepers 914 meters ahead of the convoy. Nevertheless, boats of the convoy were successfully mined in mid-channel, indicating that the mines were again laid after the minesweeper had passed, possibly by using sampans. Several sampans were observed crossing or otherwise using the channel between the minesweepers and the convoy. The convoys were then organized so that the minesweepers worked immediately ahead of the convoy. One convoy successfully passed. The next convoy had its minesweepers mined and ambushed close to the river banks.

[...]

Military Advisors

[...]

Psychologically pressuring the HN [Host Nation] counterpart may sometimes be successful. Forms of psychological pressure may range from the obvious to the subtle. The advisor never applies direct threats, pressure, or intimidation on his counterpart. Indirect

psychological pressure may be applied by taking an issue up the chain of command to a higher U.S. commander. The U.S. commander can then bring his counterpart to force the subordinate counterpart to comply. Psychological pressure may obtain quick results but may have very negative side effects. The counterpart will feel alienated and possibly hostile if the advisor uses such techniques. Offers of payment in the form of valuables may cause him to become resentful of the obvious control being exerted over him. In short, psychologically pressuring a counterpart is not recommended. Such pressure is used only as a last resort since it may irreparably damage the relationship between the advisor and his counterpart

PSYOP [Psychological Operations] Support for Military Advisors

The introduction of military advisors requires preparing the populace with which the advisors are going to work. Before advisors enter a country, the HN [Host Nation] government carefully explains their introduction and clearly emphasizes the benefits of their presence to the citizens. It must provide a credible justification to minimize the obvious propaganda benefits the insurgents could derive from this action. The country's dissenting elements label our actions, no matter how well-intended, an "imperialistic intervention."

Once advisors are committed, their activities should be exploited. Their successful integration into the HN [Host Nation] society and their respect for local customs and mores, as well as their involvement with CA [Civil Affairs] projects, are constantly brought to light. **In formulating a realistic policy for the use of advisors, the commander must carefully gauge the psychological climate of the HN [Host Nation] and the United States.**

[...]

PRC [Population & Resources Control] Operations.

Advisors assist their counterparts in developing proper control plans and training programs for PRC measures. They also help coordinate plans and requests for materiel and submit recommendations to improve the overall effectiveness of operations. They can be helpful in preparing to initiate control.

- **Select, organize, and train paramilitary and irregular forces.**
- Develop PSYOP [Psychological Operations] activities to support PRC operations.
- Coordinate activities through an area coordination center (if established).
- Establish and refine PRC operations.
- Intensify intelligence activities.
- Establish and refine coordination and communications with other agencies.

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