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## **MARINES REVISING STRATEGY ON LOW-LEVEL 'SMALL WARS'**

**By Dan Freedman**

WASHINGTON -- As U.S.-led coalition forces face the prospect of Iraqi guerilla warfare, the U.S. Marine Corps is revamping its 63-year-old manual for fighting such conflicts.

The 446-page Marine Corps Small Wars Manual first published in 1940 is thick with outdated advice on how to load pack mules and procure horses. By today's standards, its language on how to deal with "natives" (or "people of a low order of education") would fall somewhere between patronizing and outright racist.

But military experts say the instruction book also contains surprisingly useful insights on how U.S. forces should conduct themselves in such conflicts, as well as setting up local security forces, electing a new government and -- perhaps most importantly -- how and when to withdraw.

"It covers the waterfront -- tactics, procedures and strategy," said Noel Williams, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel who is revising the manual at the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, a Marine think tank at the corps' base at Quantico, Va.

"We're not trying to supercede it because it still contains a lot of good lessons learned," he said. "My mission is to bring it up to date."

Williams' 100-page update, which is nearing completion, is especially timely as U.S. forces face the prospect of a shift to guerrilla tactics by Saddam Hussein loyalists. Suicide bombers and hit-and-run attacks of Iraqis in civilian garb already have dogged coalition forces.

"Iraqis already have demonstrated that operating at the guerrilla level is an effective tactic for harassing and disrupting (U.S. forces)," said Keith Bickel, who worked on U.S. involvement in Haiti and Bosnia in the Clinton administration, and authored "Mars Learning," a book on the development of Marine Corps "small war" doctrine.

"That's exactly what the manual talks about," Bickel said.

The Small Wars Manual was the outgrowth of the Marines' participation in the "Banana Wars" -- civil strife in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua from 1912 to 1933. The Marines were sent to those nations to restore order and put down revolutionary movements deemed hostile to U.S. interests.

The era ended when President Franklin D. Roosevelt promulgated his “Good Neighbor Policy,” in which Washington pledged not to intervene militarily in the internal affairs of other Western Hemisphere nations.

Although many of its dictates may seem obvious today, Williams said the manual was ahead of its time in counseling U.S. occupying forces to be sensitive to local customs and culture and to never underestimate the tenacity of guerrilla fighters, whom the manual refers to as “native irregulars.”

Such forces “will have the inherent ability to withstand all the natural obstacles, such as climate and disease, to a greater extent than a white man,” the manual says. These “natural advantages” have the potential to undercut “the advantage of the Marine forces in organization, equipment, intelligence and discipline, if a careless audacity is permitted to warp good judgment.”

Disrespect for the local populace is a non-starter, the manual says. “The more one shows a fraternal spirit, the easier will be the task and the more effective the result (of gaining support of locals),” the manual says. “It is manifestly unjust to judge such people by our standards.”

Williams' update is aimed at taking into account the vast new array of military tactics, weapons and technology developed since 1940.

The Bush administration already has formulated an elaborate plan for governing post-war Iraq and winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people through a massive infusion of food, medicine and other aid to get the battered nation back on its feet.

But much of the success or failure of that effort may ride on the day-to-day dealings between coalition military forces and Iraqi citizens.

In February, the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities issued an interim “quick-look” report on dealing with the civilian population in post-Hussein Iraq.

The first two months of occupation will be “critical because everyone within Iraq and the rest of the world will be watching to see exactly what (U.S. forces) will do and how we will do it,” the report said. “The way our forces interact with the Iraqi people will set the tone for longer-term efforts and garner either Iraqi and international support or condemnation.”

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