



United States Marine Corps

Small Wars Manual



United States Marine Corps

Small Wars Manual

Tactics and Strategies for Engaging in Military Operations

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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SECTION I

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

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1-1. Small wars defined.

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a. The term “Small War” is often a vague name for any one of a great variety of military operations. As applied to the United States, small wars are operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation. As herein used the term is understood in its most comprehensive sense, and all the successive steps taken in the development of a small war and the varying degrees of force applied under various situations are presented.

b. The assistance rendered in the affairs of another state may vary from a peaceful act such as the assignment of an administrative assistant, which is certainly nonmilitary and not placed under the classification of small wars, to the establishment of a complete military government supported

by an active combat force. Between these extremes may be found an infinite number of forms of friendly assistance or intervention which it is almost impossible to classify under a limited number of individual types of operations.

c. Small wars vary in degrees from simple demonstrative operations to military intervention in the fullest sense, short of war. They are not limited in their size, in the extent of their theater of operations nor their cost in property, money, or lives. The essence of a small war is its purpose and the circumstances surrounding its inception and conduct, the character of either one or all of the opposing forces, and the nature of the operations themselves.

d. The ordinary expedition of the Marine Corps which does not involve a major effort in regular warfare against a first-rate power may be termed a small war. It is this type of routine active foreign duty of the Marine Corps in which this manual is primarily interested. Small wars represent the normal and frequent operations of the Marine Corps. During about 85 of the last 100 years, the Marine Corps has been engaged in small wars in different parts of the world. The Marine Corps has landed troops 180 times in 37 countries from 1800 to 1934. Every year during the past 36 years since the Spanish-American War, the Marine Corps has been engaged in active operations in the field. In 1929 the Marine Corps had two-thirds of its personnel employed on expeditionary or other foreign or sea duty outside of the continental limits of the United States.

1-2. Classes of small wars.

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a. Most of the small wars of the United States have resulted from the obligation of the Government under the spirit of the Monroe Doctrine and have been undertaken to suppress lawlessness or insurrection. Punitive expeditions may be resorted to in some instances, but campaigns of conquest are contrary to the policy of the Government of the United States. It is the duty of our statesmen to define a policy relative to international relationships and provide the military and naval establishments with the means to carry it into execution. With this basis, the military and naval authorities may act intelligently in the preparation of their war plans in close cooperation with the statesman. There is mutual dependence and responsibility which calls for the highest qualities of statesmanship and military leadership. The initiative devolves upon the statesmen.

b. The legal and military features of each small war present distinctive characteristics which make the segregation of all of them into fixed classifications an extremely difficult problem. There are so many combinations of conditions that a simple classification of small wars is possible only when one is limited to specific features in his study, i. e., according to their legal aspects, their military or naval features, whether active combat was engaged in or not, and many other considerations.

1-3. Some legal aspects of small wars.

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a. According to international law, as recognized by the leading nations of the world, a nation may protect, or demand protection for, its citizens and their property

wherever situated. The President of the United States as the Chief Executive is, under the Constitution, primarily charged with the conduct of foreign relations, including the protection of the lives and property of United States citizens abroad, save insofar as the Constitution expressly vests a part of these functions in some other branch of the Government. (For example, the participation of the

Senate in the making of treaties.) It has been an unbroken policy of the President of the United States so to interpret their powers, beginning with the time of President Jefferson down to the present with the exception of President Buchanan.

b. The following pertinent extracts from U. S. Navy Regulations are cited:

On occasion where injury to the United States or to citizens thereof is committed or threatened, in violation of the principles of international law or treaty right, the Commander in Chief shall consult with the diplomatic representative or consul of the United States and take such steps as the gravity of the case demands, reporting immediately to the Secretary of the Navy all the facts. The responsibility for any action taken by a naval force, however, rests wholly upon the commanding officer thereof.

The use of force against a foreign and friendly state, or against anyone within the territories thereof, is illegal. The right of self-preservation, however, is a right which belongs to states as well as to individuals, and in the case of states it includes the protection of the state, its honor, and its possessions, and lives and property of its citizens against arbitrary violence, actual or impending, whereby the state

or its citizens may suffer irreparable injury. The conditions calling for the application of the right of self-preservation cannot be defined beforehand, but must be left to the sound judgment of responsible officers, who are to perform their duties in this respect with all possible care and forbearance. In no case shall force be exercised in time of peace otherwise than as an application of the right of self-preservation as above defined. It must be used only as a last resort, and then only to the extent which is absolutely necessary to accomplish the end required. It can never be exercised with a view to inflicting punishment for acts already committed.

Whenever, iii the application of the above-mentioned principles, it shall become necessary to land an armed force in foreign territory on occasion of political disturbance where the local authorities are unable to give adequate protection to life and property, the assent of such authorities, or of some one of them, shall first be obtained, if it can be done without prejudice to the interests involved. Due to the ease with which the Navy Department can be communicated from all parts of the world, no commander in chief, flag officer, or commanding officer shall issue an ultimatum to the representative of any foreign government, or demand the performance of any service from any such representative that must be executed within a limited time, without first communicating with the Navy Department except in extreme cases where such action is necessary to save life. (U. S. Navy Regulations. NR. 722, 723, and 724.)

c. The use of the forces of the United States in foreign countries to protect the lives and property of American

citizens resident in those countries does not necessarily constitute an act of war, and is, therefore, not equivalent to a declaration of war. The President, as chief executive of the nation, charged with the responsibility of the lives and property of United States citizens abroad, has the authority to use the forces of the United States to secure such protection in foreign countries.

d. The history of the United States shows that in spite of the varying trend of the foreign policy of succeeding administrations, this Government has interposed or intervened in the affairs of other states with remarkable regularity, and it may be anticipated that the same general procedure will be followed in the future. It is well that the United States may be prepared for any emergency which may occur whether it is the result of either financial or physical disaster, or social revolution at home or abroad. Insofar as these conditions can be predicted, and as these plans and preparations can be undertaken, the United States should be ready for either of these emergencies with strategical and tactical plans, preliminary preparations, organization, equipment, education, and training.

1-4. Functions of headquarters Marine Corps.

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a. Small wars, generally being the execution of the responsibilities of the President in protecting American interests, life and property abroad, are therefore conducted in a manner different from major warfare. In small wars, diplomacy has not ceased to function and the State Department exercises a constant and controlling influence