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Insights from Past Experience with Human Dynamics in Military Operations

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Appendix B. Insights from Past Experiences with Human Dynamics in Military Operations

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All military operations have a critical human dimension. Though the nature, strength, and focus of human dynamics have varied across time and across conflicts, their presence is undeniable. Human dynamics – as we have conceptualized them here - comprise the actions and interactions of personal, interpersonal, and social/contextual factors and their effects on behavioral outcomes.

Sun Tzu's ancient strategic admonition to "know your enemy" is axiomatic in military history, but historically many military leaders have interpreted this narrowly to mean that they should know (or have good intelligence preparation about) enemy fighting forces. In discussing contemporary military transformations, Steven P. Basilici and Jeremy Simmons have observed that the relevant scope of understanding should—perhaps must—include also cultural characteristics of the adversary:

> Understanding an adversary requires more than intelligence from three-letter agencies and satellite photos; it requires an understanding of their interests, habits, intentions, beliefs, social organizations, and political symbols—in other words, their culture. An American soldier can liken culture to a minefield: dangerous ground that, if not breached, must be navigated with caution, understanding, and respect. Cultural interpretation, competence, and adaptation are prerequisites for achieving a win-win relationship in any military operation. Operational commanders who do not consider the role of culture during mission planning and execution invite unintended and unforeseen consequences, and even mission failure.[1]

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1 Basilici, Steven P. & Simmons, Jeremy (June, 2004). Transformation: a bold case for unconventional warfare. Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California. p. 6

For the military commander, however, understanding and mastering the human dimension of warfare—and Sun Tzu would probably agree—requires not only understanding these things about an "enemy," but also about the entire battlespace.

In his analysis of military leadership in the British Civil Wars, military historian Stanley D.M. Carpenter emphasizes the importance of an operation's "social context" and how this affects, and is affected by, force of human dynamics:

> Human dynamics encompass what Clausewitz called the 'moral forces' and include fear, motivation, passion, the urge to flee, hate, loyalty, and so on. A successful leader, through his inherent traits and behaviors, is able to overcome (or at least moderate) the negative aspects of human dynamics and conversely take advantage of the positive. In this regard, one can if not overcome, at least mitigate what Clausewitz popularized as the 'fog and friction of war'. It allows him to better manage the inherent chaos and uncertainty of combat. The societal context plays a large part in a military leader's success or failure. It often determines the quality of the instrument and certainly influences the depth of such human dynamics as motivation, passion, willingness to sacrifice and so forth. As with the human dynamics, it is how the commander, through his traits and behavior, manages the societal context that will determine his effectiveness.[2]

These pervasive human dynamics can be better understood to shape tactics and strategy. Indeed, the essence of strategy is to develop a plan of action that is likely to achieve a specific objective in light of an opponent's anticipated response. Anticipating responses - of an enemy, population, or social institution - has been a central dilemma of every military leader throughout history.

Some scholars of military strategy and history have suggested that, for the United States, strategy has been a core weakness. Colin Gray suggests that "The United States has a persisting strategy deficit. Americans are very competent at fighting, but they are much less successful in fighting in such a way that they secure the strategic and, hence, political, rewards they seek." It seems that the United States'

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2. Carpenter, S. (2005). Military Leadership in the British Civil Wars, 1642-1651: The Genius of This Age. NY: Routledge. at p. 5

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past experiences with human dynamics in military operation illustrates the maxim that one can "win the battle (perhaps even all the battles) but lose the war."

Ideally, strategic competence evolves with experience. According to Gray, historical examination of past conflicts– of the U.S. and others – can help to redefine and improve the "American Way of Warfare"; but he laments, "unfortunately, the first and truest love of the U.S. defense community is with technology, not with history." Gray's comments about the present parallel Ralph Peters' future-oriented analysis that "We need to struggle against our American tendency to focus on hardware and bean counting to attack the more difficult and subtle problems posed by human behavior and regional history."

History may lend its wisdom to understanding the role of human dynamics in military operations, but it certainly does not offer a menu of easy answers. Naval historian Geoffrey Till points out, however, that "The chief utility of history for the analysis of present and future lies in its ability, not to point out lessons, but to isolate things that need thinking about. … History provides insights and questions, not answers.[3]" In that spirit, the following insights from past experience are offered for consideration:

1. Cultural Awareness Facilitates Strategic and Tactical Success

Examples of human dynamics affecting military operations are abundant – though largely anecdotal- and range from the micro to macro levels.

At the broadest, strategic level, Robert Jervis[4] suggest that lack of cultural awareness is a major source of misperceptions between nation/states (particularly as noted in the 1970s, between the United

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3. Till, Geoffrey. Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age, London: Macmillan, 1982, pp. 224-225.
4. Jervis, Robert. "Hypotheses on Misperception," World Politics, Vol. 20, No. 3 (April 1968), p 454-479. Jervis, Robert. Perception and Misperception in International Politics (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976).

States and the Soviet Union), and that these misperceived intentions can have far-reaching consequences. He rejects the more politically-oriented spiral and deterrence theories as explanations for Cold War escalations, and instead focuses on "psychological dynamics" as a source of cognitive bias that, unchecked, will create and sustain misperceptions. Those misperceptions form the basis for a state's decisions and subsequent actions.

Cooper and Telfer have analyzed the cultural impediments to effective relations and communication between the U.S. and Iran. They claim that these impediments create an environment that is not conducive to resolving its mutual, critical problems. They believe "the tragedy is that relations will deteriorate because the two nations, through a marked trend of political and strategic misperceptions, will be operating with false models of the political systems and organization of the other, leading to a state of confusion exacerbated by mutual incomprehension of each other's culture." [5]

At the ground level, among the most common examples for the U.S. military are foibles and missteps arising from a lack of cultural awareness. Arcuri (2007) provides a concise description of the problem and the call for a solution:

> Few members of the Armed Forces are familiar with cultural traditions of the countries in which they operate. Yet violation of local norms and beliefs can turn a welcoming population into a hostile mob. Iraqis arrested by U.S. troops have had their heads forced to the ground -- a position forbidden by Islam except during prayers. This action offends detainees as well as bystanders. In Bosnia, American soldiers angered Serbs by greeting them with the two-fingered peace sign, a gesture commonly used by their Croat enemies. And the circled-finger "A–OK" signal was a gross insult to Somalis. The military has enough to worry about without alienating the local population. It is clear that the Armed Forces lack sophisticated knowledge of foreign countries. That does not dishonor their performance; cultural awareness has not been a mission-essential task—but it should be.

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5. Cooper, A. & Telfer, L. (Summer 2006). Misperceptions and Impediments in the US-Iran Relationship. 49th Parallel: An Interdisciplinary Journal of North American Studies, Conference Special Edition. P. 27

These cultural violations seem to have the most significant impact in operations that require engagement with a host population and that support stability or humanitarian assistance activity. One insight from these experiences seems to be the need to define the "battlespace," terrain, or area of operation, not just by physical or geographic boundaries, but also by culture. This means that service members must not only train to "know the enemy," but to "know the area." Most of Arcuri's examples are not mistakes in anticipating an enemy maneuver, they are social/cultural mistakes that carried the potential not only to anger and embolden the adversary, but also to cultivate broad hostility among the population toward U.S. presence and personnel. That hostility could then complicate current mission objectives and future operational planning.

The examples do illustrate, however, that the effects of cultural awareness (or lack thereof) can be expected to influence mission effectiveness even at the most minute and incidental tactical level. This does not mean that each soldier, sailor, airman, and marine must be an expert in the area of operation, but basic cultural awareness should be a fundamental skill for all troops operating in a foreign environment.

2. It is Necessary to Understand and Accept that Military Operations Have Political Objectives and Effects

War and politics are inextricably linked. This principle is found in most theories of warfare and evidence of its truth has been found in virtually every known military conflict. Clausewitz – the deeply influential Prussian military theorist – said starkly that "war is a continuation of politics with other means." Chairman Mao Tse-Tung commented similarly on the relationship, claiming: "Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed."

While the confluence of politics and war may seem an obvious point, it is not one that many American policy-makers seem ready to accept. Jeffrey Record observes that "Permeating the entire fabric of America's strategic culture and approach to war, especially the aversion to fighting for limited political purposes, is an unwillingness to accept

war as a continuation of politics." [6] Record further opines that "This insistence on politically immaculate military operations underpins the conventional wisdom in the United States regarding the failed prosecution of the Vietnam War." When nations oppose nations with conventional force, the power of political will and popular support favor the U.S., but when the America becomes involved in "small wars," foreign insurgencies, and humanitarian intervention, - what many see as the future of warfare - the "political" objectives become less palatable, though operationally essential.

Historically, when a third-party nation has stepped in to help suppress an insurgency, the "successful" cases nearly always involve important political concessions (to the insurgents' interest) by the indigenous government. Concessions were designed specifically to address insurgent grievances and offered even when the counterinsurgency was not favoring the indigenous government. In the Mau Mau Uprising (1952-1960), for example, concessions were made for land reform and voting rights. During The Malayan Emergency (1948-60) the government critically conceded freedom from British rule, voting rights, and actions to relieve the effects of long-term bigotry on the ethnic Chinese population.

Making concessions can be difficult to "sell" politically to the people of an intervening government. These concessions, however, were not intended as a form of surrender or a sign of weakness, but rather as an essential way to dry up popular support for the insurgents. They were apparently effective for that purpose. Because political factors are so important for the success of military operations, the *population* not just the enemy becomes a vital concern.

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6. Record, Jeffrey. September 1, 2006. "The American Way of War: Cultural Barriers to Successful Counterinsurgency," Cato Institute Paper, no. 577; 1-20. p. 5

3. Populations Matter As Much As (Sometimes More Than) Fighting Forces in Determining Military Success

Historically, during conventional wars there has been a dominant—in some cases, nearly exclusive—focus on understanding and countering enemy military forces. What has been lost is the critical importance of understanding and influencing the population. As the U.S. has become increasingly involved in "small wars" and various forms of irregular warfare around the globe, the essential role of a population in military operations—though known for centuries—has again come more sharply into view.

In the early 1800s, Napoleon Bonaparte, an imposing conventional warrior and military strategist, failed to understand—or even seek to understand—the culture of the battlespace as he preemptively invaded Spain and Portugal. With ease, his occupying military forces strode into the region and dethroned the royal family. His victory seemed effortless and complete.

Napoleon anticipated and conquered the formal state governing structure, but he failed to learn in advance how little control that authority held over large segments of its populace. Residents of the Navarre region, in particular, had become heavily dependent economically on illicit foreign trade and had a great deal to lose from the prospect of a new foreign governance. They also were more deeply bound to the influences of the Catholic Church, than Napoleon realized. According to Chandler, the confluence of forces cultivated within the population—foreseeable, but unforeseen—"popular patriotism, religious fanaticism, and an almost hysterical hatred for the French[7]." That dynamic transformed Napoleon's graceful occupation into a protracted eight-year, resource-consuming struggle.

According to Smith: "The strategic gap that developed between Napoleon's rapid conventional military victory and the immediate

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7. Chandler, David G. (1966). The Campaigns of Napoleon. New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 659.

requirement to influence positively the population as part of post-hostilities stabilization operations highlights the limits of conventional military power in post-conflict operations and the perils of forgetting "the people" in the initial and ongoing strategic calculus. Unfortunately, nations and militaries around the globe have been forced to relearn that lesson many times in the ensuing 200 years."[8]

Accounting, as Smith says, for "the people" in initial and ongoing strategic planning requires understanding and anticipating their role both in resistance and in resolution. One of the longstanding maxims of counterinsurgency strategy is to separate the population from the insurgents. This is done to increase physical and informational control; to stem the tide of insurgent growth and recruitment by denying them access; to permit kinetic action against insurgents that occurs "out of view" of the populace and reduces risk of collateral injuries; and to increase the population's sense of security, at least within their "safe zones." Andrew F. Krepinevich suggests that neglecting this separation principle was a major downfall in the United States' military action in Vietnam. He concludes that superior U.S. firepower facilitated massive Viet Cong attrition, but "it never denied the enemy his source of strength - access to the people."[9]

When insurgents have easy access to, and are hopelessly co-mingled with, the population, it is easier for them to control the "narrative" of what is happening. When the insurgent view becomes ground truth for the population, the resistance not only gains new fighters, but just as importantly, it gains a broader base of sympathizers. A population of sympathizers is perhaps the most powerful force multiplier for insurgents.

During World War II, as part of the People's Liberation War of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslavian Partisans enjoyed tremendous growth and success (culminating in over three quarters of a million fighting

8. Smith, George. 2004. Avoiding a Napoleonic Ulcer: Bridging the Gap of Cultural Intelligence. CJCS Strategy Essay Competition. Washington D.C: National Defense University Press. P. 22
9. Krepinevich, Andrew (1986). The Army and Vietnam. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press. P. 197.

troops)—according to an embedded former OSS officer Franklin Lindsay—largely as a function of a friendly population. Franklin says of the populace that "Their support was crucial to success. They provided the intelligence screens that surrounded and protected the armed Partisans, as well as the food and clothing, the shelter and the recruits, without which the Partisans could not survive[10]." T.E Lawrence similarly noted that "Rebellions can be made by two percent active in a striking force, and 98 percent passively sympathetic."[11]

4. Continuity of Knowledge on Human Dynamics is Essential, Particularly in Joint/Coalition and Protracted Operations.

During the U.S. "RESTORE HOPE" operations in Somalia (UN Operation in Somalia, UNOSUM I), the first Joint Force Commander recognized the grave operational implications of the region's "clan warfare" culture and tasked the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force to monitor not only adversary intent, but also the "disposition" of the population. A Joint Universal "lessons learned" analysis says of the Somalis that "their culture stresses the idea of 'me and my clan against all outsiders,' with alliances between clans being only temporary conveniences. Guns and aggressiveness, including the willingness to accept casualties, are intrinsic parts of this culture, with women and children considered part of the clan's order of battle."[12]

These issues proved to be vital for operational planning. Unfortunately, the cultural lessons devolved over time and across changes in personnel to the extent that "during UNOSOM II, US leaders failed to take certain factors of Somali culture into consideration, contributing to the operation's failure."[13] As Kent

10. Lindsay, Franklin (1993). *Beacons in the Night: With the OSS and Tito's Partisan's in Wartime Yugoslavia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. p. 198.
11. Quoted in Laqueur, W. (Ed.). (2004). *Voices of terror: Manifestos, writings and manuals of Al Qaeda, Hamas, and other terrorists from around the world and throughout the ages*. New York: Reed Press.
12. Allard, Kenneth (1995). *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned*. Washington DC: National Defense University Press. p. 13.
13. U.S. Department of Defense, JP 3-06, Doctrine for Joint Urban Operations (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 16 September 2002), III-10.

Strader observes: "Somewhere in the transfer of authority (TOA) between UNOSUM I and II knowledge was lost or ignored."[14]

The "lessons learned" analysis concludes that "The Somalia experience underlines the importance of knowing the country, the culture, the ground, and the language as a pre-condition for military operations[15]," but an embedded insight is that continuity of knowledge is important. Senior command certainly must understand the cultural and other human dynamics of the battlespace, but the responsibility for this knowledge cannot be relegated solely to the operational Commander[16]. As experiences in Iraq show, even brigade-level leaders must ensure that human dynamics intelligence has continuity through the transfer of authority. Brigades and their units frequently experience deployment rotations or geographic displacements. What is learned about the battlespace in one area or on one deployment may not apply when the same unit moves just thirty miles away. It is critical that area-specific knowledge not only be collected and used, but also shared and preserved through changes in personnel.

5. Human Dynamics Are Fluid and Often Variable Across and Within Conflicts or Operations

Past experiences suggest that human dynamics largely shape the disposition of a population and the character of conflict. In his book, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, John Lynn argues that all warfare is, and has been, culture-specific. He suggests that since Ancient Greek times, dynamics of human values, expectations and preconceptions–cultural (a term he uses to refer to a complex that is somewhat more idiosyncratic than nomothetic) dynamics in particular – have been the

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14. Strader, O. Kent (2006). Culture: The New Key Terrain - Integrating Cultural Competence into JIPB. School of Advanced Military Studies , United States Army Command and General Staff College , Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. p. 27
15. Ibid, p. 95
16. Gordon, James A. (2004). *Cultural Assessments and Campaign Planning: A Monograph*. School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

principal driver of whether and how nations have engaged in armed conflict.[17] While Lynn's argument is somewhat polemic, he provides extensive examples to support his view from conflicts and eras throughout military history. He concludes that human dynamics influences have been not only robust in warfare, but that the dynamics and their effects varied with the culture of the conflict's participants.

In his landmark analysis of the Vietnam War, Douglas Pike reaches a similar conclusion: that unconventional warfare does not lend itself to a grand theory. Each conflict or operation possesses a unique set of causes and sustaining or driving factors. One size – or one understanding - does not fit all. Pike concludes that "Unconventional wars grow because of the peculiar political soil of individual cultures[18]." If this is true, then according to Kent Strader, a key to success for the operational commander will be "to unravel the cause of conflict and attack its origins with non-kinetic tools and to a lesser degree its soldiers.[19]

Past military experience does not indicate that *no* human dynamics are persistent or enduring, only that many are unique and/or variable both across and even within a given operation. It is reasonable to infer that certain core dynamics are recurrent across most conflicts. However, even the core dynamics, which are relatively stable, are transformative. That is, the core dynamic may persist, but its manifestations may be different depending on contextual influences, and they change over the developmental course of the operation.

One of the predominant core dynamics influencing a population is its perceived safety and security. Perhaps this principle is not surprising. It has been a cornerstone of behavioral theories of motivation for more than half a century. Nearly every college student has been exposed to

17. Lynn, John (2003). Battle: A History of Combat and Culture from Ancient Greece to Modern America. New York: Westview Press.
18. Pike, Douglas (1986). PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam, Novato, CA: Presidio Press. p. 54.
19. Strader, O. Kent (2006). Culture: The New Key Terrain - Integrating Cultural Competence into JIPB. School of Advanced Military Studies , United States Army Command and General Staff College , Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. p. 25

Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs," in which safety/security is just one motivational notch above a human's physiological needs for food, sleep, etc[20]. In nearly all known military operations, securing the population's sense of safety has been a necessary (though not always sufficient) condition for any successful campaign to win its "hearts and minds." People feel safer living in an environment that they perceive as orderly, predictable, and fair. When an occupying military can provide that environment for the population, the loyalty of the people often follows. Without it, however, it has faltered.

Though a population's sense of security is a robust contributor to operational success, its manifestations are transformative, and therefore, fluid. In past military conflicts, the nature and object of safety concerns has evolved over time. A population may begin by fearing threats from a repressive government, but over time becomes more concerned about protection against accidental and intentional harm from insurgents who are resisting an occupying force. Likewise, in human terrain relief operations and stability operations, safety needs may shift from an initial focus on protection against tribal or sectarian violence to protection against disease and health concerns—or vice versa. The same "dynamic" or need is manifested in a different form and may require a different military response. That even the "stable" dynamics are fluid means—consistent with the "continuity" insight—that monitoring the disposition of the population must be ongoing and continuous.

Finally, it is striking how the influence of human dynamics in military operations can vary widely even *within* a given conflict or *within* the battlespace. This insight has been dramatically evident throughout recent U.S. experiences in Iraq. David Kilcullen – the U.S.'s senior counterinsurgency strategy advisor – based on personal experiences and observation notes that "Knowledge of Iraq is very time-specific and location-specific….Hence, observations from one time/place may or may not be applicable elsewhere, even in the same campaign in the same year: we must first understand the essentials of the environment,

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20. Maslow, A.H. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation, *Psychological Review* 50, 370-96.

then determine whether analogous situations exist, before attempting to apply "lessons."[21]

This has serious implications for the depth and frequency of intelligence assessments, within-theatre information sharing, and the aforementioned continuity and transfer of knowledge.

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21. Kilcullen, David (2007). *Counterinsurgency in Iraq: Theory and Practice*, 2007.