

Irregular Warfare Leadership in the 21st Century

Winning *Damaged* Hearts and Minds: An Irregular Warfare Concept

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U.S. Army Photo

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In ungoverned and under-governed environments, the local populace is usually the center of gravity. Other centers of gravity within the population may include the will of the people that takes form as support for the governing authority or other political, economic and ideological forces. To win their hearts and minds and wean them off our adversaries' control requires effective communication using the local "information systems." Effective communication at the local level earns trust, which, in turn, establishes loyalty to our cause, commitment, and eventually buy-in to the regime we support. It also requires a focus on the local economic ecosystem that delves down to the community level, improves basic prosperity, honors local culture, and reinforces what's important to the people. It requires a focus on the local political system that respects local codes, social networks, and empowers local leaders that eventually will connect to the state, region, and national political system.

Our goal must be to establish capabilities that support the creation of enduring, safe, and secure environments with local participation and responsibility. We want to develop Community Internal Defense (CID) participation with local, state, and foreign governmental and civilian agencies with, and for, the people with the purpose of protecting its citizens. This community provides a safe and secure environment, economic and social well-being, effective governance, human rights, and rule of law with a capacity to counter lawlessness. This is similar to the end-state of America's historic "Wild West" communities.

To properly develop CID in ungoverned and under-governed environments and to focus on critical factors of the local social, economic, information, and political systems, our forces must develop tacit knowledge and use "below the waterline" intelligence (gathered within often hard to penetrate or denied spaces of cultural, sociological, relationship-driven, and historically linked associations). U.S. forces must understand that this is a long-haul commitment and that we must use all elements of national and foreign power to include not only military and other governmental agencies, but the for-profit and non-profit capabilities of the private sector as well. The term Whole of Nation (WON) approach is used for this purpose.

The establishment of CIDs supports Foreign Internal Defense (FID) doctrine and the Counterinsurgency (COIN) "oil-spot" principle of clearing, holding, and establishing secure base areas, normally in population centers, that gradually expand outward from the bases in a fashion similar to oil spreading across water. Once ungoverned and under-governed areas are cleared by coalition forces in selected "oil spot" areas focus should shift to winning the hearts and

minds of the local populace. The locals hold cleared areas, the public and private teams build or rebuild the areas, and foreign support forces focus on outside interference. In most cases, however, the people themselves need to be rebuilt first for CID to be effective.

Winning Hearts and Minds

The mottos of “Winning Hearts and Minds” and “Free the Oppressed” are more than catchy mantras, they are the embodied missions and core promises from US Army Special Operation Forces (SOF) to help people in need throughout this world. The “hearts and minds” missions and strategic objectives are also integral to tactically defeating enemies that are staging a parallel social offensive to support their own agenda—often through insurgency. By addressing the political and social grievances in a way that demobilizes the will of the people to support the ideology of a hostile movement, current military unconventional warfare teachings suggest that a conflict’s momentum can be decreased and hopefully contained and defused. The COIN doctrine similarly addresses aspects of neutralizing the message of the insurgents and disrupting their recruiting systems to secure the population, but how can the oppressed be freed or won when their hearts and minds are damaged or so fraught with fear and desensitization that typical civil, stability and psychological initiatives are rendered virtually useless? The “oil spot” then turns inward and evaporates as opposed to expanding.

Unfortunately, many historic guidelines of guerrilla target selection are not guidelines of today’s adversary. Acts to increase prestige with civilians and precautions to assure civilians are not subjected to reprisals. Therefore the response to current adversary tactics and strategy lies in part with enhancing our Irregular Warfare “hearts and minds” campaigns and Range of Military Operations (ROMO) with improved situational understanding and Cross Cultural Leadership skills as the initial requirements of CID. These enhancements will enforce better contextual planning according to each unique environmental priority and should be driven by enhanced area intelligence assessment support—ones that are much deeper and operationally specific than they are currently—to ensure better situational awareness. Social-cultural “hearts and minds” destitution can only be understood and aided through the perspective of the full environmental oppression knowledge, or more simply, one can never know what lengths of support are required for a community or individual until the depth and source of their fear and needs are fully realized. At this point, cross cultural leadership skills can help rebuild a community that has been emotionally destroyed and empower them with the necessary psychological assistance to minimize future threats.

The Tactics of Strategic Terror

Many conflicts today are hybrids of terrorism and insurgencies that blend brutal acts of violence against civilian and non-military targets with little regard for past rule of war conventions that many guerrillas and insurgents tended to acknowledge in the past. Women and children are increasingly the targets and comprise the bulk of contemporary armed conflict victims. Their traumatic pain is leveraged to destabilize populations and destroy cohesive will and bonds within the society. Whereas the majority of historical guerrilla warfare objectives have largely focused on targeting a state's defense, economic centers of gravity, state-sponsored authority mechanisms and political authority, today many terror-blended conflicts now target the civilian base to raise the tactical intensity of war to a more strategic transnational stage to affect a wider base of political actions.

Groups like the Somali extremist group Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Hizbul Mujaideed, and Bangladesh's Harkat-ul-Jiad-al-Islami, to name only a handful, are known to attack aid workers, threaten peacekeepers, bomb civilian population centers, and are often linked to tribal warlords, transnational business cartels, local political insurgents, regional illicit goods smugglers and other "terror" groups. These groups are much less concerned with the classic strategies of mass mobilization and political aspects of guerrilla warfare, and find it easier to terrorize and intimidate the population to change politics through fear as opposed to winning civil support for their movement. The adversary groups' support ends up being based on a much wider ideological belief system—Islamic Extremism—which does not require popular support when imposed through violence and show of force that gains a stronger movement enabler by like-minded individuals to obtain global financing, personnel allocation (safe haven and foreign fighters) and international attention. The Pakistani Taliban in the Swat Valley is a perfect example of this approach where school destruction, public executions, and acts of terror against the local population has been the preferred mechanism used by the extremists to control the valley while also tapping into a larger Islamic movement.

Another tactic that is widely used and is quite possibly one of the more destructive acts is rape. In war, rape assaults the individual woman, her family, and the community. Historical and anthropological evidence of rape in the context of war dates back to ancient practices particularly in conflicts defined by racial, tribal, religious and other divisions. Military forces often use rape to systematically force families to flee their villages by humiliating the family unit, instilling fear to control them and subsequently destroying the community social fabric, often contributing to the goal of ethnic cleansing. Public rapes in Bosnia, Sudan, and Rwanda, have been used to instigate the expulsion of entire communities that were tied to forced impregnation, intentional disease

transmission and genital mutilation. In Pakistan, Afghanistan and parts of Africa, political rape has evolved to destroy the honor of political or power rival foes leaving the target and their families with feelings of isolation, guilt, helplessness, depression, anxiety and embarrassment. Many US soldiers and aid workers come into post-rape environments and gain a sense of the dark emotions and fear without being able to really identify the root spiritual burden that has engulfed the hearts and minds of entire villages leading to distrust and personal apathy.

Situations surrounding rape are worsened with particular religious and cultural attitudes around rape that are typically found in the areas that most rape infractions are occurring. Married women can be disowned by their husbands and ostracized by their community, unmarried women may never marry due to the attitudes that they are “spoiled,” and a child born as a result of rape is often considered a child of the enemy, and later abandoned if not killed outright. As a result of the conflict in Afghanistan, those women who were raped and brutalized resulted in many honor killings. In Afghani raids where men and women were to be killed, some young virgin girls were raped before killing based on the belief that virgins should not be executed. Women or young girls resisting rape are reportedly beaten, shot, stabbed, killed, and/or tortured in many conflicts throughout the world and history. Other times, the female’s arms and legs may be broken to prevent escape while some young girls are abducted to be later used for means of sexual pleasure, slavery, and even taken and/or sold as child brides.

The toll that this takes on a community consists of extreme emotional, psychological, and physical symptoms that relate to long-term, complex and severe consequences, and interpersonal changes like distrust, anger, isolation and psychiatric disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Children are particularly vulnerable to long-lasting mental and emotional effects and require special care and counseling that is not typically available. The excessive amounts of fear cannot only transform a person temporarily; it can also modify behavior permanently within the brain’s structure to entire communities. The high levels of aggression-related hormonal changes in children who witness the violence, war-related horrors, and family loss, as well as face constant danger or threats enhances their own development along similar paths of fighting, aggression, and dehumanizing the enemy.

So, while civil interventions by US SOF, aid or relief groups, and policy may include protection; water and sanitation; food security and nutrition; shelter and site planning; health and community services; education; etc., psycho-social understanding tied to ethnic, tribal, clan, and family values should be a priority in order for other interventions to be maximized in effectiveness. After all, while there may not be a single agreed upon terrorist personality or profile, most research suggests inherent themes of injustice, abuse, and humiliation as traits

that are good predictors of future violent and adversarial behavior. This would suggest that those affected by terror can easily gravitate to similar tendencies as well as issues with trust and compliance to those trying to help, despite the CID COIN assistance being provided. Those surviving individuals who would typically be viewed as leaders in a community are equally as damaged and will likely not retain the necessary emotions to ethically support their people.

Treating Hearts and Minds

The reality of human suffering has a certain feel, a different smell which cannot be adequately explained in words or conveyed in pictures. The raw pain – physical, emotional and spiritual – of another human being in close proximity calls out for assuagement to that secret place of compassion hidden in all of us. To really win hearts and minds and improve a community's situation, the cross-cultural leader must be able to accept the responsibilities inherent in responding to such damaged cultures engaged in complex cycles of violence. As a first step in the negotiation of cultural and political violence, the SOF soldier must understand the psychological cultural identities and the damage sustained to the local socio-cultural norms within the area of operation. This presents a unique opportunity for SOF through cross cultural leadership skills to help a community rebuild to a more sustainable condition, in accordance with their social-cultural views. Most Western aid and psychological assistance starts with emphasizing individualism, self-reliance, and self-initiated actions to solve problems and cope with adversity. This seriously contrasts with the reality of many communities that are under current siege. Even imposing Western trauma guidelines may exacerbate the situation of refugees and victims thereby undervaluing their own local beliefs and connections to their local social and community support means.

One of the best ways to obtain and apply this understanding is through deeper and wider pre-plan area assessments along with an awakening of the interconnectedness of the leader (commander) to the people they would serve. Off the shelf area studies can provide some answers to intelligence requirements, but appropriate Irregular Warfare-based programs and pre-mission planning must be more focused on contextually operationalized historical and social cultural aspects that dictate the success of an operation and the appreciation of the plight. Requirements are also the cornerstone as to whether particular missions will have enduring effects or whether they will be short-term solutions only to fall by the wayside despite risks to individuals and the expense of resources.

In many of the countries where SOF currently operates, there is a complete breakdown of social equity, justice, and systems to identify, build and provide ethical and moral leadership. The required leadership principals exist in a specific context; that of social-cultural leadership in a time where few political

structures can claim cultural homogeneity. In countries such as Sudan and Somalia, two of the least governed areas of the world today, people are no longer able to feel the grief or suffering of mind over the plight of their loved ones. Generations of children are being raised in environments of sheer brutality where the grief of others and compassion is beyond their emotional capabilities. They will never grow to lead communities or even their own household with ethical balance and human compassion. Instead of ethical leadership, they will likely be part of the warlord mentality that continues to arise where individuals are taught to do unto others before they could do unto them. Such warlords are not leaders and they do not feel the ethical pull to motivate them into accepting responsibility for the physical, mental and emotional condition of their fellow humans. Even in the face of collaboration or resistance to Islamic Extremists such leaders will often only think of personal benefit and force others to submit to their will. Communities under this rule continue to live under inhumane social and emotional conditions.

SOF soldiers who have studied and practiced cross cultural leadership in complex war zones have codified the philosophy of leadership from amorphous thoughts and feelings to demonstrating leadership principals that can be imparted on war-torn communities. These principals must continue to be understood and embraced by military leadership and applied to current Irregular Warfare activities and training both in the United States and abroad in conflict zones around the world. In his book, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (2006), Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, writes:

“...when we enhance our sensitivity toward other’s suffering through deliberately opening ourselves up to it, it is believed that we can gradually extend out compassion to the point where the individual feels so moved by even the subtlest suffering of others that they come to have an overwhelming sense of responsibility toward those others.”

When our missions are geared towards improving hearts and minds of people and building their psychological well being, we can then add on other programs and missions that correlate to military CID strategy and tactics. The alternative is that short-term efforts are not likely to produce the intended results, and once our forces leave a particular area, there is no effective leadership to support the community needs. The hearts and minds battle will again be lost.

Authors

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