

Improving Intelligence Efforts in COIN: Seizing the Cultural Initiative

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~~It is readily acknowledged that~~ The United States Army is a formidable conventional fighting force second to none, and that the most significant threat posed to us by today's enemy comes in the form of asymmetric warfare. ~~However,~~ The purpose of this article is to establish the following points:

- Modern asymmetric warfare (in the form of fourth generation warfare or 4GW) is characterized by globalization
- Globalization is conducive to insurgencies, and
- Culture is the center of gravity in counter insurgency (COIN) operations

Additionally, this article will examine current cultural endeavors pursued by the Army, and discuss why further cultural immersion is necessary and vital to success. The end-state of this ~~article-essay will~~ is to promote the discussion of a supplemental Iraqi or Afghan cultural immersion or reverse-embedding program.

History of generational warfare. While the first three generations of warfare are generally accepted in the community of military strategy and theory, the concept of 4GW is neither well defined, nor universally accepted. The first three generations of warfare span from as early as the 16th century to the mid 20th century and are characterized by mass, firepower and maneuver respectively. For an ~~more~~-in-depth review of the first three generations, readers are referred to an article published in the October-December 2004 issue of *MIPB* by Chief Warrant Officer Three (R) Del Stewart and the original article found on pages 22-26 of the October 1989 issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette*. Despite the misnomer of "generational" warfare, which suggests a linearity of sorts, it is important to realize that generations of warfare are not mutually exclusive, and subsequent generations never completely replace previous ones. However, the commonality linking each generation ~~is that each successive form of~~ is warfare arose from the introduction of a new technology, and subsequently, new tactics to implement them on the battlefield. In this sense, 4GW is no different; however unlike its predecessors, the technology introduced in 4GW is not something maneuver elements have traditionally used to physically destroy the enemy. Instead, it comes in the form of information technology and mass media; used to subvert, undermine and defeat the enemy. For this reason, intelligence has become the main effort in today's fight, as seen in today's reliance on human intelligence (HUMINT), and the Army-wide introduction to Every ~~Soldier~~Soldier a Sensor (ES2) training.

4GW, Globalization and Culture. In a recent publication by the Strategic Studies Institute, titled *Rethinking Insurgency*, Dr. Steven Metz, Chairman of Regional Strategy and Planning, provides further insight into how the globalization caused by the development of information technology defines 4GW and makes it conducive to insurgencies:

"Many [national borders] do not reflect political, economic, or social distinctions on the ground. Artificial and increasingly fragile states are pummeled by globalization, interconnectedness, and the profusion of information. Globalization and information profusion make it difficult for states to manage the distribution of goods and power within their borders and expectations."¹

These effects described here empower non-superpower nations by allowing them to better exploit existing asymmetries between themselves and superpowers. For example, wealthy nations with well-funded research and development programs may retain a technological advantage by

¹ Steven Metz, *Rethinking Insurgency* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, 2007), 12.

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developing the latest cutting edge technologies, ~~but~~ however, this advantage is frequently marginalized by the world-wide accessibility to similar technologies available on the black market. Yet, technology and information are not the only aspects of civilization that have been impacted by this globalization—and they are certainly not the only asymmetries the enemy leverages against us. Anthropologist and UCLA Professor Nicholas Gessler writes:

“...members of a culture share common mindsets based upon living in common social, behavioral and physical environments...[They] regard themselves as the standard for what it means to be a “person”... In the past, when cultures were isolated from one another...one rarely dealt with persons of a different culture. In today's society...cross-cultural encounters are increasingly frequent, [and] we can no longer afford the luxury of this economy of thought.”²

While culture is a less tangible asymmetry than technology, it is no less exploitable on the battlefield today. In fact, military strategist David Kilcullen, in his presentation, titled “Counterinsurgency in Iraq: Theory and Practice,” described two marked advantages of the enemy in today’s environment to be: “cultural understanding of the target population, and longevity.”³ To date, it has been well established that COIN is a population-centric mission, with a solution that is “20 per cent military and 80 per cent political.”⁴ However, to best understand the people, it is necessary to first understand the very thing that defines who they are, how they think and how they act: their culture. Failure to do so has strategic implications that later turns into lessons learned—consider, for example, the use of female coalition soldiers in mosques, and the management of detainees. For these reasons, culture should be regarded as the center of gravity in COIN operations. Although a culture gap will always exist between Americans and Iraqis, this is one asymmetry the Army cannot afford to be deficient in during a COIN campaign. Just as the enemy minimizes the disparity between U.S. technological advantages through the global black market, the Army should continue to minimize the disparity between the enemy’s cultural advantages by augmenting a more comprehensive cultural immersion program.

Culture in Military Operations. Both historical and contemporary military campaigns have shown the strategic implications of cultural awareness in foreign affairs and military operations. In 1941, to stop an expanding Japanese military power, the U.S., along with the British and the Dutch, imposed an embargo on exports of oil and steel, with the expectation that doing so would force them to negotiate. But as author Colonel John Hughes-Wilson describes it, “any knowledgeable adviser on Japanese culture and thought at the time could have explained, the American diplomatic pressure left only one real choice...to fight, and to seize what Japan needed, despite efforts to deny access by the Americans and their friends.”⁵ Decades later, similar cultural biasing and mirror-imaging led to poor preparation for the infamous Tet Offensive in 1968, during which American forces, based on their own experience in 1944 with the Germans in the Ardennes, were largely convinced that the decisive push would occur at Khe Sanh, a firebase 12 miles from the border of North Vietnam—instead, it took place all throughout South Vietnam. In the 21st century, the significance of culture has not changed; today, more than ever, culture has become increasingly vital in our success. The aggressive use of force in the historical city of Fallujah in 2004 only brought greater scrutiny on American cultural indifference. Shortly thereafter, the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment’s campaign in Tal Afar resulted in perhaps one of the most acclaimed success stories in the contemporary operating

² Nicholas Gessler, “Cultural Intelligence”; available from <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/geog/gessler/tutorials/>; Internet; accessed 12 Mar 2008.

³ David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency in Iraq: Theory and Practice* (2007), 55.

⁴ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006), 63.

⁵ John Hughes-Wilson, *Military Intelligence Blunders* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004), 63.

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environment. ~~came to be known the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment's campaign in Tal Afar.~~ Yet, in both cases, the outcomes were largely dictated by the actions of US ~~s~~Soldiers and their respective level of cultural understanding. It comes as no surprise then, that British Brigadier General Nigel Aylwin-Foster wrote in his criticism of Army operations, "a COIN force... must be able to see issues and actions from the perspective of the domestic population."⁶ The preceding examples show that this is true across the operational spectrum: it applies to ~~s~~Soldiers at the strategic, operational and tactical levels, and in all roles, whether maneuver, fires and effects, operational support or force sustainment. With the increased reliance on HUMINT today, cultural understanding affects intelligence professionals just as much—if not more—than it does the ~~soldier~~ ~~Soldier~~ patrolling the streets.

Cultural Intelligence. Intelligence professionals worldwide may be familiar with the phrase, "intelligence drives operations." But whether as staff officers that play the role of threat commanders, or analysts that develop threat courses of action, it is imperative that assessments made are as culturally accurate and unbiased as possible. Otherwise, the advice and recommendations developed may reflect "an adversary whose behavior and decision-making resembles those of educated, white, middle class Americans,"⁷ as was the case in one anecdote written by Dr. Rob Johnston, a Director at the CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence. Indeed, playing the role of the enemy commander is ineffective at best if unable to replicate their cultural understanding of the population, because in the end, "specific cultural knowledge is a skill and the foundation for forecasting the behavior and decision-making of foreign actors."⁸ Yet, contrary to the ~~Soldier~~ ~~Soldier~~ patrolling the streets, the intelligence professional gains little of his or her cultural knowledge through civilian interaction (due to limited opportunities), and the majority of it through reading. Ideally, the adaptable ~~Soldier~~ ~~Soldier~~ at all levels should understand the enemy through interaction with the civilian populace, classroom training, and self-motivated reading. Much like the Army's Training and Leader Development Model, cultural awareness should be achieved through Institutional Training, Operational Assignments and Self Development, each of which is interconnected with the others. Self Development is a leader-guided individual responsibility, but will always vary ~~Soldier~~ ~~Soldier~~ to ~~Soldier~~ ~~Soldier~~, Supervisor to Supervisor. In the Institutional Training domain, the Army has already developed an 80-hour modular cultural awareness program for deploying ~~Soldiers~~ ~~Soldiers~~, as well as made improvements to cultural realism seen at Combat Training Centers (CTCs). Where the Army falls short in this model is the Operational Assignments domain. While there is certainly no shortage of operational assignments today, an inconsistent level of cultural experience is achieved across military specialties throughout these assignments.

Culture in the Operational Environment. At the ground level, ~~Soldiers~~ ~~Soldiers~~ patrolling the streets, manning checkpoints and executing non-kinetic operations have the ~~privilege~~ ~~opportunity~~ of gradually becoming familiar with community leaders and learning firsthand the customs, traditions and cultural nuances of the people. Moreover, with the Army becoming increasingly involved in training and advisory roles in foreign operations, ~~Soldiers~~ ~~Soldiers~~ now also have opportunities to serve in Military Transition Teams (MiTTs) and Embedded Training Teams (ETTs), as well, where the level of interaction between American ~~Soldiers~~ ~~Soldiers~~ and foreign ~~Soldiers~~ ~~Soldiers~~ becomes much more personal. Additionally, the Army's latest cultural endeavor known as the Human Terrain System, is made up of a small team

⁶ Nigel Aylwin-Foster, "Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations," *Military Review* 85, no. 6 (2005): 4.

⁷ Rob Johnston, *Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2005), 82-4.

⁸ *Ibid*, 84.

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of ~~Soldiers~~Soldiers and Anthropologists. The team's sole purpose is to provide cultural insight on the area of operations, advising the brigade commander and staff on potential second and third order effects of military operations. Though it is still too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the Human Terrain System, assignments to MiTTs and ETTs naturally require ~~Soldiers~~Soldiers to become more culturally attuned to their foreign counterparts. Despite these opportunities, only a fraction of the force is exposed to the depth of cultural experience provided by them—more can be done to mitigate the enemy's cultural advantage. But because no Operational Assignment yields the same cultural experience, and no amount of Institutional Training or Self Development will provide ~~Soldiers~~Soldiers with greater cultural insight than a foreign citizen, the Army should integrate foreign cultural advisors into its units, just as it integrates military advisors into foreign armies. Surprisingly, such a reverse-embed program would not be the first adopted by the Army. Though not originally intended to be a cultural exchange program, the Korean Augmentation Troops to the United States Army (KATUSA) program of the 1950s has provided tactical and cultural advantages to the ~~8th~~Eighth U.S. Army at all levels of operation.

The KATUSA Program. Originating during the dire need for troops in the Korean War, the KATUSA program was an initiative taken by General MacArthur to augment Korean Nationals into the U.S. Army, which still exists today. As with most new programs, for various reasons, when it first started, it was very unsuccessful. Amidst shoddy recruiting and little or no training, Korean ~~soldiers~~soldiers would frequently be used as ammo bearers and often became deserters.⁹ However, according to the ~~8th~~Eighth Army today, “the KATUSA ~~soldiers~~soldier is fully integrated into a U.S. unit; he lives, works and trains with his American comrades. Not only does he learn through this association, he raises the operational capability of the unit to which he is assigned and imparts to his American counterparts a better understanding of Korea and its people.” KATUSAs fill a wide range of MOS's in the ~~8th~~Eighth Army and work in all types of units from Infantry to Signal and Intelligence, and provide several advantages, tactically and culturally. Not only do they increase the manning strength of a unit, but the cooperation between U.S. troops and KATUSAs also promotes mutual trust and support, and improves the local perception of the Army. Moreover, on top of being proficient in the language and having a deep knowledge of local cultures and traditions, they are familiar with the terrain and the threat, and can blend into the populace, providing an indispensable perspective U.S. ~~Soldiers~~Soldiers often cannot.

Fall-out of Cultural Immersion. Nonetheless, such a program is likely to face much resistance and criticism on many levels. The most significant concern is likely to be focused on operational security (OPSEC) and subversion and espionage directed against the U.S. Army (SAEDA). While this is a realistic threat, it will only serve to reinforce security, heighten alertness and increase scrutiny. The key is that as the host of the program, the Army maintains control over who is augmented where, and how they are utilized. Additionally, individual vulnerability assessments can be handled on a case by case basis by the Special Security Officer, but must not be pursued so aggressively as to break mutual trust between augmentees and American ~~Soldiers~~Soldiers. It is also possible that the likelihood of espionage be reduced due to a mentality similar to that adopted by the Chinese Nationalist Revolutionary Army, who would often have their own ~~soldiers~~soldiers be recruited by the Communist Army when captured, during the Chinese Civil War.¹⁰ In other words, insurgents may not trust augmentees for fear of maintaining their own operational security. This also opens up many opportunities for Counter

⁹ Martin Blumenson, “KATUSA,” *Military Review* 37, no. 5 (1957): 51-6.

¹⁰ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006)*, 35.

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Intelligence (CI) and HUMINT campaigns. Other arguments the program faces may include the fact that South Korea is an environment that does not face an active insurgent threat and the program's success there is not indicative of success in a COIN environment. Antagonists would follow with the argument that if it is to succeed in a COIN environment, it may require half a century, just as it did in South Korea. However, because this is not an entirely new program, and conditions during the middle of the 20th century were much different than they are today, the Army can learn from many of the mistakes it faced during the initial push for the KATUSA program, thoroughly detailed in a 1957 Military Review article by the late Lieutenant Colonel Martin Blumenson, appropriately titled, "KATUSA." Finally, others may argue whether the KATUSA program provides any intimate knowledge about the North Korean threat whatsoever, suggesting that South Koreans are very different from North Koreans. While there may be some truth to this, even KATUSA ~~Soldiers~~Soldiers are far different from Republic of Korea (ROK) ~~Soldiers~~Soldiers, in that the majority of the former are college students that come from wealthy, upper-class families. But no matter how different they may be, South Koreans can still provide more cultural insight about North Koreans than the average American ~~Soldier~~Soldier can, because certain aspects of culture simply can not be replicated.

To summarize, cultural knowledge is a distinct enemy advantage, and because the objective of COIN (people) is culture-centric, we must first achieve a deep understanding of the culture ~~before we can~~in order to understand the people. However, intimate cultural knowledge cannot be developed through just Institutional Training and Self Development; it requires regular interaction with foreign nationals abroad. Current Operational Assignments do not always provide this level of interaction and consequently, different levels of cultural experience are achieved by ~~Soldiers~~Soldiers in different specialties. Because of this, the Army should seek a more uniform cultural immersion program that integrates foreign citizens into its ranks, and provides deep cultural understanding at all levels of operation. To this end, several cultural and tactical advantages as well as operational risks of a similar reverse-embed program in South Korea today have been presented in this article to encourage discussion. The final outcome should be a program that mitigates the enemy's cultural advantage, preventing insurgents from leveraging the asymmetry of culture against coalition forces every day.

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