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Information Operations and Winning the Peace: Wielding the Information Element of Power in the Global War on Terrorism

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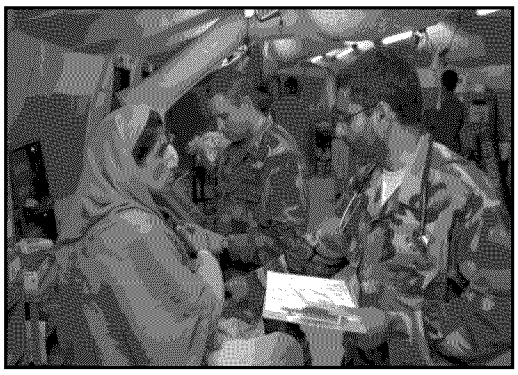
"Potential enemy audiences and particularly senior decision-makers should be understood, along with decision-making processes and priorities. If such human factors analysis is not conducted in advance, it is unlikely we can craft ... themes and messages that will modify adversary behavior."

U.S. Department of Defense, Information Operations Roadmap



BACKGROUND

Perhaps more than ever before Information Operations (IO) is (or at least should be) the main effort tactically, operationally, and strategically in the current phase of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). This national effort is in fact about winning the "war of ideas." However, it's important to understand that this way of fighting is new to the United States and new to the world for that matter. Counterinsurgencies (COIN) have been fought in the past but the U.S. has never fought a counterinsurgency in an information environment so favorable to the enemy. This information environment favors the enemy's strengths and exploits our vulnerabilities (truth, bureaucratic layers and clearances, real time press reporting, etc.). Thus, both of these factors (IO as the main effort in COIN and the current information environment) present new and unique dilemmas that must be examined and overcome. Furthermore, the fundamentally important connection between this war of ideas and the diplomatic efforts and military operations in places ranging from Iraq, to Afghanistan, to Bosnia and beyond presents unique challenges. U.S. military commanders are expert at conducting kinetic operations. They are less expert at recognizing the inseparable nexus between kinetic action and the competition for influence of foreign audiences. With these important issues in mind, the United States Army War College, in collaboration with the Advanced Network Research Group at the Cambridge Security Programme, conducted a workshop on how IO influences actors during stability and reconstruction in the midst of COIN. It took place from 29 November to 1 December 2005 at the Center for Strategic Leadership, Carlisle Barracks, PA. In addressing the dilemmas posed by this current environment, the workshop considered the Second Israeli/Palestinian Intifada as a case study offering many parallel IO lessons learned that could be applied to current operations in Iraq and elsewhere.

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OVERALL WORKSHOP OBJECTIVE

The workshop's objective was to define and analyze how IO influences both adversaries and internal and external actors in order to better contribute to a positive end state. Participants used the case study to drive critical discussions of the interplay between the tactical, operational, and strategic dimensions of IO in a complex conflict/stability and reconstruction environment.

WORKSHOP DESIGN

The workshop brought together an international audience of military, national security community, and intelligence community leaders as well as experts from academia. It was conducted over the course of three days and began with a plenary session and a dinner and keynote speech to set the stage for the subsequent working sessions and discussions. In order to satisfy workshop objectives, day two focused on addressing key themes through a series of interactive workgroups. Day three was devoted to briefing the plenary group and key stakeholders with the recommendations, observations, and insights gained from the individual breakout groups.

PLENARY SESSION TOPICS AND BREAKOUT GROUP SESSIONS

Participants studied tactical (Israeli Defense Forces incursion into Jenin), operational (Israel's Operation Defensive Shield), and strategic (Israeli withdrawal from Gaza) scenarios. Each of these presented unique IO dilemmas or themes of significance, particularly given the nature of that conflict (stability and reconstruction while conducting a counterinsurgency). Initial plenary session expert presentations provided the basis for small group work. Participants then divided into breakout groups to consider four themes with broad IO applications:

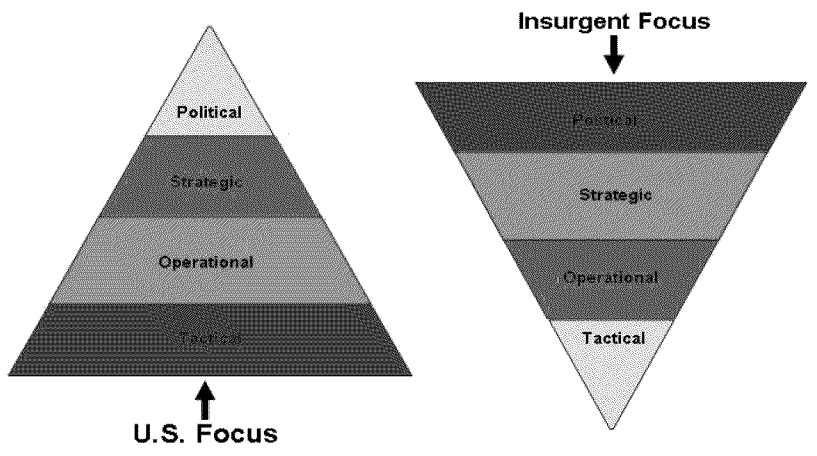
1. Tactical Means/Strategic Ends: Focused on information and influence outcomes created using tactical means that have strategic implications. In an effort to win hearts and minds, how can we ensure that tactical requirements (and victories) do not lead to strategic losses? There are many examples (checkpoints, attacks on holy sites, etc.);
2. Boundaries between Military and Political Responsibility: Considered the national strategic responsibilities for information related activities and strategies versus military responsibilities. Where do the military IO requirements end and the national strategic IO requirements begin…or vice versa?;
3. Definitions and Categories: Addressed the dilemma of how to deal with an adversary who provides goods and services to the general population whom you wish to influence. How do you win hearts and minds when the insurgent provides basic services to the indigenous population…and you're trying to eliminate him? Will they be willing to turn them in without a viable alternative (that they trust)? And finally;
4. Operating Environment and Wildcards: Explored how to deal with the press, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), suicide bombers and unlimited access to the internet while trying to influence a population to your ultimate ends. Given images, rumors, disinformation…how do you get the genie back into the bottle (or never let her out)?

KEY POINTS AND INITIAL FINDINGS

A senior U.S. military commander set the stage for workshop discussions with a keynote speech at a dinner held the evening of the first day. The speaker noted that counterinsurgency is a separate and distinct form of war: a war of ideas, and a war for the minds of the indigenous population. U.S. military leaders have a cultural bias toward a kinetic solution in war that doesn't fit this current wartime construct. This bias is exacerbated by an outdated COIN doctrine and an IO doctrine that is not necessarily correct (e.g., where does the media fit in?). Overcoming this bias requires an understanding of the kind of war we are currently engaged in. The United States focuses wartime efforts and resources toward the tactical level of war. Turning the emphasis of war on its head (the insurgent view of war) makes the information element of power not only primary, but consumes resources and focus toward strategic vs. tactical "combat;" a model the U.S. and coalition forces need to understand and adopt.

Understanding that IO is the main effort, however, is not enough. Commanders must also understand that influencing a target audience requires "delivering the goods" not simply sending the message. In other words,

delivering the goods is better than selling the goods. Still, the message that accompanies and supplements the delivery of the goods is important. Understanding that the best messenger is not necessarily U.S. or coalition forces but rather a credible indigenous person whose message will always resonate more than yours is critical. The commander is in charge of the war of ideas and he is the key to success in changing the culture of his command toward this new paradigm. Sometimes the information fight is the main effort. It may be difficult for a commander to conduct kinetic operations in support of information operations, especially understanding that he may take casualties, but he must be able to do that. The commander must explicitly and unambiguously define the center of gravity in order to identify that main effort.



U.S. and Insurgents View the War From Different Perspectives

The three breakout groups considered the dilemmas presented for each case study and presented their results to senior U.S. government stakeholders. An analysis of initial findings reflects trends that both correspond to and expand upon the keynote speech and broadly fall into three categories: the merging of tactical, operational, and strategic information operations; messages and messengers; and strategic challenges.

Merging of IO Across the Levels of War:

- A doctrinal model or process is necessary in order to effectively influence an indigenous population and key stakeholders at all levels.
- Tactical operations must be considered in terms of potential strategic implications based on the current information environment. More than ever before all elements of power are employed at all levels of war and the seams between those levels must be considered prior to military operations.

Messages and Messengers:

- Cultural awareness is vital, and the enemy often has more cultural credibility among their neighbors than military occupiers. "Rare is the day that our message will be stronger than the local culture. The culture moves the message…."
- Maintain message discipline and don't be thrown off by erratic media reports. "It (the message) has to be sustained to get believed. It's public diplomacy in the last three meters that counts."
- A central strategic theme is essential, however, subordinate themes and messages (and deeds that reflect the message content) must be categorized, assigned and tracked against different target audiences (e.g., allies, indigenous opponents, fence sitters, indigenous supporters). However, in the ubiquitous media environment at least "two cultures must be addressed in the message: insurgency/indigenous population and committed friendly forces."
- If successful influence operations involve "delivering the goods," they may more broadly be focused toward "restoring hope." Messages and actions should be oriented toward this end.
- Whichever news story breaks first will be preeminent, at least initially; therefore publicize anything that lends credence to coalition operations.
- Engage the media at all levels early and often. Establish command-level personal relationships to augment the public affairs office.
- Educate the media (and by extension the public) regarding operational objectives to avoid rumors and

disinformation about Law of Armed Conflict violations. On the other hand, report and investigate violations and corrective actions immediately while recognizing that American credibility requires maintaining the moral high ground.

- Mounting casualties put additional stress on troops and may lead to IO mistakes. Expect that and proactively deal with it.

Strategic Challenges:

- "There is always an informational sequel to a physical act." Skillful operators should build (a counter response) into strategic design." Establish a counter-disinformation element and ensure it is prepared to respond rapidly. This element should be interagency and multifaceted.
- In the absence of strategic information guidance, the military does have a role to fill the gap; however, use of the information element of power by the military alone does not necessarily have the credibility to mitigate and affect a target audience strategically by itself. A U.S. governmental agency must be established with the organization, capacity, and process to do this.
- At the national strategic level the military element of power may not hold primacy in the GWOT and, in fact, the military element is most likely a supporting effort strategically (DImE vs. DIME in the Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic element of power paradigm).

CONCLUSION

"Fools learn from experience whereas wise men learn from other peoples' experience"

Otto von Bismarck

The lessons learned from the Israeli/Palestinian Intifada have a direct relationship to our current operations in the GWOT. And perhaps more than ever before the effective use of the information element of power will be the key to victory. An extensive analysis of the results of this workshop will continue, culminating with a formal publication that will capture and analyze findings and provide a recommended action plan for the future.

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