

Information Operations on the Counterinsurgency Battlefield

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It is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach 90% of the total preparation for the battles.

-- Osama Bin Laden¹

Introduction

Terrorism has always been an information-based conflict. A terrorist wins or loses by how much he can imprint a perception of lethality (hence the *terror* in terrorism) upon a population, in order to influence the government. Like anyone else Terrorists can shape their narrative through propaganda, but for few aside from terrorists is that shaping so critical to survival. In the modern era, terror groups have gone beyond the mimeographed missive of relying on the media's easy attraction to bloodshed and spectacle. They have embraced the modern communications technologies that spread their message exponentially more effectively than anything seen previously. Some have created their own media conglomerates to professionally produce original media. This paper is concerned specifically with how terrorist groups use media as a combat multiplier. Propaganda helps terrorists shape their own narratives, a task that is critical to their survival. That task is no longer confined to convincing someone of the righteousness of a cause or the evil of one's enemies. Instead, it has played a role in altering political support for battles as they occur.

To illustrate this, we shall focus on battles against terrorists and insurgencies whose outcomes have been determined in the insurgents' favor due to Information Operations. Using three case studies of military battles against Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, the Mujahadeen Shura, and Hizb'allah, this paper will show not just that IO can determine outcomes and even grant victory to terrorists, but explore by what methods it does so and the lessons that can be learned from this.

Included here will be a discussion of several battles involving massive differences in conventional ability, each between an insurgency and a combined arms capable conventional force, where each has been judged either a defeat or draw on the part of the conventionally stronger force. In each case, the defeat was due to Asymmetrical Media Warfare on the part of the insurgency, combined with insufficient or miscalculated Information Operations efforts by the Conventional Force. Lastly, we shall look into the media organizations organic to two of the most threatening international terrorist groups currently active: Hizb'allah and Al Qaeda.

1 <http://www.jeffersoncomm.com/documents/StrategicCommunications-BewaretheJabberwocky2.pdf>

The Concepts

Two terms d'art for this paper are 'Information Operations' and 'Asymmetrical Media Warfare'. Asymmetrical Media Warfare² refers to the overall strategy of using media and propaganda to shape the battlefield and aid in reaching the desired outcome. Information Operations (IO) are the tactical actions taken during Asymmetrical Media Warfare. By Asymmetrical Media Warfare, I refer to a mix of the concepts of asymmetrical warfare (I.E. Forces of distinctly different conventional military capability, where the typically weaker side refuses to fight symmetrical to the strength of the stronger, and attempts to exploit the supposed strength of the conventionally stronger side, such as mass and technology, and turn them into weaknesses) and what is referred to as 4th generational warfare (I.E. Warfare as an attempt to influence the political action of the other side, where the centers of gravity are the population, the popular sentiment, and the political will of the opposition)³.

The standard effective strategy by modern militaries against asymmetrical warfare is counterinsurgency. Counterinsurgency runs by very different rules than standard maneuver warfare, and is won or lost on different grounds. As such, it is worth reiterating here the common ways that insurgencies and other asymmetrical forces succeed in such warfare. An insurgency needs only to survive to be considered victorious. As such they need merely to out wait the enemy, or effectively attack their political will to continue. Here is where Asymmetrical Media Warfare becomes a viable strategy to inflict tactical and strategic defeat on their enemy. Developing a carefully groomed media narrative and exploiting a captive media audience enables terrorists and insurgents to effectively attack their opponents' political will to continue.

While Mao helped develop the force protection concepts (avoid conflict except when circumstances are unambiguously favorable, sacrifice space for time, avoid defending territory etc.) necessary for an insurgency to survive until the enemy gives up, it was Vo Nguyen Giap and Ho Chi Minh (the leaders of insurgencies against the French and Americans) who best understood how to use media and politics to attack the true center of gravity of the insurgent's opponent: the population's political will. Actively convincing the enemy populace and government that the cost of their ambitions is too high is much more effective than waiting for them to come to that realization on their own.

The North Vietnamese never controlled any western media conglomerates, but they did have access to many western journalists, and gave plenty of well-controlled media tours of their fighting positions⁴. They boldly displayed Prisoners of War as public curiosities and elicited propaganda statements from them in front of world media⁵. They levied their willingness to send the cream of their youth to a violent death into a world perception of indomitability. This paid off with the Tet offensive, which by conventional terms should have been an enormous disaster⁶. The offensive completely destroyed the Vietcong as a fighting force, seized and held

2 I am unaware if I am coining a new phrase here, but the concepts behind it are established and well elucidated.

3 Hammes pp (1-36)

4 As we will see bellow Hizb'allah has become quite skilled at this.

5 It is important to point out that both the display of prisoners (an explicit violation of the laws of war) and the sickening level of torture many of them endured to coerce that statement had no bearing on how they were accepted by the media.

6 Even by insurgency standards this should have been a disaster. Mao would have been mortified to use up such manpower against enemy strong points for no material gain. The damage done to the Vietcong is the equivalent of having the divisions of the Marine Corps so overwhelmingly attrited, that the remnants could only serve as squads attached to army units.

little territory after the first weeks, and cost the over a hundred thousand troops, including almost all of their skilled guerrilla troops. Yet, it also convinced many Americans, especially influential reporter Walter Cronkite, that the war was unwinnable, and is generally viewed as the battle that ensured the American withdrawal⁷. An enormous price in blood purchased the narrative that the US was no closer to winning the war despite almost a decade of fighting and an outlay of hundreds of billions of dollars.

What is Narrative?: A Brief Explanation of Propaganda

Propaganda works by appealing to different cues based on cultural, religious, or political beliefs, and by creating a specific schema by which the propagandist wants his audience to view the world. A schema is a specific narrative, based on a partial set of facts, which is meant to make an audience draw specific conclusions. While lying is not an unusual tactic of propagandists, the most effective propaganda often uses some truth by presenting a limited set of accurate facts, without any mitigating context or opposing viewpoint.

These narratives play a strong role in the IO war. Insurgents are canny and conscious of IO concerns. They know how they want themselves and their enemies to be portrayed in the world's eye. Duality, or an us-versus-them narrative plays particularly well in cultures of pride, grievance, and damaged self-esteem so common to the Middle East. The average man in such cultures would love to believe he is righteous and his enemies are evil degenerate infidels, and some may support any blow against said infidels if it would restore their damaged pride⁸. Simplicity, and lack of context are also necessary tools; these can turn a picture of dead Jihadis, for example, into innocent young men murdered by The Crusader.

While IO dominance is more often achieved through manipulating neutral media outlets, modern terrorists control their own media. Hizb'allah has its Al Manar, a legitimate television and radio conglomerate that acts as its propaganda arm. Al Qaeda maintains an internet based wing, Ar Sahab, to disseminate propaganda and training manuals. However in the two of the three case studies, it is mainly the western media that is used as a tool to win the battles. Only the third heavily involved one of these terrorist media organizations. This implies that it isn't so much the media conglomerates that pose the threat on the immediate battlefield, as much as the respect for IO of the terrorist commanders that created them.

IO on the Battlefield: Three Case Studies

Case Study No. 1 - The First Battle of Fallujah: Partisan Independent Media During the Battle, Lack of IO Action by Coalition Forces

Fallujah is far smaller than Iraqi cities like Baghdad, Ramadi, or Mosul, yet more infamous in modern military history. In April of 2004, it was the site of the first of two major urban battles. It was also the site of the first, and only decisive defeat of US forces in the Iraq War. US Marines withdrew from the city, not because of casualties, or too great a perceived risk, or any inability to advance, but because of a dissolution of political will, based on a massive international outcry, caused by a concerted propaganda campaign by the defenders utilizing Al Jazeera, and other news agencies on hand, to provide a sympathetic light.

7 Wilbanks (2004) and Wilbanks (2007)

8 Ralph Peters has often said that Al Qaeda's 9/11 strike is viewed by many Muslims and Arabs as the most significant achievement of the Muslim and Arab worlds in the past several centuries.

Media Situation: With ongoing ethnic cleansing of Shia and Sufi Iraqis and Islamic Criminal gangs (the base of which would eventually coalesce into the Mujahadin Shura) taking over local governance, Fallujah in February and March of 2004 was destined for a Coalition assault. Despite a Coalition ban on press entering the city, during the five days of saber-rattling and build up prior to the battle⁹, Al Jazeera had plenty of time to embed a cameraman and a reporter into Fallujah General Hospital, prior to the assault. While the copy presented on Al Jazeera was disturbing enough in the English, the words broadcast over Arabic TV were exponentially more inflammatory.

English language reportage naturally concentrated on wounded women and children. Unsurprisingly, it failed to show the majority of wounded were military age males, or speculate anything other than them being innocent bystanders. The Arab language broadcasts knowingly and deliberately referred to the dead as “martyrs”, exploiting all the moral cachet the term holds to Muslims. On top of that, the local doctors, several of whom openly identified with the insurgency itself, essentially invited Al Jazeera in. As such, the journalists essentially acted as mouth pieces for the local insurgency. Themes that repeatedly appeared included the Coalition using excessive force¹⁰, the insurgency being locals defending their home, and the casualties being overwhelmingly civilian and caused solely by Coalition fire. The Internet came into play as carefully selected photos and tidbits of rumor started appearing not just on pro-insurgent websites, but on large numbers of left wing and anti-war websites in the west.

Effects: The Coalition assault came under extreme political pressure in Iraqi political circles, which had a conservative party drop out of the government and publicly call for fighters to go aid the “heroes of Fallujah”. The international media kept showing the same stills of dead children. And the Coalition partners suffered a massive increase in attacks due to “sympathetic detonations” of violence¹¹. Under this crushing pressure, Vigilant Resolve became a sadly ironic name. Allegedly, the link that broke first was CPA head Paul Bremmer, who after being pressured by the Iraqi provisional government, convinced General Abizaid to enter into a ceasefire. The ceasefire led to negotiations between the military and local civil leaders representing the numerous and barely interrelated factions of the insurgency. In the meantime, sniping and indirect fire became the chosen methods of engagement as all momentum ceased in the attack. Eventually the ceasefire was agreed, to, and a supposedly neutral and reliable “Fallujah Brigade” was stood up to patrol the city, which was viewed as an essential Coalition surrender by the insurgency and its supporters.

Aftermath and Lessons Learned

This paper will not go into the specifics of the failure of the interim between the American withdrawal and the second battle of Fallujah, poetically named Al Fajr.¹² However, the

9 The lynching of the four Blackwater security guards that precipitated the battle, occurred March 31st, while the first shots of Operation Vigilant Resolve occurred on April 5th.

10 Including the defilement of mosques, despite only two of them being destroyed, and the insurgents’ fondness of using them as forward observation and firing positions.

11 The British especially were being hard pressed by attacks from the Jaish Al Mahdi, which as an Iranian-backed Shia insurgency, was diametrically opposed to the AQIZ/Mujahadin Shura groups that made up the core of the fight in Fallujah. There is no reason to believe there was any coordination between the two groups. Therefore the author judges their attacks as a side benefit of the IO campaign, irrelevant of any cynical motives on the part of Shia.

12 “the Dawn”

victorious conclusion of the new battle showed that the US forces had learned the tactical lessons from the first battle, including in IO. The US forged a better cordon, and conducted an extensive buildup, that by its presence, combined with public warnings, convinced the overwhelming majority of the civilian population to flee. As with the first battle, the US limited journalists' access to the city, but this time they ensured that they had close to 100 embedded writers and journalists to tell their side of the story. Finally, their first moves were to seize Fallujah General Hospital and the Al Janabi Clinic in the first hours and on the first day of the assault respectively, in order to ensure that they were not used as propaganda factories.

The first lesson is a rehash of this paper's thesis. Due to the political nature of asymmetrical warfare, insurgencies can use the media to inflict battlefield defeats against conventional forces. While the Al Jazeera reporters may not have been in the direct employ of the various insurgent groups in the city, they certainly were sympathetic, and were getting all their information from tribal doctors who are strongly believed to have been insurgency sympathizers. Essentially, the supposedly independent private media acted as a direct mouthpiece for the insurgency.

Secondly, while the short term effects of insurgent IO campaigns may win them the day, there are long term IO consequences as well. The US found itself accused of war crimes following both Fallujah battles, but the claims had far greater currency in international press after the first battle. This despite the fact that atrocity claims were far more widespread after the second battle and included several documentaries that were widely distributed. Victory solves many of the issues of such recrimination, since when it is over, we control the battle space and can show people counter evidence at leisure. The embedding of journalists also allows us to create an accurate counter-meme¹³ by seeding the idea of a constant battle against well armed, tactically savvy professional jihadi fighters, backed by visual documentation of the overwhelming disregard of the laws of war by the enemy. It also helps that the loudest accusations were either deliberately fraudulent¹⁴, speciously ignorant¹⁵, or paranoid schizophrenic¹⁶ in nature.

While there is never a substitute for victory, negotiation must always be conducted from a position of strength. When the coalition entered into a ceasefire for negotiations it conceded an IO victory to the insurgency, as the world perceived that the underdog insurgents had militarily checked the mighty American war machine, through only pluck, grit and faith in Allah. Secondly, as the IDF and sniper attacks continued, the battle during the "ceasefire" became static and attrition based. Without the dynamic victories of maneuvering to seize new ground, the combination of the sniper's efficient toll on the insurgency, and the property damage created by both side's mortars gained nothing for the Coalition and arguably handed the insurgents a tactical

13 The prevailing meme of the first battle being that Americans were killing large numbers of civilians due to either reckless disregard or deliberate targeting, while fighting against poorly armed civilians who were just trying to defend their homes

14 https://secure.sunshinepress.org/wiki/Fallujah%2C_the_information_war_and_U.S._propaganda claims of use of American cluster bombs based on evidence of wounds that are indistinguishable from those of normal artillery, mortars or bombs.

15 [Fallujah: the Hidden Massacre](#) falsely claimed that White Phosphorus is illegal in warfare, believed that the substance which ignites to 3000 degrees in air somehow doesn't burn clothing, and bizarrely claimed that it constitutes a chemical weapon (the equivalent of claiming that bullets are chemical weapons due to lead being poisonous). Furthermore, their evidence consists of pictures of civilians who clearly died of causes other than WP (having green skin from rot and clothes intact, instead of being charred and ragged) and interviews with people who had no first hand knowledge.

16 "Star Wars in Iraq", by the same people who made "Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre", claims the US used Ray Guns to explode insurgent heads. For some reason, it didn't get the circulation that their previous one did.

IO victory. The stream of casualties allowed the insurgency to reinforce the narrative of US excessive force that so devastated the battle effort, while every house destroyed, no matter by whom, was greater proof of American inhumanity. Negotiation must always be from a position of strength, where the enemy feels constant pressure and loses time as an asset. Giving up the option of maneuver, in fact trying to fight a 4th generation battle as a 2nd generation war of attrition, will ensure that time is on their side.

Case Study No. 2 - Jenin: State Sponsored IO, Complicity by International Organizations

In April of 2002, Israel was in the midst of its worst wave of suicide bombings in what had already been a violent four years. After a particularly vicious suicide massacre of 30 mostly elderly diners at a Pessach ceremonial feast in the resort town of Netanyah, Israel launched a massive raid into a neighborhood of the West Bank city of Jenin. Jenin, in the nine years since the Israeli government turned it over to the Palestinian Authority, had become a celebrated home of suicide terrorists, producing 28 suicide bombers in the second intifada. Both sides knew exactly where and on what terms the battle would be fought. A small corner of the Jenin refugee camp was to be the site of a massive cordon and dynamic raids on suspected suicide terrorist cells belonging to Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hamas.

Israel's preparatory IO was limited to attempting to clear civilians out of the area with bullhorn messages, while the Palestinians bombarded the locals with pro-suicide bombing propaganda. During the battle, the unprepared Israeli government spokesmen "were themselves unaware of the extraordinary humanitarian efforts made by the IDF while still under fire"¹⁷. The battle itself was a close quarters engagement involving infantry with bulldozer support, against suicide bombers, HBIEDs and well entrenched gunmen with well designed kill zones. The Palestinians would in their own media reports also claim a large number of child and teenage suicide bombers as combatants. In deference to civilian casualties, the Israeli Army drastically limited their use of air and indirect fire. Furthermore, they recklessly exposed their infantry to enemy fire in order to ensure that targeted areas were clear of civilians. These actions went so far beyond required levels of proportionality that no western military has ever utilized such rules of engagement in an offensive operation, and an American commander would likely have been relieved for doing so. It also resulted in 28 dead Israeli soldiers (far more than the Marine losses for Vigilant Resolve) and 56 dead Palestinians, almost all PIJ or related insurgents, and the remainder mainly civilians acting as combat service support.

The IO Aftermath

Jenin is famed as a low point in the historic cesspool that is journalistic ethics, as dozens of western papers, with only the slightest Palestinian provocation and no evidence, took it for granted that the Israelis committed a war crime. However, this analysis is concerned with actions taken by PIJ and the Palestinian Authority ("PA") to create and sustain that impression, not the well documented ethical and professional failures of most of western print and broadcast press. The PA in press speeches claimed hundreds or even thousands of dead Palestinian civilians, and directly accused Israel of a deliberate massacre. According to some reports they also littered the area after the Israeli withdrawal with dead donkey parts in order to give the sight and smell of large numbers of mutilated dead. The few journalists that actually tried to find testimonial evidence of crimes all quote the same laborer, Kamal Anis, the overwhelming

17 Diker

convenience of which, and the totally fabricated claims of whom, implied that he was an IO plant¹⁸. The head of the local hospital, who actually benefited from the invasion due to being provided extra medical supplies by the Israelis and several Israeli army medical personnel to aid in caring for the wounded^{19,20}, would claim that the Israelis attacked his hospital with tank shells and destroyed a wing of it²¹.

Israel initially responded by asking for a multinational military observer investigation, and by releasing satellite photos of the destroyed area. The latter barely made a dent into the public consciousness compared to the claims that Israel destroyed the majority of the city. The former was canceled and replaced with a highly politicized civilian force, filled with several members who had public hostility towards Israel. Israel made the decision to ban them from the site, and their report was predictable in its myopia. It was only months later, after a full investigation, that the UN was willing to admit a conclusion that echoed the facts. While banning the “fact finding” mission was both the morally and tactically correct decision, the situation should have never reached that point.

International organizations played a very biased role in the IO campaign, essentially repeating the same accusations as the media and PA government. Due to the fact that the UN and its related relief agencies ran the camp, and for the previous decade had allowed Palestinian militants to use it as an arms factory and militant headquarters (in violation of their own laws as well as international law²²), they are both legally and morally culpable for the activities of the militants. As there was no possibility that they were unaware of the situation on the ground, and their failure enforce their own standing rules led to the terrorism in the camps, their parroting of the PA’s official line appears to be abject cynicism.

Strategic Consequences

Operation Defensive Shield was occurring throughout the West Bank, and resulted in a siege of Arafat’s compound and the mass arrest of hundreds of members of Hamas, PIJ and Al Aqsa Martyr’s Brigade. The Jenin Siege provided for massive international condemnation of Israel, and a mobilization of international Pro-Palestinian activists to the West Bank. This arguably led to an early break in the siege of Ramallah, and the end of major offensive operations elsewhere in the West Bank. Left wing activists attracted by the media outcry created a human shield around the Bethlehem Church of the Nativity to shield several gunmen who were holed up inside, which turned into another public relations nightmare for the Israeli army. Essentially the entire Operation Defensive Shield was crippled by the outcry from the Jenin Siege.

Lessons

When properly motivated, state apparatuses can help create IO victories. The press, especially the British press, had its own preconditioned prejudices, but they were brought out first by years of the same David vs. Goliath narrative being spread by the Palestinians, and the PA’s on-scene attempts to create the impression of both a massacre and a heroic battle. Having been

18 Another technique utilized by Hizb’allah.

19 Dajani (p .3)

20 Dikar

21 Rehov shows visual evidence of the total damage to the hospital at the time, amounting to several pitted bricks in an outside wall, which may or may not have been from small arms fire of an unknown vintage.

22 ADL (p. 26) refers to this as the unclean hand doctrine.

programmed by the Palestinian narrative, the press “aspired to make Jenin a symbol of steadfastness, firmness and resistance for the Palestinians . . . in their vivid imagination”²³. Long after they publicly admitted there was no massacre, the PA actually funded and propelled through the festival circuit a propaganda documentary called Jenin Jenin, which repeats many of the discredited claims about the Israeli army. It is still considered an authoritative documentary of Israeli wrongdoing, despite the author, Mohammad Bakri, stating in court that he was ordered to create it as propaganda by the PA, and that he personally doesn’t believe the accusations he makes in it²⁴. By initially controlling the IO, the PA and the insurgent groups may have further restricted Israeli firepower, increased Israeli willingness to risk their infantry, and hampered the Israeli’s wider operations. By maintaining their focus and perpetuating their IO narrative long after even they have publicly admitted its fraudulence, the PA has retrenched the blood libel myth of Israeli brutality.

The PA also had invested in the long term strategy of controlling journalists. Journalists in their territory existed at their sufferance, and if a journalist was too consistently unflattering they would have official protection taken away, risking retaliation. This ensures a self-selection of journalists who are generally already partisan, or were willing to tow the line in order to not be summarily murdered by Hamasawi gunmen. The obvious level of self-censorship was amply demonstrated by French Jewish journalist Pierre Rehov, who shot a documentary about Jenin by pretending to be a left wing journalist and using his French passport. He ended up producing a film (entitled The Road to Jenin) that not only rebutted Jenin Jenin almost point by point, and crippled the enemy narrative by showing the battle in context of the suicide massacre that initiated it, but showed how easily disprovable many of the Palestinian IO claims would have been to anyone with a camera. The Israelis refusal to allow embedded journalists on these operations was probably a mistake. They rightly feared for their safety, but their timidity prevented the balancing coverage that the US would enjoy three years later during Al Fajr. They wouldn’t have needed someone as partisan and sympathetic as Rehov to have effectively challenged their enemy IO offensive.

Much of the Arab media took a very different direction from the narrative being presented by the western media. Egyptian newspapers featured interviews with Hamas and PIJ gunmen and bomb makers, discussing the traps they laid and the ambushes prepared, published before, during and after the battle. Al Jazeera, Al Ahram, and an Al Manar related newspaper all reported similar information. The Arab narrative was of victory and destruction of the Israelis, completely opposed to the narrative presented to the west by the insurgents and the PA, and to the narratives that played on other Arab media. This brings up the amazing capabilities for cognitive dissonance on the part of the Arab world, as they unquestioningly accept two conflicting narratives simultaneously. It also brings up the possibility of using the opposing press’ own narrative. While Israel may not have wanted to rebroadcast a narrative that presented them as loosing, in this case, it would have caused more good than harm.

Case Study No. 3 - Lebanon: Media Apathy or Collusion

While the above cases involved IO successes due to influencing the media, in neither case did they actually have their own media organization. Hizb’allah does. In the summer of 2006 they

23 Dajani (p. 2)

24 http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=42404 Bakri testified in a libel case by Israeli reservists against an Israeli cinema showing the movie, that the films’ distortions were knowingly deliberate, and done under government orders.

leveraged it, and carefully calibrated public affairs plan to win a stunning IO victory against Israel.

Hizb'allah began this war by staging a cross border raid into Israel proper, where they killed several soldiers and kidnapped two. Israel's stated goal in its incursion into Lebanon was to recover the two kidnapped soldiers, or at least their bodies, and to seize rocket positions to halt the constant rocketing of towns in northern Israel. A likely unstated goal would be to severely attrite Hizb'allah forces, and damage their hold on Lebanon. Aside from a large ground incursion, Israel began bombing the known Hizb'allah infrastructure, much of which consisted of offices located in commercial or residential areas. Hizb'allah launched a counteroffensive involving large numbers of ground troops using "conventional" guerrilla tactics, and massively increased their shelling of Israel population centers. Both sides were bombing population centers, but Israel had legitimate military targets while Hizb'allah was deliberately attempting to kill only civilians (and had been doing so constantly since before the incursion).

Hizb'allah ran a thorough IO campaign designed to obscure the facts of the last sentence above. It was notable for its completeness as well as effectiveness. Hizb'allah controlled all the sectors where bombings occurred with an iron fist, and allowed no journalists in unless they were vetted and escorted. They altered large numbers of bombing sites by planting civilian artifacts like graduation photos at sites, and in one memorable instance used a fake rescue worker (dubbed in the Internet media as Green Helmet guy) to take reporters to casualty sites, where he ordered a child's body repeatedly loaded and unloaded from an ambulance for the cameras. In a flaunting of religious mores that even the west respect,²⁵ Hizb'allah media controllers planted a burning Koran at the hours-old site of air strikes. Meanwhile reporters were threatened with lack of access and violence if they took any pictures of the ubiquitous armed Hizb'allah fighters, then rapidly rushed through sites with only enough time to swallow their controllers' explanations before being taken to the next prepared site. Meanwhile, Al Manar broadcasted endless parades of civilian casualties across the Arab world's television screens.

The reportage mixed those who eagerly swallowed the tripe being served, and regurgitated it as their own independent observations, and those who acknowledged they were being manipulated, but still reported the story Hizb'allah wanted them to see. The local stringers were often on Hizb'allah payroll. One Reuters photographer, Adnan Hajj, faked or digitally altered numerous photos, by adding smoke trails to sky lines and other such tricks, in order to multiply the appearance of devastation. His photos received wide release through Reuters before they were debunked, and led to the coining of the neologism, "fauxtography."

If Israel bombed an office, or even a missile site in a residential neighborhood, the civilian casualties, often exaggerated, were either signs of Israeli callousness, or were the deliberate targets of Israeli inhumanity. That Hizb'allah chose to screen their missile sites with civilians (which puts the onus for war crimes on them), or that at the same time Hizb'allah was attacking purely civilian targets might only appear in copy, written after a reporter had withdrawn from Lebanon. On the other side of the border, the coverage of the civilians murdered by Hizb'allah missiles lacked any child corpses thrown before the cameras, just staid rubble shot from a distance. Those who might have covered it were too busy at the northern border taping the confused formations of unprepared Israeli reservists or photographing Israeli positions from the

25 Camera: Photo of Koran was taken by fauxtography poster boy Adnan Hajj

wrong side of the border, due to a catastrophic failure of Israeli operational security²⁶.

Strategic Consequences

Israel accomplished none of its objectives, except perhaps attriting Hizb'allah fighters in open combat. Even then it was limited damage at a high cost. The POWs were not recovered until a humiliating prisoner exchange two years later, where their remains were traded for dozens of terrorists. Once the media storm began, the clock was ticking until Israel would have to withdraw. Israel may be more casualty adverse than most western armies, and certainly is more media sensitive. Hizb'allah media response was fully predictable, and the Israeli goal difficult enough to achieve, that Israel could have predicted the need to withdrawal would occur quickly. As Hizb'allah survived, managed to inflict reasonable casualties on the Israelis in small unit combat, never stopped rocketing Israeli cities, and still held the bodies of the captured soldiers, the media consensus held them as victors. Although Israel probably inflicted painfully high casualties and destroyed much organizational infrastructure, there was nothing tangible to prove Israeli victory. In battles where no land changes hands, media consensus defines the victory.

Lessons Learned

The first lesson of this conflict is that any IO plan is better than none. Israel seemed to have none at all, despite constantly being made to look like fools and butchers by the Lebanese and Palestinians prior to the operation. It could have exploited its own civilian casualties by simply bringing the press to the bombing sites and interviewing people who had to live under the daily bombing. They needn't ghoulishly exploit corpses or resort to desecrating religious books like Hizb'allah does to let the world know that Hizb'allah was murdering its citizens.

Countering the narrative that Hizb'allah presents would have been harder. Israel couldn't change what Hizb'allah was doing in its own neighborhoods, but the Israeli media handlers could have tried to embed a reporter from each station or burro that was giving such fawning coverage of the enemy. Irrelevant of their politics, a news service rarely will turn down a chance to cover combat, and just having a reporter on scene all but guarantees coverage of your side of the fight. If nothing else, having a reporter getting fired at with Sagger missiles could provide an antidote to the lack of footage of one's armed opponents.

The media usually knows when it is being baldly manipulated, but will accept even that when it is the only way to cover the story. CNN international reporter Nic Robinson exposed many of Hizb'allah's obvious ploys on an episode of CNN's Reliable Sources, but days earlier, while on site in Beirut, he was filing reports heavily influenced by what he knew was a "dog and pony show"²⁷. American "new Media", especially the network of web journals informally known as the blogosphere, were far more willing to provide skepticism of Hizb'allah claims, and several persuasive Internet based investigations helped expose several major Hizb'allah frauds, and even led to the firing of Reuters photographer Adnan Hajj. Military commanders may want to accept these journalists as embeds. They provide a major advantage over network embeds since most of them are going to continue journalism only for a few years, and are almost always independent of any major organizations, and therefore are far less averse to potentially offending terrorist organizations that might then deny their colleagues access. Furthermore, they are rarely from the

26 Peters (2007)

27 CAMERA (2006)

same homogeneous political ghetto that journalists seem to come from, which may make them less likely to fall prey to the narratives and assumptions that have so poisoned popular reporting.

Conclusions

Part I: Journalists

While this paper has taken the position that one can neither trust in a journalist's ethical commitment, nor overestimate the extent that journalists are willing to bend the truth, draw baseless conclusions, or even deliberately lie to gain a story, it is not trying to portray the media as the enemy. The media is not your opponent in IO warfare, it is the battleground. Hating and ignoring the media will not make it go away, and will guarantee that your story will not be told. Any insurgent worth his salt will ensure that his is, giving him victory by default. Nor is it worthwhile to pretend that society can ever effectively reform journalism as an institution by somehow stressing ethics or loyalty.

Since an operational commander needs to deal with journalists, some basic lessons need to be repeated. As we have seen with the Israelis and with the first battle of Fallujah, the absence of a media plan is as good as encouraging the media to lie about you. Second, being members of a democratic state and respecting human rights, we cannot control the media the way Hizb'allah has. If we stonewall or deny any access the media will simply find its own way in. What commanders can do by judicious use of embedding is shape the narrative by emphasizing what they want the journalists to see, and by getting their story out. While it doesn't eliminate the opposing enemy narrative, it limits its currency vastly.

The only time the military should attempt to legally restrain the press is when the press is deliberately aiding the terrorists on an operational level. The case of Bilal Hussien, who kept close contacts with Sunni insurgents and kept explosives in his apartment, comes to mind. Due to the ambiguity, action must be limited to overt and unambiguous cases, where the reporter is all but embedded with the insurgents, and the targets are civilians. The only case of a western journalist that fits the bill is when two journalists embedded with Paris Match newspaper embedded with terrorists for several days and, with full prior knowledge, attended a SAM attack against a DHL cargo plane flying out of Baghdad international. If this were a mere criminal act they would have been guilty of conspiracy. Commanders and policy makers should treat such actions similarly.

Part II: Where We Go From Here

There are several key lessons that should apply to IO in almost all Counterinsurgency.

Embedding works. American Service members overwhelmingly act honorably in combat, and there is only one case the author is aware of where an embed publicized an even ambiguous incident²⁸, and the fallout was limited. Embeds ensure that approvingly or disapprovingly, our story will be told.

28 See Peskowitz (2004) Kevin Sites, a journalist with NBC photographed a marine firing on a wounded insurgent whom he thought was playing possum. It became a minor scandal due not to the reporter, who gave the tape to the command to decide to release, but because of Al Araybiyah and Al Jazeera, who released distinctly shortened versions of it.

There is no substitute for victory. At the end of the day, the best IO is being the last man standing in the battlespace. In insurgency warfare, all the enemy needs do is survive to claim victory. If, like Israel in 2006, your goals do not include taking over land, then publicize and repeat ad nauseum your goals, and refuse to quit until they are accomplished. If Israel had pressed on and recovered its soldier's bodies, a nationally televised memorial could press home a mission accomplished theme that would silence Hizb'allah claims of military victory. A corollary to above is that victory helps weaken accusations of illegality against your troops. It also may help recover lost political capital. A commander or policymaker should view the political and moral capital lost in fighting as a spent asset, and know that nothing short of victory will recover it.

We cannot censor, silence or ignore our way out of the IO fight. Only by seizing the initiative, and attempting to shape the narrative by presenting a clear message and getting it disseminated, can we hope to undermine insurgent propaganda.

Asymmetrical Media Warfare will remain a threat as long as we have insurgencies and high technology. It is unquestionable that insurgencies are not just aware of Information Operation techniques, but actively embrace Asymmetrical Media Warfare as a major weapon. It is also clear that the effective insurgencies are far better at IO than western military. Most importantly, IO can and has played a major deciding factor, and in the case of Vigilant Resolve, *was the deciding factor* in allowing a militarily weak insurgency to defeat a skilled conventional military. These defeats were preventable, unnecessary and prohibitively costly. And if no lessons are learned, they will be repeated.

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