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The Importance of Cross-Cultural Capabilities to Win Armed Conflicts

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Magdalena Defort

“He [prince] should therefore never take his mind off military matters, and he should educate himself in them more in peace than in the time of war; As for the exercise, he should, apart from keeping his men well disciplined and trained, always be out hunting, and by that means accustom his bod to discomfort; and at the same time he must learn to understand geographical configurations, and see how mountains slope, how valleys open out and how plains lie...”

-- Niccolò Machiavelli^[1]

Introduction

This essay seeks solutions for how the Army can strengthen its landpower in terms of the comprehensible understanding and awareness of the human dimension (social, cultural and political systems) of the environment; therefore, it addresses the issues that pave the way for succeeding in every mission on foreign soil. An in-depth understanding of the diversity of cultures and their features strengthen the Army’s landpower influence. This can make it capable of supporting the regional aligned and local forces to address contemporary asymmetric threats. These include insurgency, violent extremists, civil war, organized crime, and instability from a variety of sources including spread of infectious diseases and resource competition.

Background

Clausewitz’s *coup d’oeil* (inward eye) is proven in the theatre of war, the—“quick recognition of a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection.”^[2] This effective method can be compared to a chameleon nature that slightly adapts its characteristics to fit into a different environment, although its nature remains the same. Neglecting this simple form of adaptation to the operational environment was and still is one of the causes of tactical misfortune and operational failure. As the classic military strategist, Niccolò Machiavelli, highlighted, “the army is exposed to more and greater danger while marching through an enemy’s country than on the battlefield. Thus, an exact map of the whole country...with a perfect knowledge of all the towns, their distance from each other, and all roads, mountains, rivers, woods, swamps, and their location and nature”^[3] (terrain awareness) is relevant before undertaking every operation on an unknown land.

In the twenty-first century, the failed states and regional conflicts (ethnic, tribal, and religious warfare) are home to frequent armed confrontations where the Army, as a supportive arm to the local and aligned forces (i.e. foreign internal defense/stability and support operations), is deployed to remote lands. However, a majority of expeditionary operations are compromised by the ignorance of understanding of geo-political features of the region/country and its human diversity (in terms of culture, language, religion and political system). Geo-social awareness (about a peculiarity of environment and its people) makes preparation for the operation complete. If the Army assists the local or aligned forces in a regional mission, the knowledge about their strategy, planning and *modus operandi* is relevant in continuing a joint mission. If these issues fail, the traditional strategic orientation results are unsuccessful. The ghost of Vietnam (and similar colonial conflicts) could return and warn of the disastrous results of that war caused by the ill-fated ambitions of policy-makers disinterested in familiarizing the Army not only about a nature of war, but also environment where the forces would be deployed. Landpower depends not only on the generalship, but also on statecraft that plays a decisive role in formation of a new generation of armed forces deployed to challenge every operation around the world.

Two arts—war and politics—possess a common style: leadership. As Machiavelli said, the “successful statesman has to be a capable general”.^[4] Both arts work on modeling the human raw material in order to transform it into a new form. As the statesman does with its citizens, so does the general (and subordinate leaders) with its soldiers. To achieve success in statecraft and warfare, both need what Machiavelli refers to as qualities of *virtù* and organization. A good organization within the army and government is *sine qua non* to effective leadership. Because these two arts juxtapose one another, they need both a good organization and leadership.

A recognition of the importance of understanding the environment and the human dimension of the operation’s milieu is necessary to address both military and civil considerations before undertaking a mission. To put these in practice, investment in knowledge and training of the “nerve of army” is required to forge the success of its landpower. As Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter’s security adviser, said, “Nothing could be worse for America than if American policy were universally observed as arrogantly imperial in a post-imperial age, mired in a colonial relapse in a postcolonial time, selfishly indifferent in face of unprecedented global inter-dependence, and culturally self-righteous in religiously diverse world. The crisis of American superpower would then become terminal.”^[5]

The importance cross-cultural capability by the Army was confirmed Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki’s statement that what his country needs is a diplomacy and not more boots on the ground. Indeed, a long-term political strategy is more needed than constant military operations and bombing.^[6] A recognition of importance of the human dimension by both Army and policy-makers to continue the armed conflict is paramount. As the Prussian military strategist, Carl von Clausewitz’s said “...as Wars are in reality, they are, ...only the expression or manifestation of policy itself. The subordination of political point of view to the military would be contrary to common sense...The subordination of the military point of view to the political is, therefore, the only thing which is possible.”^[7] Indeed, to support its regional aligned and local forces, the US Army has to possess cross-cultural capabilities in order to be able to confront every asymmetric threat and continue the Clausewitz’s politics by other means (warfare).

Indeed, the US Army, as the most committed armed forces involved in an array of the operations around the globe, is challenged by its international partnerships and coalitions. To carry out the war on foreign soil, a possession of accurate cross-cultural preparation and understanding about this foreign soil is required. The novel procedures and shift within the military’s culture of education and its practice will be provided to revamp the Army’s real landpower in joint regional operations. The policymakers decide about the education and training programs and, additionally, how much of the annual budget to devote to

these issues.

Recommendations

Military and civil alliances are paramount for maintaining peace and stability in the globalized world. Understanding the residents (language, religion, culture, political system) and environment where a mission takes place is relevant to gain their trust, which facilitates intelligence gathering and collaboration. The real Army's landpower is more about the knowledge about a region and its people than military and technological capabilities. Indeed, a respect for these elements is required for a modern and committed Army.

Success in supporting the aligned and local forces on the foreign soil requires an examination of military culture. Then, that culture should be shaped to focus attention on intensive training in a proficiency of languages and familiarity with the array of pertinent cultural components. To get the inherent vision about a region, a separate formation of small, tailored special forces, as cross-culturally competent units with diverse regional, cultural, and linguistic understanding, should form an integrated component of counterinsurgency operations. To acquire the adequate cross-cultural capabilities, an array of the specialized courses, e.g. language proficiency, cultural, social and political issues on a region, supported by native lectures, should be an important aim for forming a new generation of the qualified Army to challenge the operations. However, an in-depth knowledge and respect for the diversity of each country or region among the Army is only possible if the policymakers and military staff possess the awareness of how important it is to instill these values in a new generation of armed forces. For that, a part of the military budget should cover these education programs.

The next issue is a training in conjunction with local forces. A model for these kinds of training centers are the Department of Defense regional centers (operated by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency in coordination with the Combatant Commanders) where armed forces prepare for cooperative operations in a given region. At a strategic level, these include the Marshall Center in Europe, the Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies for the Americas, the Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Asia and the Pacific Rim, the Near East-South Asia Center for Strategic Studies for the Near East and South Asia, and the Africa Center for Strategic Studies for Africa. These centers train foreign military leaders for defense and counterterrorism. The optimal option would be that the Army build from these network connections and establish on-going mission/theatre specific training initiatives to sustain expeditionary operations. This goes beyond familiarizing itself with residents and their environment and must encompass gaining trust and operating effectively with partner nations and their populations. Because what "was what mattered most; there are far more elements of U.S. power and influence we can bring to the table than boots on the ground."^[8] Indeed, the diplomacy is more powerful than the weapon to succeed in every confrontation.

Conclusions

To maintain the cross-cultural capability, Army personnel should be constantly enrolled in education and training programs prior to and during expeditionary operations. Continuity in learning, e.g. foreign languages maintains and strengthens the Army's capacity in communication and gathering intelligence. Indeed, the education cost is lower than the intensive and quick courses that never work.

End Notes

[1] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, (London: One World Classic, 2009), 43-44.

[2] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, (New Jersey: University Princeton, 1984), 75.

[3] Machiavelli, op. cit., 143.

[4] Ibidem, LXXX.

[5] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance. Three Presidents and the Crisis of Superpower*, (New York: Basic Books Press, 2007), 215-216.

[6] Seth Moulton, "Get ready for another Iraq War." *The Washington Post*. 23 June 2016,

On web: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/get-ready-for-another-iraq-war/2016/06/23/575f626a-2cf9-11e6-b5db-e9bc84a2c8e4_story.html.

[7] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, (London: Kagan Paul, Trench, Trübner and CO, 1908), 124-125.

[8] Seth Moulton, op.cit.

About the Author



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Magdalena Defort is originally from Poland. She earned her Ph.D. from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She pursued postdoctoral studies at the Institute of Social Research at UNAM. Currently, she is a Scholar/Researcher at the University of Miami, Coral Gables where she serves as co-chair and co-editor of the research project/book entitled *The Decline of US Hegemony and Latin America Integration in the 21st Century: New Patterns of Regional Cooperation and Conflict?* Defort's research interests include terrorism, drug trafficking, insurgencies, civil-military relations in Latin America and military collaborations in countering the new threats in the Americas. She is a member of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). She speaks fluent Spanish and English, and has communicative skills in French and Portuguese.

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