COIN Sequitur?

The purpose of this paper is to provide trends on tactical context in Counterinsurgency Operations for advisors and trainers in the realm of security, development and reconstruction.

Background and Historical Vignette.

For Clausewitz, "theory will have fulfilled its main task when it is used to analyze the constituent elements of war…to define clearly the ends' in view and that such analysis is meant to educate the mind of the future commander [in our contemporary case we might say "practionioner"]…not to accompany him on the battlefield." Or even perhaps from the lectern and graduate program.

Doctrine and theory must not only be subject to analysis and evaluation, the distance between theoretical understanding and execution must be bridged with practical utility.

It is the role of the commander to achieve victory, the role of the practioner to achieve success. They are dependent on each other. Clausewitz felt this was achieved through decisive battle. A little different for the practioner but the essence of that is the same. At the tactical level, victory is the end. At the policy and strategic level the tactical victory is how diplomats achieve favorable outcomes and use that success as political and economic leverage. Successful civil-military integration at the strategic level is also crucial for the tactical level.

At the tactical level, strategic cooperation and culture drive the tactical operational planning and integration. Tactically, especially in COIN, decisive battle outcomes can be achieved even if an engagement is not fought. Centers of gravity, tipping points, and culminating points in counterinsurgency are achieved across multiple vertical and horizontal lines of operation/effort; that is why it is a "Comprehensive and Integrated Approach" or a "Whole of Government Approach."

Here is an example. A Provincial Reconstruction Team develops over time a good relationship with the village elders of a local village. The PRT learns that the village needs a bridge over the river to shorten the farm to market time and to connect with other villages where relatives live. The PRT develops a plan that utilizes local villagers' to help build the bridge and hires a local contractor to assist in the on the job training and construction of the bridge. During the construction process the Taliban attempted to coerce the village. The village reacted by taking charge of security and running the insurgents out of town; by the time they notified security elements they had already taken care of the problem.

The bridge, although considered temporary, is still in use and protected by the villagers. Total cost was about 5000$ in tax payer money, huge gains in reconstruction and development that enabled security. This same district has had the added benefit of economic and infrastructure growth that is self sustaining.

It is this specific tactical context that helps provide the basis for "grammar" and "logic" in this theoretical exploration on war. For the practioner it is negotiating the specific nuances of culture, language and politics at the local level that provide the basis for his work. Once again, both must work together.

Tactical Innovation [context] in COIN has been ascribed to General Petraeus when he secured Mosul. In 2005 H.R. McMaster led successful operations in Tel Afar and Col Sean MacFarland was championed for modeling McMaster when he took Anbar Province in 2006. In 2006 Petreaus is credited with the ideas contained in FM 3-24 and in October of 2008 Assumed Command of CENTCOM. By implication, the US sought innovation when it named General McChrystal to assume command of COMISAF in June 2009. No one seemed disappointed when his initial assessment was released and it indicated that we must do things profoundly different than we had been.

If the dates of change of command and the release date of doctrinal manuals, such as FM 3-24, FM 3-24.2, FM 3-07, FM 5-0 and Coordinating Draft FM 7-0, are in indication of change, then the US Army began the path of transformation in 2006. Other recent supporting documents include the DoD Directive on Command Language Programs; or TRADOC PAM 525-3-7-01, Human Dimensions For the Future; Although one might argue that we have "come late to the party", RAND studies, such as Victory has a Thousand Fathers, appear to indicate that the US Military is within the statistical norm of the learning curve. Equally telling is that despite reported tactical and operational success, that small unit success is insufficient to overcome strategic and policy failure.

Historical Vignette:

"[d]uring my first mission [in Afghanistan], we were protecting refugees escaping an area that was under mujahideen attack . . . [i]n my mind our presence was 'helping Afghans' particularly with educating women and children [and m]y combat unit participated in 'humanitarian aid': accompanying doctors and delivering food, fuel, clothing, school and other supplies to Afghan villages.

"..[We] sent thousands of economic advisers to oversee major new construction projects, including the building of hospitals and power stations and expansion of Kabul airport,"

Sound familiar? It should, this is the soviet experience in Afghanistan. The Cold war narratives in the media and literature shaped our understanding of what happened during the decade of Soviet involvement. Reports culled from opened archives reflect an astute understanding of COIN and the principles of a Hearts and Minds campaign by the Soviet leadership.

Never the less, a lot of crucial information regarding the practical utility of executing counterinsurgency techniques is reduced to one or two sentences but then says no more and spends the rest of its pages recounting combat operations. This is fairly typical of the existing literature on the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, both for Soviet/Russian studies and for those produced in the West.

Because the Soviets entered Afghanistan with no counter insurgency doctrine, hearts-and-minds operations had a largely uncoordinated character and were, especially in the early 1980s, often the result of local initiatives rather than centrally directed policy.

Many stories from the early 1980s involved the de-mining of villages which had been mined and booby-trapped by the mujahideen. A typical article in *Sovetskaia Rossiia* in March 1983 described the actions of a Soviet military detachment which cleared 20 mines placed by the mujahideen in a village school. "The soldiers," claimed the newspaper, "constantly come to the aid of the local population."
 Similarly, Moscow World Service broadcasted a report in August 1984 describing the actions of a dog-handler, Junior Sergeant Nikolai Svitsov, and his dog, Elsa, clearing mines from homes in an Afghan village. Svitsov and Elsa also removed fourteen mines "hidden in the walls and earthen floor" of the village school.

The earlier report in *Sovetskaia Rossiia* also described another project undertaken by Soviet engineers in the mountain settlement of Kalay-Dala. After de-mining a village, one of them, Sergeant Sabit Pugmanov, told his comrades of a wonderful custom existing from time immemorial back home in Uzbekistan. 'When someone in our settlements decides to build a home, all the people come to help without being asked. This is called khashar. And people work without payment, from the goodness of their hearts.' The entire company supported the sergeant who proposed to organize such a khashar in the Afghan settlement which had suffered heavily from the bandit attack. And work started. The walls of new homes grew like in a fairy tale. In one of them smoke even started pouring from the chimney. It was the grateful hosts who had started to cook supper for all those on the building sites. Thus they celebrated the new settlement together, Soviet soldiers and Afghan peasants.[1]

Fm 3-24, Counterinsurgency has a chapter on Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield and begins with defining and describing the operational environment and its effects; crucial steps necessary to evaluation and determining courses of action. The element that seems to be missed in these four steps is civil considerations in this process, particularly when human factors and dynamics don't line up neatly with physical lines of communication and political boundaries drawn on a map. People and information flow – continuously.   The process of describing these civil considerations is how one portion of key information is grouped. Six socio-cultural factors are specifically listed and several pages are devoted to these factors [2]

Grouping this information becomes clearer when one looks at FM 3-24.2, Tactics in COIN, and begins with the methodology on page 1-18. An extensive list of cultural influences, variations and manifestations is listed. Equally telling is how the next several pages break out this taxonomy and list questions for each influencer.

Ultimately combining and understanding these influences with variations and manifestations will hopefully lead one to situational awareness. But implicit in this awareness is the need to have cultural understanding which then leads to competence; competence in understanding, determining, evaluating and then deciding courses of action.

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[1] Soviet Hearts and Minds in Afghanistan pages 4-22, The Historian, Spring 2010, Vol 72 Issue 1
[2] FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency, Dec 2006, pp 3-2 through 3-9

This competence correlates strongly with capability, unit and staff capability, and should progress from awareness to cross cultural competence in which counterinsurgents can detect subtle indicators of change and how this will impact planning and decisions.

This awareness and capability is cross-cutting and improves a unit's effectiveness and force protection. It is also cross cutting along lines of operation as it might be simultaneously tied to governance, security and reconstruction.

For instance, external support to an insurgency consists of several elements such as moral support, political support, resource support, and sanctuary support and all this is tied to physical geography and in some cases virtual geography.

Conclusions:

Conflict in the present is compared to and understood to us from the lens of the past. The study of military history seems to focus on why one loses a war and the consequences of winning and losing; primarily through the lens of tactical missteps and governmental mistakes.

Clausewitz has stood the test of time and is still the standard reference for war; both big and small. The   principles of war remain the same however the form, scope and consequences of application or misapplication are what changes.   Without the right "guides" do we succumb to the presumption of technology and that science, weapons and globalization have changed the rules of war; or perhaps just altered the form, scope and consequences?

Consider the following *Commanders Reflections on COIN during an After Actions Review.*

90% of mistakes reflected poor understanding of COIN

New training requirement…the tactical event with strategic consequences

All Design and Planning must begin with "What is my I/O Message?"

How do I Leverage unity of effort and weaknesses of partners operating in my Operating Environment?

What percentage of Troops is off the FOB and immersed in training partners and engaging the population through partners. This is a measure of your effectiveness

Shape-Clear-Hold and Build can only be enabled by ANSF, Coalition and NGO Partners

Everything….Everything is a Shaping Operation or contributes to shaping an operation…shaping never stops

Where is the continuity over time: OEF 6 to OEF 14?

Training Needs To Include Interagency Involvement during ARFORGEN

What is the difference between a development project and a stability project? How do you know this?

Does the project achieve an effect? What kind of effect? Has it been red-teamed/gamed for 2nd, 3rd and 4rth order effect? Does this effect include gaming social dynamics and socio-cultural intelligence?

Are cross cultural skills incorporated into operational and tactical design process?

Victory in conflict does not necessarily rest on the ability to inflict massive destruction but on the ability to move and influence popular support away from your enemy. And while warfare will continue to evolve, our tendency seems to mistake outwardly visible variations as fundamental change in the conduct of warfare. However, the changes are really more situational to the specific operating environment and contextual in application rather than fundamental.

Our commander indicated that "90% of mistakes reflected poor understanding of COIN" and that the "New training requirement [is] the tactical event with strategic consequences."

Tactical innovation [context] comes from answering such questions as: "Are cross cultural skills incorporated into operational and tactical design processes?

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