

It is “historically” common to compare “now” with “then” in the operations process and many of the analogies we use have an irresistible allure. Immediate ones that come to mind are the oft quoted comparisons of Vietnam with Iraq and Afghanistan. Sometimes the use of these “lessons”, histories, or analogies enable us to make decisions with a minimum of fresh analysis. Sometimes the most appropriate lesson or analogy to use is the one that is ignored.

The next few paragraphs begin with what we know in an effort to look at conditions or analogies that might be neglected.

Language and culture are not mission enablers to Full Spectrum Operations (FSO); rather they are in direct support thereof. In January, 2010, Major General Flynn addressed this serious deficiency in our understanding of the operating environment. *“Eight years into the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. intelligence community is only marginally relevant to the overall strategy. Having focused the overwhelming majority of its collection efforts and analytical brainpower on insurgent groups, the vast intelligence apparatus is unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which U.S. and allied forces operate and the people they seek to persuade. Ignorant of local economics and landowners, hazy about whom the powerbrokers are and how they might be influenced, incurious about the correlations between various development projects and the levels of cooperation among villagers, and disengaged from people in the best position to find answers – whether aid workers or Afghan soldiers – U.S. intelligence officers and analysts can do little but shrug in response to high level decision-makers seeking the knowledge, analysis, and information they need to wage a successful counterinsurgency”*¹...The most salient problems are attitudinal, cultural, and human.”²

In the journal, PRISM, A Journal of The Center For Complex Operations (CCO), LTG Robert Caslen said: *“The most pressing obstacle hindering our cultural understanding is an arrogant and haughty attitude. It is critically important to understand the fabric of the society that we are working in...”*³

(A presumption of the operations process?)

Counterinsurgency theory and subsequent debate describes two approaches: a “population-centric” approach, referred to as “hearts and minds,” and an “enemy-centric approach” that focuses primarily on engaging insurgents and insurgent leadership.

At its heart, a “hearts and minds” approach is the struggle for the support of the population. It is a proactive approach involving all the elements of national power; even down to the tactical level. *It is a competition with the insurgent for the right to win the acquiescence of the people.* It is those military, paramilitary, economic, psychological and civil actions employed to defeat armed resistance, reduce passive opposition and reestablish legitimacy. General Petraeus’s counterinsurgency guidance lists twenty-four rules that capture the spirit and intent of this approach.⁴

A review of the convergence and divergence of contemporary and historical trends, reveals that, these elements are interdependent, evolve operationally, and require familiarity with a number of disciplines – a thorough understanding of the “role of resident networks in society,”⁵ and one might add, within the operating environment. The common element in Hybrid, FSO, and Counterinsurgency Operations (COIN), is that they are difficult to understand, and are inherently messy in devising plans and methods.

The use of history is a critical element in the operations process in devising plans and methods. We use campaign analysis, battle reports, after action reports and our own experience to assess and judge plans and operations. History and analogies used in the process are used to generally advocate for or against a problem we are challenged with.

Many charge that they are already too busy and respond to the argument on making better use of history in the Operations Process by stating; “*They’re too busy; can’t read what they get now. They will glance at it on the way to the meeting. If you do get their attention, you can’t keep it, they have to run off to another meeting or important engagement.*” Judgements and feasibility come down to the “doability” of improvising and inventing a requisite response. As Americans we are rooted in “Can-Do” and the ability to improvise solutions that no one has done before.

An allegedly new condition in this process is the globalization of the international system with its own unique “prose” of culture, rules and logic (of counterinsurgency?).

For the soldier, history is usually read and studied for generally two reasons; esthetics, and that history may help us understand operations. Thucydides and Tacitus focused on the political-military aspects of history. Herodotus writes history with a bent toward socio-cultural aspects to help us understand the social dynamic. Current processes that use DIME, ASCOPE and PMESII are tools that assist us in devising operational plans and methods with an eye on culture and civil considerations. When coupled with Intelligence preparation and the Tactical Conflict Planning and Assessment Framework, a dose of history, analogy and lessons learned. By now I think everyone in the world has seen the short video *lost in translation*, and like a good Sufi parable, this video has multiple meanings.

In the planning process we generally use great blunders or great successes for our analogies to argue for or against a particular event. History is filled with great blunders and great success. We are mostly attracted to the great blunders and catastrophes in an attempt to find a lesson that best serves our immediate need. In most cases we know or feel that something is wrong and an outsider looking in will ask, ‘How did they come to that decision?’ ‘What were they thinking?’ How do we apply the lessons learned? Is it a matter of just applying rigour? Would due diligence in the staffing, information gathering, and decision making process have prevented that kind of decision?

When we ask such questions in the use of history, we usually ask if we could have done better, and if so, how? This then leads to a ‘gaming’ or visualization of the entire process and imagining how the outcome would have played differently. Current doctrine encourages this by “Red Teaming.”

When we use history (lessons learned?), the questions asked above might be rephrased to: what caused us to believe the information we had at the time we made the decision? What were assumptions about the use of (history/lessons learned) that made us believe certain things would happen? In essence we are drilling through to the process of 'Why would they do that?' Applying this in cultural context for unique operating environments poses even greater challenges.

In general, the use of history or lessons learned is about improvement, even marginal improvement of some kind.

The infamous Bay of Pigs offers an illustration. Kennedy and his Administration spent six days assessing and analyzing options. Airstrikes were an option, so was an island invasion. Ultimately it was a Naval Blockade and Robert Kennedy negotiating the withdrawal of missiles from Turkey that would end the crisis. Similarly, the Strategic Studies Institute, Wanat, Combat Action in Afghanistan, 2008 is an example of contemporary history that is meant to provide historical context for future leaders and decision making in chaotic and complex environments.

The Operations process is ultimately about the employment of power – soft power and or hard power – and in this light, specifics and particulars matter greatly. In many cases our first impulse is to do something. Our second thought is what or whether we should, and then in what sequence.

Decision making involves drawing on history (lessons learned) in an effort to advocate for or against a situation. It also helps us frame sharper questions in a more systematic method because nothing threatens analytic questions more than beliefs that fuel convincing advocacy; few things threaten advocacy more than obvious flaws in analysis.

Our usual practice is to plunge into action, place an overreliance on fuzzy analogies, neglect the past history of that issue, fail to think about presumptions (not assumptions but presumptions), with little to no effort spent at seeing current choices as part of the historical sequence.

Harry Truman's response to Dean Acheson's news that North Korea had just invaded South Korea is illustrative; "By God, I am going to hit them hard". What makes this all so interesting is that these same men in 1948, and again in 1950, stated that Korea was of little strategic value and the use of military force would be ill advised. Why then, in June 1951, did they decide to fight?

That question is outside the scope of this paper, however for our illustration of the use of history, Truman would invoke the analogies of the 1930's. He would make reference to Manchuria, Austria, Ethiopia and how the League of Nations had failed. The lessons of the thirties would provide the underlying theme for supporting a stern response. History and lessons learned that resonate with association, cultural association. Yet they never asked why those specific analogies were so critical to deciding to fight.

Separating the known, the unknown, the unclear, and presumed allows one to truly analyze the situation by, disassembling the parts, especially in the use of historical analogy. (Analyze from: *anas*, meaning things; and *lysein*, to dissolve; in an effort to disassemble a situation now).

If our first caveat is that the known, unknown, unclear, and presumed are directly related to the decision; the second is that they must be identified from the standpoint of person or persons who have to act. These things must be written down. *“In conversation you can get away with all kind of vagueness, often without realizing it. But there is something about putting your thoughts on paper that forces you to get to specifics. That way it’s harder to deceive yourself or anybody else.”*

Using the Truman illustration, the Presidents’ chief concern, based on the analogies he used, was not Korea.

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Science, art, and history all have one thing in common with decision making. It is the use of analogy to find pattern and similarity; a frame of reference. Thucydides argued that his history of the Peloponnesian Wars would arm future decision makers to do better when faced with comparable choices.

Decision making is the propensity to think forward in “time streams”. History (lessons learned), is sometimes that reference point. But, In the decision making process, what time frame is used? Is amount of time needed to achieve the objective a matter of weeks or months? How does this compare with the history of the socio-political environment?

Did the process of applying lessons learned to the operations process include a time streaming of what the outcome would look like after you rotated out of mission? What does the transition to locals, coalition partners, or NGO’s look like in this visualization, time stream, or red teaming event? What fresh facts, If at hand, or by when, would cause you to change your presumptions?

What historical placement are you using? An event, an organization, a region, a special event, your own experience? How does this help you articulate the stereotypes and bias in your presumptions?

All else aside, the blinders self imposed by fickle public support, frailties of intelligence, honor, revenge, interest, and the uncertainty of luck don’t allow for the probing of presumptions or finding history that fits – in insuring that there are no more Dien Bien Phu’s.

The history and the uses of history in a cultural context in the operations process does matter.

In conclusion, a look at stated success in current operations reflects that successful operations were multidisciplinary, multi-approach, and followed multiple simultaneous Lines of Operation. An analysis of British operations, 2006-2009, in Sangin District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, reflects an

either- or-approach, and a failure to understand the “role of resident networks” of its Operating Environment. The Combat Studies Institute, Wanat, Combat Action in Afghanistan, 2008, shows how operations quickly devolved to “enemy-centric”.

The Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) runs a training program that promotes enhancing the adaptability at the individual and team level. This program is known as the Asymmetric Warfare Adaptive Leader Program (AWALP). Though this was not the purpose of the AWALP, AWG mentors have observed the participants’ performance and formed some conclusions about the levels of skill demonstrated. Some of the skill deficits observed in leaders attending the AWALP, are skills that most Army leaders consider to be fundamental. These skills are often trained in both the institutional and operational domains. Several skill deficits were listed. most notable is: *Leaders are not well attuned to seeking opportunities when conducting operations in and amongst civilian populations. Awareness of cultural issues is only one aspect. Leaders lack the deeper understanding of discerning what is important, significant or relevant when interacting with civilian populations. Many of these skills would also benefit when partnering with host nation forces or conducting advisor and training missions*⁶.

How much of this might be attributed to the operations process when devising plans and methods?

The current doctrine, approaches and strategy have been highly criticized. However, a “good strategy presumes good anthropology and good sociology.” (The presumption of cultural context in the operations process?)¹

While learning must also encompass strategic and political lessons, history and past experience do not teach, they enlighten. The art of learning comes from understanding linkages and conditions under which the events took place.

The trends of counterinsurgency, compared with the observations on language and culture training, appear to reflect that breadth, depth, and multidisciplinary approaches better serve operational need. Evidentiary support for this comes from RAND, in which they indicated that successful COIN practices tend to run in packs.⁷ Additionally, Much of what entails success in these “packs”, is contingent on integration of many elements with language and culture at multiple levels simultaneously.

- Navigate the internecine Politics
- Identify potential supporters
- Identify spoilers and detractors
- Maintain neutrality from power brokers
- Fight the enemy
- Protect the population
- Make friends
- Keep the friends you have

¹ Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics*, New York: MacMillan, 1973, p. 332. Brodie goes on to add, “Some of the greatest military blunders of all time have resulted from juvenile evaluations in this department.”

Hidden Messages in the Operations Process

- Integrate your actions with others outside your chain of command and span of control

These same elements will most likely be subsets of future Direct Action, Stability Operations and Humanitarian Missions.

In a recent SOCOM ARR, an example of the cognitive elements that give depth and breadth to the operations process (in cultural context), described the perfect Female Engagement Team (FET) as a medic and an analyst that could ask the locals open-ended questions.

Engineer, Medical, and Civil Affairs Units will be the “force of first choice”, and will require warfighter support. This is emphasized in TRADOC PAM, 525-3-0, The Army’s Future Force Capstone Concept, dated 7 December 2009. This force of first choice will require language skills, cultural capability, and regional expertise within that warfighter support. The ability to use history and lessons learned in cultural context when devising operations, plans and methods is the keystone to success.

¹ Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan, MG Michael Flynn, CPT Matt Pottinger, USMC, Paul D. Batchelor, DIA p4

² Ibid, p9

³ PRISM 2, no 3, p7

⁴ COMISAF Counterinsurgency Guidance, 1 August 2010

⁵ PRISM 2, no 3, p7

⁶ Asymmetrical Warfare Group, Leaders as Trainers, A description of currently observed training challenges as seen by AWG AWALP cadre, 4/14/2011, version 2B, Final.

⁷ Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, and Beth Grill, ***Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Detailed Counterinsurgency Case Studies***, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-964/1-OSD, 2010. See also, Evidentiary validation of FM 3-24, Published in: Joint Force Quarterly (JFQ), Issue 60, 1st Qtr 2011, Jan. 2011, p. 126-128; Discusses the demonstrated efficacy of the COIN principles embodied in FM 3-24, historical evidence and data collected from 30 case studies for recent resolved insurgencies. The vast majority of governments and COIN forces that adhered to multiple tenets of the field manual prevailed over the insurgencies they opposed.