

Finally, in order to succeed in COIN and stability operations, we must understand the cultures with which we are operating. This is actually much more difficult than it sounds. Truly understanding another culture requires more than speaking a language or knowing certain social customs so that we do not offend our hosts. Certainly those things are important. But to truly have an impact, and to do more good than harm, we must understand the social power structures that informally govern societies as well as the internal motivations of the enemy and the people. In short, we need to develop an anthropological approach to understanding our enemies.

What motivates them at the individual and social level? To what extent is the conflict about religion, or economics, or ideology, vs. other grievances?

Our enemies understand the importance of cultural factors. Indeed, today's conflicts are catalyzed by the enemy's ability to tap into "cultural narratives" of a host population, gain their support, and grow. Our challenge is to understand this dynamic and learn to counter it.

As the citizens of Iraq and Afghanistan begin to build a strong new sense of "national identity" - one that trumps the appeal of violent transnational extremists - our goal is to help them achieve that vision. Our ability to assist rests on our ability to understand - at a cultural level - the factors influencing their struggle.

Our intelligence processes and education and training systems must adapt to the need to obtain, analyze, and disseminate cultural knowledge. And by dissemination, I mean to everyone who needs it. It does no good for the military or anyone else to collect information if they do not share it with their interagency, coalition, private, and non-governmental partners.

These four observations from history are only a start. There are surely more lessons to be learned from a careful examination of our past experience.

In the time I have left I want to move to the present and say a few words about the nature of the challenge we face today.

NEW STRATEGY AND TOOLS FOR THE GLOBAL INSURGENCY

The effort to learn from the past is relevant not only to Afghanistan and Iraq, but also to the global insurgency we face more broadly. Although much progress has been made in crippling the leadership of the Al-Qaeda network, it would be premature to declare victory and simply come home as some have suggested.

It would also be unwise to assume that in order to defeat this enemy we will not need new tools.

A number of scholars have asserted that today's insurgencies have evolved. For instance, today's enemy is highly adaptive, trans-nationally connected, media-savvy, and networked. In this environment, we cannot blindly graft old methods onto new strategies. We must determine what "classic" counterinsurgency approaches still work and what new approaches are required. This necessitates an adaptation of our traditional counterinsurgency theory.

One example of this dilemma is troop strength. What is the proper ratio of security forces (military and police) to a given population? An often cited rule of thumb is approximately 20 soldiers per 1000 residents. A recent study by the Army's Combat Studies Institute in Fort Leavenworth attempted to derive the "right" ratio based on historical analysis. Although the numbers varied significantly across cases, the average turned out to be 13.26 soldiers per 1000 inhabitants or 91.82 residents per soldier. But, the study's own Forward warns that these results "cannot be used to guarantee victory by simply putting a certain number of soldiers 'on the ground' relative to the indigenous population. The percentages and numbers in the study are merely historical averages, with all the dangers inherent in any average figure."

This is but one example of the difficulty in attempting to find easy to apply scientific rules of thumb to the Art of counterinsurgency. Evolution by the enemy requires that we exercise extreme care in our application of COIN principles learned from past experience. In his recent article "Counterinsurgency Redux," David Kilcullen warns