

Integration of Psychology into Intelligence Production

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JANUARY 20, 2009

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The current intelligence preparation of the battlefield procedure is an exhaustive and meticulous task of evaluating every aspect of the battlefield and attempting to deduce an enemy's course of action based on previously disseminated information regarding his doctrine and tactics. In evaluating the enemy, we often fail to look at the core of his nature. Insurgents do not strictly follow any particular doctrine in order to prevent themselves being locked into predictable tactics that can be overcome. The unexpected event, or "black swan," that comes as a surprise has no foundation in previous engagements or historical tendencies. If intelligence

analysts are better familiarized with the psychological underpinnings of the enemy's nature, they are better prepared to understand his actions and intents. Ultimately, the aim is to gain a better understanding of what makes the enemy “tick.”

In addition to overcoming the psychological obstacle of trying to think like the enemy, contemporary analysts would benefit from having an enhanced perspective of their own thought processes. Certain characteristics are intrinsic to all analysts and everyone is biased and subjective on some level. Better understanding of human psychology will aid in recognizing the presence and influence of opinion on analysis.

Presently, the training that intelligence officers receive at MIBOLC does not include much material on the machinations of human thinking. Analysts examine the enemy through the lens of Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB). The four step process defines the battlefield environment, describes its effects, and then evaluates the threat, taking into account the enemy's capabilities, disposition, composition and preferred tactics. The final step is developing possible courses of action based on the previously identified information. ¹

Throughout the procedure, the enemy mentality is not explicitly engaged. Threat courses of action are based on previously observed tactics and techniques and what the enemy prefers to do historically. In our present conflict the enemy is specifically adapted to be tactically flexible and thus avoid demonstrating historic tendencies. Al-Qaeda has deliberately designed their training regimen to be experimental and ever evolving. Contrary to US instructors that are locked into training doctrine, enemy combatants like those of Al-Qaeda are constantly improving or shifting their tactics, techniques, and procedures. ²

One of the greatest shortcomings in attempting to predict an enemy's future actions based

1 FM 34-130 (Washington DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1994), 1.1-1.5

2 H. John Poole, *Tactics of the Crescent Moon: Militant Muslim Combat Methods* (Emerald Isle: Posterity Press, 2004), 179-180

on previous engagements is the inability to foresee the “black swan.” A black swan event is an outlier or event that is beyond the realm of normal expectations. It is simply a surprise because it is nothing like what has been experienced in the past. The attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001 can be deemed a black swan. Its very unexpected nature helps facilitate the conditions for it to occur. That is to say had there been any expectations of such an attack there would have been countermeasure in place to prevent it.³ Indeed, future terrorist attacks will aim to take on the shape of the black swan and strike where least expected.

To further complicate the conundrum of attempting to predict enemy behaviors, we must also overcome the notion that the enemy has a similar mindset to our own. The attacks on September 11th clearly demonstrated that terrorists of the militant Islamic breed do not hold to the same social norms, laws, or morals that we do. The act of committing suicide in effort to kill innocent civilians on a large scale is morally reprehensible and unimaginable, yet it is a tactic that is perpetrated with regularity in the Middle-East. During the Iran-Iraq war young children were sent to clear minefields while holding plastic keys to heaven.⁴ How does the enemy mentally justify such actions? The ability to understand and predict enemy behaviors is not only dependent on knowing capabilities, but also understanding their moral boundaries. The perplexities of enemy behavior require a great deal of imagination and creativity to replicate. However, analysts need to develop predictions with the enemy's mindset, not their own.

Several reasons identified for intelligence failure are rooted in psychological pitfalls. Some of these categories described by Paul Reynolds in his article “Long History of Intelligence Failures,” include overestimation, underestimation, complacency and mirror imaging. In each case, analytical predictions project internal biases on to the enemy. Overestimates determine the

³ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, “Learning to Expect the Unexpected,” *Edge: The Third Culture* (2004): 2-5

⁴ Reza Aslan, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution and Future of Islam* (New York : Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006), 245-255

threat is greater than actuality, and underestimates deduce the enemy is not capable of doing something. The Battle of the Bulge came as a surprise because no one predicted enemy travel through the Ardennes Forrest as it was too dense through which to mount an offensive. This occurrence of mirror imaging occurred because intelligence analysis adapted the enemy course of action to friendly capabilities.⁵ Predictive analysis of current terrorist threats must overcome the tendency to project friendly capabilities on to the enemy, even if those capabilities are representative of moral paradigms. Analysts must be able to surrender their bias of conscience.

Psychology of Intelligence Analysis by Richards J. Heuer examines the many psychological impediments to intelligence analysis. Heuer points out that every analyst will bring their own subjective opinions and bias into their production of intelligence. Furthermore, many analysts are not able to rapidly incorporate abstract concepts into conventional problems, or fail to approach abstract problems with an abstract mindset.⁶ Ultimately, a better understanding of psychology will help analysts better understand themselves and overcome obstacles like these.

The first phase of psychological adaptation to intelligence analysis is incorporating a block of instruction on introductory psychology into the intelligence basic officer leader's course. The recommended reading accompanying this block of instruction is *Psychology in Action* by Karen Huffman and *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* by Heuer. It would best be placed in to the current training schedule just before classes on cultural awareness. Providing students with the basic tools of comprehension for complex insurgent behavior prior to engaging the mind set of the militant Muslim will allow for enhanced exploration of cognitive and emotive faculties that drive the threat to operate the way they do.

5 Paul Reynolds, "Long History of Intelligence Failures," BBC NEWS (2004): 1-3

6 Richards J. Heuer Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* (Central Intelligence Agency : Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999), 111-126

Following a brief exposition of basic human psychology, analysts can begin to apply those fundamentals to real world situations through case studies and selected readings. Based on their understanding of Middle Eastern culture in conjunction with the knowledge gained of the evolution of the militant Muslim through readings, students can begin to develop their own model for insurgent behavior.

Psychology and predictive analysis do not readily lend themselves as topics that can be testable in a simple GO/NO GO fashion. They are less of a simple dichotomy and more so a subject matter that is best suited for practical exercises. Students would explore the enemy mind through case studies provided by readings. The instructional block would culminate with scenarios in which students would have the opportunity to explore a situation through the enemy perspective. The focus is less at driving towards developing a “right” answer and more towards fostering creativity. The objective is to integrate what the analyst knows about the enemy, how they think the enemy thinks, and produce a prediction.

Ultimately, intelligence analysts would have a more positive footing inside the enemy's head and their own. Rather than question the moral nature of enemy behavior, analysts will be able to identify with enemy motivations and work within the paradigms of enemy cognitive patterns and behaviors. Intelligence work is not a 100% process. However, with a better understanding of human nature and the cultural implications of the contemporary operating environment, analysts will be better prepared to predict the next black swan.

Given that psychology is an often overlooked topic in predictive analysis, an increased

amount of instruction would facilitate greater creativity. Analysts need to overcome their own psychological obstacles in developing intelligence that is objective and unbiased. Removing these inherent obstructions and increasing familiarization with enemy mentality will promote improved predictive analysis. In this era of unconventional warfare, creativity in analysis is paramount. Providing psychological training for analysts would only add another tool for cultivating that creativity. Improved analysis of the enemy from this mindset will better prepare intelligence professionals for predicting the next black swan.

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