

Running head: HEARTS AND MINDS: GAINING ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE

Hearts and Minds: Gaining Actionable Intelligence

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## Hearts and Minds: Gaining Actionable Intelligence

Actionable Intelligence (AI) is defined in military terms as: “Any information from a reliable source that may be used by a commander to insure a successful mission or operation conducted with speed and accuracy”. In no other time has this been more important than in our current Global War on Terror (GWOT).

Even in this era of satellite technology, spy planes and reconnaissance drones, our best source of A.I. will always be word-of-mouth from the local populace. Winning the trust and confidence of the local nationals is and will always be the one of the greatest challenges in all foreign conflicts that the United States will be involved in. The U.S. must make every effort not to alienate themselves from the local population by using techniques of brutality and chastisement to gain information. This will only lead to resentment and non-cooperation and make the objectives of our military extremely difficult or impossible to accomplish. We must use lessons learned from past conflicts to ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated today.

### Obstacles to Obtaining Actionable Intelligence

#### *Mistrust of local nationals to U.S.*

To gain the trust and Confidence of the local nationals (LN) is far and away our largest obstacle to obtaining good A.I. Not understanding the culture of a foreign country has long been a problem for Americans. This stems from the vast freedoms that we enjoy in our country and often take for granted. We do not realize that most societies are not as open as ours. Years and often centuries of poverty and oppression give root to cultures that are very untrusting and often hostile. Citizens of these nations have always been ruled by autocratic and despotic leaders telling them how to act, live and think. We, as

Americans with the best of intentions do not realize that people who have been oppressed for so many years will not often grasp the concept of freedom overnight. It will take patience and time on our account to eventually earn their trust.

*Enemy propaganda*

The success and prosperity of the U.S. often leads to resentment from other countries, in particular impoverished nations who see the U.S. as a land of greed and excess. This is often fueled by generations of religious teachings, Islam in particular, by leaders and cults that will twist the words of the Koran or Bible to fit their own agenda. Poverty combined with religion will almost always breed extremism. With this comes the mistrust and non-cooperation from the L.N. whom, in most cases are not hostile but will not volunteer any intelligence to U.S. or western allies. This is what plagues us in our current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is not only religious extremism that causes mistrust. In cases such as the Philippine War (1899-1902) and the Vietnam War (1962-1973), just the lack of cultural awareness and our support of corrupt government leaders caused the common people of those nations to view our cause in an unappreciative manner. These public views made our missions overly difficult (Philippines) or impossible (Vietnam) to accomplish. Gaining the trust and cooperation of the L.N. is no easy task but is paramount to the success of our missions by the intelligence that the people will provide. Gathering this intelligence must be done carefully and we must not ignore the lessons of our past conflicts.

Techniques to gain Actionable Intelligence and their Effectiveness

*Modern technology*

Currently, our most simple way of gathering trouble free and accurate intelligence is through technology, an advantage that the U.S. has enjoyed in all of our modern conflicts. Satellites provide us with global imagery on troop and equipment movements and the ability to intercept communications. This is done, for the most part, on a strategic level. Our newest and extremely effective tools of intelligence gathering are made with the unmanned aerial drones equipped with camera and videofeed systems capable of use day or night. The “Raven” system is an aerial camera that can be employed down to the company level. Training for the Raven is available in theater and can be given to lower enlisted if duty requires. The “Predator” drone is a main staple to modern intelligence and has been put to widespread and sometimes very public use in the current Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns. Equipped with both night vision and thermal capabilities, the Predator can be remotely operated from control stations in theater or around the globe to provide 24-hour intelligence capacity to combatant commanders. Topping off the Predators many invaluable features is the capability to destroy targets of opportunity with equipped Hellfire missiles and has been employed to eliminate several high value targets in the current War on Terror. The greatest drawbacks to these technological intelligence gathering systems is the cost of building and maintenance, and in the case of the Predator, the amount of specialized training needed to operate such systems.

*The human factor*

Interaction with L.N.’s has always provided the best intelligence while at the same time allows our Soldiers to win the trust of the common people in the villages and cities. Prior education in and respect for local customs is paramount for this to be

successful and our campaigns in the Middle East prove this. U.S. Special Operations Forces collaboration with Afghan warlords which formed the Northern Alliance almost single handedly drove the Taliban regime from the country in only a few short months (October 2001-April 2002). This is due to the respect and recognition shown by U.S. troops to Afghan culture and tradition.

#### *Hurting our cause*

Public cooperation in Iraq has proven to be much more elusive because of the deep secular divides between the Sunni, Shia and Kurds combined with a common distrust of westerners. Incidents such as the Abu Gahraib prisoner abuse scandal and the killings of non-combatants in Hawditha, though extremely rare, only add fuel to the fire of enemy propaganda and solidify the distrust toward the U.S. Techniques of forcibly extracting information such as beatings, simulated drowning, destruction of homes and villages etc. have only proven to drive the local population to sympathize with or join the insurgency as demonstrated in the Philippines and Vietnam. Any short-term gain is not worth the permanent damage done to the U.S. image and cause (Ehrhardt, 1936).

#### *Proven methods*

Meetings with village and tribal leaders combined with food distribution and medical aid will vastly grow public cooperation with coalition forces. The more trust that the public has in us, the more information they will be inclined to share and this information will be much more accurate and timely than any gathered by means of brutality and intimidation. Many lives, both coalition and local will be saved because of this partnership and trust and has been proven time and again throughout history.

### Conclusion

As methods of obtaining actionable intelligence become highly advanced with the aid of modern technology, human interaction is still our most effective and favored method. We, as members of the U.S. military must always ensure humane treatment of local nationals through the safeguarding of basic human morals and values. Setting the example through supervision and training will allow us to accomplish this goal.

References

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