

“Using Host Nation Advisors to defeat Modern Insurgency”

By 2LT Neal Nisargand August 2008

As the US military today wages counter-insurgency against enemies within Iraq and Afghanistan, some political commentators believe that the US lacks experience in fighting an insurgency. Due to the Cold War against the Soviet Union, the US shifted much of its military strategy and tactics to fighting conventional wars. These commentators are right to argue that the US has to make a tough transition from conventional warfare between large armies to guerilla warfare against insurgents. Insurgents create unique difficulties by avoiding head-to-head conflict. Instead, they customize their tactics to exploiting US military strengths such as size and technology. However, most Americans forget that the US experienced insurgencies throughout the 19th century and managed to defeat them. The US Army waged wars against Native American tribes including an important war against the Apache Indians. The Apache Wars demonstrate the importance of understanding the insurgents' cultural mindset and how it manifests itself in their tactics. US forces at the time used Apache scouts to better understand the enemy Apache, and US forces today should again use cultural advisors to help defeat current insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Prior to American arrival in Apache lands, the Apaches first fought with the Spanish and then with the Mexicans. Apache raids against the states of Sonora and Chihuahua were so successful that northern Mexico came to be known as the “unpopulated land”.¹ The US interactions with the Apache Indians occurred as a result of the Mexican American War. The War concluded with the Gadsden Purchase of 1853 that

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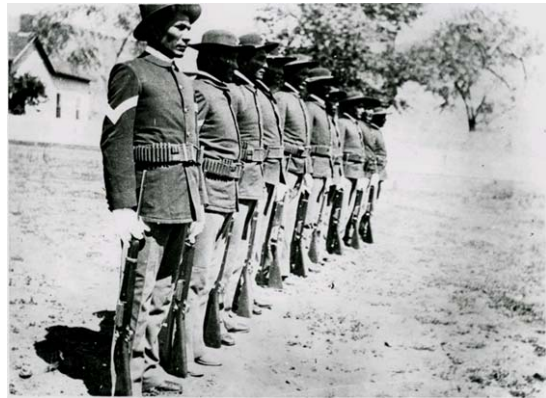
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transferred Arizona and New Mexico to the US. “Apaches were initially deferential and friendly, for they assumed that anyone who waged war against the Mexicans must have other virtues.”² In the early 1850s, miners encroached upon Apache territory in their search for gold. US Army dragoons patrolled supply routes to prevent Apaches from robbing supply convoys. The Apaches lived by hunting and gathering food and also trading. By moving into Apache land and threatening the Apaches’ food sources, the Americans disrupted the Apaches’ way of life. The US government originally intended to coexist with the Apaches but changed their strategy when they realized that the Apaches needed to hold their territory or steal from the Americans to survive. Throughout the 1860s, the US Army stationed themselves in fixed positions to protect civilian populations.

During the important Battle of Apache Pass, the Army was trapped in a canyon with the Apaches overlooking their position. The Army found themselves without water but used their howitzers to attack the Apaches’ fixed positions. The Apaches retreated but learned never to engage the Army in a “set battle”.³ In the early 1870s, the US Interior Department and War Department argued over how to deal with the Apaches. The Interior Department wanted to move the Apaches peacefully with the threat of military action while the War Department believed that the only an all-out war would subdue the Apaches. For almost a year and a half, the dispute continued until President Grant approved an offensive by the US Army. This bureaucratic stall gave the Apaches time to unite their bands and conduct raids against the American citizenry.

US Army General George Crook made important modifications to Army intelligence, logistics, and command and control in order to seize the advantage against

the Apaches. Prior to starting his campaign, Crook met with experienced soldiers, the territorial governor and conducted his own reconnaissance, essentially carrying out the “intelligence estimate process”.⁴ Crook then reorganized his unit into smaller elements, each equipped with scouts, combat troops and mule pack trains. However, Crook’s most innovative change was to utilize friendly Apaches as Army scouts. Crook first used Mexican scouts to track the Apaches because they had better knowledge of the terrain than the Americans. Once Crook realized that he could recruit friendly Apaches as scouts, he used these scouts to better understand how the enemy Apaches would react to US maneuvers. He then attached Apache scouts to each of his elements. The Apache scouts




knew the enemy tactics and their weaknesses. Crook conducted a winter campaign against the Apaches which exploited the fact that the Apaches had to live off of the land.⁵ The Apaches could not re-supply themselves during the season when food was least available. With his Apache scouts and more mobile troops, Crook could then pursue the enemy Apache at night and attack them in their previously secure hiding places. Crook’s campaign caused the Apaches to settle in the US designated reservations.

During the Apache Wars, General Crook skillfully used Apache scouts that held intimate knowledge of the enemy Apache tactics.⁶ Crook did not have large numbers of Apaches favorable to the US cause so he had to use employ the Apaches he had to provide intelligence. In the current Iraq conflict, the US has an Iraqi Army counterpart and a civilian population both capable of gathering intelligence as well as taking action.


The US Army must remember to rely on local forces to fight insurgents rather than attempting to fight with only the US's military might. When the Iraqi military takes the lead, an important outcome will occur. Just as the Apache scouts knew their enemy, the Iraqis will know "the traits and characteristics of the population" which allows them to anticipate insurgent actions.⁷ The Army has already begun to create Military Transition Teams (MTTs) to train and supplement Iraqi Army units. MTTs enable the Iraqi Army to build its professionalism by working with the Americans, and the US personnel gain better insight into how both friendly and enemy Iraqis think. As the Apache Wars demonstrate, a force can exploit the enemy's cultural traits to understand how they will fight.

However, the US Army must go further than simply using MTTs to defeat the insurgency. While MTTs expose many Iraqis to US culture, they expose very few US personnel to Iraqi culture. The US Army needs its conventional forces to exploit the local culture to win a counter-

insurgency effort. To exploit the local culture, US Army units need cultural advisors from the host nation who can help intelligence and operations planning efforts. A host nation cultural advisor could work for the battalion



Comparison to MTT



MTT	HN Cultural Advisor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train the Iraqi Army in US tactics and influence Iraqi soldiers with US culture US personnel teach, Iraqis learn Few US personnel, many Iraqi personnel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train US Army in local area tactics and influence US leaders with local culture Advisor teaches, US personnel learn Few local personnel, many US personnel

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staff and provide input to the S-2 and S-3. Using a cultural advisor would allow US forces to fight insurgents by understanding why and how the insurgents fight US forces.

The ideal candidate for a cultural advisor would have close connections to community within the area of operations and share a similar ethnic, economic or other background in common with the local populace. Having an advisor who matches the demographics of the community is critical because the advisor will provide input that matches the interests of the population. Hiring a host nation cultural advisor would obviously create major force protection concerns. For this reason, the cultural advisor would need to be thoroughly vetted by US forces. The US commander would meet with local leaders to ask for them to recommend advisors. US forces would also vet the local leaders to ensure that the leader did not have ulterior motives for their recommendations. At the same time, the most useful host nation advisors would be persons who once fought against US forces as an insurgent. These advisors would have the greatest understanding of insurgents since they were formerly insurgents. Thus, an important balance must be struck between having advisors who understand the enemy but are not working for the enemy.

The recruiting process would work in the following manner. The S-2 would analyze the local demographics and determine which leaders and social groups are important within the battalion's area of operations. The commander would meet with the key local leaders and ask them to recommend advisors. In an area with three major tribes, the commander would seek several candidates from each tribe. After thorough counterintelligence investigations of each candidate and his recommending leader, the commander would choose three advisors with one representing each tribe. The advisors

would meet with the battalion staff who would familiarize the advisors with how the Army plans battalion operations and conducts the military decision making process. Once the advisors join the battalion staff, they will fulfill two major roles. The first role would be within the S-2 shop. Their purpose in the S-2 shop would be to help the S-2 assess the enemy forces better. The advisors would analyze emerging enemy techniques, tactics and procedures (TTPs) and study enemy attack patterns. They would assist the S-2 in creating the enemy's most likely and most dangerous courses of action. The advisors would also play a role in assisting the S-3. They would predict how the enemy and the local population would react to US operations. The S-3 could then tailor his operations to disrupting the enemy without bothering the mass base. Once operations occur, the advisors would provide feedback on their effectiveness which would allow the S-3 to correct mistakes in upcoming operations.

Since force protection is the most important concern when inviting local advisors into a US unit, this section will make suggestions to mitigate that concern. As mentioned before, the

advisors and the recommending local leaders would be thoroughly investigated by US forces to reduce the possibility of hiring a threat to US forces. The S-2 will be in charge of the advisors and keep them on a need to know basis for intelligence. The advisors will

MISSION PLANNING

S-2 Shop

- Analyzes enemy attack patterns
- Analyzes enemy emerging TTPs
- Assesses enemy MLCOAs, MDCOAs
- Makes force protection recommendations

Wargaming against S-3

- Finds weaknesses in friendly maneuver
- Predicts how enemy might react to operations
- Predicts how mass base might react to operations
- Provide feedback on effectiveness of previous operations

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be left out of operations that are deemed to sensitive for their knowledge. As a further protection measure, the Army could assign an additional intelligence soldier to the battalion S-2 to act as a facilitator for the advisors. This soldier would officially serve as an intelligence analyst, but his actual training would be in counterintelligence so that he could monitor the advisors for force protection issues.

Host nation cultural advisors can bring tremendous benefits to Army battalions. First, they will provide a wealth of cultural knowledge about the area of operations (AO) since they are intimately familiar with the community in the AO. This will prevent the US commander from accidentally irritating the populace and cause the mass base to remain favorable towards US forces. Winning the population's approval is the most important part of defeating an insurgency. Second, the advisors will provide the battalion commander with a more realistic assessment of how the enemy will react to US actions. This will allow the battalion staff to plan operations that better exploit the enemy's cultural weaknesses. In the Apache case, the Apache scouts understood that the enemy Apache warriors could not easily re-supply in the winter because the warriors depended on their tribes' ability to hunt and gather food. In a modern Iraq situation, a cultural advisor could tell US forces if insurgents are more likely to attack before a holiday or which neighborhood will give insurgents refuge after an attack. A local advisor will have much greater access to this information than a battalion new to its AO. Clearly, a host nation cultural advisor will possess intimate knowledge of the society which is so crucial



to winning counter-insurgency.

Clearly, the US Army needs to continue to study past counter-

insurgencies such as the Apache Wars to glean lessons learned from the past. While the Apache Wars occurred more than 100 years ago, they remain applicable. They show that highly technological means such as howitzers or air support are not always useful in defeating an insurgency. Instead, the military should understand how the enemy fights and reinvent tactics to fight him asymmetrically. The best way to accomplish this is to understand the interests of the local population and the insurgent forces. General Crook used Apache scouts to gain cultural understanding about the Apaches. To win against insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, US forces must help the local government win the support of the general population. They must convince the local population to separate itself from the insurgent forces. By utilizing host nation cultural advisors, the US Army can educate commanders and staffs to plan operations that take into account how the local population will react and how US forces can win their support. The more US forces understand the local population, the better success they will achieve in defeating insurgencies.

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