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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

**Exposure and Experience:
Additional Criteria for Selecting Future Operational Theater Commanders**

by

Christopher J. Williams

Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

23 October 2009

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*“Not everything that can be counted counts,
and not everything that counts can be counted.”*
- *Albert Einstein*

ABSTRACT

Creating a synergy of effort amongst the nearly innumerable agencies involved in a contingency operation is one of the challenges of the operational theater commander, which makes his selection an essential element of mission success within a theater of operations. This paper argues that because of the rare opportunities that exist to command at the operational theater-level of war, exposure to those serving in operational positions should be maximized prior to selection to command of an operational theater. Exposing potential leaders to this level may likely provide the otherwise unattainable experience required for successful completion of operational theater command. Failure to provide enough exposure to our potential future leaders to this level of command and to assess their likeliness for success in this area may result in poor execution of the military element of power and the overall poor integration of all elements of national power at the operational-level. No attempt is made herein to identify or address each of the intrinsic, obscure and immeasurable number of qualities that equate to either a successful or unsuccessful operational theater commander. This paper simply suggests that conducting a critical analysis of the experience of the leader and his exposure to the operational theater-level of war will likely add additional depth to the scrutiny required when selecting senior military leaders.

INTRODUCTION

In a quest for a more agile, unconventional approach in an operational theater that has gone quickly downhill, on 11 May 2009 President Obama fired General David McKiernan as the top Operational [Theater] Commander in Afghanistan.¹ He replaced him with General Stanley McChrystal, an Army commander not without his own controversial background stemming from his role in the mishandling of the Army Ranger Pat Tillman fratricide incident.² Speaking in support of that decision, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said, “As I have said many times before, very few of these problems can be solved by military means alone...and yet, from the military perspective, we can and must do better.” And, “It’s time for new leadership and fresh eyes.”³ What then is it that made General McKiernan, and other relieved operational theater commanders in history unsuccessful, and what makes General McChrystal the latest candidate for success? At the operational theater-level of war there are increased doctrinal considerations that do not exist at the tactical level. Joint Publication 3-0 adds to the principles of joint operational warfare three additional operational theater-level qualifiers: Restraint, Perseverance and Legitimacy.⁴ These qualifiers are added because the complexities of joint operations at the operational theater-level require a broader analysis than the principles required for success at the tactical level. Similar to this accepted concept are complexities at the operational theater-level of command that require a commander selected from a broader analysis than is provided via performance evaluations aimed at

1. Jelinek, Pauline. "The Huffington Post." *David McKiernan Steps Down From Top Afghanistan Command Post*. May 2009. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/05/11/david-mckiernan-steps-dow_n_201621.html (accessed September 29, 2009).

2. Mendoza, Scott and Lindlaw, Martha. "General Suspected Cause of Tillman Death." *Washingtonpost.com*. August 4, 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/03/AR2007080301868.html> (accessed October 19, 2009).

3. (Jelinek 2009)

4. Department of Defense. *Joint Publication 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations*. Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2008, II-2.

selecting junior to mid grade officers. This paper examines potential additions to the long-accepted qualities of military leadership that should likely be developed in order to further identify tactical leaders for potential service as operational theater commanders. This paper argues that because of the rare opportunities that exist to command at the operational theater-level of war, exposure to those serving in operational positions should be maximized prior to selection to command of an operational theater. In short, this paper offers that education plus previous experience and exposure may equal preparation. Failure to provide potential future leaders enough exposure to this level of command and to assess their likeliness for success in this area may result in poor execution of the military element of national power and the overall poor integration of all elements of national power at the operational theater-level.

This paper does not, however, attempt to argue for specific training and educational “road maps” that may eventually produce a qualified operational theater commander. Such programs have been developed for years and have produced senior commanders in each of the Services that have performed either successfully or unsuccessfully. Regardless of an individual’s performance in the specific role of Commander (e.g. Gen McKiernan in Afghanistan), to achieve the rank of General (or Admiral) in the U.S. Military is a significant accomplishment. The questions addressed in this paper are aimed at understanding if there may be a relationship between the amount of operational theater-level experience and exposure and success in command at the operational theater level of war.

This paper is also not a pedestrian attempt to change Service-specific leadership qualities such as the USMC leadership traits of: justice, judgment, decisiveness, initiative, dependability, tact, integrity, enthusiasm, bearing, unselfishness, courage, knowledge, loyalty and endurance captured in the acronym „JJ DID TIE BUCKLE’ as a starting point for

teaching military leadership.⁵ This acronym, and the countless versions and variations of it proffered by “think tanks,” study groups and other organizations, ably serves the purpose of introducing and reinforcing the requisite skills for development of the military’s young leaders and has worked superbly for generations. What this paper argues is to add two interrelated considerations, exposure and experience, to the inventory of qualifiers used by senior leaders when selecting operational theater commanders.

Leadership criteria and qualities are broad topics. In fact, they are some of the most researched, studied and published subjects in U.S. society. The search engine Google™ returns approximately 140 million entries for the key word, “leadership.”⁶ This paper simply suggests that to ignore, or even gloss over the utility of exposure and experience when weighing the qualities of those who will command at the most senior operational levels of the military is to devalue the path that each of the military services, individual experience, combat service, personal ambition and a small hint of divine providence have combined to provide in the way of qualified senior officers.

The operating environment of the current Overseas Contingency Operation (formerly, “The Global War on Terror”)⁷ is complex, evolutionary and subject to an unimaginable number of exterior and interior influences. In Afghanistan alone, the Forces utilized in, or associated with, the operations that support this contingency vary from division and brigade-sized conventional U.S. military units to elements of foreign government secretariats and

5. U. S. Marine Corps. "USMC.mil." *USMC Doctrine*. October 20, 1998.
http://www.marines.mil/news/publications/Documents/MCRP%206-11B%20W_CH%201%20Marine%20Corps%20Values_A%20User%27s%20Guide%20for%20Discussion%20Leaders.pdf (accessed October 11, 2009).

6. Google. *Google*. October 5, 2009.
<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&source=hp&q=leadership&aq=f&oq=&aqi=g10> (accessed October 5, 2009).

7. Wilson, Scott. "The Washington Post." *'Global War on Terror' is Given New Name*. March 25, 2009.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/24/AR2009032402818.html> (accessed September 29, 2009).

bureaus to nearly 1,750 multi-national Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).⁸ Many of these organizations operate along their own Lines of Operations/Effort (LOO/E) toward oftentimes disparate tactical, operational objectives or strategic end states and compete for the scant resources and attention of the Afghan population. Creating a synergy of effort amongst the nearly innumerable agencies involved in a contingency operation is one of the challenges of the commander of an operational theater, which makes his selection an essential element of mission success within a theater of operations.⁹ Conducting a critical analysis of the experience of the individual and his exposure to the operational theater-level of war will likely add additional depth to the scrutiny required when selecting these senior military leaders.

The argument of this paper is organized in the following manner. First, the terms exposure and experience are defined and their importance discussed relative to previous successful and relieved commanders of operational theaters. This is followed by a discussion of the different types of exposure, which for the purposes of this argument, are direct and indirect. To offer a potential counter argument to this argument, this paper will then examine the possible relationship between successful U.S. Presidents and the amount of political experience they possessed prior to assuming that office. Lastly, conclusions and recommendations are provided to support the thesis of this paper.

8. Council on Foundations. "United States International Grantmaking." *Country Information: Afghanistan*. June 2009. <http://usig.org/countryinfo/afghanistan.asp> (accessed September 29, 2009).

9. Use of the gender-specific pronoun 'his' here is intended to avoid pronoun point of view confusion throughout this paper. The point of view of this paper is from the masculine, but obviously, an operational commander could also include the feminine.

EXPOSURE & EXPERIENCE

It is reasonable to assume that only by actually occupying a position or billet, can one truly gain “experience” at that specific job skill. Positions that demand this specific requirement are rare, but include such things as the Presidency of the United States, a first-time mother, or an operational theater commander engaged in combat operations. President William J. Clinton, when asked about his wife’s level of experience to be President quipped that, “You could argue that no one is ever ready to be President.”¹⁰ How then do the strategic leaders of the United States minimize the leap-of-faith in confidence required when selecting someone to lead the U.S.’s military and potentially interagency forces over the length of a war or campaign?

This topic is pertinent because, while uncommon, one need not look far to see that those in a U.S. strategic leadership position have made unfortunate choices of operational theater commanders at times throughout our history, and specifically during the current war. “The decision to fire McKiernan represents one of a handful of times since President Harry S. Truman's removal of Gen. Douglas MacArthur [as Commander, UN Forces in Korea] in 1951 that U.S. civilian leaders have relieved a top wartime commander.”¹¹ Similarly, while not officially relieved, Gen. John Abizaid retired as the Commander of Central Command and General George Casey relinquished Command of Multi-National Force-Iraq prior to completing their full tours after they opposed the surge of troops in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.¹²

10. Stanglin, Jeff. "Suite101.com." *Experience to be President: Republicans Continue to Cite Obama's Supposed Lack of Experience*. August 8, 2008. http://us-elections.suite101.com/article.cfm/experience_to_be_president#ixzz0Tx13mfOT (accessed October 5, 2009).

11. Tyson, Ann Scott. "Top U.S. Commander in Afghanistan is Fired." *The Washington Post*, May 12, 2009: 1.

12. Spiegel, Perter. "Top General in Mideast to Retire." *The Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 2006: 1.

What is similar about all three of these commanders is that, in comparison to more successful commanders at the same level of command, they had little previous exposure and experience to the type of command they assumed. Table 1 compares the career paths of two successful and two unsuccessful officers who served in operational theater command. Study of the table suggests a pattern between their previous experiences, the amount of exposure that experience provided and their likelihood of successful service in command of an operational theater of war. Clearly, comparison of only four officers throughout American military history is perversely small. As well as is the disparity of the operating environments between the American Civil War, WWII and today's conflict. However, for the scope of this paper, a pattern clearly emerges between service in direct observation of an operational theater commander (exposure) and the future success of these specific officers.

What this suggests is that experience and exposure, by both syntax and understanding, are very closely related. For the purposes of this argument, they are again closely linked; however, the subtle differences between them go a long way toward explaining the disparity between the performances of senior leaders. Exposure conveys a measure of experience in that the results and ordered effects of decisions are visible to those intimate with a situation and lessons learned may be garnered by a person exposed to them. The 18th Century Prussian Philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote extensively on this subject, asking if an object can be known to have certain properties prior to the experience of that object.¹³ Specifically, he states, "...it follows from this that it is possible that there are objects of such nature which the mind cannot think, and so the principle of causality, for instance, cannot be applied outside of experience: hence we cannot know, for example,

13. Kant, Immanuel. "The Critique of Pure Reason (E-Book)." *The Project Gutenberg Etext of The Critique of Pure Reason*. July 2003. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4280/pg4280.html> (accessed October 2, 2009).

whether the world always existed or if it had a cause. And so the grand questions of speculative metaphysics cannot be answered by the human mind, but the sciences are firmly grounded in laws of the mind.”¹⁴ Paraphrasing, Kant was conveying that the mind can only have empirical knowledge of what it actually experiences, but through exposure to widely accepted scientific facts, exposure can equate to a level of experience.

Significant in Kant’s argument is the statement that sciences are firmly grounded in laws of the mind, even if the mind has no experience in certain scientific events.¹⁵ This implies that exposure does lend to experience and is critical when exploring what can be considered „the unknown.’ The relationship between experience and exposure is explained here through Kant because it draws attention to the fact that experienced operational theater commanders, like witnesses to rare scientific anomalies, are exceedingly rare. However, the exposure to and careful study of the widely accepted lessons learned from those anomalies may synthesize into a modicum of experience that, while still subordinate to actual experience, can produce favorable results during similar events.

14. (I. Kant 2003)

15. Baird, Forrest E., and Walter Kaufmann. *From Plato to Derrida*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008.

Experience Comparison of Former Operational Theater Commanders		
Officer	Billet/Result	Conventional /Joint Experience ¹⁶
		Operational Experience
General David Petraeus ^{17, 18}	Commander MNF-I / Successful	Extensive: - Commander of 101 st Airborne Division for OIF I. - Leadership and Staff positions in airborne, mechanized, and air assault infantry units in Europe and the United States. - Command of a battalion in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) - Command of a brigade in the 82nd Airborne Division. - Staff assignments: - Aide to the Chief of Staff of the Army; battalion, brigade, and division operations officer; Military Assistant to the Supreme Allied Commander - Europe; Chief of Operations of the United Nations Force in Haiti; and Executive Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
		Extensive: - 16 months as First commander Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq - 11 months as NATO Training Mission- Iraq - Commander of the U.S. Joint Interagency Counter-Terrorism Task Force-Bosnia (concurrent as commander of 101 st Airborne Division.) - Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations of the NATO Stabilization Force during Operation Joint Forge in Bosnia
General David McKiernan ¹⁹	Commander ISAF / Relieved	Extensive: - Commander, 1st Battalion, 35th Armor - Commander, 1st Armored Division - Commander, 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division - Commander, 1st Cavalry Division - Commander, 3rd U.S. Army/Combined Forces Land Component Command during OIF I - Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations, Headquarters, United States Army, Europe and Seventh Army - G-3, Headquarters, Department of the Army. - Following OIF 1, he was the Deputy Commanding General/Chief of Staff for United States Army Forces Command. - Commander U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR)
		Limited: - 1996: Deputy Chief of Staff G-2/G-3, Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) both forward deployed in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina and also in Rheindahlen, Germany.
General Douglas MacArthur ^{20, 21}	Supreme Commander SWPA / Successful	Extensive: - Chief of Staff, United States Army - Chief of Staff, 42d Division (WWI) - Commanded 84 th Infantry Brigade - Vera Cruz expedition - Superintendent, West Point - Aide-de-camp to President Theodore Roosevelt
		Extensive: - Supreme Commander, Southwest Pacific Area (WWII) - Field Marshall of the Philippine Army

16. Conventional and Joint Experience are listed here together because the objective of this paper is to suggest that service in actual operations is separate from service on the Joint Staff, a Combatant/Functional Staff not forward deployed or service in a conventional unit.

17. General David Petraeus' experience in this chart is up to the point in time when he assumed the operational command of MNF-I. This compares to the point in time when General McKiernan assumed command of ISAF. General Petraeus is used in this example because it is too early to judge General McChrystal's performance in Afghanistan.

18. —. "United States Department of Defense News." *www.defense.gov*. October 16, 2009.

<http://www.defenselink.mil/bios/biographydetail.aspx?biographyid=166> (accessed October 16, 2009).

19. International Security Assistance Force. "NATO/OTAN." *International Security Assistance Force*. June 10, 2008. <http://www.nato.int/isaf/structure/bio/comisaf/mckiernan.html> (accessed October 16, 2009).

20. Bell, William Gardner. *Center of Military History*. October 3, 2003.

http://www.history.army.mil/faq/mac_bio.htm (accessed October 16, 2009).

21. Public Broadcasting Service. *PBS.com*.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/macarthur/peopleevents/pandeAMEX96.html> (accessed October 8, 2009).

General George McClellan ²²	Commander Army of the Potomac / Relieved	Extensive: - Commanded a company of engineers during the Mexican-American War. - Commanded his engineering company at West Point, for the purpose of training cadets in engineering activities. - Second-in-command on an expedition to discover the sources of the Red River. - Department of Texas, survey of Texas rivers and harbors. - Pacific Railroad surveys to select an appropriate route for the transcontinental railroad. - June 1854, reconnaissance mission to Santo Domingo. - 1855, official observer of the European armies in the Crimean War. - Commanded the Ohio militia in April 1861 as MGen of volunteers. - Commander, Department of Ohio in May 1861
		Limited: - Occupy Western Virginia - Commander the Army of the Potomac

Table 1: Experience Comparison of Former Operational Theater Commanders

TYPE OF EXPOSURE: DIRECT

Direct and indirect are the two types of exposure addressed in this paper. Direct exposure is the easier of the two to define and the easier of the two to conceptualize as potentially enhancing the qualities of successful operational theater-level commanders. Direct exposure is the first-hand witnessing of an event, decision, process, consequence, ordered effect or reaction as it occurs. Because of the construct of military staffs and the filtering brought about through the process of vetting lessons learned by witnesses, direct exposure to operational theater command should only be assumed when a person is actually assigned to an operational theater staff that is forward deployed and executing an operation or campaign. In other words, having direct access to daily decisions and influences incurred by the operational theater commander is useful because often times many lessons are hidden, deleted or overtly ignored by the opinions of editing staff members. What is and is not important to those that report on events and decisions often drives what lessons are derived. Unfettered access via direct exposure is invaluable because from this perspective staff members experience the variables that may cause a change of direction, receive information that validates assumptions and witness the fruition or failure of the commander's operational vision through his daily decisions that impact operations. Additionally, it can be reasonably

22. Sears, Stephen W. *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon*. New York: De Capo Press, 1988, 32-61, 79-80.

assumed that leaders exposed to the operational theater-level may better understand the functional requirements of a theater of operations. General Petraeus' direct exposure in several situations displayed in Table 1 directly contributed to his education and suggests, without discounting his obvious and considerable intellectual skills, that someone exposed to the same experiences may perform on a par at the operational theater-level. This interaction may be the most effective way to prepare future operational theater commanders because, while they do not feel the same pressure as the commander, they see in real-time, the challenges of the position.

The differences between General McKiernan and General McChrystal are further fodder in support of the argument for exposure. "His [McChrystal] selection marks the continued ascendancy of officers who have pressed for the use of counterinsurgency tactics in Iraq and Afghanistan that are markedly different from the Army's traditional doctrine."²³ And, "McKiernan, an armor officer who led U.S. ground forces during the 2003 Iraq invasion, was viewed as somewhat cautious and conventionally minded, according to senior officials inside and outside the Pentagon."²⁴ These two comments support the argument that direct exposure is a valid qualifier because, as demonstrated in Table 1, General McKiernan's conventional experience did not expose him to the operational theater commanders in the current Overseas Contingency Operation and may have handicapped him when faced with command in an unfamiliar environment. General McChrystal, through his assignments, conversely, has been exposed extensively to the commanders in the current operational theaters and as far back as his first operational theater joint experience in 1981.

23. (Tyson 2009, 1)

24. (Tyson 2009, 1)

When, as a captain, General McChrystal served as the intelligence and operations officer (S-2/S-3) for the United Nations Command Support Group—Joint Security Area in Korea.²⁵

TYPE OF EXPOSURE: INDIRECT

“...historical re-creation will always exercise a hold over the imagination, offering as it does vicarious experience to writer and reader alike...a historical education achieves a number of goals at once: It trains the mind, enlarges the sympathies and provides a much-needed historical perspective on some of the most pressing problems of our time.”

John Tosh: The Pursuit of History

Direct exposure is invaluable and, again, should only be assumed when someone is actually forward deployed and acting in an operational capacity. Assignment to a forward deployed operational theater staff, however, is not an opportunity that is available to all personnel and is often a matter of good timing. In the event that direct exposure is not possible, indirect exposure may lend nearly equally valuable lessons learned. The challenge of indirect exposure is that it puts the onus of synthesizing information into knowledge solely in the hands of the recipient. In other words, when directly exposed, the events happen right in front of the observer; with indirect exposure the person that wants the knowledge must actively seek it, critically consume it and glean lessons learned without the benefit of immediate feedback on the success or failure of the theater commander's actions.

An example of this is indirect exposure through education. As the quote from John Tosh above exposes, history has always been a window to the future. Education has always played an essential element in the development of the way officers think about and execute warfare. History, theory and practical but “consequence free” mistakes performed in the insulated academic environment are essential to the development of officers. The founder

25. Stephey, M. J. "Time.com." *Stan McChrystal: The New U.S. Commander in Afghanistan*. May 12, 2009. <http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1897542,00.html> (accessed October 17, 2009).

and first director of the U. S. Army's School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), Brigadier General Huba Wass de Czege, USA retired, expanded on reasons for offering graduate-level education to military officers and on the importance for that education to evolve constantly with the evolution of warfare. "...officers in the early 1980s knew the military doctrine of the day, but didn't understand how to judge or revise it. Also, there were concerns about investing [an additional post command and staff college year] of an officer's career and the cost of the training. The course evolved to emphasize the art of operations, though [Wass de Czege] said it should have maintained a broader theoretical focus. That might have helped the Army realize how future battles would be conducted by smaller sized units to bring peace to a traumatized people. I think the reason for change is that some senior leaders didn't understand the difference between indoctrination and deep education."²⁶

The "deep education" mentioned by General Wass de Czege is vital to providing this abstruse 'experience'. Colonel Julian D. Alford, USMC, explains the relationship between observing and understanding in his efforts to shape the operating environment within the context of the theater of operations in Operation Enduring Freedom. He states, "To *understand* is to gain an intimate knowledge of the human and environmental dynamics impacting the campaign, particularly within a unit's AO. To orient to the challenges in our AOs, we must first work to understand not only our enemy, but also the history, culture, traditions, and languages of the Afghan people. Simply studying enemy tactics, techniques, and procedures will leave us with a limited understanding of our AOs."²⁷ In short, it is not enough that students simply observe history and gain enough knowledge to graduate from

26. Milburn, John. "Leavenworth-based SAMS celebrates 25 years." *Army Times*, May 19, 2009: 1.

27. Alford, Julian D. "Operational Design for ISAF in Afghanistan." *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 2d Quarter 2009: 92-98.

colleges and universities—it is critical that they understand what it is they are studying. That may seem obvious on the surface, but the process of linking exposure to experience and linking experience to successful operational theater command is found in the assimilation of information into knowledge—something not always evaluated as a requirement for graduation or promotion.

Indirect exposure is also formed when senior officers looking to be assigned operational theater command, or officers currently serving in that role, take the time to observe the impact of their decisions on the military personnel executing their operational design. General Wass de Czege alluded to this form of exposure as well when he stated that, “Counterinsurgencies benefit when the vision from the top is continually challenged by the view from the bottom. Best results occur when colonels get around to talk to company commanders...corps commanders talk frequently to brigade commanders and so on...The exchange of views over this helps them both discover and then work the right one. The visiting higher commander can learn more details about the relevant forces and factors at work in his bigger AOR. This then will lead to a better problem framing at his level...”²⁸ This form of indirect exposure cultivates an exchange from which counterinsurgencies certainly benefit. Arguably however, the commander’s design of the counterinsurgency and understanding of his decisions at all levels of his operational theater command has an experience forming effect as well.

There is no “cook book” for constructing operational theater commanders. However, when looking at previous successful commanders it appears that one possible equation is: Education plus previous experience equals preparation. Education in this form refers to a

28. Czege, Huba Wass de. "Small Wars Journal." *Of "Intellectual and Moral" Failures*. May 24, 2007. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2007/05/of-intellectual-and-moral-fail/> (accessed October 13, 2009).

combination of formal training and education with lessons learned over a career in the profession of arms. Previous experience in this case refers not only to the obvious professional familiarization produced from duty in one's Service-specific military occupational specialty, but also from the lessons learned by duty, and associated exposure, in a complex combat environment.

Much like command at the operational theater-level, tactical combat experience, while not as uncommon, is also sometimes a matter of good timing. After eight years of combat in the current Overseas Contingency Operation, there are members of the Services that have not been a part of combat operations.²⁹ This demonstrates the "chance" involved in obtaining extensive combat experience. Malcolm Gladwell argues in his book *Outliers* that demonstrated excellence is a product of those that combine opportunity with approximately 10,000 hours of practice. He used as example very successful persons from a wide cross section of business, sports, music and society. Gladwell supposed that what separated mediocre or even successful players from truly exceptional or statistical „outlier' performers was the achievement of a minimum of 10,000 hours of performance at their specific skill.³⁰ This is an important statistic because it furthers refines the search for the person who is most likely to succeed in an operational theater environment. If this variable is assumed correct and it is applied through the filter of those that have actually been engaged in forward contingency operations for an extensive period, then the population from which to choose operational theater commanders is assumed to be very exclusive. Although the 10,000 hour analysis has limited direct application as criteria for selection to operational theater

29. Conway, James T. "ALMAR 002/07 EVERY MARINE INTO THE FIGHT-COMMANDANT'S INTENT." *Marines.com*. January 19, 2007.
<http://www.marines.mil/news/messages/Pages/2007/EVERY%20MARINE%20INTO%20THE%20FIGHT-COMMANDANTand%2039;S%20INTENT.aspx> (accessed October 17, 2009).

30. Gladwell, Malcom. *Outliers*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008, 35-68.

command, the argument is potentially potent and supports the assertion of the importance of experience to successful execution.

Major General Robert Scales', USA retired, article *Return of the Jedi* was recently published in the *Armed Forces Quarterly* and offers a utopian idea of development of operational theater commanders. However, while a few of General Scales' ideas are laudable such as the creation of a Senior Strategist's Program for General/Flag officers to continue their professional education, General Scales is by and large overambitious in his ideas. His statement that, "A successful preliminary examination would waive the education and service requirements necessary to gain credit for joint service, thus leveling the career playing field by giving these officers the same amount of time to command as their conventionally educated peers" is particularly unsettling.³¹ This paper is not intended as a rebuttal to his article, but it is sufficient to state that General Scales' draconian approach to intra-Service officer development would likely create a cohort of tactically unskilled operational savants. These officers, in the larger analysis of building an operational bridge between tactics and strategy, would likely fail because of the lack of exposure to contemporary Service and Joint issues and the lack of leadership development produced through indirect exposure to subordinates as mentioned earlier. As Robert S. McNamara found out with his much maligned cost savings initiatives, the Services can be particularly dogmatic about their functions and contributions to National Security—a formula that, for better or worse, has worked for over two centuries. This should not be construed as espousing a policy of status quo. Change is good and enhancing the aforementioned value of education in developing

31. Scales, Robert H. "Return of the Jedi." *Armed Forces Journal*. October 2009.
<http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2009/10/4266625> (accessed October 8, 2009).

operational theater commanders will likely have value, but should not be at the expense of Service identity and tactical success.

PRESIDENTIAL COMPARISON: ARGUING THE ARGUMENT

Table 2 below demonstrates the converse to these assertions by comparing the indirect and direct exposure and experience of American Presidents prior to their elevation to the Presidency and, via non-partisan survey, their perceived performance by the American people.³² Analysis of Table 2 provides a potential argument that experience as a whole is bunk and adds very little to the scrutiny required to select senior leaders or commanders. Regardless of the potential political opinion and controversy that perpetually surrounds this sort of data, for the purposes of this paper, the rankings in Table 2 are truncated for brevity and are secondary to the un-debated amount of experience that each of these Presidents had prior to assuming the arguably most powerful office in the World.³³ Surprisingly, what Table 2 shows is that the President with the most pre-Presidential experience is ranked on average as the 41st-best President (second only to Warren G. Harding as the worst President in U. S. history). Additionally, it also states that the number one ranked President, Abraham Lincoln, is 26th in precedent for experience. This is completely inverse to the argument in this paper that experience lends to a potentially predictive analysis.

32. Levine, David A. *How Good Are Experienced Presidents?* <http://www.electoral-vote.com/evp2009/Info/experience.html> (accessed October 17, 2009).

33. The complete table is available at <http://www.electoral-vote.com/evp2009/Info/experience.html>

President	Rank	Age	VP	Gov	Senate	House	State Leg	General	Cabinet	Sum	Party
James Buchanan	41	65			10.25	10	6		4	30.25	D
Lyndon B. Johnson	14	55	3		12	12				27	D
Gerald R. Ford	28.5	61	0.75			25				25.75	R
George Washington	3	57					16	8.5		24.5	F
James Garfield	33	49				18	2	3		23	R
Dwight D. Eisenhower	9	62						11		11	R
Abraham Lincoln	1	52				2	8			10	R

Table 2: Truncated Comparison of Presidential Experience

The counter to this, however, is that a certain amount of indirect exposure to the influence of Presidential decisions is inescapable by most citizens. Additionally, the gifted citizen who has even a glimmer of political ambition will likely have an above average attentiveness to Presidential actions. Table 2 displays only some forms of direct exposure, and does not address the indirect exposure that would possibly be derived from Abraham Lincoln's profession of law, or the leadership lessons garnered by Dwight Eisenhower in his life-long profession of arms. While on the surface this data appears to pull away from the argument that experience matters, it may, upon deeper inspection, strengthen the position. Table 2 suggests that combining recognized superior performers—like those that achieve the senior ranks in the military—with those that have at a minimum indirect exposure to the impact of senior level decision makers may produce individuals posited to produce effective results.

CONCLUSION

Research collected in support of this paper enhances the assertion that a combination of both indirect—suggested here to include both education and previous duty in a complex tactical environment—and direct exposure may equal a degree of experience that points to

successful performance as an operational theater commander. Further, this paper has presented arguments for the addition of exposure and experience to the catalog of long-accepted qualities of military leadership utilized to identify tactical leaders for service as operational theater commanders. Arguments presented in this paper demonstrate that because of the scarcity of opportunities to command at the operational theater-level of war, the amount of exposure and experience of those selected to operational theater command should be maximized prior to their selection.

Though a potential formula has been offered, what this paper has not attempted to do is reduce the very difficult decision of selecting operational theater commanders to a process of identifying who does or does not have the most exposure and experience. Clearly the challenge of selecting these commanders remains incredibly complex, includes risk and consequences, and should not be diminished to a formulaic and impersonal process. Offered here is purely raw material for further study in search of the alchemy that produces leaders capable of conducting successful operations in support of U.S. strategic aims.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The subject of experience and exposure and their relationship to identification of successful operational theater commanders is non-scientific. That is to say that quantifying a quality is certainly a difficult task that has been examined since the earliest evaluations—how to identify, categorize, weight and evaluate what someone means when they say, “He just has ‘it’, whatever ‘it’ is.” Though the discussion of this paper has centered on the potentially obscure qualities required for success at the senior operational levels of the military, there are some material recommendations that can support the difficult process of selection faced by strategic leaders.

First, because of the rarity of operational theater experience, the senior political and military leaders that choose operational theater commanders should look at the additional indicators of exposure and experience when considering selection to operational theater command. These indicators are likely contained in the records of military commanders but may not be obvious. While Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) has come a long way in meeting the requirements of the Goldwater-Nichols act of 1986, more needs to be done to recognize the extent to which an officer has achieved these two additional qualifiers. A mandatory narrative comment in each of the Service's standard evaluations that includes experience and exposure (with expanded definitions beyond this paper) to operations or duty in a complex environment as well as education may make these criteria more measurable. This narrative should utilize a common language developed by the Joint Staff to identify leadership potential and ability to frame complex issues and develop workable solutions.

Second, as a concrete step in forming joint qualified officers, the Joint Staff should develop a Joint Fitness Report for use when an officer is assigned to a Joint Command. Too many times reporting officers are forced to fumble through a Service's standard form having no idea the impact of their comments. Every Service has ubiquitous but unwritten rules which when unintentionally violated can have a disastrous impact on an officer's career. A Joint Fitness report assumes that every evaluating officer learns the reporting process upon arrival at the command and „levels the playing field' for evaluation. These evaluations would become a part of an officer's record and would be briefed via a Joint Precept at each Service-specific Title 10 promotion board.

Finally, General Scales is spot on with his assessment that education must not stop at any point in an officer's career.³⁴ For Marines, attendance at the College of Naval Warfare is institutionally referred to as Top Level School (TLS). It is referred to in this manner because it is the final formally structured military school available to officers—many of whom are junior grade lieutenant colonels with many years of service remaining. Continued Professional Military Education past TLS is essential to developing and identifying potential successful operational theater commanders or for identifying principle staff officers that serve at the highest command levels. A Senior course in Operational to Strategic bridging would likely be an energizing step toward further developing a pool of professionally prepared officers for duty in these critical billets.

34. (Scales 2009)

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