

# Leadership for the Long War: Developing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warriors

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## Abstract

The Long War is characterized by the great demands it places on the warfighter. Tactical leaders, in particular, must be particularly decisive, adaptable, and grounded in the larger strategic objectives of the fight. Those leaders must address the traditional dilemmas of mission vs. welfare of the troops (leadership), loyalty vs. honor (ethics), and risk vs. security (law of war). Are time-tested methods for leader development still appropriate or is there a need for new methods? The following concepts will be explored:

- Inoculating Warriors for Irregular Warfare
  - Development in the Domains of Leadership
    - The Physical Domain
    - The Intellectual Domain
    - The Moral Domain
- Reaffirming Maneuver Warfare
  - Critical Leadership Competencies
  - Adaptability Defined
  - Flexibility or Open-mindedness
  - Intuition vs. Forethought
- Contextualizing the Laws of War

Inoculating warriors for irregular warfare: Drawing leadership lessons from history

The current fight in Iraq and Afghanistan differs in very fundamental ways from the irregular warfare of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and, as such, requires different tactics. Marxist and Maoist revolutionaries had a distinct and rigidly structured hierarchy. Al Qaeda and other contemporary entities are organized around independently operating cells only loosely knitted into the fabric of a broader ideology. The current adversary is more irregular, as a result, than our adversaries of past irregular fights. Therefore the leadership competencies demanded in this current fight have only some precedent from past wars. Some of what we seek to develop in leaders today has little precedent.

To draw historical lessons, many turn to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in the American West. The Indian Wars, particularly during the period from the Dakota War of 1862 through the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, are cited as being rich in tactical lessons. While this premise is at best suspect, the transferable lessons for today's leaders engaged in irregular warfare are almost non-existent. There are few direct lessons for contemporary operational leaders in the actions of Crook, Custer, and Terry other than in a romantic fascination with independent-minded gunslingers operating under the most general commander's intent. Simply put, the limits of strategic restraints and the absence of constraints on the tactics employed by the American Army make any corollary to the current fight difficult.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It should not be surprising that SLA Marshall's *Crimsoned Prairie: The Indian Wars* is still the most commonly read and consulted book on this topic among military officers. His influence on the study of military leadership is comparable to James MacGregor Burns' influence on leadership theory in general. Marshall's *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* and *The Armed Forces Officer* cast a broad shadow over contemporary military leadership study.

While it is true that leaders of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century US Army had to be adaptable, innovative, and possessed of skills that are highly sought in today's officers, the unconstrained nature of tactics they brought to bear on their enemy on the Great Plains passed into history almost as quickly as the technologies they possessed. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century counterinsurgency efforts of the US, Britain, France and others provide better tactical and leadership lessons, although they too are not wholly transferable.

Drawing historical parallels between the Vietnam experience and the current fight is distinctly problematic. Pundits attempt these parallels by employing clichéd terms such as “quagmire,” “failed strategy,” and “un-winnable war” mistakenly. As those terms are intentionally politically loaded and crafted for critical effect, they are of little use in the attempt to draw out historical lessons beyond the political.<sup>2</sup>

The tactical lessons of initiatives such as the Combined Action Platoon are well documented. The leadership lessons for Marines and soldiers engaged in the irregular fight, for the most part, have been limited to post-combat mitigation of the effects of irregular warfare. Research into Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other leadership crises heightened during irregular warfare drawn from the period are widely used.<sup>3</sup> The implications of this work on the force have been invaluable tools for today's leaders. However, the research and teaching material for preparing combatants for irregular warfare have been harder to identify.

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<sup>2</sup> Pulitzer Prize winning *Vietnam: A History* by Stanley Karnow is a classic example of this. This best-seller is billed by its publisher as “Free of ideological bias, profound in its understanding, and compassionate in its human portrayals, it is filled with fresh revelations drawn from secret documents and from exclusive interviews with the participants - French, American, Vietnamese, Chinese: diplomats, military commanders, high government officials, journalists, nurses, workers, and soldiers.” In reality, today's military leaders often dismiss such work as off-point and are far more likely to read Mark Moyar's *Triumph Forsaken* or James Webb's novel *Fields of Fire* for insights into the lessons of Vietnam.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* and *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* are among the finest and most popular of these offerings.

The same can be said for the French experience in Algeria and the British experience in Malaysia. While political, psychological, and even tactical lessons abound from this period, those tasked with leader development must search harder in the historical record. Little insight into the required qualities of intellect, human understanding, and moral character enabling a leader to inspire and control a group of people engaged in this type of warfare is explicitly attempted—it must be carefully mined from the sources. Detailed, prescriptive advice for leaders of counter-insurgency forces is often hidden in plain sight. The US Marine Corps and Army of today must draw out those lessons where available and clarify their approach to the professional development of 21<sup>st</sup> Century warfighters.

#### Development in the domains of leadership

The very definition of leadership is contentious. US Marines, for example, universally accept that there are two primary objectives to leadership—accomplishing the mission and taking care of your people. Marines accept that there are traits and principles of leadership and that leadership by example is the highest form of leadership.<sup>4</sup> Finally, Marines tacitly accept that leadership is a process, not a position and that this process occurs at the intersection of the leader, the led, and the situation. Virtually all other aspects of leadership are up for debate.

When considering the most effective way to develop leadership, it is perhaps best to break the activity down into its component parts. In this way, particular skill sets can be addressed most directly. Those component parts—or domains—for the purpose of this paper are identified as the physical, intellectual, and moral domains. These three domains are present in any leader to one degree or another, and their emphasis depends

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<sup>4</sup> US Marine Corps, MCWP 6-11, *Leading Marines*, 1995 (re-published 2002).

upon the situation. Irregular warfare as a situation or context of leadership taxes those domains in very unique ways.<sup>5</sup>

### The physical domain

The physical challenges that warriors face in irregular warfare are as asymmetrical as the fight itself. Those operating from a position of insufficient power rely on their ability to blend into their surroundings. Their very tactics require lengthy periods of “lying low” punctuated by brief periods of high intensity kinetic attack. This fact is among their distinct advantages in the asymmetric fight. When coupled with other advantages—time is typically on their side, over-reaction by their adversary is an objective, and their own inaction can create a favorable lapse in vigilance/preparation in their enemy—a situation is created in which the side enjoying a power advantage is challenged in ever increasing ways.

The warring party with the advantage of numbers, technology, and organization must be constantly vigilant on every front. This fact taxes the physical and psychological endurance of the warrior in ways difficult to simulate during peacetime. Add to this the element of “war weariness” on the home front and the psychological strain it places on those deployed forward and you have a scenario in which the normal bounds of endurance are stretched to, and often beyond, the breaking point.

Physical strength and agility are critical in the warrior, but in irregular warfare endurance is paramount. Methods of developing endurance, conditioning warriors to be “as hard as woodpecker lips,” are intensely difficult to formalize in peace-time militaries.

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<sup>5</sup> The use of domains as a point of reference for leader development is experiencing a rebirth. The Stockdale Group at the Naval War College recently (June 2007) divided leadership traits and characteristics into the following domains: Personal, Scientific, and Artistic. This is roughly aligned with social psychologist Robert L. Katz’s work at Harvard in the 1960s.

Attrition in the most demanding military training environments such as Marines, SEALs, and Army Rangers are notoriously high. Recruiting and retention pressures counter the reality that some are simply incapable of the endurance necessary to be part of the team. A small overall force is made smaller by its self imposed requirement to screen out the unworthy.

The side operating from the power deficit does not require such a winnowing of their force because they do not require similar endurance. They only require a willingness to exist under the broader cover of their chaotic environment nurturing the hope that their patience pays off. The tactic of death by one thousand cuts demands a different type of endurance or patience from the cutter than from the recipient. What, therefore, is the practical approach for developing physically capable US warfighters in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? The answer lies on a path many are unwilling to take.

Trends among the Millennial Generation show that young men and women are less physically fit than preceding generations. Worse, there is evidence that they may be pre-disposed throughout their development against lifestyles that demand rigorous physical preparation.<sup>6</sup> The most alarming fact is that our principal war-winner, the US Army, because of increased pressure on recruiters and other competing demands, has loosened its physical standards and expectations.<sup>7</sup> The Marine Corps thankfully has resisted this trend. But not stepping backward is not good enough. Physical standards must be increased in future with a balanced effort of maximizing the endurance, strength, and agility of all service members.

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<sup>6</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising* (Vintage Books, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Mary Fitzgerald, "Mission Critical: Observations on the US Army," *NewStatesman* August 28, 2006.

One method of more effectively simulating the physical strains of combat is to design exercise routines based on combat itself, rather than on running, pull ups, and abdominal crunches. Those exercises are critical metrics for strength and endurance, but they must be augmented by load bearing endurance exercises, strength tests with weights, and long term physical demands (three hours or more of strenuous and continuous programmed activity). This approach works well in entry level training, but sustainment in the operating forces must be required.

Convincing operating force units that a 72 hour, Crucible-like<sup>8</sup> physical test held twice annually is in their best interest would be a challenge. Like all other change, however, it will be accepted over time. The most important benefit of this new approach to physical conditioning lies not in the direct physical hardening of the force but rather the psychological message that is delivered. The physical domain of leadership is a means to an end—mentally and morally prepared warriors.

#### The intellectual domain

The intellectual domain is a greater challenge in the current fight. An asymmetrical environment calls upon a mindset not often encountered in entry level training or occupational specialty producing schools. Those environments are organized around the principle that knowledge, skills, and abilities will be provided and assessed. They are *training*. The asymmetric fight does demand thoroughly trained individuals, but recall the axiom “we train for certainty and educate for uncertainty.” Education is, in this context, paramount.

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<sup>8</sup> The Crucible is a 54-hour (currently being expanded) culminating exercise in the final phase of Marine Corps recruit training. Physical challenges such as a ten mile road march, sleep deprivation, obstacle and assault courses, and Marine Corps Martial Arts exercises are conducted as a final test of the lessons of the previous twelve weeks.

Our current system of professional military education is built around learning outcomes and those outcomes are grounded in very laudable objectives of jointness, strategic/operational/tactical warfighting, and service culture and history. Leadership components of the curricula of professional military education are quite often an afterthought. Proof of this fact lies in the *curriculum vitae* of the faculties of our war colleges, command and staff colleges, and career level schools. Nearly all faculty of these various levels of education are lettered in history, political science, or international relations. While these disciplines rightly form the curricular “backbone” of needed instruction, leadership theorists, behavioral scientists, and organizational psychologists have almost no presence.

By actively recruiting experts from these latter three fields, the graduate colleges of our military services will help contextualize the lessons of history and current struggles. While one may argue that historians, for example, already provide such services, historians usually lack the academic background or experience to be able to recommend leader development programs based on their observations. Historians and political scientists are critical, but the traditional constraints of their disciplines often discourage or prevent their utility in shaping professional development for the current or future fight. Leavening faculty with practitioners drawn from forward-focused disciplines would provide expertise to craft professional military education for more prescriptive and active, and far less descriptive and passive purposes.

#### The moral domain

The moral dimension is the most difficult domain for which to develop a training and education program. One need only look at the most highly publicized failings in the



current fight to see those failings are typically driven by questionable ethical decisions on when to exercise *discrimination* and *proportionality*—in other words selecting the appropriate target and applying the appropriate force to it (kinetic or non-kinetic).

The task of acquiring a target with a sensor is simple and direct. The training regimen necessary to develop skills to select, engage, and destroy a target with the variety of weapons systems in the US arsenal is well documented. These mechanical elements of training are based in our “systems approach to training.”<sup>9</sup> While we may think of this structured, scientific method of development as a relatively recent phenomenon, it is actually quite ancient.

The soldiers of ancient Greece drilled to develop a structured, scientific knowledge of the tactics of the phalanx. This type of knowledge was typically referred to as *sophia*. The Romans also possessed a conception of scientific knowledge, *sapientia*, for the tactical and technical development of their soldiers. The higher, more advanced form of wisdom the ancients sought to impart to soldiers was *phronesis* (Greek) and *prudentia* (Roman).<sup>10</sup> These concepts were rooted in a very practical, experienced-based wisdom—the very form of wisdom we seek to impart in young Marines and soldiers deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, practical wisdom is not the product of training but of experience.

While the objective of any training program is the replication of the environment, conditions, and stresses in which skills will be employed, it is difficult (and some argue impossible) to generate the ambiguous, chaotic environment in which combatants make

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<sup>9</sup> The Systems Approach to Training has been employed by the Marine Corps for over twenty years and is a derivation of Instructional Systems Design found in the private sector. The Systems Approach to Training Manual can be found at: [http://www.pendleton.usmc.mil/schools/ims/publications/SAT\\_Manual.pdf](http://www.pendleton.usmc.mil/schools/ims/publications/SAT_Manual.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> James H. Toner, *Morals Under the Gun: The Cardinal Virtues, Military Ethics, and American Society* (Lexington KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2000) p. 60.

the most crucial moral decisions. So then what should be the objective of leader development in the moral domain? The answer lies somewhere between prudent, responsible behavior based on the laws of the nation and regulations of the service (deontology)<sup>11</sup>, and the thorough understanding of the consequences of our actions (teleology)<sup>12</sup>. Since there is little utility or time to immerse warriors in the deontological philosophies of Immanuel Kant or the teleological philosophies of Aristotle or John Stuart Mill, Marines and soldiers must be introduced to these conceptions through the experiences of their predecessors who have been placed on the horns of real ethical dilemmas.

The time honored tradition of the case study method is the most sensible, effective means for instilling practical knowledge.<sup>13</sup> The strength of the case study method lies in the active participation of all discussants. Decision making skills are practiced each time a discussant contributes to the dialogue. If the discussion leader successfully develops the dialogue a group consensus is reached. The very act of establishing consensus simulates the difficult process of choosing between competing, ambiguous alternatives; alternatives that very often demand a choice between seemingly equally negative courses of action. With a properly written case study, discussants are forced to synthesize multiple aspects of a case and apply them against their understanding of laws, norms, and standards. Discussants improve analytical skills during the dialogue by dissecting a

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<sup>11</sup> Deontology is the theory of moral obligation or duty best represented in the works of Kant (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Harper and Row Publishers) or more recently Thomas Nagel (*The Possibility of Altruism*, Oxford University Press).

<sup>12</sup> Teleology is the study of purpose and is usually associated with the works of the ancient Greeks such as Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, <http://virtuescience.com/nicomachean-ethics.html>). Utilitarianism is the moral judgment of an action based solely on its outcome. John Stuart Mill (*Utilitarianism*, <http://fair-use.org/john-stuart-mill/utilitarianism/>) is the principal philosopher in this field, while Peter Singer (*Ethics* [ed.], Oxford University Press) is a more recent proponent.

<sup>13</sup> Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995).

central moral dilemma. A warrior's ability to ultimately "see through" the friction of a volatile, uncertain event is as important ethically as it is tactically.

A leadership and ethics case study guide developed by Marine Corps University was published in late 2007. The target audience for this guide is NCO through company grade officer, but there is application to all ranks. The objective of this work is to enable leaders to benefit from the lessons of precedent, gauge the moral predispositions of their unit's members, and communicate their own understanding of proper conduct to subordinates. This guide combines the traditional "ethical decision game" approach with the more nuanced case study method.

Recognizing the domains of leadership provides structure to leader development. The preceding recommendations are designed for the training and education of warriors *before* the fight. The exercise of leadership, particularly at the small unit level, is also of critical importance. There are appropriate developing tactics, techniques, and procedures for leading Marines and soldiers in the irregular warfare environment. Just as history and precedent provide us hidden lessons for leaders preparing for the fight, the lessons for current practitioners are similarly hidden. Care must be taken to extract the best practices of traditional military leadership and add new methods for evolving settings.

#### Reaffirming maneuver warfare

In some ways, a "Global" War on Terror demands a type of leadership that was traditionally limited to command exercised at sea. Leaders must be given the broadest of direction, intent or end state, and the authority to press on. This type of authority is rarely granted in land warfare, despite our adherence to maneuver warfare as re-introduced by Fleet Marine Force Manual 1 *Warfighting* in the early 1980s. In many ways, the type of

flexibility demanded of orders given to leaders prosecuting a global war is reflected in

John Paul Jones' commission of 1778:

*"...after equipping the Ranger in the best manner for the Cruise you propose, you proceed with her in the manner you shall judge best, for distressing the Enemies of the United States, by Sea, or otherwise, consistent with the Laws of War, and the terms of your Commission."*

*The American Commissioners in Paris to John Paul Jones  
January 16, 1778*

"Manner you shall judge best" is an affirmation of the special trust and confidence placed in Jones' ability and judgment. "Distressing the enemies...consistent with the laws of war" is an expectation that he understands the rules as well as the tactics of war. Was Jones formally prepared for such a broad mandate? Hardly. His formal education was minimal; the guidance provided him by the political leaders of the young Nation was deemed sufficient. While the contemporary reader may rightly claim "different times, different rules and expectations," the basics of warfighting remain constant. Jones was authorized to "kill people and break things" in accordance with the "Laws of War." Wouldn't we all love such broad latitude in carrying out our mission?

If maneuver warfare was deemed important at the point of its rebirth in the 1980s when the threat was conventional and the battlefield considerably more predictable, then it is absolutely critical now, with the absence of a readily identifiable threat or battlefield. Authority must be pushed to the lowest possible level. With that authority comes responsibility and responsible leaders require thorough leadership training and education in the core competencies.

Critical leadership competencies

Competence is traditionally defined as the ability to perform a task. In the context of development programs, competencies are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes required to properly perform specific jobs.<sup>14</sup> The competency approach to developing leaders has been building momentum since the 1990s. This approach, in itself, is nothing new as it has its roots in Systems Leadership popular in the 1960s.<sup>15</sup> A symposium held at the US Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences in 1996 brought a wide variety of academics and military practitioners together to challenge a stagnating approach to leadership in the military context.<sup>16</sup> The actual benefits of a competency approach are vigorously debated. Competencies may lead to over-prescription which may lead to the stagnation that began this effort. Competencies may just provide the observable, measurable standards needed to formalize leader development programs. The US Army has on several occasions identified the competency framework and the Systems Approach to Training as the preferred method for developing its leaders.<sup>17</sup> Further, competencies are the trend in Department of Defense initiatives and define the direction of near-term leadership development programs.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> R. Sanchez, "Understanding Competence-based Management, Identifying and Managing Five Modes of Competence," *Journal of Business Research*, Volume 57, pp. 518- 532.

<sup>15</sup> R. A. Johnson, "Systems Theory and Management," *Readings in Theory and Management* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1973).

<sup>16</sup> Gary Yukl, "Leadership Competencies Required for the New Army and Approaches for Developing Them," *Out of the Box Leadership: Transforming the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Army and Other Top Performing Organizations* (Stamford, CT: JAI, 1999) pp. 255-276.

<sup>17</sup> *The Army Training and Leader Development Panel Officer Study Report to the Army* (<http://www.army.mil/features/ATLD/report.pdf>)

<sup>18</sup> *CJCS Vision for Joint Officer Development Roadmap*, executive summary found at [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/education/mecc06\\_cjcsvision.ppt](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/education/mecc06_cjcsvision.ppt).

The principal thesis of “cutting edge” leadership development articles of late have focused on the competencies of adaptability, flexibility and intuition. The three terms seem to be perfectly matched to the perceived 21<sup>st</sup> Century environment of rapidly changing events and norms. All three terms, as they relate to leadership development are often misused or poorly defined. Further, all three terms are rarely fully developed in the minds of those who have determined that they are *requirements* for 21<sup>st</sup> Century leaders. They are, in effect, little more than bumperstickers.

The pre-commissioning development of military officers has changed slowly since the end of the Cold War.<sup>19</sup> The moral, intellectual, and physical preparation of junior NCOs and officers demands certain timeless approaches. Producing physically tough, mentally astute, and ethically sound men and women has been the goal of the *Kriegsakademie*, Sandhurst, West Point, ROTC programs, Officer Candidates School, and the Naval Academy for a very long time. But as we slip into the so-called 4<sup>th</sup> Generation of War<sup>20</sup>, do certain concepts take priority over others? Are there truly new demands placed upon young leaders that were not there a decade ago? The answers are complex. While the competency-based approach to leadership development has merit, new techniques must be employed to respond to the new environment.

These techniques involve attitude and willingness to learn every bit as much as the traditional knowledge, skills, and abilities approach to structured learning. The task/condition/standard format of the Systems Approach to Training is dominant in the US military. This format is specifically tailored to training of relatively simple skills. In

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<sup>19</sup> The Pre-Commissioning Professional Core Competencies Manual for NROTC and Naval Academy Midshipmen has remained virtually unchanged for 15 years. The Program of Instruction at Marine Corps Officer Candidates School has remained fairly constant over that same span.

<sup>20</sup> William S. Lind, “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1989, pp. 22-26.

future, more complex forms of development will be called for to address increasingly nuanced ways of thinking, behaving, and reacting. The irregular warfare environment anticipated well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will call for new methods to refine time-tested competencies.

### Adaptability defined

While it is evident the current operating environment military officers find themselves in calls for skill sets more consistent with the leadership of Lewis and Clark than Patton, the military education and training structure that produced Patton remains virtually unchanged. If the current and future battlefield can be characterized by an uncertain non-uniformed enemy, vague and rapidly changing missions, cultural sensitivity of warfighters, and a chaotic environment, then leadership development models crafted in times of a certain and predictable enemy, leadership roles, and methods of fighting must be changed. The *Department of the Navy Objectives for 2006* calls for grooming and properly deploying innovative leaders at all levels. The Chief of Naval Operations' goals include combat capabilities of speed, agility, and adaptability. The Campaign Plans of the Army and Marine Corps are even more specific about the need to develop adaptable leaders. But what does this mean and how do we bring the concepts to reality?

The first step in inculcating a spirit of adaptability is to change the way we teach rather than to simply change what is taught. Training that is based solely upon the traditional task/condition/standard model breeds rote conformity. Education that is based solely upon the objective/lecture/assessment model breeds the same. Traditional methods encourage analysis of a challenge and selection of standard solutions drawn from

anticipated options. Methods that encourage the synthesis of information include reflective journaling, the Socratic Method, demonstration assessment, broad skim reading, and the study of the philosophical principles that underlie the immediate challenge.

*Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and  
writing an exact man. --Francis Bacon*

The second step in developing adaptable leaders is to focus on material that encourages creative thinking. Becoming familiar and comfortable with research in the field is critical. From psychology to sociology to military history to philosophy, all fields that explore human response to complexity should be considered. To make this broad grounding feasible, careful selection of instructional techniques and content must be undertaken by all stakeholders in the leadership development process.

There are several additive learning outcomes that should be introduced and emphasized to increase adaptability in professional military education<sup>21</sup>:

<b><i>Dealing with ambiguity.</i></b> (add references and problems that present multiple answers)
<b><i>Dealing with trouble.</i></b> (add references and problems that present no clearly attractive answers)
<b><i>Understanding others.</i></b> (organize students to force management of diverse opinions)
<b><i>Standing alone.</i></b> (organize students to force divergent opinion with discussion leader)
<b><i>Politically savvy.</i></b> (develop operating rules that confound expectations and comfort zones)
<b><i>Personal learning.</i></b> (develop operating rules that confound standard learning processes)
<b><i>Learning on the Fly.</i></b> (intentionally develop unrealistic timelines to accomplish tasks)
<b><i>Strategic agility.</i></b> (intentionally develop unrealistic scoping tasks)
<b><i>Timely decision making.</i></b> (develop time-driven metrics—tempo is the key to maneuver)
<b><i>Listening.</i></b> (assess points accepted rather than points made)

<sup>21</sup> As suggested by Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger, “Diagnostic Competencies Map and Developmental Difficulty,” Lominger Limited, Inc., 2005.



Flexibility or open-mindedness?

Flexibility is typically defined as a personal quality that allows an individual to alter his or her opinions, practices, beliefs, or approach based on changing demands. Flexibility is absolutely essential on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Battlefield as the environment and mission may change constantly. A pre-cursor to the quality of flexibility is open-mindedness. One can not flex to the environment if one is not willing. Many believe it is open-mindedness that is sorely lacking in leaders at every level and in every context. The military is no exception.

Open-mindedness is the personal quality that enables flexibility in practice and can be encouraged, if not developed in the classroom environment. This attribute can be developed at the entry level in the following ways:

Creating empathy for those who have gone before (case study).
Exploring alternative world views and debating them fully.
Reviewing credible research in the topic at hand.

In traditional, structured organizations such as the military, open-mindedness is not often prized as an essential trait. This can be changed by fully debating the position of other, non-traditional, non-Western, and even non-military viewpoints. Adding culture education to the military system is already paying dividends. Confirming its status as a force multiplier will serve to increase the open mindedness required to thrive in the irregular fight.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Contemporary Marine Corps approach to accomplishing this can be found at <http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/caocl/>.

All of this empathizing and careful study of other world views need not lead to what is perceived in the military culture as “touchy-feely” or “politically correct” indoctrination. Quite the contrary. Exploring alternative world views typically leads Americans to reconfirm their belief in the underlying principles upon which their Nation, and the military service of it, is founded. A classic point of debate can be built around the three central factors of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century United States: Belief that representative democracy holds the greatest promise for rule of law, security, and happiness; belief that free market capitalism presents the best hope opportunity and upward mobility; and that each human being has fundamental worth—a value that guarantees freedom from physical harm or the harmful interference of government.

Applying the world views of competitors or adversaries against these three factors of American life serves to confirm in the system young, uniformed Americans uphold. Proponents of Islamist, communist, anarchist, or fascist ideology argue from a positional disadvantage. Scrutinizing their philosophies and demands serves to confirm the rectitude of honorable military service. It is nearly impossible to confirm that rectitude without a spirited debate involving alternative world views.

The philosophical and pedagogical technique of questioning and testing one’s most basic assumptions has a place in contemporary professional military education. Instructors need only to be guided through its purpose and method. These methods, however, will vary according to the developmental level of the target audience. Regardless of the stage of a service member’s career, an academic coverage of our own foundational principles vis-à-vis those of our adversaries is time well spent.

### Intuition vs. Forethought

Much attention has been paid lately to the development of *intuitive* decision making or rapid cognition. Malcolm Gladwell's wildly popular book Blink has direct reference to its application in the military.<sup>23</sup> Rapid cognition, however, relies heavily on instantaneous pattern recognition. Much of a warrior's time is spent attempting to discern patterns in interpersonal interaction, technical functioning, and tactical interplay. At the entry level, students are only introduced to the rules and standards upon which patterns are established. There can be no realistic hope—except in a particularly talented few—to bypass the stages of cognitive development. Coming to terms with chaos and complexity takes cognitive and attitudinal adjustment. Most young warriors lack the confidence in their own abilities to make those adjustments quickly. As with all personal development, education and experience combine to create the desired effect. There can be no educational “silver bullet” to obviate the need for seasoning.

Forethought is the precursor to intuition and was identified by Theodore Roosevelt to be the most important quality in preparation for leadership. Forethought, unlike intuition, can be honed exclusively in the classroom. Case study method, discussion, decision gaming, and broad reading all develop this quality. The key is to replicate the experience desired as closely as possible. Adding stress to the lesson is critical. Learner confidence rises as hypothetical and real-world scenario simulations are introduced, tested, and debriefed. Actual experience can not be replaced but adequate forethought is established. Intuitive decision making is predominantly the product of experience.

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<sup>23</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (New York: Little, Brown, Inc. 2005).

Forethought is, on many levels, a precursor to the skills demanded of leaders to make timely, appropriate decisions. And decision making constitutes a key objective of leader development programs. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that decision making training seminars have had any effect on participants. Those seminars are typically based around selection strategies for choosing from among multiple courses of action. Such analytical methods miss the point entirely. Research has shown that decision makers, particularly those in military settings, “spend more time sizing up the situation than comparing alternate courses of action.”<sup>24</sup> “Sizing up the situation is but one function of forethought.

Some of the most convincing research assembled to support this “domain expertise” approach has shown that the key is in teaching students to maximize their experiences, rather than provide them with some form of analytical decision making matrix. Like the case study method recommended earlier, Decision Skills Training<sup>25</sup> experimented with during Urban warrior exercises of 1998, provide a generalizable template that could be applied across the levels of professional military education.

This training relied upon structured, timed, and developmentally progressive methods specifically designed to strengthen overall awareness and confidence. Broadly applied techniques helped participants visualize success and communicate intent clearly to subordinates. It was enthusiastically received by Marine leaders because it so perfectly matched the “mission orders” approach demanded by maneuver warfare. Decision Skills Training captured the essence of leadership practice of forethought and did so in a manner consistent with a fundamental Marine Corps philosophy. Unfortunately, the

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<sup>24</sup> Gary Klein et al, *Training Decision Skills for Urban Warrior Squad Leaders*, Technical Report prepared for Synetics Corp., April 1998.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

lessons of those experiments have been all but lost. Six years into the Long War, there is a need to return to the lessons of one of the Corps' most intellectually active periods of its history, the late 1990s. Decision Skills Training and other products of Sea Dragon and Urban Warrior exercises must be dusted off for potential use in the irregular fight.<sup>26</sup>

Contextualizing the laws of war

No coverage of the issue of developing leaders for irregular warfare would be complete without a discussion of one of that environment's greatest challenges. Law of War (LoW) training, or lack thereof, is part of nearly every conversation involving Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. A thorough understanding of the rules governing armed conflict in an unconventional fight is among the most important developmental objectives of our current formal training and education system.

The LoW is defined as "that part of international law that regulates the conduct of armed hostilities." It is often termed "the law of armed conflict." The LoW encompasses all international law for the conduct of hostilities binding on the United States or its individual citizens, including treaties and international agreements to which the United States is a party, and applicable customary international law.<sup>27</sup>

U.S. LoW obligations are national obligations, binding upon every Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine. DoD policy is to comply with the LoW "during all armed conflicts, however such conflicts are characterized, and in all other military

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<sup>26</sup> The best summary of the innovations of the period, as well as the institutional reluctance to embrace those changes can be found in Terry Terriff's "Of Romans and Dragons: Preparing the US Marine Corps for Future Warfare," *Contemporary Security Policy*, 28:1, pp 143-162.

<sup>27</sup> DoDD 2311.01E, DoD Law of War Program (9 May 2006).

operations.”<sup>28</sup> The primary reason American Marines and soldiers conduct themselves with honor on the battlefield is that in doing so, they keep faith with the American people, their laws, expectations, and standards. Put another way:

*“Marines will achieve victory on the battlefield in strict compliance with the Law of War. There is nothing in the Law of War that puts Marines’ lives or the mission in jeopardy. Compliance facilitates victory and, at the end of every struggle, Marines will know that they conducted themselves in such a manner as to be judged as worthy successors of a long line of Marines that has gone before them.”*<sup>29</sup>

In the age of instantaneous information, conforming to the laws of war is no longer a chivalric nicety, it is a strategic necessity. This fact has less to do with legality than it does with the way Americans view themselves. History demonstrates that mankind has always sought to limit the affect of conflict on the combatants and has come to regard war not as a state of anarchy justifying infliction of unlimited suffering, but as an unfortunate reality which must be governed by some rule of law.<sup>30</sup> However, we also recognize that the LoW, as with many international laws, is difficult to enforce. Moreover, many of our opponents routinely disregard the LoW and often use our compliance with the LoW against us. Counterinsurgency doctrine, both old and new, responds to this reality, advocating the need for good judgment and the discriminate use of force in the current fight. For example, Chapter 1 of the *Small Wars Manual* states that “in small wars ... the goal is to gain decisive results with the least application of force and the consequent minimum loss of life ... tolerance, sympathy and kindness should be the keynote of our relationship with the mass of the population.”<sup>31</sup> More

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<sup>28</sup> DoDD 2311.01E, para.4.1.

<sup>29</sup> Marine Corps Reference Publication 4-11.8B, *War Crimes*

<sup>30</sup> Law of War Workbook, page 5.

<sup>31</sup> Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication 12-15, *Small Wars Manual*, 1-17.

recently, the latest counterinsurgency manual states that “[p]roportionality and discrimination applied in COIN require leaders to ensure that their units employ the right tools correctly with mature discernment, good judgment and moral resolve.”<sup>32</sup>

In the matter of developing a thorough and working understanding of the LoW, the same nuanced thinking required for competencies such as adaptability and open-mindedness is not necessarily required. These comments highlight the challenge:

*“Due to the distributed nature of the counter-insurgency fight, young leaders (Corporal - Lieutenant) will be placed under extremely high levels of stress and forced into moral dilemmas that, in the past, might have fallen on the shoulders of more senior Marines. Marines will not learn the rules of engagement (ROE) from lectures; they must be drilled into their memory through situational exercises and role-playing. At the small unit level, actions speak louder than words. A rifle company’s “information operations (IO) plan” is to treat people with respect and perform acts of kindness/charity. Every time a U.S. unit is seen, people should be able to associate that unit’s presence with their own personal benefit.”*

**--LtCol James J. Minick, USMC, Commander, Task Force 2/2<sup>33</sup>**

LoW, escalation of force (EoF), and Rules of Engagement (RoE) are propositional knowledge.<sup>34</sup> The end state for this type of training is thorough, unambiguous understanding of the principles of the LoW, EoF, and RoE. But all of these related issues do not demand the same developmental approach. LoW is fundamentally slow to change and should be addressed early in the career of military service-member and sustained by refresher training at consistent intervals. Complexity of that training will vary with the leadership responsibilities exercised. The “Basic Principles of the Law of War” form the optimal starting point for such propositional knowledge. It can be

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<sup>32</sup> Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-3.55, *Counterinsurgency*,

<sup>33</sup> Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned Newsletter, May 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Also called descriptive knowledge, this form of understanding is characterized by declarative sentences and concrete information.

argued that in a wartime Marine Corps, rote memorization of these principles serves a role just as critical as the rote memorization of the 10 General Orders.

<b>BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE LAW OF WAR (<i>MARINES' RULES</i>)<sup>35</sup></b>
Marines fight only enemy combatants.
Marines do not harm enemy soldiers who surrender. Marines disarm them and turn them over to their superiors.
Marines do not torture or kill enemy prisoners of war or detainees.
Marines collect and care for the wounded, whether friend or foe.
Marines do not attack medical personnel, facilities, equipment, or chaplains.
Marines destroy no more than the mission requires.
Marines treat all civilians humanely.
Marines do not steal; they respect private property and possessions.
Marines do their best to prevent violations of the law of war, and report all violations to their superiors.

EoF and RoE knowledge, on the other hand, is situational. The development methods to address “situated knowledge” vary.<sup>36</sup> As is the case with moral decision making, decision games may prove most helpful here. Using LoW training as a starting point would provide a foundation upon which to build theater-dependent EoF and RoE training. As these are highly subjective undertakings, local Staff Judge Advocates must be co-opted in this effort. By allowing the subject matter experts to take lead in this form of training development relevance, accuracy, and timeliness are ensured.

The quest to develop leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century irregular environment does not demand a complete restructuring of the training and education system, but it does demand a reprioritization of developmental goals. If those goals are clearly articulated and

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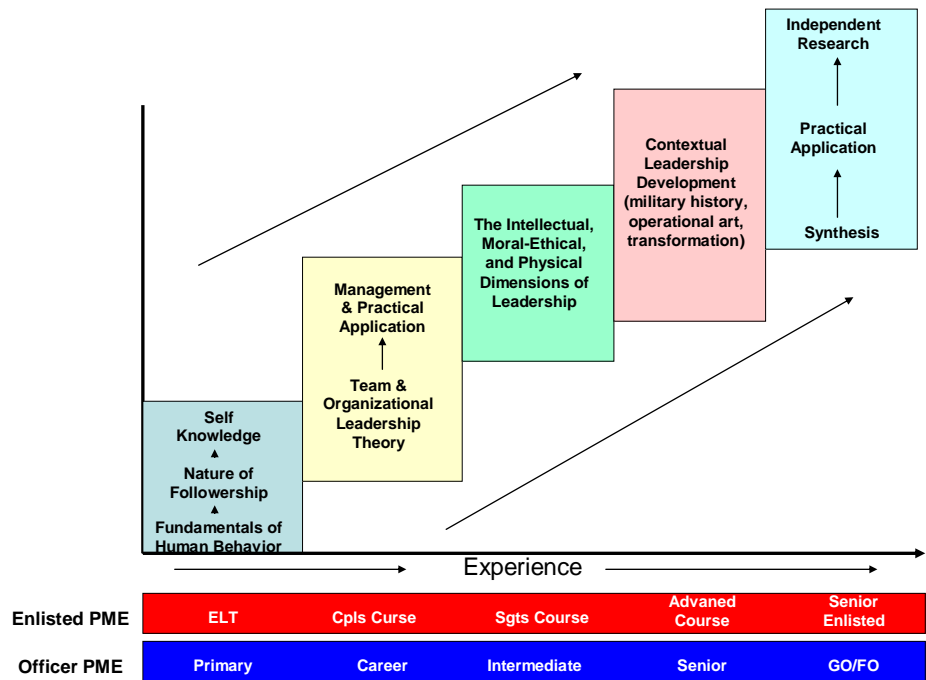
<sup>35</sup> MCO 3300.4 of 20 Oct 2003

<sup>36</sup> Situated knowledge is best cultivated by placing an individual in an environment, real or simulated, that accurately replicates the environment in which the individual will ultimately be tested. The case study method detailed earlier applies equally to EoF and RoE training.



flexibility is built into the system from the bottom up, a true learning organization<sup>37</sup> is created. In this way the organization will, in itself, be a reflection of the output we hope to produce—growing, adaptive learners who are physically, intellectually, and morally prepared for complexity.

Aside from the offerings for each component of the development continuum provided in this paper, the below is offered as an optimal flow for leader development from the pre-commissioning through the strategic level.



By approaching leadership development on par with tactical, operational, and strategic thinking, professional military education will better adapt to the demands of the current and future operating environment.

<sup>37</sup> The term learning organization was coined by Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, (New York: Doubleday, Inc., 1994).

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