

Enhancing Soldiers' Capability for Counter-Insurgency Operations

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Demands from society and family are higher on soldiers and, thus contribute towards greater stress. Therefore, desired capacities have to be built in our recruitment system, training philosophy, training methodology, training infrastructure in training academies, regimental training centres, divisional training schools and other military colleges/ schools of instruction as also in our military thinking to produce motivated, efficient and stress-adapted officers and soldiers capable of meeting future warfare challenges efficiently.

A Counter insurgency environment demands a very high order of intellectual acumen, unimagined in a conventional setting. The training methodology of security forces personnel has to strike a balance between conventional as well as sub-conventional operations since possibility of conventional war also can not be ruled out and at the same time the sub-conventional nature of present and future wars can not be ignored.¹

There is a need for clear strategic and tactical directives for the army and other security forces trained and equipped for conventional warfare to operate in an extremely challenging and hostile sub-conventional warfare environment.² Commanders and troops must understand that they are operating in a tricky situation and their overall aim must always remain the achievement of a more perfect peace. It simply implies that there is no such thing as a quick military victory. Conduct of counter insurgency campaigns will invariably extend over a number of years. No one should attempt to achieve 'quick-end' results, particularly by excessive use of force. At all levels, patience, perseverance, warmth and genuineness must be displayed by a totally committed, dedicated and motivated leadership.

The security forces personnel are fighting an elusive enemy, in the absence of any reliable intelligence and lack of cooperation from the local population. Ambiguity of aim, lack of visible success and disproportionately high casualty rates tend to erode morale among security forces.³ It is an important function of command to restore confidence of troops by keeping them well informed by clearing all foreseeable doubts at the earliest available opportunity, in order to retain/ sustain

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their fighting capacity in the battlefield environment of the present and future.

Sustaining the motivation of officers and soldiers operating in a sub-conventional warfare environment is not an easy proposition. Soldiers operating in such an environment have been observed to have experienced operational stressors, domestic stressors, intra-unit hassles, the physical and situation attributes of operation zones and socio-political stressors.⁴

Respect for religion is a very sensitive issue for troops. Therefore, utmost care must be exercised to ensure that, at no stage, do the religious sentiments of troops get hurt, either advertently or inadvertently.

Regimental spirit generates primary group bonds and cohesion. Symbols and traditions lay stress on distinctiveness and pride in the outfit and promote unit cohesion and individual self esteem. The supportive nature of regimental/unit spirit becomes most evident in an intense counter insurgency environment. Unit spirit is a true indicator of motivation and vice-versa.

Stressors will almost certainly have a psychological effect on individual soldiers and will likely have at least some negative effect on their performance. Moderate levels of stress can actually contribute to heightened vigilance and improved performance. Military personnel clearly confront significant stressors while discharging their duties in sub-conventional warfare environment. They have proven themselves to be highly adaptable to constantly changing and uncertain circumstances, requirements and demands. This adaptability allows them to deal with significant stressors and successfully accomplish their objectives in the face of stress. This adaptability comes not only from personal character and flexibility but also from their military training and experience, including basic and advanced training, operational exercises, pre-induction training and day-to-day work related challenges. The application of moderators, including training and provision of additional information, can help individuals to adapt successfully to challenging stressors and maintain high levels of performance.

Training is the chief contributor towards military effectiveness and performance in the hands of trainers and planners.⁵ Training can prepare individuals to cope with stressors by helping soldiers to adapt to the stressor stimuli by teaching strategies that allow soldiers to react more effectively to stressors and maintain performance under stress, and by building task mastery and proficiency that can prevent performance degradations. Training also improves the group

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performance under stress by fostering more effective group communication and coordination and by alerting individuals as to how other members in their group might react to stressful situations.

The importance of teamwork and group cooperation in army for successful completion of operations needs no emphasis. Because of this dependence, army's use of group-based training seems particularly important. It is worth considering since it would help soldiers to perform in a sub-conventional warfare environment with more effectiveness and certainty by diluting the effects of most of the stressors.⁶

Sensitisation of civil administration and police towards redressing genuine issues pertaining to welfare of soldiers in their home towns through policy directives to district magistrates and police authorities needs immediate consideration. This would take care of their domestic front more effectively. There is also a need for ensuring the respect and sanctity of the uniforms worn by the soldiers.

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We, therefore, have to select a soldier with new qualities of quick thinking, initiative, stealth, fearlessness and nimble footing. The soldier should be able to master multi-functionalities such as field craft, weapons, explosives, communications, observation and intelligence. A soldier has to be familiar with the social, political and religious sensitivities of the population involved and present a tough and no nonsense image but at the same time be sensitive to human beings and human rights. A soldier cannot afford to lose self control

in conditions when he or his buddies are facing grave provocation.

The training of majors, captains, lieutenants, JCOs and NCOs requires re-orientation. It is the leadership and decision making at their level that would produce required results. They have to be encouraged to think and plan for themselves and take on the spot and speedy decisions. There is no scope for looking back! It shall have to be ensured that witch hunting is not resorted to when mistakes are made and things go wrong. A new sense of discipline shall have to be inculcated, from the heel clicking and saluting culture, to following drills, orders and getting on with

the task in hand, but at the same time keeping human rights and collateral damage in focus. They will have to be good at public relations and respectful to the civil-military relationship.

Sub-conventional warfare is not going to be so much about higher planning and giving set piece orders. Political and cultural suaveness, listening to juniors, intuition and familiarity with the local social and religious milieu would be of great help. It shall have to be ensured that people on ground remain calm and do not indulge in human rights violations.

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There is a need for first rate small units equipped with light weapons, trained and motivated, somewhat on the lines of 'special forces' teams. Helicopter support will have to be integral to formations fighting insurgency and terrorism. This is critical for mobility, which will have to be terrain independent and will enable outpacing the enemy.

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Excellent signal communications will be required within the platoon and section, down to the squad and even individual soldier level. This will ensure that their actions can be coordinated, latest information is passed on and effectiveness maximised with synergy.

Intelligence will continue to play a crucial role in all formations fighting in sub-conventional warfare environment. While technology will help, cultivating local resources for human intelligence will provide better results. There is a need for intelligence fusion centres, so that intelligence from all sources can be evaluated and disseminated with speed.

Information warfare including dealing with press will also play an important role. This will help in weaning away the local population from the terrorists. Sound logistic support for soldiers operating in such an environment is an essential pre-requisite and must be ensured at all times. Troops should be capable enough to merge with the locals and live off the land, if the situation so demands.

The army will continue to be deployed for fighting in sub-conventional operations in the foreseeable future. In addition, the pace of life will become faster and aspirations of human resource will multiply in geometric progression. Demands from society and family would be higher on soldiers and, thus, further contribute towards stress. Therefore, desired capacities have to be built in our recruitment system, training philosophy, training methodology, training infrastructure in training academies, regimental training centres, divisional training schools and

other military colleges/ schools of instruction as also in our military thinking to produce motivated, efficient and stress-adapted officers and soldiers fit to meet future warfare challenges efficiently. Commanders must realise that they on their own cannot motivate troops. However, they can create the right kind of climate that may significantly enhance the motivation level of troops.



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Notes:

1. Dixit, K.C., "Sub-Conventional Warfare Requirements, Impact and Way Ahead", *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 4, No 1, IDSA, New Delhi, January 2010, p. 134.
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3. Goel, D.S., "Psychological Aspects of Counter-Insurgency Operations", *Combat Journal, Army War College, Mhow*, 1998, pp. 43-48.
4. Asnani, V., "Stress and Job Satisfaction among Soldiers Operating in Counter-Insurgency Areas", *DIPR, Note*, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 3-13.
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