

# **Moral Warfare in Counterinsurgency Operations**

**A Monograph**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

MORAL WARFARE IN COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS by MAJOR David C. Chiarenza, US Army, 36 pages.

The purpose behind this monograph was to explore the moral level of war in the context of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the larger framework of counterinsurgency operations. Operation Iraqi Freedom is a war fought in the moral realm and the resulting operational environment poses complex ethical dilemmas for the U.S. Army. This monograph argues that resistance to U.S. endeavors in Iraq is due to losses in the moral realm for the compliance and support of the Iraqi people which is critical in defeating any insurgency.

The method of analysis employed is qualitative analysis of ethics, morality and counterinsurgency. Analysis of the OIF operational environment and principles of Moral Warfare established premises that formed my conclusion. Deductive reasoning led me to conclude that the Army needs to embark on an urgent reassessment to remedy current ethical trends and regain our moral authority in Iraq.

This monograph draws heavily from cotemporary literature on morality, Just War Theory, and COIN ethics in order to define Moral Warfare. The center of gravity of COIN operations is accepted as the support of the population. I attempt to show that the conduct of U.S. forces directly impacts the population's sense of security and their level of support.

In the conduct of research the notion of moral asymmetry emerged. Insurgents are not governed by Western morality. Differences in morality clearly affect insurgent tactics and objectives. Morally asymmetric operations exploit our inability to combat the effects of terror tactics. U.S. forces are constrained by the law of war as well as Western values in combating violent insurgencies.

The conclusion is not intended to criticize the professionalism of the U.S. military but to highlight the importance of ethics in obtaining the support of the Iraqi people and ultimately improve the perception of the U.S. military. The ethical conduct of the military ultimately generates legitimacy and political capital necessary for the next conflict.

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## Introduction

*“Most of the generals and politicians did not think through the consequences of compelling American soldiers with no knowledge of Arabic or Arab culture to implement intrusive measures inside an Islamic society. We arrested people in front of their families, dragging them away in handcuffs with bags over their heads, and then provided no information to the families of those we incarcerated. In the end, our soldiers killed, maimed and incarcerated thousands of Arabs, 90 percent of whom were not the enemy. But they are now.”<sup>1</sup>*

Operation Iraqi Freedom is a war fought in the moral realm and the resulting operational environment poses complex ethical dilemmas for the U.S. Army. With future operations similar to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) becoming more prevalent, winning against an insurgent foe is going to require much greater attention to ethical issues. This monograph argues that resistance to U.S. endeavors in Iraq is due to losses in the moral realm for the compliance and support of the Iraqi people which is critical in defeating the insurgency.

The War in Iraq is an attrition strategy that seeks to lower the tide of insurgent activity to a manageable level while raising the bridge of Iraqi security capabilities. The U.S. withdrawal is reliant on Iraqi forces combating a small insurgency in a relatively secure environment. However, the insurgency has shown a capacity in recruitment that outpaces U.S. ability to incarcerate or kill. Ironically this also affects the raising of the bridge in that security forces have high casualty rates and experience great difficulty in recruiting and retention. In order to break this dynamic we must gain the understanding that Operation Iraqi Freedom is a war in the moral realm as a battle of ideologies in order to gain the compliance and ultimately the support of the Iraqi people. Commanders readily acknowledge the importance of gaining the trust of the Iraqi people. The aim of improvements in infrastructure and security operations is to protect the population in order to facilitate political reconciliation while alienating an insurgency reliant on

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<sup>1</sup> “Dramatic Failures Require Drastic Changes.” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 19 December 2004, p 1

the support of the Iraqi people. These operations are not without merit but are shaping operations that reveal an underestimation of the scale and nature of the problem. Only by obtaining the populace's consent to government authority and stopping support to the enemy can U.S. and Iraqi government forces prevail.

The character of warfare is changing. The United States Army continues to transform in order to meet the challenges posed by an adaptive enemy. We can no longer fight a war on terms that we did not choose. The greatest challenge to American conventional dominance is irregular threats in small wars, resistance movements, and insurgencies. In order to succeed, irregular forces pursue asymmetric approaches to offset U.S. conventional supremacy. The objective of these forces is to gain the population's acceptance of their authority as legitimate or at the minimum, the population simply succumbs in order to bring about the insurgents will. Enemy forces succeed by fomenting disorder and chaos in order to undermine the existing government and U.S. force's moral legitimacy. The moral level of war is critical to winning a fourth generation, asymmetric counterinsurgency. Failure at the moral level of war leads to a longer occupation, a viscous cycle of violence and ultimately the loss of popular support.

Fueling the insurgency is the U.S. occupation with tactics and policies that frighten and humiliate the population. This view is based upon my experiences in Operation Iraqi Freedom 2, discourse among peers, and scholarly research and is the motivation for the premise of this monograph. My views are not substituted for research but were experiences drawn upon to verify supporting literature.

Viewed as occupiers, our forces are responsible for much of the current violence by the Iraqi people. Popular opposition varies by intensity and character but throughout Iraq it is a "reaction to the coercive practices of the occupation, including military, policing, and penal

operations.”<sup>2</sup> The result is an Iraqi people with increasing support to the insurgents to avenge humiliations. The response by the Iraqi people is amplified by cultural differences that U.S. forces still do not understand or simply choose to ignore.

Operation Iraqi Freedom has been a relatively “clean” counterinsurgency operation when measured against similar operations. “Clean” does not refer exclusively to casualty count but also to atrocities, tactics employed, and the humanity displayed by the counterinsurgent. For example, modern insurgencies in Algeria, Vietnam and the Malay peninsula are characterized by massacres and heavy handed tactics. However, due to the speed of media reporting, enemy information operations, international scrutiny, and declining American support, a debate is emerging over war crimes and the culpability of the soldiers allegedly involved. The argument divides both military and civilian leadership while alarming the US population. Emotions range from accusations of an extensive military cover-up to justification of soldier’s actions because of the complexity of the conflict. Despite the relative “cleanness” of the OIF counter-insurgency campaign, the U.S. military has much to improve upon. Similar to the Philippines campaign of the 19th century, the American soldier in Iraq holds paternalistic and racist attitudes that were inimical to nation building. Suppressive policies, sanctioned by commands, are justified because “natives” are unfit to rule themselves and will continue to be for the near future. American soldiers bring a “paternal forbearance” and a visible sense of a superior civilization with them to Iraq.<sup>3</sup> This kind of moral superiority is not conducive to gaining control of the population. Because the objectives of OIF are humanistic and based on what we feel is morally sound justification, we resist the conclusion that the behavior of U.S. forces is somehow to blame for the

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<sup>2</sup> Carl Conetta, *Vicious Circle: The Dynamics of Occupation and Resistance in Iraq* Project on Defense Alternatives Research Monograph #10 [monograph on-line]. (Project on Defense Alternatives, 2005, accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://www.comw.org:80/pda/0505rm10.html>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup> Combat Studies Institute. *Armed Diplomacy: Two Centuries of American Campaigning* (Fort Leavenworth: CSI Press, 2003), 82.

Iraqi resentment. As long as we persist in believing that the insurgency and sectarian violence is the source of strife in Iraq then we will ultimately lose the war or have to lower expectations.

Exasperating these racist tendencies is the complex and dynamic environment of Iraq. Service members face constant changes in mission while combating a violent insurgency. Many military members have served multiple tours with little time between rotations. This leads to dehumanizing and retaliation against the populace. An unrealistic military culture of punitive or retaliatory policies further isolates American soldiers. This is not to say that ROE and ethical violations are to be tolerated. But the perception of guilt before innocence needs a reversal to allow soldiers the freedom of action. Otherwise, we risk further racism and interaction as soldiers blame Iraqis for their condition.

The ethical conduct of American service members in combating insurgent moral asymmetries and in gaining the support of the Iraqi people is critical to the success of OIF. The notion of moral asymmetry is that the combatant forces have such differing ethics and sense of morals that an asymmetry is created in the moral realm that cannot be combated through tactics. Operation Iraqi Freedom will be a long campaign and U.S. forces will continue to improve upon counterinsurgency tactics. However, kinetic operations and civil-military endeavors will not be decisive. Insurgents do not limit themselves to purely military means. Unlike conventional operations, the U.S. Army cannot impose its will on the enemy as it lacks the necessary capabilities to combat the spectrum of means at the disposal of the insurgent. The “long-term success in COIN depends on the people taking charge of their own affairs and consenting to the to the government’s rule.”<sup>4</sup> The key task then is security of the population. We first must inspire the Iraqis to provide for their security by gaining their trust. Our attempts at providing security without this trust are simply counterproductive. The media portrayed the February, 2005 Iraqi

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of the Army. *Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2006), 1-1.

elections as a security success as fifty-one percent of registered voters came out to the polls. In fact, Task Force Baghdad experienced 106 attacks that day to include eight suicide bombers, the highest level over the course of the year. There was no rational reason why the Iraqi people went out on Election Day other than courage. Counter-insurgencies are traditionally long in duration in which the vitality and courage of the population ultimately defeats the insurgent, not the U.S. military. It is the role of the American military to preserve this courage by first garnering the populations support then building confidence in Iraqi security and government apparatus. Once the courage displayed by Iraqis on Election Day is commonplace, the insurgents will not have a base of support or a reason to function.

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and counter insurgency operations (COIN) pose complex ethical dilemmas for the military. COIN operations require restraint, cultural awareness and non-lethal tactics in order to secure the support of the population. However an inverse relationship develops between these requirements and the length of the operation. The longer the operation, the more likely Army units will experience degradation in military ethics as the rigors of COIN begin to take their toll. The dichotomy of the COIN restraint and the soldier's warrior ethos also contributes to soldier confusion. Trained in kinetic, violent action, soldiers find COIN operations inherently difficult and counter intuitive. Told to use restraint and gain the support of the population, soldiers also must combat insurgents.

Roger Trinquier explains that the "goal of modern warfare is control of the populace."<sup>5</sup> Insurgents use terrorist tactics to isolate the populace, adding to their general despair. Coerced into supporting the insurgent, the population loses confidence in the state and security forces. American forces must be a viable choice over the insurgent, offering security, stability and hope for the future in order to gain the support of the populace. When American units resort to the

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<sup>5</sup> Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare, A French View of Counter Insurgency* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute, 1985), 32.

indiscriminate use of force we are no more preferable than the insurgent and risk losing control of the population, international legitimacy, and support of the American people.

If U.S. forces alienate the population, the Iraqis will look toward any other group for protection and security. Security operations and infrastructure improvements are negated when poor ethical decision making and Iraqi cultural identity is trampled. Though the insurgency is ruthless, the population identifies culturally with its members. Despite poor living standards and security, they have a shared bond. U.S. diplomacy and information operations cannot overcome illegalities and harsh approaches exercised by the military. In the end, we are only distinguishable from the insurgent in that we are American. Our efforts to improve conditions are wasted if we cannot gain the support of the people. We are simply mirror imaging our culture to Iraq.

Currently, Iraqis reject any responsibility that may subject them to the retaliation of the insurgent. U.S. forces in constant contact must build this responsibility from the bottom up and lead by example. The building of Iraqi Security Forces is essential for the defense of the populace. Like Americans, Iraqi Forces must respect the population's basic liberties or risk being as oppressive as the insurgents. Iraqi Forces must guard against abuses towards the population or they will increase internal friction. Much reporting revolves around the general lack of military competency of Iraqi forces which is understandable considering their relatively recent genesis. Military proficiency will emerge over time. However, the ethical conduct of these forces and the ability to gain the support and control of the population is suspect and needs greater emphasis. The alternative is a future tool of repression, local shadow regimes, insurgent collusions and the possibility of future coups.

Ethical conduct is necessary in obtaining the support of the population and is crucial in combating the insurgency. Insurgent tactics add to the complexity of the operational environment. The insurgents do not "play" upon traditional "rules" or the laws governing just wars. Moral asymmetry is effective, obviating our fiscal overmatch and greater resources,

undermining population support, and affect U.S. national will. Insurgents are not constrained by Western morals and ethics. In their struggle to prevail, the enemy employs tactics that prey upon U.S. vulnerabilities. The nature of insurgent warfare favors the irregular forces. The insurgent does not need to gain support of the population by improving their lives, but can gain support through fear and coercion. The enemy enjoys the advantages in the information environment, initiative and deception. Insurgent operations are conducted in such a manner that American forces are often placed in ethical dilemmas. For example, the insurgent shapes the information sphere to his advantage. Suicide attacks, collateral damage and mass killings have, “little military value but create fear and uncertainty within the populace and government institutions. These actions are executed to attract high-profile media coverage or local publicity and inflate perceptions of insurgent capabilities, undermining U.S. and Iraqi legitimacy.”<sup>6</sup> U.S. forces are constrained by the truth.

Equally immoral tactics are sometimes employed by U.S. forces as the most effective means to combat insurgent tactics. Units must guard against questionable tactics that yield short term results. The insurgent derives strength from unrestrained morals in the form of freedom of action and through inexpensive coercion. The U.S. holds our soldiers and Army to a higher standard. The dichotomy is the more we strive to gain population support by improving lives and providing security, the more the insurgent must rely on terror tactics. This war in the demographic battle space is essential for winning the war in Iraq. By maintaining moral legitimacy, U.S. forces may be at an initial disadvantage. However, in the long term, insurgents discredit themselves by resorting to coercion in order to maintain population support. As long as U.S. forces retain the moral high ground, insurgent support will ultimately erode. If the insurgents are successful in gaining control of larger portions of the populace despite our best moral efforts, many of the moral asymmetries diminish because the insurgents must employ

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of the Army. *Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC:

legitimate tactics to retain control. “That may produce new vulnerabilities that adaptive U.S. forces can exploit.”<sup>7</sup>

The Iraqi government and the U.S. fail if we cannot maintain a degree of order and security that can inspire the populace. This allows time for other elements of power to assist in defeating the insurgency by addressing the causes of instability. The ethical conduct of American service members, in constant contact with the populace and showing genuine respect and sensitivity will enable the Iraqi people to resist the insurgents. Improving infrastructure and creating security cannot alone gain the support of the Iraqi people. While facilitating cooperation the logical lines of effort do not guarantee compliance. We continue to improve essential services only to find them in disrepair a short time later. We build trash collection points and Iraqis still dump their trash in the street. Perhaps if we had gained the trust of the people, Iraqis will eventually see the benefit of these services over time. But they do not exert the effort to utilize, maintain, or secure these projects. This is both cultural phenomena we fail to grasp and a backlash against U.S. policies and tactics. We must first gain and maintain their trust by distinguishing ourselves from the insurgents by winning the moral war.

We defeat ourselves. Incidents like Haditha and Abu Ghraib have strategic impact on the moral level of war. While hundreds may be killed at a market bombing without nearly a whisper in the media, the Muslim world riots at a published article of a U.S. soldiers error in judgment. There is no way to calculate the damage done in number of retribution attacks against U.S. forces, deaths and in loss of influence. But it is undoubtedly counterproductive. We are conducting intrusive operations in a culture subjected to 35 years of tyranny and influenced by outside extremist organizations in open conflict with the West. We must work harder than the insurgent in order to win the support of the population. The moral level of war is a battle of ideologies and influence. The battle for nation’s minds relies on ethical conduct, and an understanding of the

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Government Printing Office, December 2006), 1-3.

cultural context. The following chapters will explore the nature of moral warfare, just action and combatting moral assymetry in order to explore how the U.S. can regain ground loss in the moral domain in OIF.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## Importance of Population Support

In a counterinsurgency, the moral level of war is fought to win the support of the population. This chapter on population support seeks to reinforce the importance of ethics in relations with the population prior to discussing moral war principles. The counterinsurgency mission involves assuming responsibility for everyone in the AO. This means that leaders feel the pulse of the local populace, understand their motivations, and care about what they want and need. Genuine compassion and empathy for the populace provide an effective weapon against insurgents. The greatest challenge for leaders may be in setting an example for the local populace. Effective senior and junior leaders embrace this role and understand its significance. It involves more than just killing insurgents; it includes the responsibility to serve as a moral compass that extends beyond the COIN force and into the community. It is that moral compass that distinguishes Soldiers and Marines from the insurgents.<sup>8</sup>

Insurgencies are never defeated by military means alone. Volumes of counterinsurgency literature indicate that securing the populations support is critical to victory. Logical lines of effort support this objective by building institutions and the rule of law that undermine support to the insurgents. Reducing the number of disillusioned and economically desperate also impacts the insurgent base of support. Civilians are the center of gravity, and any effective response must extend beyond military means.<sup>9</sup>

When counterinsurgents resort to aggressive tactics that harm and degrade the population they put themselves above the law. Aggressive house searches and detentions without the benefit of law feed public disillusionment and enemy propaganda.<sup>10</sup> Combating the insurgency and securing the population must be mutually reinforcing. Counterinsurgent operations must have the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 7-1.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington: The University press of Kentucky, 2004), 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Countering Afghanistan's Insurgency: No Quick Fixes*. (Crisis Group Asia Report, 2006, accessed 19 February 2007); available from [www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/4565e7fe4.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/4565e7fe4.pdf); Internet.

support and momentum of the local society. Without the population's mobilization and confidence as an ally, counterinsurgent operations will fail. U.S. forces must be legitimate, in support of the rule of law and backed by irreproachable moral authority. "Historically, the critical test of legitimacy is the ability of one side or the other to guarantee the security of the population."<sup>11</sup> Bases of support in either camp accept that their side has the best chance of ensuring future security. U.S. forces must demonstrate that it can combat the insurgents effectively while protecting the population. Insurgents only have to demonstrate that the Iraqi and U.S. forces cannot provide security; an easier task. Peace will only prevail if the population gives into the demands of the insurgent. Thus the insurgent does not have to abide by the same moral obligations as U.S. forces.

Winning the confidence of a differing culture while in combat is difficult. The process is takes time. However, over time a unit's moral resources deteriorate. The complex operational environment weakens the moral links to the population. Indiscriminate or misdirected use of force and dehumanizing behavior reinforce the insurgent's position. Restraint and ethical conduct is the key to success. But restraint is counterintuitive in combat. Amoral conduct by U.S. forces are makes us an enemy of the population. Without their support, intelligence gathering is hampered and the insurgency swells. U.S. forces then fight blindly and resort to illegal actions contrary to the ROE and the established rule of law. This brings the loop full circle.

Overly aggressive kinetic military operations complicate the challenge of gaining population support by adding to the perception of an occupation. Many Iraqis tend to blame the occupation for eliciting insurgent violence or failing to prevent the violence. As much as 30,000

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<sup>11</sup> John A. Lynn, "Patterns of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (July-August 2005): 23.

Iraqis have died due to military action on all sides as of May 2005.<sup>12</sup> Almost certainly, some of the deaths are due to coalition excessive or imprudent use of force. In a tribal society, this has huge repercussions.

An opportunity exists because the, “insurgents have no positive message with which to inspire popular support.”<sup>13</sup> The Iraqi people, the American public, and the American soldier are each a center of gravity in the moral realm. Iraqi support is critical and must be earned through improved security provided by sympathetic U.S. forces. The will of the American people is essential in a long war. This will is eroded by any unethical conduct by American soldiers. The soldier must believe that the war is worth the sacrifice and not give up on a moral approach towards victory.

Complex counterinsurgency operations place difficult ethical demands on the military. The obligations to secure the population produce profound ethical considerations. These considerations are essential to “persuading people their best interests are served by your success.”<sup>14</sup> U.S. forces must capitalize on insurgent corruption and injustice in order to sever the moral bonds that bind people to the insurgent. Simultaneously, we must share burdens with people as basis to form moral bonds to combat insurgent philosophy and ideals.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Carl Conetta., *Vicious Circle: The Dynamics of Occupation and Resistance in Iraq Project on Defense Alternatives Research Monograph #10* [monograph on-line]. (Project on Defense Alternatives, 2005, accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://www.comw.org:80/pda/0505rm10.html>; Internet

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Krepinevich. *How to win in Iraq*. (Foreign Affairs Online, 2005, accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20050901faessay84508/andrew-f-krepinevich-jr/how-to-win-in-iraq.htm>; Internet.

<sup>14</sup> D.J Kilcullen, *Twenty-Eight Articles Counterinsurgency*. [document on-line] (Washington D.C: 2006, accessed 19 February 2007); available from [http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/pdf/kilcullen\\_28\\_articles.pdf](http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/pdf/kilcullen_28_articles.pdf); Internet. 5

<sup>15</sup> John Boyd, *Patterns of Conflict* [presentation online] (Defense and the National Interest, 1986, accessed 22 February 2007); available from [http://www.d-n-i.net/second\\_level/boyd\\_military.htm](http://www.d-n-i.net/second_level/boyd_military.htm); Internet

## Nature of Moral Warfare

An armed moral conflict aims to destroy the moral bonds that permit the population and the counterinsurgent to function. Emotions like fear, anxiety, and alienation generate exploitable opportunities for the insurgent, subvert the population and magnify friction. Operations that weaken these moral bonds create an atmosphere of doubt and suspicion that loosens the bonds between U.S. forces and the Iraqi people. The fact that insurgent forces are not bound by ethics or law to use tactics that create such emotions creates a moral asymmetry. Unless vigilant, our forces lose moral strength, values and authority as we become increasingly isolated from the population.

The U.S. Army's objectives in Iraq have suffered along with our moral progress. The problems evolved from negative events and the everyday actions of some units who suffer from a weakening of moral values. A recent poll showed that less than 22% of Iraqis support the presence of coalition forces and 49% say that the coalition's presence worsens the security situation. In the same poll, nearly 100% of Iraqis in Baghdad say they avoid U.S. patrols.<sup>16</sup> If the overall conduct of U.S. units was exemplary, then we should not see such low support. The poll indicates that the insurgents are successful in weakening U.S. moral authority and that the actions of some of our units have added to this perception.

Iraqi mistrust implies a rupture of the human bonds that permit individuals to work as an organic whole in harmony with one another.<sup>17</sup> The loss of moral values has reduced our capacity for sympathy and replaced this emotion with hardness. Likewise, the widespread hope found among Iraqis after the ground war has given away to apathy. The weakening of the Army's moral resources has left some units without restraint. Unit social pressures and moral

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<sup>16</sup> "Iraqis See Hope Drain Away." *USA Today*, 19 March 2007, p. 9A.

<sup>17</sup> , John Boyd *Patterns of Conflict* [presentation online] (Defense and the National Interest, 1986, accessed 22 February 2007); available from [http://www.d-n-i.net/second\\_level/boyd\\_military.htm](http://www.d-n-i.net/second_level/boyd_military.htm); Internet

climate leans towards amoralism. The restraining effects of acting on decent impulses are replaced by acting on revulsion and hatred.

Few if any units are immoral. Immoral units would have a difficult time masking their actions. Amoral units are those that seem moral but do not have the deeper convergence of being moral. These units solicit a surface conformity to the ROE and law of war. However, they do not actively protect their moral resources or sympathize with the population. The command climate does not encourage the development of moral feelings in order to motivate obedience. Degrading behavior is tolerated under a thin veneer of humanity.

Over time, our actions and decisions become behavior that set into character and command climate. If this behavior is lacking morality, we turn Iraqi apathy into defiance. The duress and humiliation imposed by a unit fuels a moral identity among the Iraqi people of resistance and strength. Instead of liberators we become occupiers. It is not difficult for insurgents to portray Iraq as more secure and prosperous before the arrival of Americans. Of course, insurgents commit greater crimes than U.S. forces against the population. But sophisticated information operations and obvious cultural differences make U.S. units an easier and more visible target of frustration. Moral asymmetries employed by insurgents armor the insurgent against possible retaliation from the population. If the same tactics were employed by U.S. forces, there would be an international backlash.

A moral gap is becoming increasingly evident. Indifference towards the Iraqi people and focusing on the insurgent has led to the proliferation of amoral conduct. Moral resources have fewer claims over the actions of units due to the success of insurgents in generating fear, uncertainty, and mistrust. Vast cultural differences between the Iraq population and U.S. forces have also eroded our capacity for sympathy. It is human nature to extend sympathy towards those who we identify with and are in our immediate community. As Operation Iraqi Freedom continues, the moral resources of our army are neutralized creating amoral units that assert

themselves by dominance and cruelty.<sup>18</sup> A recent survey of U.S. soldiers revealed that one-third believes torture should be allowed if it gains intelligence on the insurgency. Half the soldiers reported that they would not report a comrade for mistreatment of a civilian and ten percent acknowledged mistreating civilians. GEN Petraeus admonished soldiers saying, “This fight depends on securing the population, which must understand that we, not our enemies, occupy the moral high ground.”<sup>19</sup>

## The Trinity

“The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish...the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.”<sup>20</sup>

Based on our U.S. justifications, OIF is a just war in accord with U.S. morals and policy. However, it was not articulated that the war would be fought at the moral level. This realization occurred later in the campaign when initiative for gaining popular support was handed to the insurgents and the behavior of units had largely been justified and immoral behavior was ingrained as habit. Clausewitz’s writings on moral forces are psychological not ethical. However, his description of psychological moral forces can be transferred to ethical forces. Particularly when engaged in a moral war. Clausewitz believed that moral forces were fundamental to war. The physical factors “seem little more than the wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Glover, *Humanity, A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 33.

<sup>19</sup> “GEN Petraeus Warns Against Torture *Washington Post*, 11 May 2007, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Howard and Peter Paret, *Carl von Clausewitz's On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 88.

precious metal, the real weapon, the finely-honed blade."<sup>21</sup> The moral qualities are manifested in the armies, governments, populace and the effects associated with victory and defeat<sup>22</sup>.

Clausewitz's trinity of war comprises three specific elements; irrational forces, non-rational forces, and rationality. The population is the bulk of irrational forces and provides the "emotions of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity." The governments are the rationality part of the trinity and subordinates war to reason and policy. The military is then the non-rational force that plays on chance, probability, and talent. These forces, irrational, non-rational, and rational, interact in a dynamic manner in any conflict. The trinity model in counterinsurgency operations swings wildly due to the dynamics of the operational environment. Counterinsurgent successes move the pendulum in the zone of military chance, probability, and talent, political reconciliation and elections towards the rational zone, sectarian violence towards irrationality. In the conduct of a counterinsurgency, the support of the population is critical for success. Once emotions get out of control, the trinity's pendulum moves towards the irrational zone and the people become much more decisive in resolving the conflict which is where we are in Iraq. In order for the trinity to be balanced, the support of the population must be gained. Given that the population provides "emotions of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity," this support must be gained through the moral domain or support will be fleeting.

## **Just War Theory**

Gaining and maintaining the support of Clausewitz's irrational actors requires highly ethical and morally just military forces. This role falls to the military due to a shortage of trained civilian and interagency counterparts. The military is also the most visible component of U.S. policy and is in constant contact with the population. Theory into the conduct of war provides a framework for ethical operations.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 184.

The Just-war theory addresses the justification of how and why wars are fought.<sup>23</sup> From this theory two ethical frameworks of war are offered, the principles that govern justice of war (*jus ad bellum*) and the principles of just conduct in war (*jus in bello*). The moral level of war and ethical conduct draw heavily from the Just-war theory. Both principles, *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, are mutually supporting. This monograph addresses the actions of the military in gaining the support of the population at the moral level of war and combating insurgent's moral asymmetry as they seek the same objective. The military is responsible for *jus in bello*.

The essence of *jus in bello* is the tension between force protection and collateral damage. This tension is governed by international law and rules of engagement and proportionality due to the military's inclination and obligation to preserve their forces. However, if this concern causes leadership to employ tactics and prosecute targets that result in excessive collateral damage and casualties, then these laws have been violated and the moral high ground seceded to the insurgents.

*Jus in bello* is taught rigorously to soldiers and leadership. All soldiers are briefed on the rules of engagement prior to deployment, annual training is mandatory for all soldiers on the laws of war. Army leadership courses stress the Army values and ethics. Our leadership has taken great strides in reinforcing just war conventions. Yet war crimes, poor moral decision making and humiliating ethical conduct persists. When grievous, the violators are held responsible for their actions by the U.S. military. But it appears that this idealism has not permeated all echelons and formations. Atrocities may be few but the lack of responsibility and ethical conduct in interactions with the public are far ranging.

The moral framework of *jus in bello* includes who are lawful targets (discrimination) and how much force is morally acceptable (proportionality). Both are relevant to a discussion of

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<sup>23</sup> Alexander Moseley, *Just War Theory* [article on-line] (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/j/justwar.htm#top>; Internet.

moral warfare in Iraq. The insurgents understand the laws that govern the U.S. military's action and attempt to solicit proportionality and discrimination violations. The tactics employed create moral tensions. As mentioned, the first tension is between force protection and combating the insurgency. Often a violent reaction or preemptive action will deter future attacks. However, these same actions may violate the principles of *jus in bello*, causing significant collateral damage. Another tension is the need to combat the insurgency amongst the population. The insurgency "swims" in the population and target fidelity is not always possible. Deliberate deception and constant movement cause consternation for U.S. forces and leads to kinetic operations against innocent targets. While not intentionally a violation of the discrimination principle, the secondary effects on population support are significant. In both tensions, violations of *jus in bello* could be deliberate and justified in the minds of the commander in order to accomplish the mission. This slippery slope misses the premise in that we are containing the insurgency and seeking the support of the population through moral actions in order to ultimately defeat the insurgency.

The principle of discrimination does not mean that we should completely avoid civilian casualties. The practicalities of fighting a counterinsurgency almost guarantee collateral damage. Deaths should be accidental not deliberate. Target discrimination needs to be deliberate and thoughtful. A lawful target may be in proximity to civilians, and target prosecution may yield collateral casualties. This is a lawful justification. A moral decision process needs to also determine the most proportional delivery system and tactic to minimize these casualties as well as determine if the loss of influence amongst the population justifies the action. A balance between necessity, civilian casualties and loss of population support must exist.

This balance is encapsulated in the moral doctrine of double effect. Double Effect reconciles the prohibition against attacking civilians and legitimate military operations.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Walzer, *Just and unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 153.

Military operations that will likely have evil consequences are permitted if the act itself is a legitimate act of war, the direct (primary) effect is morally acceptable, the intention is moral or that the negative effect is not the ends and the good effect compensates or outweighs the negative effect.

The discrimination process is well defined at higher echelons. Strike criteria are created to ensure that all considerations have been contemplated. However, the number of events executed by these echelons is few in the aggregate. Soldiers must also abide by the principles of proportionality in the conduct of daily operations in order to avoid the accidental loss of life. Combat training centers and home station training admirably instruct units through the use of vignettes that exercise moral decision making. This is critical because the population interacts with these soldiers far more frequently than the officer with the strike criteria. Soldiers must maintain this interaction in order to build a relationship with the population and understand his environment. From understanding greater support and credibility with the population is built. Secondly, the soldier learns to recognize the differences in atmospherics. He can sense when the environment is not “normal.” This knowledge becomes tacit and instinctive. When dealing with a tactical situation in which force must be used, the soldier is far more likely to make an instinctive decision that errs on the side of proportionality and discrimination.

“A legitimate act of war is one that does not violate the rights of the people against whom it is directed.”<sup>25</sup> This is problematic in an insurgency. The insurgents are not a state sponsored force and are not necessary representative of the population. Non-uniformed combatants and frustration lead the counterinsurgent to view everyone as the enemy. However, the spirit of the War Convention rule is that the population cannot be warred against unless they surrender this right through their actions. Even if this right is surrendered, *Jus in bello* requires the military to temper action with the principles of proportionality and discrimination. When soldiers obey these

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 135.

bans they are acting justly which leads to even greater acts of kindness that are not required for the mission but taken wholly, create a humanitarian soldier who can win a moral war.

*Jus in bello* requires the military be responsible for their actions and tempers military action with the principles of proportionality and discrimination.<sup>26</sup> From the just war theory other moral issues arise that also affect the morality of war. The just war theory only touches on the use of kinetic force. Other issues of morality that bear on gaining the populations support include ethical conduct, the morality of obeying orders and ignorance of ones own actions.

## **Ethics and COIN**

*“No people in the world accepts occupation and nor do we accept the continuation of American troops in Iraq. We regard these forces to have committed many mistakes in the handling of various issues, the first and foremost being that of security, which in turn has contributed to the massacres, crimes and calamities that have taken place in Iraq against the Iraqis. Iraq can rely on itself and its people and it does not want foreign troops in its country.”<sup>27</sup>*

The Just war tradition evolved from an agreed set of rules and laws. Enemies were similar. However in Iraq, the insurgent has a vastly different religion, culture, race and ideology. Not constrained by Western sensibilities, a moral asymmetry is created. Continuous operations under these conditions erode the ethics of the counterinsurgent out of frustration. The counterinsurgent begins to use questionable tactics in order to combat the insurgent who fights using a different set of morals. In extreme cases, atrocities and war crimes are committed. Moral erosion also leads to humiliating acts and a lack of ethical and cultural bearing when in contact with the population which provokes an indefinite series of vengeful acts.<sup>28</sup> In order to combat

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Carl Conetta, *Vicious Circle: The Dynamics of Occupation and Resistance in Iraq* Project on Defense Alternatives Research Monograph #10 [monograph on-line]. (Project on Defense Alternatives, 2005, accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://www.comw.org:80/pda/0505rm10.html>; Internet

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Moseley, *Just War Theory* [article on-line] (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/j/justwar.htm#top>; Internet.

asymmetrical morality the ethics on conduct need consideration in order to further the concept of moral warfare. This chapter on ethics seeks to link the theory of just war with practical execution or ethical conduct.

The insurgents in Iraq have forfeited any right to fair and ethical treatment. They hide amongst the population to disguise their combatant status and solicit civilian casualties, infiltrate Iraqi security forces, destroy vital infrastructure, and commit atrocities like torture, mutilation, kidnapping and mass murder. Yet, they are expected to receive humane treatment. The U.S. military is expected to uphold the laws of war and treat the Iraqis humanly or we jeopardize the mission risk losing the Iraqi people.<sup>29</sup> A just cause does not provide sufficient justification for any means necessary to defeat a morally asymmetric foe. The U.S. military must be vigilant in arming themselves against the dark side of human nature in war. The leadership and character of our soldiers is vastly improved since the atrocities that occurred at My Lai nearly 40 years ago. The conditions necessary for My Lai, a racial element, the frustration of guerrilla warfare, and a hostile populace are present in Iraq. Fear and paranoia can create conditions among American forces that cause individual and unit breakdowns leading to savage acts. Liberties taken in combating insurgents leads ultimately to the dehumanizing of the population from which they spring.

The average Iraqi has limited options. On one side is a failed security apparatus that is corrupt and infiltrated by insurgents. Police and Iraqi Army units are unable to stop rampant crime let alone the insurgency at this point in time. Insurgent cells operate throughout the country. Extortion, murder, intimidation, torture and crime are everyday occurrences attributed to the insurgents. Simply driving to work and buying food in the market is hazardous as a rocket could impact or vehicle bomb may detonate. Children are intimidated at school or even attacked.

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<sup>29</sup> David L Berry, *Chivalry and Humanity, Even in Counterinsurgency, are not Obsolete* [article on-line] (Armed Forces Journal Online; accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2006/09/2002037>; Internet.

Interaction with security or coalition forces marks the Iraqi citizen as a collaborator. U.S. unit presence is viewed as a magnet for insurgent violence. Many amongst the population report various routine irritants that include constant patrols that threaten vehicles that move to close with gun fire, roadblocks that also result in shooting, routine round-ups and nightly raids.

Each group presents a unique challenge to the Iraqi citizen. Each group vies for the support of the population, but has little to offer in return. The U.S. is offering a hope for a secure, economically and socially progressive Iraqi state. However, it is difficult to see that future when the Iraqi is subjected dehumanizing behavior. Ethics goes beyond the ROE. A person's behavior is a manifestation of their intent. The necessary daily operations of U.S. forces are not always carried out ethically and are thus viewed as irritants. These daily framework operations also occur beneath the shadow of Abu Ghraib, the video-taped killing of an unarmed Fallujia insurgent and the 2006 rape of a 14 year old girl and subsequent murder of her family. According to polls, unethical and violent behavior in addition to the "scandals" has led to a rapid decline in Iraqi confidence in U.S. troops.<sup>30</sup>

Harsh treatment and abuses are more widespread than the media reports. They occur daily throughout Iraq. This is not to say that every unit and every soldier is guilty of such acts but that the behavior is more common than reports indicate. Raids are traumatic events and a key motivator of U.S. opposition. Mistaken targets result in false arrests, initial entry is violent, collateral damage and destruction of personal belongings frequent, and the treatment of residents can be harsh.<sup>31</sup> Detainee's families often do not know where their family member is taken. Between 66 percent and 75 percent of detainees are released within a few days. The cumulative

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<sup>30</sup> Carl Conetta, *Vicious Circle: The Dynamics of Occupation and Resistance in Iraq Project on Defense Alternatives Research Monograph #10* [monograph on-line]. (Project on Defense Alternatives, 2005, accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://www.comw.org:80/pda/0505rm10.html>; Internet

<sup>31</sup> *Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross on the Treatment by the Coalition Forces of Prisoners of War and other Protected Persons by the Geneva Conventions in Iraq During Arrest, Internment and Interrogation* [report on-line] (accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://cryptome.org/icrc-report.htm>; Internet.

effect of these negative encounters is a loss of influence. Polls show that over half of all Iraqis have had negative encounters with U.S. forces. This opinion affects the entire populace as nearly every Iraqi has experienced, seen or heard of a negative incident involving U.S. forces. "They searched my house," he said. "They kicked my Koran. They speak to me so poorly in front of my children. It's not that I encourage my son to hate Americans. It's not that I make him want to join the resistance. Americans do that for me."<sup>32</sup>

Dependency of Iraq on U.S. resources and the military should not be confused with loyalty, support, or even gratitude. "Indeed, dependency is itself often a source of humiliation and anger."<sup>33</sup> We cannot afford to breed resentment instead of trust. The daily interactions with Iraqis are an opportunity to win legitimacy for the OIF mission. It is being squandered by an uphill moral battle that creates an environment of mistrust. "In COIN, preserving noncombatant lives and dignity is central to mission accomplishment. This imperative creates a complex ethical environment."<sup>34</sup> This is essential to maintain the political will of America and to garner the support of the Iraqi Population. Our standards of treatment are well articulated. The insurgency is expected to act without principle. When we resort to unethical treatment of the population by our own standards the Iraqis view us as indistinguishable from the insurgents.

Counterinsurgency operations against an asymmetric foe bring certain ethical imperatives to prominence that is not as critical in other forms of conflict. Though the use of indiscriminate force is never permitted, it is outright counterproductive in COIN. Limiting destruction is counterintuitive to soldiers trained to destroy the enemy. Soldiers and leaders must "rapidly adapt cognitively and emotionally to the perplexing challenges of counterinsurgency and master

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<sup>32</sup> "Anti-U.S. Outrage Unites a Growing Iraqi Resistance." New York Times, 11 April 2004, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Carl Conetta, *Vicious Circle: The Dynamics of Occupation and Resistance in Iraq* Project on Defense Alternatives Research Monograph #10 [monograph on-line]. (Project on Defense Alternatives, 2005, accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://www.comw.org:80/pda/0505rm10.html>; Internet

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of the Army. *Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2006), 7-6.

new competencies as well as new contexts.”<sup>35</sup> The OIF environment is fraught with moral ambiguity. Leaders must provide direction by setting the moral tone and acting decisively to indicators of unethical behavior.

Almost everyone possesses the capability to resort to illegal tactics and treatment. Moral outrage leads indiscriminate killing without a strong sense of ethics and moral justice that is reinforced regularly. The well spring of hatred flows from the bottom up beginning with the soldier who loses his buddy, views the horrors of the insurgents and then has to interact with the populace. Subsequent opportunities will exist for the wartime equivalent of “negligent homicide of noncombatants,” and to mistreat civilians. Commanders must take care to arm these soldiers against such actions and to avoid issuing orders that may involve force without indications of combatant’s locations. Even if our ethics and morals allowed it, we could not coerce compliance from the Iraqi people. The information age has brought to the forefront the relationship between the military and civilians. The scope of military operations now demands even greater scrutiny of ethics in combat.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid; 7-1

# Moral Action and Population Support

## Religion and Culture

The Iraqi insurgency has an opposing ideology strong with religious overtones. The insurgency manipulates Islam in order to gain population support and to energize recruitment. The logic of preying on a religiously sensitive culture is that the population can relate to the insurgency through a shared or common demographic trait. A shared identity facilitates the conversion of the population to resistance to U.S. forces. The Arab world views the U.S. and the West as inherently hostile due to global expeditionary military actions, domination of economic markets and the exportation of a cultural ideology not compatible with Islamist ideology. This cultural conflict has led to a growing strand of extremism by Islamist. While its roots were initially peaceful, philosophical and introspective, the modern strand views confrontation as inevitable and necessary to combat Western influence in the region. Extremist ideology seeks to overthrow corrupt Muslim governments not in concert with protecting the umma (body of Muslims) from corruption and decadence.<sup>36</sup> A purified umma is more apt to combat Western influence.

The second extremist assumption is that only a caliphate governed in accordance with the Qur'an and the sharia law can govern with the appropriate dedication to Islam. The next logical progression is that an Islamic state cannot be secure unless the West is forced to retreat from the realm of Islam. No acceptance of these views results in an extremist labeling of apostate or enemy and the justification of killing Westerners and other Muslims.<sup>37</sup> The plethora of insurgent and terrorist organizations in Iraq have neither a shared ideology nor an articulated long term objective the least of which being a caliphate. However, the extremist view of resistance to the

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<sup>36</sup> Steven E. Daskal, *Changing the Paradigm of the War [article on-line]* (accessed 20 February 2007); available from [http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/daskal\\_changing\\_paradigms.htm](http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/daskal_changing_paradigms.htm)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

West is well understand and fueled by a long term occupation by the U.S. in Iraq. This invites external assistance to the insurgency as well as influential international terrorist to the conflict who have articulated such visions.

The resistance to U.S. endeavors in Iraq is in the moral realm for the compliance and support of the Iraqi people. Fueling the cycle of violence is a cultural acceptance of suffering, tribalism and revenge. This cycle has spurred the current sectarian violence as those attacked seek socially accepted vengeance that hardens the spirit and radicalizes portions of the society. Even though the target of sectarian violence is not usually U.S. forces, the brutality adds to the increased complexity of the environment. Frustrations lead to an increase in insurgency recruiting and a hardening of the population's views towards American optimism.

## **Collateral Casualties**

Perhaps one of the most contentious figures from OIF is that of civilian casualties caused by U.S. Forces. The theory of just war addressed the principles proportionality and discrimination. This section illuminates the impact of collateral casualties on population support. Certainly underreported as evident in any reconnaissance of a post combat site, an erosion of moral and ethical restraints facilitates the use of tactics that result in civilian casualties. This radicalizes those who were previously not sympathetic to the U.S. In turn, the new insurgents blend in to the population and stage more attacks that make it difficult to avoid civilian casualties and the resulting cycle.

A goal of asymmetric tactics is to contribute to the creation of collateral casualties resulting in a loss of counterinsurgent influence on the population. It is also possible that a counterinsurgent unit could be incited to the point where morals are completely eroded, resulting in increased collateral casualties and a complete disregard for the population. Prolonged periods combat, high casualty rates, combat stress, mission diversity, rules of engagement, inability to

discern combatants and unit morale can lead to the counterinsurgents lack of concern for avoiding casualties.

As previously discussed, the insurgents have little concern for avoiding casualties among their own civilians. This makes the task of distinguishing between militants and civilians difficult for the U.S. military.<sup>38</sup> Also, there are both “cognitive and motivational biases that hinder military judgment under such circumstances”<sup>39</sup> This leads to conflict and escalation, and the too frequent over escalation of force. Though OIF has been a relatively “clean” operation by all accounts, several crimes have been attributed to U.S. forces and one must assume that many more go unreported making political solutions and population support difficult.

Insurgents seek to blame U.S. military action as the cause of civilian casualties. This fuels the population distrust of our forces. Escalations of force and contact battle drills are often subjective and situational dependant. Over time, bias hinders most U.S. military leaders’ decisions as to the appropriate response to a decision. The cultural differences of Iraq further this bias as we fail to identify with the population we are attempting to secure. Morals begin to erode when faced with decisions in this complex environment and casualties “radicalize those who were previously not sympathetic to the militants.”<sup>40</sup> This erosion manifests itself in decision bias during operations. Take a unit frequently attacked by improvised explosive devices. As risk increases, barriers to ethical decisions making are created in order to prevent friendly casualties. The unit begins to return fire after every IED attack, regardless of whether a triggerman is visible. Then the unit fails to search the area for casualties. Detainments without sufficient cause increase as the unit searches the area for intelligence. Raids also increase as undeveloped targets are pursued under the pressure to produce intelligence and results.

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<sup>38</sup> Rebecca J. Wolfe and, John A. Darley, “Protracted Asymmetrical Conflict Erodes Standards for Avoiding Civilian Casualties,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace and Psychology* 11, no. 1 (2005): 61.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

Units slowly “pull away” from interactions with the population and focus on the combat aspects of COIN and they interact less with Iraqi security forces. This simple chain of events generates population opposition to U.S. units. Ultimately, a segment of the population in this area of operations will actively support the insurgent.

## Combating Moral Asymmetry

Morals define the rules of conduct by providing a distinction between right and wrong. They express cultural truths of conduct, conform societies and generally provide the basis for legalities. Military ethics, the law of war, and the code of conduct are manifestations of American and International morals that govern the use of military force. Insurgents in Iraq are not governed by the morality of the West. Their tactics are clearly employed in order to exploit our inability to combat the effects of terror tactics. U.S. forces are constrained by the law of war as well as Western values and sensibilities. Insurgents can gain popular support through coercion, fear, and false seeding of the information realm. An overreaction to an attack or atrocity committed by an insurgent element detracts from the U.S. objective of garnering popular support and erodes our image as a champion of civil liberties and a protector of the population. The moral tension between the two forces in gaining the support of the population is exploitable and must be considered in operational design.

Insurgents use tactics with the aim of wearing down the larger counter insurgent force over a long period time. By their nature they are an asymmetric threat. The insurgent relies heavily upon the tenants of intelligence, surprise, mobility, outside assistance, and secure bases of operations as the best means for achieving their goals. However, the morality that governs the actions of the insurgent and guides their operational framework is also an asymmetrical threat. This moral and ideological asymmetry is intended to make the cost of the war prohibitive. This cost is measured in terms of financial, international prestige, lives and domestic moral capital. The insurgents also use morally asymmetric operations in order to entice units to adopt “illegal methods” to succeed and resort to more permissive levels of force. This in turns breeds mistrust and discord among the population and severs the moral bond with U.S. forces.

Insurgent operations seek the “greatest political and informational impact with the lowest amount of risk,” in the conduct of operations.<sup>41</sup> Violence and fear is employed to achieve goals and is linked to political and informational actions. Tactics are primarily employed against noncombatants, infrastructure, local security forces and counterinsurgent elements in order to gain maximum informational and political effects. These effects often result in generating population support and changing the behavior of governments.<sup>42</sup>

Moral asymmetry is a dichotomy. Both insurgents and U.S. forces seek the support of the population. Yet these objectives are opposing in how influence is gained. U.S. forces cannot control a population as culturally different and as large as Iraq. Instead, we seek to gain the support for the Iraqi government and the coalition by offering a more attractive option for the future. OIF forces seek security in Iraq in order to gain the support of the population and enable the political process to reconcile differences. Security operations are enabled by civil-military operations and infrastructure rebuilding that improves the quality of life and addresses the basic needs of the Iraqi’ people. Just as the insurgent relies on asymmetric and guerrilla style tactics to defeat our conventional overmatch, they employ similar tactics in gaining population control.

Insurgents seek to control and manipulate the population. They cannot compete with the resources at the disposal of U.S. forces. By improving quality of life they offer the same future as the U.S. They employ moral asymmetric tactics in order to discredit American actions. They simply cannot create an equally attractive future due to a lack of resources. But if the insurgent creates chaos in the face of U.S actions then they discredit our efforts. Information operations are then employed in order to promulgate the perception that the crisis is directly attributable to U.S. actions.

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<sup>41</sup> U.S. Department of the Army. *Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2006), 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Insurgents do not have to win but only make the conditions in Iraq intolerable for the Iraqi people, coalition forces, and the U.S. population. Many media reports lead us to believe that the Iraqi population supports an insurgency against the U.S. While elements of the population certainly offer support to insurgents it is comparatively small to the larger population. The insurgents only have to prevent support for U.S. and Iraqi government political goals. Insurgents cannot offer a competing, attractive future and so cannot gain overwhelming popular support. They must only prevent a future that does not incorporate their ideology from materializing. In essence, the Iraqi insurgency is a prolonged delaying action. After a U.S. withdrawal the insurgents can then work towards gaining popular support and installing a government of their choosing. If we know then that the future we offer is more attractive, then it is critical that we gain the advantage in the moral level of war in order to overcome mistrust and discord.

In order to defeat an insurgent we must win morally, not through tactics, quickly admit any setback, and then readily adapt to any unforeseen circumstances. He must accomplish the latter without sacrificing his ideals.”<sup>43</sup> This statement gets to the very nature of the moral level of war. It is the notion of respect that displays genuine concern for the Iraqi culture and people. John Boyd continues the line of logic by emphasizing traditions and experiences that build trust and harmony among the populace.<sup>44</sup>

At the same time we must reveal the harshness of our enemies. Moral warfare destroys the moral bonds that permit the combatants to “swim in the sea of people.” This type of warfare requires less reliance on material superiority but on human values or morals for success. The intent behind insurgent attacks is to erode this bond by discrediting our actions through information operations or by soliciting an adverse counteraction. This creates an atmosphere

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<sup>43</sup> John H. Poole, *Tactics of the Crescent Moon: Militant Muslim Combat Methods* (Chevy Chase: Posterity Press, 2005) 223.

<sup>44</sup> John Boyd, *Patterns of Conflict* [presentation online] (Defense and the National Interest, 1986, accessed 22 February 2007); available from [http://www.d-n-i.net/second\\_level/boyd\\_military.htm](http://www.d-n-i.net/second_level/boyd_military.htm); Internet.

among the population of doubt and suspicion that loosens moral obligations and ties to U.S. forces.

Feelings of fear and anxiety among the population create uncooperative demographic pockets that are easily subverted to the insurgents cause.<sup>45</sup> Care must be taken in planning not to attribute uncooperative pockets to a lower standard of living or assume insurgent saturation. While this is possible, these areas may not ever be persuaded to support Iraqi government or U.S. forces if we do not recognize that it our perception that alienates the populace. This may be due to insurgent information operations or our conduct. The commander must look internally and reflect on the possibility that his unit may have breached a cultural sentiment or mistreated the population. Countering this negative image is necessary to building moral bonds with the population that permit interaction and facilitate the surfacing of courage within the population.

Morally asymmetric operations have the intended consequences of perception manipulation, and the creation of chaos. The more shocking the event, the greater the possibility for information manipulation, particularly if it solicits a violent U.S. response. Demonstrations and controlled casualty inducing attacks ferment instability while portraying counterinsurgent ineffectiveness. Assassinations and infrastructure attacks destroy symbols of compliance. Attacks on counter insurgents reveal their weaknesses, erode unit morale and accelerate U.S. discourse on early withdrawal. Manipulation of information and propaganda creates the perception of failure and misleads the population.

### **Moral Decision Making (Fog and Friction)**

As morals erode, decision makers identify less with the population. The counterinsurgent views every member of the population as an enemy or at the least a sympathizer. There is less

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<sup>45</sup> *Four Questions and Answers on Asymmetric Warfare* [article on-line] (Nato Defense College Web Page, accessed 2 March 2007); available from [http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/research/asym\\_war\\_comments.pdf](http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/research/asym_war_comments.pdf); Internet.

incentive to differentiate who is a combatant and restrain from violence because everyone is viewed as the enemy at some level. What was once immoral is viewed as justifiable as we begin to change our beliefs in order to justify our acts. The acts themselves then become more likely to occur. An aspect of this phenomenon is that the counterinsurgent views their actions as justified within the ROE as self defense while the population views those same acts as unprovoked attacks against them.<sup>46</sup>

Iraq is an atrocity producing situation. An unsympathetic public, insurgents using guerrilla tactics combined with moral and cultural asymmetries creates fog and friction. Fog, mental realm, and friction, environmental realm, are created by stress leading to breakdowns in decision making, perception, ethics and discipline.

Frustration and lack of effectiveness leads to decisions and tactical orders that are immoral in order to achieve results. Units discard the, “ethical rules of conventional war and adopt policies that necessarily target the civilian population who hide and support the insurgents.”<sup>47</sup> It is unlikely that every “incident” in Iraq is has been carried out by a wayward unit that did not understand the mission or commander’s intent. The justification for such acts is without merit. Dehumanizing deepens collaboration with insurgents. “It forces people in the middle of the road to take sides.”<sup>48</sup> The counterinsurgency becomes counterproductive. Leaders must act upon the moral propositions for the conduct of OIF.

The military needs to understand the moral and political consequences of placing civilians at risk, eroding military morals and unrestrained escalation of force. As moral decision making decays the “fog of war.” Fog is in the mind, effecting how we learn about the environment and our subsequent decisions. Decisions based on imperfect information become

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<sup>46</sup> Rebecca J Wolfe and John A. Darley, “Protracted Asymmetrical Conflict Erodes Standards for Avoiding Civilian Casualties,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace and Psychology* 11, no. 1 (2005): 59.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel Ellsberg. *Counterinsurgency Tactics Led to Haditha, My Lai*. (New Perspectives Quarterly Online, Summer 2007, accessed 25 April 2007); available from [http://www.digitainpq.org/archive/2006\\_summer/12\\_ellsberg.html](http://www.digitainpq.org/archive/2006_summer/12_ellsberg.html)

more prevalent as decision makers compensate for uncertainty by “being overconfident that the information they have is complete.”<sup>49</sup> As we identify less with the population we do not search for the information required to reduce uncertainty.

Friction exists within the environment. In a counterinsurgency, friction is most clearly evident in the relationships between participants. Friction can also be viewed as the relationship between the counterinsurgent and the population. Every encounter can be stressful as the two seek competing agendas. The counterinsurgents seek compliance while the population seeks services. The fog is generated by cultural differences between the agents that impede communication and make decision making difficult because the counterinsurgent cannot effectively comprehend situations.<sup>50</sup> Insurgents understand the fog and friction in Iraq and exasperate the situation by erasing distinctions between themselves and the population in order to further distance U.S. forces from the population and solicit collateral casualties.

Fog and friction quickly generates a force protection mentality. Units extract themselves from the population emotionally and physically. Physical withdrawal manifestations include “super FOB” basing and a reduction in infrastructure and population support operations intended to service the population. This becomes a cyclic problem as forces have now contributed to the original source of fog and friction, a lack of cultural context. Emotional withdrawal results in heavy handed tactics that generate fear in order to ensure compliance and reduce friendly casualties. This begins at an unconscious level as a reaction to attacks and overtime becomes a matter of practice in entire units as a force protection measure.

The indicators of population withdrawal are self evident to anyone who observes such a unit. Iraqis are referred to as “towel heads” or “hajji”. Suspicious looking Iraqis are threatened

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>50</sup> Carl Conetta, *Vicious Circle: The Dynamics of Occupation and Resistance in Iraq Project on Defense Alternatives Research Monograph #10* [monograph on-line]. (Project on Defense Alternatives, 2005, accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://www.comw.org:80/pda/0505rm10.html>; Internet

with interrogation at Abu Ghraib. The mechanism of "distancing" makes it possible for a soldiers to indiscriminately return fire.<sup>51</sup> These provide counterinsurgent forces with a self image that they are in control by dehumanizing a population. Psychologically, a bond is built of martial spirit, of a shared burden, self confidence and a common enemy. From the Iraqis, it also evokes hatred not compliance and increases the distance between the two populations. Innumerable small acts of insult occur in Iraq that colors the population's perception of U.S. forces. They are not isolated and are likely not to be reported. Taken for what they are, they seem insignificant. But the cumulative effect is staggering as the events are relayed throughout entire neighborhoods. The impact on the moral level of war cannot be calculated and is likely irreparable.

### **Information Operations and Moral Asymmetry**

The moral level of war is even more critical to insurgent forces. The U.S. will survive a defeat in Iraq. The insurgent's very existence may be jeopardized by defeat. The insurgents live among the population and must navigate demographic and cultural intricacies in order to survive and grow. Recruitment, safe haven, logistics, and compliance rely heavily on managing the population's expectations. The insurgent's greatest tool for moral warfare is information operations. Millions of people can be reached at little cost or risk. The insurgency is adept at exploiting their violence through information operations. These operations undermine Iraqi government legitimacy and U.S. forces, excuse insurgent transgressions and generate popular support. Virtually every form of media and communication is used to broadcast their success and our shortcomings; either actual or perceived. Again, the insurgents are not bound by our ethics. "Insurgent broadcasts need not be factual; they need only appeal to the populace."<sup>52</sup> Insurgents directly attack public support for the U.S. effort, both in Iraq and abroad. Every incident is reported as a catastrophe that plays upon the fears of the population. This fuels the insurgencies

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

ruthless tactics. With an unprecedented number of reporters equipped with real time technology, any perceived illegality by U.S. forces can be reported before the impact is ever even realized. The exploitation of these illegalities by insurgents leads to an erosion of the public support. The media also creates dubious measures of effectiveness that favors the Iraq insurgency and influences an international audience. Reports of U.S. and Iraqi civilian casualties do not help U.S. forces assess the insurgency, but provide the insurgency with tangible objectives that assure continued air-time and further erodes U.S. moral authority.

## **Moral Resourcing**

A generous and sincere operational approach and ethical conduct makes it more likely for cooperation that leads to trust instead of retaliation among the Iraqi people. In a moral conflict, it is difficult to combat a unit's natural inclination towards harshness. However, we must find the appropriate counterweight to the insurgent's use of moral asymmetry and our own deeply rooted psychological response of cruelty. John R. Boyd outlines the following moral resources needed to triumph in the moral domain of war:<sup>53</sup>

*Moral strength: Mental capacity to overcome menace, uncertainty, and mistrust.*

*Moral victory: Triumph of courage, confidence, and esprit (de corps) over fear, anxiety, and alienation when confronted by menace, uncertainty, and mistrust.*

*Moral defeat: Triumph of fear, anxiety, and alienation over courage, confidence, and esprit when confronted by menace, uncertainty, and mistrust.*

*Moral values: Human values that permit one to carry on in the face of menace, uncertainty, and mistrust.*

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<sup>52</sup> U.S. Department of the Army. *Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2006), 3.

<sup>53</sup> John Boyd, *Patterns of Conflict* [presentation online] (Defense and the National Interest, 1986, accessed 22 February 2007); available from [http://www.d-n-i.net/second\\_level/boyd\\_military.htm](http://www.d-n-i.net/second_level/boyd_military.htm); Internet.

*Moral authority: Person or body that can give one the courage, confidence, and esprit to overcome menace, uncertainty, and mistrust*

First, we must continue to engage ourselves with the Iraqi people. It is not enough to simply be in contact or visible. Intimacy erodes self interest as sympathy grows with the shared experiences and suffering of the Iraqis. Sympathy is a strong restraint on ruthless behavior.<sup>54</sup> Units must take the initiative and consciously plan actions and operations that strengthen moral resources and the moral bonds between units and the population. In turn this will weaken the moral centers of gravity that insurgents depend upon. Leaders must not turn away from indicators of amorality in the unit. Cruel actions can not be tolerated as a means to an end. Every poor decision has a counter action among the population and cements the action as acceptable within the unit. Reducing combat stress and recognition of the indicators is critical to preserving moral identity.

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<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Glover, *Humanity, A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 25.

## Conclusion

The most powerful level of war in Iraq is the moral level. The war in Iraq is fought over the support of the Iraqi people. A demographic war must be rooted in the just war theory to restrain the use of excessive force that threatens support from the population. Moral war also implies that U.S. soldiers will conduct themselves in an ethical manner that avoids unnecessary humiliation and hardship for the Iraqi people. A moral victory results when the populace turns from the insurgency and asks for our assistance instead of our departure. By defining everything an insurgent does as terrorism or illegal while maintaining our own actions as legitimate, we undermine ourselves at the moral level.<sup>55</sup>

Negative effects cannot be more than a shaping effort in the moral domain. The military is designed for negative effects and is being used more increasingly to achieve constructive aims at a moral cost. The occupation has brutalized the moral fiber of the military. The worst consequences have been like Abu Ghraib, but smaller incidents have been seen throughout the conflict. If one-third of soldiers support torture, half will not report it and ten percent openly acknowledge abusing civilians, imagine what we do not know and the moral cost to a generation of soldiers. Eventually we will depart Iraq. If any gains are made, they are not likely to outweigh the loss of our military's moral conscious.

Thomas Ricks explains how in 2003 and 2004, U.S. forces responded to an early stage insurgency in Iraq with heavy handed operations that inflamed the population. Demands to defeat the insurgency resulted in thousands of peremptory searches, questionable arrests, abuses, an "us versus them attitude" and finally to Abu Ghraib. He goes on to describe how division

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<sup>55</sup> John Boyd, *Patterns of Conflict* [presentation online] (Defense and the National Interest, 1986, accessed 22 February 2007); available from [http://www.d-n-i.net/second\\_level/boyd\\_military.htm](http://www.d-n-i.net/second_level/boyd_military.htm); Internet.

commanders fostered a command climate of aggression not conducive to winning popular support.<sup>56</sup>

“We and our Iraqi partners recognize that improving security for the Iraqi people is the first step in rekindling hope.” General Petraeus, Multinational Force Iraq Commander, recognizes the importance of intimacy with the Iraqi people in order to build cooperation and security as well as regaining our moral authority. Our newest strategy in Iraq employs U.S. and Iraqi forces inside Baghdad neighborhoods to safeguard residents against insurgent and sectarian violence. Increased protection of the people is sought through saturation of Baghdad by military forces that operate from forty security posts across the city. Yet this latest security crackdown has yielded mixed results with a drop in sectarian murders but a rise in high-casualty car bomb attacks.

We continue to adapt tactically but only address moral issues on a surface level. This new strategy will certainly deter some violence. But does nothing to enhance our image among the Iraqis or remedy moral shortcomings. Proximity of forces to the population does not build a supportive relationship unless our behavior and actions are modified. As shown, Iraqi general sentiment does not support American operations in Iraq and at best our presence is tolerated as a necessary evil.

The new security crackdown in Baghdad has the potential to weaken U.S. moral authority. An urban security outpost manned by hardened U.S. soldiers may provide some physical protection to the populace but also brings the potential of conflict. Young soldiers who are immature emotionally must be lead by thoughtful and sensitive leaders equipped with moral resources. The conditions that bring about incidents like Haditha are more intense in combat outpost. Increased camaraderie due to isolation and less oversight may make it easier for soldiers to condone immoral practices.

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco, The American Adventure in Iraq*. (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006).

We can still achieve our goals of a stable Iraq, committed to the rule of law and unsympathetic to terrorism. Our military is adaptable and courageous. . Our cause is just and many units display the discipline and compassion needed to gain the support of the population. Given time the U.S. military can establish security which creates the opportunity for economic and political conditions to deter civil war. However, it only takes a small percentage to inflict the damage that Ricks outlined in 2003 and 2004. Current deployment requirements, a tired military and domestic dissent, erode the will and the morals of soldiers.

All allegations of unethical behavior must be investigated in order to deter further incidents, establish an ethical climate and guard against moral complacency. Operational risk assessments and decision making must take into account moral implications. This includes a task organization that considers the physical and mental fatigue of the unit as well as their moral climate, the risk of ethical dilemmas, and conditions for a moral victory.

The war in Iraq requires soldiers with capabilities to maintain their moral bearing. A population we do not understand, an unseen enemy, the complexity of urban combat and high casualty rates characterizes the environment within Iraq. A break down in ethical decision making is understandable. A war of ideas and ideals, stories of soldier abuses would have eventually been fabricated.<sup>57</sup> However, ethical breakdowns have occurred and fuel the narrative of extremist organizations and insurgents.

It is unlikely we will ever kill or capture all the insurgents. The moral conduct of our soldiers may be more important than bullets. The moral and information war is the most important aspect of Operation Iraqi Freedom. We must equip our soldiers with a sense of cultural awareness that leverages prudence and sensitivity in their conduct to regain the support of the Iraqi people and combat insurgent moral asymmetry. Senior commanders must maintain the

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<sup>57</sup> Andrew Sullivan, *Rethinking the war II* [online article] (The Atlantic Online, 1986, accessed 8 May 2007); available from [http://http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the\\_daily\\_dish/2007/05](http://http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the_daily_dish/2007/05)

“moral high ground” in all their units’ deeds and words in order to build influence based on moral credibility. Operation Iraqi Freedom will be a long campaign as U.S. forces continue to improve upon counterinsurgency tactics. However, kinetic operations and civil military endeavors will not be decisive. Only through the ethical conduct of operations that provide the population a sense of security will hope emerge. The Army needs to embark on an urgent reassessment of everything from training manuals to the rules of engagement in order to instruct soldiers in combat ethics and remedy current ethical trends. To build popular support, U.S. forces must build a narrative of moral authority and genuine concern for the Iraqi people or risk undermining political and economic initiatives and enabling insurgent operations. Winning the moral war destroys the insurgent narrative while providing the population a clear competitor to support.

*“We had to arrange (our soldiers) minds in order of battle just as carefully and as formally as other officers would arrange their bodies. And not only our own men’s minds, though naturally they came first. We must also arrange the minds of the enemy so far as we could reach them; then those other minds of the nation supporting us behind the firing line, since more than half the battle passed there in the back; then the minds of the enemy nation waiting the verdict; and of the neutrals looking on; circle beyond circle.”<sup>58</sup>*

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<sup>58</sup> T.E Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* [book on-line] (accessed 19 February 2007); available from <http://www.wesjones.com/lawrence1.htm>; Internet.

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