

# Institutionalizing the Human Domain

*Being Penny Wise and Pound Wise*

---

**1/1/2014**

**Nicole Jobe**



*Sheik Tomah Al Juburi, center, meets with contractors after a site survey of the new local police station, U.S. Army photo.*

“There remains nothing, therefore, where an absolute superiority is not attainable, but to produce a relative one at the decisive point, by making skilful use of what we have.” – Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

“America’s ability to deliver strategic landpower requires an improved understanding of the convergence of the human, cyber and geographic terrains we will operate in. Today’s global connectivity and its effect on the changing environment reinforce that lasting strategic results can only be achieved by effectively influencing people. Success depends as much on understanding the social and political fabric of the situation as it does on the ability to physically dominate it.

“The Army’s unique understanding and dominance of the land domain, as well as the factors that influence human behavior, enable it to shape security conditions favorable to U.S. and allied interests.” – The Honorable John M. McHugh and General Raymond T. Odierno, *Army Strategic Planning Guidance 2013*<sup>1</sup>

---

As evidenced by the excerpt above, strategic guidance is replete with explanations of the importance of human domain in strategic landpower. General Raymond T. Odierno, General James F. Amos, and Admiral William H. McRaven all echoed its importance in the Joint white paper, “Strategic Landpower: Winning the Clash of Wills,” stating that “In a word, the success of future strategic initiatives and the ability of the U.S. to shape a peaceful and prosperous global environment will rest more and more on our ability to understand, influence, or exercise control within the ‘human domain.’”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, at least half of the primary missions of the U.S. Armed Forces, as outlined in the defense strategic guidance, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*, involve the human domain as an integral component of the mission.<sup>3</sup> Thus the need is evident and straightforward: the nature of current and anticipated future engagements demands proficiency in the human domain. This need must be balanced with fiscal constraints, however. Current and future budgetary restrictions increase the need for efficiency. Accordingly, the General Purpose Force (GPF) will therefore be required to demonstrate ever greater capacity and capability in the human domain.

### **The Human Domain in Strategic Landpower**

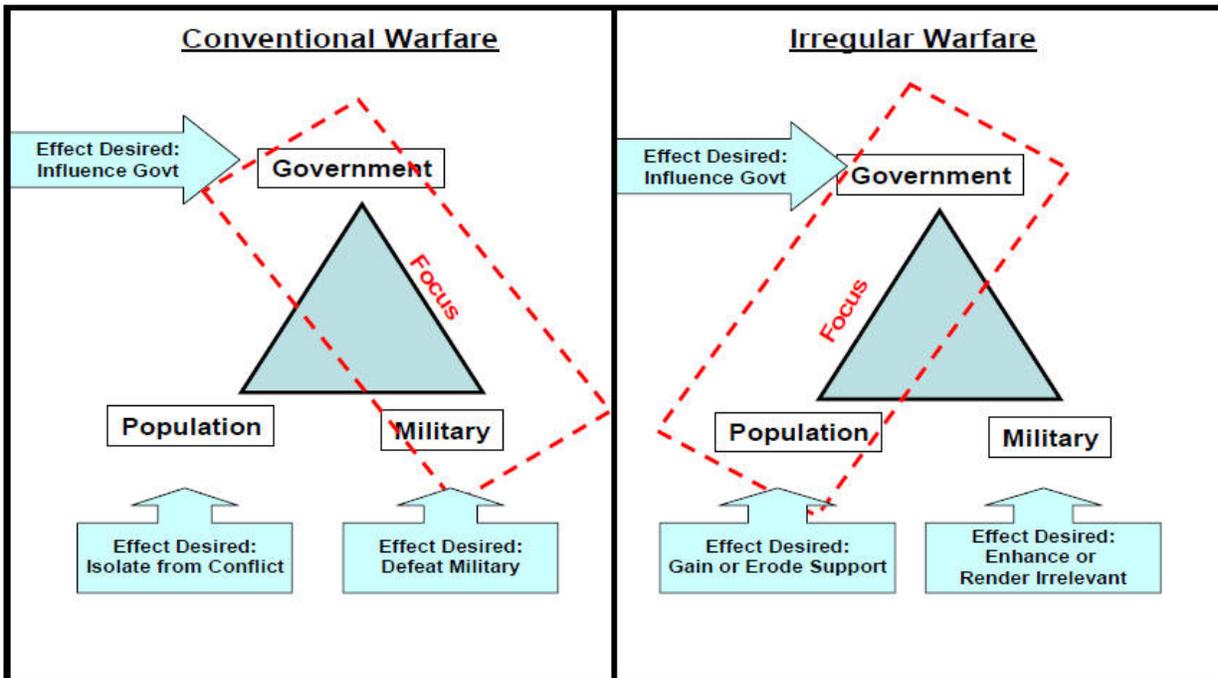
The role of human domain in landpower is evident, as is the Army’s role in its execution. While the human domain spans all of the physical domains (air, sea, land, and space), it is an inherently landpower-based realm; one simply cannot connect to the human element through the skies, by sea, or via cyber technologies nearly as effectively. The human domain requires human interface. Major General Robert B. Brown and Major Ronald W. Spring reiterate this sentiment in a paper for the U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence. They state that “The Human Domain cannot be controlled or managed by technical means or capabilities; it requires human

contact – person to person interaction – with duration and persistence over time.”<sup>4</sup> Current and future operations such as Building Partnership Capacity (BPC) will rely heavily on skill sets in the human domain. BPC can be done without adding specialized capabilities to GPF, and is likely to be executed by GPF in permissive environments where the Host Nation will accept larger numbers of troops. BPC will certainly not be the only human domain-based element of landpower used in future engagements, however.

Foreign Internal Defense (FID), Counterinsurgency (COIN), Security Force Assistance (SFA), as well as other stability and contingency operations are certain to be a part of the future landscape of U.S. forces as well. In order to limit the costs and maximize the efficiencies of such operations, however, engagements within the human domain must be executed by a smaller number of troops than those used in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus, the Army must integrate considerations of the human domain into doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF). Training at all levels and Professional Military Education programs in particular must include skills on how to operate proficiently within the human domain, as well as how to capture and distribute the knowledge of the lessons learned while doing so, thus elevating the entire institutional knowledge of the Army.

The magnitude of the human element in conflict is difficult to overstate. The aforementioned Maneuver Center of Excellence paper concluded, simply, that success in the human domain is vital for decisive military outcomes.<sup>5</sup> Most academics and military strategists generally conclude that ground forces will face a wider variety of contingency missions and irregular warfare conducted in the midst of the population, vice opponents committed to strictly conventional aggression. This does not indicate that the role of landpower is diminished; rather it highlights the need for skill in the human element, which is equally important, if not more so, in these irregular conflicts as it is in more conventional clashes. This is visually depicted in the Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept, version 1.0, emphasizing the importance of focus on the population.<sup>6</sup>

## Contrasting Conventional & Irregular Warfare



This is in no way meant to convey that the Army should focus on one at the expense of the other. Rather, the emphasis is to use skill in the human domain as a force multiplier. The significance of the population is further evidenced in the definition of irregular warfare, which doctrine defines as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations....”<sup>7</sup> The U.S. simply cannot afford to be anything but adept, if not dominant, in this type of struggle. Even Clausewitz repeatedly addresses the human domain, speaking not only of the “imperfection of human perception and judgment, which is greater in War than anywhere,”<sup>8</sup> but also that “One and the same political object may produce totally different effects upon different people, or even upon the same people at different times; we can, therefore... [consider]...its effects upon those masses..., and consequently the nature of those masses also comes into consideration.”<sup>9</sup> What Clausewitz understood and the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan reiterated is that the human domain is critical to success in all phases of joint operational planning as defined in JP 5-0, from Phase 0 – shape to Phase IV – stabilize and Phase V – enable.<sup>10</sup> Even Phase III – dominate has a crucial human component that the Army must be deftly handle.

### The Need for Institutionalization of the Human Domain in the Army

Despite the pervasiveness of the human domain and the apparent agreement of its importance in strategic documents, there remains, to date, a lack of its institutionalization within the Army. Indeed, there is not even an agreed upon definition of human domain. Further delay in institutionalizing such a critical component would be done at the expense of greater, if not

outright, success in future operations. While the lack of institutionalization does not necessarily preclude the Army from performing human domain functions, doing so would greatly improve its efficacy. Missteps in the complex and adaptive human domain can be just as costly if not more so than battlefield errors. Consider, for instance, the accidental Koran burning in Afghanistan in 2012. Some 30 Afghans died in subsequent protests, and the incident was cited as the cause for “at least some of the six fatal attacks on U.S. military personnel” that followed as well.<sup>11</sup> Not only that, but untold other damage spread from this incident through the resultant negative or even hostile feelings of Afghans. What were the second and third order effects of this error? Similar to the adage warning against being penny wise and pound foolish, neglecting the human domain in this era of budget pressures may save money, but at what greater cost?

General Peter Chiarelli, as Commanding General of Multi-National Corps-Iraq, asked his brigade commanders what was the number one thing they would have liked to have had more of, and they all said cultural knowledge.<sup>12</sup> It is not exactly a secret that non-Americans often know more about us than we do about them. Nonetheless, debate lingers about the advantages versus disadvantages, cost versus benefit, and exactly how to implement human domain. Surely, thoughtful discussions should occur; however, the Army must take decisive action on human domain sooner rather than later. This is not to suggest that no efforts to advance human domain have been made; undeniably, the Army has made progress towards that direction. The Strategic Landpower Task Force, tasked to study the application of landpower to achieve national objectives in the future, has even been directed to examine the concept of human domain.

Another way the Army has been exercising its skill in the human domain is through the Human Terrain System (HTS). According to the mission statement of HTS, it “develops, trains, and integrates a social science based research and analysis capability to support operationally relevant decision-making, to develop a knowledge base, and to enable socio-cultural understanding across the operational environment.”<sup>13</sup> The Strategic Landpower Task Force identifies HTS as “one important innovation during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan”<sup>14</sup> and says that HTS “provid[ed] a level of cultural expertise not resident in the force.”<sup>15</sup> While the task force identifies that providing this socio-cultural information to the military and civilians being embedded with military units is controversial in the academic community, there is no shortage of people willing to volunteer for HTS regardless. Further, HTS can train active duty military (and has done so in the past) to perform many of the same functions as the civilians on the Human Terrain Teams. HTS has proved its worth in the human domain, especially as of late. Brigade and higher headquarters in Afghanistan find HTS useful and impactful and rate them well, as evidenced in a June 2013 poll. 100 percent and 93 percent, respectively, agreed that “HTS-provided information added to the socio-cultural understanding of the operational environment” and “was actionable,” while 100 percent and 90 percent, respectively, agreed that “HTS-provided information fulfilled an information requirement and was operationally relevant,” and “useful for decision-making.”<sup>16</sup>

Aside from HTS, however, there appears to be little the Army is doing to actively institutionalize or pursue training in the human domain; and even HTS is going away as Afghanistan concludes. General Robert Cone, while Commanding General of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) admitted that after initial skepticism, he is now “the biggest advocate of what the Army has learned about human terrain.”<sup>17</sup> During the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan the Department of Defense made multiple efforts to improve on cultural and language skills. In 2010 the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services reported on these efforts and found many still required further action. One of their recommendations was that the policies of the services “should recognize language skills, cultural awareness, and regional expertise as core competencies on the same level as traditional combat skills.”<sup>18</sup> Clearly, a fair amount of gaps in human domain persist to this day. It is tempting, especially during budget cutbacks, to discard that which is not deemed immediately “necessary.” In doing so, however, the policymaker may overlook the longer-term strategic importance of certain key programs. HTS or any program addressing the human domain, or language or cultural shortfall may be examples of those programs. General Cone concurs, saying when budgets retract, “the first things they will cut are the linguistic skills [and] the human terrain systems.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Institutionalizing Human Domain throughout the Army: DOTMLPF and Proponency**

In order to advance the human domain and operate and maneuver effectively therein for the land realm, the Army must write doctrine which addresses and incorporates the human component of warfare. The Strategic Landpower Concept and addition of a seventh warfighting function of “engagement” is a start and possible foothold. Once human domain is successfully implemented into the military via Army doctrine, the Army should ensure it is properly put into operation throughout the force. In order to incorporate human domain effectively throughout the Army, the Army should identify a proponent. Army Regulation 5-22, *The Army Force Modernization Proponent System*, “establishes policies, duties, responsibilities, and relationships applicable to the Army Force Modernization Proponent System, to include determining DOTMLPF requirements with regard to a particular function or branch.”<sup>20</sup>

Establishing a proponency for the human domain, such as HTS, would not only ensure the integration of human domain, but also help guarantee its important place in strategic landpower. The proponency office would support the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Army as a whole in the execution of human domain responsibilities across DOTMLPF. Furthermore, creating a human domain proponent would prompt a DOTMLPF capabilities based assessment to identify requirements and perform gap analysis, subsequently allowing the Army to implement and address the training and other shortfalls which currently exist. For instance, the Army could implement basic computer based training for all GPF to recognize and operate efficiently in the human domain. Specialized, more in-depth training could be established for leaders, including how to cull the information Soldiers gather and distribute it throughout the Army. Soldiers conducting BPC or SFA would have tailored training as well. Training and education could

expand as far and wide as the Army sees the requirement; human domain training could even be incorporated into Foreign Area Officer (FAO) training.

There is no doubt that the Army is already executing human domain operations every day since late 2001. Unfortunately, that execution is mostly done on an ad hoc basis. Soldiers may recognize they have important knowledge about the human terrain, but are conceivably not familiar enough with the bigger picture. If Soldiers alert their leader, perhaps they do not know how to properly cull and distribute that information throughout the Army. Worst of all, no knowledge of the human domain is assured because there is currently no institutionalized GPF-wide leadership education and training and no Army doctrine on the human domain. Every conflict spans the range of operational planning and takes place in the human domain. To ignore the human element is to invite failure. The studies are out, the literature exists from academics and military strategists alike: all indications point to a need to institutionalize Human Domain in the Army. In order to properly integrate the human dimension into operations at the appropriate level, and utilize Army capabilities such as HTS effectively, TRADOC should request that the Army identify a Force Modernization Proponent in AR 5-22 for the human domain for DOTMLPF development and integration across the force. Doing so will ensure the Army can, as Clausewitz said, “produce a relative [superiority] at the decisive point, by making skilful use of what we have” – expert knowledge of the human domain.

---

<sup>1</sup> John McHugh and Raymond Odierno, *Army Strategic Planning Guidance*, 2013,

[http://usarmy.vo.llnwd.net/e2/rv5\\_downloads/info/references/army\\_strategic\\_planning\\_guidance.pdf](http://usarmy.vo.llnwd.net/e2/rv5_downloads/info/references/army_strategic_planning_guidance.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Raymond T. Odierno, James F. Amos, and William H. McRaven, “Strategic Landpower: Winning the Clash of Wills,” 2013,

<http://www.tradoc.army.mil/FrontPageContent/Docs/Strategic%20Landpower%20White%20Paper.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The White House, *Sustaining Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*, 2012,

[http://www.defense.gov/news/defense\\_strategic\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Steven Metz, *Strategic Landpower Task Force Research Report*, October 3, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, Version 1.0, September 11, 2007,

[http://www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare/concepts/iw\\_joc2\\_0.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare/concepts/iw_joc2_0.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, Version 1.0, September 11, 2007,

[http://www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare/concepts/iw\\_joc2\\_0.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare/concepts/iw_joc2_0.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (London: N. Truber, 1873).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 5-0, August 11, 2011, [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp5\\_0.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp5_0.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Kevin Sieff, “U.S. Probe of Koran Burning Finds 5 Troops Responsible, Officials Say; Afghans Demand Trial” *Washington Post*, March 2, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-probe-of-koran-burning-finds-5-soldiers-responsible-afghan-clerics-demand-public-trial/2012/03/02/gIQAwJqYmR\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-probe-of-koran-burning-finds-5-soldiers-responsible-afghan-clerics-demand-public-trial/2012/03/02/gIQAwJqYmR_story.html).

<sup>12</sup> TRADOC Human Terrain System Testimonials, undated, <http://humanterrainsystem.army.mil/>.

<sup>13</sup> TRADOC. Human Terrain System Mission Statement, 2014, <http://humanterrainsystem.army.mil/>.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Metz, *Strategic Landpower Task Force Research Report*, October 3, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

---

<sup>16</sup> Human Terrain System Assessment & Evaluation Cell, Commander's/Staff Assessment Form Summary, February 25, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Gary Sheftick, TRADOC: Strategic Landpower Concept to Change Doctrine, *Army News*, February 4, 2014, [http://www.army.mil/article/118432/TRADOC\\_Strategic\\_Landpower\\_concept\\_to\\_change\\_doctrine/](http://www.army.mil/article/118432/TRADOC_Strategic_Landpower_concept_to_change_doctrine/).

<sup>18</sup> U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Building Language Skills and Competencies in the Military: Bridging the Gap*, December 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Gary Sheftick, TRADOC: Strategic Landpower Concept to Change Doctrine, *Army News*, February 4, 2014, [http://www.army.mil/article/118432/TRADOC\\_Strategic\\_Landpower\\_concept\\_to\\_change\\_doctrine/](http://www.army.mil/article/118432/TRADOC_Strategic_Landpower_concept_to_change_doctrine/).

<sup>20</sup> Department of Defense, *AR 5-22: The Army Force Modernization Proponent System*, March 25, 2011, [http://www.apd.army.mil/pdf/files/r5\\_22.pdf](http://www.apd.army.mil/pdf/files/r5_22.pdf).