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THESIS

DEHUMANIZATION AND IRREGULAR WARFARE

by

Alexander S. Ford

June 2013

Thesis Advisor:	Anna Simons
Second Reader:	Heather Gregg

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In the current global environment the practice of dehumanization—the stripping away of common attributes among people that call for respect and constrain violence—and the misperception it creates have resulted in misguided attempts by militaries to influence the center of gravity in irregular warfare, the civilian population. Traditional thought in this matter implies that cultural training is the most important factor in creating more effective influence when dealing in irregular warfare scenarios. By examining dehumanization and the factors that cause it in irregular warfare environments, this thesis will provide a framework for how dehumanization impacts influence operations. My analysis seeks to explain how dehumanization occurs and how it can be prevented, thereby setting necessary conditions for effective population influence.

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DEHUMANIZATION AND IRREGULAR WARFARE

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ABSTRACT

In the current global environment, the practice of dehumanization—the stripping away of common attributes among people that call for respect and constrain violence—and the misperception it creates have resulted in misguided attempts by militaries to influence the center of gravity in irregular warfare, the civilian population. Traditional thought in this matter implies that cultural training is the most important factor in creating more effective influence when dealing in irregular warfare scenarios. By examining dehumanization and the factors that cause it in irregular warfare environments, this thesis will provide a framework for how dehumanization impacts influence operations. My analysis seeks to explain how dehumanization occurs and how it can be prevented, thereby setting necessary conditions for effective population influence.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANASF	Afghan National Army Special Forces
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CT	Counter Terrorism
FID	Foreign Internal Defense
MOI	Ministry of Interior
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha
UW	Unconventional Warfare
VSO	Village Stability Operations

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

In 2009, I was deployed to Afghanistan to conduct Village Stability Operations (VSO). The area of Afghanistan was Khakrez, and the first U.S. forces to establish bases had only arrived seven months ago. Because of this, Khakrez had been considered dominated by the Taliban. During this time, I chose to fast for Ramadan. At the time I was living with Afghans, so my fasting became common knowledge among the local population. I chose to fast for Ramadan because I felt it would be an effective way to build rapport with the Afghan National Army Special Forces (ANASF) team that lived in the same house as my Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) team. Also, it would ensure that I would not attempt to push the ANASF soldiers too hard during this time and our operational tempo would properly reflect what Afghans were doing during Ramadan. However, soon after beginning my fast I noticed that whenever I initially met an Afghan, someone who was with me would explain that I was fasting during Ramadan. The frank conversations that followed led me to believe that the act of fasting had shifted the way Afghans perceived me. These frank conversations began to build relationships of mutual trust and respect, and became essential as I negotiated with local power brokers to increase their support for the government, rejecting the Taliban. This new perception led me to question what had changed. This thesis offers an explanation for what I believe occurred.

This thesis will examine how cross-cultural misunderstandings, a core result of dehumanization, occur during times of conflict. These misunderstandings affect the ability to influence and control populations, particularly during Unconventional Warfare (UW), Counterinsurgency (COIN), Counter Terrorism (CT), Foreign Internal Defense (FID), and Stability Operations.[1] This thesis will also consider factors that contribute to the dehumanization that occurs during the conduct of irregular warfare and how these factors can be minimized to improve the ability to influence populations. This study is

[1] Irregular warfare is a broader term that includes these types of operations.

meant to clarify the impact that dehumanization has both at the tactical level and when establishing strategic goals. I am using the lens of Village Stability Operations (VSO) in Afghanistan in order to create a framework for connecting dehumanization to operations during population-centric warfare.

U.S. strategy in COIN conflicts is often defined as a fight to win the "hearts and minds"[2] of the population. Despite this thrust, no concerted effort has been made to study what leads to dehumanization (or its opposite, humanization) with respect to our ability to influence populations abroad. Dehumanization is found across cultures and serves as a means to deny people their individual differences and create biases in one group against members of another group.[3] It is usually based on differences between race and ethnicity.[4] This creation of an out-group or in-group can even be artificially created. For instance, during Muzafer Sherif's Robbers Cave Experiment, Sherif took a group of 22, white Oklahoma City adolescents and divided them into two groups of 11 located at a "summer camp." These groups, without any outside provocation, began to discriminate and eventually act out violently against one another, essentially turning the other group into a 'them'.[5] The campers' spontaneous division into an in-group and an out-group impacted their ability to work together and even led to spontaneous violence.[6]

The development of in-groups and out-groups is also important in population-centric warfare. Population-centric warfare is defined as warfare in which the main aim is to influence the behavior of a target population, whether in a COIN or UW context.[7] By exploring the factors that lead to or enable dehumanization, my aim is to assist in

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[2] United States Army. *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5. (2006).* Once the unit settles into the AO, its next task is to build trusted networks. This is the true meaning of the phrase "hearts and minds," which comprises two separate components. "Hearts" means persuading people that their best interests are served by COIN success. "Minds" means convincing them that the force can protect them and that resisting it is pointless. p. A-5.

[3] Susan Opotow, "Aggression and Violence," in *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, eds. M. Deutsch and P.T. Coleman, 403–427 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 417.

[4] Nick Haslam, "Dehumanization: An Integrative Review," *Personality and Social Psychology Review*10 (2006) 252–264

[5] Muzafer Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, et al., *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment*. (Oklahoma City: University Book Exchange, 1961), 120–148.

[6] Ibid, 148.

[7] United States Army. *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5. (2006).*

countering this type of cross-cultural misunderstanding, one that I have seen plague counterinsurgency strategy in both its development and implementation.

The topic of this thesis raises several questions. For instance, what is dehumanization's tactical impact when it comes to influencing the population in a conflict? How has dehumanization played out in other conflicts? And, ultimately, how can we leverage lessons learned from answering these questions to improve our ability to function in foreign cultures in the future? One important distinction must be made. This thesis contends that by focusing on humanizing ourselves and members of the foreign population with whom we are interacting, we will be able to better influence and communicate with the population overall, leading to our ability to achieve our strategic goals. This thesis is not arguing that population-centric warfare is the only or even the best way to defeat an insurgency. Rather, if we are going to wage population centric warfare, being able to communicate with the population is essential, and dehumanization represents a significant impediment to that goal.

Dehumanization is not a new phenomenon in inter-human conflict. Man has arguably always "dehumanized" his adversaries in order to coerce, maim, or, ultimately, kill them while avoiding the problems of conscience. "War not only departs from the normal; it inverts all that is moral and right: In war one should kill, should steal, should burn cities and farms, should perhaps even rape matrons and little girls."[8] By stripping away his opponents' humanity, a combatant can turn his adversaries into objects deserving of wrath; doing this also helps justify violence. Dehumanization still occurs today in developed and undeveloped societies throughout the international system. But again, the focus of this thesis is specifically on the impact that dehumanization has, in its various forms, on a security force's ability to influence the population locally.

Because the primary purpose of most militaries is to win their nations' wars, the training for war often includes significant propaganda designed to dehumanize the

[8] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997), 12.

targeted enemy.[9] However, in its collective social form, dehumanization creates miscalculations in the desires of and understanding about a population and therefore has a larger impact on military strategy than is reflected in just genocide or civilian casualties. "Demonizing and dehumanizing the enemy is an old and familiar practice. It's an effective means of simplifying a conflict for the public, instilling a sense of victimization and taking the moral high ground. We called Germans *Rhine monkeys* and *krauts*. The Japanese *nips*, the Viet Cong *slopes* and *Charlie*. In Iraq and Afghanistan we took an Arabic term of respect, *haji*, and derisively applied it to the entire population."[10] Dehumanization often serves as the tool to distance the killer from his target to enable killing behavior.[11] But—and this is a key point—enabling a soldier to kill his adversary represents a very different tool than that required to enable a soldier to influence and shape a population's behaviors.

B. APPROACH

What, meanwhile, is dehumanization? This thesis will examine dehumanization and communication theory in order to better understand how theories about both interact with one another. The intent is to determine where dehumanization has prevented effective communication during operations meant to influence populations. This thesis will treat counterinsurgency operations as an exemplification of population-centric warfare and will study the impact of dehumanization on various counterinsurgency campaigns in history. Surveying different counterinsurgency operations in different regions with different goals will demonstrate both the universal difficulties dehumanization causes and the successes that can accrue when dehumanization is overcome.

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[9] Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Black Bay Books/Little, Brown, 2009).

[10] J.E. McCollough, "Knowing Thy Enemy," *Time Magazine*, May 7 2013. http://nation.time.com/2013/05/07/knowing-thy-enemy/#ixzz2UFZHJZVf

[11] Grossman, *On Killing*, 187.

In the second chapter, three important questions will be asked and answered: What is dehumanization? How does communication work? And finally, how does dehumanization impact that communication?

In the third chapter, three vignettes will be discussed to better illustrate the points described in Chapter Two. These will focus on localized events, mainly because dehumanization *is* a localized event; in one area of a conflict it can occur, while in other areas it may not. The three cases represent the good and bad of dehumanization minimization or its occurrence. These highlight different aspects of dehumanization: its harmful results, as well as the positive impacts when it is minimized.

The fourth chapter provides a more recent example and draws heavily on my experiences in Afghanistan. The purpose of this chapter is to describe VSO and explain how some of the tenets of this strategy led to success in fighting dehumanization, resulting in better population influencing operations. This chapter will also describe some of the strategic impacts that can be distilled from VSO, specifically in reference to reducing dehumanization and allowing troops conducting influencing operations a better chance for tactical success.

The Conclusion integrates the prior discussion and makes two main points. The first is that our traditional Special Forces cultural training, by focusing on differences between cultures, actually sets the conditions for the first step in dehumanization, and needs to focus more on our cross-cultural similarities rather than on differences. The second is that our strategies need to build on tactical ownership and investment in local areas if we want our troops to be effective in population-centric counterinsurgency, and that this is best accomplished with a VSO-like strategy where dehumanization is prevented and conditions are set for improved cross-cultural understanding.

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II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

A. DEHUMANIZATION

An introduction to dehumanization will begin by discussing its definition and will utilize a model that demonstrates many of the warped perceptions of others that dehumanization can cause. "Dehumanization is a psychological construct which has been very broadly defined as the denial of humanness to others, the negative consequences of which … include various forms of antisocial behavior, especially violence directed toward those dehumanized."[12] Because dehumanization is a psychological process it only occurs within the person doing the dehumanizing. It only really affects the perceptions of the person who is doing the dehumanizing. Dehumanization does not change the outside world, but impacts the ability of a person to accurately realize what is occurring. "But in the process of dehumanizing the enemy in our own minds, we lose sight of the fact we've done nothing to change them. We've only changed ourselves, and how we see them. They remain as human as ever. As human as we."[13]

The literature often focuses on genocide as a result of dehumanization. Yet, ineffective influence, while less drastic, is just as prominent a result of dehumanization. This chapter will describe and define two essential components that will serve as the basis for my argument about the need to change how cultural training is conducted. The first component reflects how dehumanization arises and what results from this behavior. The second relates to how communication works and the role communication plays in influence.

In his article introducing a model of dehumanization, Nick Haslam breaks down much of the research about causes.[14] Race, ethnicity, gender, disability, delegitimization

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[12] Arlen Moller and Edward Deci, "Interpersonal Control, Dehumanization, and Violence: A Self-determination Theory Perspective," *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*13 (2009): 43.

[13] J.E. McCollough, "Knowing Thy Enemy," *Time Magazine*, May 7 2013. http://nation.time.com/2013/05/07/knowing-thy-enemy/#ixzz2UFZHJZVf

[14] Haslam, "Dehumanization," 252–264.

and moral exclusion are all factors involved in dehumanization.[15] Haslam further breaks down dehumanization into denying others' uniquely human characteristics and human nature. One sees his model in Figure 1. I am focusing on the "Human Uniqueness" section because this is what applies to culture and socialization.[16] Animalistic dehumanization and its five underlying factors represent an unrealistic understanding of a separate group. These five factors form the basis for the stereotypes and unrealistic understanding of a group due to dehumanization.

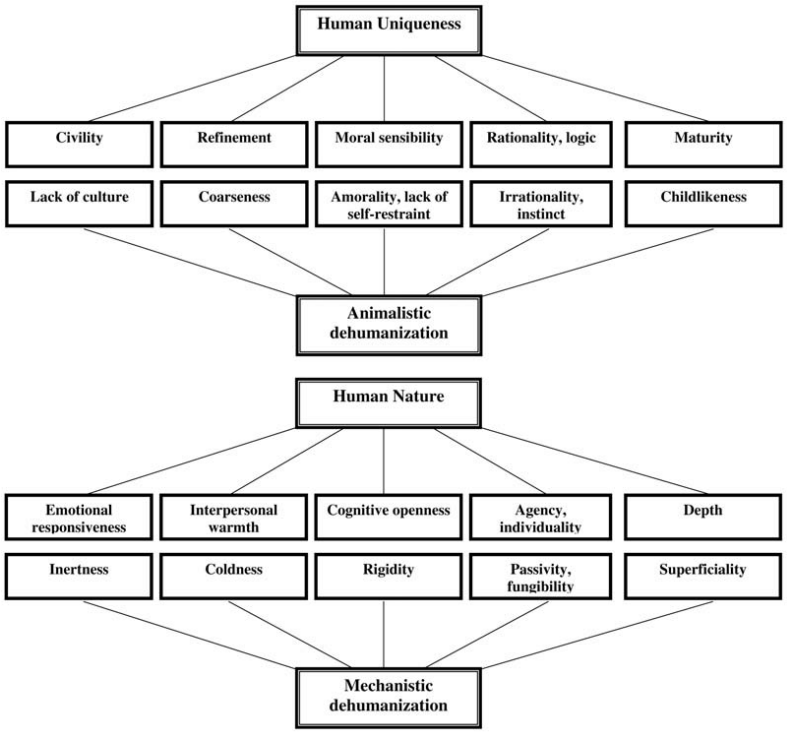

Figure 1. Dehumanization Model[17]

The use of race and ethnicity to dehumanize, ascribing less humanness to little known or understood cultures is an old phenomenon.[18] But, as shown by Halsam's

[15] Ibid, 252–254.

[16] Ibid, 256.

[17] Ibid, 257.

[18] Gustav Jahoda, Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1999).

model, the categories that feed dehumanization are varied. Dehumanization is simply the process by which two groups are created, an "us" and a "them," where the "them" is denied humanness.[19] First, the "us," or in-group is created, based on set, but fluid criteria. This is followed by the creation of a "them," or the out-group.[20] Dehumanization, by this definition, denies a group of people their humanity and serves as a means to deny people their individual differences and yields or fuels biases against the created out-group.[21]

The existence of dehumanization has been well documented during warfare, and also exists in irregular warfare. In its more extreme forms, dehumanization can result in events like the Rape of Nanking, or the genocide in Rwanda of Tutsi by the Hutu. During World War II, for instance, distinct propaganda products were designed to make the Japanese look less than human. (See Figure 2.) But dehumanization can also be much more subtle, like common usage of the derogatory term "gook" to describe enemy combatants and civilians alike during U.S. combat operations in Vietnam. Or, to cite an example from our current conflict(s), the use of the term Haji to refer to Muslims.

Name calling itself is a form of dehumanization, one that strips away some human aspects of members of an out-group. As the rest of this chapter will show, even minor instances of dehumanization can have a large impact on a soldier's ability to then influence the created out-group.[22]

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[19] Moller and Deci, "Interpersonal Control," 43.

[20] Berreby, *Us and Them: Understanding the Tribal Mind* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), 32–45.

[21] Haslam, "Dehumanization," 262.

[22] Robert Kimmel, "Culture and Conflict," in *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, ed. M. Deutsch and P.T. Coleman, 453–474, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 458.

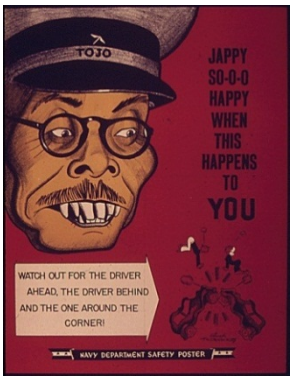

Figure 2. Dehumanization Example (World War II) From thepardu.wordpress.com

Dehumanization creates miscalculations in cross-cultural understandings and impacts how populations react to events and attempts at communication.[23] It is these miscalculations that arguably impact the most important aspect of population-centric warfare, a population's reaction to efforts to influence it. Often counterinsurgency is said to be a fight to 'win the hearts and minds' of a certain population.[24] Dehumanization creates conditions that run directly counter to that goal in the form of moral disengagement.[25] Specifically, moral disengagement allows for aggression and violence to be considered justified and deserved or fair when used against members of an out-group.[26] "To the extent that the victims are dehumanized, principles of morality no longer apply to them and moral restraints against killing are more readily overcome."[27] One of the main conditions for this is denying the humanity and deservingness of 'others' by derogating them. Central to fighting a population-centric conflict is having an understanding and appreciation of the people.[28] However, because dehumanization

[23] Ibid, 460.

[24] United States Army. *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5. (2006).*

[25] Susan Opotow, "Moral Exclusion and Injustice: An Introduction," *Journal of Social Issues* 46: 1–20.

[26] Herbert Kelman, "Violence without Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of Victims and Victimizers", *Varieties of Psychohistory*, ed. G. M. Kren & L. H. Rappoport, 282–314 (New York: Springer, 1973), 301.

[27] Opotow, "Aggression and Violence," 417.

[28] David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare Theory and Practice*, 2nd Ed. (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), 4.

results in an inability to want to try to understand the dehumanized out-group, problems in dealing with that out-group will invariably arise.

Much of the current literature on dehumanization focuses on the moral factors and casual factors that contribute to dehumanization. Most often it is studied as the main component of genocide.[29] When dehumanization occurs, the process that leads to genocide is an emphasis on an out-group and an in-group, resulting in the systematic killing of the out-group.[30] Therefore, for this thesis, it is important to draw connections between incidents of dehumanization and negative impacts short of genocide, as we find these in irregular warfare specifically.

In-group, out-group biases exist in every society and culture on earth.[31] While this bias is distinct from dehumanization, it is rather, a gateway to dehumanization. In-groups and out-groups are the result of categorization.

> Categories like Americans and Iranians, Muslims and Christians, blacks and whites, men and woman, southerners and northerners, doctors and lawyers, gays and straights, soccer moms and NASCAR dads, outgoing people and shy types, smart ones and lucky ones. Those—and all other labels that define more than one person but fewer than all—are what I call "human kinds."[32]

Despite the fact that some of these in-group and out-group biases can seem harmless, their cumulative effects lead to dehumanization and negative results. Categorization into these two groups serves to establish shortcuts for how individuals who do not have traits similar in any number of categories to see members of the out-group as less than human. "The combined effort of architecture, clothing, speech, and behavior all nudge the unconscious mind to think stigma about 'those people' is true. These techniques speak in the language of Us-Them codes making them confirm for the

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[29] Gregory Stanton, "The Eight Stages of Genocide", 1998. recovered from www.genocidewatch.org/8stages.htm

[30] Kelman, "Violence without Restraint", 300.

[31] Neil Kressel, *Mass Hate: The Global Rise of Genocide and Terror,* (New York: Plenum Press, 1996), 247.

[32] Berreby. *Us and Them*, 14–15.

rest of the mind that those people really are 'not right.'"[33] It follows from this description that someone from an out-group, that is seen as "not right" would be difficult for a member of an in-group to understand.

In many total war[34] scenarios, and virtually all conflicts, opponents typically engage in extensive dehumanization campaigns in order to create an effective fighting force.[35] This means that often part of the run up to sending troops to war includes dehumanizing influences. However, according to counterinsurgency strategy, the population in question is centrally important. Although to humanize, or accept the central point of the humanness of the opponent, may make you less effective in direct action, it can lead to additional effectiveness when it comes to indirect action and population-centric approaches.

Simplification of diverse groups is more likely to take place when the conflict is waged in a culturally complex environment with many sub-groups. Dehumanization can result from this simplification. "In more diverse, urbanized, industrialized and specialized societies, individuals rely more on pragmatic rather than consensual criteria in their reasoning."[36] The complexity in an environment can then feed into cognitive simplification in dealing with an out-group, which is a precondition for dehumanization. This, in turn, creates conditions for disequilibrium in society.[37] Often the very fact that a society with many competing cultures within in it is out of equilibrium is enough to begin an irregular conflict.[38] Forces that then have to choose one side over another will often find it easier to focus on themselves rather than the population involved in the irregular conflict. The social landscape proves too complex for them to navigate. Tactically, in such settings, dehumanization flows out of their penchant to think in terms of stereotypes.

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[33] Ibid, 240.

[34] Total War is the highest end of conflict in Full Spectrum Operations, and is defined by U.S. Army Joint Publication 1-02 as "armed conflict between major powers in which the total resources of the belligerents are employed, and the national survival of a major belligerent is in jeopardy."

[35] Grossman, *On Killing*.

[36] Kimmel, "Culture and Conflict," 459.

[37] Chalmers Ashby Johnson. *Revolutionary Change* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966, 15–39.

[38] Ibid, 59–87.

As demonstrated by many dealings by U.S. forces with the Vietnamese during the Vietnam War, dehumanization is often ingrained in the organizational culture during the conflict due to misunderstandings about the cultural complexity of the environment. "Americans were ignorant about the Vietnamese not because we were stupid, but because we believe certain things about ourselves. Those things necessarily distorted our vision and confused our minds in ways that made learning extraordinarily difficult."[39] The need to address this "enabling ignorance," and the need to change how a force conducting influence operations thinks and communicates leads to the next section of this thesis.

B. COMMUNICATION

Communication consists of source, message, and destination.[40] Further broken down, communication at each level must be coded and decoded by the source and audience. The essence of this process, which is about conveying the right message to the audience, is the goal of communication. Communication can also be broken down into the source, encoder, signal, decoder, and destination.[41] It is essential that the decoder or target of the communication, and the encoder, the person making the communication, be in tune, like a radio antenna. This is because a figurative interpreter separates the decoder and encoder.[42] The processes that occur within the encoder who creates a message, and the decoder who then understands the message, are what are so essential to influence. The key is to be clear when communicating a message, so that the decoder understands exactly what is being communicated.

What is most important to an encoder who creates the message is to elicit the desired response from the message sent. There are requirements of this: the message must be designed and delivered so as to gain the attention of the intended recipient; it must employ signs that refer to experience common to the source and recipient; in order to get the meaning across, it must arouse personal needs in the recipient and suggest some ways

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39 Loren Baritz, *Backfire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, INC, 1985), 25, 26.

40 Wilber Schramm, "How Communication Works," in *Mass Media and Society*, ed. Alan Wells and Ernst Hakanen, 51–75 (Greenwich, CT: Ablex, 1997), 51.

41 Ibid, 52.

42 Ibid, 52–54.

to meet those needs; finally, it must suggest a way to meet those needs that is appropriate to the group situation in which the recipient finds himself at the time when he is moved to make the desired response.[43] The message is much more likely to succeed if it fits with the patterns of understandings, attitudes, values, and goals that a receiver already has. However, the encoder can only control one aspect of the message, the sent portion. This means the importance of the message, and interpreting the decoder's response to the message, are vital for successful communication. In Figure 3, we see Schramm's model of communication, to include the feedback loop.

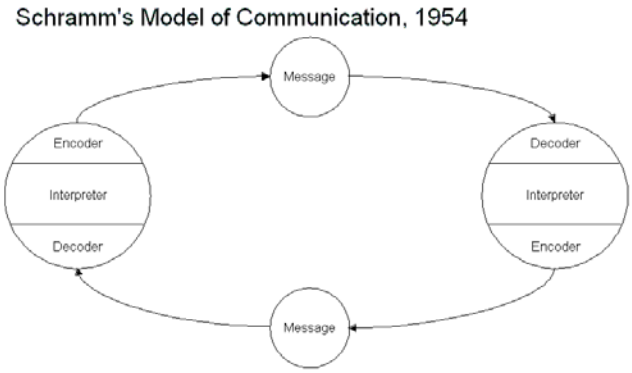

Figure 3. Schramm's Model of Communication[44]

Integral to Schramm's feedback loop is the interpretation that goes on inside each actor's head. It is here where patterns of understanding and the ability to influence a target make a difference. If any confusion takes place during this internal interpretation, the meaning of the message would be disrupted and rendered ineffective. The interaction between source, message, and the decoder is what is essential to the establishment of credibility.[45] It is here where any hints of dehumanization, in the form of stereotypes or out-group biases, will have an impact, since any misguided understanding between the decoder and encoder effectively ends the feedback loop.

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[43] Ibid, 62.

[44] Ibid, 54.

[45] C. Nadine Wathen, Jacquelyn Burkell**, "**Believe It or Not: Factors Influencing Credibility on the Web," *J. of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 53(2002): 134–144.

C. DEHUMANIZATION REINFORCES INEFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

When looking at Schramm's model of communication (Figure 3) it is clear that the encoder and decoder portions of communication are culturally dependent. Cultural norms and ideas about a group will have an impact on the message's effectiveness. At the same time, when dehumanization occurs the ability to accurately understand an out-group is compromised.

The effectiveness of coercion in limited war depends on the enemy's perception of what will happen if he fails to comply.[46] This means that any disgust or stereotyping between the encoder and decoder resulting from in-group or out-group biases will have a negative impact on their ability to communicate, and therefore influence the decoder. In other words, communication must be looked at holistically, especially when the message being conveyed consists of both actions and words. For example, someone saying the right thing but acting in a manner disrespectful or insulting would not represent effective messaging.

Communication depends on successful feedback between two parties. This can be positive or negative. Dehumanization, for instance, reinforces negative impressions between the two parties. "If you communicate a negative attribute to those who 'violate' your cultural expectation, they are likely to become less receptive to your perspective and ideas… The other party may become defensive, accusing you of misbehaving, being unreasonable and impolite, or condescending—as indeed you are, from their perspective."[47] It is this cycle that is captured by the Coleman Raider Filter Check model (Figure 4), which ensures that the judgment of foreign behavior will result in inappropriate responses and a negative reaction from the out-group, akin to dehumanization.[48]

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[46] Alvin Bernstein, "Political Strategies in Coercive Diplomacy and Limited War," in *Political Warfare and Psychological Operations*, ed. Carnes Lord and Frank Barnett, 145–159 (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1989), 146.

[47] Kimmel, "Culture and Conflict,"), 458.

[48] Ellen Raider, Susan Colemen, and Janet Gerson, "Teaching Conflict Resolution Skills in a Workshop," in *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, ed. M. Deutsch and P.T. Coleman, 499–521 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 516–517.

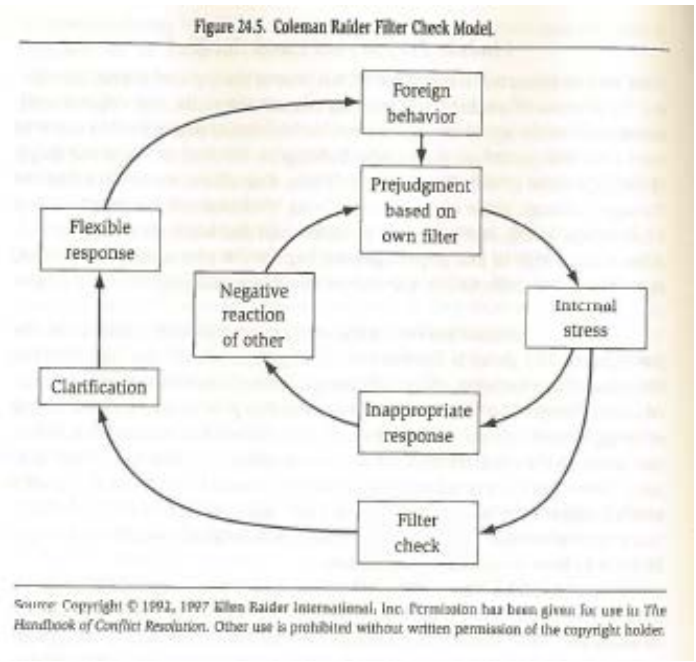

Figure 4. Ineffective Communication Feedback[49]

Something similar played out in Vietnam during the U.S. counterinsurgency efforts there. "When we did try to impose changes, for the better of course, the resistance of the people could seem like ingratitude or stupidity."[50] In these instances, attitudes which dehumanized the Vietnamese population led to their resistance to what the American forces wanted them to adopt. There was a complete breakdown in the communication loop necessary to influence a population, which then reinforced negative outcomes.

In contrast to negative feedback loops during the Vietnam War, at least one veteran could look back on more positive relations during the Korean War. During the Korean War, then-Lieutenant Ben Malcom conducted unconventional warfare against North Korean targets. Although he was untrained in unconventional tactics, and did not have any Korean cultural training or language skills, Lieutenant Malcom was able to quickly build a positive relationship with his North Korean counterpart, Mr. Pak Choll. These two men built a relationship, not because of Malcom's cultural aptitude, but

[49] Ibid, 516.

[50] Baritz, *Backfire*, 20.

because they willingly shared intelligence, conducted risky operations, spent a lot of time together, and, most importantly, respected one another. It was this mutual respect that allowed Malcom to drive operations that mutually supported Korean and U.S. goals. Malcom and Mr. Pak were able to properly communicate with one another because they had a realistic understanding of each other.[51]

D. DEHUMANIZATION PREVENTION AND SOCIAL PENETRATION

The prevention of dehumanization is easiest at the beginning stages of an interaction, when the in-group and out-group biases initially are being formed.[52] By preventing two groups from forming in the first place, investment in the local population becomes possible. It is this investment that is essential for an effective communication loop. The psychological term for this investment is social penetration.[53] Conditions for successful humanization occur by reducing incidents of out-group and in-group biases.

Insights gained from social penetration directly counter dehumanization thanks to the familiarity that is developed.[54] Social penetration can also be thought of as achieving psychological closeness with another person. Social scientists recognize that creating a closer connection makes it more difficult for subjects to harm bystanders.[55] This yields increased levels of social connection.

A social penetration strategy is essential in irregular warfare. Dehumanization is more likely to occur when lack of familiarity between two people exists and there is psychological distance.[56] This seems to be the inverse of the axiom, familiarity breeds

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[51] Col. Ben Malcom and Ron Martz, *White Tigers: My Secret War in Korea* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's, 1996), 66–82.

[52] Gregory Stanton, "The Eight Stages of Genocide", 1998. recovered from www.genocidewatch.org/8stages.htm

[53] I. Altman, and D. Taylor, *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships* (New York: Holt, 1973).

[54] Berreby, *Us and Them*, 202.

[55] Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969), 36. In his experiments on having volunteers believed they were shocking a victim in response to wrong answers Milgram demonstrated that as proximity is increased the mean maximum shock decreases and the volunteer's willingness to confront the authority increases.

[56] Susan Opotow, "Aggression and Violence," 406.

contempt. However, social penetration only takes place between an out-group and in-group that have constant contact with one another. It is through the reduction of in-group out-group feelings that increased contact can occur between groups and that the individuals involved in this contact are more likely to cooperate.[57]

The ability to properly influence and communicate with others is based on building relationships. Dehumanization will always prevent the establishment of a mutually respectful relationship. Colonel Edward Lansdale serves as an excellent example of someone who was able to build positive relations with people. While advising the Filipino government, which was fighting a communist insurgency in the 1950s, Colonel Lansdale built a reputation as an extremely effective advisor. Essential to his advising was his ability to interact with all people in a genuine matter. "Lansdale recalled earthier examples. He asked others to put themselves into the shoes of beleaguered peoples."[58] Whether he was influencing his strategic counterpart in the Philippines, Ramon Magsaysay, or interacting with local pig farmers, Col. Lansdale saw the surrounding population as essential to the conduct of counter-insurgency, and so worked to understand them. "Everywhere Lansdale went he took to the local people. He traveled (and) talked to everyone he met, and in doing so developed a sense of the local situation."[59] Thus he effectively humanized them, and continually worked on his ability to communicate better with them.

E. PERSONAL INVESTMENT

The final goal of this chapter is to discuss how these observations can be pulled together. By setting the conditions for a healthy communication feedback loop, troops will likely be more effective in dealing with the local population. Positive reinforcement will assist in the development of social penetration, leading to better and more effective

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[57] Clark McCauley, *Ethnopolitical Warfare: Causes, Consequences, and Possible Solutions*, "Group Identification and Ethnic Nationalism, (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2001), 357. This idea is adapted from Allport's 1979 contact hypothesis according to which contact reinforces the idea of equal status between two groups.

[58] Edward Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia (*New York, Fordham University Press, 1972), xvi.

[59] Brian Lindeman, *Better Lucky than Good: A Theory of Unconventional Minds and the Power of "Who"* (California, Naval Postgraduate School, 2009), 111.

interactions with the population. As these positive events occur, troops who do not see themselves as members of an out-group will invest themselves in the area. This investment will also help them fight the impulse to delegitimize the local population, a common result of dehumanization, and one that is closely related to the systematic exploitation of a population.[60] Ideally the troops will not differentiate their success from that of the locals with whom they are interacting. It is this investment and the resulting connection between security forces and the locals that will contribute to successful military operations.

[60] Daniel Bar-Tal, "Delegitimization: The Extreme Case of Stereo-typing and Prejudice," in, *Stereotyping and prejudice: Changing conceptions*, ed D. Bar-Tal, C. Graumann, A.W. Kruglanski, and W. Stroebe, 169–188, (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1989), 175.

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III. THREE VIGNETTES

The three cases discussed in this chapter represent a sample of counterinsurgency experiences. The first involves U.S. troops in the Philippines in the early 20th century. It is a positive example, wherein an individual or group of commanders was able to counter dehumanization and influence the population. This was achieved despite a cultural divide and the depiction of most non-Europeans at the time as savages who needed civilizing.[61] The second case is that of the U.S. troops who perpetrated the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. This case represents an extreme example of dehumanization between two cultures, resulting in a total inability of the Americans to understand and influence the local population, culminating in the massacre. Last, during the Sikh rebellion in India in the 1980s, humanization efforts were undertaken that led in the end to an effective counterinsurgency strategy.

These three examples should help flesh out a framework to better understand how dehumanization impacts counter-insurgency strategy. Finally, they will demonstrate that, irrespective of specific cultures, dehumanization is a factor that should always be taken into account before attempting to influence a population.

A. THE PHILIPPINES

This section will focus on operations by Brigadier General J. Franklin Bell that took place in South Luzon during 1901–1902. The context of the U.S. operations in the Philippines from 1899–1902 is often blamed on empire-building resulting from imperialism. However, they can also be said to have been driven by the notion of the 'White Man's Burden' to civilize the world.[62] When looking at U.S. operations more closely, not all actions reflected a savage war. Some were rather nuanced operations in which the interactions between the U.S. commanders and the Filipinos were not marred by systematic dehumanization.[63]

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[61] Douglas Porch, *Wars of Empire* (London: Cassell, 2000), 142.

[62] Ibid, 142.

[63] Brian McAllister Linn, *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899–1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 328.

At the outset of operations in the Philippines there were several incidents that appear to have been caused by the negative results of dehumanization. These incidents consisted of American troops firing on Filipino civilians resulting in casualties. Presumably, the soldiers felt free to do so because they saw the civilians as expendable.[64] However, during a period called the summer stalemate in August of 1899, U.S. military commanders in the Philippines determined that to persuade the population to be friendly to the U.S. post-conflict required a different attitude from U.S. troops.[65] Thus, the most important aspect of overcoming dehumanization seemed to be realized: unless changes were made troops were risking their ability to influence the population. This shift was assisted by a massive new rotation of troops and political pressure from U.S. politicians due in part to better reporting practices by civilian reporters, which forced a restructuring and reorganization of the forces participating in the campaign.[66]

The reorganized force began to focusing on using the Filipinos to both govern and fight alongside U.S. troops. "A far more radical step was the employment of Filipinos as military auxiliaries."[67] This emphasis on governing the Philippines, under U.S. control, set the conditions necessary for the military to acknowledge its responsibility for the welfare of the civilian population. This responsibility did not imply leniency toward either the guerrillas or civilians, but rather fairness. This shift is significant because it set the stage for U.S. commanders to see that it was their responsibility to build a functioning government.[68]

One incident, in particular, exemplifying this shift took place in South Luzon in 1901. It was led by Brigadier General Bell, who modeled a proper understanding of what was needed in order to influence the population. His strikes against both civilians and guerrillas were often harsh, but the population understood them to be consistent.[69] This

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[64] Ibid, 69.

[65] Ibid, 117.

[66] Ibid, 117–159.

[67] Ibid, 128.

[68] Ibid, 136.

[69] Ibid, 302.

consistency was made possible by Bell's realization that it was necessary to deal with civilians as stakeholders in their community, rather than as sub-humans needed to be ruled over.

Brigadier General Bell started from a situation of severe distrust between the locals and U.S. troops in the area. To rebuild trust, Bell promulgated a new policy for his officers that opposed *carte blanche* persecution directed against any Filipinos who objected to American pacification.[70] Essential to Bell's operations was the education of the local population about his orders, an excerpt of which is below. These were distributed through a series of telegraphic circulars that laid out rules, to include punishments for various topics: from assassination attempts, to distribution of food, to the collection of taxes, and finally the establishment protection zones.[71] Bell realized that the population needed to understand the rules under which U.S. troops were operating, and an important part of his campaign was to communicate these rules.[72] The circumstances surrounding his public awareness efforts came at a time of ambiguity in the campaign and served to clarify what counted as offenses and what the punishments would be for both the Americans and the Filipinos involved in the conflict. The effectiveness with which Bell communicated can be seen in the subsequent success he and his troops had in isolating the insurgents. This directly contributed to his success.

> Be considerate and courteous in manner, but firm and relentless in action. Say little, and let acts, not words, convey your meaning. Words from U.S. count for nothing. The more an officer talks the less they think he is going to do. The more he does and the less he says the more apprehensive they become while waiting for what is to happen next. Except when necessary to give due warning, do not tell them what you are going to do, but do it. Above all things do not threaten. Threats are invariably interpreted as a sign of weakness.[73]

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[70] Report, 31 December 1900, Bell to Adjutant General, quoted in Gates, 214.

[71] Robert D. Ramsey III, The Long War Series Occasional Paper 24: *Savage Wars of Peace: Case Studies of Pacification in the Philippines, 1900–190*2 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007), 25–30.

[72] Ibid, 55–58.

[73] An excerpt from BG Bell during his meeting on 1 December 1901, introducing his troops to the ideas contained in his circulars.

The lesson to be learned from Bell's example with respect to dehumanization is that by demonstrating fairness with respect to how U.S. troops would interact with the locals, Bell shifted punishment from 'who you are' to 'what you have done.' This simple distinction is essential for counteracting dehumanization while still conducting aggressive counter-insurgency operations. Making this distinction proved instrumental in quelling the insurgency in his area of operations.

A potential counter-argument to Bell's success worth noting is that during the conflict in the Philippines several atrocities did occur. These were aired in Congressional hearings. At these hearings, Bell was called to testify on his operations in Samar.[74] However, not all operations during the conflict in the Philippines from 1899-1902 were defined by the dehumanization of a population. In fact not dehumanizing the locals was a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the U.S. government to be able to influence and then control the Philippine Islands. In a sense, success depended on scope. Because there was not blanket dehumanization, commanders had the space in which to conduct effective counter-insurgency operations and population-centric efforts.

B. MY LAI INCIDENT

The My Lai massacre occurred in Vietnam on March 16, 1968. Although much has been written about the My Lai massacre, this section will only focus on systematic dehumanization that was occurring within the U.S. army during this time, creating the conditions for the massacre to take place. The My Lai massacre began when Company C of 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Division began clearing a series of villages. These villages were reported to be Viet Cong strongholds. While clearing these villages, the soldiers began systematically questioning, then killing, civilians they suspected of being Viet Cong supporters. The death toll has been estimated between 300-500 civilians.[75] My argument is that My Lai was made possible due to an organizational acceptance of dehumanization and an inability of the U.S. troops to effectively communicate with the

74 Linn. *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War*, 221–224.

75 Department of the Army. *Report of the Department of the Army Review of the Preliminary Investigations into the My Lai Incident (The Peers Report)*, Volumes I-III (1970).

population. It is important to note that several other factors influenced the My Lai incident, all of which were exacerbated by dehumanization.

The evidence of dehumanization during My Lai can be found in the systematic killing of civilians that took place. One factor that led to this dehumanization was the failure of the U.S. leadership to clearly define the goals of the conflict, resulting in frustration for both the U.S. troops and the Vietnamese.[76] Additional factors that contributed to the massacre at My Lai include Lieutenant Calley's inexperience as a Platoon Leader in Charlie Company, as well as the group dynamics within Charlie Company. It was these factors that contributed to the severity of the massacre at My Lai. However, even outside of these particulars there was a policy that contributed to dehumanization of civilians and enemy combatants within Vietnam.[77] This included the use of body counts as a metric of success. Many of the civilians killed at My Lai were counted as enemy combatants to inflate the numbers reported up the chain of command. "After the massacre, the radioman said that Captain Earl R. Michles told him 'to make it look good.'"[78] A systematic cover-up involving the crimes committed at My Lai included elements at every level up to the Division Command.[79] A lack of willingness and initiative in the conduct of missions overall ran directly counter to the operational goals. The unfocused nature of the military's broad goals would ultimately impact the people sent out on operations, especially when U.S. commanders in Vietnam began to create operational goals focusing on body counts.[80] This further complicated the mission of the people conducting them, since they were focused on the subsidiary aim of creating war dead rather than on winning the war and stabilizing Vietnam.[81]

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[76] Baritz, *Backfire*.

[77] Irving L. Janis, "Groupthink among Policy Makers," *Varieties of Psychohistory*, ed. G. M. Kren & L. H. Rappoport, 315–329 (New York: Springer, 1973), 318.

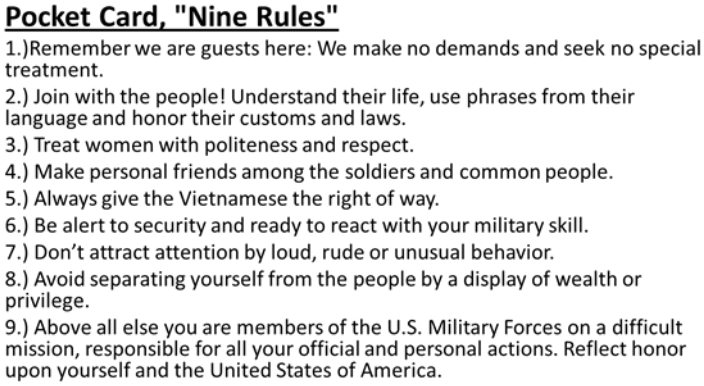
[78] Baritz, *Backfire*, 297.

[79] Department of the Army. *Report of the Department of the Army Review of the Preliminary Investigations into the My Lai Incident (The Peers Report)*, Volumes I-III (1970).

[80] Baritz, *Backfire*, 302.

[81] Guenther Lewy, *America in Vietnam (*New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 78–80.

Figure 5 represents a 1960s U.S. Army tool that outlines how soldiers were supposed to deal with the Vietnamese population.



Pocket Card, "Nine Rules"

1.)Remember we are guests here: We make no demands and seek no special treatment.

2.) Join with the people! Understand their life, use phrases from their language and honor their customs and laws.

3.) Treat women with politeness and respect.

4.) Make personal friends among the soldiers and common people.

5.) Always give the Vietnamese the right of way.

6.) Be alert to security and ready to react with your military skill.

7.) Don't attract attention by loud, rude or unusual behavior.

8.) Avoid separating yourself from the people by a display of wealth or privilege.

9.) Above all else you are members of the U.S. Military Forces on a difficult mission, responsible for all your official and personal actions. Reflect honor upon yourself and the United States of America.

Figure 5. Nine Rules

However, in reality, the treatment of the local population tended to be harsh. This was compounded by the fact that the basic training that soldiers underwent concentrated on dehumanizing the enemy, and trained the recruits to kill. The overhaul that had been done on training after World War II and Korea focused on these aspects in order to enhance the U.S. troops' ability to kill during conflict. This training contrasted sharply with the skills needed to achieve stability in a counterinsurgency environment.[82]

Certain individual and psychological factors present during Vietnam compounded the problem of dehumanization. Many soldiers fighting in Vietnam felt betrayed both by the United States' conduct of the war and their role in it.[83] Jonathan Shay explores this idea of betrayal in his work based on his counseling of Vietnam veterans. "Once or twice I have tried to explore with veterans these concepts of victory and defeat. I have abandoned these discussions because the sense of betrayal is still too great and the equation of defeat with abandonment by God and personal devaluation still too vivid."[84]

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[82] Grossman, *On Killing*.

[83] Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam* (New York: Scribner, 1994).

[84] Ibid, 8.

Although those feelings were not universal, their existence within the Army had a corrupting and, in the case of My Lai, disastrous effect.[85]

An army, such as the U.S. Army in Vietnam, is a moral force capable of using deadly force. The turmoil that permeated American society during the Vietnam War influenced U.S. troops and shook the military establishment to its foundations. This then contributed to weaken the moral compass U.S. troops needed to guide their operations. [86] The U.S. Army in Vietnam was more susceptible to dehumanizing the enemy and the local population, who appeared indistinguishable to most troops.

> Another common focus of anger and aggression were the very people the young soldier (in Vietnam) had come to 'protect.' "The way to win the war," went a common joke, "is to load all the gooks in the South on boats, kill the ones in the North, and sink the boats." (Sigmund) Freud noted that jokes, like dreams, frequently serve as wish fulfillments.[87]

Lieutenant David Donovan experienced similar incidents of dehumanization when on his first patrol in Vietnam. This was before he was assigned to a small outpost, and led a District Team.

> "Look," the lieutenant said, "we have enough trouble with our guys as it is. If we tried to charge every man that had a run-in with one of the locals we would just piss everyone off even more. Our guys would do less than they are now! Believe me, these men just see *slopes*. They don't see good or bad, they just see slopes, and they don't like any of them. If I can get my guys to tolerate these people and maybe be nice to a few of them, I figure I'm ahead of the game. If I started handing out Article 15's just because a guy is a shithead and doesn't like the natives, I'd probably be fragged within a week."[88]

U.S. soldiers in Vietnam had very little social contact with the Vietnamese. Less than one percent of U.S. forces took part in operations where they lived and fought side

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[85] Nevitt Sanford, Craig Comstock, et al, *Sanctions for Evil: Sources of Social Destructiveness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

[86] Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999), 287–304

[87] Herman P. Langer, "The Making of a Murder," *Varieties of Psychohistory*, ed. G. M. Kren & L. H. Rappoport, 257–260 (New York: Springer, 1973), 260.

[88] David Donovan, *Once a Warrior King: Memories of an Officer in Vietnam* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 32.

by side with Vietnamese allies on a daily basis.[89] For the majority of U.S. forces, their lack of social contact made it very easy to regard the Vietnamese as comprising an out-group and to dehumanize them. This is in keeping with Stanley Milgram's classic study where subjects were instructed to shock an unseen person. A statistically significant number of Milgram's subjects would continue to shock the unseen person as long as they were told to, even after they could hear the person scream in pain. [90] Troops who felt they were following orders would have been easier to lead in committing atrocities because the use of authorization can override standard moral considerations.[91] Creating psychological distance through the use of name calling is one technique to justify atrocities. Soldiers were not killing people like themselves; rather, they were killing *gooks* or *slopes*. When civilians could be included in 'body counts,' it becomes easier to see how seemingly normal people could be induced to doing something which, under different circumstances, they would recognize as cruel. Both Shay's examination of the sense of betrayal among soldiers in Vietnam and Milgram's study point to the psychological factors that influenced soldiers and help explain why members of Charlie Company proved unable to recognize and stop their dehumanization of the Vietnamese.

C. SIKH RETAKING OF THE TEMPLE

Finally, let U.S. turn to the Sikh insurgency that took place in the 1980s in India. Key to this period is the state's response to the creation of an in-group and out-group along religious lines.[92] One operation, code-named Black Thunder, illustrates how the state's eventual response to dehumanization resulted in the relatively peaceful reclamation of the holy Sikh shrine, the Golden Temple, which insurgents used as their stronghold.

The Sikh-Hindu divide in India developed in the 1980s. The genesis of the Sikh insurgency was a concentrated effort by some Sikhs to attain autonomy in the region.[93]

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[89] Francis J. West, *The Village* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), ix.

[90] Milgram, *Obedience to Authority.*

[91] Kelman, *Varieties of Psychohistory*, 301.

[92] Gill, *Punjab, the Knights of Falsehood*, 15.

[93] Mark Tully, *No Full Stops in India* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1992), 153–180.

Radicalization increased following an unsuccessful earlier operation at the Golden Temple. Operation Blue Star, in 1984, reinforced perceptions that Sikhs were being targeted by the military forces simply for being Sikhs. The military did not take sufficient care in separating radicals from moderates. Thus, dehumanization of Sikhs took place. Sikhs felt they were all being lumped together as members of an out-group.

An important precursor to Operation Black Thunder was Operation Blue Star which took place between the Third and Eighth of June, 1984. The government's extreme actions taken by the government during Operation Blue Star caused one dedicated government security officer, Simranjit Singh Mann, to question his government's intentions regarding the Sikhs. "In his resignation letter to the president of India, Zail Singh, Mann compared the government's heavy handed action to the British atrocities … In even stronger terms, he accused the government of being 'bent upon committing genocide of the Sikhs."[94] It was within this environment of animosity and dehumanization that K.P.S. Gill began his operations to quell the Sikh insurgency.

To stop the insurgency, K.P.S. Gill — the policeman in charge, and himself a Sikh — determined that it was essential to control the perceptions of the surrounding population.[95] His actions highlight how counterinsurgency should be thought about in terms of reincorporating an out-group.[96] By focusing his efforts on defining the terrorists not as cultural enemies, but as misguided peers, Gill was able to gain support among the broader Sikh community, thus taking away the insurgents' ability to influence the community. This distinction was essential to his plan for how to defeat the insurgency in Punjab.

The details of Operation Black Thunder clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of the divide Gill was able to achieve. Operation Black Thunder began on 30 April, 1986 with a blockade of the Golden Temple. Already Gill had worked to mobilize the civilian population against the goals of the insurgents with community meetings where he spoke

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[94] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 86.

[95] Gill, *Punjab, the Knights of Falsehood* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1997), 92.

[96] Ibid, 107.

against the radicalization of their religion. The actual operation resulted in very little bloodshed. The police, instead, successfully cleared out and separated the insurgents from the civilian population occupying the Golden Temple.[97] Key to this operation was that the Indian troops, led by the police, were able to clear the insurgent stronghold without heavy loss of life. The ability to separate the insurgents from the civilians was heavily influenced by Gill's humanization of the Sikh people, and his insistence that the insurgency not be fought through the security apparatus, but by convincing Sikhs that it was not in their interest to support the insurgency.

The conflict in the Punjab was not particularly bloody, with only an estimated 8,000 casualties overall, but it did consist of a decade of terror attacks and resulted in the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in retaliation for Operation Blue Star. The shift in tactics undertaken by K.P.S. Gill (along with other government officials) clearly demonstrated their desire to get the population to disregard what the insurgents said, and to make clear that the Indian government was not trying to exterminate or oppress the Sikh people. "If the Sikh people are to free themselves of the self-inflicted slavery of their minds … they will have to reject not only this doctrine of failure and infirmity, but equally the leadership and institutions that propagate and perpetuate it."[98]

Some explanations for how the Sikh rebellion was defeated give credit to other sources. Mann, who became active in the Sikh movement, believes that the militants were destroyed from within, by a problem of leadership. However, by focusing on fighting ideas and affecting a separation between destructive and constructive ideas it can be argued that Gill's efforts were integral to denying insurgent leaders a following. "Thus, one lesson that could be distilled from Gill's example is that it takes intimate familiarity with what insurgents are peddling to undo them."[99] Indeed, instead of fighting the insurgents directly, which would have resulted in more bloodshed, Gill fought the

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[97] Sanjoy Hazarike, "Troops in Punjab Enter Sikh Temple Complex," *The New York Times*, 1988-05-14

[98] Gill, *Punjab, the Knights of Falsehood*, 136.

[99] Anna Simons, "Got Vision? Unity of Vision in Policy and Strategy: What it is and Why we need it," Strategic Studies Institute, July 2010, accessed April 30, 2013.

insurgents' ideas. It was this ability to fight the separatists ideologically, given his knowledge of them, that ensured Gill was not fighting members of an out-group, but rather trying to influence members of his own in-group.

D. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THESE VIGNETTES

Each of these examples illuminates a different point related to the impact of dehumanization or its absence in counterinsurgency operations. The first example of Bell in the Philippines demonstrates how a lack of dehumanization does not necessarily make for more peaceful operations. Rather, Bell demonstrated that by effectively communicating with the locals, which he could do by not dehumanizing them, his operations were both brutal and effective in pacifying the area. This effective communication is what is absent in our second example of My Lai. Here, the U.S. Army established a command structure and culture that dehumanized the local population, making it impossible to effectively communicate with the Vietnamese, ensuring that the results would end up being brutal *and* ineffective as well as crossing moral lines. Gill's example, meanwhile, suggests that even in the absence of significant cross-cultural differences, avoiding dehumanization still must factor into a counterinsurgency strategy. This is because as the insurgents attempt to mobilize the populace against the government, they can most easily do so through the creation of in-groups and out-groups. As K.P.S. Gill demonstrated, overcoming this split and preventing dehumanization by government forces is essential. It is this (re)humanizing influence that features prominently in the example in the next chapter.

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IV. COINCIDENCE?

A. WHAT IS VSO?

In this chapter I want to revisit the principles discussed in Chapter Two and examine them in the context of Village Stability Operations (VSO). My experiences in Afghanistan during 2009-2010 will feature prominently to highlight some of the key aspects of VSO that work to combat dehumanization and lead to the type of personal investment I believe necessary to influence a local population.

VSO has been employed in Afghanistan since early 2009. Many articles have been written about why this program has proven successful.[100] Members of the Senate Armed Service Committee and others have said that VSO has proved a significant threat to Taliban interests in Afghanistan.[101] Among the reasons given: decentralized government and localized security facilitated by VSO and the development of an Afghan Local Police (ALP) have helped achieve stability in Afghanistan.[102] As the main ingredient of its success VSO has been able to formalize bottom-up and top-down approaches in tying the districts of Afghanistan to the central government.[103] Others have described VSO and the ALP as focusing U.S. efforts on Afghan solutions to the problems in Afghanistan.[104] All of these articles claim that VSO has been successful in Afghanistan, but miss what I believe to be an essential reason for its success.

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[100] On the website *Small Wars Journal* alone, a search on VSO or for Afghan Local Police (ALP) brings up more than 30 articles.

[101] CJ Radin, "Report: Afghan Local Counterinsurgency Programs Prove Successful," *Threat Matrix Blog of The Long War Journal*, April 4, 2012, http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2012/04/report_local_counterinsurgency.php (accessed June 1, 2013.).

[102] Seth A. Shreckengast, "The Only Game in Town: Assessing the Effectiveness of Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," *Small Wars Journal* (March 2012): http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-only-game-in-town-assessing-the-effectiveness-of-village-stability-operations-and-the-a (accessed May 30, 2013).

[103] Lisa Saum-Manning, "Comparing Past and Current Challenges to Afghan Local Defense," *Small Wars Journal* (December 2012): http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/vsoalp (accessed May 30, 2013).

[104] Donald Rector, "Afghan Local Police: An Afghan Solution to an Afghan Problem," *Small Wars Journal* (January 2012): http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/afghan-local-police-an-afghan-solution-to-an-afghan-problem (accessed May 30, 2013).

The purpose of this chapter is less to examine VSO, however, than to point out how several of the tenets of VSO concept counter the natural inclination to dehumanize the native population and the enemy. For instance, VSO creates conditions whereby those conducting the mission actually become invested in the area and the people. It is this investment that lays the foundation for preventing dehumanization and creating the conditions needed to influence the population. The investment in a community and the recognition of other people as individuals is essential to overcoming dehumanization and its impact.[105] The VSO program was not designed to counter dehumanization of local populations. However, it has the potential to have this effect, which is one, I will argue, U.S. forces should capitalize on.

Three points are integral to my argument. First, VSO successfully mitigates the factors that will lead to dehumanization. Second, as VSO is implemented and counters dehumanization influences, its tactical successes become significant. Third, when a strategy is designed that reduces dehumanization and achieves tactical success, more effective influence on and compliance by the population results. All three points fit with the broader argument that when designing a strategy to influence a population, understanding the tactical impact of dehumanization is essential to success. What would greatly enhance the conduct of VSO is if the principles of dehumanization were understood *before* deploying, instead of being learned through experience, as during my deployment.

B. WHAT IS VSO, AND HOW DOES IT FIGHT DEHUMANIZATION?

To lay the groundwork for the first point, that VSO mitigates dehumanization, requires a brief description of VSO. VSO is conducted by an embedded U.S. force that lives with and participates in the lives of the people in a specific Afghan village. The site can be small, centered around a dense population center and includes a number of Afghan nationals, usually members of the Afghan National Army (ANA) or Afghan National Army Special Forces (ANASOF). These individuals cohabitate with the U.S. forces and depend on each other for security.

[105] Kelman, "Violence without Restraint", 301

Mutual security is key. Otherwise, forcing this type of intimate closeness could lead to resentment, most clearly exemplified by the colloquialism, "Familiarity breeds contempt." However, because the ANA and U.S. personnel share responsibility for security, cooperation becomes immediately necessary, preventing resentment. People can ignore one another while eating in the same room and they can politely look away while passing one another in a hall on their way to bed, but they cannot ignore one another when they depend on each other to keep everyone safe while they sleep. This distinction ensures that a foundation of trust is built between the security forces. Having to be co-dependent with a group of ANA, who could otherwise be seen as belonging to an out-group by the U.S. troops, sets the conditions for U.S. troops to be able to humanize the local population. Basically, people cannot help but humanize those they must cooperate with.[106] This cooperation breaks down the differences between preconceived in-group and out-groups.[107]

VSO also ties a U.S. force to a certain area, where the people implementing VSO know that their mission success is tied to the welfare and attitudes of the surrounding population. The population surrounding a VSO site is the target of influence operations. Because they are physically present, members of the U.S. force are able to interact with the same people consistently, increasing connections between the two groups.[108] The consequent consistency of interactions, combined with the motivation for mission success being tied to the surrounding population, creates incentives for investment in the area by the U.S. personnel attempting to have an impact there.

None of these three aspects are cultural constructs. They are not created by cultural training and are not enhanced by greater cultural familiarity. Instead, they are natural by-products of the personal connections that result from needing to work with(in) a population. In a sense, what I am talking about is reward-based influence, a result of

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[106] Sherif, *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation*, 194–195.

[107] Berreby, *Us and Them*, 69.

[108] Robert Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: Quill, 1984), 67.

mutual respect, not greater cross-cultural familiarity.[109] It thus turns out that a major element in countering dehumanization grows out of understanding how to build up influence to accomplish U.S. goals in an area. It is borne out of the proclivities of living at VSO sites, not thanks to cultural sensitivity training.

One sees this in the consistency that living in a VSO site fosters. U.S. personnel and the locals have no choice; they have to talk every day, and this automatically increases effective communication. This increase in effective communication in turn breaks down any lingering out-group/in-group barriers.

Being attached to a single area and placing the emphasis on similarities rather than differences provides the best framework for disrupting the likelihood of dehumanization. For instance, I was invited to the wedding of a young man who had previously been a Taliban fighter in a neighboring province. He returned home at the request of his father, a village elder, to get married. His father invited me to the wedding with my ANASF counterpart and spent hours with U.S. during the meal. It was at this event that the father asked for my assurance that his son would be safe from reprisal attacks for leaving the Taliban and returning home. My experience up to this point had been that this particular village elder was a problem. However, I understood that by making a concerted effort to provide his son security I could demonstrate my investment in him and his area. Once I agreed to his request the two of U.S. were able to build a more effective dialogue and greater mutual trust, which proved excellent tools through which to influence the area.

C. TACTICAL SUCCESS IN VSO

Effective communication and investment in an area have cumulative effects. Building trust and credibility between two groups, which is a natural result of personal investment in an area, enhances the effectiveness of a message. During a counterinsurgency, deterrence is an effective tool for tactical-level operations. To communicate deterrence, the credibility and nature of the threats depend on both the

[109] John R. P. French and Bertram Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," *Studies in Social Power*, 1959, 150–167.

allowable rules of engagement and support from the local government. A credible, sufficient threat is easier to communicate to an opponent at the tactical level when there is a clearly defined strategy. In addition to the significance of ease of communication, a familiarity with the opponent allows a better assessment of what will be seen as credible and sufficient to enforce the threat accompanying the deterrent.[110] It is this familiarity with an opponent along with the ability to tactically deter him that distinguishes tactical deterrence from deterrence at a strategic level.

Here, for example, is how I coerced the local Afghans in my area of operations to establish an Afghan Local Police (ALP) force. I could not have done this without being locally invested in the area and without the effective communication loop resulting from my constant presence.[111] I had serious problems raising an ALP because of Taliban influence and intimidation in the area. Initially, I attempted to use threats, specifically the threat of aggressive searches of any buildings inhabited by those I suspected of helping the Taliban. My aim was to put enough pressure on the people to force them to build an ALP. I attempted to use this technique to coerce the development of an ALP over a two-month period, but was still unable to develop an ALP even with the support of the Governor and Chief of Police. However, as I continued to interact with the locals, I also realized that I had been framing the development of an ALP incorrectly. Instead of using threats, I needed to use promises in order to achieve my desired effect. It was coming to the realization that rewards, based on an in-depth understanding of the needs of the population, would carry more weight than threats that enabled me to be successful.[112]

The necessary feedback to identify this flaw, and the need to switch to a carrot instead of a stick approach, was greatly helped by the fact that I was dealing with the population on a daily basis and a certain degree of honesty had developed between the village elders and myself. Much of this honesty stemmed from my decision to fast during

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[110]Kim Cragin and Scott Gerwehr. *Dissuading Terror: Strategic Influence and the Struggle against Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004), 13–25.

[111] Afghan Local Police or ALP is an Afghan Ministry of Interior initiative that is meant to add to the effective number of police in the area. They are recruited from the local population and deputized by the Provincial Governor to work with SF units and the police to bring about better security.

[112] French and Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," 167.

Ramadan, as I described in the Introduction. It was during this time that I found that the elders were willing to engage me on a variety of topics, like Islam and Christianity, which allowed U.S. to build a better foundation for mutual understanding. My fasting also supported my narrative that ODA and I were not there to fundamentally alter their lives. Rather, my fasting was a tangible proof of my respect not only for them (as elders), but also for their religion.

What grew out of the relationship that developed during this period was a mutually beneficial agreement. I promised not to search any houses and the village elders promised to develop an ALP and secure their own villages effectively. This co-dependence was grounded in much more realistic expectations than those we had previously tried to develop. The result was not only the development of an ALP, and increased security in the area, but a greater trust between U.S. troops and locals in the region.

D. STRATEGIC LESSONS OF VSO

VSO compels the people implementing it to actually engage at a personal level with the population they are tasked with influencing. The importance of this cannot be overestimated. Liking and cultivating a relationship with the people with whom you are dealing conveys respect. Because dehumanization establishes unrealistic expectations of the population in general, threats levied based on these expectations will inherently fail. Hence, dehumanization undermines what is needed in order to achieve the tactical successes required to influence the population. Threats may be necessary, but they have to be realistic. When viewed through this lens, the essential communication facilitated by VSO is essential to any population-influencing strategy.

Why is it important to understand and like someone that you are trying to influence? The answer to this requires discussion. Nowhere in military doctrine is it required that someone understand or like the person they are working with. Often, doctrine bends over backwards to overcome any cultural reservations that a U.S. service member might have regarding a target population. It rarely focuses on similarities and how to communicate through those similarities, rather than despite differences. By requiring communication and personal investment, VSO can be conducted in a way that

the ties success of an ODA to cooperation with the local population, instead of meeting metrics that only matter to the U.S. military.

Inadvertently, VSO manages to succeed outside the usual U.S. policy constructs. Instead of treating VSO sites as strategic hamlets, or game pieces on a map, it is more prudent to recognize that VSO works because it is localized strategy that focuses on personality and personal relationships.[113] By leveraging these relationships, it creates a counter to the temptation to dehumanize. It is through this leverage that VSO gains real strategic effectiveness. Most argue that influencing a population is essential to successful counter-insurgency strategy. VSO offers the best available platform for affecting this influence, community by community.

In counterinsurgency operations, or unconventional warfare, a person must influence the surrounding population. Why influence is not broken down into a common sense approach that uses terms like 'us' and 'the insurgents' is beyond this author, especially since it naturally follows that when someone likes and respects you, it is easier to influence them. We see this effect in conditions established by VSO. Hence, an argument can be made that when you establish the conditions for someone to like and respect you, that target will listen to the message you are conveying without any undue interference. Once this essential element is met, VSO can move on to the larger goal of influencing the population to reject your mutual opponents.

E. UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Tamping down dehumanization was an unintended benefit of VSO, which occurred after my decision to fast for Ramadan and was reinforced as I involved myself in the lives of the Afghans surrounding my base in Khakrez. I did not consciously set out to create a counter to the likelihood of dehumanization, but as I reflected on my deployment after the fact I realized how powerful a factor dehumanization is during operations that are intended to influence a population.

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[113] Joshua Thiel, "Withdrawal and Win: 'Go' for victory in Afghanistan," *Small Wars Journal* (February 2013): 1, http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/withdraw-and-win-%E2%80%9Cgo%E2%80%9D-for-victory-in-afghanistan (accessed March 20 2013)

Essentially this chapter reviewed five factors. The first three were the VSO attributes of mutual security, consistent presence, and investment in the area. Together they counter dehumanization. The other two factors, humanizing the local population and attempting to build a group with them to fight the insurgents, helped achieve tactical success when it comes to influencing the population. All together these factors offer an exportable idea for how to counter dehumanization and create conditions necessary for influencing a population beyond just Afghanistan. These factors are not unique to VSO. Rather, any strategy designed to influence a population must consider both how to make the troops conducting that operation care about the area and how to get them to effectively and immediately counter incidents of dehumanization which are so common during conflicts.

For my ODA, the development of an ALP in Khakrez amounted to more than just the creation of an additional layer of security. It was also a symbol representing the choice of the local Afghan elders to support the government over the insurgents in the area. The Shura announcing the creation of the ALP was attended by the Kandahar Provincial Governor, and an assistant to the Minister of the Interior (MOI) among others. During this meeting, Mullah Agha, a local village elder and former Taliban commander, stood up and said, "the worst thing that happened to the Taliban in Khakrez is Captain Alex coming here." [114] His opinion of me and my ODA was not based on the fact we had been able to kill and capture the most insurgents in the area. Neither did he praise U.S. because we had built the most wells or delivered the most aid to the people of Khakrez. Rather Mullah Agha's sentiment reflected the fact that my ODA had bought into my idea of building relationships with the surrounding population. We would talk to anyone who visited our VSO site, which showed in how we operated on a daily basis and directly contributed to our success.

What do anecdotes like mine about VSO mean? Add enough of them up and they should make clear how VSO prevents dehumanization and how essential the prevention

[114] Mullah Agha had commanded insurgent forces in several provinces, including Helmand until approximately 2005 when he returned home and retired, citing a need to keep his two sons from following his path.

of dehumanization is to influencing a population. Rather than creating ink spots of security as the aim of counterinsurgent strategy. VSO establishes investment *in* an area. As this chapter indicates, it is this investment that is critical to both countering dehumanization and achieving effective communication. Without both of these components, influencing a population is impossible. One difference between using 'ink spots' of security and designing a strategy based on countering dehumanization is that to really influence a population requires U.S. to stop thinking about using locations strategically and instead think about using people strategically. Counter-dehumanization strategy invests in the people, which is very different than just using the people who happen to be found in strategic locations. This distinction is actually key.

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V. CONCLUSION

> It was very difficult for a different-looking, different-acting, different-speaking, different-thinking person to be accepted in that conservative, highly traditional culture. There were just too many slips to be made, too many oversights to be misconstrued, and too many attitudes to be changed for real acceptance to come easy. I felt that this gesture from some of the older men of the village was a signal that my team's efforts to get along and be helpful were really being appreciated.[115]

A. CULTURAL RESPECT

The demands of population-centric warfare require a new emphasis on countering dehumanization. Although this emphasis cannot guarantee influence, it establishes an excellent starting point for anyone to be able to interact with, communicate with, and, ultimately, influence another person. This factor is also independent of whether the two people share a similar cultural background or not. Soldiers expected to influence a local population should be trained in how to respect the culture they will be operating in. But achieving respect is different from simply learning about a list of cultural norms that apply to that culture.

By training to counter the formation of in-groups and out-groups, and the dehumanization that is likely to follow, a soldier should be able to take information about the population and properly understand it without bias. Once a soldier is dealing with a population without bias, his communication and influence techniques will be improved.

The difference between cultural training as the memorization of a list of cultural traits and cultural training designed to counter dehumanization is simple. With the former, one is expected to learn about what makes members of another culture different. With the latter, one wants to accept the culture for what it is. Recognizing this slight, but essential, framing distinction can help prevent the first steps of in-group and out-group formation and will allow soldiers communicating with locals and adversaries alike to be able to better understand what rewards or deterrents would be more effective in any given situation.

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[115] Donovan, *Once a Warrior King*, 256.

For instance, when I fasted for Ramadan I demonstrated my respect for Islam and the culture of the Afghans around me. The respect I earned allowed me to better communicate both threats and rewards, and helped establish the conditions for my success in establishing an ALP and building support for the government in the area. This better communication was not a result of my having an anthropologist's understanding of Afghanistan. I had little ability to speak Pashto, the local language, so this was not a factor. It was instead the credibility that was given to me by the Afghan locals because I made it obvious that I respected them; they in turn gave me respect. Indeed, the risk that the elders in Khakrez took to establish an ALP would not have been possible without the trust built from our mutual respect and my time in the district with them.

B. IS DEHUMANIZATION A SLIPPERY SLOPE?

Is dehumanization as simple as just using derogatory terms? Is it a slippery slope? If you start applying out-group tendencies, will you eventually dehumanize your enemy? The research on this matter is unclear. However, there is evidence that indicates dehumanization is necessary for terrorist groups to recruit members to commit violence.[116] What is also clear is that once an in-group and out-group are created, even artificially, tensions between the two are reinforced and can escalate quickly.[117] Once two groups are created, the use of derogatory terms can set in motion this escalation.[118] Whether the terms are based on race, gender, tribe, etc., their use is essential to the increase in tensions.[119] History suggests that even the relatively common use of derogatory terms during warfare represents the first step in defining the existence of an out-group, something that needs to be avoided in population-centric warfare.

Even during the initial stages of dehumanization, the use of derogatory terms causes unrealistic expectations that prevent the crafting of a message that will be properly

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[116] Fathali Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration," *American Psychologist*, Feburary – March 205, 161–169.

[117] Berreby, *Us and Them*, 158.

[118] Sherif, *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation*, 155–184.

[119] Berreby, *Us and Them*,160.

decoded by the audience.[120] So, even if the more negative consequences of dehumanization — genocide or massacres — do not occur, starting down the road to dehumanization will still have an impact. For our purposes, it does not matter whether the slippery slope of dehumanization gets more slippery, because even in its initial stages it negatively impacts a force's ability to influence a population.

C. PUTTING IT TOGETHER

The people discussed in this thesis: Bell, Lansdale, Gill, Donovan, and others were able to leverage and influence populations and people during irregular conflict. Success can be explained by a myriad of factors. Personal attributes, for instance, cannot be discounted. However, an essential part of their success was their ability to deal with people effectively. They interacted with people, even when they came from different cultures, as members of an in-group. As a result, they built a solid base of respect. They invested themselves in the population, and they worked with and ensured that they understood the population.

The cultural training U.S. forces receive often focuses on the cultural differences between 'us' and 'them'. However, after World War II, as part of their preparation for duty in occupied Japan, U.S. troops were shown the film "Our Job in Japan." The film concentrated on similarities between the two cultures in an effort to help troops relate to the local Japanese. "The most striking aspect of the film… was its fundamentally optimistic message. Neither blood, culture, nor history drove the Japanese to war, but rather socialization and indoctrination of recent vintage. When all was said, reeducation did not in fact seem to be such an insuperable task."[121] It is this depiction of the Japanese and their troops as human that represented a distinct shift away from their dehumanization, which had been such an important feature of wartime propaganda films.[122] This reframing of cultural training as a discussion of proper etiquette, rather

[120] Schramm, "How Communication Works," 51.

[121] John W Dower. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton , 1999), 217.

[122] Ibid, 213.

than as an introduction to a foreign culture offers a far better platform for how to influence others than beginning with a list of differences between the cultures.

It is too simple to condemn dehumanization as bad. However, currently there are no training programs tied to our population-centric warfare goals that discuss dehumanization as something that has been reducing our ability to successfully influence the people we have been tasked to work with. This thesis has aimed to provide a jumping off point for that discussion. Dehumanization creates unrealistic expectations by essentially reinforcing an others' membership in an out-group. Those unrealistic expectations result in an inability to communicate effectively. This inability to communicate limits any ability to influence the population, and hinders the successful execution of population-centric warfare. Admittedly, preventing dehumanization may not guarantee influence over a population, but it does remove a major impediment.

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