

**DOES CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING MATTER AS A TOOL THAT
INFLUENCE MILITARY ASPIRATION IN FUTURE
COUNTER INSURGENCY OPERATION**

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INTRODUCTION

Knowing our adversaries cultures prior to engage in a battlefield, may able to put any security force of the world to be as the upper hand over its adversaries to that particular battle. In addition to that, the degree of how much information about adversary's culture ones security force need to gather is seemingly cannot be determined from past histories alone but in-situ assessment will vary depending upon different situation, the spot and the people involved. Beside organization structure which attempts to integrate organizational functions and activities to achieve efficiency, organizations also possess 'cultures', which refers and values that emerge in the organization over time.

Organizational culture's well accepted definition is 'a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered, or developed by given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.'¹ In short, some think of organizational culture as 'the way we do things around here'. The elements of organizational culture include value, expectations (roles and rules of behaviour), the customs and rituals or 'traditions', the stories, myths, metaphors and symbols concerning the history of the organization, the key figures, and the everyday shop talk or 'lingo' within the organization.²

In relation to that, it is suggested that it is pivotal for any security force to understand its adversary's culture since culture can be as a tool to future military aspiration which in the case history of Malaysia is by having understanding organizational culture of Malaya Communist Party, Malaysia has the edge over its adversaries initiative and efforts that later was used to undermine and terminated MCP military action in Malaysia. The knowledge and applications of organizational culture are defined in numerous ways. Richard and Mills coined that organizational culture is knowledge of local conditions and cultural mores in crucial in understanding constraints and opportunities, care should be taken not to overstate this 'culture' aspect in favour of hard intelligence and to realise that local actions are intrinsically shaped by incentives and disincentives. Both of them also stated that

¹ Edgar H. Stein (1985). *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. 4th Edition. Wiley Education. p56.

² Kim-Yin Chan, Star Soh and Regena Ramaya. *Military Leadership in The 21st Century*. Cengage Learning, Organizational Culture. p 199-200.

knowledge of operating conditions has to include the nexus between criminal and political groups, and of the overall local 'operating system' of politics, personalities, tribe, religion, power and money.³

There are a number of anthropological schools of thought with varying definitions of culture and explanations of how culture is produced and reproduced. "Culture are the total pattern of human behaviour and its products embodied in thought, speech, action, and artefacts (technologies) and dependent upon man's capacity for leaning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations through the use of tools, language, and systems of abstract thought, the body of customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits constituting a distinct complex of tradition of a racial, religious, or social group, a complex of typical behaviour or standardized social characteristics peculiar to a specific group, occupation or profession, sex, age, grade, or social class".⁴

Another definition is, "culture refers to the ways of life of people in a given society, to their social heritage. According to the classic definition by the anthropologist Tylor, culture is 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities acquired by men as a member of society'. In any society there exists a body of knowledge, ideas, values (conceptions of desirability), attitudes, customs, myths, prejudices, and the like, which make up the nonmaterial aspects of the culture at that time and place".⁵

Lastly culture refers to the socially transmitted habits or mind, traditions, and preferred methods of operations that are more or less specific to a particular geographically based security community. "Culture may be qualified for more precise usage, as in strategic culture or political culture. Strategic culture is the result of opportunities, of resources, of the skill with which those opportunities, of resources, of the skill with which those opportunities and resources have been managed, and of the lessons which a society decides its unfolding history should teach. To a considerable degree societies are prisoners of the past. Policymakers have been educated both formally and by life experiences in their particular society to expect certain relationships generally to hold true".⁶ Ancient strategist like Sun Tzu asserted that knowing own adversaries aspirations is having advantage over them as if having key to penetrate and weaken their main effort.

³ David Richards and Greg Mills. *Victory Among People, lesson from Countering Insurgency and Stabilising Fragile States*. Rusi. Knowledge, Culture and Incentives. P 12.

⁴ Philip Babcock Gove, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of The English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, Massachusetts, G & C. Meriam Company, 1971. p 552.

⁵ Charles H. Coates and Roland J. Pellegrin, *Military Sociology: a study of American Military Institutions and Military Life* (Maryland: Social Science Press, 1965). p 26-27.

⁶ Colin Gray, *War, Peace, and Victory* (New York : Simon and Schuster, 1990). p 45-46.

“Prior to challenging another team or individual, study them, get to know them. Inform yourself about all aspects of the opponents’ environment. Base your strategies on awareness and gathered information, regardless of the time or cost involved. Consult with others who have competed against this opponent. Know about your opponent’s desire, hopes, and aspirations. This information must work together with your intuitive sense of what’s best for the group”.

Sun Tzu

The culture awareness is as important as situational awareness in a battlefield. According to Pierre Bourdieu’s, everybody is an agent that interacts in societies using accepted practices, actions that have specific objectives and meaning. Practices are based on culturally accepted strategies for operating in particular environment at a particular time. Practice, then, is the objectification of a selected strategy. Strategies are a function of social structures, sets and systems of norm and thought that have historical context and content. Structures help human beings make sense of their environment. When faced with a given structure people select and employ a strategy or strategies that are culturally acceptable and achieve the desired result”.⁷ History, the physical environment, and technologies determine the content of structures. Successful practices are reproduced when confronted with objective conditions, in a particular environment, that fit into identifiable structures that have been culturally learned. In the mind, the objective conditions are placed into familiar structures, which enable people to act appropriately, that is, to select the most fitting strategy, and then to put it into practice.

However, agents do not simply reproduce practices based on the accepted strategies. They sometimes employ culturally unacceptable strategies, adapt strategies to nuances in environment, and improvise new strategies, which result in new practices. Bourdieu refers to this ability to organize strategies, to adapt, innovate, and improvise as the habitus. The habitus is a cognitive process that identifies strategies and reproduces practices based on the objective perceptions of the real world. It produces variations of practices and strategies based on the variations and nuances of the objective world, the degree to which a selected strategy achieves the results desired, the willingness and motivation to improvise, and the unique make-up of each individual.

Notably, by understanding adversaries’ culture, own security force organization is able to maximize its power to topple its adversaries with less military effort. In general, culture do varies significantly among nations and within states, the martial spirit is not constant, and the martial spirits can be diminished or enhanced by numerous factors”.⁸ The willingness of the

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (London:Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁸ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: The Modern Library, 1937) p 739.

people of a nation to risk their lives in battle varies from nation to nation and war to war, and it can be argued that certain cultures have maintained through the centuries a stronger martial spirit than other nations. The frequency of war, the type of war, geographic circumstance, the wealth of the nation, the quality of life, the political system, and numerous other factors influence the martial spirit of a nation. "The martial spirit may or may not explain success or failure in war. However, it is necessary element to fight war, and one of the factors necessary to generate combat power. Ancient Sparta, medieval Prussia, and modern Germany have historically been considered nations with a strong martial spirit".⁹

Culture makes the objective world comprehensible by inculcating structures and constructs. It influences behaviour by providing agents with strategies and establishing boundaries between the normal and the abnormal, between the normal and the abnormal, between the permissible and the impermissible. In war it is necessary for a nation to understand the tenets, dynamics, fictions, divisions, and exigencies of its own primary culture to maximize its power. While the martial spirit has not always brought these states military or political success, it was nevertheless an important constituent in their ability to fight. As long as wars are made up of battles that require men to enter the battlefield, the martial spirit will be an essential component of a nation's ability to fight a war. Hence, political leaders need to understand and protect the martial spirit of its people.

Another important aspect relating to exploiting culture and local dynamics is treatment of the enemy. "Given that many insurgents are 'accidental' and fight for personal or local motivations, the wholesale killing of insurgents can in fact be detrimental to acquiring popular support. For an example in Dhofar, Sultan Qaboos introduced an amnesty promising a cash grant and full immunity for surrendering insurgents".¹⁰ Many of those who surrender actually ended up joining the SAS. "Similarly, the Vietnamese Chieu Hoi amnesty programme aimed to procure information and recruits for the pro South irregular militias".¹¹ "The British frequently employed capture Malay guerrillas to track down their former comrades in the jungle".¹²

From good intelligence alone, a nation does not win wars but through understanding one culture, the security authority can design and reform dysfunctional culture identified within the insurgency organization i.e. in the case of Malaysia is MCP. Ironically, yet a nation cannot win battles and the war without a good intelligence system if its adversaries have the abilities to apply overwhelming military power. Without an effective intelligence system to provide accurate, timely, and useful information to the

⁹ William McDougall, *The instinct of Pugnacity*, reprinted in *War*, ed. Leon Bramson and George W. Goethals (New York: Basic Books, 1964), p 33-64.

¹⁰ Ladwig, 'Supporting Allies in Counterinsurgency,' p.73

¹¹ Hughes & Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate,' p.7

¹² Hughes & Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate,' p.16

military and government, conventional forces and institutions are virtually blind in a counterinsurgency campaign. "Today we have an impressive tactical and operational intelligence system built primarily around air reconnaissance, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and space surveillance systems that can go deep behind the enemy lines and use a variety of means (imagery, heat sensing, etc.) to locate the enemy's vehicles, larger units, aircraft and depots, and the like. Although the high-tech assets can bring in a lot of intelligence, they are also exceptionally expensive and have routinely failed to provide the level of intelligence that was promised or expected".¹³

The insurgent rarely has front line or industrial assets or complex logistics to defend. He'll have arms caches and headquarters but these are normally carefully hidden and indistinguishable from any local business or farm. The insurgent's protection lies in cover and concealment and dispersion. He scatters his stock of weapons, ammunition, and explosives in numerous small caches and he expects to lose a few of them. His headquarters has basic communications equipment. In this types of war, it's normally the insurgent who has the intelligence advantage versus the high-tech, conventional Western army. The insurgent, hidden as he is in the guise of an innocent civilian, refuses to present an easy target to the high-tech surveillance and reconnaissance assets. Moreover, he has a host of other advantages. The insurgent is on his home turf and is completely at home with the terrain, language, and local customs. If the insurgency has strong popular support, than a large part of the population becomes a direct intelligence asset. The insurgent has the opportunity to keep the military and police under constant close surveillance.

"Insurgents often operate highly effective counterintelligence program to prevent the security force from slipping agents and informers into their rank. Let only a few, highly trusted colleagues know of the whereabouts of the insurgent leaders. Carry out attacks with unemployed teenagers hired by lower-level insurgent officers who simply pass out the weapons, put a few hundred dollars up front, and tell the kid to fire a few rounds at the sentry post at midnight or to set up a rocket pointed at security forces' base and set a timer for five minutes, enough time to get away. Such rank and file insurgents have little idea who hired them and have almost no information to provide if captured. Finally, if the insurgents catch a government informer or agent, they can execute him and display the body in the middle of town so that everyone gets the message about what happens to informers. Insurgents only need to publicly kill a few of the population who collaborate with government to cow the overwhelming mass of the population".¹⁴

¹³ James S. Corum. *Fighting The War on Terror 'Counterinsurgency Strategy'*. Zenith Press. Intelligence. p 121-124.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p 125.

From somewhat reminiscence of Malaysian and other countries history, the lessons learnt from those countries past counterinsurgency operations was that the best intelligence sources against insurgents has been former insurgents who have 'turned' and thrown in their lot with the government. No one knows the insurgent leadership, membership, organization, or tactic better than a former insurgent. Turning members of the leadership is especially valuable because it is especially demoralizing for the insurgents and lends credibility to the government forces. "The U.S. forces fighting the Filipino *insurrectos* in the early 1900s made rapid progress breaking the insurgency in some provinces when they convinced some insurgent leaders to switch sides and surrender their troops and weapons. Often the ex-insurgents became some of the staunchest government supporters.

The U.S. forces arranged the surrender of Juan Cailles, one of the most dangerous insurgent leaders on Luzon. Cailles was given amnesty and larger cash reward, and made a district governor. He then became one of the most pro-American of the Filipino leaders, and took to hunting down the remaining insurgents with enthusiasm".¹⁵ In Malaya and Kenya, the British were able to convince a significant number of the insurgents to change sides and join the government forces. This played a key role in defeating both insurgencies.

The counter insurgency effort in Malaya began with the British Counter Insurgency Warfare (CIW) campaign in Malaya (1948-1960). The conduct of that CIW campaign is considered as a model of a successful counterinsurgency campaign. The British government, over time, tuned a large, popular insurgent movement into a tiny, isolated forced. In the end, Malaya made the transition from a colony to a peaceful and stable democracy. To achieve this end, the British had to study a culture both side for the local people and insurgent tactics, including the large-scale resettlement of part of the rural population, the deployment of large numbers of troops and police, and the establishment of an extensive civic action program to improve the lot of the disaffected people.

A key feature of the British strategy was the development of a comprehensive media campaign to undermine the rebels and win popular support for the government. By any reckoning, the government media campaign deserves a good deal of the credit for defeating the insurgency. By understanding the need and culture terms of the insurgent, I will take my country Malaysia as one of the successfulness counter insurgency operations in eliminating insurgent effectively and successfully (1948-1960).

¹⁵ Brian M. Linn, *The Philippine War 1899-1902* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 200) p 296.

In relation to that, by understanding the Malaya Communist Party aims and strategies are the essentials to undermine their efforts in harbouring fallacies in the mind of Malaysians especially the Chinese community in Malaya. The aim of the communist party is world domination. The Communist parties of the world plan to achieve this aim by winning control of the government of non-communist countries in 3 ways. Win control of the country through overt and legal constitutional struggle, Win control of the country by illegal armed struggle through revolutionary war, or a combination of both.

The MCP strategy was to conduct aggressive warfare in the interior to force out the British planters, miners, administration, police and others from villages and small towns. Among the measures taken by MCP were disruption of economy and government through violence, setting up guerrilla bases in evacuated areas, enlarging territorial expansion areas such as in villages, towns, and sections of interior, anticipated to lead to breakdown of economy and security, and seizing power following the breakdown of government.

As a counter measures to the MCP strategies, the main effort taken was by understanding the cultural appreciations of the situation in Malaya through a plan known as the Briggs plan. Lieutenant General Sir Harold Briggs, coordinate and direct the anti-bandit operations of the police and fighting forces. Briggs arrived in Kuala Lumpur on April 3rd 1950. Briggs has suggested a long term plan to build up a comprehensive organisation as well as a short term plan. Briggs recognising that the Communist armed forces in Malaya relied very largely for food, money, information and propaganda on the Min Yuen, Briggs argued that it was necessary in order to end the Emergency to eliminate both the Min Yuen and the MRLA (Malayan Races Liberation Army).

The reason why the Min Yuen was able to exist and function in populated areas was largely because the population as a whole lacked confidence in the ability of the forces of law and order to protect them against gangsters, Communist extortion and terrorism. Briggs argued, security and with it confidence and information, could only be restored and maintained by firstly, by demonstrating Britain's firm intention to fulfil her obligation in defence of Malaya against both external attack and internal disorder, secondly, by extending effective administration and control of all populated areas which involves a large measure of squatter resettlement into compact group; a strengthening of the local administration; provision of road communication in isolated populated areas; setting up of police posts in these areas and thirdly, by exploiting these measures with good propaganda, both constructive and destructive".¹⁶

¹⁶ Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948-1960*, Frederick Muller, London, 1975, pp 237-238.

In sum, the outline plan, broadly, was to clear the country, step by step, from south to north by dominating the populated areas and building up a feeling of complete security in them, with the objective of obtaining a steady and increasing flow of information from all sources. So, by breaking up the Min Yuen within the populated areas and isolating the guerrillas from their food, information and supply organisation in the populated areas, the affect was it destroyed the guerrillas' initiative that forced them to attack the Security Forces on their own ground that opens their weaknesses at the end.

Another counter measure taken by Brigg Plan was population and resources control whereby Chinese community eating culture was used against the Chinese born MCP whereby fresh vegetable as well as rice were controlled by the British authority at that time. This is the measures taken to separate the population from the communist insurgency. Among the measures are resettlement program that involved almost 423,000 Chinese squatters were move to 410 new villages that new villages were fenced-up and guarded to deny the foods, supplies and other logistic requirements and information being past to the communist. The second measure was registration of population that everyone above the age of 12 is required to register and issues with an identity card that separated the MCP with the population. The third measure was control of foods supplies that flow in the villages and other places. Villagers going to their works area were limited to cooked food and only allowed to carry food enough for that day that forced the MCP as a restriction in acquisition of foods and supplies".¹⁷ The fourth initiative was establishing Federal Joint Intelligent Committee that was aimed to examine means of strengthening intelligence and Police Special Branch technique.

It was a combined effort of Security Force and Civil Departments to supervise the collation, evaluation and dissemination of both strategic and tactical information and to advise the Director of Operations on emergency intelligence matters".¹⁸ These was remained and continued in General Templar Regime. The intelligence operations were successful in providing all vital information about Communist Terrorists activities during Emergency and had resulted mass destruction on guerrillas side. These results were marked as the main factors led the victory of Federal Government.

Another counter measure took was in aspect of socio-economic development. The measures were taken among others are the initiative of development program of communities in Malaya. The development in the rural areas and new settlement were initiated. These programs brought opportunities for a better educations, health services, housing, water supply

¹⁷ Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948-1960*, Frederick Muller, London, 1975, pp 391-397.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp 359-360.

and electricity to the rural population. This is something which is new to the population. The second initiative was the provisioning of land. The provision of land to new villagers gives the opportunity of opening up of jungle land for cultivation. This is not possible during the squatter's era".¹⁹

The next essential counter measure was the psychological warfare of which is the deciding factor to the victor of Malayan campaign. The objective of that psychological warfare was to undermine the moral of the Malaya Communist Party (MCP) members. Psychological warfare campaigns using leaflets, radio and aerial broadcast were conducted and intensified to encourage defection and the surrendering of the MCP. It is a success in which the MCP leaders impose death penalty for those who read the government leaflets".²⁰

The counter measures in the Brigg Plan were deemed successful when a peace agreement between the government of Malaysia, Thailand and MCP was signed on the Dec 2, 1989. The essence of the peace agreement was the surrender of MCP and termination of its military action and operation in Malaysia and Thailand. Chin Peng, who has not been seen in public since 1955, signs on behalf of the MCP. The peace agreement between Malaysia – Thailand and MCP represents the final victory for the Malaysian and Thailand in its 13 years of insurgency war with the MCP. Due to the lack of support from the peninsular Malaysia population has fail the armed insurrection. The ideology brought by the MCP is not welcome by the people especially the Malays. The communism temptation of the Chinese community could not gather enough support to sustain its armed rebellion. The concepts of violence and to instilled fear among the community and population of Peninsular Malaysia has miscarry and unstable the majority of the multi-racial population. Chin Peng appears to return to the jungle but is believed to be engaged in commercial activity in southern Thailand.

In a nutshell, the conduct of counterinsurgency operations is decisively influenced by culture. In fact, it is impossible to understand the behaviour of a nation in war without some understanding of its culture. The idea that an insurgency win or loses by its ability to win the hearts and minds of the people, by understanding that, indirectly we already create eyes and ears for successful of the operations. Some insurgencies might be defeated by sheer brute force; this option is ruled out by any Western democracy today on the grounds of morality and practicality.

¹⁹ Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla warfare, The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1990, pp180-184.

²⁰ Ibid, pp 180-185.

The Malayan Emergency was the only war the West won against Communism. Many people remember Western failures like Korea and Vietnam but few nowadays recall the victory in Malaya. It was an intense 12-year jungle war fought by the British, British Commonwealth and Malay forces against the army of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) led by Communist fanatic Chin Peng. The result of the war was the establishment of the independent democratic nation of Malaya, later to become the present day Malaysia. Ironically, here in Malaysia, while often ruthless in combat with communism, the British over here, studied the culture and make local people together with them by established a friendly relationship with the general population, based on mutual respect. This, and the prospect of national independence, was preferable to the terror and death inflicted by the Communists.

CONCLUSION

By having the edge of knowledge on local conditions, cultural constraints, opportunities, a wise strategic move is realised to understand the knowledge of operating conditions, understanding adversaries culture, we are indeed are ahead. In any adversary culture, every member is as an agent that potentially can leverage its practices, strategies for operations, how its adapt, innovate, and improvise its strategies, are strategic advantage to us in the past. The reminiscence of Malaya two Emergencies were successfully overcome because we have the wisdom on adversaries' leaderships, memberships, organization culture and tactics. It was owed to the advantage to manipulate adversaries' efforts through information leverage (media campaign). As a result, our force was able to dominate not only the physical ground but also adversary psyche, to win their heart and mind that is, defeated them in their own ideology game. So, the triumph over adversaries in two counterinsurgency campaigns was victorious because we understand on how to shatter adversaries' organization after breaking their organizational culture.

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