

Considerations for Planning Humanitarian Operations in Hybrid Warfare

Hybrid warfare, a military strategy that includes conventional, irregular, and cyberwarfare, is currently being practiced in many parts of the world, most notably in the Ukraine and Syria. The conduct of humanitarian operations in hybrid war zones is especially problematic because of the combination of kinetic operations and subversive efforts. With the added complexity of these subversive belligerents, including extremist splinter organizations, large scale humanitarian operations often do not exist at all. The reasons for a lack of humanitarian intervention is often because of the presence of an occupying belligerent force who not only possess an unsympathetic attitude toward a population, but may also be persistently forcing a political or ideological agenda on the them. In many of these cases, the occupying force intentionally terrifies the population, causing wide-spread displacement within the area, and eventually, may contribute to massive refugee movements out of the entire region.

If the U.S. commits to undertake a substantial humanitarian intervention within a hybrid war, then it should be integral to the success of U.S. strategic objectives, policies and long-term outcomes. U.S. military involvement in any humanitarian operations are also inherently based on ethical foundations. A consequentialist approach focuses on the desired outcome, and within this approach a utilitarian-based cost-benefit analysis is essential. In other words, within these large scale humanitarian efforts, what is the best course of action that achieves the best consequences for the most people? Simply stated, the ethical consequences of humanitarian military operations during a hybrid war must be tied directly to strategic policy outcomes.

Why involve the military in humanitarian operations during a hybrid war? Successful humanitarian operations require a reasonably safe environment, no matter what type of war. During hybrid warfare, multiple players and numerous belligerent groups are operating within the area of operations, including those imbedded within the population. Conducting humanitarian operations in a hybrid war is often within a chaotic and dangerous environment. To actively pursue operations to relieve widespread suffering and end atrocities, a capable military force must provide this safe environment on a hybrid battleground.

As discussed, successful humanitarian operations are a major part of reaching policy objectives in hybrid warfare. However, in hybrid warfare, the side that controls populations and holds decisive terrain, typically cities, has a significant advantage. Part of the problem is that doctrine does not adequately address how to conduct humanitarian operations in a hybrid environment, and there also exists a notable gap in literature.

This paper discusses the specific challenges of conducting humanitarian operations in hybrid warfare, and discusses possible preventive and reactive methods to conduct these essential operations, specifically within the context of ethical and strategic purposes. Although there will never be one method or solution that applies to all hybrid wars, it is imperative that policy makers and military planners began to more closely examine humanitarian operations in hybrid warfare.

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Biography

Scott Porter is an associate professor and team leader in the Department of Command and Leadership at The U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He is a retired Army Armor officer, a veteran of three conflicts, and a former board member at the National World War One Museum at the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri. In 2013 he was the Civilian Educator of the Year for the Department of Command and Leadership, The U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command.

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By Scott A. Porter

Andrew F. Krepinevich, president of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, stated in his February 18, 2016, article in the Wall Street Journal, that “the Army's biggest problem is its declining ability to wage the kind of protracted irregular wars that America's enemies increasingly prefer to fight.”¹ Even Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, Unified Land Operations (2011) states the most likely security threats that Army forces will encounter will be within an irregular warfare environment that includes hybrid forces; a mix of regular, irregular, criminal, and terrorist forces in various combinations, usually seeking to fight a protracted war in populated areas.²

Therefore, it is apparent that the United States military must be capable of operating within an irregular war against hybrid forces, including in support of large-scale humanitarian operations to relieve suffering and prevent more refugee crises. This is important for three reasons; mass migrations of populations and their potential impact on national security, the ethical considerations in the planning of humanitarian operations, and the necessity for the government and military to be proactive in complex emergencies.

Migration as a Weapon

Syria stands out as a current example of hybrid warfare (HW).³ The war has caused over half of the prewar population to displace with over five million Syrians fleeing their country.⁴ The magnitude of the Syrian mass exodus has strained the ability of those countries who care for and feed them, and has brought to light significant security concerns for Europe and the United States.⁵

Because of a multiplicity of hostile forces in HW, a chaotic environment ensues whereby the innocents suffer the most. Any war zone is a dangerous environment to civilians, but in HW

the side that controls populations and holds decisive terrain, often large cities, has a significant advantage.⁶ Occupying hostile forces often intentionally deny food, shelter, and medical aid to the population. Even worse, as in the Syria example, hostile forces more often than not possess an unsympathetic attitude toward the local population by committing atrocities or sadistically forcing a political or ideological agenda upon them. They intentionally terrify the population, causing wide-spread displacement within the area, and eventually contribute to massive refugee movements out of the entire region.⁷

Conventional forces can also add to the chaos. General Philip Breedlove, Commander of the U.S. European Command and Supreme Allied Commander for NATO, asserts that in Syria the Russia and Syrian forces are using migration as a weapon. These large population movements are deliberately planned to mask the movement of criminals, terrorists, and foreign fighters. Just as importantly, they cause the other countries to react to massive immigration populations. The result is a humanitarian crisis like we have seen coming out of Syria. Dozens of countries, mostly in Turkey and Europe, are desperately trying to establish policies, procedures, and make-shift programs to house, feed, and care for millions of refugees. As a result, these massive movements of people have created national security concerns throughout much of the world, including in the U.S.⁸

Ethical Considerations

There is also an ethical dimension to the plight of refugees, and there exist strong differences of opinion about refugee movements. The New York-based advocacy group *Human Rights Watch*, in reference to the Syrian refugee crisis, stated “Forcing people to remain in a war zone, where they risk death and injury, is no solution to the challenge of protecting Syrians fleeing their county”.⁹ On February 9, 2016, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees cited

international law, in that countries should admit “all civilians who are fleeing danger and seeking international protection.”¹⁰ To complicate the problem, protecting the fleeing Syrians may be helping the hostile forces that made them flee. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu recently told reporters that “with every refugee that we accept, in a way, we would be contributing to this ethnic cleansing aim. If this is a strategy to change the demography in Syria, then we all have to be vigilant against it.”¹¹

These aforementioned points bring to light the crux of humanitarian aid in hybrid war, the need to align strategic objectives and execute actions that provide the best outcome or consequences for the pre-determined end state. Consequentialism, the most common form of ethics in the contemporary Western world, focuses on the end state. Within consequentialism are two basic forms, egoism and utilitarianism. Egoism concerns achieving self-interests as being the most favored outcome.¹²

The utilitarian approach considers the best course of action as the one that promotes the best consequences for the most people.¹³ From the U.S. strategic planning perspective these two basic forms of consequentialism must be considered in determining the end state for a given situation. It is from this end state that the operational plan, and then tactical plans, are designed to achieve specific objectives. Although many would question the uprightness of the egoism form, the reality is that many, if not most, nations intentionally place self-interests as the basis for their foreign interventions.¹⁴ As the current lone superpower in the world, the U.S. often has a focus on a utilitarian-based approach while also using a cost-benefit analysis to inform decision-making. Stated plainly, any intervention into a foreign country should be with the aim of improving regional stability. So, specifically within large scale humanitarian efforts, what is

the best course of action that achieves the best consequences for the most people of the affected populations?

Whole-of-Society Solutions

From a U.S. policy perspective, Lt. Gen. Benjamin Freakley, U.S. Army (Ret.) and Maj. Gen. Margaret Woodward, USAF (Ret.), as guest columnists for *Best Defense*, identify the need for a more effective organization that inspires whole-of-society solutions to situations like Syria, or any hybrid war. They state that the U.S. is overly dependent on the U.S. military to solve problems. They propose that “The nation needs a quarterback to organize the remaining muscle of a \$4 trillion government, an army of nonprofits, the brainpower of universities, the engine of private sector, and networks of state and local governments that are now untapped or underutilized in crises.”¹⁵

Freakley and Woodward recommend revising the 1947 National Security Act to create a newly empowered National Security Council (NSC) with more authority, and one that includes whole-of-society solutions. Simply put, the NSC would create the strategy and also bring multiple entities together to prevent crises or to respond quickly and effectively once a crisis appears. After the conflict, their recommendation includes an approach like the Marshall Plan to enable a country to recover and rebuild. Experts from inside and outside of the government must be included, along with governments and experts from allied countries. The plan would need to be comprehensive and include the political, diplomatic, informational, economic, military and societal efforts. This new policy would align somewhat with current joint doctrine, Joint Publication (JP) 3-08, whereby the whole-of-government approach is discussed. The goal of this new NSC is first to keep a constant focus on U.S security goals and then develop a strategic vision for success.¹⁶

Operational Approaches

If the new NSC, as described by Freakley and Woodward does come about, they may have an ability to make more timely decisions. This would affect how quickly the U.S. Military must prepare for deployment into HW. There would be an immediate requirement to develop operational approaches to set the conditions for the whole-of-society solution. Major Rick Johnson, in his monograph in the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) Report 13-4 states there are three imperatives for operational art in HW. It is important to note that these imperatives explain the characteristics of an operational approach, not a holistic approach such as the whole-of-society concept.¹⁷

The first is that the approach must cognitively disrupt the hybrid threat's logic in the forms of warfare employed, rather than just using physical means. The synchronization of combined tactical actions must achieve enough of a disruptive effect on the enemy that an opportunity exists to exploit the situation with a continuation of operations. Examples include the concept of *Operational Shock* to attack the coherent unity of the hybrid threat *as a system*, such as targeting the interconnections in the enemy's system.¹⁸ In the whole-of-society concept, along with doctrine contained in JP 3-0, experts from not only the military, but scientists and even scholars from think tanks and academia could be significantly helpful for the disruptive effect on the enemy.¹⁹

The second imperative, based upon doctrinal underpinnings in JP 3-08, *Interorganizational Coordination During Joint Operations*, is to produce a fusion of actions within the combined efforts of military and non-military organizations. Again, the whole-of-society concept would benefit, this time by enabling this fusion of military and non-military organizations to occur. It is critical that the total approach fuse tactical successes to the strategic

objectives within the same context which gave birth to the hybrid threat forces. Therefore, it is imperative that military forces possess a situational understanding of the area of operations and link tactical actions to the operational objectives. For example, multiple missions and tasks will be required to support the combined humanitarian effort. Military commanders and their staffs must “fuse” with non-military organizations and understand the “big picture” of how they fit into the overall plan.²⁰

The third imperative is understanding that HW is a relationally complex, and at times, chaotic situation. In HW, military commanders must probe for information and use emergent practices to gain and maintain the initiative over hostile forces.²¹ Especially for Army commanders, the exercise of mission command is paramount, as prescriptive or uniform measures are too rigid and binding. Most information on the enemy and environment may come from the “bottom up,” so the use of disciplined initiative empowers leaders to discover unexpected opportunities and threats.²²

U.S. Military Proactive Approaches to Humanitarian Operations in Hybrid Warfare

With faster deployment timelines and more integrative requirements to be part of a whole-of-society approach, the U.S. military must have an expeditionary mindset and capabilities unequalled in previous conflicts. JP 3-29, *Foreign Humanitarian Assistance*, 03 January 2014, discusses “Complex Emergencies.”²³ The United Nations (UN) defines a “complex emergency” as “a humanitarian crisis in a country, region, or society where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires and international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing UN country program.”²⁴ JP 3-29 uses the UN’s definition “complex emergency” in describing actions that might be necessary in HW for all the military services, but

only in general tasks and terms. The requirement to integrate into a whole-of-society approach during HW means significantly more pre-planning and coordination in order to respond effectively and efficiently.²⁵

During HW, multiple players and numerous belligerent groups are operating within the area of operations, including those embedded within the population, even at times using them as human shields. Conducting humanitarian operations in a hybrid war often occurs within a chaotic and dangerous environment. To actively pursue operations to relieve widespread suffering and end atrocities, a robust and capable multi-national military force must provide a safe environment for the overall plan to be successful.

If the U.S. military commits to undertake a substantial humanitarian intervention, it must be part of a broader multi-national campaign to first eliminate the threat. This would require the new NSC and the whole-of-society approach to collaborate and fuse with our multi-national partners for the intended outcomes. This would also involve the U.S. military to do the same amongst partner militaries for operational and tactical operations. Although this collaboration would add to the complexity of planning and execution, the fusion would significantly enhance the overall capabilities and political support of the force.²⁶

The military approach must be integrative and multi-dimensional within the overall plan. Neither a singular approach using airstrikes, nor a one-time desperate attempt to push or parachute limited relief supplies into an area, will suffice. Even if successful, the relief ends up being short term and possibly counterproductive, enabling the belligerents to pilfer the supplies and sell them on the black market. Over the last several months we have seen unsuccessful humanitarian attempts like this in Syria, such as the February 2016 Munich Security Conference to temporarily halt the fighting in Syria to get relief supplies to starving communities. In hybrid

war, political negotiations to stop the fighting seem improbable at best. Much more likely is for the belligerents to use the negotiations to buy time to make their own gains without threat of a foreign intervention. For example, at the same time as the Munich Security Conference was occurring, tens of thousands of Syrians were being driven from their homeland by Syrian government and terrorist forces.²⁷

Conclusion

Migration as a weapon in HW produces massive humanitarian crises. Syria is the most notable example during current times. In planning for humanitarian relief, ethical considerations must be included to determine the best strategy and course of action. Because of the complexity and requirement for faster responses with HW, whole-of-society approaches or something like it, are necessary to provide operational approaches that disrupt the hybrid threat's logic rather than just using physical means, such as airstrikes. Even so, the U.S. military's ground role in Joint Humanitarian Operations remains basically the same but will necessitate tighter timelines and more requirements to coordinate and collaborate with other militaries and more government and non-government organizations. Considering that the US military will most likely conduct humanitarian operations within HW scenarios, gaining and maintaining situational understanding is crucial to mission success. This will require a reliance on the philosophy and principles of mission command in order to provide a secure environment for a whole-of-society approach to the problems of the future.

¹Andrew F. Krepinevich, “Overhauling the Army for the Age of Irregular Warfare.” *The Wall Street Journal* (February 18, 2016).

²Department of the Army, *ADP 3-0, Unified Land Operations* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, October 2011), 4.

³Maxim Trudolyubov, “Russia’s Hybrid War.” *The New York Times* (February 24, 2016).

⁴Liz Sly, “Trapped Between Airstrikes and Locked Gate, Syrian Refugees are Pawns in a Wider War.” *The Washington Post* (February 10, 2016).

⁵Ben Thompson, “NATO Commander says Russia and Syria are using migration as a Weapon.” *The Christian Science Monitor* (March 2, 2016), 2.

⁶Frank Prautzsch, “U.S. Army Mega City Operations: Enduring Principles and Innovative Technologies.” *Small Wars Journal* (February 22, 2016).

⁷Thompson, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2-4.

⁸*Ibid.*, 1-4.

⁹Sly, *The Washington Post*.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Daniel M. Bell, “Introduction to Deontology and Consequentialism for Military Leaders.” *E100 Readings*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, Summer 2015), 1-9.

¹³*Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴Department of Defense, *Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, Joint Operation Planning* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office), 11 August 2011, II-1.

¹⁵Lt. Gen. Benjamin Freakley, U.S. Army (Ret.) and Maj. Gen. Margaret Woodward, USAF (Ret.), “Retired generals: Time for new body to coordinate and implement national policy”, (March 10, 2016), *Foreign Policy/Best Defense* on line at <<http://foreignpolicy.com/>>

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Major Richard Johnson, “Synthesis: Operational Approaches to Hybrid Warfare.” *Hybrid Warfare, Joint Special Operations University* (MacDill AFB, FL), August 2013, 101-108.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁹Department of Defense, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, Joint Operations* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office), 11 August 2011, IV-4.

²⁰Johnson, *Hybrid Warfare, Joint Special Operations University*, 102.

²¹C.F. Kurtz and D.J. Snowden, “The new dynamics of strategy: Sense-making in a complex and complicated world.” (*IBM Systems Journal*, Vol. 42, No 3, 2003), 462-483.

²²Department of the Army, *ADP 6-0, Mission Command*. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office. May 2012), 1.

²³Department of Defense, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-29, foreign Humanitarian Assistance* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 03 January 2014), 20, 69.

²⁴Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *OCHA Orientation Handbook on Complex Emergencies* (Washington DC: United Nations Printing Office. August 1999), Chapter 6, on line at
<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/3D153DA3049B322AC1256C30002A9C24-ocha__orientation__handbook_on__.html#6>

²⁵JP 3-29, 20, 69.

²⁶JP 3-29, Chapter II.

²⁷ Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, “Dispatch from the Turkish Border: Syrians Waiting in Vain for the World.” *Defense One* (February 10, 2016). Online at
<<http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/02/dispatch-from-turkey-syria>>