



The Human Domain

The Army's Necessary Push Toward Squishiness

Maj. Mark Herbert, U.S. Army

Maj. Mark Herbert is a strategic analyst at the Army Capabilities Integration Center, Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Eustis, Va. He holds a B.A. in history from the University of Missouri at Saint Louis and an M.S. in strategic intelligence from the National Intelligence University. His thesis discusses how the intelligence community may use the social sciences in their information analysis.

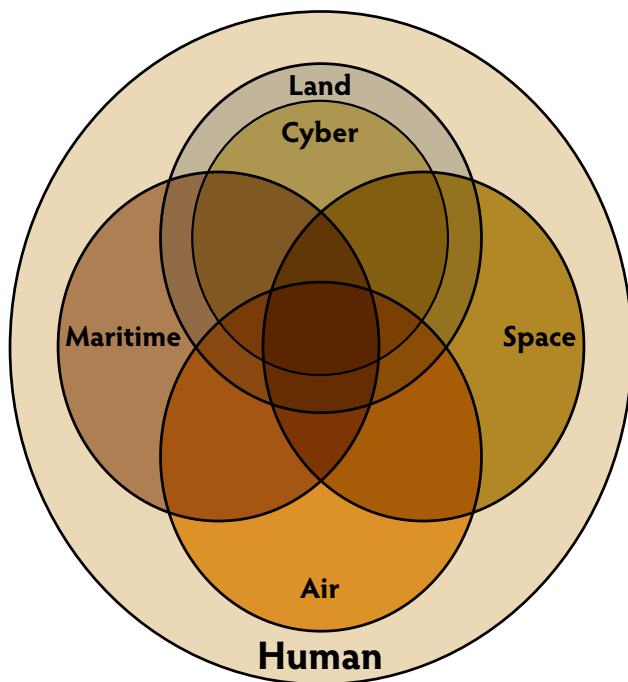
Man, the molecule of society, is the subject of social science.

- Henry Charles Carey, 19th century economist

The current fiscal challenges facing the Department of Defense have forced the services to reinvent themselves

Capt. Brett C. Gordon, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, hands out bottled water to children during a Medical Civic Action Program visit, 14 March 2013, in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan.

(2nd Lt. Jennifer Frazer, 102nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)



Domains of Conflict

and develop innovative concepts, while also scrambling to ensure they define themselves by one simple word: relevance.

To this end, the U.S. Navy and Air Force have developed their future trajectory for policy makers and strategists in relation to Air Sea Battle, positing deep strike and control of the sea commons as the arbiter of future conflict. It is worth noting that these rely primarily on technological measures to achieve.

In contrast, the land components of the Department of Defense have begun to collaborate on their conceptual frame of reference for relevance in an era of austere resources, but one looking to sell an old idea in a new package. Their answer is neither a call for a complicated campaign concept, nor another set of expensive weapons or vehicle programs. Instead, the idea is to focus on the humanness of warfare and how, historically, warfare remains fundamentally a human endeavor fought among people, usually of different cultures, with complicated sets of complex idiosyncrasies.

One outgrowth of such an approach is that it reveals the need for expanding the intellectual paradigms used to research and analyze the human endeavor of war in order to better formulate the tools necessary to prevail in conflict. For example, while history is a great teacher, it is not the only avenue of approach that should

be used for clarity on this concept. Relying on history alone will not suffice as a guide to reveal the underlying motivations nor mitigating solutions common to war. Instead, expanding the conceptual tools to more fully analyze warfare must include use of the social sciences. This is a key step to help us unravel the mystery that is human violence, understand the human side of a given conflict, and forecast human behavioral responses to various courses of action contemplated that involve employing military action in such a conflict.

The concept of the *human domain*, as the Army is currently terming it, is not new. Historians of warfare have returned *ad infinitum* to the idea that warfare is inherently a human endeavor. Conflict takes place in many areas and domains: on the ground, at sea, in the air, in space, and now in cyberspace. But as the figure indicates, the one overarching and all encompassing domain is that of the human domain.

The Army's simple all-purpose solution to problems in the past has often been mainly a recourse of destructive violence; killing is sometimes what we do when we do not understand the problem. In contrast, efforts to understand the human domain at a much more sophisticated level may assist us in understanding a situation, preventing escalation, and limiting the amount of violence required to mitigate the situation.

As the Army and Marine Corps are, in the main, ground forces, it stands to reason that they push an idea of future warfare that includes human interaction as the overarching concept and indispensable component linking all lines of operation/lines of effort.

To develop this idea the Army, the Marine Corps, and U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) have begun a cooperative effort under the *strategic landpower* initiative to establish a Strategic Landpower Task Force to gather lessons learned from the past decade or more of war, incorporate "historic, contemporary, and emerging military, human, and strategic considerations, as well as the enduring relationship between the land domain and the human domain" into doctrine, and postulate what the operating environment will look like in the future.¹

As part of this effort, Army senior leaders have pushed the idea that history gives credence to and justification for the idea of the human domain. There are, in fact, thousands of volumes of historical writings replete with analyses claiming to explain just how human

warfare is, from ancient battles of note to those occurring today in Afghanistan, Syria, and elsewhere.

However, most of this writing appears to be mainly concerned with details of tactics and strategy (and sometimes logistics), not the study of warfare from a social science perspective, the underlying factors of which would be better explained by intellectual constructs relying upon cultural anthropology, psychology, and sociology.

Consequently, if we are to invest in the idea of the human domain, a vast idea in and of itself, then the scope of research and scholarship that the Army uses must expand concurrently to encompass the vastness to some degree. Consonant with the above, the incorporation of fields other than history—psychology, anthropology, sociology, and the like—will open myriad new and insightful doors to ideas about warfare and the human domain.

We must break away from the familiar think tanks and perfunctory advice from complacent experts regurgitating thread-worn theories and statistics. Instead, we must bring new fields of knowledge and information that draw upon diverse experiences and data sets.

In short, if the Army is truly serious about understanding human interaction and its relationship with warfare then there has to be a concerted effort to reach out to these other fields of study that specialize in humanness in a more *hands-on* way.

This process can be expected not only to introduce the new, but also revitalize the old by enhancing and broadening research done in traditional fields such as history. The combination of such will build deeper, broader, and more sophisticated understanding to problem sets associated with the causes and resolutions of war.

While this concept appears sound, the problem arises when the Army, Marine Corps, and USSOCOM attempt to sell this idea to those who determine strategy and ultimately funding. Relatively cheap social science research does not have the same sexy allure as building billion-dollar planes in congressional districts. Help is most sorely needed, but the Army has not helped itself persuading policy makers of social science value to the military.

Therein lies the squishy part. Neither the Department of Defense, nor the rest of the national security establishment, has had a good track record



U.S. Army Maj. Nancy Lewis passes gifts to Afghan women present during the ceremony held in celebration of International Women's Day at the Shahrara Garden in Kabul, 11 March 2013.

employing the social sciences in any of its analyses; they have been historically either completely absent or horribly misused.² Additionally, when it comes to formulating strategy, warfare, or diplomacy, credible representatives of the social sciences have been underrepresented at roundtable discussions, strategy sessions, or on the staffs of decision makers. This seems to validate what the Strategic Landpower White Paper notes: the use of any of the social sciences in the study of warfare and the idea that conflict is about people have “not received the central emphasis that it should in U.S. military deliberation.”³

While the Army has attempted to utilize aspects of the social sciences over the past few years with the development of its counterinsurgency doctrine and its proponents, the chasm is still wide. This gap has hindered, and will continue to hinder, understanding of the human domain. So, how do we close the gap?

Closing the Gap

There are two things that the Army must do to understand the gap and come up with solutions in an attempt to bridge it. First, we must understand the history of the interaction between ourselves and the social sciences and recognize the reasons for the divide. Applying lessons learned from the past may prevent us from making the same mistakes again.

Second, the Army must incorporate and internalize all the information that the social sciences can offer in a serious effort to understand what warfare is. Every avenue of approach should be used and all fields of the soft sciences should be explored to find help in understanding the human domain in conditions of war.

History of the Army and Social Sciences

The military has made forays into the realm of the social sciences in the past. As far back as World War I, both sides of that conflict hired anthropologists and psychologists to help in the war effort. Their perceived misuse through the Great War and into World War II caused fervent disagreements in the academic community, calling into question the use of scientists by the military.⁴

The Cold War further intensified the feelings of conflict concerning the role of science and its use by the government for political and military gain.

For example, the Army’s use of academic analysts to research the cause of insurgencies in Latin America during Project Camelot caused unease and protest about the ethics of such practices.⁵

At about the same time the FBI was involved in compiling information regarding professors and other academics in the country’s colleges and universities. This was at the height of the Cold War, the era of the Red Scare, when communism was seen as an internal threat to the nation. The FBI, with the consent and covert support of the schools, began a blacklist of those professors whom they believed to be involved with nefarious and “un-American” organizations and whom were thought to be “subversives.” This has resulted in a lingering legacy of suspicion and mistrust between the government and many in academia.⁶

The use of sociologists to support the use of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support teams in Vietnam and later the Human Terrain System in Iraq and Afghanistan further alienated the academic world from the military and its operations. Many in the academic community saw these programs as using scientists as political or military assets and not in their true capacity as scholars and educators.

In October of 2007 the American Anthropological Association Executive Board released a statement regarding the Army’s Human Terrain System Project. In it, the board voiced its disapproval of the program based on ethical grounds and concern that it would put their members in danger.⁷ To this group, the Army was simplifying a very complex subject. David Price, anthropologist from Saint Martin’s University, notes that when the Army or the military as a whole “wants to embrace something as potentially soft as anthropology, it is often drawn to fantasies of hard science.”⁸

These examples illustrate the chasm as it exists between much of the social science community and the military today. Driven mainly by a history of the military’s perceived immoral use of social scientists and their unique fields, further widened by political stances or by disagreements in policy, many academics and researchers have become antagonistic to any attempts to span the gap. Opposition to the latest wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the confinement of foreign fighters in Guantanamo Bay, and the use of so-called enhanced interrogation techniques have muddied the water still



U.S. Navy photo by HMC Josh Ives

U.S. Army Lt. Col. Mark Martin, civil affairs team lead for Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Farah, shakes hands and laughs with Mawlawi Guhlan M. Ruhaani, director of Hajj and Endowment, after a key leader engagement in Farah City, 29 December 2012.

further. Any relationship that we attempt to build with the academic world to expand the dialogue between the two must take these factors into account.

Given this torrid history, it may seem impossible for us to effect any change in our association with academia. However, like any relationship, success depends on the work put into it.

Incorporating the Social Sciences

The Army has taken the first step by realizing the importance of understanding the humanness of warfare, but more steps must be taken in the correct direction to build credibility and be successful with the concept of the human domain.

First, Army leadership must make the human domain concept a priority. Establishing a working group or small research team is not enough. While perhaps not on the magnitude of an Army Center of Excellence, there needs to be an office or center that can do the heavy lifting that is required to develop and push the

ideas. The office must be the central hub of research and synthesis on the human domain and have the strong backing of senior Army leaders.

Along with the office, a proponent must be nominated to lead concept development and implementation. Who leads the way on the human domain is just as important as how it functions and impacts the services. Currently there is a collaborative effort between the Army, Marine Corps, and USSOCOM. While all three have experience with the concept of the human domain, there must be a main actor to provide guidance and leadership. As the largest of the land components, the Army must take that role.

Second, the Army must get outside of its comfort zone in regard to its farming of ideas and information. If there is to be a synthesis of knowledge and understanding of what encompasses the human domain as it relates to warfare, then who better to glean that knowledge from than those who study, teach, and write about it?

Currently, the Army pulls a certain core group of academics, scientists, business people, and theorists for its policy and strategy discussions. They are trusted confidants who collectively bring a broad wealth of

successful. However, the Army must be careful to avoid its previous mistakes of using social scientists for what has been dubbed less than moral reasons by those in the academic arena. Any attempt by the Army to co-opt or use the work of social scientists for political or military operational reasons may be seen as another attempt to misuse or exploit them, widening the existing chasm and ruining any attempt we may try to close it.

Focusing efforts in this area has the additional practical effect of providing a strong fiduciary argument for the Army as we compete for relevance against a tide of budget cuts and fiscal constraints that can be expected to continue. More importantly, it provides a conceptual framework for dealing with the real world as it is evolving and the actual threats we are likely to face in the foreseeable future. Thus it must be taken seriously as the help of experts from fields like psychology, anthropology, sociology, and other social sciences promises real return on investment which will stand up to outside criticism.

In contrast, if the Army instead falls back—as it traditionally does—on relying upon ill-informed advice from a regular list of current and former politicians, and continues to spend its money funding research contracts with crony for-profit think tanks and retired officers turned lobbyists, the Army’s strategic landpower initiative will fail.

Conclusion

The Army’s current lack of institutional commitment to expanding its intellectual field of discussion is evident in its professional reading list. Only one book with a subject other than political or military theory appears: Lt. Col. David Grossman’s *On Killing*.

The Army must promote expansion of its educational frame of reference and adopt what biologist E. O. Wilson called his theory of consilience, the bringing together of all the different fields of study into one great synthesis of knowledge.⁹

This includes exploring the relevance of previously untapped resources in the academic world and fields of study that may seem innocuous or unrelated but may still add depth or breadth in unexpected ways. Similarly, we as an institution have to attempt to forge



U.S. Army National Guard 1st Lt. Chad Carlson, 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

U.S. Army Capt. Steven Pyles speaks with local residents during a counter indirect fire patrol near Lalmah Village, Chapahar District, Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, 1 September 2013.

knowledge to the table. The same must be done with experts and academics from the social science community. Inviting more psychologists, anthropologists, primatologists, and others to Army conferences and forums will add a great deal of information on the human aspects of strategy and warfare. Along with establishing such a group of core social science advisors, the Army should conduct a human-domain-specific conference, inviting academics from all the social science fields. This forum might provide the Army with additional knowledge on topics it missed or previously ignored.

In short, to actually accomplish the implied objectives of the strategic landpower strategy, we must begin to build a network of contacts with key educators and specialists if we are serious about learning about the human domain of warfare. We must look more toward institutions like the University of New Mexico’s Evolutionary Psychology Department and less toward the John F. Kennedy’s School of Government in our development of the human domain.

The same intimate relationship of trust that the Army has with businesses, industry, and government entities must be built with the academic world of related social sciences if the human domain concept is to be

new and wide-ranging relationships in the academic world among disciplines that may at first blush seem irrelevant. The Army and its strategic analysts must not be afraid to get a little squishy. There is a vast array of fields of study that could contribute to the understanding of the human domain of conflict, but have yet to be contacted or explored.

We must also understand that in our quest for knowledge the bridge may be blocked by ideological opponents in the political and academic worlds; that there may be pushback by some who have disdain for the military and will attempt to stigmatize contact among their colleagues. Learning from history gives us pause; the history between the academic world and the Army is not something that resonates with a great deal of hope. However, the Army leadership should realize that we need academia if new concepts largely drawn from social science research and expertise are to succeed.

A way to bridge the gap is to continuously engage such communities by attending social science symposiums and lectures, or even sending students for social science degrees at a wider range of civilian universities in order to both acquire some expertise in narrow disciplines as well as make valuable contacts. Similarly, inviting more diverse and more numerous academics to participate in Army learning events can potentially create mutually beneficial relationships.

To succeed, efforts to reach out to academia must turn into bridges, and the building must begin soon. The animosity and mistrust that some sectors of academia have had for assisting the military must be challenged with honesty and a true quest for understanding by those of us in the Army. However, there cannot be prolonged skepticism on either side or the endeavor is doomed from the start.

Incorporating the study of the social sciences into the concept of the human domain will lead to profound change in the way the Army deals with conflict through a deeper synthesis of knowledge about ourselves and our social behavior. Conversely, academia could greatly benefit in its study of the sociological dimensions of human violence by professional association with those who conduct war first hand and have an intimate familiarity with it.

It is this deeper understanding in both communities that together could lead to possibly foreseeing or even preventing conflict as long-term integration of social sciences into the decision process gains creditability and influence that affects the policy level. Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Raymond Odierno has said "preventing conflict is better than reacting to it."¹⁰ Understanding conflict through the idea of the human domain may help the Army do exactly that. We have to get squishy. ■

Notes

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