

Engaging with Local People: More Tea and Fewer Messages

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INTRODUCTION

Military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have highlighted the difficulties of maintaining support from non-adversary local people while countering the threat from various adversary groups. Dealing with this threat is further complicated because the distinction between adversary and non-adversary groups is sometimes hard to identify, as well as being fluid over time. Within this complex system of related groups, the actions of any external actors, including military, will have an impact on groups beyond those that we are seeking to influence. Any short-term success in countering adversaries has the potential to undermine long-term success and stability if military actions alienate wider groups of local people.

The need to ‘win the hearts and minds’ of local people has long been claimed to be central to success in counter-insurgency and stabilisation operations. But this is difficult to achieve without a sound understanding of just how the local people live and interact in groups, and how their support might best be achieved. This paper argues that the social sciences provide valuable insights into how people, anywhere, operate and change. The first part of the paper provides examples of the kinds of theories that help build such understanding. It begins by looking at the nature of people and how people interact, before moving on to groups and their relationships, how change happens, and the nature of political organisation. In the second part of the paper, a selection of these approaches are taken further, as the theoretical basis for understanding how to engage successfully with local people.

HOW SOCIETIES OPERATE AND CHANGE

THE NATURE OF PEOPLE

Humans interact with one another; shared ideas about the world facilitate and structure this interaction. Social psychologists explain that this drive to form social groups is part of human nature, and originates in the need to band together for survival. Indeed the mere adoption of a group label as referring to oneself is enough to trigger the processes involved in identifying with other people, and these processes underlie social cohesion, liking or disliking of others, prejudice and conflict. Experiments have shown how the allocation of complete strangers to different groups according to trivial criteria (such as tossing a coin) can lead such individuals

to more highly rate members of their own groups and to discriminate in favour of their own group in the allocation of resources (Sherif *et al.*, 1961; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Billig, 1974).

However, people are never members of just one group. An individual is part of many different social circles, perhaps a family, religious group, work unit, or sports team. Each group to which individuals belong influences their beliefs, values, attitudes and perceptions. Identity is an umbrella term to describe how people perceive themselves and others. Each individual belongs to multiple identity groups, through birth, assimilation, or achievement. The identities people choose to bring forward are context specific. A naval officer's affiliation with the Royal Navy may be actively promoted in a tri-service headquarters, while at his brother's wedding it is his familial identity that is important. When Harlequins play London Wasps at rugby, yet another identity or group affiliation will come to the fore, depending on which team he supports. In social psychology, this is referred to as different levels of self-categorisation; a person chooses different self-categorisations according to the situation (Turner *et al.*, 1987). As a result of these multiple, overlapping affiliations with different groups, each individual is the only person who has all these particular identities and is thus a 'mono-individual,' (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p.214) a unique example of the combination of all those groups. The more groups that we can bring into a description of a person – be they family, social, ethnic, religious, academic, geographic, among others – the better the idea we will have of the person we try to describe.

A person's multiple identities are not static. Just as people highlight certain group affiliations at certain times, so they may add or drop group affiliations over time. Individuals may leave a group (be it a formal group, like a Territorial Army unit, or an informal group, such as voters for a political party) if they feel its views no longer match their own, and similarly they may join new groups. While some military doctrine recognises the multiple and fluid nature of identities (JWP 3/80: Information Operations, p 2-2; JDP 3/90: Civil-Military Co-Operation, p 1-1), in practice, there is a tendency to simplify society into the three groupings of 'opponents, friends and neutrals', and to concentrate on relationships significant to the transfer of military resources to the adversary, particularly regarding 'sponsors' and 'sympathisers' of adversaries. Such simplifications focus only on the relationship between an individual and one or other side of a conflict, and distract one from a deeper understanding of the range of identities influencing (or able to influence) that person.

RELATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE

Being part of a group means to act in accordance with the informal rules or 'norms' that a person inherits when they become part of that group. Social psychological research with Western populations has shown that encouraging people to identify with a goal or group has a more lasting effect on attitudes and behaviours than that induced by coercion or persuasion (Hogg, 1992; Lewin, 1965). Moreover, where people are required to comply with social norms, but no attempt has been made to ensure that they identify with the group requiring that conformity, they are likely to conform in public but not change their private views or behaviour (Festinger, 1953).

Theorists have different views on how and why people interact and build relationships with other people. This is illustrated by theories about exchange. Adam Smith (1779) states that exchange is to be found in all societies due to the innate nature of people to behave in

their self-interest, according to their different skills or advantages. However, a number of experimental tests have shown that individuals do not always act in their individual self-interest, but will contribute to collective resources even where they could 'free-ride' and get away without contributing. The belief that others will cooperate actually makes cooperation *more* likely, and subjects will volunteer resources to punish cheats (Ostrom, 2004). For example, people using rural irrigation systems in India share and support the communal water tanks and temples even where their fields are higher up the water-table, because such contributions are not simply individual economic transactions, but are part of their wider social relationships, guided by the norms of their groups (Mosse, 2003).

A second approach to exchange argues that reciprocity – the obligation to give, receive and reciprocate – is the innate human tendency leading to exchange (Mauss, 1954 [1924]). The exchange can be of material goods, or non-material information; in either case, the obligations of reciprocity remain. For example, when a leader gives money or gifts to his followers, the followers reciprocate not with items but with their loyalty. Similarly, when NATO forces build a well in a village in Afghanistan, they may ask for (or expect) information about insurgents in return. It is important to note that what might be described as 'corruption' or 'bribery' is culturally variable; the exchange might be seen by those involved as simply reciprocity.

A person's social obligations are closely affected by whom he is related to. Kinship, the relations between two or more persons based on common ancestry, marriage or adoption, is thus a very important factor in human social organisation. These relationships are typically split into those based on blood ties, described as descent, and those based on marriage ties, described as alliance.

Descent involves the tracing of relationships back to previous generations, and may influence group organisation, succession, marriage, political and economic organisation. In contrast, alliance theorists view the development of alliances between groups through the exchange of women as the fundamental fact of kinship. Levi-Strauss (1966) argued that the very formation of society occurs when a man gives his sister to another man, thereby creating ties of affinity. Central to this exchange is reciprocity, as men exchange 'their' women in order to obtain the right to receive women in return, and thus the group ensures that their most valuable resources are distributed according to principles other than biological chance. More recent anthropological work on kinship has opposed the previously dominant view that societies were generally well integrated and stable, instead seeing kinship as a flexible idiom (Leach, 1961; Carsten, 2000). However, kinship remains key to understanding where peoples' allegiances lie.

THE NATURE OF GROUPS

As noted above, people are part of multiple groups, yet they move in and out of groups without the groups themselves dissolving. Anthropologist Frederik Barth (1969) examined how ethnic groups maintain their existence, despite the fact that people move between groups through marriage, migration or occupation. He stated that this continuity is not due to the cultural practices or rules that make one group different from another. Rather it is the boundary that defines the group: groups exist only in relation to other groups, and group members define themselves in relation to the members of other groups. Although Barth was

concerned with ethnic groups, the principles also apply to other kinds of group. It is the boundary between 'us' and 'them' that defines the group, not a particular territorial affiliation or other historical characteristic.

Sociologists classify those groups with which we identify or feel loyalty as 'in-groups;' 'out-groups' are those with which we do not identify. Interaction with out-groups both further develops each individual group's 'identity' (in terms of defining itself as an in-group) and cohesion, but can also change the nature of the groups. Work on the development of street gangs has shown that gangs evolve out of groups of childhood friends into violent groups, due to adversarial relations with out-groups (Thrasher 1927; Suttles, 1972; Vigil, 2003). External interaction or threats may increase the cohesiveness of a group. The threat of violence from rival gangs is one such external cohesing influence, but state interventions with street groups can also have the same unintended consequence (Klein, 1971, 1995). Groups therefore do not exist or change in a vacuum, and interaction with others may increase the cohesiveness of a group, and may change its form. The mere labelling of a group of individuals (as 'Al Qaeda' or 'Taleban' for example) by external actors may contribute to strengthening that group's identity as such, because (as discussed above) labelling and acting with people as if they are a member of a group actually increases their identification with the group in question.

Just as cooperation and reciprocity are key organising principles for relations between individual people, so too are they important in understanding the nature of groups. Cooperation requires trust. Reputation and repeated interaction are important in building trust in the behaviour of other individuals. Trust is sustained in families and in business interactions by the expectation of many future interactions (Fearon and Laitin, 1996). But complications arise when individuals are involved in infrequent interactions beyond the family. In order to trust and cooperate with someone with whom one is unlikely to deal with frequently in the future, one requires information about the individual's past record and behaviour to judge whether trust can be bestowed. Therefore systems that allow for easy access to such information help resolve this problem of trust in groups which are larger than the family.

Social networks of trusted people, be they within ethnic groups, between colleagues or shared use of a tea shop, allow access to information, including information about other people with whom they do not have direct links. Information from a non-trusted source may not have the impact that the information supplier would like it to, irrespective of the content of the information. This has implications for government 'messaging' or business advertising.

RELATIONS BETWEEN GROUPS

Just as in relationships within a group, trust is also a fundamental factor in relations between groups. Groups serve to enable stable and cooperative relations between individuals by providing access to information on individuals through the group's social network and by providing a social framework that increases the likelihood of future interactions. Social networks *between* groups are usually less dense, thus making information on individual reputations harder to acquire and interactions across group divides tend to be less frequent

(Fearon and Laitin 1996, pp. 717-719; Colson, 1974). Systems for overcoming these challenges are therefore necessary for cooperative inter-group relations.

'In-group policing' is one such system, in which a person trusts individuals from another group in the knowledge that that group will monitor and police its own members, identifying and sanctioning any individuals responsible for foul play. The two groups cooperate knowing that they can rely on the other group's superior information about its members as a guarantee against untrustworthy behaviour (Fearon and Laitin, 1996). In India, cities with informal long-standing in-group policing institutions have consistently avoided mass violence during periods of high tension between Muslims and Hindus, while other cities (without these structures) repeatedly descend into sectarian violence (Varshney, 2002). These cooperative organisations ensure peaceful relations by policing neighbourhoods, correcting rumours and facilitating inter-communal communication in times of tension. However, Government attempts to construct peace committees in local districts to encourage peaceful relations across ethnic divides were only successful where there were existing civic structures of inter-ethnic engagement. Attempts to create peace structures artificially from above, without existing structures to build upon, failed. Major structural changes tend to only be achievable during periods of mass upheaval and are difficult to deliberately manipulate.

In unstable inter-group relations, the entire group, or any individual from that group, will tend to be held responsible for the transgressions of particular individuals within that group. This is known as collective punishment. To an outsider, individuals will often be perceived simply as their stereotype of, for example a Palestinian or a Hazara. In an attempt to deter future wrongdoing by individuals within that other group, punishment is directed at members of the other group indiscriminately, rather than at the individuals responsible (Fearon and Laitin, 1996). This can lead to unstable relations and even episodes of mass violence.

WHY CHANGE HAPPENS

Groups are not static entities and individuals do not always follow the same social rules. Yet theorising on how groups change, as opposed to individual behavioural change (Darnton, 2008), is still in development. One approach is complex adaptive systems theory, which states that a social group or groups with components that interact with each other constitute a single complex adaptive system. Any external group that comes to interact with that system (such as an intervening military force) becomes but another part of the system. Because a complex adaptive system is a product of a large number of elements and connections, all in flux, outcomes are very difficult to predict (Shaw, 1997, p. 235). Any intervention will almost certainly have unexpected consequences, sometimes including results in the opposite direction to those desired.

Social scientists have sought to understand the relationship between an individual and a group of which they are part, and whether the 'social structure' (the shared concepts that order society) has greater influence on how people behave, or whether an individual's free will or 'agency' (the capacity of individuals to make choices and act independently) is more significant. Shared ways of doing things are deeply embedded in our consciousness and therefore cannot be easily changed. Although theorists allocate great importance to the individual and to society, there is general agreement that peoples' actions, which are the result of an interaction between their individual agency and the social structure, feed back

into the social structure, thus altering it in the process. (Bourdieu, 1977; Connerton, 1989; Giddens, 1984; Ortner, 1987).

Of course, groups do not live in isolation of external influences. The development of economic globalisation and international communications systems means that it is now easier than ever before to transfer information, ideas and resources around the world (Berdal, 2003, p. 489). External influences affect the value of the social relationships, sometimes making them unstable. Major changes are more likely when significant external influences impinge on societies.

An alternative approach to understanding social change is provided by political economy theory, which posits that all social phenomena ultimately rest on individual decisions, which themselves rest on and are constrained by 'institutions', being the systems that relate individuals to each other. These institutions in turn rest upon 'endowments', those features of an institution that have value enough to underpin that institution (Weingast, 1998; Shepsle and Bancheck, 1997). A change in the endowments, or their value, may cause individuals' decisions to change to the point that they exceed the restrictions of existing institutions. Actors then force a change in the institutions to reflect the new value of endowments. Without sufficiently valuable endowments, sustained cooperative relations between groups will not develop or endure. In the Indian cities discussed above, those in which effective in-group policing systems emerged were those where extensive economic and social institutions existed that spanned the ethnic divide. A breakdown into violence would have threatened the valuable endowments of these institutions, particularly the business ties. Therefore, in contrast to cities without these trans-ethnic institutional links, efforts to continue cooperative relations during times of tension were successful.

These approaches to understanding social change have implications for military doctrine. Current UK doctrine focusses on 'messages' as the key means for affecting change in societies and groups, for example by transforming the legitimacy of the enemy leadership, undermining their 'moral power base' and in turn 'separating leaders from supporters.' (JWP 3/80: Information Operations, p. 2-1). This position relies on an understanding of human actions and allegiances as derived from the objective calculations of rational facts by individuals. Doctrine therefore expects the messaging approach to affect collectives by its targeting of the rational calculations of individuals, which in turn is expected to lead swathes of a society or group to change their courses of action and loyalties. But people 'are not mobilised individually, by cold calculations of rational facts' (Kilcullen, 2006, p. 33); they are mobilised as part of social groupings.

POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Societies have evolved systems for managing political power and authority. Anthropologists describe a spectrum from centralised societies, through leadership groups to acephalus (headless) societies (Hendry, 2008). Centralised systems are most familiar to Westerners. In their most organised form they have a head at the top, with layers of positions with lesser degrees of authority below that. People indicate submission to the system (willingly or otherwise) by paying tribute or tax. These public funds make other structures possible including a ruling class and officials to act on behalf of the group, protection, courts, public facilities, feasts, an aid for the needy.

Leadership societies are those in which leaders are simply people whom others are content to follow. Such systems are found among people of Latin America's tropical rain forests, in which leaders come and go, and villagers follow a leader only as long they see it to be in their self interest to do so – the leaders do not have coercive power. Similarly, in almost every school class in the country, the 'cool kid' has influence without a formal position. Notably attempts to co-opt leaders of this kind usually fail, because they remove the legitimacy of the leader. When centralised governments that have tried to appoint a local chief to work through, providing remuneration and a badge of office, such 'chiefs' often find themselves the laughing stock of their community. Giving a prefect's cap to a cool kid would similarly lose him his position as leader of his community (ibid, p. 192).

Headless or tribal systems are described as 'segmentary' because different parts or segments come together to cooperate when it is appropriate to do so, but dissipate again into segments or smaller tribal groupings in times of conflict or when cooperation is not advantageous. Small units are defined in opposition to each other, but combine at a higher level in opposition to other larger segments (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). We see this kind of 'tribalism' in the West during sports contests, when town X supports its own team when playing against town Y, but those internal divisions become irrelevant when the town X and town Y's county team is playing another county. Both sets of county supporters then come together as a nation to support the national team against another nation's team.

Examples of each of these forms of political organisation may be found within any one society, although one form will usually be dominant. Trying to change one form of political system into another, such as encouraging a tribal system to become more centralised or state-like, is a difficult and long-term process.

STATEHOOD AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Despite the multiple forms of political system existing in the world, states are often seen as the key actors in the international system; indeed statehood is the key criterion for access to international institutions such as the United Nations. States are also a focus for development theory as they are often seen as central to alleviating poverty, and this is the basis for UK government policy. The UK has explicit policy commitments to encourage state-building because states are understood to be central to development and the provision of long term security and stability (DFID, 2006, p.19; Whaites, 2008, p. 4).

But both insurgent groups and multinational corporations pose a challenge to theories which see sovereign states as the central or exclusive actors in international relations (Strange, 1999); moreover some responsibility for governance has been displaced to other levels, such as the European Union or the World Trade Organisation. In this complex context, the role or nature of elites is not as straightforward as simply those people with authority to 'lead' a group. Western societies have particular expectations of elites and experts, which may not be shared by other societies. The position of elites is not static and struggles for power and status are an important driver in social change. Struggles for status within groups can have significant and even bloody consequences for relations between groups. In supporting and encouraging the development of states and of elites it is important to take into account the kind of leadership usual in that society.

ENGAGING WITH LOCAL PEOPLE

The social science theories discussed above illustrate that a fundamental organising principle of human society is our propensity to form, and act according to the norms of, groups. If we want to understand any conflict situation, we need to understand how groups work generally, and how the particular groups in a specific situation interact. This section uses the theories discussed above as the basis for examining how the UK Armed Forces might better engage with local people. ‘Engagement’ here refers to any personal, non-combat interaction with local people.

As shown above, cooperative relations between individuals and between groups of individuals are based on trust. Sociological theory illustrates that trust is built upon reputation (past evidence that the other is trustworthy) and the likelihood of repeated interactions (evidence that the other has a stake in remaining trustworthy). The theory of reciprocity indicates that when two people (or groups) enter into an exchange, it results in an obligation to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. This ties both parties into an ongoing relationship (the ‘repeated interactions’ mentioned above).

Social psychological research has shown that attitude and behavioural changes are long-lasting when brought about through the person’s (or group’s) identification with a particular goal or group, as opposed to through coercion or persuasion. Identification in this context means seeing themselves as part of a particular group with particular intentions or desires. Historical analysis has quantified strategic success factors most likely to improve the odds of achieving campaign success in counter-insurgency campaigns for both state and insurgent actors. The research found that popular support was the most significant factor in either insurgent or state political success, and was also highly significant in military success (Hossack, 2007).

OUTCOME-FOCUSSED AND PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Engagement can be divided into two broad types: outcome-focussed engagement and proactive engagement. Outcome-focussed engagement is carried out in order to achieve a specific effect, or to present a message to local people. It involves ‘managing perceptions, explaining why we are doing what we are doing’, or ‘having a line to take’. This kind of engagement tends to be focussed on short-term gains. Outcome-focussed engagement is often a priority for information operations units, who focus on identifying the change that they wish to achieve among a target audience, and developing appropriate messages for this end. In the police context, Operation TRIDENT – working on all incidents of gun crime in which both suspect and victim are black – is similarly outcome focussed. Police officers undertake targeted activities in order to ‘explain the issues that they face’ to large numbers, primarily targeting children at the end of primary school, preferably in one-off engagements with captive audiences (as in schools).

Proactive engagement is that carried out in order to build trust among the local population, but without the expectation of achieving immediate outcomes or behavioural changes. The focus is on building relations with people in the area, on their terms, usually with longer-term outcomes. The UK Police Safer Neighbourhood Teams’ (SNTs) role is to

resolve the quality of life (crime and anti-social behaviour) issues that are identified by local people. Proactive engagement is central to success, in identifying the issues and developing partnerships to resolve them. Rather than taking a message to the community, SNTs believe that 'actions speak louder than words'. Dealing with the community's problems is seen as first priority, as this will in turn earn the respect, trust and cooperation of the communities they serve.

People use their trusted groups in order to both access information and to identify other trustworthy individuals, and so a cooperative relationship is the best way to ensure that information is received by target audiences. Outcome-focussed engagement, with its direct approach to getting our message across, is not particularly conducive to building such positive relationships. Indeed outcome-focussed engagement can be counter-productive as it can limit the chances of open dialogue through a hard-sell of a particular message.

As noted above, it is rarely possible to develop cooperative structures at the height of a crisis. On the contrary, relationships between potentially conflicting parties need to be developed slowly, in a neutral context such as that of trade or social visits. Research drawing on the work of the London Metropolitan Police's Muslim Contact Unit (MCU) in countering violent extremism confirms that only proactive engagement – building relationships early on – is capable of tackling contentious issues before they escalate (Spalek, El Awa & Zahra McDonald, 2008).

Outcome-focussed engagement should only therefore be undertaken with a particular community after a period of trust-building proactive engagement. This may not involve significant changes in approach; just saying "Good morning" to local people passed on patrol is a building block; taking tea with a local elder whenever offered is an excellent step. However, a move towards this type of engagement will require a relaxation of the requirements to see effects quickly, to know the end state of a particular activity, and even to hold control over an interaction.

APPROACHES TO ENGAGEMENT

Interviews with military personnel showed that personal experiences often shape the approach to engagement taken, and whilst guidance and doctrine notes related to engagement (for example on shuras and key leader engagement) have been developed their application is seen as *ad hoc*. An inconsistent approach to engagement is likely to impact negatively on building up our reputation with local groups. The operational tempo of military activity usually requires engagement to be a short-term activity, designed to solve problems quickly, with measures of effect based on quickly observable outcomes. However, effective engagement requires consistent action over a long period, with outcomes unlikely to be observed immediately.

The identification of what local people want through seeing engagement from their perspective provides a way for the Armed Forces to promote a shared goal and thus helps build positive connections. Understanding perspectives also requires recognition of people's underlying needs. A military officer's experience of a farmer in Cyprus, who took a shot at his base every night, illustrates this principle. The local man was upholding his honour, since the UK Armed Forces had bulldozed a number of trees in order to create an access route.

Although payment had been made, the man felt that this was insufficient in the local culture to uphold his honourable status, so he resorted to taking shots as a way of making a statement. Recognising this, the soldiers did not retaliate. The form of engagement that a local population chooses to adopt should not necessarily be taken at face value, as it may not be representative of their true intentions and reflects only the resources available to people with grievances. Seeking to identify these needs will help the Armed Forces to engage more positively.

Successful engagement requires the willingness to allow these alternative perspectives to shape approaches to interaction. Engagement cannot be seen as being a one-way iterative process; it must be viewed as a flexible relationship that is shaped by both sides. McDonald's engagement strategies in East Asia illustrate the success that is possible when taking a flexible approach. The company's global strategy is to create consistent consumer experience, yet in practice, in East Asia McDonalds adapted when local customers required flexibility, serving Vegetable McNuggets and a mutton-based Maharaj Mac in India to cater for religious dietary restrictions. In China, even the company's most symbolic image, Ronald McDonald, was paired with a female Auntie McDonald, who entertains children and attends parties. The company has also brought about small but influential changes in eastern Asiatic dietary patterns, such as the instigation of festivities to mark specific birthdates of young people which was unknown in most of East Asia before McDonald's invested heavily in advertising for birthday parties (Watson, 1997).

Although organisations like McDonald's or the UK Armed Forces bring considerable resources to engagement with local people, they cannot control the ways in which local people will respond. If engagement with local people is to be successful, the military must also be open to change, and able to adapt its standard operating procedures to local needs and desires.

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Military engagement can be seen to occur at five levels: direct, indirect, third party, non-engagement and failed engagement, with decreasing control by the military at each level. Direct engagement, involving face-to-face interaction between two parties, is the ideal approach for establishing trust through reputation and repeated interaction. It allows for more nuanced observation of the other party's reactions, instantaneous reactions to changing events or information and involvement of more people.

Indirect engagement refers to interaction that is mediated via a technology (such as email or telephone) but still controlled and undertaken by ourselves. It is of benefit when it is inappropriate to meet directly with the other party, when they do not want to meet or do not want to be seen meeting with the UK Armed Forces. Members of police SNTs interact with community members through email and telephone following open meetings intended, for example, to reduce prostitution. Concerned residents are invited to contact inspectors to report on increases or decreases in the problem. It should be noted that indirect engagement is only undertaken following direct engagement to establish cooperative relationships.

There will be circumstances in which any direct engagement between UK Armed Forces and local people will be problematic, and cooperative relationships are better built, at least

initially, through third parties. For example, religious civil society activists in Afghanistan could provide an antidote to violent fundamentalist ideas, but they are also anti-secular and critical of the UK's involvement in the country. They avoid contact with Western organisations, and indeed their legitimacy among local people would be undermined by contact with the UK Armed Forces. In such circumstances, direct or even indirect engagement on our part would be inappropriate and counter productive.

Direct engagement may also be dangerous for the other party. In Iraq, there have been instances where locally employed or NGO staff have been targeted by opposition forces, believed to be in part because they had engaged directly with the UK military. NGOs are often better placed to talk to local minority groups than are the military, and thus have the potential to act as potent third parties for engagement with local people. However, NGOs are usually very reluctant to share information with UK Armed Forces. Most NGOs follow the principle of 'do no harm' (Anderson, 1999), designing activities that should not cause physical, economic or other kinds of harm. The military, of course, cannot follow this principle: they are trained and deployed to potentially use lethal force in pursuit of the UK Government's intended end-state. Close association with military forces would also compromise NGOs' stance of independence and impartial action and therefore their access to the populations suffering through conflict. Many NGOs are therefore concerned about the humanitarian activities undertaken by the military as (according to NGOs) they confuse and conflate the nature of very different organisations (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam *et al.*, 2008).

Given the current paucity of language skills among the military, in practice almost all UK Armed Forces' interaction with local people is conducted through interpreters, themselves a third party. Although interpreters are tasked by the military, they may engage in unintended ways, such as offering their own opinions rather than interpreting exactly what is said. Interpreters need to understand the intent of an interaction and accurately reflect this. UK Armed Forces can make this process easier by themselves gaining an awareness of local cultural and linguistic norms, allowing the military engager to express themselves in ways that are easier for the translator to translate. For example, referring to 'enemies of Afghanistan' or 'criminals', rather than 'foreign fighters,' helps to avoid unintended interpretations, as the last would include the UK military.

Non-engagement with certain groups might imply that those people who do come forward to engage represent the only points of view in a community. However, the concerns that are not heard are potentially more important than those that are audible. But knowing who is not coming forward is insufficient; the UK military must make it as easy as possible for people to engage in ways that are appropriate to their culture. Engaging with women in Afghanistan and Iraq was difficult because there are few females, particularly linguists, serving in the UK Armed Forces who can act as their counterparts.

Rather than addressing non-engagement head-on, the military could identify issues on which collaboration is seen by the local people as advantageous to them, which in turn leads to greater identification with the UK's intent. The UK's Stabilisation Unit worked with a community in Kabul, in which the male elders did not want them to engage with the women, but did want better sanitation. Stabilisation Unit representatives argued that in order to link up households in an effective sanitation system, women needed training in health and hygiene. As a result, child dysentery halved in a month, the men became comfortable with women's engagement with outsiders, and the women became more confident, leading eventually to the establishment of a female shura for UK representatives to communicate

directly with local women. This illustrates a creative solution to overcoming non-engagement and the benefits of building up relationships (proactive engagement) before attempting to implement new initiatives (outcome-focussed engagement).

Engagement fails when the other party has become so dissatisfied with the outcome of interaction with UK Armed Forces that they cease further engagement. As cooperation is built on reputation and repeated interaction, if these break down it will be very difficult to (re)establish a cooperative relationship. Disengagement with the UK Armed Forces might lead to greater engagement by the other party with other groups, including those hostile to the UK's intent, giving further imperative to get engagement right first time.

ENGAGING WELL

While current military engagement is ad hoc, proactive engagement does already occur while troops are on patrol. Thus the improvements needed to carry out effective proactive engagement may well be minimal. The absence of institutional recognition that proactive engagement is not only beneficial but vital for campaign success is a stumbling block. However, other actions would also improve the UK Armed Forces' ability to engage.

Sufficient time is needed for the repeated interactions necessary to build trust. Troops' six month rotation cycles are an obstacle, because by the time good relationships have been built, it is time for the UK Armed Forces to return home. Locals get fed up of meeting someone new every six months, and an incoming unit can undo all of the progress made in the previous six months, if the earlier unit is thought to have lied because a subsequent unit fails to carry out its promises. This affects one's reputation – a key aspect of building trust. One strategy for mitigating these problems would be to stagger deployment of some staff across standard deployment cycles.

Current data-management practices are not conducive to building up an institutional memory even within one tour, let alone between tours. Limited networked IT means that it is difficult for forces in Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) to write and share patrol reports, making it impossible for incoming personnel to pick up local relationships where the previous unit left off. Indeed it puts the military at a disadvantage, as local people retain a memory of past interactions while the UK Armed Forces do not. Current moves to bring in ISAF-wide data management systems are a step in the right direction as improving data management is vital for improved long-term engagement.

To engage well, one needs to understand the culture of the community. In order to best support this requirement, there is scope to develop current military training in cultural awareness; specifically, there is a requirement for improved training in basic knowledge of the culture and language of the local people as well as skills to enable more complex analysis of societies. Moves are also afoot to improve cultural training across the UK military, but it will take a while before the benefits are seen

To conclude, it is clear that extensive engagement already occurs between UK Armed Forces and local people in theatres of operation. However, it is usually seen to be valuable only when it brings immediate benefits to the military. Such outcome-focussed engagement is not ideal for building cooperative relationships, and may alienate people rather than

building their trust. Improving military engagement with local people requires building relationships before expecting outcomes from them, a commitment to avoid coercion and persuasion wherever possible, and to work towards enabling people to identify with a goal in common with the Armed Forces. It involves worrying less about the content of our ‘messages,’ and taking more time to create personal relationships with those who live in the countries in which we work, not least by drinking tea together.

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EDITORIAL REMARK

Dr. Tomlinson's paper: *Engaging with Local People: More Tea and Fewer Messages* was selected by the participants as the Best Paper presented at The Cornwallis XIV Group workshop: *Analysis of Societal Conflict and Counter-Insurgency*. Congratulations Kathryn!