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# Empathy as a Combat Capability

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*Conflict will increasingly involve multiple diverse actors, all competing for the allegiances and behaviours of targeted populations. As a consequence the outcome of future conflict will increasingly be decided in the minds of these populations rather than on the battlefield.*

The Australian Army, *Adaptive Campaigning: The Land Force Response to Complex Warfighting*, 2006, p. 1.

A fundamental challenge facing Australian soldiers operating in the contemporary battlespace is the complexity of the *human terrain*. The modern battlespace is inhabited not just by protagonists, but also by a wide range of other groups, often with widely differing objectives, motivations and behavioural drivers. To equip Australian soldiers for the human complexity of the battlespace, the Australian Army must develop empathy as a combat capability. The article advocates that the most effective way for the Australian Army to develop this capability is to study in the discipline of anthropology.

This article draws its analytical basis from the Australian Army's assessment of the contemporary battlespace as detailed in the *Future Land Operational Concept* (FLOC). This two pronged document comprises *Complex Warfighting* and *Adaptive Campaigning*. The FLOC analyses the contemporary battlespace and provides conceptual, force modernisation and capability direction to the Australian Army to ensure it remains postured to meet the demands of the future operating environment.<sup>1</sup>

*Complex Warfighting* assesses the contemporary battlespace as complex, diverse, diffuse and highly lethal. Effectiveness in the contemporary conflict environment will "demand the application of precise and discriminating force, in a Whole-of-Government framework, to influence and control populations and perceptions". It will require versatility, agility and orchestration, which in turn requires a human-centric philosophy of warfare, an ability to conduct integrated Whole-of-Government campaigns and an ability to conduct integrated campaigns in complex environments.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Australian Army, *Adaptive Campaigning: The Land Force Response to Complex Warfighting* (Department of Defence: Canberra, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> The Australian Army, *Complex Warfighting* (Department of Defence: Canberra, 2004), pp. 24-25.

*Adaptive Campaigning* is the comprehensive conceptual response to *Complex Warfighting*. It accounts for both the adaptive nature of warfare and the integration of combat, stabilisation, reconstruction, counterinsurgency, security, civil-military cooperation and humanitarian and peace support operations. It identifies five interdependent and mutually reinforcing lines of operations through which Australian soldiers will be able to contribute to the Whole-of-Government strategy: Joint Land Combat; Public Information; Population Protection; Population Support and Indigenous Capacity Building.<sup>3</sup>

In the Australian Defence Force's capstone operational concept document, *Joint Operations for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Chief of the Defence Force Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston observed that Australian soldiers will continue to "operate in the midst of populations".<sup>4</sup> The FLOC recognises the inherent human element of warfare and accepts that, in essence, "war is a form of armed politics, and politics is about influencing and controlling people and perceptions".<sup>5</sup>

### **The Human Terrain**

The modern battlespace is inhabited by indigenous populations, those both aligned and unaligned. They are accompanied by a wide variety of externally based actors: private contractors, multinational companies and organisations sponsored by a variety of interested governments. The factional nature of these groups and the existence of 'agenda within agenda' make the contemporary battlespace a challenging environment to navigate. The presence of allied or coalition forces, all acting and striving to meet their respective national strategic objectives, muddies the battlespace even further.

The multifarious *human terrain* of the battlespace complicates the task of Australian soldiers as they must try to win the confidence and alliance of indigenous populations while simultaneously combating their adversary. To succeed in this task, Australian soldiers must be armed with the tools to develop positive relationships, even intimacy, with indigenous populations. This would enable Australian soldiers to contribute to the Whole-of-Government effort to influence and shape the perceptions, allegiances and actions of indigenous populations and to establish control over the battlespace to allow for peaceful political discourse and a return to normality.<sup>6</sup> If Australian soldiers are to contribute to the achievement of

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<sup>3</sup> The Australian Army, *Adaptive Campaigning: The Land Force Response to Complex Warfighting*, pp. 31-33.

<sup>4</sup> A. Houston, *Joint Operations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> The Australian Army, *Adaptive Campaigning: The Land Force Response to Complex Warfighting*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. iii.

national strategic objectives, then they must meet the challenge of the contemporary battlespace by capitalising on every encounter with its inhabitants.

Australian soldiers will not be the only ones attempting to influence other battlespace inhabitants. Undoubtedly, the adversary will also attempt to garner support and most likely will capitalise on any considerable advantage of being 'cut from the same cloth' as indigenous populations (as applicable), which may greatly increase their probability of success. Effective communication will be crucial to ensuring that Australian soldiers are able to interact engagingly and build intimacy with battlespace inhabitants. Australian soldiers will need to be mindful of the implications of their every action or inaction, as these will shape the perceptions of battlespace inhabitants.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, Australian soldiers will be in constant adversarial competition for the allegiance of indigenous populations and can ill afford the loss inherent in even one negative encounter. Whether this results from a considered action or an unintended side effect, the impact could be equally damaging to the campaign of wills and beliefs being waged within the battlespace: "Making enemies is easy. It is harder to make friends. Violation of local norms and beliefs can turn a welcoming population into a hostile mob."<sup>8</sup>

Australian soldiers therefore will need to assess how every prospective action (or inaction) may shape inhabitants' perceptions. In the multifarious *human terrain* of the modern battlespace effective communication is vital. Acknowledging the importance of indigenous populations within the battlespace and implementing systems to equip soldiers with the tools to operate and communicate effectively in this environment is essential.

### **The 'Culture' Revival**

The importance of indigenous battlespace inhabitants and their perceptions is not a revolutionary or new idea. Indeed, in 500 BC Sun Tzu wrote:

In military matters, it is not necessarily beneficial to have more strength, only to avoid acting aggressively; it is enough to consolidate your power, assess opponents, and get people: that is all.<sup>9</sup>

Rather, the recent renewed focus on understanding battlespace inhabitants and shaping their perceptions represents the unearthing of an old

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<sup>7</sup> M. Stone, Languages in Crisis National Language Summit, 7 June 2007.

<sup>8</sup> I. Skelton and J. Cooper, 'You're not from around here, are you?', *Joint Force Quarterly* (December 2004).

<sup>9</sup> S. Tzu, *The Art of War*, Trans. T. Cleary, (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1988), p. 140.

awareness, a revival of an old truth that has been allowed to be pushed into the periphery when strategists and leaders are developing campaign plans.

Often, leaders and strategists get so focussed on planning combat operations, and the stark, immediate and reactive aspects of a campaign, that they forget to consider indigenous populations and their perceptions. It is only later when war drags on that leaders and strategists stop to consider these battlespace inhabitants.

And when people are entering upon a war they do things the wrong way around. Action comes first, and it is only when they have already suffered that they begin to think.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, by the time people realise that indigenous populations should be considered it is often too late and negative perceptions are already entrenched. The task of winning their allegiance and shaping their perceptions becomes doubly hard from this position.

As leader of the 'Coalition of the Willing', the United States faced this very problem. Against significant internal senior military advice, the United States' initial campaign plan for Iraq appears to have been unbalanced, with an over-emphasis on military outcomes. This over-emphasis was highlighted in May 2003 during President George W. Bush's fateful visit to USS *Abraham Lincoln*, where he proclaimed that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended", before a backdrop boasting 'mission accomplished'.<sup>11</sup> Yet in 2008, at the conclusion of Bush's nine year term in office, United States forces remained heavily engaged in counterinsurgency<sup>12</sup> operations in Iraq. While conventional combat operations may have ended in 2003, the insurgency and counterinsurgency continued throughout 2008 with around 152,500 American military personnel deployed in Iraq.<sup>13</sup>

Counterinsurgency in Iraq, and increasingly now in Afghanistan, has forced the United States to reassess and reconsider the importance of indigenous populations within the battlespace. They have learnt the hard way that indigenous culture matters at every level—strategic, operational and tactical:

Misunderstanding culture at a strategic level can produce policies that exacerbate an insurgency; a lack of cultural knowledge at an operational

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<sup>10</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Trans. R. Warner (Middlesex: Penguin Books Limited, 1978), p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> 'President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended', 1 May 2003, <[www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030501-15.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030501-15.html)> [Accessed 31 May 2008].

<sup>12</sup> Counterinsurgency theory in a nutshell—a competition with the insurgent for the right and the ability to win the hearts, minds and acquiescence of the population—D. Kilcullen, 'Twenty-Eight Articles, Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency', <[www.tecom.usmc.mil/caocl/OIF/Cultural\\_Guidance\\_Learning/kilcullen\\_28\\_articles.pdf](http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/caocl/OIF/Cultural_Guidance_Learning/kilcullen_28_articles.pdf)> [Accessed 28 May 2008]

<sup>13</sup> 'US to withdraw 4,000 troops from Iraq', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 May 2008.

level can lead to negative public opinion; and arrogance at a tactical level endangers both civilians and troops.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of battlespace inhabitants and their perceptions is now becoming more broadly recognised within the United States military. Indeed, all the Services, to varying degrees, have initiated culture and language programs to arm more troops with critical knowledge about the people and places they will encounter.<sup>15</sup>

An example of this can be seen in the United States Marine Corps' *Center for Advance Operational Culture Learning*. Established in 2005, the Centre aims to equip attending Marines with operationally relevant regional, culture, and language knowledge to allow them to plan and operate successfully in the joint and combined expeditionary environment.<sup>16</sup> Another example can be found in the issuing of the United States Army's new field manual, FM 3-0. The field manual (the first major upgrade since 11 September 2001) institutionalises the requirement for cultural awareness among Army personnel, highlighting that it is "critical to understanding populations and their perceptions to reduce friction, and prevent misunderstanding".<sup>17</sup> These are only two of the many "culture awareness" systems the United States military have or are implementing to engender greater cultural awareness among their personnel.

However, while this article draws upon American examples to highlight the widespread reawakened awareness of the importance of all battlespace inhabitants and their perceptions, it advocates that a uniquely Australian model is required. Indeed, the Australian Army must discern and adopt a campaigning approach that is not only effective but is also akin to Australian culture itself—both its military manifestation as much as the parent society from which it stems. American systems, regardless of their benefits, should not be blithely implemented as an 'off the shelf' option because this would fail to recognise the differences between the Australian Army and their American land forces counterparts.

Australia's role, reputation and degree of influence with various state and non-state actors in international affairs are not only different to those of our coalition partners, but they also play out in different ways. Australia is a middling regional power—the United States is far from this, and before they have even step into an operational theatre, Australian soldiers will meet a reception different to that waiting for their American counterparts.

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<sup>14</sup> M. McFate, 'The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture', *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 38 (Third Quarter 2005), p. 44.

<sup>15</sup> K. McIntire Peters, 'Culture Club', *Government Executive* (1 April 2007), p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> 'USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL)', <[www.tecom.usmc.mil/caocl/](http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/caocl/)> [Accessed 31 May 2008].

<sup>17</sup> J. Harlow, 'Army's new FM 3-0 Field Manual for Operations Raises Stability Operations to Status of Army Core Mission', *Pentagon Brief* (1 April 2008), p. 2.

As both combatant and ambassador, the Australian soldier has historically been most successful in a strategic sense when able to establish rapport and gain the trust of indigenous populations and other battlespace actors. Indeed, the Australian Army's long experience participating in coalition operations, often with militaries from vastly different social and cultural backgrounds, has given rise to a distinctive approach to campaigning:

Our own unique military experience has been in far more cooperative actions, which have seen us working with a range of different militaries in addition to our traditional allies, the US and the UK. The fact that we almost always operate in a coalition environment [as an equivalent partner] helps us to be better attuned to other actors in the battlespace, and more culturally aware when working with other countries.<sup>18</sup>

The Army must implement a uniquely Australian system that engenders soldiers with a degree of understanding that goes beyond 'cultural awareness', providing guidance on how to think, not what to think.<sup>19</sup>

Do not write it as a formula. Write it as a way to teach officers to think, to think in new ways about war. War is ever changing and men are fallible. Rigid rules simply won't work. Teach men to think.<sup>20</sup>

Implementing a system so as to make Australian soldiers "culturally aware", will not be enough, as while this approach may aim

to encourage greater sensitivity to the nuances that differentiate cultures, it actually encourages a crude view of ancient and fixed ways of war. It risks replacing strategy with stereotypes.<sup>21</sup>

To operate effectively in the modern battlespace, Australian soldiers will need to possess a wholly new combat capability which prepares them to operate effectively amongst populations. This combat capability to be developed is *empathy*.

## **Walking in Another's Shoes**

Perceptions of what empathy is, or what being empathic actually entails, vary. Most commonly, empathy is equated with 'walking in another's shoes'. Empathy is associated with one's ability to see, feel or perceive a situation or emotion from another person's perspective. *The Australian Oxford Dictionary* confirms that empathy is "the power of identifying oneself mentally with (and so fully comprehending) a person or object of contemplation".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Major Nick Floyd in C. Holcroth, 'Punching above our weight', *Defence* (April 2006), p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Author refers reader to W. Monfries, *Education and Training Challenges for Security/ Land Forces in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (31 October 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Col. John R. Boyd (USAF Ret.) in M. Leslie, 'Cultural Understanding: The Cornerstone of Success in a COIN Environment', *Infantry* (July/August 2007), p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> P. Porter, 'Good Anthropology, Bad History: The Cultural Turn in Studying War', *Parameters* (Summer 2007), p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> B. Moore (ed), *The Australian Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Although empathy involves “understanding, being aware of, and being sensitive to the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another” it does not imply “actually sharing the feelings or emotions of another”.<sup>23</sup> When considering the development of empathy as an Australian Army capability it is essential that *empathy* not be confused with *sympathy*<sup>24</sup> as their meanings are very different.<sup>25</sup>

There are two key reasons why the development of empathy as an Australian Army capability is essential. Firstly, developing an empathic capability will ensure that Australian soldiers have not only ‘cultural awareness’ but also the *understanding* necessary to decipher the motivations and behaviours of battlespace inhabitants. This is crucial if they are to succeed in either accommodating or altering those motivations and behaviours. Secondly, developing this capability will ensure that Army’s communication objectives transcend cultural divides, and penetrate beyond social and cultural barriers. Empathy is a valuable tool for human interaction precisely because it increases exponentially the effectiveness of interpersonal communication. Messages uncomprehended by or miscommunicated to the target population are simply wasted. Empathy can transform them; make them comprehensible.<sup>26</sup>

Empathic people are capable of moving beyond their own values, perceptions and experiences to comprehend the perceptions and motivations of others. Empathy supports the development of cultural sensitivities in that it “promotes the healthy practice of overcoming ethnocentrism to imagine others’ perspectives”.<sup>27</sup>

While not purporting to be unerringly prescient, empathic people can use their ability to ‘walk in another’s shoes’ to become more predictive of others’ behaviour and reactions. Empathic people are able to accept difference and perceive shades of grey rather than stark black and white. To empathic people, differences are not necessarily threatening. They are able to recognise alternative behaviours and beliefs without feeling the need to challenge their validity. This allows them to see commonalities in behaviours and beliefs and build bridges between different groups rather than defining, and consequently dividing, them by their differences.

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<sup>23</sup> University of Minnesota, ‘Service Definitions’, 1 July 2007, <<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/profdev/definitions.html>> [Accessed 24 August 2007].

<sup>24</sup> *Sympathy*: “feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else’s misfortune”. B. Moore (ed), *The Australian Oxford Dictionary*.

<sup>25</sup> I. Roxborough, ‘Inside the Adversary’s Mind: Pedagogy, Empathy and Insurgency’, Conference of Pedagogy for the Long War, Quantico, 29 October – 1 November 2007.

<sup>26</sup> E. Goldman, ‘Strategic Communications: a Tool for Asymmetric Warfare’, *Small Wars Journal*, 6 October 2007, <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2007/10/print/strategic-communication-a-tool/>> [Accessed 8 October 2007].

<sup>27</sup> Porter, ‘Good Anthropology, Bad History: The Cultural Turn in Studying War’, p. 50.

When people are mentally and emotionally prepared for difference they are ultimately better equipped to respond appropriately to people and situations that are foreign to them. Indeed, if people are prepared for situations that are outside their usual norm then 'foreign' simply becomes different, and not hostile.

The nature of contemporary Australian deployments places soldiers in many unfamiliar environments where they are required to interact with a diverse range of individuals and groups. Conflict environments are volatile, and the motivations driving the actions and behaviours of battlespace inhabitants will range from fear, uncertainty and trepidation to greed, hatred and ideological self-righteousness. To ensure Australian soldiers are able to interact meaningfully with indigenous populations and other battlespace actors they must be prepared for these different environments and be able to recognise these motivational drivers.

Most Australian soldiers will enter the contemporary battlespace with an unquestioning acceptance of their own cultural and societal norms, their own perceptions of the world and of humanity, their own ideas of right and wrong. While they may recognise differences between themselves and other battlespace inhabitants, they will not necessarily comprehend the process by which these differences have evolved. An empathy capability will assist Australian soldiers to identify the foundations of these perceptions and understand that these perceptions are not innate but are cultural and social constructs.

### **'A Fair Go'**

Empathy as a combat capability is not designed to undermine the belief systems of Australian soldiers or advocate tolerance for behaviours that are incompatible with the Australian ethos and values. Empathy is a tool, a high level skill that can equip soldiers and facilitate their success in the contemporary battlespace, thereby ensuring the achievement of national strategic objectives.

Some critics fear that building empathy as a combat capability will contradict the traditional, endemic cultural norms of military behaviour and may impair the Australian Army's ability to function as an effective fighting force. They question whether Australian soldiers can maintain the mental discipline required to employ violent, lethal force while simultaneously displaying empathy towards indigenous populations and other battlespace actors. Concern is also raised for the problems developing intimacy with indigenous

populations and other battlespace inhabitants may cause soldiers, both professionally and psychologically.<sup>28</sup>

Such criticism, and concern, underestimates the capacity of Australian soldiers to make meaningful distinctions between personal attitudes and professional behaviour. Australians have earned a high reputation in this regard, from their earliest encounters with Turkish forces at Gallipoli<sup>29</sup> to their more recent peacekeeping missions throughout the Asia-Pacific region. This predisposition seems to stem directly from the national culture, from an ethos holding that even one's opponents are entitled to 'a fair go'. It has often enabled Australian soldiers to engage more effectively with indigenous populations and other battlespace actors—including adversaries—than some of their counterparts could manage. It should be recognised for what it is, both an expression of national values and a very valuable moral asset, even in combat. While retaining the capacity to employ combat lethality if and when necessary, and earning a reputation as highly skilled soldiers, Australians have also become renowned for their capacity to develop such intimacy and affinity within their operating environment.

Australian soldiers have achieved remarkable success in engaging with indigenous populations and other battlespace actors without formally developing empathy as a combat capability.<sup>30</sup> However the nature of the contemporary battlespace suggests that building on the Australian commitment to 'a fair go' by formally developing empathy as a capability will exponentially enhance the capacity of Australian soldiers to contribute to the achievement of national strategic objectives.

## Anthropologising the Military

The most efficient and effective conduit for developing empathy as a combat capability is the discipline of *anthropology*.<sup>31</sup> It provides the breadth of subject matter necessary to educate and prepare Australian soldiers to utilise empathy in their interactions with indigenous populations and other

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<sup>28</sup> The scope of this article does not allow the author to examine the potential psychological implications of developing empathy as a combat capability. The author recommends the Australian Army undertake further study on potential psychological implications prior to implementing empathy as a combat capability.

<sup>29</sup> Witness the Anzacs' compassionate conduct with the Turks during the troop-brokered truce to bury the collective dead after the 19-20 May 1915 counter-attack, and the sentiment elicited that spurred Ataturk's famous message to the mothers of the Anzacs: "Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives ... you are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehments to us where they lie side by side here in this country of ours ... You the mothers who sent their sons from far away countries wipe away your tears. Your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. Having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well".

<sup>30</sup> Witness for example the success of Operation BEL ISI, the Bougainville Truce Monitoring operation.

<sup>31</sup> *Anthropology*: "the study of mankind, especially of its society and customs". B. Moore (ed), *The Australian Oxford Dictionary*.

actors in the contemporary battlespace. However, such anthropological instruction should be composed, designed and delivered in recognition of three temporally separate phases of learning. These phases are generic and not necessarily sequential, and Australian soldiers can gain benefit from instruction in one phase without necessarily having experienced the others.

The first learning phase should introduce a broad theoretical base which encompasses anthropological principles and includes lessons on societal structures, behavioural considerations and drivers, power and influence sources and structures of political and social gatherings.<sup>32</sup> This learning phase is targeted at increasing the general anthropological knowledge of Australian soldiers and is not conditional on having an established battlespace location.

The second learning phase occurs once a mission locale has been established. Instruction should be targeted at delivery of competencies concentrating on a discerned focal area and should include behavioural norms, the role and accepted treatment of women, tribal and ethnic power bases, economic reliance and historical and existing social conflicts. This anthropological backgrounding will allow soldiers to 'hit the ground running' when entering the battlespace, greatly reducing the likelihood that they will commit some egregious *faux pas*.

The third learning phase is operational, involving deployment of a cultural and/or linguistic expert with the mission. The requirement for this phase is already well-recognised by the Australian Army at the highest level:

The Army is to regard linguistic and cultural capability as a combat capability in its own right, and is to train, organise and employ combat linguists and regional specialists accordingly.<sup>33</sup>

Such deployments will clearly assist commanders and soldiers to develop intimacy with indigenous populations and navigate the multifarious *human terrains* in which they will operate, ensuring that Army strategic communications are constructed and targeted to maximise impact and acceptance. Effectively utilised, anthropological expertise can be a very effective 'weapon'.

A key challenge to developing empathy as a combat capability for the Australian Army will be gaining the trust and support of the anthropological community. Some elements within the American anthropological community already oppose the use of anthropological expertise by the military, fearing that it may be exploited to the detriment of indigenous communities. The

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<sup>32</sup> LTCOL Nick Floyd, interview with author, 16 August 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Chief of Army Development Intent (CADI) in The Australian Army, *Adaptive Campaigning: The Land Force Response to Complex Warfighting*, p. 30.

mid 2007 deployment of the inaugural *Human Terrain Team*<sup>34</sup> to Afghanistan with the United States Marine Corps encountered such opposition.<sup>35</sup> The *Network of Concerned Anthropologists* raised a petition advocating that “anthropologists should refrain from directly assisting the US military in combat, be it through torture, interrogation, or tactical advice”.<sup>36</sup> In conjunction with their fears for the welfare of indigenous populations, these anthropologists are concerned that the integrity of their discipline will be compromised by any link with the military.

On the other hand, many of those proposing that anthropology should be utilised as a military resource regard such opposition as academically purist and narrow-minded. They assert that the central purpose of anthropological study is to study cultures and societies in order to better understand human behavioural and societal drivers. Because it will facilitate its interactions with indigenous populations in the battlespace it is therefore appropriate to extend such understandings to the military.

This conflict stems from different understandings and perspectives on the purpose and use of anthropology. Both views are valid. Anthropology *has* sometimes been abused in the recent past by militaries to the detriment of the indigenous populations, arguably so in Vietnam. Militaries in the contemporary battlespace *are* interacting with indigenous populations in volatile environments where there is an increasing requirement for effective communication. However attacking critics of using anthropology as being purist and narrow-minded is counter-productive, automatically alienating many uncommitted practitioners. The anthropological community holds the key to unlocking this academic resource which the military wish to harness and which is essential to the successful development of empathy as a combat capability. The conflict between anthropologists and the military stems from their different understandings and perspectives on the purpose and use of anthropology.

To reach agreement each side will need to acknowledge the legitimacy of the others' concerns and understand its motivations. The mild irony is that “perhaps the first cultural gap we need to bridge is the one between the military and the academics”<sup>37</sup> and that what is required in this situation is empathy for each other. Anthropologists currently working with the military perceive both anthropologists and the military as wishing to protect indigenous populations and use this commonality as a bridge between their

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<sup>34</sup> *Human Terrain Team*, an experimental Pentagon program that assigns anthropologists and other social scientists to American combat units in Afghanistan and Iraq. (D. Rohde, 'Army Enlists Anthropology in War Zones', *The New York Times*, 5 October 2007).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Network of Concerned Anthropologists, 'Pledge of Non-participation in Counter-insurgency', <<http://concerned.anthropologists.googlepages.com/home>> [Accessed 8 October 2007].

<sup>37</sup> LTCOL Nick Floyd, interview with author, 9 October 2007.

two worlds. "I'm frequently accused of militarizing anthropology ... but we're really anthropologizing the military".<sup>38</sup>

Institutionalising the study of anthropology throughout the Australian Army will be a long and arduous task and unfortunately training time within the Army is at a premium. With the majority of training time already committed to more tangible training requirements such as weapon skills there is little space in the curriculum for anthropology. However the development of empathy as a combat capability through the study of anthropology is too important to be sacrificed at the expense of time in the training schedule.<sup>39</sup> While "it may not seem like a priority when bullets are flying, cultural ignorance can kill".<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the Army needs to get creative in its training approach. One possible option would be to include 'empathy' lessons in other training activities, as already practised in an *ad hoc* manner by the Australian Army.<sup>41</sup> For example, during training exercises, role players (as civilians on the battlefield), who would react to the actions of the platoon based on social norms etc, could be included.<sup>42</sup> And whilst some anthropological specific instruction will still be required, approaches such as this would assist minimise the overall strain of adding yet another training requirement to an already packed military training curriculum.

It is also important to recognise that once soldiers start instinctively reacting empathically, they are unlikely (hopefully) to stop. As established earlier in this article, empathy becomes an ingrained behaviour. All lessons in anthropology will build from previous learning and as soldiers' capacity for empathy develops their requirement for future instruction will decrease, with the focus shifting to refresher courses and area specific training.

## The Way Forward

The increasingly complex nature of *human terrain* is one of many challenges facing Australian soldiers in the contemporary battlespace. The implications of its complexity stretch far beyond the potential impact on the Australian Army's combat capability. The extent and nature of soldiers' relationships with indigenous populations and the complex interplay between various battlespace actors will play an increasingly significant role in determining future conflict outcomes. To achieve national strategic objectives in this increasingly challenging environment the Australian Army must identify new strategies and equip its soldiers with new tools.

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<sup>38</sup> Rohde, 'Army Enlists Anthropology in War Zones'.

<sup>39</sup> M. Leslie, 'Cultural Understanding: The Cornerstone of Success in a COIN Environment', *Infantry* (July/August 2007), p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> McFate, 'The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture', p. 44.

<sup>41</sup> The Australian Army, *Planning Guidance for development of a Cultural Understanding Capability in the Australian Army* (19 November 2007), p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Leslie, 'Cultural Understanding: The Cornerstone of Success in a COIN Environment', p. 7.

Understanding and adapting to all manner of terrain is an unchanging fundamental to the successful conduct of military operations, and *human terrain* is no different. Recognising empathy as a combat capability is an innovative strategy, and a highly effective tool that will further enable soldiers to engage effectively with indigenous populations and other battlespace actors:

To assemble armies and put them into dangerous situations is the business of generals. Adaptations to different grounds, advantages of contraction and expansion, patterns of human feelings and conditions—these must all be accounted for.

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Tzu, *The Art of War*, p. 158.