

Military Police as Soldier-Diplomats

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The nature of US military operations changes daily in the contemporary operational environment (COE). The demand for leaders to be flexible, adaptive thinkers and decision makers increases with each operation. Conventional warriors must also be diplomats to succeed in the myriad of stability operations. These new Soldier-diplomats need a unique set of skills. The Soldiers and leaders of the Military Police Corps are best suited to meet these new challenges.

Military Diplomacy

Although Iraq is central to any discussion concerning military operations today, dozens of small unit operations are going on throughout the world, many of them overlooked and underestimated in their influence. They are the pinnacle of shaping operations that may one day become decisive operations for the defense strategy of the United States and for the overall stability of the globe. Special operations forces and civil affairs (CA) units operate across the globe to foster positive relationships between the host countries and the United States. Many special operations missions focus on supporting countries that are struggling to establish reliable democracies. These are not the operations that the public is familiar with, such as the programs that trained guerilla fighters in South America or the efforts to decrease the drug trade through Central America. The operations in question facilitate the following:

- Building bridges.
- Widening roads.
- Improving response to natural disasters.
- Securing borders.
- Fighting criminal organizations through the development of strong relationships with the local government or influential organizations.

Units operate quietly, leaving small, unobtrusive footprints that minimize resentment among the local population. The result is dozens of small successes each year that have big payoffs in the long run.

Although special forces units are the primary executors of many of these missions, defense attaches also wield enormous influence all over the



world. Often working alone or with very small staffs, these officers reach out to local institutions to shape the environment. Their methods are stealthy and precise. They must ingratiate themselves with local citizens and exert their influence in undetectable ways. Although they work in conjunction with US embassies and theater commands in support of common goals and strategic objectives, they operate in the field with unparalleled autonomy and are solely responsible for the success or failure of those operations.

The Balkans

The Soldier-diplomat role was established in depth during operations in the Balkans and fine-tuned by many midlevel officers in Bosnia. Members of all branches had to learn to think not just as warriors but as politicians also. At the heart of any civil strife are basic human needs. Although combat power helps in operations, there can be no success without a deeper level of understanding and that is a difficult transition for many military officers. At the start of operations in the Balkans and Bosnia, many complained that the role of diplomat distracted the military from its true mission of fighting wars and winning them. However, more forward-thinking officers realized that it was a predictor of times to come and that the experiences gained while enforcing the Dayton Peace Accord would develop skills that would be used in the future. More flexible, adaptive thinking is vital to current operations. Success demands that planners think outside the tactical box to become Soldier-diplomats.

On a more narrow scale, the same is true in Iraq. Young captains and even younger lieutenants are

entrusted with key tasks such as being liaisons to city councils, supporting the democratic process, interfacing with school principals, and initiating infrastructure development. The purpose is to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi citizens, an aim that most people agree is the most important aspect of success in that theater. It cannot be done with combat power alone. As a result, the diplomatic handbook is being written and revised daily by commanders and small unit leaders on the ground, requiring flexible leaders with unique skill sets.

State Partnership Program

Another example of the development of Soldier-diplomat skills is inherent in the State Partnership Program (SPP) operated by the National Guard Bureau. This program connects 36 states to more than 38 countries around the globe. Each relationship is different, with diverse goals, but the overarching strategy is to foster cooperative relationships with nations that are moving toward more progressive government systems. It is a “component of the US strategy of selective and flexible engagement in Europe, Central Asia, and Latin America, and eventually, perhaps, in the Pacific Rim and Africa.”¹ National Guard Soldiers in the program travel several times each year to the country they are partnered with and coordinate training opportunities. They assist only in projects identified by the host country. The goals often involve the development of citizen-soldier establishments similar to the National Guard in the United States. Frequently, these relationships affect economic and social policies that support stability in the region. The host countries frequently benefit by moving in a direction that will facilitate acceptance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The officers who operate in this obscure program, often military police Soldiers, must act with little doctrinal guidance simply because they are not fighting a war. They must first carefully navigate the political

landscape of their partner country because initially they are not dealing with fellow soldiers. They must tread lightly until trust is established and the program consistently meets the expectations of each partner. At the outset, these are not military operations but diplomatic ones, which nonetheless affect strategic military planning in the United States. Most importantly, the SPP promotes the US model of a military ruled by civilian leadership, a vital concept in the stability of developing nations. Once the partnership is developed, joint training is often conducted between the American state’s National Guard Soldiers and the host nation’s developing army. Resources are exchanged and critical assessment and planning tools are shared by National Guard leaders. The SPP has gained prominence in the last five years for its support of NATO’s Partnership for Peace Program and is expected to continue to garner support from influential leaders at the Pentagon.

Programs like the SPP, the positions of defense attaches, and CA missions do not replace the warfighting mission—fighting and winning wars will always be the top priority. However, it cannot be denied that stability operations will almost always follow wars, requiring leaders to balance warfighting skills with those that prevent wars and develop strong nations. CA officers are trained to operate with methods other than warfighting methods; most other officers are not. They must develop the skills as they go, in real time. In these situations, members of the Military Police Branch are ahead of their peers. As the enforcers of military law, they already have some of the skills required of the leaders in future operations.

Scalpel Versus Bayonet

In May 2003, Lieutenant Colonel John Hammond, commander of the 211th Military Police Battalion, Massachusetts Army National Guard, was ordered by V Corps to stand up a unique task force (TF). Designated TF Enforcer, it was composed of military police units and counterintelligence and psychological operations teams. They were tasked to establish a foothold in Fallujah and to identify, locate, and capture or kill enemy forces operating in the area. TF Enforcer conducted patrols designed to gather actionable intelligence, then executed raids based on this intelligence. Lieutenant Colonel Hammond’s main effort was a military police company. In an article in the April 2005 issue of *Military Police*, he argued that military police Soldiers can perform this type of mission with more precision than many combat arms organizations. He compared the two types of units to the difference between using a scalpel and a bayonet. The military police technique reduced collateral



damage and often yielded greater cooperation from local citizens. Lieutenant Colonel Hammond stated that, "Precision, speed, and stealth are critical components that are the calling cards of the military police platoon."² By the time the TF was dismantled in late 2003, tons of explosives and ammunition had been seized and the overall goals had been accomplished. Lieutenant Colonel Hammond said that the success of the TF was a direct result of the unique military police skill sets. In order to gain intelligence in this environment, it was critical to balance warfighting skills with a more diplomatic approach. Platoon leaders were required to develop relationships and operate within the existing infrastructure to achieve results and gain actionable intelligence. For several reasons, military police Soldiers are better at this than most other Soldiers.

Military Police Skill Sets

Military police Soldiers are accessible in their up-armored high-mobility, multipurpose wheeled vehicles but are sufficiently protected to ensure relative safety from hostile forces. The Bradley fighting vehicle, although it offers exceptional protection, substantially limits the contact Soldiers can have with the local population, making it more of a challenge to win their hearts and minds. Military police Soldiers also have received training that their combat arms counterparts have not. When executing law and order operations, military police Soldiers are trained in interpersonal skills and communication. They have developed the decision-making skills and the flexible responses needed in situations that require other than lethal force. Additionally, military police Soldiers have learned to use levels of force, evaluate situations, and apply



procedures based on individualized events. The sensitive nature of many military police missions, such as detainee operations, has enabled military police leaders to think flexibly and use adaptive techniques instead of always relying on the textbook response. This is an exceptional advantage in today's COE. As stability operations continue to advance throughout the globe, it is these diplomatic abilities that will mark the difference between success and failure.

Conclusion

The traditional concepts of the warfighter are changing every day. A mission conducted on the borders of Iraq and another executed in the slums of Baghdad can occur simultaneously but may vary extensively in scope, methodology, purpose, and effects. The COE will only remain "current" for a limited time. Today's leaders must master a balance between conventional warfighting and a substantially more varied role that includes politics, diplomacy, and exceptional insight. Leaders within the Military Police Corps possess unique skills that will enable them to navigate this emerging battlefield successfully. Already trained to be adaptive and flexible thinkers, military police Soldiers have the ability to fulfill the need for warfighters as well as diplomats.

References

¹ Mr. John Groves, "The State Partnership Program," *Parameters*, Spring 1999, pages 43-53.

² Lieutenant Colonel John Hammond, "Military Police Operations in Fallujah," *Military Police*, April 2005.