Social Sciences Contribution to Civil Affairs
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Civil Affairs must introduce theory and practical skillsets from psychology to fulfill its role as an information-related capability to “engage and leverage the civil component of the operational environment.” CA’s current application in the competition continuum in other than armed conflict is unprepared to navigate the complexity of human terrain, the arena of “cognitive warfare.” To win without fighting, it must be more proactive, encompassing external fields of study to effectively deal with societies outside of armed conflict.

Winning without fighting involves the use of “narrative identity theory” and specific “motivational interviewing” skills. Narrative identity theory contextualizes that society at large in a story that reflects its belief system and how its past and future maintain fidelity to that narrative. As such, narrative identity lays out how experiences build, form, and contribute to self-narratives on how an individual fits within the larger societal story.

Relevant to this is how specific operations are informed by societal narratives. In psychology, the term is “meeting the patient where they are at.” For CA, the challenge is to align messaging with what a culture will understand and be receptive to. This is opposed to a cumbersome and reductionist approach of sticking to rigid themes and messages or talking points that assume audiences will gravitate towards anything we produce.

Motivational interviewing, however, entails specific strategies for influence in the employment of applying a coherent messaging or effects driven approach. Motivational interviewing is used in psychology to enhance internal motivation to change instead of an authoritarian approach. If any individual is resistant in psychology, they will discard any intervention. Similarly, if an individual is skeptical or hostile to CA, the soldier is faced with an impossible task of limited guidance and sparse tools to rely on.

Influence, the business of winning without fighting, and the intricate challenge contained within the role of “engage and leverage” is realistic once the Civil Affairs Corps trains its force on the spirit and goals of motivational interviewing. By employing narrative identity theory in area study research, and applying motivational interviewing in CA missions; CA will then utilize reliable research and theories to win without fighting.