

PERFORMANCE DURING PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS

KEYFACTORS FOR SUCCESS: A VIEW FROM THE FIELD

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Introduction

Some years ago in KOSOVO, my French brigade commander told me that a soldier in Peace Support Operations has to be an **all-round** trained soldier with a **clear mind** and a **warm hart**.

It sounds superhuman, but I totally agree with his point of view. Post Cold War operations place new pressures on commanders and soldiers. They not only have to be well trained as a soldier, but also need the skills of a diplomat, a psychologist and a humanitarian aid worker.

After this statement I could stop my speech, everything is said on soldiers' skills and their performance. But don't worry, I will not do so.

During the next minutes I will pinpoint some key factors for success in Peace Support Operations from my personal experience as a former battle group commander in KOSOVO. After defining success in Peace Support Operations, I will enumerate some principles of training as I experienced them before, during and after my mission. The next issue I will speak about is the extreme importance of the moral factor on operations. Afterwards I will focus on the philosophy of command and I will conclude with the issue of welfare support as important key factor for success in military operations.

Peace Support Operations – defining success in a complex environment

Peace Support Operations are multi-functional operations involving military forces and diplomatic and humanitarian agencies. In Peace Support operations, the concept of victory and defeat is inappropriate. Military operations in Peace Support Operations will be designed principally to create or support the conditions in which political and diplomatic activities may proceed.

Military action will therefore complement diplomatic, economic and humanitarian endeavors which together pursue political objectives. Peace Support Operations, therefore, normally involve not only the commitment of troops but also police and civilian personnel undertaking a wide range of diplomatic, security, civil affairs and humanitarian activities.

In fact Peace Support operations are often not a soldier's job, but only soldiers take the task upon themselves, basically because the civil agencies of the international community are not yet deployed or are not yet properly staffed. This implies a great challenge for the commander in the field. Indeed, even when troops have to execute not military and sometimes boring but vital tasks, they need to be convinced that their job is useful. We have to ensure that our troops understand what they are doing and believe in it

Success will be measured by the rate at which the sum total of those activities progresses towards the achievement of the mandate. A stable settlement, not military victory, is the ultimate measure of success in Peace Support Operations.

Ultimately it are human beings that execute the military mission. Therefore we need highly skilled Armed Forces with a reputation of excellence in performing Peace Support Operations. Our soldiers have to get through a selection and training process that gives them the essential grounding for further professional development. Finally, collective training will turn them into effective soldiers.

Some principles of training

One of the key factors for successful operations is training. Specific training for the conduct of Peace Support Operations will be given in addition to combat training but won't be a dilution of it. Although, in principle, in Peace Support Operations the use of force is limited to self-defense purposes, there may always be a need to escalate to real fighting in the conduct of any operation.

PSO require high standards of individual skills, discipline and morale. Training is vital to deliver these standards and a credible force capable of coping with escalation, and capable of operating in a multinational and multi-agency environment.

The success of an operation depends on the command's training prior to and during the operation. It should be a continuing process for both personnel and unit. The training program has to be clear, logical and comprehensive and should be based on an assessment of the mission and the area of operations. The exact training requirements must be identified early in the planning process in order to organize and resource the required predeployment training capability.

The foundation of Peace Support Operations predeployment training should focus on the revision of individual basic military skills such as weapon handling, patrolling, first aid, physical training, etc.

Superimposed on these basic skills are those aspects that are specific to the Peace Support Mission such as:

- customs, culture, religious practices, political situation, geography, economic, and historical background of the situation and population of the area of operations
- capabilities of the opposing factions
- how to communicate effectively to the public through the media
- negotiation and mediation
- English language training, Although most coalition forces speak English, not all operational terms mean the same thing in every army
- situational awareness to include mine and booby trap awareness, and weapons recognition
- rules of engagement
- rules of behavior
- laws of armed conflict
- crowd control and the use and employment of non-lethal riot control agents
- an outline of the civilian agencies operating in the theatre
- appeal to interpreters.

The command may be faced with working with a diverse set of troops and augmentations. The more they train together, the more they will learn about how the other thinks and acts. Participation in the training program will also enhance teambuilding and the staff members' perception of one another.

Training is also the best method of learning the strengths and weaknesses of your troops and it helps to create cohesion.

Training continues once the troops arrive in the area of operations, based upon specific requirements and functions. Therefore it should include exercises to rehearse the Operational Orders or new missions and demonstrate the formation's capabilities, which may serve as a deterrent.

All it takes is one soldier or a small unit acting improperly to compromise the mission or to undo weeks of efforts to build goodwill in the area of operations. Inappropriate individual statements and actions may offend forces from other nations or civilians in the area of operations, and create negative perceptions. Individuals should not assume that the indigenous population or a number of other agencies don't understand gestures or derogatory statements made in their own language or slang. Training and continued emphasis on proper personal conduct may prevent this.

All personnel should also receive instruction on understanding methods of operating in coalitions and with troops of other allied nations. Make sure that all augmentations participate in training events and provide specific training to all units or individuals that receive other equipment.

High morale

Besides military skills each soldier has to master the proper execution of his mission. **High**

morale is also extremely important and a key to success. Success in operations often depends more on moral than on physical qualities. Outnumbering forces, armament and resources cannot compensate for lack of courage, of energy, of determination to succeed nor a bold spirit.

Because of the uncertain nature of military operations, those involved are forced to endure a constant threat to their lives and well being. Fear, surprise and shock will be a constant drain on resources, both physical and mental. To cope with these challenges, courage and leadership coupled with unit cohesion and discipline are the best counters to that fear. There is but one certainty in relation to military operations: there is no such thing as a casualty-free or risk-free conflict, even not Peace Support Operations. We have to keep that in mind.

This moral factor is difficult to define. The morale of troops promotes the right spirit and the determination to achieve the aim. There are many things that contribute to morale: training, confidence in equipment and good administration as well as confidence in commanders, fair and firm discipline coupled with an open communication between soldiers, their peers and their commanders, self-respect and a clear understanding of what is going on and what is required. If all these requirements are met, there is a clear potential for military success. To engender and sustain morale, however, **motivation, leadership and management** are required.

Motivation implies a determination for getting things done. It derives from a personal commitment to an idea, a sense of purpose, and a feeling of belonging. Many people have an instinctive desire to do what is right and good. One way of generating motivation, therefore, is to ensure that our troops understand and believe in what they are doing .

A sense of purpose is achieved when that belief is linked to the individual's involvement in its pursuit. Involvement is a stronger source of motivation for most people when they feel they belong to a team, of which all members provide the others with support.

In military units, given the challenges inherent to military operations, the need is to go beyond mere team-building, to develop genuine comradeship that will endure even if things turn out very badly. It is pride in belonging, best described by the term "esprit de corps" in relation to unit identity. Being highly motivated in peace-time is one thing; to retain that motivation during lasting military operations requires a profound commitment to one's comrades, one's unit, and to the cause of one's assigned mission.

Leadership at all levels is the principal element in the maintenance of morale. Without good leadership, morale will undoubtedly crumble in the face of adversity. All leaders, great and small, must accept their responsibility for maintaining morale and the spirit of those under their command. Military leadership is the projection of personality and character to get subordinates to do what is required of them and to engender the confidence that breeds initiative and the acceptance of risk and responsibility.

Born leaders are rare, but I am convinced that leadership potential can be developed by training and experience. Individuals will develop their own style of leadership and no two people will necessarily lead in exactly the same way.

Leadership starts with self-discipline. True leaders promote this amongst their subordinates by decisive action, precept and example, advice, encouragement and admonishment. Outstanding leadership will sustain high morale when all other factors are against it.

Management is no substitute for leadership. Management is about making the best use of available resources. It is an attribute of command that cannot be overlooked because it is fundamental to efficiency. I see good management as an element that promotes high morale, because without good management of resources and the provision of sufficient administrative support, the maintenance of morale and the motivation of the troops would be rendered considerably more difficult.

Good management is the ability to achieve the right balance: neither an overabundance nor a shortage of resources, either of which would undermine the concentration of effort on the main objective.

The particular environment of PSO can produce significant challenges to commanders to maintain morale. Shifting mandates can be particularly frustrating but nothing is more potentially damaging to military morale for a soldier than to witness human suffering while being constricted in response.

A sound philosophy of command

A sound philosophy of command is another key to success. It requires timely decision-making, a clear understanding of your superior commander's intention, and the commander's determination to see the plan through to a successful conclusion. This requires a style of command that promotes mutual trust between troops and their commanders, freedom and speed of action and initiative, but which is responsive to superior direction.

The set of personal qualities of a successful commander is large and varied. Commanders at all levels must have an open mind, be receptive to all possible solutions and have the ability to grasp the essentials. Their decisions should be firm and timely, arrived at by thinking in quiet periods what action should be taken if different circumstances arise. Commanders must retain their calm in crisis situations, with the courage to withstand mental stress and strain, and refuse to be distracted by bad news. Commanders need to explain clearly what they want to achieve and why, so that they can be effectively and appropriately supported by their peers and subordinates. They must be able to convince subordinates at all levels they have their best interests at heart. They should have the confidence to delegate in the knowledge that their intentions have been clearly expressed and well promulgated. Commanders must know how far to drive their soldiers. People

must not be pushed beyond their limits at which they lose their powers of recovery. Last but not least, commanders must also consider their own well-being, for it is essential that their energy is conserved for crucial periods.

Welfare support as an element of success

The recent increase of operational commitments of the Belgian Armed Forces has shown a growth in welfare provisions. The welfare of personnel in theatre, and personnel supporting the operation, and their families, should be of prime concern to all commanders. Within theatre, the provision of basic facilities, including welfare telephones, have a significant bearing on the individual's and unit's morale. National welfare support has developed on an ad-hoc basis, and imbalances and shortfalls in welfare provision have highlighted the real need for a holistic, balanced approach in Peace Support Operations.

The primary aim of welfare support still is to maintain and strengthen the morale of the soldiers, by making the fullest possible provision for their emotional and physical well-being consistent with the operational and environmental circumstances in which they are placed, and the availability of resources. It encompasses a range of facilities including, but not limited to, communication links with the home base, recreational and entertainment facilities and the provision of psychological, spiritual and pastoral care.

Personnel deployed in operations may have to put up with significant deprivation consequential to these deployments and to the tasks required to undertake. They may have to maintain combat effectiveness for long periods under tiring and sometimes dangerous circumstances, experiencing periods of boredom, alternating with short bursts of high intensity, and often, high risk activity.

To this should be added possible emotional strains due to separation, such as concern for partners and offspring. Staying in contact with home by telephone, post and, increasingly, e-mail, is an important requirement for personnel deployed on operations. Although good leadership throughout the chain of command can alleviate much of the stress caused by these circumstances, additional welfare support is required to maintain the physical and emotional well-being of personnel and thus contribute to the high morale necessary for operational effectiveness.

You can train your men as much as you want, but what do you think will happen during your operation if they run around with the thought that nobody cares about their families at home. They will not act effectively of course, I can assure you. For that reason a whole framework for the families has to be put in place at home. If there is one lesson we have learned from our past operations, it is the importance of the well-being of the soldier's family at home.

The soldiers need to be confident that problems at home are taken care of swiftly by the military at the home base. Therefore we also need to create the possibility for our military in the theatre to discuss family problems with an expert, which we call a Mental Readiness Counselor. Besides his role as psychological expert and advisor this Mental Readiness Counselor should be the link

between the soldier in the theatre and the military framework at home which has to handle his family problems.

The attitude of the most significant others towards “their” soldier before, during and after the mission has a major influence on his effectiveness. Those who know that a variety of support to their families is available when needed will act more effectively in the theatre. Families need to be kept informed and may also require some support for lengthy tours, particularly those who are young, who have dependant children or relatives, or who are geographically isolated. We need to ensure that information is passed to those remaining behind. If families are aware of what to expect and what kind of welfare support those deploying will receive, they will be emotionally better prepared for the tour.

Personnel deployed on operations may be exposed to extremely stressful situations. Stress management is part of the health, safety and welfare responsibility of the chain of command, which is assisted by specialist personnel. In this, the commanders have the primary responsibility for their personnel. Stress management should therefore be an integral element of unit preparation for a deployment, and plans should include pre-deployment, the deployment stage itself and post-deployment measures.

Another issue that needs further reflection is the ideal duration of a tour. We, Belgians, do four months without leave. Other nations stay six months, but with the possibility for their soldiers to take leave in the theatre or at home. Besides operational considerations, it is clear that social considerations need to be taken into account. Whatever, from my point of view, a tour of less than four months may be favorable for the well-being of the soldiers and their family, but is not possible for operational reasons.

Conclusion

As conclusion for my speech, I would simply point out that an objective and complete assessment of military effectiveness is very difficult, I think even impossible. Effectiveness in military operations cannot be made in term of economics, or mathematical formulae. Clausewitz made the point this way: *“Military operations have their own grammar, but not always their own logic.”*

Thank you very much for your attention.