A CENTURY OF MILITARY PSYCHOLOGY: ARE WE READY FOR THE NEXT 100 YEARS?

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SCOPE

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INTRODUCTION

- Military Psychology is facing challenges that confront it in all areas of military endeavour.
- Military Psychology plays a vital role in assisting the military in successful recruitment, training, deployment, and the utilisation of the very highly advanced technical equipment used in today’s military operations.
- Military Psychology plays a vital role in the treatment of post-battle casualties.
INTRODUCTION CONT.

- From small beginnings 100 years ago, Military Psychology expanded rapidly.
- As specialisation within the military developed, Military Psychology became fragmented.
- The past century consisted of many lessons, most of which have not been applied as humankind entered into the 21st-century.
- Hegel stated almost a 170 years ago: *The first glance at History convinces us that the actions of men proceed from their needs, their passions, their characters and talents; and impresses us with the belief that such needs, passions and interests are the sole spring of actions.*
- Military Psychology lacks a thorough understanding of the underlying ideological belief systems and specific leader personality traits and often pathology that drive the political decision-making processes towards military deployment instead of addressing the core issues underlying conflict situations.
It appears that there is no sane and well-thought through strategy before governments commit their forces to military operations in various parts of the world.

American political scientist and historian, Michael Parenti:

Through much of history the abnormal has been the norm. This is a paradox to which we should attend. Aberrations, so plentiful as to form a terrible normality of their own, descend upon us with frightful consistency.

The obvious question that Military Psychology has to answer is: What is at the core of this continued paradox whereby aberrations become normality?
**The Core of the Paradox**

- Based on historical data Israeli historian Yuval Harari postulates that war and genocide were as violent 12000 years ago as it was in the 20th Century.

- Historian Ian Morris: war has been advancing society:

  *War is mass murder, and yet, in perhaps the greatest paradox in history, war has nevertheless been the undertaker’s worst enemy. Contrary to what the song says, war has been good for something: over the long run, it has made humanity safer and richer. War is hell, but—again over the long run—the alternatives would have been worse... What has made the world so much safer is war itself.*
THE CORE OF THE PARADOX CONT.

- Morris predicts that the next half century could be the most dangerous of all times.
- The rationalisations from comparative statistics do not negate the huge numbers of lives destroyed and futures crushed in the ongoing conflicts around the globe.
- Military Psychology is intimately involved with the Military in the conduct of conflict and thus should work to understand the human mind leading to decisions on military and quasi-military operations.
- The world is in a state of perpetual advanced technological warfare waged by statutory and non-statutory forces alike, with all sides utilising the variety of advanced social media technologies to recruit the masses to do battle (in whatever form) on their behalf.
Daily news statements indicate that political and military entities engage in a variety of actions designed to perpetuate war simply because it is politically convenient to do so. Pardy:

- “Deter,” “degrade” and “defeat” flow from our leaders’ tongues with the ease of salesman selling a new mouthwash; “precision” bombing is discussed as if this was equivalent to tossing curling stones in downtown Moose Jaw; training by foreign troops of local forces is accepted as if this was a woodworking class in the local trades school; recovery of downed pilots from ISIS-controlled territory is glossed over with the suggestion that the Americans will handle this nasty possibility;...

Unfortunately there is one aspect of the war that is being ignored, and as with most modern wars it is the most important. No one, especially the militaries involved, has offered any assessment of success in understandable terms of what this war will achieve. Most will only say that a conclusion is years away, which in today’s world is no answer whatsoever.
We have dressed for a ball that we do not understand, and invited ourselves, knowing we have no capability of influencing the outcome. Instead, leaders who should know better see the war as a means of scratching a small itch in the national body politic—fear of an imprecise national security threat. In response, they send our soldiers into harm's way, and this even before they have satisfactorily dealt with the wounded from the last war.

Eleven years of fighting the Afghans with overwhelming force and money, the creation of comprehensive new security and military forces, the fostering of civilian political measures of electoral politics and the holding of elections and the creation of a hothouse corrupt economy based on foreign money have done absolutely nothing to change anything of any significance in that ancient land.
Albert Camus at the beginning of the Second World War:

- We used to wonder where war lived, what it was that made it so vile. And now we realize that we know where it lives, that it is inside ourselves. For most people, it’s the embarrassment, the need to make a choice, the choice which makes them go but feel remorse for not having been brave enough to stay at home, or which makes them stay at home but regret that they can’t share the way the others are going to die.

- It’s there, that’s where it really is, and we were looking for in it the blue sky and the world’s indifference. It is in this terrible loneliness both of the combatants and of the noncombatants, in this humiliated despair that we all feel, in the baseness that we feel growing in our faces as the days go by. The reign of beasts has begun.

- The hatred and the violence that you can already feel rising up in people. Nothing pure left in them. Nothing unique. They think together. You meet only beasts, bestial European faces. The world makes us feel sick, like this universal wave of cowardice, this mockery of courage, this parody of greatness, and this withering away of honor.
The Role of the Human Psyche in War Decisions cont.

- At the core of all conflicts is the human psyche that creates imaginary belief systems resulting in horrific violence perpetrated by one human upon another.
- Violent clashes (also called “wars”) occur when group specific beliefs collide with opposing group beliefs, with no neutral middle ground from which to find a compromise.
- The only way in which to enforce a particular belief system, is through the use of the military, jailers, judges and police.
- Historian Harari:
  - *a single priest often does the work of a hundred soldiers—far more cheaply and effectively.*
These “priests” exist in various guises, whether they be the wizards of the economy, the spin doctors of the political systems, or the clerics of the various major religions and associated sects. They all work hand-in-hand, often in opposition to each other, to maintain an order or a belief system that is largely imaginary.

However some beliefs are universal and accepted by all, regardless of creed or ideology.

These beliefs are an integral part of the continued abnormality paradox and come at tremendous cost in human suffering.
The Role of the Human Psyche in War Decisions cont.

- Parenti: the cost of the normal abnormality paradox:
  - Sixteen million lost and twenty million wounded or mutilated in World War I, followed by the estimated 62 million to 78 million killed in World War II, including some 24 million Soviet military personnel and civilians, 5.8 million European Jews, and taken together: several million Serbs, Poles, Roma, homosexuals, and a score of other nationalities.
  - After World War II: two million dead or missing in Vietnam, along with 250,000 Cambodians, 100,000 Laotians, and 58,000 Americans.
Today in Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East: “smaller” wars, replete with atrocities of all sorts. Central America, Colombia, Rwanda and other places too numerous to list, suffered the massacres and death-squad exterminations... In Mexico a “war on drugs”... 70,000 lives with 8,000 missing.

Consider the 78-days of NATO’s aerial destruction of Yugoslavia complete with depleted uranium, and the bombings and invasion of Panama, Grenada, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Western Pakistan, Afghanistan, and now the devastating war of attrition brokered against Syria. And as I write (early 2013), the U.S.-sponsored sanctions against Iran are seeding severe hardship for the civilian population of that country.
Finding the Middle Ground

- If Military Psychology can be instrumental in identifying the universal and acceptable belief systems that would unite people, rather than bring about violent conflict as we experience it in the world today, then perhaps there may be an opportunity to break free from this most unfortunate paradox where the abnormal has been the norm that threatens to destroy all of humankind.

- Morris: War has made the planet peaceful and prosperous; so peaceful and prosperous, in fact, that war has almost, but not quite, put itself out of business. Hence, the final paradox is the paradoxical tale: If we really want a world where war is good for nothing, we must recognize that war still has a part to play.
Military Psychology must study war and its antecedents to instruct military leadership and government leaders.

Some leaders are more prone than others to engage in war. According to English publisher, Ernst Benn:

- Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it wrongly and applying unsuitable remedies

Understanding of the human drives, fears and anxieties that influence political and military leaders’ perceptions on given situations, explains much about the decisions reached on war engagement or not.

Military psychologists should assess not only opposition and rival leadership, but also analyse the thinking of own and allied leadership in order to understand the forces and factors in the decision-making process that results in military operations without a clear mandate, military objective and an absence of a viable exit strategy.
Finding the Middle Ground Cont.

- Opting for alternatives to military engagement is possible, and should be the first course of action. Harari:
  - *Had the last Soviet ruler, Mikhail Gorbachev, given the order, the Red Army would have opened fired on the subjugated masses.*
  - *Yet, the Soviet elite, and the Communist regimes through most of eastern Europe (Romania and Serbia were the exceptions), chose not to use even a tiny fraction of its military power. When its members realised that Communism was bankrupt, they renounced force, admitted their failure, packed their suitcases and went home. Gorbachev and his colleagues gave up without a struggle not only the Soviet conquests of World War Two, but also the much older tsarist conquests in the Baltic, the Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia. It is chilling to contemplate what may have happened if Gorbachev had behaved like the Serbian leadership—or like the French in Algeria.*
Most violent and bloody expeditions come about from imaginary creations of the individual and collective minds of political leaders who choose to engage rather than disengage, to pursue war rather than peace. Fulbright:

- The more I puzzle over the great wars of history, the more I am inclined to the view that the causes attributed to them—territory, markets, resources, the defense or perpetuation of great principles—were not the root causes at all but rather explanations or excuses for certain unfathomable drives of human nature. For lack of a clear and precise understanding of exactly what these motives are, I refer to them as the “arrogance of power” — as a psychological need that nations seem to have in order to prove that they are bigger, better, or stronger than other nations. Implicit in this drive is the assumption, even on the part of normally peaceful nations, that force is the ultimate proof of superiority—that when a nation shows that it has the stronger army, it is also proving that it has better people, better institutions, better principles, and, in general, a better civilization.
Finding the Middle Ground Cont.

- Harari: the expectations of people in other parts of the world, once exposed to imaginary concepts such as the American dream, develop desires to experience a similar lifestyle:

- So maybe Third World discontent is fomented not merely by poverty, disease, corruption and political oppression but also by mere exposure to First World standards. The average Egyptian was far less likely to die from starvation, plague of violence under Hosni Mubarak than under Ramses II or Cleopatra. Never had the material condition of most Egyptians been so good. You’d think they would have been dancing in the streets in 2011, thanking Allah for their good fortune. Instead they rose furiously to overthrow Mubarak. They weren’t comparing themselves to the ancestors under the pharaohs, but rather to their contemporaries in Obama’s America.
Military Psychology big picture perspective:

- For the coming decades the most likely cause of conflict and most significant threat is the attraction of a concrete rather than abstract conceptual thinking, such as touted by the Islamic State.
- Concrete substitutes appeal to a component of the population yearning for a more tangible life experience than what is provided through media hype and political rhetoric, in the absence of a sense of belonging, meaningfulness, and happiness in a conflict ridden, futureless world.
There is a serious need to develop a message directed at the conflict areas that would counter the aberrant concrete beliefs that feed the recruitment to these alternative military forces. Harari:

- Most history books focus on the ideas of great thinkers, the bravery of warriors, the chastity of saints and the creativity of artists. There is much to tell about the weaving and unravelling of social structures, about the rise and fall of empires, about the discovery and spread of technologies. Yet they say nothing about how all this influence the happiness and suffering of individuals. This is the biggest lacuna in our understanding of history. We had better start filling it.
CONCLUSIONS

- There is an urgent need for Military Psychology to actively study and apply lessons learned from the historical behaviours and actions of humans, governments, organisations, institutions, and corporations in armed conflict.

- Military Psychology should utilise these data sets to develop new and creative applications that can serve to prevent, limit, and end hostilities between opposing parties.

- Military Psychology’s ability to understand, explain and redirect human behaviour, has to work towards bringing about negotiated resolution and tolerant co-existence of prevailing political, economic, religious, ideological, and psycho-social differences, rather than the alternative course of engaging in unproductive military operations.
Military Psychology has to break away from following the old jagged path, so well described in a poem by Sam Foss who died three years before the First World War:

**THE CALF-PATH**

One day, through the primeval wood,
A calf walked home, as good calves should;
But made a trail all bent askew,
A crooked trail as all calves do.

Since then two hundred years have fled,
And, I infer, the calf is dead.
But still he left behind his trail,
And thereby hangs my moral tale.

The trail was taken up next day
By a lone dog that passed that way;
And then a wise bell-wether sheep
Pursued the trail o’er vale and steep,
And drew the flock behind him, too,
As good bell-wethers always do.
And from that day, o’er hill and glade,
Through those old woods a path was made;
And many men wound in and out,
And dodged, and turned, and bent about
And uttered words of righteous wrath
Because ’twas such a crooked path.
But still they followed -- do not laugh --
The first migrations of that calf,
And through this winding wood-way stalked,
Because he wobbled when he walked.

This forest path became a lane,
That bent, and turned, and turned again;
This crooked lane became a road,
Where many a poor horse with his load
Toiled on beneath the burning sun,
And traveled some three miles in one.
And thus a century and a half
They trod the footsteps of that calf.
The years passed on in swiftness fleet,
The road became a village street,
And this, before men were aware,
A city’s crowded thoroughfare;
And soon the central street was this
Of a renowned metropolis;
And men two centuries and a half
Trod in the footsteps of that calf.

Each day a hundred thousand rout
Followed the zigzag calf about;
And o’er his crooked journey went
The traffic of a continent.
A hundred thousand men were led
By one calf near three centuries dead.
They followed still his crooked way,
And lost one hundred years a day;
For thus such reverence is lent
To well-established precedent.
A moral lesson this might teach,
Were I ordained and called to preach;
For men are prone to go it blind
Along the calf-paths of the mind,
And work away from sun to sun
To do what other men have done.
They follow in the beaten track,
And out and in, and forth and back,
And still their devious course pursue,
To keep the path that others do.

But how the wise old wood-gods laugh,
Who saw the first primeval calf!
Ah! many things this tale might teach --
But I am not ordained to preach.
CONCLUSIONS CONT.

- It is time to create an international task force of Military Psychologists from multiple Military Forces to work together to maximise the input of psychological considerations to create messages to achieve peaceful resolution.

- The alternative is continual needless regional wars with all its negative consequences and the perpetuation of age old resentments well into the future, as a chosen action based on perpetual mythology, rather than scientific reason.
QUESTIONS?

- Thank you!