

# Behavior Modification Is No Strategy for War

by Carl Osgood

One of the Holy Grails of the Pentagon's Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) is that Information Age technology and the thought-processes that go along with it would give the warfighter perfect knowledge of the battlefield. The technology would allow him to look through weather, walls, smoke, around corners, and into caves at what the enemy was doing. The conceptual process would allow him to anticipate what the enemy is thinking and doing, and allow him to act upon the enemy's "nodes," cut them, totally disrupt his ability to operate, and thereby change his behavior without having to resort to outmoded "Industrial Age" massed armies and logistics in order to destroy enemy forces. The initial U.S. entry in Afghanistan in 2001, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, were supposed to have validated these concepts and laid the basis for the reorganization of the U.S. military along these RMA lines.

However, reality, as it always does, intervened. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan degenerated into British-style counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns, and, even more dramatically, Israel went to war in southern Lebanon in the Summer of 2006, and failed to accomplish its goals in a campaign that was supposed to have been a lightning defeat for Hezbollah. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) that went into Lebanon were, according to one study, beset by a doctrine that emphasized generating "effects" on Hezbollah's "systems" in order to create a "consciousness of victory" on the Israeli side, and a "cognitive perception of defeat" on the part of Hezbollah. The result was that Israeli brigade commanders went into combat with operational orders they could not understand, and ground forces that were woefully ill-prepared for the conventional defense that the Hezbollah militia expertly executed. That study was produced by the Combat Studies Institute of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, earlier this year.

The study, by Matt Matthews, a historian and former National Guard armor officer, attributes the Israeli failure to two of the more important concepts of the Revolution in Military Affairs: Effects Based Operations (EBO) and Systemic Operational Design (SOD). *The Commander's Handbook for an Effects-Based Approach to Operations*, produced by U.S. Joint Forces Command in 2006, states that "an effects-based approach ... focuses on improving our ability to affect an

adversary's behavior and/or capabilities through the integrated application of select instruments of national power." Or, as Matthews puts it: "EBO is designed to affect the 'cognitive domain' of the enemy and his systems, rather than annihilating his forces."

EBO has been the subject of development and experimentation in the U.S. military since at least 2002, whereas SOD is newer. SOD is largely an Israeli invention, the brainchild of Brig. Gen. Shimon Naveh (ret.), the founder of Israel's Operational Theory Research Institute, in 1995. According to Matthews, who interviewed Naveh as part of his research, "SOD attempted to provide commanders with the aptitude necessary 'to think critically, systemically and methodologically about war fighting.' The design focused 'on the concept of the enemy' and provides operational commanders with tools to conceptualize both their enemies and themselves for the purpose of designing suitable campaigns."

## Doctrine Failed in Lebanon

In April 2006, the IDF promulgated a new doctrine that was very much inspired by EBO and SOD. Ron Tira, an Israeli military analyst who was interviewed by Matthews, reported that the new doctrine replaced "the 'old' structure of Mission, Commander's Intent, Forces and tasks ... with a whole new world of Political Directive, Strategic Purpose, System Boundaries, Operational Boundaries, Campaign's Organizing Theme, Opposite System Rationale" and so on. According to Matthews, Naveh drew heavily on terminology from "post-modern French philosophy, literary theory, architecture and psychology" for this new way of thinking. The problem was that few Israeli officers were familiar with such language, nor could many understand why the old system of simple orders and terminology had to be replaced.

When the war came, in July 2006, Israeli operations were not designed to inflict actual military defeat on Hezbollah; rather they were supposed to produce "effects" that would force Hezbollah out of southern Lebanon and cause the militia to disarm. The IDF began with an air campaign that was supposed to produce those effects, and when that failed, the Israeli army launched a ground campaign that was supposed to do the same thing. Instead, they ran into an expertly prepared conventional, but decentralized defense that was totally unperturbed by Israeli efforts to generate "effects," and was able to inflict heavy casualties on poorly prepared Israeli ground forces, whose major experience over the previous several years had been in occupation duty in the Palestinian territories.

Matthews concludes, "The effects-based operations and Systemic Operational design-inspired doctrine that vigorously embraced airpower at the expense of a classic ground maneuver campaign was certainly a major factor in the IDF's disappointing performance." He adds that Naveh's SOD also proved highly disruptive. "The new language and methodol-

ogy severely handicapped many commanders in the field.” Matthews also notes that years of counterinsurgency operations had seriously diminished the Israeli army’s conventional combat capabilities.

### **‘An Unvalidated Concept’**

Matthews notes that the Israeli experience has obvious lessons for the U.S. military, some elements of which are diving headlong into these concepts. U.S. Joint Forces Command has been experimenting with and promulgating what they call “an effects-based approach to operations” for several years, and the Air Force has been the primary proponent of the theory among the services, based on its experience in planning and executing the air campaign during the 1991 Gulf War. The Army has been working with elements of SOD since 2005, but the effort there has been somewhat restrained. In fact, the Army pulled back from incorporating EBO into its training curriculum in 2005, because Army officials concluded it was “an unvalidated concept.” As explained by one official, the “fatal flaw” with EBO and its associated concept, “operational net assessment,” is that they are based on a reductionist approach to understanding the enemy. This might work relatively well with something like an integrated air defense system or electrical power grids, but falls flat when the primary component of the “system” is human beings.

As for SOD, the Army has developed a tool called “Commander’s Appreciation and Campaign Design,” which is described as “a cognitive process intended for use by commanders charged with designing, planning and executing military campaigns.” It uses elements of SOD, but at the operational and strategic level, not at the level of tactical operations, where it failed in Lebanon. The Army has not abandoned the more traditional analytic approach known as the “military decision making process (MDMP),” which “aims to produce the optimal solution to a problem from among the solutions identified.” Army doctrine leaves it to the commander to use whatever approach, analytical or intuitive, best fits his needs.

### **Danger of a Counterinsurgency-Only Force**

While the Army has been hesitant about diving headlong into some of the RMA concepts, it has had no similar hesitation about counterinsurgency warfare, in large part, because of the demands of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. While there are obvious differences between the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories and the U.S. military occupation of Iraq, the same problem nonetheless arises: erosion of conventional combat skills to fulfill the demands of a counterinsurgency campaign. A small number of prominent officers in the Army are warning of the dangers of “preparing to fight the last war,” which means, in this case, the present war. The next war may not look like the present one, and yet the reorganization of the Army and rewriting of Army doc-

trine are being driven by the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Lt. Col. Gian Gentile, a veteran of two Iraq deployments who currently teaches history at the U.S. Military Academy, speaking at a March 26 event at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., warned that the Army is risking the same kind of failure that the Israeli army experienced in Lebanon. The Israeli army wasn’t even able to handle basic tasks, such as command and control between battalions and brigades, or coordination between tanks and infantry.

Gentile argued that the supposed success of the surge in Iraq compounds the problem for the U.S. Army because that, and the high profile of the new counterinsurgency manual, are have a “Svengali-like effect on us, like we have some secret recipe for success.” In response to a question from this reporter, Gentile expressed the thought that while the Army’s new operational doctrine, with its commitment to stability operations, makes sense based on what the Army has been doing for the last five or six years, “I do worry about that, especially when that operational doctrine gets into the hands of a combat brigade commander who has to allocate time and resources in a constrained environment to training and what that kind of doctrine tells him what he must focus on.” He added, “I don’t believe that the Army has had the kind of debate about its doctrine, how it sees the future, what its role is in the same way that the American Army did in the early 1980s,” following the Vietnam debacle.

While Gentile is treated as something of a heretic in the Army, what with counterinsurgency doctrine becoming the new orthodoxy, other officers have issued warnings similar to his. National Public Radio recently surfaced a memo to Army Chief of Staff Gen. George Casey by three former brigade commanders, all colonels with extensive experience in Iraq, warning that the Field Artillery branch is suffering an identity crisis “as a result of transformation, COIN-centric operations and the non-standard manpower demands” of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Most soldiers in field artillery are serving outside their military specialties and the average artillery unit will take 6 to 12 months to retrain, assuming it’s actually given the time to do so. The colonels warn, “With each passing month that we continue to let these perishable skills atrophy, and lose our expert practitioners, we are mortgaging not only flexibility in today’s fight, but our ability to fight the next war as well.”

While Army doctrine calls for a “full spectrum force”—that is, a force able to operate at any point from benign peace-keeping operations and disaster relief, to counterinsurgency, to major combat—the practical effect of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Gentile and others are warning, is that the Army is becoming a counterinsurgency-only force. This problem may be compounded to the degree that the U.S. military adopts concepts and doctrines based on behavior modification, as opposed to fighting to defeat an enemy with the intention of then creating the conditions for a durable peace.