

## **TRAINING TO UNDERSTAND FOREIGN PEOPLE**

### **AIM**

1. The aim of this paper is to recommend an approach to train military personnel to understand the people of Afghanistan in support of the COIN doctrine applied to the Afghan theatre.

### **THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND PEOPLE AND TO TRAIN FOR IT**

2. Counterinsurgency is about gaining the support of the local population. This is not achievable without understanding the local people.

3. In order to gain this support, military presence, actions and message must be positively perceived by the people and their leaders. Often, actions aimed at protecting the population are perceived otherwise by locals. So, what must be understood are the elements relevant to the perception process. This encompasses, among others, culture, language, religion and social organization.

4. Collaboration with local security forces also benefits from a better understanding of the people.

5. Understanding people is an ability everyone naturally masters at a certain level. It is used every day when meeting people in our home neighbourhoods. Foreign people are sometimes culturally very different from most of NATO troops, this makes the understanding process more difficult and lengthy; and might cause many misperceptions. Training to understand foreign people aims at reducing the amount and seriousness of these misperceptions.

### **TRAINING IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Knowledge Base**

6. Before programming the training, a Knowledge Base (KB) of everything known about the specific population should be built. From one side it constitutes the pool of information to draw upon and disseminate through training. From the other hand it is a living body of knowledge which needs to increase, update and improve continuously. The KB sources are either direct or indirect knowledge. Direct knowledge is acquired by direct interaction with the people. This method of acquiring knowledge is the most efficient since it allows assessing the perception process by observing how people react to one action or message. Indirect knowledge is acquired by listening to or reading from someone who had the direct interaction. Indirect knowledge is also acquired by observing not the people but their environment and then deriving knowledge about the people. To remain relevant, Indirect Knowledge should always be verified and adapted by personnel with up-to-date direct experience so it fits the time and the area where the trainees will be operating. What is valid in one area or one specific group today is not valid in another one next month.

#### **Training categories (See table in Appendix 1)**

7. Although all troops should be trained in understanding the people, the training needs are not the same for everyone. The kind of tasks performed by the militaries implies specific

kinds of interaction with the people, which in turn imply specific knowledge and skills to be mastered. So, training must be tailored to the mission and trainees sharing the same training needs should be gathered into Training Categories as follows.

8. The Everyone Category includes all deployed personnel who, independently from their mission and tasks, might have short informal interactions or be observed by Afghans. This represents almost every NATO deployed member. This category's training focus is not to cause negative perception among the population. This category's training should comprise:

- The basis of COIN doctrine explaining why the people's support is key;
- The Dos and Don'ts, highlighting the simple actions which cause negative or positive perception among locals;
- Basic local vocabulary;

Based on this knowledge the ability to apply Do and Don'ts and greetings to the trainees' specific military tasks;

- Respect for the local people.

9. The Staff Category includes personnel involved in the planning, command and control processes. These personnel are not expected to directly interact with local people while performing their tasks. This category's training focus is to integrate the population's perception within the planning, command and control processes. This category's training should comprise:

- Local culture awareness.
- The basis of COIN doctrine explaining why the Afghan people's perception has to be integrated in the military processes.
- The tools enabling the integration of knowledge on local people into military processes, including the use of subject matter advisors.

10. The Interacting Category includes personnel whose mission and tasks implies interacting with local people on a regular basis. This category's training focus is to build trust with them. This category's training should comprise:

- The ability to analyse and evaluate how facts and messages are perceived by both local and Self cultures.
- The ability to identify the cultural biases which make people from different background perceive the same fact in a different way.
- High level communication and language skills and the efficient use of interpreters.

### **Training Topics** (See table in Appendix 1)

11. Culture Awareness is the topic which directly draws on the Knowledge Base to derive very simple knowledge such as Do's and Don'ts up to more complex abilities such as identifying the cultural biases of one's Self culture. The acquisition of an open minded attitude is key to this topic. Therefore, interactive instructional methods (group discussion, case study) in which the trainees are involved in discovering or developing a solution to real life problems are recommended. Also, interaction with local people should be sought in priority.

12. Communication is the most difficult topic to learn since it comprises the acquisition of local languages and implies practicing with native speakers. It is the most efficient understanding capability multiplier which should be addressed in priority. A lesser option to the acquisition of local language skills is to train to work with interpreters.

13. Military Integration addresses how the local people's perception impacts and is integrated into the military tasks. The key element of this topic is the acquisition of an attitude, the COIN mindset, which justifies the need for and enables the understanding of the local people. This is where the leadership should clearly show the example.

### **Training Needs Table**

14. The table in Appendix 1 lists the Training Categories and their Training Needs expressed through Training Topics further detailed through Enabling Objectives. The Key Elements of each Enabling Objective are highlighted and some Significant Instructional Methods are proposed together with a non exhaustive list of References to indirect knowledge and tools.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

15. Training to understand foreign people is a many stage process which could be considered as a medium to long term endeavour. However, it starts with a few simple steps which, if properly conducted, can bring short term improvement in theatre while paving the way for a future broader understanding capability. Within the various elements presented in this document, some are key and should be addressed in priority: The development of the appropriate attitude, the COIN mindset; the acquisition of language skills; and the creation of a knowledge base which is tailored to the mission.

### **APPENDIX 1: Training Needs Table**