

THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN COMBAT

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INTRODUCTION

One of the perils for military planners in a high-tech world is to be taken in by the destructiveness of modern weapons and to give in to the currently popular theory that modern war will last for days or weeks rather than months or years in short, to envision a world where technologies, not people, dominate war. We can ill afford to dismiss the human element in combat. The stakes are far too great. Iraq's war with Iran was potentially a high-tech and swift war. That war is entering its fourth year and has cost, to date, 900,000 lives. Cohesion--mutual beliefs and needs that cause people to act as a collective whole has so far played a more significant role in the Iran-Iraq war than all the sophisticated weapons on either side.

In assessing who wins wars and why, it is easy to overweigh any one factor and neglect others. Broad factors such as objectives and strategies, weapons and materials, technology, numbers of soldiers, and the human element must all be considered in determining who wins and why. I am concerned with the human element in war, it recognizes the probability of major effects on war outcomes from other sources. Single-cause

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explanations must be avoided: they claim too much for one factor at the expense of others. This appears to be the case with the determining factor in future modern wars. I want to register my reservations about the school assertion that unit cohesion will not significantly affect future "high-tech" wars; and assertion that cohesion can only be maintained in mass armies and not in small, specialized team armies of the future. In the future, the effect of high technology on military cohesion and combat effectiveness must be considered. The lethality and multiplier effects of new and modernized weapons systems will continue to modify the nature of war, as they have through history. From the time of the French Revolution and the beginning of the era of modern warfare, when French armies dominated the battlefield, cohesion and its relation to nationalism became a major factor in warfare. With major advances in the capabilities of wide numbers of weapons systems and accompanying operational doctrine, it has been suggested that the significance of military cohesion will decrease as a principal factor in determination the outcome of future battles. FM 100-5 states that future major battles will likely be conducted within an integrated battlefield. The overall battlefield will be extended beyond the more traditional front lines and will encompass conventional, electronic, chemical, and possibly nuclear weapons, In viewing this future change in the characteristics of future battles, some observers have raised the important question of whether "by adapting military organization and tactics to the projected technology of the battlefield of the future, we run the risk of undermining the sources of social support that have historically sustained

soldiers in battle."Those who are most concerned with this possibility appear to be primarily influenced by the two major considerations.* One is the low personnel density in the form of relatively small weapons teams scattered widely over the battlefield because of weapon lethality, chemical contamination, and improved communications. The other consideration appears to be an implicit conclusion that cohesion that is congruent with Army objectives cannot exist without an undetermined but large number of troops organized into large maneuver elements that interact on a daily, face-to-face basis and thereby provide the social support necessary for cohesion. Others carry the argument further, stating that even if large armies were feasible. The counter proposition made here and in the chapters that follow is that cohesion will become even more important as the technology of war develops but that cohesion will probably also become more difficult to achieve. The chance, dispersion, isolation, confusion, danger, stress, and hardship of the future battlefield will ensure that the decades-old trend of authority and decision making moving downward in the organization will continue. A form of warfare where soldiers marched lock-step into battle in long lines under the watchful eye of a sergeant behind them with drawn sword has changed to one of the small, independent-unit tactics and leadership found in recent wars. Perhaps the 1973 Arab-Israeli war best illustrates this trend. The 1973 war was the largest tank battle ever fought, yet it was characterized by numerous small unit engagements most often won by the side displaying the most initiative, leadership, and cohesion at the small-unit level.

Strong military cohesion is possible in quite small groups

and under intense pressure and stress. In fact, in both the Chinese and North Vietnamese examples, three-man military cells are used as the basic building block in constructing cohesive units following their 3 x 3 organizational concept. In it, each unit is one of three like units which are part of a larger unit also comprised of three like units. In both armies, the central focus of cohesion is at the very small unit level. The three-man military cell with proper leadership and control became the strength upon which the extraordinary endurance of both armies was based. This is especially significant in the case of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) since it was required to operate widely dispersed under the conditions of extreme hardship and stress often described as characteristic of future battlefields. In this regard, it is also interesting to note how the Israeli Army deals with battle stress similar to the type envisioned in future wars. During the 1973 and Lebanon conflicts, treatment of stress casualties had the goal of returning the soldier to duty with his unit. The power and attraction of the small cohesive unit to the soldier helped achieve a remarkably high rate of success in treating his battle stress. It has also been suggested that the importance of cohesion in explaining combat performance has been overstated or that cohesion can be replaced by alternative sources of motivation and control. Support for the view that the significance of cohesion has been overstated is made by some who point to prior studies describing soldiers who fought as individuals rather than as part of a cohesive unit. Such conclusions are probably questionable. Related suggestions also discount military cohesion by suggesting that patriotism can be an alternative combat

motivator. The view of cohesion as an isolated phenomenon on the battle-field indicates a narrow comprehension of the nature of military cohesion and its origins. It is important to recognize the various sources of cohesion. Patriotism or nationalism are not alternative motivators; rather, they manifest themselves in cohesive units by helping provide the well-integrated group values and communications necessary for military cohesion. Another suggestion, that smarter soldiers require less of the social support and leadership that bind cohesive units together, appears to be made upon an incomplete examination of the evidence. Those armies that have enjoyed the highest degrees of cohesion and combat effectiveness in the past have achieved such success in part because they relied upon the most qualified and the smartest people available. Certainly, an army that has the smartest people available in its ranks has greater capability. It also has a far greater challenge in motivating and leading more active, intellectually diverse, and questioning soldiers. One is reminded that the Principles of War, which apply equally to all nations, are autonomous and that an army that achieves the greatest cohesion will win, everything else being equal. The Arab-Israeli wars illustrate this point well. Finally, the suggestion that drugs be seriously considered as an alternative form of motivation in view of the expected loss of social support on the modern battlefield is very questionable. Numerous moral, physiological, and other questions can be imagined. It seems certain that the army that succeeds in creating and maintaining cohesive units on future battlefields will have a significant advantage over those that do not.