

Cultural Implications of Non-Lethal Weapon Deployment

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Abstract

Cultural insight is a vital facet of the overall scheme of military operations. In this context, culture is not country specific but also relates to the specific religions, languages, norms, and values on a global level. Understanding the reactions to the military from various target populations will potentially increase the effectiveness and overall impact of an operation. The increased involvement in peace support and humanitarian aid has highlighted a change in focus for the military. The majority of operations are conducted in global regions where the culture, language, and religion of the local populations are disparate. The emphasis has changed from the use of firepower resulting in material damage, to the understanding of specific populations in order to achieve a behavioural end-state. All of these scenarios require increased interpersonal contact between the military and target audiences, and potentially the deployment of *non-lethal capabilities*. The selection of non-lethal weapons is partially situation dependent, aiming to provide the minimum level of force to achieve the desired result. In situations where non-lethal weapons are deployed it is essential that the behaviour and reactions of the target audiences can be predicted. It is therefore extremely important that the military not only have an awareness of the effect of a specific weapon, but also of the reaction they will receive to its use. It is not enough to assume or simply surmise how people will respond to the use of weapons, which have little media presence. Moreover, it is inappropriate to regard people in bordering countries as being similar enough to react to situations in the same manner. An overall increase in cultural awareness should aim to avoid any negative repercussions and to maintain public support for non-lethal weapon use. This paper aims to illustrate the importance of cultural assessments and highlight cultural issues through the use of case studies from various world regions.

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This study was funded by the UK MOD's Corporate Research Programme TG05: Human Sciences and Synthetic Environments. Any views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of DERA, MOD or any other UK government department.