

OFFICER AND COMMANDER IN ASYMMETRIC WARFARE OPERATIONS

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Starting from the data of a field research conducted among soldiers with asymmetric warfare experiences from nine different countries, the author seeks to identify and shed light on the various problems that officers with command responsibilities had to face during their missions. A picture emerges of feelings and experiences relating to their first impression upon arriving in the theatre, relations with local armed forces, relations with the local population and local authorities, relations with NGOs, relations with other armies, the impact of the rules of engagement (ROEs), training and education, and operational experiences. The paper ends with a discussion of the lessons learned.

Key words: *asymmetric, operations, professional, local, armed forces.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Asymmetric warfare operations (1) requires soldiers, but especially officers with command responsibilities, to make deep changes of mentality, professional attitude and also of tactics (2) with respect to the traditional preparation for conventional war operations, all themes on which an abundant literature has developed (3).

For commanders at all levels, operating in an asymmetric warfare environment means being prepared to act “*in the presence of civilians, against civilians, in defence of civilians where civilians are the targets, objectives to be won, as much as an opposing force*” [1]; it means forgetting some fundamental principles of combat

and accepting to use minimal force and only when strictly necessary [2]; it means acquiring the ability to motivate one’s men and to apply these limitations, accepting greater personal risk [3]; it means being able to assume governance roles in local realities that have very different cultures, norms and customs from those of one’s home country [4], [5]; it means being prepared to manage a multiplicity of functions, not only military, simultaneously [6]; it means acquiring interoperability with military contingents of nations that are very different from one’s own [7]; it means having to expand one’s professional baggage into sectors and disciplines that are far removed from one’s education and training [8] [9] (Blomgren, 2008; Caforio, 2001).

It means all this and even more which, from time to time and from mission to mission, proves to be important and necessary.

In this framework of profound change of the international military context and of commanders' professionalism [10], [5], [11], [12] a project of a field research (4) was carried out by an international team of interviewers recording the assessments and experiences of the persons directly concerned, the results of which are being published in book form [13]. But beyond this choral effort, written by numerous authors, on the survey's general results, in this paper I would like to place the emphasis particularly on the experience of those who have lived asymmetric warfare operations in a command activity, drawing lessons learned that will be especially useful for their professionalism as officers and commanders. This paper is comprised of this brief introduction, a chapter devoted to analysis of the data collected (5) on the following aspects, deemed especially meaningful [9]:

- a) First impression upon arriving in the theatre;
 - b) Relations with local armed forces;
 - c) Relations with local populations and local authorities;
 - d) Relations with NGOs;
 - e) Relations with other armies;
 - f) The impact of the rules of engagement;
 - g) Training and education;
 - h) Operational experiences;
- and closes with a section devoted to discussion.

2. DATA ANALYSIS

2.1. First impression upon arriving in the theatre

The intervention of military units in asymmetric warfare operations generally occurs in the context of failed states also characterized by conditions of cultural and economic backwardness that provide fertile terrain to insurgents for propaganda and recruiting. Weakness or non-existence of a central government, its inability to control the territory, widespread existence of living conditions that are often at the limit of survival, and a lack or scarcity of basic infrastructure are for the most part situations in which unit commanders find themselves compelled to operate. This often occurs in countries in which the natural environment itself is hostile: deserts, mountains, harsh climatic conditions, namely circumstances that pose considerable logistical and organizational problems to commanders.

Recognition of this reality – always different from what was imagined before experiencing it in person – therefore very often constitutes the first observation, the initial impression upon arrival at the mission location by the interviewed commanders: an acquisition that is also necessary in order to properly plan one's command activity.

This recognition manifests itself in expressions like:

TURA03: *Smell and vision of misery and chaos surrounded me when the doors of the plane are opened. In the first days I thought*

there was no order and rule in this country. And the god had forgotten this geography.

TURA06: I was in Afghanistan last year. My first impression was horrific. The living conditions of Afghan people was so bad. There is no security, anywhere and any time you can bump into an explosion.

SAA5: My first impression was a culture shock towards the state of deterioration of infrastructure.

SIC49: Culture shock. He was earlier in less developed countries like Lebanon and Albania, but Afghanistan is something special. On one hand this is feudal society.

In addition to culture shock, the impact with the natural environment appears significant as well, shown by responses like:

ITC29: A strange sensation: you go out from the plane and the first feeling is of heat, dust: it seems that you are inside boundless barracks. You have no idea of what can exist outside....

KRA01: I had a feeling of desolation due to hot weather over 50 degree C. and sandstorm. I was worried about life over the next sixth months since all the roads leading to the unit were located in desert.

As well as the impact with the human environment:

SPAA02: Regarding his first mission (Enduring Freedom, led by US), after the harsh impact of climate conditions, he was shocked by the economical inequality of the local society, with a narrow rich class and a broad poor class.

SAC01: The impression was one of hostility, emanating from the

government forces and also from the local population. The local forces were disorganized, not paid in salaries, but also tried to show some pride in their looks and actions. The rich citizens were very hostile and unwelcoming. Poverty was everywhere and nobody gave a damn.

It is a question of an impact that refers to more than one theatre, although with different nuances, and that leads commanders to be concerned with the future living conditions of their unit during the mission, with frequent statements, as we have seen, of the type: *I was worried about life over the next sixth months since all the roads leading to the unit were located in desert.*

2.2. Relations with local armed forces

In many asymmetric warfare missions the military units deployed are called on to train and collaborate with local armed forces and police. The reconstruction of an efficient state depends on re-establishing general security conditions, guaranteed by prepared, efficient local forces that can ensure these conditions even after the departure of the intervening allied forces.

It thus seems particularly interesting to examine the opinions of the interviewed officers on relations with the local forces.

These relations are often difficult or, at the least, go through an initial period of difficulty and distrust. We see first of all a profound cultural gap between the soldiers from developed countries sent on mission and the local armed forces and

police. At best, there are difficulties of language comprehension and mentality. At worst, the mixture can include corruption, bad faith, double-crossing and money scams, often rife among the soldiers of the local forces. However, the situation differs depending on the theatre in which the asymmetric warfare operations take place. From the interviewees' responses, it is particularly negative in Afghanistan, Iraq, and in some Central African countries, better in the Balkans and Lebanon. The following interview sums up the situation well:

ITC16: *We met some difficulties in cooperating with Afghan armed forces, because we had to interact with persons who have a culture and a lifestyle very different from us. Their military preparation was very low. We had to train them and they behaved as children playing: anyway, we had the opportunity to see some results from the training. We carried out joint operations with them and they seemed rather motivated (but very bad equipped). Surely some of them was double crossing and there was the possibility to find some soldiers trained by us on the insurgents' side.*

Differences of course also exist from unit to unit, or even from soldier to soldier, whose motivations might be the salary, the desire to serve one's country, unemployment, and other contingent reasons. One must also consider the local soldier in the reality of his country, with the bonds that religion, tradition and customs impose on him. The religious factor can be particularly important in some theatres, as seen from the following statement by a Turkish officer:

TURA03: *There is sympathy towards our army members because of religion factor. Sharing the common value patterns put us in different position among other army members.*

Digging deeper into the reality of the individual theatres, for Afghanistan (on which the negative observations are especially numerous) it is claimed that the Afghan soldier lacks team spirit: each person seems to work by himself, does not have the idea of organization, does not care about planning; he has a different perception of the value of human life; sometimes he uses drugs. Others do not feel they have any duty to perform their service but they have to receive some form of reward, gift or bribe. Consequently, often the Afghan units remain in wait, expecting the ISAF forces to "open the breach". An example of the difficulties of collaboration is given by the following response by an interviewee:

SPAA04: *Working alongside Afghan forces was very complicated, mainly due to cultural and idiomatic barriers as well as by professional procedures and huge technological gaps. Besides that there was a strong feeling of distrust between both forces.*

The situation for the countries of Central Africa is not very different, however. The South African officers had this to say about the local forces:

SAC17: *Armed forces: Poorly organized and trained. Lack of proper leadership. Corruption on higher*

level. Poorly equipped and poor facilities. Personal relationships with rebel groups on certain levels.

SAC02: *Sometimes it is expected from you to make financial donations to build a working relationship, but that is a trap. Eventually you can become an additional source of crime and not a serious work partner.*

And for Iraq:

BGC14: *You can't trust them. They are lazy and irresponsible. So many Iraqi people die every day because of their irresponsibility (Iraqi Ground Forces Command).*

The general, widespread feeling is that to rebuild reliable and efficient local armed forces according to Western parameters is going to take a long time; times not always compatible with the foreseen duration of the mandate.

2.3. Relations with local populations and local authorities

The reception of the forces by the local populations in the theatre of operations is often multifaceted and conditioned by various factors, such as:

1. the pressure of the insurgents on the population;

2. the tactical behaviour of the counterinsurgency forces: if they conduct combat operations locally, the people remain distrustful and hostile; if the activity is humanitarian aid, they show themselves to be friendly;

3. the population's disposition towards the country's legitimate government;

4. the historical experience of the local population;

5. the conduct of the counterinsurgency forces;

6. the cultural background of those forces: if there is a shared religion, the attitude is more likely to be favourable, as mentioned earlier;

7. the relationship with the local authorities.

Some examples follow.

For point 1:

ITC12: *In some village relationships are not easy; it happens that the local authorities fear to let you come in, because the threat of insurgents' retaliations. In fact retaliations are frequent.*

For point 2:

ITC18: *Local population is a victim of the situation: it is in favour of the coalition forces where and when they make humanitarian assistance; less in favour where military operations are carried on.*

ITC07: *We had a good welcome by local population, particularly when we intervened when it needed help (during the winter, for instance) or in the more far and isolated villages.*

For point 3 one must remember that, normally, military units that come into contact with individual villages represent the legitimate local government, with its bright spots and dark spots. Some testimonies:

SAC01: *The local government was a nightmare, to say the least. To get something done was a laborious process involving lengthy debates and decision making. Money inevitably had to change hands. Corruption was strongly suspected.*

PHIC20: *I have learned that when you enter a village, you are the lobbyist for government programs; you are the face of government.*

As far as the local population's historical experience is concerned, its attitude appears to be clearly influenced by past experiences and can be differentiated from group to group. For example:

SAC53: *Local population: It was interesting that the Tutsi got on very well with the white officers – they are the minority. The Hutus were less friendly. All the interpreters were Tutsi and this was problematic as they hate the Hutus.*

Conduct is an essential aspect of the ability of the counterinsurgency forces to win the hearts and minds of local populations. Adopting correct, impartial behaviour is the key, also in view of the fact that a foreign force present on the local territory is inevitably perceived as an invader. Examples:

TURA03: *People accept all soldiers as invaders without country classification. They just want to get some benefit like money or food from you. This is the way most of people behave us.*

SAC01: *Local population: Burundi/DRC: The local population definitely saw the opportunity to exploit the RSA soldiers to the maximum. We utilized their local knowledge and rewarded them accordingly. But nothing you got was for free. Social, sport etc. interactions always had a price you had to pay. Unfortunately our soldiers exploited their poverty status by exploiting their ladies.*

PHIB14: *We always emphasized the highest standard of discipline because whatever efforts we have, if the soldiers commit mistakes, the whole organization will be affected.*

The benefit of a common cultural and religious background is especially the case for Islamic culture, as many asymmetric warfare operations have been and are being carried out in Islamic countries. A Turkish official states, for example:

TURA25: *Local people had the same culture like Turkish people. So that Afghan people and Turkish officers were able to understand each other easily. Also the religion was an important factor to establish good relationship with local people.*

The relationships of the commanders deployed in asymmetric warfare operations with the local authorities are often negative. Corruption, collusion with the insurgents, and attempts to exploit the situation and the military units are very often the prevalent connotation of the local political, but also military, leadership. The examples of negative assessments of this type are extremely numerous. Here are a few of them:

DKC20: *I worked with authorities in the form of officials, politicians, police and army. Basically I did not trust government officials and police. They were corrupt, secretly helped our enemies and committed atrocities against the local population. The contact with them was necessary and was respectful, though I felt resentment and a sense of moral corruption by talking to them.*

ITC08: *Local authorities were not always collaborating: in some case we registered persons who run with the hare and hunt with the hounds; in other cases corrupted authorities.*

Some cases of positive relations are cited as well, such as that of an Italian colonel who says:

ITC17: *The head of the village is very important and I had with several of them a very positive relationship, including some warning on possible threats. Distribution of relief was through local police or Afghan army; the heads of the villages indicated the poorest families.*

2.4. Relations with NGOs

The relationship between military commanders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) appears to be one of mutual distrust which, in the judgement of the commanders, arises from poor preparation of the members of the NGOs in peace operations in general and in the context of asymmetric warfare in particular. The NGOs are seen as a problem from which, insofar as possible, it is best to keep one's distance. The testimonies in this sense are numerous:

SAC53: *We avoided the NGOs like the plague. Most were staffed by young European women who were passionate about what they were doing, but did not know actually what to do. They considered the military as an obstacle. Their objectives and the military objectives were not always the same.*

SPAC18: *In the case of those NGOs there is ignorance or misunderstanding about the peace forces role, and that creates false expectations.*

The biggest problem that is posed for commanders at the various levels is that of monitoring NGO operators' activities, aimed at keeping them from

getting themselves into dangerous situations or from interfering with the military activities. Some examples:

SAC50: *International organizations, NGOs, press, etc.: Difficult to engage with because they wanted to be seen as being unrelated to the military, regardless of what your main responsibility is.*

DKC20: *I felt that many NGOs considered themselves as superior and that we (soldiers) were part of the problem.*

Thus, comparison is inevitable between the organized and at times schematic military mindset and the spontaneous, voluntaristic, at times anarchic mentality of NGOs. For example:

SPAC06: *I had more relations with NGOs, especially in Kosovo. I don't like the way they work. Our procedure is more ordered, clearer. What I saw is NGOs didn't have a clear idea of what their mission was. My feeling was that they didn't do their work properly.*

2.5. Relations with other armies

One salient characteristic of asymmetric warfare operations is generally cooperation between armed forces of many nations, many more than in past experiences of conventional wars. This happens because peacekeeping has become an indispensable condition for development of the industrialized world, and every country of this world is called on to help keep the peace in accordance with its possibilities.

Such cooperation involves big problems of integration and coordination that are generically

lumped together under the term “interoperability”. Interoperability has constituted the leitmotif for international alliances like NATO (and others), which has accomplished a huge organizational task by creating “standard operating procedures” (SOPs). Interoperability thus appears to be pretty much guaranteed among the countries belonging to these alliances, while it must always be strived for and achieved with and between third-party countries. Cultural differences, though, cannot be codified and are more difficult to harmonize.

For the NATO countries it must also be said that, since SOPs are better for dealing with technical and operational problems than human ones, interoperability is more easily attained for services that have easily codifiable technical procedures, such as navies and air forces, while for ground forces, where the human factor takes on greater importance, the difficulties appear to be greater.

This situation is also the case for the interviewees of our research, taking into account that all of them belong to countries bound by international alliances (NATO, SEATO, etc.). This means that the responses of the interviewees belonging to navies and air forces for what concerns relations with the forces of other countries are of the following type: ... *coordination was easy with the navies who belong to NATO, because we have a common cultural background, common procedures.*

Examples of issues with interoperability problems between the soldiers of countries belonging to

Western-style international alliances and those of third-party countries are frequent, with statements of this sort:

SPAC05: *We had contact with troops from India, Indonesia, Malaysia... the relations with the Polish were rather good. With the rest it was quite indifferent, even bad. We had many misunderstandings with the Indonesians. Our procedures were way too different.*

While relations with members of the same alliance generally prove to be easy:

ITC07: *We worked with American, French, Spanish, Canadian colleagues without problems of interoperability.*

There are a few exceptions, however, that highlight the existence of a cultural gap between the soldiers of the largest powers (US, France, UK) on one side and the others, where, for the former, judgments like the following one are also expressed:

SAC02: *Experienced people from the major powers (France, UK, etc.) as dominating and arrogant, mostly working in the interest of their own countries and not the mission.*

BGC06: *A little arrogant, especially the British...*

DKC21: *I must admit that I very quickly grew tired of the Americans, whose style is somewhat more hierarchical and vociferous than what we know.*

Or behaviours hard to reconcile with a multinational environment are pointed to:

TURA24: *Most of the military personnel were US in NTM-A HQ. So, US folks were conducting daily life as if it was a pure US HQ. They were doing some ceremonies according*

to US traditions since they were the majority. I respected their rituals. But in a multinational environment there must be multinational culture and daily life. I don't have to celebrate US special days or I don't have to eat meal on a dining table covered by a US flag.

Or which create feelings of relative deprivation in comparison:

KRA03: *I felt that welfare support for soldiers in the US military was enormous (e.g., welfare facilities such as gym, swimming pool, BX, mess, etc., and programs for leisure time through voluntary participation). On the contrary, I felt support in our case is insufficient, and leisure time programs sometimes appeared as a burden like an event or daily routine.*

Cultural affinity instead works positively, such as in responses like the following ones:

SIC 42: *Also with allied forces relations were excellent. He worked together especially with Italian alpiners who have similar mentality like Slovenes.*

PHIS08: *I have participated in Philippine Humanitarian Support Mission in East Timor for 6 months in 1999. I am good friends with members of Australian Army. When I was in East Timor, we often shared our ideas about our political/country setting and our military experiences. The Philippine military has more in counterinsurgency operations; but the Australians have more in technology.*

SPAC17: *There was more affinity among non-English-speaking countries or with certain difficulties to speak English (Spain, Italy and France) on one side and among English-speaking countries or akin on*

the other (English, Irish, American, Scandinavian, Dutch, Swiss, etc.).

As it can be seen, the human factor and its role in interpersonal relations remains a major problem for commanders with respect to technical interoperability and operating procedures.

2.6. The impact of the rules of engagement

In operations whose ultimate aim is always that of re-establishing peace and that take place in most cases in the middle of civilian populations, special importance is taken on by the "rules of engagement" (ROEs), i.e., the rules that govern the conduct of the units deployed in action, with the chief goal of avoiding civilian casualties while still protecting the safety of the soldiers on mission. The particularity of these missions is therefore that of avoiding civilian casualties and collateral damage as much as possible in a delicate balance with the need not to expose one's soldiers to unnecessary risks. ROEs are created and refined for this purpose.

ROEs have first and foremost a political value. They are decided in the political sphere and differ from theatre to theatre, in an effort to shape them in accordance with the local situation.

On the military side, ROEs are highly unpopular due to the limits they pose on commanders' freedom of action and to an alleged contradiction with the soldier's professional parameters. Some examples of these positions:

ITC16: *ROEs: they are not always understandable, because they are written by politicians.*

SPAC06: *ROEs should be settled by the commander-in-chief of the deployed troops, as he witnesses the ongoing reality.*

SAB09: *The ROE was a challenge because in certain instances the local population indicate they will attack you for no apparent reason and you can't shoot unless the mission commander gave permission otherwise. The UN protects the locals and then the peacekeepers – your word means nothing.*

SPAC16: *ROEs I think they are very restrictive, even affecting negatively the safety of the personnel deployed in the operational zone.*

In particular, improper use of equipment and weaponry is a frequent complaint:

ITA01: *Our aircraft (Tornado) is organised for ground attacks, but it has been employed for air reconnaissance only: a very limited use of this kind of aircraft. It was forbidden to use bombs, for fear of collateral damages.*

But perhaps the most widespread complaint regards the differences in ROEs depending on the country the contingent belongs to. Indeed, various countries set limitations (in general risk limitations) – called “caveats” – on the use of their personnel, with negative consequences both on the morale of the personnel and on the ability to command them. Various examples include:

TURA08: *In Afghanistan since we had many national caveats, I couldn't work with our allies in many areas that NATO soldiers are having engagements.*

SIC01: *ROE did obstruct their work in the field, especially regarding their monitoring tasks with the ANA. He [the commander] trained them, mentored them, however, because of ROE, he was not allowed to follow them in the field. Members of ANA did not understand this.*

DKA04: *But it could be very difficult to work on tasks with many different units, each with their own ROE or interpretation of this.*

BGC02: *National caveats are imposed to limit the participation of the Bulgarian troops in dangerous situations. This is a problem.*

And at times, political tactics put the troops on the ground in difficulty, as in the case that follows, recounted by a Bulgarian lieutenant colonel:

BGC17: *ROE Yes. We had been requested by the German contingent to guard a school of civilians, if necessary. For months we have not received response from Bulgaria. This was an embarrassing situation, especially given the fact that we were completely on their (German) logistical support.*

2.7. Training and education

The participation of military units of the countries considered in this study in asymmetric warfare operations constituted an important, significant screening both of commanders' education for the military profession in general and of their specific preparation for this type of mission. This appears to be even more true for the militaries of the medium-sized powers considered in this study, which had not had many other occasions to put themselves to the test in the recent past.

The general framework that emerges from the interviews is that of a positive assessment of the professional preparation of the units sent on mission, with differing degrees of intensity for the various countries considered: a more generalized positive assessment for the Danish, Italian and Spanish respondents, a less convinced judgement for Turks and Bulgarians. Even the most satisfied respondents, however, note the scarce availability in their home countries of the equipment that would be used on the mission (6):

SPAC18: *We must make an effort to provide the units that are to take part in a mission the equipment, weapons and vehicles they will have to deal with on the operational zone, so that they have a proper training.*

ITC16: *TRAINING AND EDUCATION: adequate to the situation. We can improve our training if we get more means at home.*

Opinions on the specific preparation for the individual mission offer a different picture. Numerous respondents (from more or less all of the countries) feel that their preparation was inadequate.

SAA03: *It was evident that more than half of the members deployed were not properly trained for the specific operation.*

BGA52: *I lacked adequate pre-deployment training.*

DKA04: *My basic training was good. The more specific training for the mission was very poor.*

SIC38: *Training and preparation was almost completely out of reality. Especially training in Hochfelzn, Germany, was waste of time and*

money. The best preparations began, when you came into battle theatre and when your forerunners were informing you what's going on.

And, as this last interviewee declares, it is the on-the-ground experience, the contact with one's predecessors that is the most important element of the preparation, an element that enters into action only after the start of the mission, however.

ITC23: *In Afghanistan we had to learn on the field, because the theatre was very different in respect to the previous ones (Bosnia and Iraq).*

ITC90: *Adequate, but you specially learn by more experienced colleagues and you build your own experience, step by step.*

Here, too, the comparison with the armed forces of the major powers again comes to the fore:

ITA03: *TRAINING AND EDUCATION. Adequate, but I suggest an improving of resources, so that we can carry out a training equivalent to that of the Americans and British.*

With regard to proposals for better preparation for the mission, mostly what emerges is acknowledgement of the profound difference of command action in an asymmetric warfare context compared to conventional warfare, and therefore of the necessity of specific preparation:

SAB01: *I think more training in the asymmetric field would have assisted me in handling the situation. Conventional war is simple and straightforward. My training was definitely inadequate for the task I was given and that goes for everyone*

who was under my command. More emphasis during training should be placed on irregular or asymmetric warfare.

These are followed by a series of specific observations such as that of making more use of experiences gained in the field, improving knowledge and comprehension of the “lingua franca” (i.e. English), training units in environmental contexts more similar to that of the mission, developing, especially in cadres, greater cultural knowledge of local populations, and improving officers’ knowledge of rules and procedures for working in multinational formations. Some examples:

ITA02: *TRAINING AND EDUCATION: adequate; what was very different in respect to the training is the operation environment (high mountain) that would need a different training, not possible in Italy. Besides that, it would be convenient to make more night training.*

TURA19: *The major problem is lack of speaking English and the listening English skills of our personnel.*

BGA16: *There must be interactions between people who have occupied a position in past mission and people who are about to hold it after. There must be more detailed information about the environment in which someone is going to work.*

2.8. Operational experiences

The range of new experiences that the interviewed sample reports encountering in the operations in which they took part in the various theatres includes numerous aspects of asymmetrical warfare. A good number of these constituted experiences

they had never before had, first and foremost the “baptism of fire”. Coming under enemy fire for the first time was experienced as an important event by most of the interviewees, irrespective of home country, and its perception appears significant in all the recorded interviews.

ITC94: *It was a strong emotion to be under fire.*

DKC1: *In Iraq, we were under rocket fire for 85 days, where we fell down on our stomach.*

It is also interesting to note the variety of situations in which coming under fire took place: air support, anti-piracy interventions, ambushes, mopping-up operations, improvised mines, suicide attacks, salvos of rockets and mortar rounds directed at the base. Examples:

ITA04: *We were ready to take off in 30’. We made infiltration operations, exfiltration from dangerous zones, reconnaissance, convoy escort, medical rescue. In Afghanistan land is very mountainous and radio communications are difficult. I was involved in fire conflict several times: it happened also that my helicopter was hit.*

TURA01: *Yes, I have operational experiences. I took part in counter-insurgency operations as a company and a battalion commander. I was wounded twice in action. Most of these operations were small unit size operations in harsh conditions (i.e. mountainous, highly vegetated areas).*

PHIC17: *...the detachment was ambushed. I went back to Maitum where the command center is to wait for reinforcement. One soldier was wounded as the platoon was pinned down by rebel MILF forces.*

All this did not happen in a typical war environment but prevalently among the civilian population, where the aggressors are often intermingled and disguised.

BGC14: *There were bullets coming "from nowhere"...*

PHIB9: *Definitely there were women and children combatants.*

PHIC14: *In one engagement, I hesitated for a moment because the rebel was a female.*

Operations certainly and severely tried the preparation and character of soldiers and the abilities of commanders. The former often had to get on-the-ground experience before acquiring a true command capability and did not escape from the general rule for these types of operations, namely that the novice has to learn from the more experienced.

SAB01: *OPERATIONAL EXPERIENCES: I learnt from on the ground operations, everything happens quickly. Instinct and training and a bit of luck takes over. The lack of training that the rebel groups have gives you an advantage but the anger, willingness, aggression, unprofessionalism of the rebel groups gave us problems.*

But also those who were not directly involved in fire fights constantly lived under this threat, especially in theatres like Iraq and Afghanistan. Overall it seems clear that the asymmetric warfare environment often leads to risk perceptions typical of war.

The richness of experience gained in the operations in which the officers of the sample participated thus constituted an entirely respectable

training process, with a view to that constabulary soldier whose birth Morris Janowitz [2] predicted fifty years ago.

3. DISCUSSION

The data analyzed in the preceding sections show both the command problems encountered by officers in asymmetric warfare contexts and the possible (or desirable) solutions.

The national environment presents commanders first of all with a significant challenge at logistical level, as well as one involving the morale of the soldiers, relegated to living long periods in much harsher conditions than those normally experienced in the homeland. The importance of motivating one's subordinates and creating occasions and structures suitable for alleviating the hardships of life on operations constitute the main problems of officers with command responsibilities.

On the one hand, the unreliability of the human environment contributes to creating feelings of risk in the soldier, while on the other it lends itself, due to the poor living conditions and the well-being gap compared to the contingent's home country, to strengthening the humanitarian motivations, especially if they are adequately valued by the commander.

Closely tied to the specific theatre of operations is the ease or difficulty of establishing and maintaining good relations with the local armed forces for whom the commanders of the units on mission often perform a mentoring function. The shortcomings that often characterize the soldiers of these forces in terms

of both equipment and motivation constitute a major challenge to the command and coordination skills of the commander on mission in the territory. Contexts where these problems are on display require a long and extensive educational effort regarding the local forces, a job that often exceeds the duration granted for the mission itself. A part of this picture is also the necessity of instructing one's own personnel to be on guard against displaying attitudes of superiority or disdain for the culture of the local armed forces.

As already evidenced by Abrahamsson [1] one of the peculiar characteristics of asymmetric conflict is that the strong side forces are forced to operate and even to fight in the midst of local populations, to act on their behalf even in the presence at times of latent hostilities, under a constant threat from insurgents dressed in street clothes and who blend in and become indistinguishable from the civilians. Every commanding officer, at any level of command, thus finds himself having contacts and relations with both local populations and local authorities.

These relations are not always easy, and one premise is that the officer must understand the mood of the population and the attitude of often corrupt authorities, sometimes forced to steer a middle course between insurgents and intervention forces. The result is the necessity of being able to develop a humanitarian aid programme that is sensitive to local moods and needs and suitable for winning hearts and minds, as stated by the theoreticians of asymmetric warfare [3].

The research data, illustrated in the section devoted to their analysis, show the changeability of the attitudes of populations in accordance with the type of action carried out by the units on mission; the difficulty of overcoming cultural prejudices against the intervention forces; the necessity of not appearing as occupation forces; the embarrassment of also representing often corrupt and inefficient local governments. It is in these relations that the asymmetric warfare environment presents all its specificity and is often an absolute novelty for the deployed forces.

In the field of humanitarian aid, then, as well as in reconstruction activities, commanding officers often find themselves cooperating with civilian organizations whose work should extend and supplement that of the military units. This is a collaboration that is not always easy, especially in the case of NGOs, which leads some interviewees to make statements like: We avoided the NGOs like the plague. The difficulty often arises from the lack of a higher coordination activity able to harmonize two deeply different human environments. The NGOs in fact appear to be comprised of young people characterized by a spontaneous, voluntaristic, at times anarchic mentality who often lack concrete operational experiences and frequently put themselves in situations of personal risk that must then be resolved by soldiers, the very forces from whom the NGOs strongly want to distinguish themselves.

It is a difficult collaboration to implement, therefore, one in which the commander must know how to bring both diplomacy and authoritativeness to bear.

As we saw in the preceding section, the problem of operating in collaboration with contingents from many different countries, characteristic of modern asymmetric warfare operations, is not only a matter of interoperability. A significant human relations problem between soldiers who come from very different cultural contexts is also present. For example, American and Turkish soldiers, members of the same alliance, can easily share military technologies and deployment methods, while their respective cultural backgrounds and their behaviours remain profoundly different.

And it is precisely from the standpoint of human relations that feelings of relative deprivation are created [14], in an amalgam of groups of soldiers belonging to different countries (Latin versus Northern European countries, for example) and/or religious faiths. Collaboration with the commanders of other contingents to prevent or smooth over any contrasts or misunderstandings is therefore a constant concern for the officer with command responsibilities.

The rules of engagement and the resulting operational activity require a command activity that is above all educational, wherever it appears difficult to get soldiers exposed to risk situations to contain and calibrate their response. As we have seen from the data, widespread contestation of the ROEs appears due to fears or feelings that the soldier's safety is not given sufficient consideration.

In operations undertaken in asymmetric warfare environments a military unit can also find itself involved in a fire fight. Now, if one

considers that the majority of the soldiers of the countries examined here had never before undergone the so-called "baptism of fire", one immediately grasps how challenging and crucial the commander's task of generating proper conduct of his subordinates in such situations is.

And it is chiefly the result of effective prior training that enables the commander to achieve such conduct in the face of an armed attack. The data obtained from the officers' opinions regarding the training received prior to deployment on mission thus appear particularly meaningful. On this point two prevalent opinions are found: the first is that the general military training received appeared adequate for the asymmetric conflict situations encountered; the second is that the training for the specific mission (knowledge of the terrain, the culture, the social organization, the history) was often superficial or lacking.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Wishing to glean from the research data a set of lessons learned, albeit one that is by no means exhaustive, we can say that an officer and commander in an asymmetric warfare environment should:

- a. know how to create a logistical organization capable of functioning in particularly difficult and isolated environments;

- b. be fully aware of the importance of relating properly with all the other actors present on the territory (local armed forces, civilian populations, local authorities, other coalition forces, international organizations, both humanitarian and not);

c. acquire the ability to operate (and, if necessary, fight) in the midst of civilian populations, respecting them as much as possible;

d. be able to achieve an “interoperability of human relations” between one’s own soldiers and those of the other contingents of the coalition;

e. attend to the motivations of his men, in particular those most functional to the mission;

f. possess skills in the preparation, command and control of his men in the emergency situations typical of asymmetric conflict;

g. be aware that also commanders often have to get on-the-ground experience before acquiring a true command capability;

h. be able to interpret and explain ROEs to subordinates, as well as update them to the specific mission;

i. be able to cope with stress situations of one’s personnel, resulting both from mission events and from prolonged separation from the family, as well as reintegration into the social life of the home country upon returning from the mission.

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ENDNOTES

(1) An asymmetric conflict typically involves two actors, one "strong" and one "weak". In this kind of conflict, strong actors typically have a lower interest in winning asymmetric conflicts because their survival is not immediately at stake (see Caforio, 2008). According to Richard H. Shultz and Andrea J. Dew (Shultz & Dew, 2006), since the end of the Cold War conventional militaries and their political leaders have confronted a new, brutal type of warfare in which non-state armed groups use asymmetrical tactics to successfully fight larger, technologically superior forces.

(2) Military professionals thus find themselves faced today with a situation that requires not a simple update, but a substantial change in their preparation and professional performances. Indeed, "the change from an invasion defence towards a defence based on flexible response puts the military profession under the strain of changing large parts of its expert base, as well as ethical norms and corporate traditions" (Abrahamsson & Weibull, 2008: 13). What capabilities, then, are needed to deal with these demands? All the authors (see Moskos, 1976; Blomgren, 2008; Gentile, 2008; Nagl, 2009) agree in believing that the traditional military preparation for conventional conflicts constitutes the indispensable base also for the vast range of operations in asymmetric warfare. This preparation is no longer sufficient, however, and other skills appear necessary for the military professional faced with a new scenario (see also Caforio, 2012). For the ethical aspect see van Baarda, Th. A. and D.E.M. Verweij, 2009.

(3) So plentiful that it is not possible to give an accounting here. In a general sense and by way of example we can cite: Abrahamsson & Weibull, 2008; Caforio, 2008 and 2012; Fitzpatrick, 2009; Hoffman, 2007; Kaldor, 1999 and 2003; Nagl 2009.

(4) The research was carried out in the period July 2010 – February 2011 on a sample that included 237 officers (158 army, 30 navy, 45 air force, 4 other forces), questioned by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews by a group of researchers from the nine participating countries (Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, Philippines, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain and Turkey). The choice of the participating countries was made by excluding the strongest powers and the countries who are the largest contributors, which seem have been studied extensively before: we tried to find out more about the experiences of

soldiers from middle-sized powers and small countries, not so dominant in the international arena. For more detail on the research as a whole, see Caforio 2013b, forthcoming.

(5) In the text that follows, the various testimonies are reported using the code employed in the research itself. In particular, the first letters indicate the home country (for example, IT for Italy, PHI for the Philippines, etc.), the next letter indicates the armed force the interviewee belonged to (C for army, B for navy, A for air force), and the number that follows is the serial number that identifies the individual interview.

(6) The explanation is that small and medium-sized military powers found themselves having to concentrate their best resources in the field and little remained back in the homeland for training.