

Behaviorism Invades The U.S. Military

by Carl Osgood

July 16—The “Revolution in Military Affairs” (RMA), also known as the Rumsfeld Doctrine, died a much deserved death in the dust of Iraq and Afghanistan over 2005 to 2009. The basic theory behind RMA was that Information Age technology would revolutionize warfare by giving commanders perfect knowledge of the battlefield. Now RMA has been replaced by an even more incompetent method, one that buries the physical and cognitive aspects of humanity even deeper than RMA did. That is the method of behavioral science.

Instead of getting back to the “business of war” (which means winning the conditions for the peace) as Brig. Gen. H.R. McMaster, one of the severest critics of RMA, argued for in 2010, the U.S. Army has instead plunged headlong into the pseudo-science of behavior modification. This dive into an even deeper insanity was in full view during a June 6 media day at the Unified Quest 2012 wargame held at the U.S. Army War College from June 3-8.

The doctrinal shift that the Army is undergoing was attributed, by Army officials who briefed the media, to the new strategic guidance that the Obama Administration issued last January. Indeed, there is some nominal connection between the Army’s change in posture (and that of all of the military services), and the “Asia pivot” of the guidance document, but the *method* comes straight from the clique of behavioral economists that has surrounded Obama since before he took office.

Behavioral economics ignores the science of physical-economic production, which is required to physically sustain a population, in favor of using the “pleasure-pain principle” to influence what choices they make as consumers, or even to accept a lower standard of living. This bestial view of man rejects actual human creativity in favor of British intelligence founder Jeremy Bentham’s “hedonistic calculus.”

Bentham, in his infamous *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1780), argued

that mankind is governed by only two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. “It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as determine what we shall do. . . . Every effort we make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it.” Bentham was plagiarizing the Aristotelian Paolo Sarpi (1552-1623), a Venetian Servite monk, who argued that man can only know the world through his senses. Sarpi was the author of the radical, anti-cognitive, empiricist doctrine, later codified by successive generations of English utilitarians, including John Locke, Bernard Mandeville, Adam Smith, and Bentham. The cabal of so-called behavioral economists around Obama, including Cass Sunstein, Austan Goolsbee, Richard Thaler, Dan Ariely, and others, are all hardcore followers of these English utilitarians.

‘The Starfish and the Spider’

One source of the channeling of this kind of thinking into the military (but by no means the only one) is Ori Brafman, the Israeli-born author of *The Starfish and the Spider* and, along with his brother, of *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior*, both of which have made it onto several military reading lists. Brafman is an advocate of the idea of so-called leaderless groups, which, he claims, are a more powerful form of organization. His basic argument is that the spider can be crippled by removing one of its legs, or killed by taking off its head, but if you take off one leg off a starfish, it simply grows another leg, and the leg that was removed leg could even grow into another starfish. This makes the starfish a superior form of organization.

Why? Because it has no brain! In a presentation to a conference sponsored by the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command in 2009 (which can be seen on YouTube), Brafman used this analogy to explain how the Spanish conquistadors were able to easily defeat the Aztec and Inca empires, both highly centralized societies, but were confounded by the Apaches, a highly decentralized society. There is apparently nothing in his thinking about the moral qualities, or lack of thereof, of each of these societies, or of their form of political economy, or any other factor that may have played a role in creating the conditions which led to the political outcome in each case. Brafman is, instead, calling for the reverse evolution of human society, from higher levels of organization to lower, the oppo-

site of the direction in which the universe is moving.

The ideas of decentralization and behavior modification are what have replaced the failed RMA. When it seemed that the military services might get back to competent methods of strategy-making and war-fighting, along come the behaviorists to make sure that the U.S. military doesn't return to its republican roots.

This is what was on display at the Unified Quest wargame. Behavior modification is already deeply embedded in U.S. foreign policymaking, as any competent observer of U.S. policy towards Iran and Syria should be able to see. On Iran, the policy approach is, that if enough pain, applied through draconian sanctions, is imposed on the Iranians, they will see the light, and end their nuclear weapons program, although U.S. intelligence agencies have insisted repeatedly over the past few years that the Iranian regime has made no decision to move forward with building a bomb. If the pain fails to convince them, then military force is called for.

We have seen this already in Iraq and Libya, and in neither case can anyone make the argument that U.S. military intervention resulted in improving the general welfare of Iraqis and Libyans. In both cases, once the regime in power was removed, the violence flared out of control. Iraq remains a violent place after the withdrawal of U.S. forces last December, and Libya is ruled by militias accountable to no one but themselves, and is exporting its violence to other areas of West Africa, particularly Mali.

Behavior Modification as Strategy

According to the officers who briefed the press on June 6, the U.S. Army sees itself making a major strategic shift, based on the Obama strategic guidance. This effort is intended to create the force that the Army thinks it must become by 2020. Until recently, the Unified Quest series was focused on solving the problems that the Army was facing in its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, the Army is out of Iraq, and expects to be winding down the war in Afghanistan. "This is about changing gears, as opposed to the last few years, where we were focused on the war-fighter, or more near-term



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The U.S. Army's "new" strategic doctrine, based on behavior modification, is nothing but a rewarmed version of Jeremy Bentham's "hedonistic calculus," which argues that mankind is controlled by his appetite for pleasure, and desire to avoid pain. Bentham's portrait by Henry William Pickersgill (ca. 1829).

evolutionary changes," explained Col. Bob Simpson, the director of the Army 2020 effort.

In the context of the Obama strategic guidance and the shift into behavior modification, the Army is grappling with what it calls "the human domain," although it hasn't yet fully agreed on its definition. "We don't have in Joint [services] and Army doctrine the models for thinking about going to war," Simpson explained. "We don't have sufficient ways to think about the human behavior we're trying to change. War is fundamentally about changing behavior. How do we develop a joint model for thinking" about how to change behavior?

"We need to formalize a way of thinking, before you go into war, so you understand the human behavior you're trying to change—that's fundamental to how you think about operations." Simpson referred to Clausewitz's famous dictum about war being the extension of politics by other means. "The purpose of any activity, even an attack, is to change someone's behavior. It's not just about influence. Sometimes it has to be compelled.... The military is all

about compulsion.”

Brig. Gen. William Hix, director of concepts and learning for the Army Capabilities and Integration Center (ArCIC), used the example of NATO’s bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999 to show how this is supposed to work. He argued that NATO changed the behavior of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic by bombing the hell out of the country. The cutoff of electricity and the destruction of other infrastructure caused certain interest groups that Milosevic had a power relationship with to pressure him to come to some sort of accommodation with NATO, to bring an end to the bombing. “We were able to achieve an outcome by changing the behavior of the national leader,” Hix said. “We figured out a smarter way to do business. We understood the interactions of that society.”

This description brought to mind, at least to this author, the “system of systems” thinking that characterized the RMA. By looking at the enemy as a “system of systems,” a commander is supposed to be able, by analysis, to determine where to attack the enemy to mechanically generate the desired effect. Lt. Gen. Keith Walker, the director of ArCIC, denied that what the Army is doing is that mechanistic. “I think the uncertainty, complexity and disorder of the environment is that way because of humans. Therefore, it’s not mechanistic,” he said. “Therefore, it’s the human nature of conflict that really matters. Therefore, our participation in what we can do personally, personal relationships, between individuals and groups makes a difference. . . .” The problem for the Army, he said, is “how do we incorporate that aspect into how we frame the problem” that is to be addressed.

What Does It Mean To Be Human?

There is no question that an army must understand all of the terrain it is operating on, including the human element of that terrain. The G.W. Bush Administration arrogantly rejected the cultural and political expertise that would have been appropriate for preparing its invasion of Iraq, with results that most of us are familiar with. But human beings are not monkeys, as the behaviorists seem to believe. Human beings are as different from all non-cognitive animal species as living process are from non-living process. *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche, on the April 18 edition of *The LaRouchePAC Weekly Report*, put it this way:

“Non-living processes seem to operate in what we

call normal clock-time, normal clock-time sequence. Life appears to work that way, but it doesn’t actually do that. And above all, human creativity absolutely does not do that. And human creativity represents the expression of a principle, expression *in* mankind and *by* mankind, which is not dependent upon as such on any lower form as an antecedent. That is, you do not get life from non-life. You do not get human creativity, from mere biological existence. But rather, you get what we recognize as creativity, as an expression of the lawfulness of the universe. . . .

“If we do not understand mankind and creativity, if we stick to these things we’re trained to believe in, these things will prevent us from ever accomplishing our mission. We have to now, finally, come to the point that we recognize this principle: that the universe itself, starts with creativity, as a principle. That’s the name we would give to it, if we want to identify it: Creativity itself is a principle, a universal principle. The universe is based on that principle, at least as far as we know it: that the existence of the human mind is the highest expression we know of, on which everything depends, *that* creativity!”

Clearly, the Army has adopted Jeremy Bentham’s pain-pleasure principle as the means for making strategy, a method that will, surely, lead to more wars, rather than fewer.

It wasn’t always so, however. The historical foundation of the U.S. Army goes back to the engineering principles that were developed to a very high degree at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point during the 19th Century. West Point-trained engineers played an indispensable role in the early development of the United States, principally through the building of canals and railroads. They also played a key role in spreading this American System of economics around the world, as they worked to outflank the British Empire’s control of the seas by girdling the world with rails.

This was the opposite of the anti-human outlook of the Empire that George Washington fought to free us from. That American System outlook has been eroded since the end of World War II, and has been replaced by British-inspired geopolitics, social sciences, and behaviorism. The only way out is for the Army to return to its republican roots and drive out the sort of irrationalism typified by the behaviorists, but that purge can only begin with a political change at the top.

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