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# Reasoning and the Military Decision Making Process

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**Abstract**

The archetypal view of the military is that of a hierarchical organization whose members are conditioned to respond to command without question. Its election of obedience as "the supreme military virtue" portrays it as subscribing to the highest degree of group conformity possible within any human organization. This view is not helped by the fact that the military adopts a decision making calculus referred to as the Military Decision Making Process (also referred to as The Estimate Process in some military organizations). This seems to suggest that either the soldiers are not expected to think or that whatever thinking it does passes through a decision-making prism which is devoid of the personal inputs of individual soldiers. The irony of the situation is that a course in critical thinking is a required component of staff school training, which is usually a first step towards command and staff appointments in the military. This paper is an attempt to understand reasoning in the military. Using relevant examples, it examines popular clichés about reasoning and the military and the extent to which they are justified by the structure and function of the military. It also looks at the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) and the extent to which it supports or inhibits autonomous reasoning by individual soldiers, and compares it with other analytical decision making tools. Drawing examples from specific command and staff decisions it concludes that while regimentation may be appropriate for the rank and file, the capacity for reason is an important asset in the military especially as warfare continues to evolve from the conventional to new and bizarre mutants of war.

## Introduction

In a scathing caricature of the military, the late African Musician, Fela Anikulapo Kuti referred to them as zombies who will not move, talk or sleep without being commanded to do so but who will do everything, including dying, on command. This perception of soldiers as an unthinking but strictly controlled mob that dispenses violence on command is very common among Africans, especially those who have passed through the painful experience of war or have had direct contact with the military, even in peacetime. It is a perception that started during the European pacification of African tribal groups for colonization and grew through the wars of independence, Africa's many civil wars and military interventions in politics. In part, this poor reputation may be well-deserved, given the African experience of the brutality of invading colonial armies and the viciousness of

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its many militias and national armies. Colonial pacification expeditions were, for instance, notorious for their disregard for the live of natives, whether such natives were fighting within its ranks or living in the communities that had been slated for pacification. Also, Africa's homemade militias, such as The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) Sierra Leone have gained notoriety for their cruelty. On the other hand, national armies, like those of Uganda under Idi Amin, Congo/Zaire under Mobutu and Liberia under Samuel Doe have gone down in history as tools used by unpopular despots to brutalize their citizenry and perpetuate themselves in office. The experience of many Africans has been that soldiering is for the dregs of society; people who cannot fit properly into normal civil life, where reason dictates behaviour. The levity with which military personnel handle human life marks them out as devoid of natural emotions especially so within the African societies where human lives are highly valued and moral value is located, not in the individual, but rather in the *relationship* between individuals. Thus the perception of the military as lacking in reasoning is a product of several years of people's interaction with the military and the tendency of military personnel to operate outside the rules that govern community life and peaceful co-existence.

The perception of the military as an unthinking, destructive but organized violent mob is not restricted to Africa but is also found in academic literature from outside Africa. In discussing military procurement practices for instance, Josip Lučev (2011, 157)observes that "a certain degree of mystification surrounds all military decisions, as if their very existence stands for violence and irrationality incomprehensible to a fully civilized mind, and only justifiable with the harsh realities of the world." For Lučev and perhaps many other people around the world, the military is an unavoidable inconvenience that should be kept away as far as possible from civilized society and only tolerated because its capacity for violence is necessary for keeping the enemies of the state at bay. To this end, the best place for the military is in their barracks or otherwise on a remote and desolate battlefield, far away from other human populations. Such perceptions notwithstanding, one could argue as many have done in the past, that soldiering is in fact a profession of gentlemen; a profession where the virtues of courage, perseverance, endurance and chivalry find their full expression. It could indeed be argued that much of the poor perceptions of the military is due to a profound lack of understanding by the civilian population of the unique nature and function of the military and follows from an attempt to evaluate military behaviour using civilian morality. On the other hand, military theorists like Huntington have argued that the herd mentality that is often association with soldiers grew out of a failure to distinguish between professional soldiers and enlisted men. Thus for Huntington (1957);

> The enlisted men subordinate to the officer corps are part of the organizational bureaucracy, but not of the professional bureaucracy. The enlisted personnel have neither the intellectual skill nor the professional responsibility of the officer. They are specialist in the application of violence not the management of violence. Their vocation is a trade not a profession.

Fotion and Elfstrom (1986, 47) also make this point when they argue, "certainly in the military most draftees and many volunteers can hardly be thought of as professionals. Their superiors might urge them to act in a professional manner or even tell them that they are professionals in the hope that they will act that way." But it is not evident that the distinction between officers and men makes a difference to people's perception of the military. This is because the general population does not make that distinction and even if it did, its understanding of the military as a highly hierarchical organization where the behaviour of the rank and file is the responsibility of the officer corps, makes such a distinction immaterial. Again, because it is the enlisted men that constitute the visible part of the military (they are usually the ones who go on patrols, engage the enemy and interact with the population in the course of their normal military assignments), they cannot simply be wished away as Huntington attempts to do. The distinction between professionals and tradesmen, though indicative of the training and hierarchy within the military, cannot be used as an excuse for the violent and often irrational behaviour that people identify with the military. Huntingtons's restriction of soldiering to the officer corps aims to show that the poor perception of the military by the population is borne out of their interaction with people who should ordinarily not represent the military. But Michael Thiesfeld, in his rebuttal of Huntington makes a case for the inclusion of enlisted man within the cadre of professionals. He makes this point when he observes that "young Soldiers are patrolling on foot, engaging the populations, making life and death decisions in a matter of seconds, and are often conducting these activities without a Commissioned Officer looking over their shoulder" (Thiesfeld 2010). Thus, Thiesfeld argues that professionalism should not only be attributed to the officer corps but should also be extended to the enlisted men. This notwithstanding, it is important to note that the enlisted men are always under the command of officers, who, as professionals, ought to direct them to behave appropriately. Thus, irrational behaviour, even by enlisted men cannot be excused under the pretext that they are not professionals, rather, it should reflect on the officer corps and the military in general.

The behaviour of officers and men is not the only reason for the perception of many that the military is an organization where the autonomous reasoning is suppressed. The hierarchical structure of the military, within which individuals appear to have little opinion concerning their profession, actions or existence, reinforces this view. Greg Foster (2004, 91), for instance, observes that "the military is, by nature, a hierarchically organized, authoritarian institution built on rank, the sanctity of command, uniformity and rigid rule following." Sam Sarkesian (1981, 12) makes the same point when he observes that "personal value systems, institutional requirements and community perspectives will never be in perfect harmony in terms of military professionalism" (Cockerham, and Cohen, 1980,1273). The above gives the impression that individual reasoning and the independent consideration of facts are not encouraged, especially when such reasoning deviates from what has become conventional. More often than not, an officer or enlisted man is required to suspend his critical judgment in the choice of alternatives and rather "use the formal criterion of the receipt of a command or signal as his basis of choice." This portrays the military a regimented organization that discourages critical judgment and personal initiatives. Again the fact that obedience is often cited as the "supreme military virtue" (Huntington 1957, 74) supports the view that the autonomous reasoning is not a feature of the military. This is because unquestioning obedience leads to regimentation; a situation where agents do not necessarily understand why certain orders have to be obeyed nor are they encouraged to reason concerning such orders.

## Critical Thinking and the Military

The above view of the military notwithstanding, the military often prides itself as a rational organization where critical thinking is encouraged and officers are expected to rationally assess command and staff challenges and respond to them with reasoned solutions. They are always eager to show that a professional soldier is not merely someone who has acquired a level of proficiency at military manoeuvres and the use of military equipment, but rather, one who possesses "certain skills and perhaps even a sense of responsibility to exercise these skills in certain ways and at certain times" (Fotion and Elfstrom 1986, 48). Thus, even when a commander is tasked with a particular military objective, the expectation within the military is that he still has the responsibility to reason as to how best the objective could be achieved within the confines of relevant laws and best international military practices. This view of soldiers as strategic thinkers is underscored by Cardon and Leonard as follows:

> In an era of persistent conflict, our Army requires versatile leaders, critical and creative thinkers capable of recognizing and managing the myriad transitions necessary to achieve success. In a dynamic and complex situation, these include not just friendly transitions but those of adversaries as well as the operational environment. Commanders and staff must possess the versatility to operate anywhere - along the spectrum of conflict and the vision to anticipate and adapt to transitions that will occur over the course of an operation. (Cardon and Leonard 2010, 4)

In other words, Cardon and Leonard are of the view the contemporary military environment is ever changing and as a result throws up challenges which the professional soldier has to confront creatively and rationally. But it is not only the techniques and materials of warfare that are always changing; the rules of engagement, temperament of the contemporary soldier and the operational environment also change such that the old requirement that a soldier should merely "obey the last order" no longer holds. Experience at trouble spots around the world has shown that the work of the soldier is not restricted to fighting and inflicting losses on the enemy but includes other functions which may require non-military skills and the appreciation of dictates of other cultures. In the current military environment, soldiers are required to think on the move and in the process make decisions that reflect the interests of their country, the safety of their men and the dictates of international conventions. It is in recognition of this need that most military colleges seek to improve the reasoning capacity of their student-officers by electing a course in Critical Thinking as a core component of staff college education. The need for a course in critical thinking arises out of the fact that, as Emilo (2000, vi) observes, "the current educational system has not prepared us for tomorrow's challenges. We've been taught what to think but not how to think." This is why there is a belief in many military training establishments is that military training should not follow this trend and instruct military professionals on what to think but rather should help them develop critical thinking. Mead (2013, 12) confirms this when he observes, "For the first time in its history, the military wants to teach even junior personnel not just *what* to think but *how* to think." Thus, in making Critical Thinking a part of the staff college curriculum, the military hopes to "provide conditions favourable for the development of the autonomous personality" (Szasz 1970, 142) and through this help to develop the capacity for autonomous reasoning within the officer corps. What is not clear, however, is whether in referring reasoning they mean the same thing as Walton (1990, 401) when he

says, "in a critical discussion, logical reasoning can be used where one party, in dialogue with another party, tries to convince this other party that his (the first party's) point of view is right." Again, it is not clear whether in referring to autonomy they share the views of Kant that it "is not merely self-assertion or independence, but rather thinking or acting on principles that defer to no ungrounded authority'' (O'Neill 1992, 289–299).

Although a course in critical thinking is a required component of staff college education, it is doubtful whether student-officers actually get to develop their critical thinking capabilities in the way that is envisaged in the curriculum. It is also doubtful whether the development of such capacities takes place in an atmosphere where the autonomous reasoning is allowed to flourish. The reason for this doubt is that staff college training takes place within a rigid and time-critical environment where student officers are required to work at various educational tasks that combine formal tactical military training with normal academic work. In such a crowded milieu, what passes as the development of critical thinking is sometimes merely an instruction on the tools of critical thinking. It is not evident that an attempt is ever made to ensure that such tools are applied, or that there is a link between formal academic instruction in critical thinking and the practical business of warfare. Again although the military prides itself as encouraging the application of reason towards the achievement of military objectives, it puts in place step-by-step decision making procedure to which officers are expected to adhere in making military decisions. This procedure, referred to as the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) has been described as "an indispensable model for the problems posed by a bipolar security environment" (Cardon and Leonard 2010, 2). Thus we have an ironical situation where on the one hand the military seeks to promote autonomous reasoning and on the other, seeks to control the type of reasoning that gets done by setting out the parameters for such reasoning. Rather than encourage reasoning, dictating the way reason gets done could actually be said to inhibit reasoning. This view that the MDMP inhibits reasoning is not readily accepted by the military; rather they look upon it as an instrument that ensures the application of reasoning in military decision making. Their understanding is that, setting the parameters within which reasoning gets done ensures that officers do not make rash decisions that are based on the whims of the moment but would rather be forced to go through a process that guarantees some reasoning.

## The Military Decision Making Process

The Military Decision-Making Process is used by many military establishments as a standardized reasoning calculus to ensure precision and uniformity in military decision

making. It is an analytical tool "employing a time-intensive, but logical sequence to analyze the situation, develop a range of options, compare these options, and then select the option that best solves the problem" (Marr 2001, 8–9). It involves the effort of the commander and his staff-officers in bringing to bear their collective cognitive resources toward achieving a military objective, with the men and material available to the commander at the time. It emphasizes the importance and expertise of staff-officers and the opinion they bring to the discussions that produce the blueprint of the mission. Such staff officers as are in intelligence, logistics, air support, artillery, infantry and others with specializations relevant to the mission all contribute to the decision from the perspective of their expertise and the resources they control. In employing this calculus there is a belief that if sustained and appropriate reasoning is applied to a military objective, such an objective could be achieved efficiently. The MDMP consists of seven steps, viz:

Step 1 - Receipt of Mission

Step 2 - Mission Analysis

Step 3 - Course of Action Development

Step 4 - Course of Action Analysis

Step 5 - Course of Action Comparison

Step 6 - Course of Action Approval

Step 7 - Orders Production

Each of these steps consists of various tasks, the completion of which constitutes the full application of the MDMP. Apart from Steps 1 and 7 which involve the mere communication of information, the remaining steps of the process ought to involve purposeful and reflective judgment which is the hallmark of critical thinking. In developing the MDMP the military considered the enemy to be a thinking, innovative and unpredictable adversary who will employ every guile in pursuing his objective. It considered that the only way to overcome a resourceful enemy is to get into his thinking curve, understand the drivers of his thought and take steps to frustrate his plans. In doing so, critical thinking is usually regarded as an indispensable tool and its role in military strategy is underscored by Cardon and Leonard when they argue:

> Critical thinking also helps distil the immense amounts of information and determine those elements of information that are most relevant to the situation. This is an important step in mitigating the risk associated with guidance that does not fully account for the complexities of the operational environment. Critical thinking helps to clarify guidance and

enables commanders to achieve a mutual understanding of the current
situation and the desired end state. (Cardon, and Leonard 2010, 6)

It could therefore be argued that in principle, the MDMP encourages the use of Critical Thinking in the hope that it will ensure a thorough analysis of the enemy and the combat environment. But what is accepted in principle may not always translate into practice. Thus, it is important to determine whether or not in practice, the MDMP promotes reasoning.

The MDMP, just like other analytical decision making tools, conceives of decision making as a series of analytical steps which when properly followed lead to appropriate decisions. Its two basic components consist of identifying/understanding the problem and implementing the solution is also common to other analytical decision making processes. For instance, the Critical Thinking Decision Making Process (CTDMP), proposed by Anne Thomson (1999, 92–3) has options, information, consequences and evaluation as its essential components. The development of options which is the first component of Anne Thomson's CTDMP, comes in as task 2 of the third step of the MDMP and could be said to belong to the initial stage of problem identification/understanding. The requirement by Thomson's CTDMP that we seek information as a second step in decision making comes in as step 4 of the MDMP. The consideration of the consequences which constitutes step 3 of the CTDMP features as task 1 of step 5 in the MDMP, while 'evaluation' which ends the CTDMP, apart from recurring consistently at the different steps of the process constitutes task 2 of step 5. Whereas the first and second components of the CTDMP could readily be classified as identifying/ understanding the problem, the last stage of the process could be associated with implementing the solution. From the above, one could argue that the MDMP is as good as any analytic decision making tool and may even be better since it incorporates features that are not found in other such instruments.

The above notwithstanding, it is important to note that the MDMP is a time consuming decision making instrument which, ironically is meant to be applied in a time-critical military environment. This presents decision making challenges to the commander because, often, the time that is available for decision making, is not usually adequate for a full application of the MDMP; this is especially so when the decisions involved are time-critical field decisions. A full application of the MDMP requires that the commander and his staff perform 41 tasks between the receipt of the mission and the issuing of Warning Order (WngO) for the mission. Each of the tasks is of a technical nature and may require interaction with other units, friendly forces and enemy forces. The tasks also have to be accomplished within the timeline set by higher headquarters

and delimited by the commander. It is not surprising, therefore, that many commanders and staff have complained about the time and resources that go into using the MDMP. Marr for instance, observes that "unit performance at the U.S. Army's combat training centres (CTCs) suggests that tactical units have difficulties in applying the MDMP" (Marr 2001, 2) and part of the reason for this is because they are too long for use in real combat environments. This view is corroborated by Garcia (1993, 3) when he claims that "observations from subject matter experts observing staffs during training indicate that they have difficulty conducting the military decision-making process." Although Garcia does not say why staff officers have these difficulties, there is no doubt that much of it has to do with the conflict between the time for initiating an action and the time it takes for the process to be completed. Thus, even where a commander earnestly wishes to adhere to the MDMP, common sense will dictate to him that such a decision will arrive too late to ensure the success of an operation. Thus it is not uncommon for the commander to switch from the MDMP, which is an analytical decision making tool, to an intuitive decision making process which is not so time intensive. This defeats the whole purpose of the MDMP which has always been to prevent officers from acting intuitively rather than rationally.

Again, although the MDMP is usually presented as a reasoning calculus, some of the tasks required by the process are of a practical nature, such that, subjecting them to sustained reasoning would be superfluous. Upon receiving a WngO from higher headquarters at the first step, for instance, the MDMP tasks for the commander are mainly routine. He is expected to;

- Alert the staff.
- Gather the tools: Higher Head Quarters order, Maps, Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs), Appropriate Manuals, and Running estimates
- Update running estimates.
- Conduct initial assessment

It is apparent that these processes do not require sustained reasoning and to apply such reasoning to them would make a mockery of the process. The second step in the process, mission analysis, consists of 17 tasks, viz:

- Analyse higher Headquarters order.
- Perform initial Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB).
- Determine specified, implied, and essential tasks.
- Review available assets.
- Determine constraints.
- Identify critical facts and assumptions.

- Perform risk assessment.
- Determine Commander's Critical Information Requirements/Essential Elements of Friendly Information (CCIR / EEFI).
- Determine initial Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) plan.
- Update operational timeline.
- Write the restated mission.
- Deliver a mission analysis briefing.
- Approve restated mission.
- Develop initial Commander's intent.
- Issue Commander's planning guidance.
- Issue warning order.
- Review facts / assumptions.

Although the above include tasks that appear to entail sustained reasoning, it is important to decide whether, like Benard Gert, we believe that "rationality is not purely procedural, that is, there is no specifiable procedure of deliberation that can plausibly be said to confer rationality on whatever goals might happen to emerge from it" (Gert 1991, 103). If we do, then the fact that the MDMP is a structured and specified procedure for reasoning condemns it. Also, the fact that officers are limited to a specific operational timeline that is either set by the commander or by Higher Headquarters makes it more likely that they will run through the different steps rather than give them reasoned consideration. Again it is important to note that a Commander may, at his discretion, decide whether to do the full MDMP or to abbreviate the process after receiving the WngO. In abbreviating the process, the commander may wish to adopt any four of the techniques detailed in force manual 101-5. These include:

    a. Increase the commander's involvement, allowing him to make decisions during the process without waiting for detailed briefings after each step.

    b. The commander to become more directive in his guidance, limiting options.

    c. The commander to limit the number of COAs developed and war-gamed.

    d. maximize parallel planning.

In each of these abbreviated options, it is the tasks and steps that involves sustained reasoning and analysis that get jettisoned.

Although the MDMP is often cited as an analytical reasoning instrument for the military, the realities of military life appears to stand in the way of its effective application. The realities referred to here, begin early in military training where a concerted effort is made to replace the individualism of civilian life with a military groupthink and a socialization process is put in place to suppress the autonomous personality and

replace it with a heteronymous one. Early in their training, cadet officers and men are constantly reminded of the virtues of obedience and made to appreciate the need to defer to the superior knowledge and experience of the commander, trusting that the net effect of carrying out his/her command will be beneficial to all concerned. A culture of obedience is important, not only because the military must be united in confronting an objective but also because such a unity of purpose translate to efficiency and efficacy. This culture of obedience is sometimes carried over when officers are given command and staff appointments and is sometimes seen as a disincentive for critical judgments and independent opinions. Some officers would rather recycle a judgment made by their superiors in similar circumstances or adopt a position from the military operational manual than make a critical judgment of their own. Thus instead of making a reasoned and unique judgement that effectively addresses the particular situation, the MDMP allows officers to pretend that they are actually making a reasoned judgement whereas they are merely going through the motions.

Another disincentive for critical judgement in early career officers is the need to avoid blame for operational failures. A failure to achieve an objective sometimes spells catastrophic outcomes for the formation and can weigh heavily on the officer responsible. Blame for such failure would be mediated if the decision was based on ideas that emanate from the rule book or from what has been done in the past but would be severe if it was a novel idea that emanates from critical judgment of the officer. In such cases, the officer would be adjudged to be lacking in judgement and incapable of making sound decisions. This is to say that critical judgment and the resultant new approach to a military objective is fine, so long as it achieves results and since no one can say for certain when a critical judgment will achieve such results, officers are more likely to make "safe" decisions and that is, decisions that are based on the training and indoctrination of the particular military. Thus although, in making decisions, commanders and staff are expected to be guided by professional judgement gained from experience, knowledge, education, intelligence and intuition, many officers (especially those that are new to command responsibilities) sometimes shy away from taking this step and instead try to second guess the kind of decision that their superiors would expect in the circumstance, or stick to what has worked best in the past. Here again, the MDMP aids and abets such recycling of old decisions by putting in place tasks that could be performed and labelled as reasoning without necessarily applying critical judgement and innovation.

An argument for saying that the MDMP is a disincentive to reasoning comes from the fact that most officers do not look at the MDMP as an invitation to reason concerning the task at hand but as reason itself. Their relationship to the MDMP is best understood

using the distinction made by A. H. Simon between programmed and non-programmed decision making. According to Simon (1977, 46), "Decisions are programmed to the extent that they are repetitive and routine, to the extent that a definite procedure has been worked out for handling them so that they don't have to be treated from scratch each time they occur." Programmed decisions are usually approached from the standpoint of organizational policy and the rules for, and specific ways of handling them are usually well known within the organization. In the military for instance, officers and men are fully aware of the standard procedure for 'intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB),' viz., 'determining specified, implied, and essential tasks,' 'reviewing available assets,' 'determining constraints,' 'identifying critical facts and assumptions,' and so on. An attempt to introduce something novel or extraneous to such an established operating procedure would appear uncalled for and potentially destabilizing to the general routine of the military. Since such decisions are programmed, they are not subjected to as much discussion or consideration as they ordinarily should, rather they are automated to ensure consistency and also save time. On the other hand, decisions are non-programmed "to the extent that they are novel, unstructured and unusually consequential." Such decisions do not typically follow established guidelines and their rules are complex and little understood. In the military, such decisions are required once in a very long while and are often the exclusive preserve of very senior officers who may or may not consult their subordinates in the course of making the decision. Given its structure and function, it is clear that the MDMP is a programmed decision making tool and merely functions as a checklist which officers run through when making decisions. The lofty ideals that are the hallmark of critical thinking are usually lost to the automated check listing that is the hallmark of the military.

## Of Reasoning and Warfare

The popular clichés concerning reasoning and the military notwithstanding, there is no doubt that the difference between a successful army and a mediocre one lies in the quality of the command decisions taken by its officers. Although the unschooled may believe that soldiering consists merely in aiming a gun at a target and shooting, the fact that military engagements entail strategizing should be ample evidence that soldiering is an art which require the full application of the faculties of reasoning. Indeed, "military strategy consists of the establishment of military objectives, the formulation of military strategic concepts to accomplish the objectives and the use of military resources to implement the concepts" (Lykke Jr. 1977, 186). Any military strategist will confirm

that a good strategy begins with having sufficient respect for the enemy, understanding him as a rational and calculating being and approaching confrontation with him with a careful analysis of his motives, capacities, emotions and history. They understand that it is very rarely that chance plays a role in military success. Most especially they understand that high quality military decisions have never been a product of mere chance but rather of sustained reasoning, especially when military decisions deviate from the norm. It is the quality of command decisions that gives a numerically inferior army advantage over a numerically superior one, as was the case in the Falkland war. The three prong strategy of declaring a Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ), deploying small but highly mobile raiding parties and landing troops at San Carlos bay, 50 miles from Port Stanley, was a carefully thought out decision. Although the techniques involved are not new, the decision to employ them within the particular context of the Falklands involved a careful juxtaposition of ideas and options.

It is also the quality of the command decisions that could give a rag tag army advantage over a technically proficient army. An example of this was the decision of the Iraqi Republican guard to avoid direct confrontation with a technically superior US led military coalition but rather fight a psychologically debilitating war of attrition with them from within the population; turning what should have been a clinically precise military operation into attrition warfare. Here again, although the concept of guerrilla warfare is not entirely new, the decision of the Iraqis to adopt it at that time and especially their election to deploy Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) as an important component of the overall plan was truly ingenious. Again, the Vietnamese general Vo Nguyen Giap is often referred to as military genius because of his effective military decisions, many of which are still shrouded in mystery. His signature tactic of attacking several enemy interests at the same time did not only force the French to disperse their numerically and tactically superior force into smaller units that the Vietnamese forces could easily engage but was also psychologically debilitating for the Americans when, many years later, they sort to defend south Vietnam from communist rule. Vo's other strategy of timing every offensive to achieve the greatest negative public opinion impact in the enemy country became his specific contribution to the techniques of war. Williams (1963, 130) for instance notes that "the assault on Dien Bien Phu, was clearly timed to coincide with the 1954 Conference at Geneva where the Indochinese territories were to be partitioned and parcelled out." News of the brutality of the attack not only had an impact on French public opinion concerning the war but also on the public opinion of other countries with overseas colonies. Its impact was such that, it is suspected that President Eisenhower's ignored the recommendations of his war cabinet on sending troops to help the French

fight communism in Vietnam because of the negative public opinion that the attack had in the United States.

This two prong strategy was also used with devastating effect in the Tet offensive which, despite not achieving its set objective, is considered a turning point of American involvement in the Vietnam War. According to Guan (1998, 346), "contemporary American intelligence reports which have shaped much of the writings on the Tet Offensive laid emphasis on Giap's opposition to Thanh's strategy for a quick and decisive victory, preferring the continuation of the protracted war strategy." It is generally believed that Giap's preference for a protracted battle was due to the expected impact of such a battle on the morale of American soldiers on the field and on American public perception of the war. Attacking several cities at the same time gave the impression that the Americans were fighting an enemy with an endless supply of men while the siege on American forces gave the impression that the Americans were easy targets for the enemy. It is the propaganda value of his attacks that is often cited as the reason for American withdrawal from Vietnam such that, "Osama bin Laden and other terrorists have routinely mentioned Vietnam as a model for the type of victory they are seeking, a debilitating blow to the American will that results in demoralization at home and withdrawal of troops abroad" (Robbins 2010, 52). This is despite the fact that Vo's strategy involved a colossal loss of men and the victory was achieved at a great cost to the nation's productive capacities. Decisions such as these are not the product of regular military processes (indeed Giap was not a professionally trained soldier), rather it is the product of sustained application of reason to the task of defeating the enemy.

## Conclusion

Facing an enemy in a situation where the fortunes of the men in uniform and indeed an entire country depends on the decision of a few is very eerie and should be approached with all the intellectual resources that are available to the officers and men. Reducing such intellectual resources to a checklist of items such as on the MDMP can never stand any army in good stead as it confronts an enemy. This, especially so, since the elite military colleges around the world open their doors to cadets and student officers from many nations, thus ensuring that 'the run of the mill' operational procedures that are taught at military colleges are no secret but can be easily recognized by the enemy who may use this knowledge to his advantage. Again the fact that nations change alliances ever so often results in a situation where officers and men who, until recently, were fighting from within the same trench may be planning on how to annihilate one another. What this

means is that the military training and other assistance that a country gives to a friendly nation at some point may become a lethal weapon in the hand of an enemy when such a nation turns round to be hostile. Since programmed decision making tools such as the MDMP form part of such assistance, it is important for officers to develop the capacity for non-programmed decision making sure that they have an advantage when confronted with such an enemy. This is not to say that the MDMP should be completely abandoned but it is saying that it should not be relied upon as an "indispensible tool." Also, the socialization of officer cadets should not completely strip them of their individuality and thereby their capacity to bring innovative ideas into the conduct of war. Officers and men should be encouraged to develop and maintain their capacity for rational enquiry and by extension their ability to be innovative and creative, even in the application of the MDMP. Limiting the capacity of officers and men to effectively use their reason in the application of the MDMP put the military at a disadvantage when they face a resourceful enemy and this may escalate the human and material cost of winning a war. Developing a capacity for rational thought thus becomes indispensable especially in an ethical military that can ill afford the waste its human and material resources.

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