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Ideas as Weapons: Influence and Perception in Modern Warfare

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Anthologies are neither easy to compile nor edit, especially in a fashion that provides a depth and breadth of knowledge while minimizing overlaps and gaps in coverage. The case of *Ideas as Weapons* in that regard is a worthy attempt to capture thought on the increasing, if not preeminent, importance of information in modern warfare. Published in 2009, a complete reading of the book makes it clear that most chapters are based on articles written prior to 2006. While this certainly appears to date the content in what is still a nascent and emergent doctrinal field, the material often reflects accurate and prescient facts, analysis, and recommendations that are as applicable today as when they were penned. The practitioner of information in warfare will find himself nodding in agreement most of the time, but there are also readings that will cause him to scratch his head or disagree rather strongly. Given that dichotomy, a review of the book is best approached by considering valuable overarching insight that supplants individual chapters and recommending articles that provide the best insight into information as it applies to today's and future conflicts.

Ideas as Weapons is replete with important concepts inherent to the successful application of information to military success. Counterinsurgency is a recurring theme, entirely understandable considering the current nature of conflict. The emphasis here is rightly on population-centric operations and the importance of persuasion toward attitude and behavior change. The military's current definition of information operations is discussed and critically portrayed as obfuscatory. There is a recurring call for ownership of the information aspects of warfare by military commanders, recommending that they establish an intent envisioning the information environment in light of military operations while defining an appropriate information end state. Visual imagery's lengthy declassification procedures are considered, this in line with the criticality of speed in today's information environment. Perhaps the most prevalent and recurring message is the oft overlooked importance of actions in sending loud messages that portend the role of all military members as information operators. Most interesting in considering this array of topics is the fact that they have risen to prominence over the course of the past four to five years, appearing increasingly in pre-doctrinal manuals and studies pointing to the prophetic nature of their importance as presented here.

The editors have split the anthology into four sections: geopolitical, strategic, operational, and tactical. Do not be deceived by this somewhat artificial

breakout. Short of a few exceptions, it is more reflective of the level of discussion as opposed to the trend line in lessons learned. As Admiral Mike Mullen notes, “The lines between strategic, operational, and tactical are blurred beyond distinction” in today’s information environment. Having said that, it is worth pointing out to the potential reader the chapters of significance where, short of reading the entire book, one can get the most valuable insight.

Dr. Phillip Taylor offers a short but valuable chapter on “The Limits of Information Strategies.” He states what may be obvious to many, that any attempt to control the information environment at the strategic level will prove futile. Still, Taylor offers that it is imperative to consider the information effects of words and deeds as applied to multiple audiences, particularly in messages that come from Washington. T. X. Hammes and William Darley follow with previously published pieces that are well worth a first look, or a reread if applicable. Hammes, who is generally respected for his work on “4th Generation Warfare” applies that same theory directly to information operations, deftly pointing out flaws and providing relevant recommendations for fixes. Darley’s “Clausewitz’s Theory of War and Information Operations” should appear on the reading list of every senior military leader. It is strategically focused and considers the full spectrum of military operations.

Religion is “the single most problematic, complicated, sensitive, volatile, and debated subject in the current Global War on Terrorism,” notes Pauletta Otis in Chapter 19. Otis does not shy away from the subject and develops an excellent contextual overview of religion as it impacts information in warfare. There are several chapters that call upon history to apply lessons to the current theaters of war. One of the best is “Estimates, Execution and Error . . .” where Colonel Eric Walters uses Vietnam to glean lessons learned that can be directly applied to ongoing operations in Afghanistan. Several other outstanding chapters bear mention, including Metz’s “Massing Effects in the Information Domain . . .” and Kilcullen’s “28 Articles . . .” both previously published and widely read. The final “Tactical” section of the book is generally anecdotal in nature and is a mixed bag in terms of quality of writing and content.

The editors conclude the book with a note that the anthology is meant to provide a framework on which to build thinking as opposed to a checklist for how to proceed. *Ideas as Weapons* accomplishes its stated objective. Information practitioners will find value in reading the entire book with a critical eye in an effort to learn, reinforce their own knowledge, or consider the perspectives from different viewpoints. The layperson will not, and should not, read the entire book. The breadth and depth of coverage for an interested novice may well prove laborious. Instead, focus on the chapters recommended in this review; they provide insight and critical analyses on both the challenges and opportunities reflective of the book’s subtitle: *Influence and Perception in Modern Warfare*.