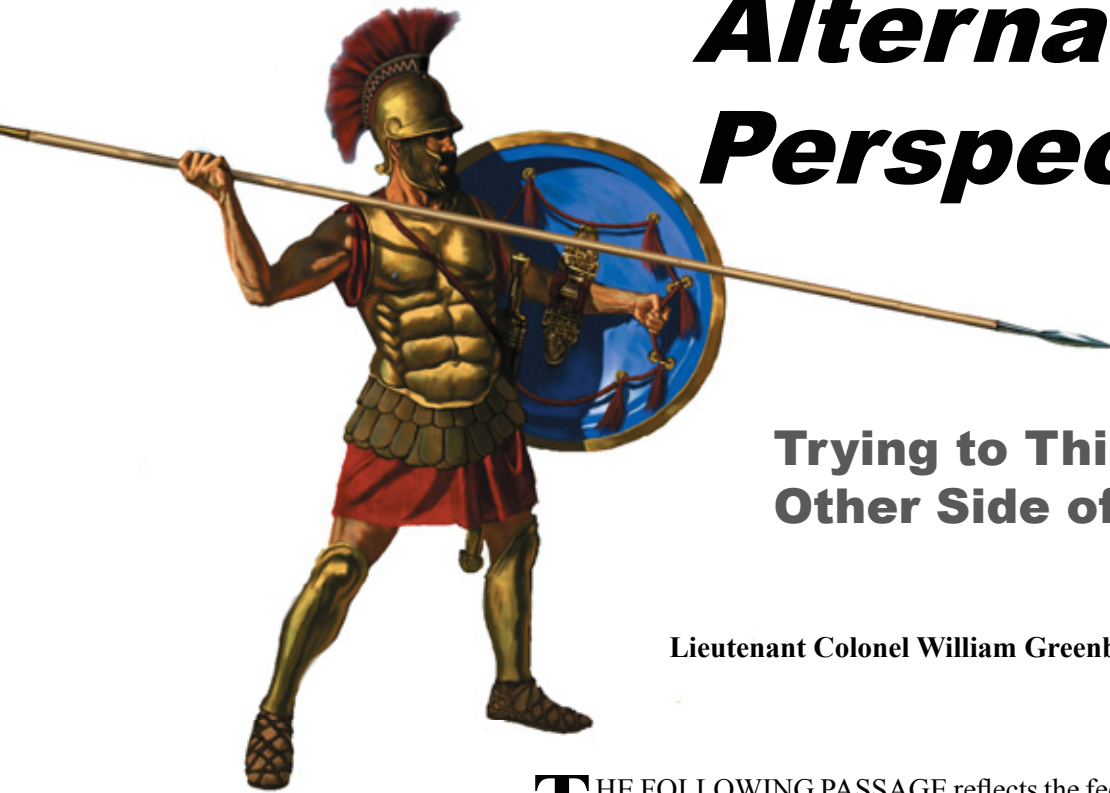


Alternate Perspectives



Trying to Think from the Other Side of the Hill

Lieutenant Colonel William Greenberg, U.S. Army, Retired

THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE reflects the feelings of Ulysses S. Grant during his first engagement in the Civil War. During the run up to the engagement, Grant thought about the Confederate enemy only from his own perspective, never really wondering how the enemy commander might be thinking about the upcoming battle:

As we approached the brow of the hill from which it was expected we could see Harris' camp, and possibly find his men ready formed to meet us, my heart kept getting higher and higher until it felt to me as though it was in my throat. I would have given anything then to have been back in Illinois, but I had not the moral courage to halt and consider what to do; I kept right on. When we reached a point from which the valley below was in full view, I halted. The place where Harris had been encamped a few days before was still there and the marks of a recent encampment were plainly visible, but the troops were gone. My heart resumed its place. It occurred to me at once that Harris had been as much afraid of me as I had been of him. This was a view of the question I had never taken before; but it was one I never forgot afterwards. From that event to the close of the war, I never experienced trepidation upon confronting an enemy, though I always felt more or less anxiety. I never forgot that he had as much reason to fear my forces as I had his. The lesson was valuable.¹

As Grant and his regiment crested the hill, and looked down below upon an empty enemy camp, it dawned on him that he had never taken the alternate perspective, looking at the situation from the enemy commander's view.

Most people are barely conscious of the cultural factors and biases that control their own actions. Culture is an overwhelming force, one that forms mental models that ultimately guide most of our actions. Culture also has a tendency to narrow our thought processes to the point that we believe most

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IMAGE: 4th Century hoplite, Johnny Shumate.

people think as we do and view a problem as we would. Trying to break out of the “cultural cocoon” that guides our actions and look at a situation from another person’s perspective is difficult. However, the ability to do so is crucial to understand how others will act in a given situation.

In organizations that conduct some form of red teaming activity, looking at alternate perspectives of the enemy and other actors in the operational environment improves decision making.² This article examines two commanders who gained insight into the the enemy’s perspective to achieve success on the battlefield.

Try to Understand the Hated Enemy

Gaining the perspective of one’s enemy, especially if he comes from a different society and culture, is a daunting task. In classical Greece, one great commander developed such an insight into his enemy while absolutely despising its society. In the early fourth century BCE, having defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War and expanded her direct influence throughout Greece, Sparta (known as Lacedaemon) dominated the Hellenic world. The Spartan oligarchy did this through a confederation of allies funded with Persian gold. Using its military might, Sparta forced numerous cities throughout Greece into their coalition. Sparta’s rule enforced a conservative oligarchy like their own in each of the city-states among its allies, conditions abhorrent to democratically minded factions that had formerly dominated in Attica and Boeotia.

Thebes was the major city-state in Boeotia, the northern region of Greece south of Macedonia and Thessaly. Sparta came to dominate Thebes in 382 BCE, when a Spartan general, Phoebidas, installed a pro-Sparta oligarchic regime in place of the democratically elected council. One of the leaders of the anti-Spartan faction, Epaminondas, then organized a revolt against the regime and, in 378 BCE, cleared Thebes of all pro-Sparta forces.

Over a six-year period, the Spartan forces tried to retake the city but were rebuffed each time. During his protracted defense of Thebes, Epaminondas grew to hate every aspect of Sparta’s xenophobic culture as well as their political oligarchy. More importantly, he gained vast experience fighting the Spartans. He began to understand their conservatism in warfare

and the centers of gravity in Spartan society. Even though he passionately hated the Spartans, he had developed a deep appreciation for Lacedaemonian perspectives. Epaminondas’s knowledge of Spartan ways helped him break away from a purely ethnocentric Theban view and facilitated his ability to predict how Spartan leadership looked at military situations.³

On the strategic level, Epaminondas realized that Spartan subjugation and exploitation of the helots of the Peloponnesian peninsula was crucial for Sparta to raise highly professional military forces. Without the helots, Spartans would have to work their fields themselves, limiting their ability to train soldiers for war. Further, due to changing financial parameters that defined a citizen in Lacedaemonian society, Sparta’s ability to generate well-drilled professional forces was diminishing. Sparta could no longer field large numbers of Spartiates (professional Spartan soldiers). It had to depend on lower tiers of Lacedaemonian society and upon its allies to fill-out its phalanxes.

Epaminondas understood the link between Sparta’s scarcity of Spartiates and its traditional insistence on placing its best hoplites on the right side of the extended phalanx. With only limited manpower, and the natural inclination for a phalanx to wheel counterclockwise (due to the individual hoplite unintentionally edging to the right to be covered by his neighbor’s shield), Spartan generals always weighted the right side of the Lacedaemonian phalanx. Their best-drilled hoplites, traditionally the citizen Spartiates, would thus defeat the enemy left and roll up the line of battle.

By the time of Epaminondas, much of the Lacedaemonian phalanx consisted of Dorian Perioeci—a class one tier down in Spartan society—who were not as well drilled but who nevertheless were formidable infantry backing up the Spartiates. As the xenophobic and insular Spartiate population declined significantly after their heyday during the Persian invasions, the Perioeci increasingly provided the center core of Sparta’s army. The left wing of the Lacedaemonian phalanx now consisted of allies, helot hoplites, and even freed helots, the “newly enfranchised,” who were given land in exchange for service, essentially a feudal militia.⁴ However, the extreme left flank was strong, as the Spartans posted the Arcadian Sciritae there, a unit of hardy semi-professionals whose status was the same as the Perioeci.

Spartan society reflected this cultural division of the heavy infantry hoplite phalanx, on the spectrum from Spartiates to enslaved helots. The phalanx was a manifestation of both the security needs and the culture of the state. The Spartiates' first duty was to keep the helots subjugated, then to achieve success on the battlefield against rival city-states.

Only on rare occasions during the Peloponnesian Wars did the Spartans adapt to changing situations—they remained a mentally entrenched and hide-bound military society incapable of imagining the flexible tactics Epaminondas had in mind. During most of the first war, Lacedaemon depended on its highly trained hoplites to awe the Athenian League and rarely needed to actually fight large-scale land battles. However, at the battle of Sphacteria in 425 BCE, a Spartan citizen *mora* (a Spartiate regiment) was forced to surrender to Athenian light troops who pelted them with impunity. The Spartiates proved incapable of learning from this tactical harbinger, but the lesson was not lost on later soldiers like Iphicrates of Athens and Epaminondas of Thebes.

Sparta's army and military philosophy had developed over centuries, and it remained a severely conservative organization ripe for exploitation. Epaminondas understood Lacedaemonian tactics and military conservatism, and he sensed that he could take advantage of Sparta's reliance on its reputation for unbeatable heavy infantry. He began his fateful campaign to free Thebes by further developing Thebes' trained forces. He realized that he could never defeat the Spartans in a normal phalanx battle. However, Epaminondas made up for quality with quantity. He built up the Theban army with vast numbers of Theban freedmen and farmers, augmented by his Boeotian neighbors. This is one of the first times a military organized as a *levee en masse*. All Thebans and their allies, no matter their economic status, were conscripted to take up arms to defend their city-states. This was a revolutionary step in the ability of a city-state to augment its forces.

When he took this much-enlarged force to the field, Epaminondas also radically changed the

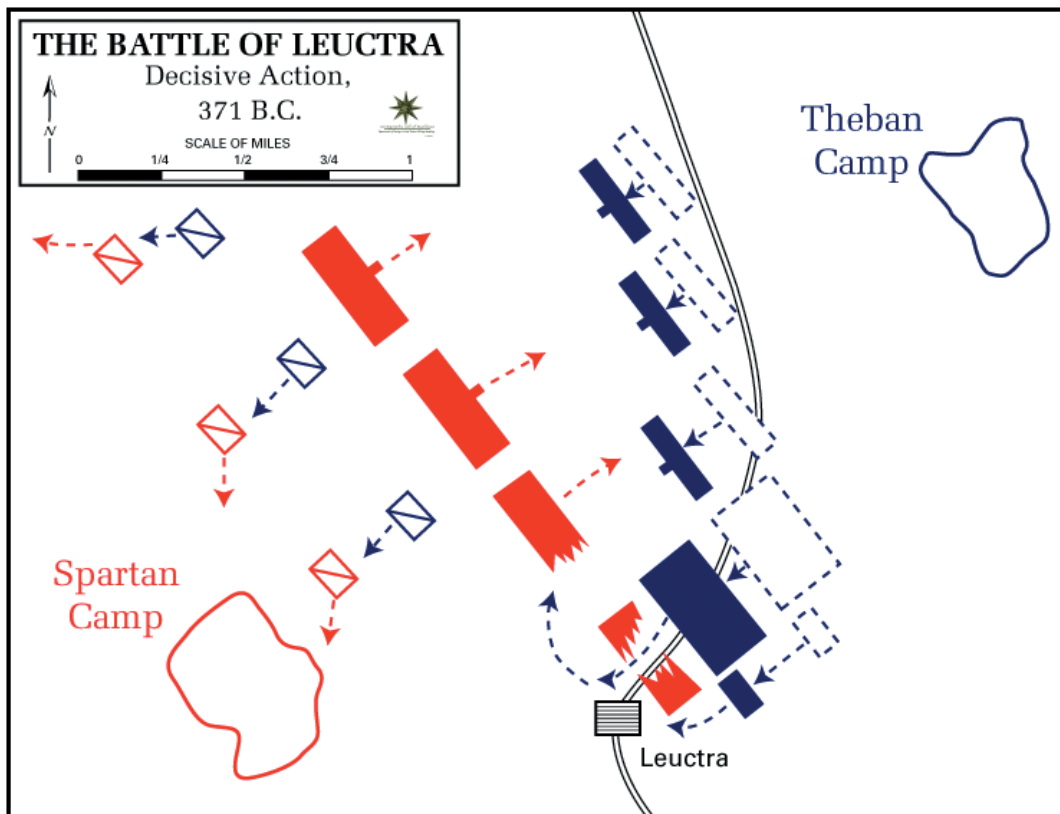


Figure
The Battle of Leuctra

organization of the Theban-Boeotian phalanx. He looked at the situation from the Lacedaemonian viewpoint and knew the Spartan generals would organize to fight in their traditional manner. Epaminondas also realized that the Spartan leaders would keep the army's movements relatively slow to maintain the cohesion of the phalanx while maneuvering. Epaminondas's larger militia-type forces only had to stay massed to be effective. As long as the Theban forces remained compact, Epaminondas could maneuver his force to bring greater mass against a numerically weaker Lacedaemonian right flank. Because trained Lacedaemonian professionals were the source of Sparta's leadership and power, Epaminondas realized that real success meant killing as many Spartiate citizens as possible on the enemy right wing. He reasoned that by thickening his left flank he would oppose the Spartiates on their right flank where he could fight an attritional battle, forcing the Spartans to expend precious skill and leadership that they could never replace. Lacedaemonian losses would then compel the Spartan generals to conserve their own best forces and use greater numbers of lesser-trained or unwilling allies.

Epaminondas planned to form his left wing into over 50 files of troops, instead of the usual 12. He also reformed an elite unit of 300 lovers known traditionally in Boeotia as the "Theban Sacred Band" to serve as a Boeotian veneer of quality needed to spearhead his anticipated overwhelming quantity of mass. The Sacred Band would break into the lines of Lacedaemonian Spartiates followed by the massed phalanx. Epaminondas also planned to thin out and refuse his right wing, securing that flank in an economy of force that would pin down the Sciritae on the Lacedaemonian left wing. Epaminondas understood that the Spartans, being extreme traditionalists, would not counter these moves by thickening their own lines, because making such a change would radically go against Spartan tradition and training. He also knew they would not be able to discern how much he had weakened his own right wing for the economy of force mission. The Sciritae had been accustomed to waiting for the shock of the enemy right, and Epaminondas anticipated that they would persist in that expectation.

The two armies met on 6 July 371 BCE in a wide valley in southern Boeotia at Leuctra (Figure 1).

Epaminondas deployed his forces in his planned unorthodox style, a left-flank-heavy echeloned formation and a withheld right in an economy of force. He crushed the Spartan army in what amounted to a mental ambush. Approximately 45 percent of the Spartiates were killed (400 Spartans), including their king, Cleombrotus. Epaminondas' massed free militia force had decisively defeated the finest military heavy infantry force in the Western world. Sparta never really recovered from this defeat. The Boeotian League, led by Epaminondas, followed up its victory at Leuctra with campaigns into the heart of Lacedaemonian territory.⁵ By 360 BCE, Sparta had to accept defeat and negotiate an end to the war.

Epaminondas' shattering of the Spartiate's reputation for invincibility started a social revolution within the Peloponnesian peninsula. Sparta gradually lost control of its enslaved helot population through the intervention of the invading Boeotian League and its inability to control the remaining helots owing to lack of Spartiate power (directly related to the losses at Leuctra). Eventually Sparta lost control of all helots, thus destroying her managed economy. In 336 BCE, Greece finally succumbed to the newly powerful state of Macedon, led by Alexander the

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Great's father, Philip (who had studied as a royal hostage in Epaminondas' household), and the era of Spartan superiority was over.

Being able to develop an alternate perspective about an adversary gives any general a huge advantage. Further, having the capability to look at a situation from the enemy's perspective, even when absolutely hating one's enemy, is rare. Humility is the operative principle in achieving such presence of mind. Epaminondas' success sprang directly from his ability to consider and understand the Spartan perspective and how that perspective would react in war.

Trying to Gain Perspectives on Another Culture

Comprehending an opponent's perspective when both sides come from similar cultures is hard enough, but it is much more difficult to do so if one comes from a radically different culture. A number of military leaders have understood the need to gain such an insight, but history finds few examples of any successes. While in command of the Third Fleet during World War II, Admiral Halsey tried to establish an organization to better understand the Japanese decision-making process. According to journalist and historian Evan Thomas—

The Department of Dirty Tricks spent much of 1943 pondering what [Halsey's chief of staff] called "the Oriental mindset." They found it "baffling" at first. "We couldn't put ourselves into the minds of the Japanese," recalled Carney. Japanese decision making seemed "irrational" and thus difficult to predict. They seemed to favor complex elaborate operations that, once started, could not be stopped or altered. "There was no such thing as turning back once committed. Whether this was considered as cowardice or a violation of the Samurai code, whatever it was, I don't know," recalled Carney.⁶

American society before World War II had little interplay with Japanese society. None of the senior military American leaders in the Pacific, except for Douglas MacArthur, had ever lived in Japan. No anthropologist with a Japanese background (if any existed in the U.S) was on the senior level decision-making staffs in the Pacific.

This situation is not unusual. Most commanders throughout history have gathered the best intelligence available on the enemy, trying to figure out how the enemy will act, but usually looking at the problem from their own perspective and mindset. This is "mirror imaging," believing you are thinking like the enemy, when in reality you are looking at the problem from your perspective.

Therefore, it is rare to come across an individual who was successful in thinking outside the cultural parameters that bind most people. Edward Lansdale is one such person. He had the unique ability to see another person's view of a problem, even if that person came from a very different culture. This ability to see the alternate perspective helped him



(U.S. Air Force)

Major General Edward Lansdale, 1963.

successfully influence and affect key individuals in the Philippine political and military establishment during the 1940s and 1950s, ultimately helping the Filipino leaders defeat the Communist insurgency called the People's Anti-Japanese Army (Huks) and strengthen the democratic process.

Praised and pilloried in press and film in the last four decades, Lansdale is a controversial figure. Portrayed favorably in the book and movie *The Ugly American*, but vilified by Graham Greene in *The Quiet American* and by Oliver Stone in the film *JFK*, Lansdale is the ultimate insider who can think and act like the people of the culture he inhabits.

Lansdale was born in Detroit, Michigan, to an upper middle class family. His father was an executive in the auto industry, and Lansdale's family moved around the country as Lansdale's father moved up the corporate chain. The family eventually moved to California when Lansdale was 14. Upon graduation from high school in 1926, he enrolled at UCLA where he concentrated on journalism. Lansdale left UCLA in 1931 to try

his hand at journalism. However, it was the height of the Great Depression, work was scarce, and Lansdale drifted through a number of jobs until he finally found a spot in an advertising agency in San Francisco.

Working in the advertising business taught Lansdale to develop strategies and information campaigns to sell different products. To be successful, Lansdale had to imagine what would appeal to the populace. To do this he had to think like the targeted audience. This experience in advertising would be his introduction to thinking in alternate perspectives.

Lansdale volunteered for the military at the start of World War II. Through a series of acquaintances he had made in the advertising industry, Lansdale maneuvered himself into a position with the newly formed Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA. Lansdale's duties in the OSS provided him with opportunities to develop solutions that were not the standard "Army way" of accomplishing the mission. At the end of the war, Lansdale was reassigned out of the OSS, which was being dismantled, to the occupation command in the newly recovered Philippines.⁷ Lansdale was placed in a situation and location where his ability to intuitively understand an unfamiliar culture could be put to good use.

The Philippines was a war-torn land when Lansdale arrived in October 1945. The 1942 Japanese invasion interrupted the process of transferring power from the United States to an embryonic Philippine national government. Three years of Japanese occupation had created deep fissures in the

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Philippine social structure. American invasion and reoccupation caused massive death and destruction throughout the archipelago. The American government had negotiated with the Philippine national

leadership in 1935 to grant independence to the islands in 1945. Upon reoccupation in 1945, the United States decided to continue with the power transfer, and on 4 July 1946, the Philippines became an independent state.

Though independent, the new regime had problems, including a growing communist insurgency initiated by the Huks. The Huks, one of many groups resisting Japanese occupation, had a politburo for political guidance and a subordinate military organization to conduct large-scale guerrilla war. Their political actions and rhetoric focused on the inequitable distribution of land and the lack of government support for the common peasant. The upheavals of World War II created a political vacuum throughout the Philippines archipelago, which the Huks quickly filled. The new Philippine government of President Manuel Roxas, hampered by internal political divisions, massive corruption throughout the political process, and the huge task of rebuilding the country, could not contain the growing communist insurgency. The Huk political platform of land reform and egalitarian government appealed to a vast majority of the Philippine people, who were disgusted with a government that provided neither a voice for their complaints nor an economic avenue for advancement. This was a situation where Lansdale could thrive.

Lansdale, initially in the G-2 (Intelligence) section of the Army Forces Western Pacific, quickly recognized that the information developed by the G2 from U.S. and Philippine sources was either false or misleading. He knew that to truly understand the situation in the countryside he would have to leave his secure office in Manila and meet the average Filipino on the ground. He started traveling alone throughout the countryside, stopping unannounced in obscure barrios (villages) and talking to the local leaders and common peasants alike. These conversations illuminated the culture and custom of the society, the problems that the local people were facing, and the vision that they saw for the future.

Lansdale also opened up his house on the U.S. compound in Manila to all Filipino visitors (mostly military commanders) who were conducting business with the U.S. command.⁸ The ensuing conversations gave him another avenue to gain insights into the Filipino culture and an understanding of the conditions on the ground in the fight against the

Huks. Once Lansdale developed numerous contacts throughout Philippine society, he decided to search out Huk fighters to truly understand their perspective. The Huks were concentrated on fighting the new Philippine government, and saw the remaining U.S. forces in the Philippines more as an overarching authority that was leaving than as a threat. On numerous occasions, Lansdale infiltrated his way into Huk camps and safe houses and, through long conversations with Huk leaders and fighters, gained insights into the movement at the grass roots level.

As Lansdale took in all this information he began to comprehend the Huks' perspective concerning the Filipino people and society. At the end of his tour in the islands in 1949, he could view the situation in the Philippines from a Filipino perspective, but he was not in a position to change the situation.

Returning for his second tour, Lansdale was in a position to affect the Philippine society and the war against the Huks. In 1947, Lansdale transferred from the Army to the newly activated U.S. Air Force. Lansdale's old contacts in the OSS then

recruited him to work at the also newly established CIA. In 1950, Lansdale went back to the Philippines with a small team to help advise the newly appointed defense minister, Ramon Magsaysay. Throughout the 1950s, he would use his positions in the Air Force intelligence organizations as a cover for his CIA activities.

Two senior leaders at the CIA, Colonel Richard Stilwell and Frank Wisner, decided that Magsaysay, a representative in the Philippine Congress, would be the best leader to fight the Huks and possibly lead the new nation. The CIA put pressure on President Quirino to appoint Ramon Magsaysay as defense minister and then placed Lansdale in a position where he would be the key advisor to the new defense minister. Lansdale and Magsaysay hit it off immediately, and over a three-year period they became close friends and compatriots.⁹

This relationship was remarkable, given the time period, when racial and ethnic biases were openly advocated. Lansdale had the ability to divorce himself from any form of ethnocentrism or racial



(University of Michigan, Bentley Image Bank, BL003760)

Ambassador Homer Ferguson and Philippine president Ramon Magsaysay visit the U.S. aircraft carrier *Shangri-La*, 9 March 1956.

biases. He had a strong belief in the American role in the world and the inherent rightness of spreading American values and beliefs to newly independent countries, but these beliefs did not lessen his respect for the Filipino culture. His love of the culture and empathy for the common Filipino endeared him to the country. By 1950, Lansdale had attained a deep knowledge of the Philippine society and the Huk Insurgency. This perspective helped him work closely with Defense Minister Magsaysay because he could see problems from Magsaysay's and other Filipino leaders' perspectives.

Lansdale delved further into the multilayered Malay-Hispanic culture of the Philippines to find pieces of that culture to use in the fight against the Huks. He was adept at using superstitions, myths, and focused intelligence to develop and execute successful psychological operations against the Huks. He convinced Magsaysay to follow his example and get away from the capitol to see the counterinsurgency operations of the Army on the ground.

Filipino politicians, who normally came from the upper class, generally focused their activities around the capital, Manila. Magsaysay was a middle class outsider who came from the provinces, with no power base in the Manila elites. Being an outsider gave Magsaysay a different perspective from the average Filipino politician and helped him be more responsive to the average citizen. While visiting troops in the field, Lansdale convinced Magsaysay to look into local conditions near military camps. This helped Magsaysay get a better perspective of the needs of the average peasant, and it gave Lansdale an opportunity to build a power base in the provinces for a future Magsaysay presidential candidacy. Lansdale understood the need of the populace to find a politician not tied into the Manila elites. The people wanted someone who would represent them. Magsaysay, Lansdale decided, would be the people's choice.

Lansdale's ability to see the operational environment from the Filipino perspective gave him a huge advantage in influencing the military and political situation. Though the Filipinos leaders knew he was a representative of some element of the American government (at the time they did not know it was the CIA) and had some form

of clout beyond the normal advisory relationship sponsored by the U.S. Military Advisor Group, these key stakeholders trusted Lansdale. The strength of this trust came from Lansdale's ability to see problems from the Filipino perspective and to give advice that seemed to be in the best interests of Filipinos. Other American senior military and civilian leaders had tried to help the Filipino leaders solve the Huk crisis. However, the solutions they proposed were from an American perspective. Lansdale was unique in finding solutions from a Filipino perspective, thereby making it easier for the Filipino leadership to accept his recommendations.¹⁰

In 1953, Lansdale facilitated the election of Magsaysay to the Filipino presidency. The CIA heavily funded the campaign, but Lansdale orchestrated the campaign behind the scenes. One of the most persistent and influential grievances the Huks had against the government was the feeling that the previous incumbents had corrupted each of the preceding presidential elections, leaving the average Filipino with no real voice in the election outcome. Lansdale made sure the administration of President Quirino would not corrupt the election. He convinced the Filipino army's senior leaders, who were mostly reformist, to provide security to the polling places using soldiers and ROTC cadets, virtually stopping election fraud. Using his advertising experience, he had Magsaysay conduct an American-style political campaign, with the emphasis on getting out to see the voter in the countryside.

Lansdale knew this type of campaign would resonate with the average Filipino. Magsaysay campaigned throughout the archipelago with gusto. The results were astonishing. Out of 5 million eligible voters, Magsaysay won in a landslide, garnering 4 million votes.¹¹ With Magsaysay installed as president, the Huk rebellion slowly withered away, until it became a small nuisance for the government, with the rebellion finally disappearing in the 1990s. Lansdale had defeated the Huk rebellion and established a viable Philippine political system by looking at the problem from the Filipino perspective. Interestingly, Lansdale did not stay in the Philippines to see the results of his success. He moved on to Indochina to help the newly independent South Vietnamese government.

Perspective

Both Epaminondas and Edward Lansdale were capable of seeing past the confines of their own culture and society and viewing situations from an alternate perspective. Epaminondas forced himself to view the situation from the point of view of a society he despised. He examined the Lacedaemonian society from a Spartan perspective, looking for weaknesses he could exploit, and molded the Theban and Boeotian forces to take advantage of Spartan shortcomings. At the Battle of Leuctra, Epaminondas knew that the Spartan leaders could not afford a battle of attrition. He placed his forces tactically in a position on the left flank, maximizing his ability to kill the Spartiates. Only an individual who could see from the opponent's perspective could have executed the plan successfully at Leuctra and then continued the campaign into the Peloponnesian peninsula, freeing the helots and bringing on the downfall of Sparta.

Edward Lansdale faced an even greater challenge. Having no actual forces to influence the

situation in the Philippines, he had to learn to see matters from the Filipino perspective and influence the key decision makers in Filipino society. All of Lansdale's success depended on his ability to see the situation from the Filipino perspective.

In the current operational environment, U.S. leaders are often in situations where the use of force is one of multiple options available to resolve operational issues. Commanders who can understand the perspective of the enemy and other involved actors can better understand the situation they face and effectively use the elements of national power that are available. In Iraq it was the coalition leaders understanding the perspective of the Sunni Awakening Movement and its lead group, the Sons of Iraq, that facilitated a change in policy and the turnaround in the Iraqi insurgency. Gaining an insight into the enemy's perspective is extremely difficult, but it is a step toward understanding enemy strengths, weaknesses, and intentions. If the leader can attain such insight, he has a much better chance of success. **MR**

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