

# SOCIAL ENGINEERING — AS A SOCIOCULTURAL TACTIC —

A Bio-Psycho-Social approach to gray zone challenges.

BY CAPTAIN CHRISTOPHER RUSSELL O'BRIEN

## INTRODUCTION

During peace time scenarios, order is maintained through internationally established and accepted laws and regulations. However, that environment has had its volatility revealed to the world through the operating environment we face today and anticipate for tomorrow. The threat today is defined by aggressive state and non-state actions that deliberately fall short of recognized thresholds of traditional war. We must adapt our approach.<sup>01</sup> This article will provide an alternative approach to the overly militarized and overly constrained techniques in response to today's Gray Zone challenges. We must think, plan, and approach these challenges differently. This article will discuss the paradigm shift of USASOC following the Army Capstone Concept through *ARSOF 2022*, the educational challenges facing U.S. Army Special Operations Command today, possible solutions to these problems, as well as introduce a unique weapon system for today's challenging operational environment.

The Social Engineering as a Sociocultural Tactic Cycle provides a new lexicon which shifts from past Department of Defense methodologies

towards Gray Zone challenges, to one centered on the Human Domain and a Bio-Psycho-Social approach to cognitive engagement. Through the SESTC, SOF will collect, analyze, and apply information in order to leverage the human condition and quietly deter emerging security challenges. The SESTC pushes our force to understand and account for root causes rather than symptoms while providing a tactic to increase the specialization of SOF, apart from conventional warfare, in order to raise our country's efficiency against Gray Zone challenges.

## U.S. ARMY FUNCTIONAL CONCEPT OF ENGAGEMENT

Following the Special Operations Forces White Paper, published February 2012, the Army Capstone Concept, published Dec. 19, 2012, identified a capabilities gap with the Army's past functional construct. The ACC stated that in order to operate more effectively in the Land Domain, while still accounting for the human aspects of war and conflict, the Army required a new Warfighting Function. This new function was to encompass the tasks and systems to allow the Army to assess, shape, deter and influence the decisions and

behaviors of security forces, governments and people through lethal and nonlethal means. To meet this requirement, USASOC was tasked by the Commanding General of the Army Capabilities Integration Center through an Integrated Capabilities Development Team Charter to write the concept and conduct a Capabilities Based Assessment for the Seventh Warfighting Function, now titled the U.S. Army Functional Concept of Engagement, to develop solution approaches that mitigate the Army's gaps in conducting engagement activities.

The content and focus of the FCE changed multiple times from start (SOF focus) to final concept (CF focus) and is still changing. The ongoing tenants of the FCE are gaining an understanding of the human aspects of the operating environment, building relationships, building partner capacity and leveraging enabled partners to contribute to the multinational effort. The FCE supports increasing the Army's awareness of the Human Domain. The concept prioritizes sufficient knowledge of aligned regions, and provides guidance to better survive within the sensitive human, cultural, and political dynamics of an uncertain operational environment. USASOC's solutions will be submitted

01 Coalition forces speak with local villagers near Baghdad, Iraq. The Social Engineering as a Sociocultural Tactic Cycle) provides a new lexicon which shifts from past DoD methodologies, to one centered on the Human Domain using a Bio-Psycho-Social approach to cognitive engagement. U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY MASS COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST 1ST CLASS MICHAEL B.W. WATKINS

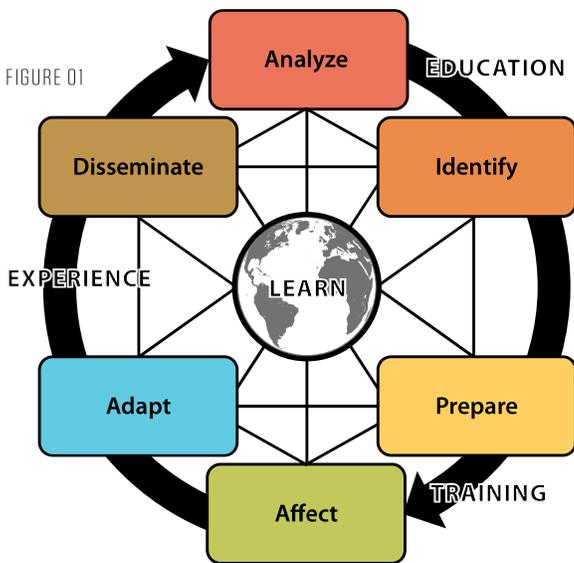


to the Army Requirements Oversight Council for approval and to take the FCE from a theory and implement it as doctrine. Separately, USASOC has also initiated and instituted educational and organizational changes such as language, regional expertise and culture programs throughout the force to grow its abilities within this realm. As vital as these efforts are to prevent and shape future conflicts and war, they primarily affect the strategic and operational efforts of our Army and do little to increase SOF Soldiers' capacity to win at the tactical level.

Social Engineering as a Socio-cultural Tactic Cycle (is a tool to provide common understanding and language in order to increase SOF Soldiers' ability to leverage U.S. national interests, maneuver effectively across a broad spectrum of human terrain, have better awareness of, and control over, foreign partner subversion, as well as influence enemy, adversary, neutral and friendly individuals and groups to more effectively prevent, shape and win.

**SOF LREC:  
THE FOUNDATION OF SPECIAL  
OPERATIONS ENGAGEMENT**

Investing in human capital and creating the world's best trained and educated special operations



Soldiers is one of the top priorities as outlined in ARSOF 2022. SOF LREC programs must be at the core of this priority and receive full attention. Where the ACC detailed what the Army must accomplish in the future, the Army Operating Concept described how the Army must fight in the future. Through the AOC, Army forces, both conventional and special operations forces, must be regionally aligned in order to properly organize their capabilities and respond to immediate requirements within a complex operational environment. As a result, and as outlined by the AOC, SOF Soldiers will be required to be proficient in language, culture, customs and regional orientation. These are the core functions of SOF LREC programs.

Currently, SFGs offer the Command Language Programs taught by regional representatives. Courses last roughly four months. Such programs provide Soldiers the opportunity to advance their understanding of the cultures of a region and continue to develop or maintain their language proficiency achieved from the Special Forces Qualification Course. Further, live-fire range safety briefs, commands and even Concept of the Operation briefs and story boards are all executed in their assigned language and incorporate aspects of their current country focus culture. Efforts such as these are all a result of the Command Language Program.

To offer such programs is a positive step in the right direction. However, these programs are still very self-initiated, largely affected by command emphasis and personalities and are heavily constrained by training timelines and operational deployments. With other obligations on top of already tight timelines, options such as these are not always practical. As a result, most regional training is done reactively prior to a deployment rather than proactively and developed over time. Here in-lies the largest challenge for SFGs given the operational tempo they have experienced from 2001 to drawdown. With only limited time between

operational deployments, often LREC programs are neglected for other capability requirements during an Operational Detachment Alpha's permission train up. Too often, time just doesn't allow SFGs to make the transition needed by today's operational environment to go from a reactive educational environment to one that is properly developed over time and proactively aligned to their region.

With that being said, SFGs have internally developed many systems to maintain continuity of effort and share information gathered in regards to various regions' orientation, culture, customs, and the progress/efforts made within each. Special Operations Tactical After Action Review and Special Operations Debrief and After Action Review are examples of such systems and are digitally maintained and shared between operational detachments entering and leaving theater. Efforts such as these, similar to LRECs, aid detachments' ability to prevent, shape and win within their regions and assist in meeting operational requirements such as those outlined by the AOC.

LREC programs, and efforts such as CLPs, are the backbone of engagement within the special warfare form of special operations. As stated in the ACC, AOC and emphasized by ARSOF 2022 priorities, special operations Soldiers must be educated and culturally in synch with their operational environment at a level unparalleled by any other force. Achieving this level of education is paramount in identifying root causes of Gray Zone security challenges. Without it, efforts will continually be directed towards symptoms rather than preventing and shaping conflict.

**GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CYCLE  
THEORY: HOW TO FACILITATE  
PREVENT AND SHAPE**

When the Army introduced the concept of the Human Dimension, it presented an excellent means to focus efforts inwards to increase the efficiency and strengthen our orga-

Analyze	Identify	Prepare	Affect	Adapt	Disseminate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global context</li> <li>• Regional context</li> <li>• Other perspectives</li> <li>• Cultural nuances</li> <li>• Negotiations</li> <li>• Game theory win/win options</li> <li>• Areas to impact</li> <li>• Ramifications, orders of effect</li> <li>• NMS and ARSOF needs</li> <li>• TSCAPs, Campaign Plans</li> <li>• Priorities</li> <li>• Current abilities in LREC</li> <li>• Training needs (ours/theirs)</li> <li>• Threats to deter</li> <li>• Key units, personnel to engage</li> <li>• Points of influence to leverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Gaps</li> <li>– Requirements</li> <li>– Opportunities</li> <li>– Methods</li> <li>– Partnerships</li> <li>– Exchanges</li> <li>– Exercises</li> <li>– Augmentations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Training Requirements</li> <li>• Units to assign</li> <li>• Mutual benefits</li> <li>• Education venues</li> <li>• Measures of effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plans</li> <li>• Concepts</li> <li>• Relationships to leverage</li> <li>• TSOCs to receive</li> <li>• Country Teams to receive</li> <li>• Units/Schools to host</li> <li>• PMT</li> <li>• Personnel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LREC training</li> <li>– Tactical</li> <li>– Security</li> <li>– Medical</li> <li>– Acclimate</li> <li>– Admin</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Pilot programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deploy</li> <li>• Engage</li> <li>• Train</li> <li>• Observe</li> <li>• Ask</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Assist</li> <li>• Shape and/or prevent</li> <li>• Deter</li> <li>• Disrupt</li> <li>• Influence and/or manipulate</li> <li>• Build <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Rapport</li> <li>– Partnership capacity</li> <li>– Relations</li> <li>– Future opportunities</li> <li>– Knowledge and skills</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen</li> <li>• Think</li> <li>• Learn</li> <li>• Correlate</li> <li>• Adjust</li> <li>• Understand</li> <li>• Invite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidate</li> <li>• Synthesize</li> <li>• Report</li> <li>• Capture change</li> </ul>

FIGURE 02

nization’s human capital. However, there is much more potential within human capital than just an inward look at our own organizational performance. The same perspective should be applied outward and tailored to every region that surrounds our nation. This realization is what drove the creation of the Special Operations White Paper and the effort to incorporate the Engagement Capability into what was then the six Army Functional Concepts.

The implementation of the Engagement Functional Concept brought the Army’s attention to focus on how its conventional and special operations forces can better affect external actors in a non-lethal manner similar to how the Human Dimension focused leaders’ efforts inwards. The focus of the Engagement Functional Concept was to build the Army’s capability to prevent and shape future conflict in an undefined operational environment. However, to effectively prevent and shape the social, cognitive and moral underlying forces of foreign populations, allies or our enemies (not to mention win amid these parameters), we must all first see, understand and

account for the Human Domain in the same manner.

Figure 01, the Global Engagement Cycle, is a theoretical example of what such a construct may look like and is comparable to the Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze and Disseminate process used in targeting. Currently, Functional Solution Analysis results are being refined prior to being staffed as part of the Engagement Capabilities Based Assessment. Throughout this strategic planning process, the need for, and design of, such a construct will be determined. This representation is only an example of what such an idea may look like. Regardless of the outcome from the CBA, a synchronized perspective will be necessary to properly identify and fulfill LREC requirements and bring USASOC to a proactive educational stance. Such models also provide a placeholder to drive initiatives, development of processes, and doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy solution sets.

Figure 02 depicts an example of some possible subordinate actions, considerations and items for

DOTMLPF-P solution set development. If implemented, these tasks should also include the same type of subordinate templates to assist in planning, development, execution and feedback similar to the F3EAD targeting cycle. It is a flexible, codified system that continuously adjusts LREC focus priorities to fit the demands of a continuously changing operational environment.

As stated before, ARSOF’s LREC strategy is the absolute prevent, shape and win strategy. However, currently, there is no structure to support information processing to enable command decisions. There are clear concepts for planning and executing targeting, but not one that is suited well for the complexity and interdependence aspects of operations (or the Engagement Functional Concept’s capabilities for engagement) with humans to shape and influence. Until such a model is created, SOF will continue to fight a reactive battle of educating its forces in response to Gray Zone challenges within a fluid hyper-sensitive operational environment which calls for more refined and proactive measures.

FIGURE 01  
Example of a  
Global Engagement  
Cycle.

FIGURE 02  
Possible Global  
Engagement Cycle  
associated terms.

## COEM & CM2E, AN ORGANIC ASSET TO PROVIDE AN EXTERNAL SOLUTION

The Irregular Warfare Analysis Division at TRADOC Analysis Center White Sands Missile Range is one of many subordinate divisions headquartered at Fort Eustis, Virginia. TRAC-WSMR's IW Division specializes in aiding decision makers through providing analysis of single Soldier to Brigade Combat Team level operations with a focus on Irregular Warfare.

As guided by the National Defense Strategy, and specified through TC 18-01, "without a clear understanding for the desired effects and end state for a region or conflict, it is impossible to assess whether support...would achieve favorable results."<sup>92</sup> TRAC-WSMR's IW Division is able to aid the strategic level by evaluating, modeling, and analyzing the problem as defined by the "customer" and providing feedback and recommendations prior to establishing a definitive plan. TRAC-WSMR's IW Division can also assist planners in deciding whether to provide U.S. sponsorship to an environment within Irregular Warfare scenarios. Among other capabilities, this team can clarify the feasibility of support by describing the human conditions of the environment (through the

Complex Operational Environmental Model, *Figure 3*). TRAC-WSMR's IW Division can aid strategic level planners in defining the appropriateness of such support (through the Complex Military Mission Environment model, *Figure 4*) based on the mission and U.S. Government strategic interests. The COEM is a deterministic simulation of the complex operational environment designed as a stand-alone model to investigate the COE impacts resulting from changes to any combination of PMESII sub-variables. The CM2E is a modeling environment where actors interact with each other in the COE to accomplish their missions over a protracted time period (e.g., 20 years).

Through both the COEM and CM2E, TRAC-WSMR's IW Division has the ability to depict a region's geopolitical environment and aid strategic-level planners in determining if favorable terrain exists for an IW campaign. This capability, and the flow of information from higher echelon planners down through the operational and tactical levels, can similarly aid in understanding a specified region's Human Domain and later be better equipped to correctly operate and engage within any operational environment. These models can help enhance the cognitive abilities of SOF Soldiers and therefore increase Soldier performance in the Human Dimension.

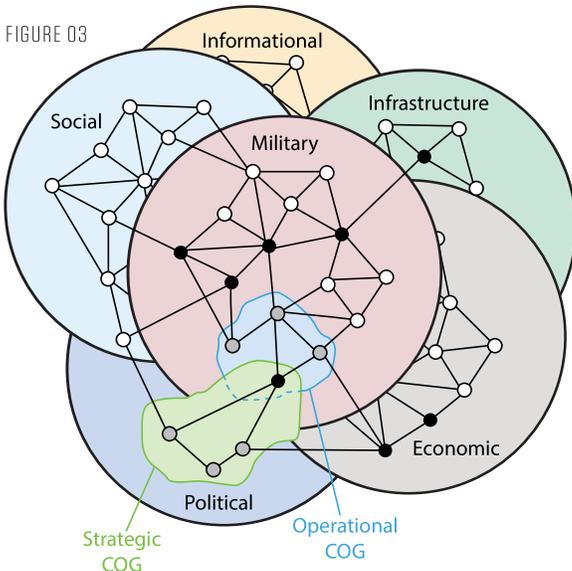
The key point to both models is their ability to indirectly fill a current capabilities gap within SFGs (more specifically their LREC programs) when proactively used and injected into an Operational Design planning process. With the tight training and operational timeliness, elements struggle to sustain regional alignment. As stated before, SFGs' regional education efforts are almost always doomed to a reactive (rather than proactive) fate. With TRAC-WSMR's IW Division's ability to produce a solution like the COEM in a period of 4-6 months (situationally dependent). It seems a tremendous educational burden could be relieved from the SFGs and other entities

under USASOC and SOCOM, should such an asset be realized and appropriately utilized.

The COEM has the potential to provide select operational detachments a base level education, or picture of the battlefield prior to deployment. This is a picture that would take SFGs immense time and effort to create and provide internally, especially within an identical timeframe. The CM2E would depict how foreign individuals and groups would likely react and be affected as a result of a proposed mission and provide an invaluable planning perspective. When disseminated to the tactical level, this perspective would empower a detachment to more effectively navigate and interact within a region's Human Domain.

The SESTC is a tactic to manipulate and influence the behavior of an identified personality. However, the SESTC focuses on the individual (or individuals) and the human terrain within a narrow and limited scope. The key challenge to this theory is educating the SOF Soldier to understand how the individual on the other end of the table is persuaded/affected by the external influences from that region. COEM and CM2E can potentially provide that knowledge prior to an operational deployment to account for those external aspects and allow the SOF Soldier to consider and plan for each dynamic. Potentially, being provided products from both frameworks, the SOF Soldier's interpretation of the situation would be higher during the 'understanding' phase of the proposed cycle due to the COEM, and the Soldier's ability to determine an intellectual strategy would be facilitated through the CM2E during the 'judgement' phase of the cycle. Both models allow USASOC to better cultivate the Human Dimension of its SOF Soldiers while successfully navigating through, and engineering, the Human Domain. Constructs similar to the non-adversary based targeting methodology found within Civil

FIGURE 03  
Complex  
Operational  
Environmental  
Model (COEM).  
IMAGE COURTESY  
OF TRAC-WSMR IW



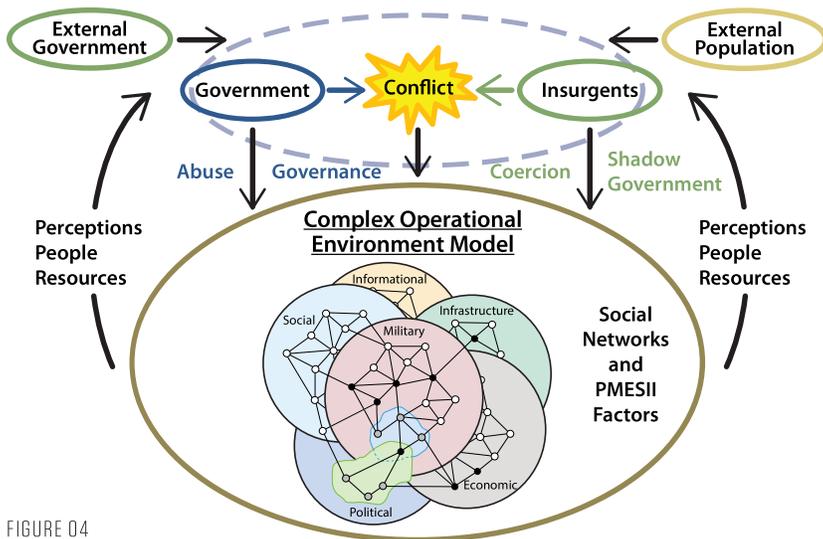


FIGURE 04

Military Engagement Development- Joint Targeting/Non-Lethal Handbook can help refine this initial understanding and account for shifts within the environment while on the ground.

## SOCIAL ENGINEERING AS A SOCIOCULTURAL TACTIC; COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT TO WIN THE FIGHT

Once it is realized how manipulative human interaction is, the boundaries and parameters traditionally influencing decisions become less definite and more a personification of the characteristics, morals and beliefs of those that create or enforce the decisions. This is a relative constant across all populations, regardless of their diversity at skin level. Through understanding the power residing in the Human Domain, SOF has the capacity to further develop their uniquely people-focused capability at a level unparalleled by any other force. When utilized as a sociocultural tactic/ weapon system, Social Engineering, and the discipline of persuasion and influence, provide SOF a means to more effectively operate and engage within the Land Domain by leveraging the human condition.

Figure 5 depicts the Human Dimension as the SOF Soldier's, and our Army's, core function. Around

it, represented in blue, is the Human Domain. The Human Domain is the similar potential found internally to our organization through the Human Dimension, but is externally resourced and leveraged through the social, cognitive and moral underlying forces of foreign populations, allies, or our enemies. To structure this model, the graphic is framed similar to the observe, orient, decide and Act loop cycle. The model depicts four phases necessary to effectively navigate throughout the Human Domain and the cycle is repeated until the desired end state is achieved. Under each phase are specific tactics, techniques and procedures to provide the SOF Soldier tools to reach a desired end state with an individual. Finally, layered in the rear of the cycle, are both the COEM and CM2E models. Depicting how each will supplement this cycle and provide the SOF Soldier perspective for the external influencers within a given operational environment.

Through application, while understanding the multiple internal and external influencers on an individual, a SOF Soldier can take advantage of this knowledge and can act quicker than the individual can execute his/her OODA loop. SE is a weapon system to navigate through the Human Domain (by leveraging USASOC's unique and experienced Human Dimension) to manipulate, control, or influence foreign people

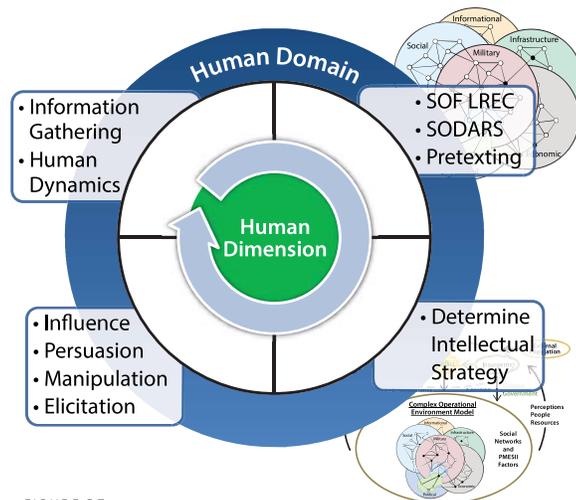


FIGURE 05

(the affect portion of the Global Engagement Cycle). This is how the SOF Soldier affects human behavior within the Gray Zone.<sup>03</sup>

Independently, no single component of the SESTC is unique or foreign to today's SOF Soldiers. However, when each element is executed in series, with this framework as a guide, therein lies a unique sociocultural tactic. It is the deliberate execution of each action, based off a superior understanding of the individual, the internal psychological and social influencers, as well as the external regional and cultural factors, that can make a person with 'people skills' a valuable and unique weapon system within the Human Domain. **SW**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Captain Christopher O'Brien is currently assigned to the 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne) serving as an Operational Detachment Alpha Commander.

**NOTES** **01.** Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone," *Special Warfare* (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, 2015), 22-23. **02.** Training Circular 18-01, *Special Warfare Unconventional Warfare* (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, 2010), paras 1-2 and 1-3. **03.** Additional information detailing the execution of the SESTC can be found within the OSD-SMA White Paper *Bio-Psycho-Social Applications to Cognitive Engagement*, published September 2016.

FIGURE 04  
Complex Military Mission Environment (CM2E). IMAGE COURTESY OF TRAC-WSMR IW

FIGURE 05  
Social Engineering as a Sociocultural Tactic Cycle (SESTC). IMAGE COURTESY OF CPT CHRISTOPHER O'BRIEN