



Red Teaming - playing the devil's advocate

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"No matter how enmeshed a Commander becomes in the elaboration of his own thoughts, it is sometimes necessary to take the enemy into account". Winston Churchill

Introduction

Context is everything. Churchill, who had an articulate way of distilling things, had some fairly challenging issues on his plate, like Nazi Germany and, after 1941, a rampant Japanese military. An allied military coalition that was rife with international politics and numerous different agendas just made things more interesting. Across the Channel, Hitler was perhaps less concerned with democracy and, it could be argued until late 1943, wasn't lacking in confidence having conquered most of Europe. So what? This is history, right? Churchill's point, and dare I suggest his underlying frustration, was that the dogmatic British Imperial General Staff had paid scant attention to the German military build-up since 1933. The Blitzkrieg, despite being a re-hash of Moltke's Schlieffen Plan, still came as a shock to the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and the French. A quarter of a century was long enough for the British and French to have forgotten their 'Lessons Learned' and for the Germans to dust off a plan for the successful start of a European campaign. If we are to refer to the allies as 'Blue', then 'Red' appeared to have been given a stiff ignoring in the inter-war years.

Is history repeating itself?

Military strategists, historians and everyone with access to Wikipedia know how the Second World War panned out; the allies won, Germany and Japan were vanquished. Since 1945 the 'Blue team' have been focussed on the threat posed by expansive Communist threats from the USSR and China (let's call them 'Red' from now on, for simplicity's sake). Some localised conflicts (Korea, Vietnam) between the two blocks never really coalesced into anything other than a minor blot on the historical landscape compared to the two World Wars. The status quo endured. The USSR may have disintegrated in terms of geography, but today Russia, enabled by an economy buoyed by natural resources in the late 1990s and 2000s, is still flexing its muscles across Europe, Western Asia and the Atlantic. China has certainly redefined the game in the last decade and their thriving economy and unity of purpose have combined into an impressive military



capability. This is underpinning their long-term economic and geopolitical strategy that is unencumbered by the democratic process. A flick through the latest copy of *Jane's Fighting Ships* illustrates a sense of the breadth and depth of the PLA maritime capability and that's just the stuff that the journalists knew of when it went to print. It's safe to say 'Red' hasn't sat on their proverbial laurels. But we are metaphorical 'all over this, aren't we? We use 'Red' in our individual, collective training and exercises all the time and every PWO should know a Sovremenny from a Luyang, a Shang from a Kilo. Right?

Facing up to the truth

In his 'Open Letter to the US Navy from Red' (An Open Letter to the US Navy from Red, Capt Dale Rielage—TACTALKS Issue 7, Dec 2017), Captain Dale Rielage, USN referred to the lack of "an honest conversation" with 'Red'. His excellent article, coupled with the current reflective behaviour of the US Navy, is a stark reminder that 'Red' needs to be respected and understood. The RAN has used elements of 'Red Teaming' before, but not coherently and collaboratively. Recognising the requirement to do more and quickly, COMWAR is, through several initiatives, energising the RAN's warfare and intelligence community to have some more honest conversations with 'Red'. Stealing a line from Capt Rielage's article, "high-velocity learning" is an excellent and topical analogy; a lack of respect for 'Red' and its capabilities will almost certainly

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not go well, especially at Mach 3. To understand 'Red' fully we must understand the process for learning about 'Red'. 'Red' is not one-dimensional, 'Red' is not as predictable as we think and almost certainly has a different concept of acceptable risk than we do. Sun Tzu (you didn't think I'd write this and not mention Sun Tzu, surely?) reminds us to:

"Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles without losing".

If we were to be brutally honest, we would admit that we have been paying lip service to 'Red' for some time and, in our most private moments in front of the mirror, we might admit that our knowledge of "ourselves" has been wanting on occasions. Things need to change and we need to be honest about it.

What is 'Red Teaming'?

The concept of 'Red Teaming' isn't new. Nine years before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, the US Navy ran an exercise in which the 'Red Team' completely overwhelmed the island's defences in an effective surprise attack. Despite this, the 'Red Team' evidence was overlooked and history, well, we all know what happened there. After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the US Department of Defence, Federal Aviation Administration and several global companies (including the likes of IBM, Hewlett Packard etc.) recognised the need to take into account how the 'other side' operates to best prepare them for what comes next. Put simply, 'Red Teaming' encourages a balanced view of the problem and to view 'Blue' actions from the adversary's perspective, challenging 'Blue' assumptions and exploring innovative methods of getting inside the 'Blue' OODA-loop. By understanding the weaknesses in the 'Blue' plan, it will provide your Commander with more coherent Courses of Action and, should, result in clearer risks and, hopefully, less attrition on the 'Blue' side.

Why Do We Need to 'Red Team'?

Put simply, because we are biased, blinded and cursed with preconceptions, like almost every organisation, especially institutional ones. And because we frequently decide that our Senior Leadership expect us to tell them that all is well with the world and that we still have the warfare advantage against 'Red'. They don't and we shouldn't—bad news doesn't improve with age. What the 'Red Team' provides is not perfect; it cannot predict with certainty what an adversary will do, nor can it uncover all possible weaknesses in a concept or plan. However, not thinking about 'Red' undermines your plan from the very start, so a balanced view is needed and healthy regard for your adversary.

What the 'Red Team' might reveal may also be your most critical vulnerability. Leaders must be cognisant that their staffs may subconsciously wish to avoid challenging the very thing that 'Red' will focus on, so if you find yourself apprehensive of 'Red Teaming' it means you probably need it. Admiral Nimitz clearly understood the value of the 'Red Team' when he told his staff intelligence officer:

"I want you to be the Admiral Nagumo of my staff. I want your every thought, every instinct as you believe Admiral Nagumo might have them. You are to see the war, their operations, their aims, from the Japanese viewpoint and keep me advised what you are thinking about, what you are doing, and what purpose, what strategy, motivates your

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operations. If you can do this, you will give me the kind of information needed to win this war."

By getting inside Admiral Nagumo's OODA-loop, Nimitz became the architect of victory at the Battle of Midway, arguably shifting the balance to the allies and setting the conditions for victory in the Pacific.

How do we 'Red Team'?

'Red Teaming' has several strands. When considering a campaign plan through a Joint Military Appreciation Process (JMAP), a wise Commander should ensure there is a 'Red presence in the room' (a 'Red Cell') when formulating a campaign plan, so Command staffs are strongly advised to look critically at providing the right number of the right people in the 'Red Cell' to offer balance to the JMAP. Sceptics make the best 'Red Team' members, especially when they're sceptical of red teaming.

Examining 'Red' may also take the form of trying to nail down a particular issue. The RAN 'Red Team' recently conducted an analysis of Spectral Denial Capabilities, facilitated by some excellent briefs by the Maritime Intelligence Support Cell (MISC) in Fleet Headquarters. The aims were three-fold; to make people more aware, to try to develop some Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTP) and to discuss how to bring Spectral Denial into the Collective Training



continuum, either synthetically or live. The output, axiomatically, sits above the classification of TACTALKS but was an excellent first step on the road to better understanding 'Red'. Future 'Red Team Analysis' is planned and will be advertised as widely as possible; if you believe that you have a particular interest or contribution to make to the subject, ensure you have a place at the table.

Day-to-day analysis of 'Red' is, of course, the bread and butter of the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) and (for Navy) the MISC. Both routinely provide intelligence products on a wide

variety of 'Red' topics and Commands, both at sea and ashore, are strongly encouraged to access, digest and (at the appropriate classification and audience) disseminate to their teams.

To conclude - hope is not a useful strategy

It invites danger if we choose to solely rely upon these organisations to think about 'Red'. As part of the greater warfare team, it is the responsibility of us all to think more like 'Red' and to understand our strengths and weaknesses whilst exploiting the vulnerabilities of the adversary. We need to have those honest conversations in the mirror about the assumptions we make (about ourselves and 'Red') and the accommodations we accept to 'maximise training opportunities' and recognise that they might be stopping us from advancing as a warfare community, a Navy and as part of the Joint Force. Focussing on one particular tactic rather than 'getting the most out of an exercise may seem counter-intuitive to some, but this underlines the change in thinking that 'Red Teaming' provokes.

The process of 'Red Teaming' should not be tightly constrained. Allow the team freedom of thought and wherever possible ensure the process is free from rank and status. Ensure that you frame the problem from the 'Red' point of view and not 'Blue' (otherwise it will merely confirm what you know, rather than what you don't know (but should)) and, importantly, understand that the 'Red Team' might get it wildly wrong; that's life, move on. Most importantly, get them to challenge the status quo, which (according to the Red Team Journal):

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“sticks like glue to assumptions, plans, and strategies. A good red team is a powerful solvent.”

If we can have the humility to accept that we are not as good as we think we are, and to understand that 'Red' is probably better than we think they are, we are at least on the first steps on the right path. As we travel down it, we might discover that we are better than we thought we were in some areas and that 'Red' has some weaknesses that we can readily exploit. But, until we devote time and resource to the process of 'Red Teaming', our planning will not be as coherent as it should be. And, whilst it might be appropriate to quote Napoleon, Mahan or Liddell-Hart, I'll leave the last words to that amazing pugilist, Mike Tyson:

“Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.”

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