

Human Primacy in Irregular Warfare: Signature Reduction and the Preservation of the Acting Person

“War is part of the intercourse of the human race.”
—Carl von Clausewitz

Abstract: Ubiquitous technical surveillance constitutes an anthropological pressure which deforms the operator from an acting person into a subject of technological processes, eroding the very capacity for adaptive judgment that irregular warfare requires. Signature Reduction is the doctrinal response - not as a technical discipline, but the retrieval of the operator’s innate capacity to act from within, perceive what dynamic and complex situations require, and to move with decisiveness under conditions no system or technology can fully anticipate or replace.

Introduction

General Carl von Clausewitz states the principle of true polarity is valid only when it can “be conceived in one and the same thing, where the positive and its opposite the negative completely destroy each other”¹. This is the purview of warfare, and humanity, which could most properly be considered conventional. We, however, delve into the category of warfare which is most properly irregular, and must adapt our understanding to its demands in pursuit of victory. It is knowledge of the art of irregular warfare and the technological means it employs that we seek, so as to reach according to operational realities a means by which to preserve - not by way of polarity but entirely independent of it - the act of the persons involved. The acting person has primacy because he stands innately apart from the polarity of conventional warfare and the technology which draws him into it.

Indeed, it is the enemy’s intent that we should be drawn into a true polarity wherein his victory comes at the cost of our defeat. The means by which he accomplishes this is the problem of our relationship to technology: the inundation, saturation, and systemic exploitation of our very own technological prowess. It is our relationship with technology which contributes to such pathologies as ubiquitous technical surveillance, attribution pressure, irreducible uncertainty, and procedural dependence. It is our intent to order by way of operational realities a trustworthy means by which to navigate this terrain. This is the function of signature reduction, the personal way by which we retrieve our irreducible power to act - to decide under pressure.

Ubiquitous Technical Surveillance as Anthropological Pressure

Under conditions of ubiquitous technical surveillance (UTS), the challenge confronting irregular warfare is no longer concealment or anonymity but preserving operational initiative under persistent attribution pressure and uncertainty. Attribution pressure emerges from surveillance ecosystems capable of correlating identity and intent across domains at machine speed. The key feature of UTS is universal observability. In light of this, risk is present not only from attribution itself, but also from the persistent pressure posed by the mere *potential* for attribution. When the battlefield is everywhere and everything is observable, nowhere is safe. When the operator encounters such overwhelming risk and uncertainty (from its potential), it is not necessarily the operation which is compromised as much as it is his very interiority. Specifically, we see a deformity in the operator’s very capacity to act - to move, communicate, act decisively - which is now at risk in this environment. Equipped with tools, training, and knowledge commensurate to technology use the operator himself quickly is taken “outside” of himself in order to account for the myriad variables and complexity introduced through technology. What suffers therefore is his genuine judgment. He no longer acts from within, but seeks to perform from without - according to the logic of the surveillance systems which he

¹ General Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Book I, Chapter 15. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1946/1946-h/1946-h.htm#chap01>

expects to observe him. This performative logic is antithetical to human judgment.

Technology does not merely expose an operator to risk and undermine the integrity of his operational judgment: it interposes itself as a mediator between him and the operational reality he seeks to understand and navigate with decisiveness. There is now a real distance wherein technological means create a mere representation of the operational environment as with an image in a mirror. While having the appearance of operational reality, the mirror image is not the same thing as direct operational judgment itself. Indeed, technology and technological systems become the privileged mediator through which the operator accesses and interprets information about the operational environment. The operator's judgment is not formed through direct observation but rather by technology. This distance is the source of significant uncertainty for the operator, who has attempted to gain insight into his environment only to find himself more removed from it. It also exposes the operator to additional risk: a sophisticated enemy need only now corrupt the representation the operator sees in the mirror.

When the performance logic of technological mediation is considered organizationally, we see the distance between decisive human judgment and operational reality scales accordingly. Genuine judgment of the collective is substituted by procedure and process - two organizational defensive safeguards against the uncertainty of the decision. Organizations under persistent attribution pressure do not consciously substitute procedure for judgment. Procedure is a defensive response to the felt organizational experience of overwhelming uncertainty. It is understood as a prudential decision and responsible attempt at necessary risk management. Having externalized in process that which begins from within, the deformity of judgment now extends across the collective. An organization which has collectively substituted judgment for process not only loses its effectiveness - it becomes predictable. A sophisticated enemy will readily understand that processes can be mapped, decision logic can be modeled, and responses can be anticipated and outmaneuvered. Such organizations follow procedures even when operational realities demand otherwise. They have substituted representation for prudential judgment. They cannot distinguish the mirror image from the operational reality.

The most devastating result of this loss of operational initiative lies not in its immediate impact but its long-term impression on the operator himself as an acting person. The operator who repeatedly acts from without rather than within - by substituting procedure for judgment, following performative logic, and favoring the mirror image over reality - is not merely losing effectiveness in particular moments. He is habituating himself through repetition into a different kind of operator. His operational initiative atrophies as a capacity, and procedural dependence becomes second nature at the expense of his judgment. The operator thus formed is no longer suited for the demands of irregular warfare. The enemy need not seek to defeat him, for he has already succumbed to the attribution pressure in the environment and found defeat.

The Irreducibility of Judgment

The most critical necessity of irregular warfare is the operator's judgment under permanent conditions of overwhelming uncertainty. It originates from within the operator as an innate capacity which extends beyond him to shape maneuver without. The best operational judgment begins where process and procedure do not exist; where data is insufficient; and where the model for the situation fails. It is precisely here you grasp the irreducibility of your judgment as a fundamentally human act and one which no algorithm or technology can replicate. The fundamental distinction here is the recognition that you are an agent who acts - not as a matter of function or performance but as a necessity of being - and the categorically different kind of person you are as a mere subject of technological processes which happen to you. Perhaps this distinction is obvious but we must say more: you do not merely process information and output decisions as does a computer. You originate decisions under overwhelming uncertainty with full moral weight, in dynamic and complex environments where no algorithm can determine the correct output because the correct output depends on judgment which is irreducibly yours. What irregular warfare demands of you here is not general

knowledge which you can apply to particular situations, but rather the fundamental human capacity to perceive what a particular situation requires and to act accordingly, in conditions where universal rules are insufficient. Such dynamism is inherent to irregular warfare and necessitates a dynamic personal response.

For this reason do we consider it a deformation of the acting person to attempt to externalize that consciousness and will of the decisive operator into procedure and process. He cedes that act which is fundamentally his to performance logic, becoming now the subject of process or system of processes, as opposed to one who originates and initiates maneuver from within. This is the diminishment of his operational judgment and the loss of any possible victory. Such an operator - who has been habituated into procedural dependence through technology and attribution pressure - has not become merely a less effective version of himself. He has become something other than what irregular warfare requires.

And yet, that which the environment can diminish it cannot fully destroy. Human judgment is irreducible and innate. Habituation through procedural dependence deforms but cannot ultimately eliminate the fundamental capacity of the acting person. This then is the aim of Signature Reduction, the retrieval of the operator's capacity for judgment, through which victory amidst uncertainty is revealed and maneuver restored.

Signature Reduction as the Preservation of Agency

Retrieval of the operator's capacity for judgment is not grounded in technique but in rediscovering that which has always been present albeit in diminished form within him. The technical disciplines which inform aspects of the doctrine's constitution - digital force protection, observability management, attribution management - are necessary but mere instruments. The only end they serve is the restoration of the operator's interiority: his ability to act decisively from within so as to make direct unmediated contact with operational reality. This is to shed the performance logic imposed on him from without. It is to discard the representation of operational reality mediated by technology and procedures which deform the operator from an acting person into a subject of processes which happen to him. Signature Reduction is that doctrine which both incorporates and orders the operator towards the restoration of his adaptive human judgment. It is here the mirror image of operational reality is shattered such that the operator might once again act according to his personhood in a manner no technology might anticipate.

Retrieval of the operator's capacity is not a passive process. When your interiority has been deformed by procedural dependence and predictability through habituation, active recovery is required. You require a conscious resistance to the performance logic of the environment and a willingness to bear the full moral weight of judgment under uncertainty without the false comfort of procedural cover. Here you will feel the most exposed. Yet, the discipline of Signature Reduction ensures you are not merely managing your observability or attribution, but are reorienting and reforming the deforming habituation towards recovery of your genuine judgment. You are renewed again as the kind of being irregular warfare requires.

The demands of irregular warfare necessitate human primacy as we have said. The cornerstone of this primacy is the irreducible judgment of the acting person amidst overwhelming uncertainty. No system or procedure can replace the acting person pursuing ends that only persons can genuinely pursue, in conditions of irreducible uncertainty, and often against all reasonable odds. The hope of this doctrine, then, is to preserve this primacy not as an abstraction or idea but as a living operational capacity of the operator. The operator acts from within, perceiving what dynamic and complex situations require, and bears the full weight of the decision.

Then, he moves.