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MILITARY COHESION (PROs & CONs)

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"My first wish would be that my Military family, and the whole Army, should consider themselves as a band of brothers, willing and ready to die for each other".

—George Washington, writing to Henry Knox on 21 October 17981

Abstract

Military Cohesion or more commonly referred to as Unit Cohesion or **Regimentation** in few countries is defined as "the bonding together of soldiers in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, the unit, and mission accomplishment, despite combat or mission stress"¹. The cohesion can be broadly classified as Task Cohesion and Social Cohesion, but it is the fine blend of these two, which makes the Military Cohesion. It serves as a force multiplier and plays an important role in building sense of sacrifice in the unit personnel, which is a vital intangible factor for success in a conflict / combat.

Key words: Unit, military, cohesion, history, leadership, advantages and disadvantages.

1. Introduction.

The Military Cohesion has long been viewed by the philosophers and military thinkers to be an important factor in maintaining the morale of troops during the stresses and uncertainties of the combat. Cohesion is said to exist in a unit, if the goals of every soldier, group and leaders coincide with each other and with the national aims / objectives. Presence of military cohesion may be broadly linked to presence of common traditions / culture and national harmony and integration. The military cohesion is not a one way traffic, which develops automatically in the troops and thus cannot be taken as for-granted. It takes willful efforts by the administration and political government to create an environment that gives credibility to the cause and rationale for engaging in the fighting. The political and military leadership plays a vital role in the development and sustenance (or vice versa) of the military cohesion. The leaders should lead from the front and possess charisma, in order to create cohesion. They must be professionally competent and stay with the nation and the troops during the hour of the need. The cohesive militaries fight in a much better manner, sustain fewer casualties and can better cope with the uncertainties in the fog of war. Though, some may resort to negativities like favoritism and exploitation in the garb of cohesion, but it is minimal. It is a well recognized fact that cohesion in a military unit is indeed a great asset as it creates the will to fight and prepares the soldiers for sacrificing the life for the motherland (if needed).

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unit_cohesion

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2. Cohesion (Dictionary Meaning and Definition)

Cohesion is derived² from Latin word `cohaes` which means 'cleaved together'. Dictionary meaning of Cohesion as given on online dictionary is `act or state of cohering, uniting, or sticking together`. However, in Physics, the cohesion is defined³ as `the molecular force between particles within a body or substance that acts to unite them`. Generally speaking cohesion refers to unity amongst the group or team members, which may be in the form of unity of thoughts / ideas, approach, action, task or goals etc.

3. Types of Cohesion (As Taken in Science)

In engineering science, there are generally seven (7) types of cohesion, depending on how various components of an entity behave / act. Some of them may not be applicable to human beings, but the knowledge of these types may help in understanding the human correlation also in some ways. As given by Ian Somerville (1998)⁴, cohesion has following seven types:-

3.1 Coincidental Cohesion

In this type, various parts of the component are generally not related to each other, but they are simply bundled together to form a single component.

3.2 Logical Association

In this type, various components performing similar type of functions (e.g. input, output, error handling etc) are placed together to form the single component.

3.3 Temporal Cohesion

In this type, various components which are started / activated at the same time (e.g. at start up / shut down etc) are put together.

3.4 Procedural Cohesion.

In this type, various elements of the component (once integrated together) form a single (complete) control sequence.

3.5 Communicational Cohesion

In this type, various elements of the component use the same input data to operate or produce similar / same data as output.

3.6 Sequential Cohesion

In this type, the output from one of elements in the component is fed as input data for another element.

3.7 Functional Cohesion

In this type, all the parts /elements of the component are considered necessary for performing a single function.

4. Broad Categories of Cohesion (Behavioral Approach)

Cohesion can be broadly categorized as Social Cohesion and Task Cohesion, as given by behavioral scientists⁵, which are defined as follows:-

4.1 Social Cohesion

This category of cohesions pertains to nature / quality of emotional bonds of the friendship e.g., caring, closeness and liking etc. amongst the members of a group. A group is said to display high social cohesion, if its members tend to develop liking for each other,

² <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/cohesion>

³ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/cohesion>

⁴ http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_are_the_types_of_cohesion?#slide=1

⁵ http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/faculty_sites/rainbow/html/military_cohesion.html

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enjoy being in the company of each other, look for ways for spending the social time with one another and feel as if they have an emotional bond which attaches them together.

4.2 Task Cohesion

This type of cohesion pertains to shared commitments amongst the members of a group for achieving the goal, which requires collective efforts from the group. Such a group has high task cohesion, if it consists of members who have the common / same goal and they are motivated enough for coordinating their efforts as one team for achieving the same end.

5. Levels of Cohesion

The cohesion can be classified with respect to its various levels⁶ as follows:-

5.1 Horizontal Cohesion

This type of cohesion refers to the bond or integration within the same category / rank structure of peers / colleagues / same rank soldiers. For example, the parallel cohesion existing between NCOs, officers and generals etc within same rank structure. Horizontal rank structure is important because it gives rise to trust and confidence between comrades, which is vital for combat. One feels that I can rely on my partner / buddy and he or she will not betray me at the critical moment.

5.2 Vertical Cohesion

This type of cohesion refers to the willingness of the under commands / subordinates to follow the commanders / leaders. Mostly it is from down to up, when the subordinates have trust in the decisions of their commanders and is considered very important for unity of aim. However, its direction may be from up to downwards also, when commanders take into account the care, morale and feelings of subordinates for making various decisions. Usually, it is two way traffic; both coexist mutually / willingly in a cohesive military set up.

6. Unit / Military Cohesion

Unit Cohesion or Military Cohesion is a combination of Task and Social Cohesions. A former US Chief of Staff in early 1980s defined it as⁷ "the bonding together of soldiers in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, the unit, and mission accomplishment, despite combat or mission stress". Whereas, the dictionary of US Army Terms defines⁸ it as "the result of controlled, interactive forces that lead to solidarity within military units, directing the soldiers towards common goals with an express commitment to one another and to the unit as a whole". Cohesion is said to exist in a unit⁹, if the basic every day goals of individual soldier, everyone in that group and that of unit leaders are coinciding / consistent; every one considering his or her basic / primary loyalty for that group / unit / entity, so that they train and fight as a single unit, having the will to risk their lives for achieving the common objective.

7. History of Military Cohesion

7.1 Unit cohesion can be traced back¹⁰ to Clausewitz, who closely linked it to the morale¹¹ or specifically to '**spirit**' of the army, which becomes a decisive factor in any

⁶ http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2010/12/whats_unit_cohesion.html

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unit_cohesion

⁸ <http://cdm16635.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16635coll11/id/1169>

⁹ <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ndu/cohesion/ch01.pdf>

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unit_cohesion

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combat / engagement. Clausewitz infers that unit cohesion is more to do with morale of the unit personnel as a whole and is not the only decisive factor. He further stresses that loss of the order and cohesion in the ranks of any unit often would lead to reduction in resistance of that unit to fight the enemy which may have fatal consequences. Sigmund Freud has also written about breaking down of cohesion amongst the soldiers which leads to panic, loss of morale, insubordination, selfishness (as against the cooperation / selfless) and "a gigantic and senseless dread".

7.2 The sociologists Morris Janowitz also worked in the field of unit cohesion along with Edward Shills in 1940s and observed that the policy of frequently rotating the soldiers and officers in the Vietnam War was a negative factor for building unit cohesion and reduction of morale in the US forces. Having studied various WW-II armies, most of the sociologists concluded that ties of comradeship between the small combat units / groups serves as a great decisive factor in developing morale, spirit for the organization and cohesion.

7.3 The Korean War in 1950 further attracted interest in the study of human element in the wars, as the Chinese People's Liberation Army which was poorly equipped was successful to defeat the Western forces to a great extent, especially in the early stages of war. The Western forces tried to instill the cohesion through informal means like promotion of shared values / hardships, teamwork and discipline. In contrast, the Chinese army drilled the cohesion through formal means of integrating the recruits in the units. This assimilation / integration process involved forced implementation through surveillance, coercive persuasion and political control. They even resorted to temporary abolishing of military ranks and physical punishments for creating a congenial environment to build the closer relationships / cohesion between the soldiers and officers. These stringent / forced methods of assimilation resulted in creation of cohesion and high morale in the Chinese army as compared to the Western forces¹². Though, very high casualty rates due to non availability of modern equipment to Chinese army resulted in a considerable erosion of this morale / cohesion by end of the Korean War, because of which the Chinese army was partly disintegrated in the spring offensive of May 1951¹³.

7.4 The psychologists and military thinkers also concluded¹⁴ in their studies done in late 1980s that without regards to the discussion if unit cohesion was an actual motivator in a combat or just a stabilizer; it indeed "enhanced fighting power", by reducing the "combat inhibitors (stress, fear, isolation)" and promoting the "esprit de corps, teamwork and morale.

8. Indicators of Cohesion

A nation's potential for nationalism and ultimately for cohesion in its army is indicated by the degree to which the following are present¹⁵:-

- 8.1** A large enough population, having sufficient territory.
- 8.2** A common and unique history, race and culture.
- 8.3** A common language and religion.
- 8.4** A nation that has the primary loyalty for the elite or the national values.

¹¹ ibid

¹² George, Alexander (1967). *The Chinese Communist Army in Action: The Korean War and its Aftermath*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

¹³ Roger Kaplan (1987). "Army Unit Cohesion in Vietnam: A Bum Rap", U.S. Army War College.

¹⁴ ibid.

¹⁵ <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ndu/cohesion/ch01.pdf>

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8.5 An adequate percentage of the population that is aware of the national interest / goals and believes in their truthiness’.

8.6 Additional Cultural Characteristics. Additional cultural characteristics that complement nationalism, motivate soldiers, and contribute to unit cohesion are as follows¹⁶:-

8.6.1 Building the belief of the soldier that his nation's political system is the best. This has to be achieved through indoctrination and socialization.

8.6.2 Displaying the superiority of the system through various means to strengthen the trust; which may be done by portraying the material well-being or prosperity as done by the West or by propagating the classless society which is practised by the communist nations.

8.6.3 Protecting the soldiers against the propaganda of the opponents against basic values which serve as building blocks for the existence or ideology of that nation, such as the anti-communism / socialism or anti-imperialism.

8.6.4 Promoting the broad norms / cultural values of the society in the soldiers and make them operative until the sub-unit or group levels.

8.6.5 Propagating the pride in the profession of the soldier’s life by creating / promoting the manly honor / romanticism through various campaigns aimed at the society.

8.6.6 Airing of special programs for providing priority and special privileges to the soldiers and promoting good things in the society, so that the soldiers develop pride in their profession.

8.6.7 Taking care of the retired / disabled soldiers or the families of the martyred soldiers and giving rewards for good performance.

9. Traits of a Leader for Building Cohesive Units

The command and control of the soldiers is quite complex and difficult, both during peace and war. Leadership is the most crucial player in developing the cohesive units. The leaders are required to maintain high level of contact with their subordinates and have good informal interaction. Therefore, the leaders must possess following traits¹⁷ to maintain / strengthen unit / military cohesion:-

9.1 The leaders should be professionally competent and perceived as such by the subordinates also for successfully meeting the challenges faced by a unit.

9.2 Rather than solely considering themselves to be managers, the leaders must emphasize on personal aspects too and make an endeavour to maintain positive contacts with the soldiers.

9.3 The leadership is important at all tiers of command, may it be at the sub-unit, platoon or squad levels.

9.4 The leader should have the charisma (an ability to survive the tough situations with grace and courage) to face tough challenges of failures. The leader must be able to integrate and mobilize the soldiers in his / her subordination at bad / demanding times.

9.5 The leaders need to master the art of indoctrinating the soldiers for increasing their influence / acceptability.

9.6 They should take due share of failures and share the hardships along with their troops and be present with them at the critical times.

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ ibid

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9.7 The leaders should have sufficient authority commensurating with their responsibilities so that they could effectively handle / settle minor issues at their level, which would develop the sense of their importance in the eyes of their subordinates.

9.8 The leaders should be willing to take initiative and use the sources and power / influence in various sub-groups. They should have the authority for reward, coercing the bad guys and maintain the sense of accountability.

10. Pros and Cons of Military Cohesion

10.1 Strengths of Military Cohesion

Following emerge out to be the strengths / merits of Unit / Military Cohesion¹⁸:-

10.1.1 Unity

The biggest advantage of military cohesiveness is unity, which is a great strength. The unit personnel must fight for one single aim, which is to win the combat for their motherland; cohesion can play a great role in maintenance of this aim at rough times.

10.1.2 Willingness to Sacrifice the Life

The unit cohesion inculcates strong feelings of patriotism and personal bonding with one another. The soldiers fight fearlessly and are always to sacrifice their lives for the motherland.

10.1.3 Better Fighting

At tactical level, sub unit cohesion is the main factor for performance in the combat. The researchers have recognized positive linkages in accounts of the many battles fought by the German Army in WW – II, the North Vietnamese Army in Vietnam Wars, the Israeli Army in Arab-Israel Wars, and the British Army in the Falklands War.

10.1.4 Fewer Battle Casualties

Cohesive units develop better team skills and have higher confidence in their comrades. Therefore, they fight better in the combat and suffer fewer casualties.

10.1.5 Less Non Battle Casualties

Anxiety in the battle field is considerably reduced, if the soldiers have confidence in their comrades and trust their leader. This protects the soldiers from most of psychological injuries by reducing stress casualties. The cohesion develops a sense of shared belonging, which increases the support that the soldiers share with their comrades; resulting in reduced stress. The feeling of loneliness is greatly diminished.

10.1.6 Better Training

The personnel in the cohesive / stabilized units develop the motivation and capability for continuous learning of new skills. The members of a team know that they have to be proficient in their skills so that they could deliver hard blow to the enemy. If some member of sub group / team is found to be lacking in a specific are of training, the comrades provide the necessary guidance and take everyone along for achieving the proficiency.

10.1.7 Strong Integration

The units which have strong cohesion stay combat capable even after suffering losses. The small / sub group cohesion and care for the comrade / buddy compels them to continue fighting until last man – last bullet.

10.1.8 Requirement of Less Administrative Support

The units which are cohesive require far less administrative support. The personnel have high moral and strong social bonds and thus have less psychological / health

¹⁸ <http://www.2ndbn5thmar.com/coh/mcbreen2002.pdf>

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problems. Moreover, the absentees / desertions are also considerably lower in cohesive units.

10.1.9 Better Family Care / Better Life Quality

It is basic need of a human being to associate with others for protection, social recognition, sharing of resources and for provision of support in case of emergency. The cohesive units have better family bonding, which caters for better family care and life quality for the families, when the soldiers are gone for the combat.

10.2 Disadvantages of Strong Unit / Military Cohesion

Unit / Military Cohesion have few draw backs also, which may arise at few instances. Following may be considered as negative consequences of Unit / Military Cohesion:-

10.2.1 Favoritism

Few personnel of a unit may resort to favoritism for supporting their unit personnel in some courses or assigning / posting them at better assignments. Moreover, the popular sentiment in a unit / sub group may give rise to disregarding merit for promotion against limited vacancies.

10.2.2 Lack of Creativity

The disagreement to the group / team view point may not be tolerated by the group, if there exists a strong social cohesion. This may result in lack of creativity and promote stereotype solutions to a problem, if the leaders solely rely on unit / group sentiment.

10.2.3 Too High Social Cohesion – A Recipe for Disaster

If the personnel of a unit start giving preference to social cohesion over unit cohesion, then there may be give rise to serious problems in a unit. In the extreme cases, it may result in insubordination or mutiny against a tough decision. Hence, proper safeguards and checks and balances have to be in place.

11. Conclusion

Unit or Military Cohesion has been long been present in the military to a varying degree, as per the national culture of various armies. The popular term for this is **regimentation** in many countries, especially in Asia. History has proved it at numerous instances that numerically inferior armies with strong cohesion and integration have defeated numerically superior armies. However, it should be understood that the strong cohesion cannot be taken as sole battle winning factor. Cohesion serves as a **force multiplier** in the military and a great battle winning asset. Therefore, the leaders have to carefully manage it, especially at the times of stress. However, it needs to be understood that a strong cohesion can only be built / developed, if it is put in place after a serious thought process and it takes into consideration all related aspects. Moreover, the method adopted by one nation / leader for developing cohesion may not work in the same manner with other nations, since every nation has different set of values / norms and ideologies. By careful management of few draw backs, the leaders must exploit the cohesion to their national advantage.

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