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# RESILIENCE CORNER: Resilience Is Not About What You Have, It Is About What You Do

Eisenberg, Daniel

Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey California

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# RESILIENCE CORNER

## Resilience Corner: Resilience Is Not About What You Have, It Is About What You Do

Resilience is a “new” term creeping into military directives, but what does it mean and how do we use it to guide decisions? In previous Resilience Corners, we discussed how resilience is more like a verb than a noun and that resilient military systems should be designed to handle surprises instead of only pre-defined threat scenarios. But how can one assess and design military systems that successfully adapt to surprise?

The key is to focus less on what your service has and focus more on what people do when faced with stressful events. For example, the resilience of an installation’s electric power system is not determined by whether it has backup generators for mission critical systems, but by the actions people take to ensure that the generators turn on and work during a blackout. Often missions are not degraded due to a lack of backup systems, but because the systems did not function as intended and personnel were unable to resolve operational issues. The fundamental question is not, “how many backups do we have,” but, “are we capable to respond to surprise?”

Research suggests that improving processes for response is the best way to promote resilience. Military practice already puts a strong emphasis on improving soldier capabilities to respond by speeding up their OODA loop—i.e., their ability to Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act under pressure [1]. Improving the OODA loop enables a soldier’s capability to sense their environment (observe/orient) and adapt to changing mission needs (decide/act). However, there is a more nuanced perspective promoted in resilience literature that suggests the OODA loop is insufficient, dubbed SAAL—Sensing, Anticipating, Adapting,



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and Learning [2]. SAAL expands on OODA to emphasize that resilience also requires an ability to overcome bias and foresee new possibilities (anticipate) and incorporate experience into future action (learn). Encouraging this broader view and implementing policies that improve SAAL may have the force multiplying effect that new military resilience requirements are trying to achieve.

Unfortunately, current resilience policies may not improve SAAL processes. SAAL is demonstrated by the actions people take, making these processes much more difficult to measure than the number of backups, soldiers, or weapon systems we have available. Simply put, SAAL cannot be counted. This means that resilience policies that focus on the quantity of an asset may not be effective, e.g., energy resilience plans that require seven days of backup electricity.

Instead, SAAL can be observed. Resilience does not ask whether we have backup power, but if we are even capable to use it. This means that resilience policies should promote training, simulations, exercises, and deployments to determine just how well soldiers adapt to new situations. Accordingly, energy resilience requirements should not just promote quantifying whether an installation has electricity for the full seven days after a blackout, but also promote observing the actions people took to make seven days possible.

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Email Dan Eisenberg at [daniel.eisenberg@nps.edu](mailto:daniel.eisenberg@nps.edu) or call 831-656-2358



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