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14. ABSTRACT The term "cultural awareness" serves as the new favorite Department of Defense buzzword but fails in its definition to adequately articulate the complexity of culture and the high level of cultural competence needed by operational commanders in the contemporary operating environment. Current failures in Iraq have validated the US military's inability to grasp the impact of culture and its corresponding effects on operations. Understanding the different levels of cultural awareness to include cultural consideration, cultural awareness, cultural understanding, and cultural competence will help usher in a new focus on culture-centric warfare. Culture-centric warfare is the acme of skill needed by operational commanders and allows them to effectively orchestrate all available assets to exploit and integrate the human aspects of warfare against the cultural terrain. Religion is often an afterthought when discussing culture, yet it is the focal point of a culture's belief system. Failure to adequately understand and incorporate religious factors into the Joint operations planning process will leave operational commanders culturally bankrupt. In addition to examining the requisite skills needed to conduct culture-centric warfare, this paper will also recommend suggestions such as education, language skills, integration of special operations forces, and cultural immersion as a means to achieve cultural competence at the operational level of war.					
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**CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER: MOVING
BEYOND CULTURAL AWARENESS INTO CULTURE-CENTRIC WARFARE**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract

The term "cultural awareness" serves as the new favorite Department of Defense buzzword but fails in its definition to adequately articulate the complexity of culture and the high level of cultural competence needed by operational commanders in the contemporary operating environment. Current failures in Iraq have validated the US military's inability to grasp the impact of culture and its corresponding effects on operations. Understanding the different levels of cultural awareness to include cultural consideration, cultural awareness, cultural understanding, and cultural competence will help usher in a new focus on culture-centric warfare. Culture-centric warfare is the acme of skill needed by operational commanders and allows them to effectively orchestrate all available assets to exploit and integrate the human aspects of warfare against the cultural terrain. Religion is often an afterthought when discussing culture, yet it is the focal point of a culture's belief system. Failure to adequately understand and incorporate religious factors into the Joint operations planning process will leave operational commanders culturally bankrupt. In addition to examining the requisite skills needed to conduct culture-centric warfare, this paper will also recommend suggestions such as education, language skills, integration of special operations forces, and cultural immersion as a means to achieve cultural competence at the operational level of war.

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INTRODUCTION

"Ultimately, culture is about humans and is inherent to the human experience."¹

Although this statement crystallizes the importance of culture to the human experience, operational commanders wrestle with the human aspects of war and how to successfully integrate culture as key "human terrain."² Even though the US military has made tremendous strides in recognizing the role of culture in warfare, a gap exists between simple cultural awareness and the execution of culture-centric warfare at the operational level of war. In order to correct this deficiency a renewed emphasis on cultural competence is necessary and will allow operational commanders to leverage cultural awareness in pursuit of mission accomplishment.³

Although cultural awareness cannot serve as a panacea to alleviate all complex social and political issues within a designated area of operations (AO), recent failures in cultural awareness dictate further investigation. Additionally, since "cultural awareness" has become a prolific Department of Defense (DOD) buzzword, it is important to offer a baseline definition of culture and its corresponding levels of awareness as a frame of reference in exploring its impact on the range of military operations (ROMO). Defining culture will also expose the tremendous difficulties in dealing with the complexities of the cultural terrain in a designated AO.

To effectively articulate the need for cultural competence at the operational level of war, this paper will discuss the "clash of civilizations" that amplifies cultural misunderstandings. Additionally, cultural awareness will be discussed in terms of achieving cultural knowledge of potential adversaries and coalition partners. This paper will also analyze and compare different

¹ Timothy R. Williams, "Culture - We Need Some of That: Cultural Knowledge and Army Officer Professional Development" (research paper, Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2006), 2.

² William Wunderie, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: Planning Requirements in Wielding the Instruments of National Power*, (RAND Corporation, April 2007), 15.

³ Williams, 10.

levels of cultural awareness as it relates to "culture-centric warfare." Finally, recommendations and counterarguments will be offered in order to help operational commanders maximize the cultural terrain in their AOs.

ANALYSIS

Definitions. US Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24 (Counterinsurgency Operations) defines culture as "a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that members of a society use to cope with the world and with one another."⁴ Although this definition helps identify some aspects of culture that operational commanders must consider, culture can also be defined as learned ideals, beliefs and values, and assumptions which cumulatively result in socially transmitted behavior patterns.⁵ In other words, culture is simply the "web of meaning" shared by members of a particular group or society.⁶ Since culture encompasses all aspects of life, the task of incorporating cultural competence into the Joint Operations Planning Process (JOPP) is imperative.

Although a more thorough explanation of cultural awareness will be addressed during the discussion of culture-centric warfare, the following definitions postulated by LTC William Wundeire, a Middle East Foreign Area Officer, will help set the stage for follow-on discussion:

Cultural Consideration - The incorporation of generic cultural concepts in common military training, knowing how and why to study culture, knowing where to find cultural factors and expertise.

Cultural Awareness: Exposure to basic cultural issues such as cultural niceties, survival languages skills, and the do's and do not's.

Cultural understanding: A deeper awareness of the specific culture that allows general insights into thought processes, motivating factors, and other issues that directly support decision making.

⁴ U.S. Army, Counterinsurgency, Field Manual (FM) 3-24 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006), 3-37.

⁵ Williams, 3.

⁶ Field Manual 3-24, 3-37.

Cultural Competence: The fusion of cultural understanding with cultural intelligence that allows focused insight into current operations. Cultural competence infers insight into the intentions of specific actors and groups.⁷

It should be noted however, that the term "cultural awareness" is often used to denote general familiarity with a specific culture and not explicitly to a certain level of understanding. This generic definition is part of the problem and its overuse does not provide an accurate picture of the complex nature of culture. It can also inadvertently minimize or magnify criticisms of cultural awareness or serve as a flippant response to pacify a critical training requirement. Throughout this paper, I will attempt to dissect the importance of each defined level of cultural awareness as it relates to the operational level of war.

History - a clash of cultures. While some suggest that the current "clash of civilizations" is ideologically or economically based, the fact remains that it is culturally-based.⁸ Although military history is replete with numerous examples of cultural awareness failures, we need not look any further than recent operations in Iraq to expose critical vulnerabilities in cultural awareness. Perhaps more telling than internal criticism by commanders on the ground, was the critique by the well-respected and long time military advocate, US Representative Ike Skelton, when he recently emphasized that "a thorough lack of understanding of the Iraq culture, to a large extent, has contributed to U.S. setbacks in the occupation of Iraq."⁹ Setbacks that have come as a result of a failure to understand the deep fault lines between Shiite and Sunni Iraqis and the cultural nuances associated with clan loyalty verses loyalty to the fledgling Iraqi democracy. It is not surprising that General Petraeus' statement "we are an Army of strangers in

⁷ Wunderie, 9.

⁸ Williams, 1.

⁹ Sandra I. Erwin, "U.S. Military Training Fails to Grasp Foreign Culture, Says Rep Skelton," *National Defense* 88, no. 607 (June 2004): 16.

amidst strangers" exemplifies the fact that cultural isolation created tragic barriers.¹⁰ Ironically enough, we're now putting up physical barriers because of the immense cultural complexities exposed in post-Saddam Iraq.

Despite the cultural failings of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the US has two pillars of knowledge to draw upon in order to increase cultural awareness and enable the operational commander to meet the challenges that culture brings to the contemporary operating environment (COE). The two pillars are doctrine and lessons learned. With regard to doctrine, it is important to note that Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 (Joint Operations), makes an explicit statement about culture by emphasizing that "history has shown that cultural awareness cannot be sufficiently developed after a crisis emerges, and must be a continuous proactive element of theater intelligence and engagement strategies."¹¹

Since JP 3-0 also recognizes history as a guide for cultural awareness, operational commanders can garner wisdom from culturally competent leaders such as General Pershing or T.E. Lawrence who achieved cultural competence by totally immersing themselves in the cultural environment, living and interacting with the local populace daily. By doing so they achieved a more complete and accurate picture of the cultural nuances in their AO. Similarly, General MacArthur's early assignment to the Philippines helped him not only develop a high degree of cultural competence of the Philippines; it also gave him a broader understanding of Asian culture. Ultimately, this broad base of cultural competence assisted in the transformation of occupied Japan post WWII.¹² A fundamental characteristic that these successful leaders

¹⁰ Robert H. Scales Jr., "Culture-Centric Warfare," *United States Naval Institute Proceeding* 130, no. 10 (2004): 35.

¹¹ Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Operations, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 (Washington, DC: CJCS, 17 September 2006), VII-10-c.

¹² Edgar F. Puryear Jr., *19 Stars: A Study in Military Characters and Leadership* (Orange, VA: Green Publishers, 1971), 108.

learned was the secret of "adaptation" which allowed them to win the support of the people and conduct seamless operations in their respective AOs.¹³

Know your enemy. Without manipulating Sun Tzu's aphorism regarding the importance of obtaining knowledge of one's adversary, implicit in this knowledge is a thorough understanding of their culture. Without the appropriate level of cultural knowledge, the operational commander and his staff will not understand the adversary's decision making process or ascertain his intentions which are often shaped by his cultural heritage.¹⁴ Thus, planning and course of action development must be predicated on a deep understanding of the enemy's culture and its impact on both friendly and enemy courses of action. If not, our assumptions may lead to mirror imaging and our actions to the exacerbation of differences, revival of ancient prejudices, or uncooperativeness at the end of combat operations.¹⁵

To accurately discern an adversary's culture, it is imperative to understand the pillars of his society. These pillars help describe the most basic and fundamental issues such as values, basic social units, and what the culture is willing to fight for.¹⁶ Operational commanders who understand the cultural pillars will be able to manipulate best them and leverage cultural knowledge to meet operational objectives. Further, the operational commander and his staff must be aware of how the different cultural and political values of an adversary influence the operating environment and its impact on national strategic objectives or perceptions.¹⁷

Although cultural awareness is acutely important during Theater Security Cooperation (TSCP) and the JOPP, continuous intelligence collection of the cultural terrain is crucial. It may become more applicable after a kinetic phase of an operation where the possibility of

¹³ Manian Ranjini, "Building Cultural Awareness," *Financial Times Information*, 29 January 2007, 1.

¹⁴ Williams, 7.

¹⁵ Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly* 266, no. 3 (September 1990): 59.

¹⁶ Craig T. Trebilcock, "The Modern Seven Pillars of Iraq," *Army*, (February 2007), 26.

¹⁷ Williams, 6.

counterinsurgency (COIN) exists. In COIN, cultural competence is a critical combat capability because it generates a permissive operating environment and helps enable access to cultural centers of gravity, situational awareness, cultural pressure points, and interaction with the population.¹⁸ A military or political plan will not work if the population and their needs are not understood from a culture-centric vantage point. Additionally, failure to recognize cultural differences, as in the case of Iraq or the broader Islamic world, will also exacerbate the problem of military leaders trying to win the will of the populace from the insurgents that possess the same cultural heritage.¹⁹

Finally, the operational commander must understand the culture of the insurgent with infinite detail to ascertain his asymmetric means versus ends.²⁰ Usually this can be done by an examination of insurgent ideology or religious belief. Understanding insurgent ideology helps operational commanders pinpoint critical weakness and critical vulnerabilities. This knowledge can only be developed by a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the enemy through the lens of his cultural heritage, history, and religious perspectives.

Know your coalition partner. When conducting multinational operations (MN)²¹ in a designated AO, the successful outcome depends on the strength and veracity of a coalition committed to shared vision and set of objectives. In order to achieve this, mutual respect is paramount and predicted on a thorough knowledge and respect for each coalition partner's

¹⁸ David J. Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, August 2005, 613.

¹⁹ Patrick W. Lang Jr., "What Iraq Tells Us About Ourselves," *Foreign Policy*, February 2007. <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/> (accessed 11 March 2007).

²⁰ Greg Mills, "Ten Counterinsurgency Commandments from Afghanistan," Foreign Policy Research Institute, 10 April 2007. <http://www.fpri.org/> (accessed 11 April 2007).

²¹ Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Multinational Operations, Joint Publication (JP) 3-16 (Washington, DC: CJCS, 17 July 2006). *Multinational operations are defined as operations conducted with two or more nations.*

unique cultural heritage. The trust garnered through cultural awareness and sensitivity will help obtain "reach in the human domain" and ultimately facilitate long term trust and confidence.²²

Obtaining trust and confidence is not easy for the US military that often fails to recognize that "the American way is best" bias is unproductive when dealing with coalition partners.²³ Perhaps this bias stems from the fact that although the US military goes to great lengths to learn about our enemy, insufficient time is spent on understanding the doctrine, capabilities, strategic goals, culture, religion, customs, history, and values of our partners.²⁴ If the US military commander spent sufficient time to understand its coalition partners and their cultures they would foster better partnerships that facilitate common trust. The heart of the issue is cultural awareness and until the US gets past its indelible tendency to negate our partner's ideas, and cultural/religious differences, partnerships will be fleeting.

In addition to external coalition partners involved in a MN operation, the operational commander must also consider the culture of the Host Nation (HN) when designing or executing operations in their country. FM 3-24 advises operational commanders to become culturally competent in HN affairs by conducting training that emphasizes HN cultural background, language, and tips for developing rapport with HN personnel.²⁵ In Iraq, insufficient study of the hierarchy of tribes, structure of Iraqi society, social structures of families or tribes, the role of women, the influence of Arabic society, the language, sectarian division, and government structure proceeding from cultural proclivities is the most profound challenge to the operational and subordinate commanders working feverishly to restore security.²⁶

²² Williams, 5.

²³ Field Manual 3-24, 6-10.

²⁴ Joint Publication 3-16, x.

²⁵ Field Manual 3-24, 3-8.

²⁶ Thomas Chevell, "Soldiers Learn Cultural Awareness from Jordanians," U.S. Department of Defense Information/Federal Information and News Dispatch, Inc., April 2006, 1.

Cultural Competence. The term cultural awareness denotes only a surface level discussion of customs, habits, taboos, values and other factors associated with getting to know another culture. The term cultural competence designates a comprehensive understanding of the organizations, infrastructure, populations, environmental, economic, and religious events both contemporary and historical in the AO.²⁷ This is graduate level cultural analysis that operational commanders and their staffs must conduct with precision-like attention in order to identify the cultural terrain in the AO. Cultural competence also demands that the operational commanders define significant military aspects of culture as they might apply in the AO and how various aspects of culture manifest themselves that can influence tactical operations. The culturally competent operational commander will then be able to "provide his tactical commanders a robust analytical tool and not just a list of cultural do's and don'ts."²⁸

In developing an effective tool to exploit the cultural terrain of the AO, the operational commander must interact with the local population to discern the cultural climate. One significant road block to interaction is the perception by the opposing force, HN, or coalition partner. Without a deep appreciation of the cultural differences of our coalition partners, perceptions become reality and serve as the baseline for all efforts in achieving cultural competence. To guard against false perceptions, operational commanders must direct their subordinates to use the following battle tested concepts when working with HN personnel and coalition partners:

- exploit the pecking order of local tribes
- understand the various nuances of bestowing honor
- draw back overt display of emotions
- do not appear to be an ally of a rival
- be patient

²⁷ Benjamin C. Freakley, "Cultural Awareness and Combat Power," *Infantry* 94, no. 2 (2005): 1.

²⁸ Freakley, 2.

- understand the difference between the wants of an individual vs. his kin group
- avoid the risk of passing judgment
- understand that interpreters may have their own agenda²⁹

Although these steps will not fit all cultural constructs, they do provide a foundation on which the operational commander and his staff can build cultural knowledge of the AO in order to direct appropriate resources and efforts.

The religion factor. Before proceeding to a discussion of culture-centric warfare, it is necessary to discuss a significant aspect of culture that often gets classified separately, is misunderstood, or altogether forgotten. The subject in question, religion, has profound impact on culture. By examining the impact of religion upon culture and how it often is overlooked because of improper terminology, a profound ingredient of cultural competence will be illuminated.

Although the term ideology is used to describe certain cultural beliefs and attitudes, what is really being described are religiously-motivated beliefs, values, and attitudes. In most cultures, there is not a separate ideology apart from religiously-motivated beliefs. With this understanding, it is relevant to note that in most cultures religion helps shape nearly every aspect of life. Since there are few historical examples of a culture without religion, a complete mission analysis at the operational level of war can not be conducted without accurately defining religion's role and effect on the political, social, economic, and cultural life of a nation.³⁰ In Vietnam, for example, the US failed to accurately understand the social and religious implications of putting a Christian leader in power of a nation with Buddhist identity and history. Similar oversight exists today given the fact that only a few operational commanders in

²⁹ John W. Jandora, *Military Cultural Awareness: From Anthropology to Application*, (An Institute of Land Warfare Publication no. 06-3, November 2006), 4-5.

³⁰ Ron Fiegle and Buford Shofner, "Religious Factors Analysis: A New Emphasis and a New Approach," *Special Warfare* 20, no. 1 (2007): 25.

contentious operating environments like Iraq understand the deep and historical significance of the Shiite and Sunni divide. To complicate matters, many commanders fail to understand the depth of Al Qaeda's religious fervor and appeal because they examine it from a Western, secular perspective and not from a fundamentalist religious perspective.

Without diminishing the role and influence of other prominent religions throughout the world, a deeper examination of Islam is needed in today's COE. One reason to investigate Islam is the fact that it is a complete mystery to most westerners, yet it's the second largest religion in the world and the fastest growing. The operational commander can ill afford such ignorance and it's important to understand that Islam is not just a religion, nor a fundamentalist political movement, but rather a civilization and a way of life that varies from one Muslim country to another but is often animated by a common spirit.³¹ Additionally, it is also important to remember that Islam, like other religions, has factions of extremists that try to fuel a clash of civilizations, making the struggle between modernity and tradition or between Western cultures and Islamic values.³²

Understanding of this magnitude will help highlight the fact that the current war against Al Qaeda is a war of faith and unbelief which requires a comprehensive understanding of Islam, jihad Islamist ideology, and Muslim culture."³³ Although this level of understanding is at the national-strategic level, lack of Islamic cultural awareness can adversely impact operational level warfare in an AO with an Islamic population. To complicate matters, it is important to note that although Americans can separate "Church" from "State," many other cultures, especially fundamentalist Muslims, cannot. Operational commanders must zealously guard against the

³¹ Ali A. Mazrui, "Islamic and Western Values," *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1997, 118.

³² Jacquelyn K. Davis, *Radical Islamist Ideologies and the Long War: Implication for U.S. Strategies Planning and U.S. Central Command's Operations*, (The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 2007), 5.

³³ Kilcullen, 614.

tendency to polarize Muslim coalition partners or exacerbate the walls of division with our adversaries due to religious presuppositions and a Western approach to faith and politics. If this happens, they negate any hope of attaining objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Culture-centric warfare. Approaching operations from a culture-centric viewpoint merits consideration. Culture-centric warfare is basically a shift in focus from a technologically-based solution to warfare to that of the intellectual or human aspects of warfare where "cultural competence and the art of war help demystify our adversary's motives and predict his actions."³⁴ Cultural-centric warfare demands an operational commander that recognizes the human aspects of warfare and fully incorporates all assets of military and non-military power into operational art and the JOPP.

A culture-centric approach also involves a fundamental change in human intelligence (HUMINT) collection that not only demands more robust HUMINT collection, but may even require that experts such as regional cultural anthropologists become part of the JOPP.³⁵ In fact, culture-centric warfare dictates that the JOPP involves subject matter experts in all areas related to culture especially those of a religious and social nature (chaplains, social workers, etc.). Since culture-centric warfare is focused on the human aspects of war, it also ushers in a new approach to planning where the incorporation of trained psychologists at different planning levels would help the operational commander and his staff determine adversary motivations and reactions to certain courses of action based on their particular cultural proclivities.³⁶

³⁴ Wunderie, 58.

³⁵ Robert H. Scales Jr., "Culture-Centric Warfare," *United States Naval Institute Proceeding* 130, no. 10 (October, 2004): 33-34.

³⁶ Steven Metz and Raymond Millen, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response*, (Carlisle, PA: United States Army Strategic Studies Institute, 2004), 35.

Adherents to culture-centric warfare would elevate Information Operations (IO) to a new level and involve a more focused and intensive communication strategy that would be culturally tailored to meet the cultural terrain of the AO.³⁷ The IO campaign should begin with the Department of State (DOS) country team where the Defense Attaché would be the critical link between DOS and the operational commander and his staff. In order to leverage the effectiveness of the Attaché, one suggestion would be to leave that person in that billet for several years in order to build cultural competence through "immersion" where language skills and knowledge of local customs could have a significant influence on operations. Although this would be a fundamental shift in how the US military assigns its personnel, resembling the British model of military foreign affairs, it is one way to ensure that the right subject matters experts assisting the operational commander gain the level of cultural competence needed to make a profound difference in the AO. Nothing, even bold changes in personnel management, should be overlooked if it can impact mission accomplishment.

It is important to stress at this point that while the operational commander should embody individual cultural competence, it is more important that he directs the right subject matter experts, political and cultural advisors, coalition partners and civil affairs personnel under his command to effectively consider and address all aspects of culture during the JOPP. The operational commander must seek guidance and advice for these experts during all phases of military operations. While some have suggested that culture-centric warfare implies a "cultural phase"³⁸ of war, the operational commander must be cognizant of the fact that aspects of culture effect all defined or undefined phases of war. Effective management of the cultural terrain is not

³⁷ Davis, ii.

³⁸ Scales, 33.

something that can be easily handled by adherence to a restrictive framework, task list, or phase of an operation. Culture-centric warfare is a fluid and dynamic process that must be an integral part of operational art. Creativity, adaptability, patience and social sensitivity are characteristics that will dominate the operational commander who skillfully executes culture-centric warfare.

Language. Any discussion of cultural competence would not be complete without a discussion of language skills. Suggestions to improve language skills are divided into two categories: individual language skills and the efficient selection and use of translators and interpreters. Attention to both will allow the operational commander to maximize a fundamental and essential aspect of culture.

To improve individual skills, one suggestion is to first recognize that the military can not make every service member an expert in a particular language, but equip personnel with the necessary basics that allow them to pick out the requisite trends or threats during street conversation.³⁹ This suggestion is already Joint doctrine as outlined in JP 3-0 where it specifically states: "Commanders will integrate foreign language and regional expertise capabilities in contingency, security cooperation, and supporting plans and provide for them in support of daily operations and activities."⁴⁰ In order to meet this Joint requirement, commanders at all levels must resource the required training and treat it like the critical war fighting skill it is. To do so may require an expansion of our foreign language training centers or an investment in programs geared towards facilitating training at several existing installations rather than sending military personnel away for expensive training.

The proper selection and use of translators and interpreters is imperative to the operational commander's ability to execute MN operations in a culturally diverse AO. To select

³⁹ Walter, Wojadakowski, "Finding the Terrorist: Locating the Enemy," *Infantry* 95, no.1 (January 2006):1.

⁴⁰ Joint Publication 3-0, III-15-m.

the best type of translators, planners need to have cultural competence in order to understand the cultural, gender, and dialect differences in the AO, and be cognizant of the fact that some translators may have personal agendas or opposing loyalties. While trust is vital in all circumstances, the protection of translators during COIN is imperative. As much as possible, given the existing security and intelligence infrastructure, a robust vetting process must be established to insure force protection and prevent possible subversion. To be effective, the operational commander will rely heavily on his Civil Affairs personnel, the DOS country team and his staff that will be responsible for initiating the selection process and coordinating translator placement down to the tactical level.⁴¹

Education. As the US military makes progress toward cultural competence, education will be the catalyst that will help transform leaders at every level of command. Although any level of cultural awareness requires self-awareness, self-directed learning, and adaptability, effective leaders must ensure collective or institutional training is conducted in order to effectively engage the cultural terrain of the COE.⁴² Although cultural education takes on many forms and is conducted and resourced at various levels, it must be focused on developing skills that will help develop individual cultural intelligence and sensitivity to cultural differences. The training should also help foster an expectation of adaptability, patience, and flexibility when dealing with coalition partners or the HN population. Therefore, whether it is called "cultural awareness for all"⁴³ or "cultural intelligence for the individual Marine,"⁴⁴ training must be realistic, relevant, and sustaining.

⁴¹ Field Manual 3-24, 3-9.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 7-5.

⁴³ Mark Neighbors, "Cultural Awareness in the Navy" (lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 13 March 2003).

⁴⁴ Jeff Fein, "Marine Corps Expanding Role for GWOT," *Defense Daily International* 6, no. 31 (2005): 1.

Cultural education for officers, especially those at the operational level of war, must be more refined, robust, and start early. It should include cultural sensitivity training, but also focus heavily on the ability to effectively communicate across cultural boundaries.⁴⁵ If started early in an officer's career and sustained throughout, it will equip future operational level leaders and planners with the necessary skills to orchestrate and execute culture-centric warfare and manage the various agencies and elements of national power that can effectively attack the cultural terrain. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) emphasized this point when he directed that during "FY 2006-2007 all primary, intermediate, and senior level military education will include regional expertise and cultural awareness."⁴⁶ One can only suggest strict adherence to the Joint directive and the continuing development of cultural awareness programs during pre-commissioning programs, junior and mid-level career courses, or innovative approaches like West Point's center for Terrorism Studies that is interwoven with cultural awareness training and practical experience.

Special Operations Forces (SOF). Any recommendation to improve cultural competence could not be adequately addressed without a discussion on SOF's distinct expertise and role in matters of culture. Because they are rigorously chosen for their intellect, foreign language mastery, and keen adaptability, SOF embody the skills needed to effectively engage in culture-centric warfare better than any other military force. Given SOF's reputation and proficiency in cultural competence, the most logical recommendation to assist operational commanders in conducting culture-centric warfare is to increase SOF's size to meet the demands

⁴⁵ Metz, 33.

⁴⁶ J.L. Shuford, "Presidents Forum," *Naval War College Review* 59, no. 3 (Summer, 2006): 17-18.

of operational commitments.⁴⁷ Given the difficulty and length of time needed to find and fully train qualified applicants, let alone the resources needed, this recommendation is not feasible in the short term. Some may argue that since SOF is scheduled to increase in the near future it could help fill the cultural competence void. In reality however, it will take a long time for new operators to attain the level of cultural competence of the more seasoned SOF veterans currently serving in the field.

At the operational level of war, the Joint Task Force commander needs greater flexibility in either controlling SOF in his AO or should have SOF task organized directly under his command. This will facilitate two key principles of war: unity of effort and economy of force. Unity of effort is achieved by placing the SOF directly at the disposal of the operational commander in a feasible and effective command relationship that eases the execution of culturally sensitive missions that SOF are designed for. Economy of force is greatly increased by eliminating redundancy of efforts in cultural intelligence collection gathering due to fact that SOF can effectively execute mission essential tasks of HUMINT collection, religious factors analysis, and local language proficiency that the operational commander can effectively exploit.

While there is currently cooperation between operational commanders and SOF in their respective AOs, it would be disingenuous to say that operational commanders are maximizing SOF efforts and expertise in a most efficient and judicious manner. While this suggestion brings a larger debate of strategic import, it serves as a reminder that at least one component of the US military understands the impact and importance of cultural competence. If operational commanders could harness this wisdom and incorporate SOF more effectively, they could enhance their ability to engage in effective culture-centric warfare.

⁴⁷ Davis, 45.

Old fashioned "immersion." Although the idea of placing military leaders in foreign cultures ("immersion") for extended periods of time (perhaps several years) may not sound plausible or even necessary in today's globalized world, it has merit. Even if the concept of immersion doesn't dictate living in the same country for an extended time period, but rather living in different countries with similar cultural patterns and history, it would help military leaders gain a high level of cultural competence. It is proven that no one can become intimately acquainted with another culture and its particular idiosyncrasies unless one lives and communicates in that culture developing a thorough knowledge of its history, customs, and religion.

Total cultural immersion would not be necessary for all military leaders, but at some level even if it just means FAOs, an expanded program could become a force multiplier. A better FAO program would entail a significant increase to the current amount of FAOs and placement in geographically sensitive areas for long-term development of cultural competence. Of course, resources and a system of incentives would have to be taken into consideration, but greater efficiency in culture-centric warfare is worth challenging the way the US military currently thinks, operates, and assigns its personnel.

Some may argue that programs such as the Personnel Exchange Program (PEP), designed to allow mid and senior level officers to serve in a foreign military billet, serves the purpose of cultural immersion. Additionally, a similar argument might be rendered in reference to Military Transition Teams (MITT) serving in Iraq and Afghanistan in which small teams of officers and non-commissioned officers are imbedded directly with indigenous units. Even though both programs have merit and are proven ways to dismantle cultural barriers, the length of tours ranging from two to three years for PEP and one year tours for MITT, are not sufficient to

develop the robust cultural competence that could be gained from a tour of several years in length.

CONCLUSION

The phrase "cultural awareness" or lack thereof has become a pithy buzzword in DOD circles, yet it fails to adequately describe the US military's abysmal performance at recognizing and reacting to cultural differences in both our adversaries and our coalition partners. This failure is in large part due to an inability to identify and concentrate on the human aspects of warfare. To rectify the problem, it is imperative that operational commanders forge a deeper cultural competence and use subject matter expertise during all phases of military operations.

The first step in achieving cultural competence is the recognition of the different levels of cultural knowledge and how they apply to the COE and its impact on the cultural terrain of a designated AO. By starting with simple cultural consideration that incorporates basic concepts of culture and working towards cultural awareness, cultural understanding, and eventually achieving cultural competence, commanders can dissect the impact of culture on operations and expend the right resources to analyze and craft culture into operational art. Cultural competence is the maxim that operational commanders must strive to attain. This will manifest itself in the skills necessary to understand our adversary and lead operations in the human domain of warfare.

Culture-centric warfare is of the highest order and is described best by the total incorporation of all cultural factors such as religion, values, social structure, customs, language, and traditions into the planning and execution phases across the ROMO. Culture-centric warfare is the mechanism that allows operational commanders to effectively level the playing field in

multicultural AOs by using all available assets of military and non-military power at their disposal. This type of warfare is fluid, dynamic, and predicated on the ability to adapt and exercise socially-based sensitivity to cultural differences.

The role and impact of religion in understanding culture can not be understated. Given the fact that the US military is involved in a global war with a religiously motivated adversary, failure to accurately understand the message of fundamentalist Islamics will continue to discredit our efforts and may prevent us from attacking our enemy's critical vulnerabilities. The operational commander can draw upon the unique strength of SOF and their religious factors analysis to help attack issues of a religious nature.

As suggestions continue to develop to meet the objective of achieving cultural competence, sustained emphasis on innovative cultural education programs will help produce future leaders and operational level planners with high levels of cultural competence. Additionally, a focus on language training and the deeper integration of SOF into the operational commander's planning process will also pay large dividends along the cultural terrain in the AO. Finally, immersion of key military leaders such as FAOs in culturally sensitive regions throughout the world for extended periods, could achieve results similar to the British model of producing culturally astute officers with impeccable regional expertise and extensive cultural competence.

Ultimately, the struggle to produce operational level leaders and planners with cultural competence requires a focus on the intangible elements of warfare.⁴⁸ This calls for a

⁴⁸ Robert B. Nett, "Ambassadors to the World: Cultural Awareness for Americans in Uniform," *Infantry* 94, no. 6 (2005): 18-19.

continuation of transformational thinking taking place in the US military. Transformation from simple cultural awareness to cultural competence must take place in order to prevent the inadvertent exacerbation of lines of division between our adversaries and coalition partners. We must reverse the trend, bridge the cultural divides, and allow culture-centric warfare to dominate operations in our globalized, yet fractured world - lives depend on it.

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