

Regionally Aligned Divisions: Enabling Cultural & Linguistic Competency in Regionally Aligned Forces

A Monograph

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Abstract

Regionally Aligned Divisions: Enabling Cultural & Linguistic Competency in Regionally Aligned Forces, by MAJ Mikola J. King, 53 pages.

The Army developed the regionally aligned forces (RAF) concept in response to a shift in national strategy that placed greater emphasis on preventing conflict through a proactive shaping of local environments. The Army intended regional alignment to overcome (in part) an observed lack of preparedness within the force to overcome the challenges of language and culture in a complex operational environment. This is clearly stated in the 2012, RAF EXORD. However, since the introduction of the RAF program the Army has not attempted the organizational changes needed to meet its own goals for increased cultural and linguistic competency.

Concepts from United Kingdom's Regimental system - specifically, stabilizing soldiers within a single regional alignment - could inform changes across the DOTMLPF that would better retain a unit's collective cultural knowledge and understanding. This conclusion draws on adult and organizational learning theory, Army doctrine, and the analysis of two military interventions that highlight the distinction between employing a culturally competent, regionally aligned, force and employing an unaligned force lacking cultural competency.

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Acronyms

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission in Mali
ANA	Afghan National Army
AQIM	Al Qaeda in the Maghreb
COCOM	Combatant Command
CULP	Cultural Understanding and Language Proficiency
DOTMLPF	Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership, Personnel, Facilities
EUCOM	European Command
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
MOJWA	Muslim Oneness and Jihad in West Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
NORTHCOM	Northern Command
OMLT	Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team
PACOM	Pacific Command
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RAD	Regionally Aligned Division
RAF	Regionally Aligned Forces
TTP	Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures

Introduction: A Discussion of Regionally Aligned Forces

Regionally Aligned Forces are those Army units aligned to a geographic combatant command (either assigned or allocated) for the purpose of executing missions (e.g. security assistance) within that geographic combatant command's area of responsibility.¹ The Army developed the regional alignment concept in response to a shift in national strategy that placed greater emphasis on preventing conflict through a proactive shaping of local environments. Critical to this effort is the development of greater mutual trust between nations within a geographic combatant command's area of responsibility and the United States, and building more empathetic and strategically sound brigade combat teams. To meet this aim, the Army recognized a need to provide geographic combatant commands predictable, scalable, tailorable capabilities to support both the regional strategy outlined by the combatant commander, and policy aims outlined by the National Security Strategy. Additionally, the Army intended regional alignment to overcome (in part) an observed lack of preparedness within the force to overcome the challenges of language and culture in a complex operational environment.²

Providing a predictable set of capabilities, outside of another major ground conflict, is simple when the organizational will exists to establish priorities. The Army's lack of preparedness culturally and linguistically is the more difficult obstacle to overcome. This is important because cultural and linguistic competence are increasingly a specified capability required by the geographic combatant commands.³ The effort to provide an assured force package

¹ Department of the Army, *FRAGO 1 to the Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) EXORD* (Washington, Government Printing Office: 2013), 56.

² Cory R. Scharbo, "The First Regionally Aligned Force: Lessons Learned and the Way Ahead," *Military Review* (July-August 2015), 85-86.

³ Allison Abbe, "Building Cultural Capability for Full-Spectrum Operations," *US Army Research Institute* (January 2008).

that is consistently competent in the cultures and languages of the regional operational environment requires new philosophies in personnel and talent management.

Personnel turnover is a reality in the Army, and can profoundly influence unit performance, through altering the distribution of knowledge and skills in the team and the relations among team members. Some skills, such as rifle marksmanship and company level maneuver, easily accommodate newly arrived, “untrained,” soldiers and rapidly bring them up to speed. This method of rapid incorporation does not transfer well with more complicated and perishable skill sets such as cultural and linguistic studies, as will be demonstrated through exploration of adult learning theory and two case studies. Therefore, the Army weakens its own efforts by executing the RAF program without making the requisite organizational changes to support it. Exploring potential organizational changes that support both the RAF mission and the intent behind it, will incorporate three working hypotheses:

1. If US soldiers spend their career in units aligned to a single region, then those units would develop the cultural empathy and mutual trust with partner nations required to meet the intent of the RAF program.
2. The United Kingdom can offer structural concepts that can be adapted to the United States personnel structure.
3. There would be no serious detriment to the lethality of United States units under the proposed personnel structure.

Concepts from United Kingdom’s Regimental system can inform changes across the DOTMLPF that would better retain a unit’s collective cultural knowledge and understanding.

The underlying assumption for these assertions is that the authors of the RAF program are correct when they state that “*an understanding of the cultures, geography, languages, and militaries of the countries where [the unit] is most likely to be employed*” are critical to mission success.⁴ Based upon this assumption there is value in developing organizational (unit) and individual cultural and linguistic competency. If these skills are not truly required, then there is

⁴ *FRAGO 1 to the Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) EXORD*, 56.

no imperative to alter Army systems to benefit the RAF program. Therefore, it must be first established that cultural and linguistic competency are indeed critical force multipliers, before exploring how the British Regimental system can inform changes to the US Army that will better support the RAF mission and the generation of strategic land power.

Methodology

This monograph will use a controlled comparison of two *most similar* cases to highlight the operational distinction during a military intervention between employing a culturally competent, regionally aligned force and employing an unaligned force lacking cultural competency.⁵ The focus of the analysis of these cases will be to determine whether cultural and linguistic understanding/proficiency, and regional empathy, significantly contributed a successful military outcome, and discuss whether the research hypotheses were supported or unsupported. Second, this monograph will discuss how the conclusions of the comparative study might support a change to US Army personnel assignments by drawing lessons from the British Regimental model. In addition to the comparative analysis, this monograph will briefly explore organizational learning theory as it applies to the Army's stated desired end state for the RAF program of developing cultural and linguistic competency, and how adopting a version of the Regimental System model might support that end state. Finally, this monograph will explore implications to the current DOTMLPF and suggest further avenues of research.

The purpose of using a structured, focused study of similar cases is to control (as best as possible) for the complexity of cause and effect relationships.⁶ The case studies used in the controlled comparison were drawn from contemporary French counterinsurgency operations: The French intervention in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom 2002-2012), and the French

⁵ Andrew Bennett and Alexander L. George, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 67-72.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Intervention in Mali (Operation Serval 2013). These cases were selected because they clearly demonstrate a marked difference in the critical independent variable, cultural and linguistic competency (both at the individual and unit level). Also, these cases represent two most similar cases in terms of controlling other variables:

- a. Both cases follow the French army
- b. Both interventions occurred in cultures significantly dissimilar from France
- c. Both interventions involved a hybrid threat
- d. Both interventions involved French forces fighting as a member of a coalition
- e. Both interventions were outside the European continent, requiring extensive logistical planning and coordination
- f. Both were thought to be short term commitments (similar political intent)

No two cases can perfectly control for all but a single variable – especially when human irrationality and decision making are involved. Therefore, it was important to find two cases similar enough, and close enough temporally, to minimize the effects of other independent variables (listed above) that would undermine any conclusions about the importance of cultural and linguistic competency as a force multiplier. These cases were selected over United States or United Kingdom examples because the United States and United Kingdom did not offer two contemporary examples that both highlighted the desired independent variable and minimized the effects of deviation within other independent variables.

To provide an element of scientific rigor that allows the conclusions of each study to be compared, both cases will be analyzed using the same sub questions:

- a. What was the degree of cultural and linguistic knowledge/empathy present in the [French] military units at the time of deployment?
- b. Did that knowledge/empathy (or lack thereof) significantly impact the initial planning of the operation?
- c. Did that knowledge/empathy (or lack thereof) significantly impact the initial execution of the operation?
- d. Did that knowledge/empathy (or lack thereof) significantly impact the overall success of the operation?

The answers to these questions will be used to determine if the first two research hypotheses are supported or unsupported in whole or in part.

The second part of this monograph incorporates the comparative study findings in a deeper exploration of how the US Army can better meet the intent of the RAF program. The analysis will explore the hypothesis that there are elements of the British Regimental system – specifically their personnel systems – that could improve the US Army’s RAF system without detriment to the force writ large. Discussion of the Regimental system will cover why it has been rejected over the years, as well as a discussion of why those factors do not apply in this instance.

The synthesis section will revisit the organizational learning theory introduced following this methodology, using the French case studies and the Regimental system as lenses. This will not be an in-depth discussion on learning theory, which is outside the scope of the research question. However, it is necessary to draw organizational learning into the discussion to explain why adopting aspects of the Regimental system may provide a superior environment for developing the individual and unit cultural and linguistic competency (and regional empathy) desired by the Army under the RAF program.

The final discussion explores implications of adopting elements of the Regimental system across the DOTMLPF. Additionally, there are DOTMLPF implications for the RAF program in its current (or any future) form that stem directly from the comparative study. Lastly, this monograph will address unanswered questions outside the focus of this work and provide recommendations for further study.

The intent behind this structure is to first support or deny the value of regional alignment as a force multiplier in the modern era, before addressing how to improve how the Army executes regional alignment. Due to the narrow focus of the research question, the analysis and conclusions are at best a building block toward a more comprehensive study towards improving the Army’s RAF program.

Adult and Organizational Learning Theory and the RAF Concept

As discussed, one aim of the RAF program is to develop “an understanding of the cultures, geography, languages, and militaries of the countries where they are most likely to be employed.”⁷ Implied is the desire to build a force that is better prepared to conduct operations in and among peoples of different cultures, without the steep, often expensive, learning curve seen in previous operations. Yet, as the as the controlled case analysis will demonstrate, multi-cultural experience in general is not good enough to conduct successful counterinsurgency and stability operations.

Marcy Driscoll defines learning as “a persisting change in human performance or performance potential...[which] must come about as a result of the learner’s experience and interaction with the world.”⁸ Applying this definition to cultural knowledge specifically, cross culture capability is acquired as a result of education, experiences, and interactions with other people. To develop a personal mastery of another culture requires individual commitment to continually improve and augment those skills. This requires disciplined self-study, but also the opportunity to deepen one’s understanding through practical interaction in an environment that tests assumptions and provides expert feedback.⁹

Like people, organizations cannot learn unless they can benefit from experience within an appropriate environment. Also like people, organizational learning requires a “persisting change” in behavior, supported by an architecture that captures new knowledge, transmits that knowledge across and through the organization, and then codifies that knowledge in institutional change.¹⁰

⁷ *FRAGO 1 to the Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) EXORD*, 56.

⁸ George Siemens, “Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age,” *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning* (January 2005), 2.

⁹ Michael J. Marquardt, *Buiding the Learning Organization: A Systems Approach to Quantum Improvement* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1996).

¹⁰ Swee C. Goh, “Toward a Learning Organization: The Strategic Building Blocks,” *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, no. 63 (1998), 15-22.

Importantly, organizational learning is interdependent with individual learning because organizational performance is more than the sum of individual performance, but a result of the group's ability to share insights, mental models, and work in unison. If members of an organization do not evolve to adopt new behaviors that incorporate the new, desired, skills (and transmit these skills to new members), then organizational growth is impossible – no matter the level of individual growth.¹¹

The RAF program seeks to inculcate cultural and linguistic proficiencies into individual, team, and organizational skill sets. Based upon the learning models discussed, the institutional learning desired under the RAF program boils down to three key elements: leader and subordinate buy-in on the importance of cultural knowledge, gaining the knowledge itself, and having access to that knowledge.¹² These elements must be supported by a firm organizational architecture that works to retain cultural knowledge at the individual, unit, and combatant command levels. Yet, cross cultural understanding requires a constant effort to maintain currency with new situations and relationships within the target culture.

The development of cultural knowledge and skills takes time, and should not be left to pre-deployment training, ad hoc unit training regimes, or passing out cultural and linguistic “smart cards.” These efforts are generally narrow, superficial, short-term responses to pressing needs. Also, developing more advanced competencies, such as negotiation and the ability to anticipate second and third order effects of actions and messages requires interaction with natives / experts in low threat training environments.¹³ The RAF efforts to date, captured in the after action reviews and standard operating procedures of units such as 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry

¹¹ Fabrizio Cotichhia and Francesco Moro, *The Transformation of Italian Armed Forces in Comparative Perspective: Adapt, Improvise, Overcome?* (Leeds: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 98-109.

¹² Gordon R. Sullivan and Michael V. Harper, *Hope is Not a Method: What Business Leaders Can Learn from America's Army* (New York: Random House, 1996), 190-207.

¹³ Abbe, “Building Cultural Capability for Full-Spectrum Operations,” 7.

Division and 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, demonstrate an attempt to move beyond the “just in time” cultural awareness training that defined the US Army’s pre-deployment training since 2001.¹⁴

The RAF program acknowledges the importance of cultural and linguistic knowledge as a requisite skillset in future armed conflicts. Soldiers on the ground will remain among the primary means of daily interaction with friendly, enemy, and neutral parties. The supposition, based upon the US Army’s experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, is that greater cultural and linguistic capability at the small unit level will increase the positive influence of those soldiers, while reducing the risk of negative interactions.¹⁵ Yet the current structure of the RAF program, and the Army personnel system writ large, do not provide the appropriate supporting organizational structure to promote the necessary individual and institutional learning. This conclusion will be demonstrated by the two controlled comparison cases to follow.

Comparison Case 1: French Operations in Afghanistan (2002 – 2012)

In the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11, both President Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin were swift to promise support as part of the NATO effort to destroy the Al Qaida network and to reconstruct the Afghan state.¹⁶ To this end, France supported Resolution 1386 of UN Sec Council under Chapter VII to establish the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and following the December, 2001 Bonn Agreement, France became a principle contributor committing 900 service members, and assuming lead nation status in the Kabul Multinational

¹⁴ Kimberly Field, James Learmont, and Jason Charland, “Regionally Aligned Forces: Business Not as Usual,” *Parameters*, no. 43 (2013), 61.

¹⁵ James F. Amos, Raymond Odierno, and William H. McRaven, “Winning the Clash of Wills,” *US Armed Forces White Paper: Strategic Landpower* (May 2013), 1-12.

¹⁶ Amaury de Féligonde, “Caveats to Civilian Aid Programs in Counterinsurgency: The French Experience in Afghanistan”, *Focus Stratégique*, no. 24 (December 2010), 5.

Brigade committed to training the Afghan National Army (ANA).¹⁷ Afghanistan eventually became France's biggest overseas commitment, ahead of simultaneous interventions in Côte d'Ivoire and Lebanon.

French military involvement in Afghanistan began in late 2001 with the arrival of French Special Forces and the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle. Additional forces continued to deploy to Afghanistan throughout 2002, forming the Kabul Battle Group in 2003.¹⁸ As French commitment grew to 1200 soldiers, President Chirac confined French support to training the Afghan National Army and providing security assistance within the capital (a relatively safe area at the time).¹⁹ This remained the status quo from 2002 through 2007.²⁰ While these years are important to provide context for French involvement in Afghanistan, they are not the focus of this case study. This study focuses on French counterinsurgency efforts.

In 2008 France further increased its commitment by assuming security responsibility for the Kapisa province and Surobi district of Kabul province, a mission they retained until the end of 2012. It is this new security mission that severely tested French counterinsurgency methods and tactics, and demonstrated the deficiencies in cultural awareness training within the French army. The realities of fighting the Taliban and interacting with the Afghan population forced France to reinvent their pre-deployment training, as well as their doctrine and equipment.²¹ This case study will focus on the years 2008 through 2012 for these reasons.

¹⁷ R.E. Utley, *Major Powers and Peacekeeping: Perspectives, Priorities, and the Challenges of Military Intervention* (Leeds: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

¹⁸ Andrew McGregor, "French Operations in Afghanistan Aims to Open New Coalition Supply Route," *Terrorism Monitor*, no. 7 (November 2009).

¹⁹ Cotichhia and Moro, *The Transformation of Italian Armed Forces in Comparative Perspective: Adapt, Improvise, Overcome?*, 67-70.

²⁰ Seth G. Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," *RAND Organization* (2008), 104-110.

²¹ Vincent Desportes, "A Distant Conflict: France and the Afghanistan War," *World Politics Review* (January 25, 2011).

Background

It should not be assumed that six years of executing the ANA training mission prepared French forces for the cultural and tactical realities of conducting counterinsurgency operations. The ANA, much like the US military, does not perfectly mirror the society they come from. Afghanistan, like most countries, has cultural variance across regions that result from a province's unique geography and demographics.

Kapisa province and the Surobi district of Kabul province are adjacent to each other, with Surobi situated at the far south of Kapisa. The geography is dominated by high mountains and river valleys, with a rural population primarily clustered along thin strips of fertile land. Kapisa has been considered key terrain by all sides of the conflict due to its proximity to Kabul, the Salang Highway (which provides access to northern Afghanistan) and the (porous) Pakistan border.²² Therefore, Kapisa and Surobi were not a security concern to ISAF because there were militants present. They were a security concern because they provided an intermediate staging area between Pakistan, Kabul, and northern Afghanistan.²³

The area hosts a complex socio-economic demographic. North Kapisa is predominantly Tajik and fairly peaceful. Southern Kapisa and Surobi are predominantly Pashtun, and equally divided between loyalty to the Taliban, to Kabul, and to the greater Pashtun people. The central region is a diverse mix of Tajik, Pashtuns, Parachi, and Pashai. In addition to these ethnic identities, there are two principle mujahideen political parties which have been in competition for influence since the Soviet Intervention of the 1980s - Jamiat-i Islami (Jamiat) and Hizb-Islami

²² Joshua Foust, *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction*, ed. Nik Hynek and Peter Marton (New York: Routledge, 2011), 90-91.

²³ Joshua Foust, "Kapisa Province: A COIN Case Study in Afghanistan," *World Politics Review* (2009), 1-6.

Gulbuddin (HIG).²⁴ The majority of the population are comprised of subsistence farmers.²⁵ However, there are also a significant population of poppy farmers, as-well-as the criminal logistics network that simultaneously supports and exploits them.²⁶

The French army was not the first coalition force to enter Kapisa. Between 2005 and 2008 ISAF attempted to clear militant forces through alternate deployments of special operations forces and conventional forces. Additionally, an American Provincial Reconstruction Team was permanently based in Kapisa. However, as security in Kapisa improved, ISAF diverted coalition and ANA forces to other areas providing an opportunity for militants to return. It was believed that the new permanent French presence would finally cement previous security gains.²⁷

France's Decision to Assume Responsibility for Kapisa and Surobi

French President Nicolas Sarkozy made the decision to expand the French security commitment and assume responsibility for Kapisa and Surobi following his election in May, 2007. President Sarkozy desired to repair France's strained relationship with the United States, and increase French standing and influence within NATO. These sentiments were captured in France's 2008 White Paper on defense and national security that stressed international responsibilities and obligations.²⁸ Sarkozy married words to actions through an increased force

²⁴ Foust, "Kapisa Province: A COIN Case Study in Afghanistan," 1-6.

²⁵ Féligonde, "Caveats to Civilian Aid Programs in Counterinsurgency: The French Experience in Afghanistan", 8.

²⁶ Jacques Cheminade, "Algeria/Afghanistan: The Inescapable Failure of Counterinsurgency," *Nouvelle Solidarite* (October 2009).

²⁷ Foust, *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction*, 90-95.

²⁸ Ministry of Defense, White Paper: National Defense and Security, 2008, pt. 8-9, 23-36 (France).

commitment to ISAF. By summer of 2008, France had assumed command of Regional Command Capital (Kabul), and had assumed responsibility for Surobi and Kapisa.²⁹

Timeline of Major Events

The first expression of the expanded French commitment was the deployment of France's first Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) in 2007, with additional OMLTs deployed in 2008. The OMLT concept is relatively resource light, providing a small scale, expeditionary version of the mentorship French soldiers already provided at the ANA training facilities around Kabul. Providing OMLTs, a skillset that already existed in country, allowed Sarkozy to quickly make good on promises to the international community.³⁰ However, in July 2008, the French army, under Taskforce Tigre, took over operations in Kapisa, headquartered on FOB Morales-Frazier, a shared space with the American Provincial Reconstruction Team.³¹

French security efforts from July 2008 until their departure at the end of 2012 was a schizophrenic application of counterinsurgency. Initially, Taskforce Tigre assumed a very conventional stance, securing lines of communication (the highways) and strongpoint defenses (in this case forward operating bases) from which to project power. Interaction with the population was largely limited to cordon and search operations.³² These methods were in contrast to the population centric 'hearts and minds' methodology being used by other coalition partners in 2008, and are reminiscent of the methods France used to exert influence in African colonies. Securing roads and key defensive positions, with little deliberate interaction with the sparse local

²⁹ Cotichhia and Moro, *The Transformation of Italian Armed Forces in Comparative Perspective: Adapt, Improvise, Overcome?* 67-70.

³⁰ Christophe Barbe, "A French Logistics OMLT in Afghanistan," *Army Sustainment*, no. 43 (April 2011).

³¹ Foust, *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction*, 90-95.

³² *Ibid.*, 92-97.

population, aligns with Jeffery Herbst's description of colonial rule (in general) as "hands off," and "violent," and with French colonial practices specifically.³³ Despite no longer being a colonial power, France has maintained bilateral ties – often through security arrangements – to most former colonies, and the geography and demographics of western Africa continue to reinforce colonial era tactics and procedures similar to those Taskforce Tigre initially attempted in Kapisa and Surobi.³⁴

France's security first, counterinsurgency second, approach was exacerbated by the death of ten French soldiers in an ambush in Surobi, just south of the Tagab Valley. Domestic reaction within France to the ambush forced political leaders to pressure the military to both curtail French casualties, and review the efficacy of pre-deployment training.³⁵ Under these pressures, Taskforce Tigre dramatically modified their tactics by reducing both the frequency of patrols and the length of time soldiers were exposed to hostile contact. Reducing time outside the operating bases further reduced French contact with local populations.³⁶ A consequence of reduced contact with locals was to reduce French military personnel's ability to supplement their already limited knowledge of the local customs and culture. This not only hampered intelligence preparation of the battlefield, but also forced the French to rely on their interpreters (who were usually not from that area) or local informants whose motives could not be fully vetted.³⁷ French security operations also became more aggressive towards local civilians, who were blamed for housing the

³³ Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 58-70; J. Clauzel, "Évolution de la vie économique et des structures sociales du pays nomade du Malil: De la conquête française à l'autonomie interne 1893–1958," *Tiers-Monde*, vol. 3, nos. 9–10 (1962), 283–311.

³⁴ Andrew Hansen, "The French Military in Africa," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2008.

³⁵ Andrew McGregor, "French Operations in Afghanistan Aims to Open New Coalition Supply Route," *Terrorism Monitor*, no. 7 (November 2009).

³⁶ Foust, *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction*, 92-97.

³⁷ Cheminade, "Algeria/Afghanistan: The Inescapable Failure of Counterinsurgency," *Nouvelle Solidarite*.

insurgents. Increased French aggressiveness combined with increased French aloofness resulted in increased resentment from the locals against what was seen as a lack of respect.³⁸

Outside of Taskforce Tigre, within the larger French defense community, the Surobi ambush prompted reevaluation of French tactics, training, and equipment employed in Afghanistan.³⁹ Importantly, there was little Afghan specific cultural and linguistic training before the Surobi ambush. The training troops had received was the standard pre-deployment training routinely used for African missions; soldiers were not being provided extensive mission-specific training.⁴⁰ The French military recognized that there were systemic weaknesses in how the army was preparing soldiers in light of the newly expanded Kapisa/Surobi mission set.

France responded to this internal reflection by making several changes to how soldiers were trained for Afghanistan. Deploying units received mission-specific training that now included robust counterinsurgency blocks of instruction in population engagement, negotiation, and Afghan culture and language. There was also an added curriculum on ethics in war (specifically counterinsurgency).⁴¹ France also increased its focus on advanced (conventional) small unit tactics, to provide soldiers the confidence and skills to fight out of future Surobi style ambushes.⁴² In addition, there was a recognition that French forces were understrength for the mission assigned, prompting the deployment of an additional 700 soldiers.⁴³

³⁸ Foust, “Kapisa Province: A COIN Case Study in Afghanistan,” 1-6.

³⁹ Cotichhia and Moro, *The Transformation of Italian Armed Forces in Comparative Perspective: Adapt, Improvise, Overcome?*, 67-70.

⁴⁰ Michael Shurkin, *Setting Priorities in the Age of Austerity: British, French, and German Experiences* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013), 26-28.

⁴¹ Desportes, “A Distant Conflict: France and the Afghanistan War.”

⁴² Shurkin, *Setting Priorities in the Age of Austerity: British, French, and German Experiences*, 26-28.

⁴³ Cotichhia and Moro, *The Transformation of Italian Armed Forces in Comparative Perspective: Adapt, Improvise, Overcome?*, 67-70.

Taskforce Tigre's rotation to Afghanistan would end in July of 2009. In March of 2009, the taskforce executed Operation Dinner Out to prepare the battlefield for the next taskforce. From 14-23 March, French troops from Kapisa and a battalion of the ANA successfully cleared the Alah Say river valley, which insurgents had controlled since 2006. Operation Dinner Out included both conventional and special operations forces, as well as US air support in the form of manned and unmanned aircraft. The operation concluded with the establishment of two ANA operating bases in the Alah Say valley.⁴⁴

By the end of summer of 2009, Taskforce Tigre was rotating out of country, having been relieved by Taskforce Korrigan. Taskforce Korrigan, armed with France's more robust and regionally focused training, adopted a population centric approach more in line with the techniques advocated by the ISAF commander, General Stanley McChrystal.⁴⁵ By late 2009, French taskforces were becoming increasingly focused on the southern half of the Kapisa province, and the more violent Pashtun south.⁴⁶

From 2010-2012 French forces conducted numerous operations in partnership with the ANA, specifically within the Alah Say and Tagab valleys.⁴⁷ Taskforce Korrigan's, and later Taskforce Lafayette's, population centric counterinsurgency and greater familiarity with the Afghan culture began to pay dividends in the form of greater civilian mobility along the regional highways, and greater efficacy of Afghan security forces among the population.⁴⁸ However, an

⁴⁴ Jean Guisnel, "Operation Dinner Out," *Le Point* (March 24, 2009), accessed November 01, 2105, <http://www.lepoint.fr/actualites-monde/2009-03-24/chronologie-de-la-bataille-d-alasay-operation-dinner-out/1648/0/328460>.

⁴⁵ Foust, *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction*, 92-97.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Kevin Dougherty, "French military effort in Afghanistan earning respect of U.S. troops," *Stars and Stripes* (October 2009).

⁴⁸ Christian Valverde, "French Forces Train Afghan Police in Investigation, Detention," *NATO* (March, 2012).

increasing number of green on blue incidents (incidents where the attackers are members of the Afghan security forces) caused dramatic shift in French public opinion. Domestic reaction to insider attacks renewed the debate within France questioning France's national interests in Afghanistan (or lack thereof), with relation to the financial and human costs. By the end of 2011 French polls showed approximately 75 percent opposition to the expanded security mission.⁴⁹

In May 2012 President Sarkozy was defeated by the Socialist candidate Francois Hollande. President Hollande, true to campaign promises, severely curtailed the French commitment to Afghanistan. By the conclusion of 2012, France had transitioned out of Kapisa and Surobi, leaving behind approximately 1500 soldiers to repatriate equipment and support the Kabul airport and training mission.⁵⁰

Outcomes

The French experience in Afghanistan imparted to the French Army a renewed emphasis on pre-deployment cultural awareness training as-well-as advanced small unit tactics, and highlighted the importance of having theater appropriate equipment. Setbacks such as the Surobi ambush of 2008, and a general dissatisfaction with French counterinsurgency operations, provided the impetus for a revamped training program and other reforms that the French believe will build a stronger, more capable force.⁵¹ Special training facilities were created in the South of France to meet these objectives.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ronald Halto, *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion and War: Winning Domestic Support for the Afghan War*, ed. Beatrice De Graaf, George Dimitriu, Jens Ringsmose (New York: Routledge, 2011), 162.

⁵⁰ Sam Webb, "Last French Soldiers Leaves Afghanistan as Country Fulfils Bid to Withdraw Troops Faster than any Other," *Daily Mail* (November 2012).

⁵¹ Michael Shurkin, *European Armies Approach Austerity in Instructive Ways* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013).

⁵² Desportes, "A Distant Conflict: France and the Afghanistan War."

Afghanistan also demanded that equipment be adapted. To this end the French developed the concept of “reactive adaption.” This program incorporated off the shelf procurement with rapid upgrade and adaption to existing systems. These programs were developed as a short term solution to France’s modernization needs while recognizing the Army’s financial constraints.⁵³

Structured Comparison Questions: France in Afghanistan

What was the degree of cultural and linguistic knowledge/empathy present in the [French] military units at the time of deployment?

French forces assuming the Kapisa/Surobi security had a moderate degree of cultural and linguistic knowledge/empathy in a general sense. French forces routinely rotate through deployments to Africa, which provide exposure to foreign cultures and experience both with partnering with host nation militaries and interacting with host nation civilians. This cross-cultural experience would provide veteran soldiers a degree of cognitive adaptability that would help prevent ethnocentrism.⁵⁴ Additionally, French units had supported the ANA training mission around Kabul since 2002.⁵⁵ This would have provided a general familiarity with Afghan customs and cultures.

However, as previously discussed, executing the ANA training mission did not prepare French forces for the cultural realities of conducting counterinsurgency operations in Kapisa/Surobi. Training the ANA in the Kabul academies divorces the Afghan soldier from their “normal” cultural environment. The academy environment is all male, all military, and comprised of a mix of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks that doesn’t occur in rural Afghanistan.⁵⁶

⁵³ Desportes, “A Distant Conflict: France and the Afghanistan War.”

⁵⁴ Abbe, “Building Cultural Capability for Full-Spectrum Operations,” 7.

⁵⁵ Jones, “Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan,” 104-110.

⁵⁶ Ian S. Livingston and Michael O’Hanlon, “Afghanistan Index,” *Brookings Institute* (February 2015), 7.

Importantly, the academy culture is also heavily influenced by the norms and standards set by the NATO countries executing the training. Also, it has been acknowledged that prior to 2008, French soldiers were not provided extensive Afghan mission-specific training.⁵⁷ For these reasons, French units did not have a high degree of cultural competency, specific to the Kapisa/Surobi mission, before 2008.

Did that knowledge/empathy (or lack thereof) significantly impact the initial planning of the operation?

French units' lack of cultural knowledge and empathy and the local level hindered initial planning, as evidenced by Taskforce Tigre's early adoption of a terrain focused security posture in direct contrast to the population centric methodology being used by other coalition partners in 2008.⁵⁸ France was certainly aware of contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine and best practices from other coalition forces. Also, as will be demonstrated in the following case study on the French intervention in Mali, the French army has a long history of working with and through local populations. Given these facts, it can be concluded that Taskforce Tigre's initial posture was influenced by a lack of understanding the local cultural and political dynamics in the planning processes, and not general incompetence.

A probable consequence of inadequate cultural understanding in the planning phase was a likely failure to adequately equip commanders with the understanding necessary to navigate the socio-political complexities of the region's diverse mix of Tajik, Pashtuns, Parachi, and Pashai

⁵⁷ Shurkin, *Setting Priorities in the Age of Austerity: British, French, and German Experiences*, 26-28.

⁵⁸ Foust, *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction*, 92-97.

peoples, and legacy mujahedeen rivalries.⁵⁹ Additionally, the region's criminal network, centered on poppy production, may have reacted negatively to a non-nuanced security approach.⁶⁰

Did that knowledge/empathy (or lack thereof) significantly impact the initial execution of the operation?

France's initial operations in Kapisa/Surobi were undermined by the planning limitations previously discussed, which stemmed from incomplete cultural understanding. Additionally, a poor cultural understanding initially resulted in French forces creating a mild animosity among much of the population. This contributed to the increase in insurgent activity which culminated in the Surobi ambush. A second result of the growing animosity, exacerbated by the Surobi ambush, was a positive feedback in hostility between the French army and the local population.⁶¹ This cycle of frustration would not be broken until Taskforce Tigre was relieved by Taskforce Korrigan. Importantly, Taskforce Korrigan was among the first French units to receive mission-specific training that now included Afghan culture and language.⁶²

Did that knowledge/empathy (or lack thereof) significantly impact the overall success of the operation?

Cultural knowledge and empathy significantly impacted the overall success of the operation. The evidence for this statement comes from the increased civilian mobility and ANA effectiveness following the transition from Taskforce Tigre to Taskforce Korrigan.⁶³ Taskforce Korrigan's increased familiarity with the Afghan culture allowed French forces to repair the

⁵⁹ Foust, "Kapisa Province: A COIN Case Study in Afghanistan," 1-6.

⁶⁰ Cheminade, "Algeria/Afghanistan: The Inescapable Failure of Counterinsurgency."

⁶¹ Foust, "Kapisa Province: A COIN Case Study in Afghanistan," 1-6.

⁶² Desportes, "A Distant Conflict: France and the Afghanistan War."

⁶³ Valverde, "French Forces Train Afghan Police in Investigation, Detention."

mutual mistrust, and begin building rapport with the local population. Better understanding of the cultural history and dynamics also allowed Taskforce Korrigan to better target lethal and non-lethal effects. Security operations were better targeted against populations sympathetic to the population, while reconstruction efforts were allocated to communities more willing to work with coalition (and Afghan) forces and the Kabul government.⁶⁴

Comparison Case 2: France in Mali (2013 – 2015)

On January 11, 2013, France launched Operation Serval in northern Mali, following a request from the Malian government for help repelling insurgent advances toward the capital city, Bamako. France's military intervention constituted a major shift in international response to the situation in Mali, which had been in the midst of a civil war for almost a year before the French intervened.⁶⁵ It is necessary to provide a short explanation of the actors and significant events that occurred in the twelve months prior to Operation Serval. Without setting the stage it is difficult to understand or appreciate some of the decisions made during France's intervention in Mali, most notably the French military's decision to fight alongside elements of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (In French: *Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad*; MNLA). This decision is significant because the MNLA are among the antagonists at the onset of hostilities.⁶⁶

Background

To understand the genesis of the Malian insurrection, it is important to quickly discuss the general demographics. The country is split north and south racially and economically. The

⁶⁴ Foust, *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction*.

⁶⁵ Alexis Arief, "Crisis in Mali," *Congressional Research Service*, (January 2013).

⁶⁶ Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 136–137.

subtropical south, where ninety percent of the population live, is dominated politically and economically by the south's largest ethnic groups the Bambaras and Malinka (collectively known as the Mende peoples) – who identify as “black” Africans. The desert north is a mixture of minorities, most notably the Songhai, Arab, Fula, Peuls and Tuareg – all of whom identify themselves as “white.”⁶⁷

The Malian civil war truly began in March of 2012 when the MNLA seized the opportunity to liberate the Azawad province while the Malian government and Army were in the midst of a power struggle following a coup d'état. It is important to note here that the MNLA were motivated by socio-economic factors other than religion; they were generally a secular organization. The MNLA were armed with weapons and experience from recently supporting the fighting in Libya, and reinforced by defectors from the predominantly Tuareg units of the Malian Army stationed in the north. As the insurrection gained momentum it attracted the support of three Islamist groups: Ansar Dine, the Muslim Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), and Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM).⁶⁸ True to Parsa's *theory of the revolution*, the most radical elements of the insurgency seized the reins of power and the more moderate MNLA was nearly destroyed.⁶⁹ As the Islamist factions consolidated power there was a de facto peace with the Malian government, which ended in January 2013 as the northern insurgents resumed their offence to the south.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Stephanie Pezard and Michael Shurkin, “Toward a Secure and Stable Northern Mali,” *RAND Corporation* (2013), 5-14.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Misagh Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 3-86.

⁷⁰ Michael Shurkin, *France's War in Mali* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2014), 7.

Disposition of Forces Prior to Intervention

The final element to set the stage is to describe the belligerents' dispositions on 10 January 2013 as French president Francois Hollande was committing his nation's military to yet another intervention. The insurgents controlled northern Mali in its entirety, including the key cities of Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal. With the resumption of hostilities, France estimated the Islamist forces were within 48 hours of the Bamako. French estimates of the numbers of fighters associated with the Islamist groups prior to Operation Serval generally gave Ansar Dine and AQIM a few thousand fighters each, MOJWA under 1,000. All of these organizations were known to be armed with man-portable air defense systems, anti-tank guided missiles, light armored vehicles, artillery, and antiaircraft cannons.⁷¹

In terms of the French led coalition, France had no forces in Mali on January 10, but it had military assets close at hand: 250 soldiers in Dakar, Senegal; 950 troops and Mirage fighter jets based in Ndjamena, Chad; and 450 soldiers in Côte d'Ivoire. Also, France had a Special Operations Forces contingent in the region conducting Operation Sabre, a counterterrorism operation.⁷² It is pertinent to pause and point out the significance of these numbers. France had essentially a brigade's worth of regionally aligned forces in theater the evening before hostilities would be declared. As the analysis will draw out, the cultural and regional understanding present in these units was critical to the planning and execution of Operation Serval, as well as to the reception and integration of almost 3,000 additional French forces and twice that many African

⁷¹ Dona J. Stewart, *What is Next for Mali? The Roots of Conflict and Challenges to Stability*, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2013), 41.

⁷² Jean-Pierre Chevenement, et al, *Rapport d'information fait au nom de la commission des affaires étrangères, de la défense et des forces armées par le groupe de travail "Sahel."* (Paris: Senat, April 16, 2013), accessed September 15, 2015, <http://www.senat.fr/notice-rapport/2012/r12-513-notice.html>.

forces.⁷³ Although the Malian army remained intact and fighting, it had proven as unequal to the insurgent forces as the MNLA.

France's Decision to Intervene

There were several legitimate security concerns prompting France to intervene in the Malian civil war without waiting for a UN international force to be mobilized. The most critical was the imminent threat to Bamako. If the Malian government were to capitulate, Mali would likely become an Islamist stronghold on the doorstep to Europe. Additionally, French economic and security interests in Niger and Chad would be at considerable risk. Also, there were more than 6,000 French, and 1,000 other European citizens in Mali; more than France was capable of evacuating in the short time available.⁷⁴ It should be noted that France had no permanent military presence in Mali, and Mali's chief exports (cotton and gold) were not extracted by French companies.⁷⁵

Domestically, President Hollande wanted a swift military victory – unlike French intervention in Afghanistan – to shore up support at home.⁷⁶ Another concern was the possibility that four French nationals currently being held by AQIM might be executed in retaliation to any military intervention. These hostages had been abducted in September of 2010 from a French uranium mine in neighboring Niger.⁷⁷

⁷³ Shurkin, *France's War in Mali*, 14.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

⁷⁵ Roland Marchal, "Military (Mis)Adventures in Mali," *African Affairs* 112 (May 2013): 1-12.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-6.

⁷⁷ Associated Press, "Four French Hostages Freed in Niger – President Hollande," *BBC*, (October 30, 2013), accessed September 25, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24735293>.

Importantly, President Hollande was able to legitimize the French intervention under a broad interpretation of UN resolution 2086 adopted one month earlier. Resolution 2086 created the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), and tasked it with helping to strengthen Mali's defense and security forces, in coordination with the European Union and other partners. French intelligence estimated that AFISMA would take months to mobilize and deploy, with no guarantee to the quality of force that would be provided, prompting more unilateral French action.⁷⁸

Further legitimizing French intervention was a request from Mali's interim President Dioncounda Traoré for French support.⁷⁹ Additionally, France's regional partners, Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou, Senegalese President Macky Sall, and Guinean President Alpha Condé all favored intervention.⁸⁰ Given a request for support from the recognized government of Mali, a supporting UN resolution (if loosely interpreted), and the backing of regional partners, president Hollande chose to act decisively. Within hours of president Hollande's decision French SOF forces had been redirected from Operation Saber, and French mechanized battle groups already deployed to Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, and Gabon, began movement towards Mali.⁸¹

Operation Serval

France's political strategy progressed along two lines of effort, stabilizing Mali's democratic government, and garnering international support from European Union member nations and the United States (mainly to defray the cost of intervention). France's military strategy consisted of three lines of operation predominantly concerned with the first political

⁷⁸ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2086*, Official Records, 6898th meeting, SC/10870 (New York: UN, 2012).

⁷⁹ Susanna D, Wing, "Mali: Politics of a Crisis," *African Affairs* 112 (May 2013): 483.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Shurkin, *France's War in Mali*, 13.

objective. The first was to deny the insurgents access to major population centers, thus dividing the enemy from their likely support base. Second was to destroy the insurgents in the hinterland. Third was to transition primary security responsibility to the Malian army and the UN mandated AFISMA. Both the French politicians and military planners considered tempo to be a paramount element of the operation. Politicians wanted a quick victory that could be handed off to an African coalition. This would allow France to reap the international and domestic applause while keeping costs to a minimum. Military planners preached tempo because there was a real concern that more opportunistic insurgent groups (e.g. AQIM) would disperse only to resurface later, undermining future stability and prompting future interventions.⁸²

Timeline of Major Events

The first conventional force to reach Mali on January 11 was a 200-man-strong combined arms group (four platoons with minimal logistical and fire support). On January 12, French air forces began bombing insurgent formations and strongholds. Each day from January 12 on brought hundreds more troops, both from forces already deployed to Africa, and those stationed in Europe. The French deployment would eventually plateau at 4,000, while the combined African forces reached 6,400; almost half came from Chad.⁸³ Simultaneously, France secured logistical support from both host nation sources (predominantly fuel) as well as more sophisticated support (e.g. mid-air refueling and strategic lift) from a growing coalition of European Union and NATO partners.⁸⁴

⁸² Gregoire de Saint Quentin, "First Operative Lessons of Operation Serval," *Revue Defense Nationale*, no. 763 (October 2013), 32.

⁸³ Shurkin, *France's War in Mali*, 16.

⁸⁴ Dona J. Stewart, *What is Next for Mali? The Roots of Conflict and Challenges to Stability*, 43-45.

On January 15, after three days of air strikes and SOF infiltration, France's conventional ground forces went on the offensive along two supporting lines of operation. The ultimate objectives were to capture the cities of Timbuktu and Gao as well as their surrounding regions.⁸⁵ These two regions, hosting almost 95 percent of northern Mali's population, were critical to cutting the insurgents from their support networks within the population.⁸⁶ The first line of operation to take Timbuktu consisted of two mechanized, French marines, infantry groups (the 2nd and 21st). This force retook the cities of Niono (January 18), Diabaly (January 21), Nampala, and Lere (both 27-28 January) as supporting objectives before capturing Timbuktu on January 29.⁸⁷

The second supporting line of effort to retake Gao retook the cities of Douentza (January 21) and Hombori (January 25). Additionally, French special forces seized the Gao airport and a bridge at Wabaria also on the 25th, allowing French conventional forces to both seize the city and bring in reinforcements from Chad and Niger via air transport. France further reinforced the city with Malian Tuareg militia. Additional Chadian and Nigerien forces moving overland consolidated in Gao after seizing Andéramboukane and Ménaka.⁸⁸

Throughout the campaign, the French worked with less radical factions of the ousted MNLA, (in addition to the Malian army) whose involvement helped secure local buy-in and popular support in Tuareg areas. Additionally, the MNLA were intimately familiar with the socio-economic networks in northern Mali, as well as the terrain.⁸⁹ France received post-conflict criticism for working with the MNLA, mostly from outside analysts. However, it is important to

⁸⁵ Shurkin, *France's War in Mali*, 16.

⁸⁶ NASA, "Mali: Population Density, 2000," *Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center (Sedac)*, accessed 27 September 2015, <http://Sedac.Ciesin.Columbia.Edu/Data/Set/Grump-V1-Population-Density/Maps?Facets=Region:Africa>

⁸⁷ Shurkin, *France's War in Mali*, 16-21.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Stewart, *What is Next for Mali? The Roots of Conflict and Challenges to Stability*, 43-45.

recall that due to the racial and political tensions within Mali, the Malian army (as well as the Chadian and Nigerien armies) would be considered occupiers by northern populations.⁹⁰ The French military determined that the benefits of having allies with ties to the northern ethnic groups outweighed the potential political costs post-conflict. Whether French planners made the correct decision in the long-term will be seen. What matters most is that the French commanders demonstrated an understanding of who the factions were, the benefits and risks of working with them and the potential political ramifications of engagement.

From January 29-31, France executed a third supporting line of operation to capture the city of Kidal and the Tessalit airport. This operation began with the seizure of the Kidal and Tessalit airports by French special forces. The city of Kidal was seized by a contingent of Chadian forces in concert with MNLA fighters and French support.⁹¹ At the end of January, France had completed its first overall line of operation to deny the insurgents access to major population centers, thus dividing the enemy from their likely support base.

During February and March, French conventional forces transitioned to their second line of effort, named Operation Panther, destroying insurgent forces in the hinterland – specifically the Adrar des Ifoghas. Adrar des Ifoghas is the mountainous region along the Algerian frontier and a known redoubt of AQIM.⁹² Simultaneously, French and partner forces were actively engaged in suppressing an insurgency in the Gao vicinity which concluded with a clearing effort named Operation Gustav. By the end of April France had begun reducing its forces in Mali and transitioning authority to Malian and AFISMA security forces.⁹³

⁹⁰ Pezard and Shurkin, “Toward a Secure and Stable Northern Mali,” 5-14.

⁹¹ Shurkin, *France’s War in Mali*, 16-21.

⁹² Ministry of Defense (France), *Opération Serval: Update on 21 February 2013*.

⁹³ Shurkin, *France’s War in Mali*, 22-23.

Outcomes

The total human cost for France (Operation Serval) was seven killed. A number of allied African soldiers also lost their lives, including at least 30 Chadians.⁹⁴ Politically and militarily, France's intervention in Mali was counted a success. President Hollande received a military victory in only four months, at a low cost in French lives. Additionally, France was able to strengthen her ties to regional and international partners, building national prestige and demonstrating that France remained a political and military force to be reckoned with on the global stage.

Militarily, France saved Bamako and the Malian state and returned all of Mali's territory to nominal Malian control. Also, Ansar Dine was completely dismantled, and AQIM, MUJWA, were degraded and scattered to the point that they were (at least temporarily) no longer a threat in Mali.⁹⁵ Equally important, the French military demonstrated a clear understanding of (what the US Army calls) the mission command philosophy. This allowed junior leaders to gain and maintain the initiative despite the vast distances between formations. France also demonstrated the synergistic effect of regional partnerships built upon habitual relationships and a clear understanding of the cultural landscape. This last concept will be further discussed in the exploration of the structured comparison questions.

Structured Comparison Questions: France in Mali

What was the degree of cultural and linguistic knowledge/empathy present in the [French] military units at the time of deployment?

French forces executing the 2013 intervention in Mali arrived in country with a high degree of regional cultural competency. French political and military commitment to north and

⁹⁴ Pezard and Shurkin, "Toward a Secure and Stable Northern Mali," ix.

⁹⁵ Chevenement, et al, *Rapport d'information fait au nom de la commission des affaires étrangères, de la défense et des forces armées par le groupe de travail "Sahel,"* 13.

west Africa has remained constant throughout France's colonial and post-colonial history. Post WWII, when European powers were forced to shed their colonial holdings, France maintained close relations with African Francophile nations through "treaties of cooperation," and bilateral security agreements.⁹⁶ The maintenance of these ties in the post-Cold War era have translated into a persistent peacekeeping and security assistance presence in Africa.⁹⁷ French army units rotate frequently through Africa, often to the same location building intimate familiarity with the culture, geography, and demographics of western Africa.⁹⁸

Did that knowledge/empathy (or lack thereof) significantly impact the initial planning of the operation?

In addition to a high level of cultural competency, France had thousands of soldiers and the corresponding headquarters units, on the African continent.⁹⁹ Planning for the Mali intervention would have been assisted by real time intelligence analyzed by officers intimately familiar with the nuances and subtleties of the region's cultural landscape. One of the critical planning considerations was answering the questions "who can we trust, who can we partner with, what does that partnership look like?" As discussed in the case study, the French commitment of forces to Mali reached about 4,000, while the combined African forces reached 6,400.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the French worked closely with Tuareg militias.¹⁰¹ Cultural competency

⁹⁶ Shaun Gregory, "The French Military in Africa: Past and Present," *African Affairs*, no. 99 (2000), 435-437.

⁹⁷ Andrew Hansen, "The French Military in Africa," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2008.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Chevenement, et al, *Rapport d'information fait au nom del la commission des affaires etrangeres, de la defense et des forces armees par le groupe de travail "Sahel."*

¹⁰⁰ Shurkin, *France's War in Mali*, 16.

¹⁰¹ Stewart, *What is Next for Mali? The Roots of Conflict and Challenges to Stability*, 43-45.

and habitual relationships greatly assisted French planners, who knew who they could trust as partners, and what those partners were capable of.

Did that knowledge/empathy (or lack thereof) significantly impact the initial execution of the operation?

Cultural understanding and empathy borne of habitual relationships significantly improved the initial execution of Operation Serval. Cultural competency allowed French commanders to quickly build relationships with host nation militias and synchronize operations with African partner nations, notably Chad. This flexibility allowed the French to adopt a lighter force footprint and gain control of the tempo of operations without assuming undue risk or reducing lethality.

The best evidence of these assertions is found in the lines of operation to retake the cities of Timbuktu and Gao. French forces, reinforced by African partners and Mali militias seized both objectives within two weeks of the first French forces arriving in country. Both cities, along with numerous supporting objectives were seized with minimal friendly casualties. Importantly, African partners worked both alongside French forces, and unaccompanied, demonstrating successful coordination and synchronization across militaries.¹⁰²

Did that knowledge/empathy (or lack thereof) significantly impact the overall success of the operation?

Operation Serval was only the initial stages of the intervention. As demonstrated by the United States' invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, a swift tactical victory is possible without cultural knowledge and empathy. French competency in the regional culture is better highlighted through the overall success of the stability operations that followed. Over the course of several

¹⁰² Shurkin, *France's War in Mali*, 16-21.

months, French stability operations, in partnership with UN efforts, returned Mali to relative calm.¹⁰³

The total human cost for France and the African partners (not including Malian security forces and militias which were involved in civil war before the intervention) were less than 100 fatalities.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, the insurgent group of Ansar Dine was defeated in detail. Supporting insurgent groups AQIM and MUJWA were severely degraded to the point that they ceased hostilities, and many of their leaders fled Mali.¹⁰⁵ Politically, France demonstrated resolve and commitment to regional and international partners, without alienating the domestic population in Mali. Also, French president Hollande succeeded in not raising the ire in France's citizens as had occurred during the intervention in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁶

Analysis: How the Comparative Cases Might Inform the RAF Concept

The French army's deployment to Mali underscored the value of building a robust cultural competency and understanding at both the individual and organizational levels. These skills were a vital complement to French tactical acumen, and directly contributed to the successful military and political outcomes.¹⁰⁷ Cross cultural competency alone did not guarantee that French soldiers would succeed in Mali, nor did it ensure that their intelligence preparation of the battlefield would be correct. Yet the evidence strongly indicates that cultural knowledge and empathy did empower French commanders to with awareness of what they could expect from the

¹⁰³ BBC, *Mali Country Profile* (December 2015).

¹⁰⁴ Pezard and Shurkin, "Toward a Secure and Stable Northern Mali," ix.

¹⁰⁵ Chevenement, et al, *Rapport d'information fait au nom de la commission des affaires étrangères, de la défense et des forces armées par le groupe de travail "Sahel,"* 13.

¹⁰⁶ Pezard and Shurkin, "Toward a Secure and Stable Northern Mali."

¹⁰⁷ Michael Shurkin, "European Armies Approach Austerity in Instructive Ways," *RAND Review* (Fall 2013).

enemy, the Malians and other African forces, and the civilian population.¹⁰⁸ This understanding, shared with staffs and subordinates, greatly enabled the application of correct judgment to courses of action and lines of operation during the offense that set conditions for a successful transition to stability operations. Additionally, knowing what was culturally acceptable allowed the French to select lines of effort that were more likely to result in lasting stability.

In contrast, French forces in Afghanistan were generally unsuccessful during the early stages of their counterinsurgency efforts in Kapisa/Surobi. These forces would have had the same acute knowledge of west African culture, and would have been superficially familiar with Afghan culture from six years of rotations as trainers for the ANA academy.¹⁰⁹ One conclusion could be that general cross culture competency is no substitute for acute cultural knowledge and empathy. This conclusion is supported by the increased efficacy of French forces following the introduction of Afghan culture training to the pre-deployment training regime.¹¹⁰

The lesson for the US Army is that land forces must understand the sociocultural realities on the ground. There is no question that understanding the physical terrain of the operational environment is critical for soldiers at all levels; Army doctrine makes this point explicitly in multiple documents.¹¹¹ Contrasting the French experiences in Afghanistan and Mali, and the US Army's own experiences, demonstrate that the cultural terrain is of supreme importance. This will remain true for as long as wars are fought by humans, against humans, among humans.

A stated aim of the RAF program is to develop “an understanding of the cultures, geography, languages, and militaries of the countries where they are most likely to be

¹⁰⁸ Shurkin, *France's War in Mali*, 43-46.

¹⁰⁹ Jones, “Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan,” 104-110.

¹¹⁰ Foust, *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction*, 92-97.

¹¹¹ Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012).

employed.”¹¹² Contemporary military operations, the focused comparison of France in Afghanistan and Mali, and learning theory all provide evidence demonstrating that the current US Army personnel management philosophy does not support this aim of the RAF program. Organizational learning theory suggests that soldiers spend too little time within a regionally aligned unit to fully understand complex, multifaceted, cultural and linguistic knowledge unique to their region. When soldiers are assigned to a regionally aligned unit under the current system, they are expected to begin learning the regional cultures their unit will interact with. Yet, in three years that soldier will change duty stations, most likely outside of that regional alignment – perhaps to a unit aligned to a different region, with its own unique culture. The relatively short duration a soldier spends aligned to a region undermines their ability to inculcate anything but a superficial understanding of the region’s history, demographics, and a list of “do’s and don’t’s”.¹¹³ The near certainty of transferring outside that particular regional alignment weakens the linkages between developing a cultural understanding, (let alone disciplined self-study), and career success.

To overcome these challenges, the US Army should stabilize soldiers within a single regional alignment. Restated, once a soldier is assigned to a regionally aligned unit, the Army should not move that soldier outside of that regional alignment. This is impractical under the current RAF program, which is being executed at the brigade level. However, there are already suggestions that RAF would be best executed at the division level, creating regionally aligned divisions (RADs). Expanding regional alignment to a division (or larger), in conjunction with changes to manning philosophies, would allow soldiers to remain stabilized within a single regional alignment. This concept will be referred to as *stabilized RADs*.

¹¹² *FRAGO 1 to the Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) EXORD.*

¹¹³ Allison Abbe and Stanley M. Halpin, “The Cultural Imperative for Professional Military Education and Leader Development,” *Parameters*, no. 122 (2010), 21.

Structural obstacles to individual and organizational learning would be greatly reduced under the stabilized RAD concept. If stabilized to a single regional alignment for the duration of their careers, soldiers would have the time to develop the foundational knowledge of cultural norms and attitudes requisite for a higher level of understanding that would develop into a strategic perspective of culture. Importantly, no single training regime / event, subject matter expert, or deployment will grant a soldier sociocultural expertise.¹¹⁴ Because soldiers will remain aligned to a single region, they will have repeated encounters with different trainers and native practitioners. As the individual's familiarity with the culture grows, these recurrent learning opportunities will be continually reinforced by positive experiences born out of increased cultural cognition.

Notably, remaining in a single regional alignment will develop regional experts within the officer and NCO corps. This significant because it allows the Army to re-assume responsibility for training soldiers, and ensuring cultural knowledge and sensitivities are incorporated into all unit training events in a realistic manner. Because these officers and NCOs will constantly deploy with regionally aligned units, their subject matter expertise will constantly be revalidated "on the ground;" a benefit not available to many of the cultural advisors from academia. Replacing contractors, who are often seen as outsiders, with the officers and NCOs organic to that unit, will also increase the credibility of unit leadership and reinforce the sincerity of the training to new soldiers.

Unlike France, the United States does not have the requisite colonial history to provide a focus for regional partnering and national interests abroad. As the global hegemon, the United States cannot afford to narrowly define its partners, or those areas of the globe where it will commit military force. Arguably, the only United States' approximation of the French permanent

¹¹⁴ Abbe and Halpin, "The Cultural Imperative for Professional Military Education and Leader Development," 25.

security partnership in Africa is found on the Korean peninsula. Only in Korea are US Army forces as tightly interlinked with the host nation as French forces are with their African counterparts. For these reasons, the French model for developing regional cultural competency is a poor fit for the US Army. Therefore, the US Army should seek a different model that provides similar benefits. The Regimental system, employed by the United Kingdom, provides such a model.

Selective Borrowing from the Regimental System

The Regimental system *specifically* refers to the British use of the "regiment" as the basic army unit (similar to how the US Army currently uses the Brigade Combat Team). However, the term "regimental system," invokes another connotation - the British system of assigning each regiment a geographic location to recruit and train. Soldiers recruited into that regiment are expected to spend their entire career with the same unit, the same compatriots (all from the local area). This system has been somewhat modified to meet the realities of modern demographics and the needs of the British Army, but the underlying principles remain generally in effect.¹¹⁵

The Regimental system truly began with the Cardwell reforms following the Crimean War, which continued through the conclusion of WWI.¹¹⁶ The purpose of the Regimental system was to improve recruiting, retention, esprit de corps, and discipline by creating a 'military family.' Soldiers were recruited from the local region, and often had familial or historic ties to their compatriots. Soldiers within the regiment inculcate the history, traditions, and standards that define that regiment. Soldiers spent the entirety of their career in a single regiment, often composed of families from the communities that raised them. This created a deep familiarity

¹¹⁵ Ministry of Defense (UK), *British Army Structure* (2015), accessed December 17, 2015, <http://www.army.mod.uk/structure/structure.aspx>.

¹¹⁶ Stephen Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880-1918* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 35-38.

among soldiers, leading to trust, commitment, and a fear of ostracism through failure or dishonor. Importantly, each soldier - as a member of the regimental family and a contributor to the everlasting history - feels a personal stake in the success of the unit.¹¹⁷

There are several common critiques of the Regimental System. The first is that focusing a soldier's esprit de corps at the Regiment creates a "tribal system," that undermines their loyalty to the Army writ large. Thus, as an Army goes through structural changes, leaders will fight for the survival of their regiment without regard to how that might negatively affect the end result force structure.¹¹⁸ A second critique of the Regimental System has been that the Regimental focus (vice Divisions) hampered British development, training, and employment of combined arms tactics. This occurred for two reasons. The traditionalist mindset fostered by the regimental system created institutional resistance to change. (This critique was often cited as why armor and infantry combined arms tactics failed to mature during the interwar years between world wars, and during the initial stages of WWII).¹¹⁹ Also, training was predominantly conducted at the Regimental level, and did not provide leaders the experience necessary to integrate the various combat arms into a synchronized plan.¹²⁰

Adversity to Regimental System in the US Army

The United States' rejection of the Regimental system began with the Continental Army under George Washington. General Washington favored the creation of a professional cadre of officers and a small standing army. The Continental Congress rejected this proposal under the

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Michael M. O'Leary, *The Regimental System*, (2000), accessed December 17, 2015, http://regimentalrogue.tripod.com/papers/the_regimental_system.htm.

¹¹⁹ Jonathan M. House, *Toward Combined Arms Warfare: A Survey of 20th-Century Tactics, Doctrine, and Organization* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute, 1984), 48-51.

¹²⁰ David French, *Raising Churchill's Army: The British Army and the War Against Germany 1919-1945* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 280-285.

apprehension that a standing army was a danger to the fledgling republic. Instead the United States would rely on state militias. Eventually the Congress eased their opinions, allowing the creation of a Regular Army to protect borders, coasts, and the frontier, and established the US Military Academy at West Point, New York. Since the dawn of the 19th Century the US Army has continued to evolve away from the Regimental system, adopting personnel management systems that reflect the division of labor and economies of scale inherent in America's Industrial revolution. General Marshal cemented these postindustrial philosophies as the United States organized for, and fought, WWII.¹²¹ (It should be noted that this discussion pertains to the active duty force. The National Guard is in essence an American replication of the Regimental system – although this is coincidental).

Today, the US Army is in fact more akin to their British counterparts than during WWII or the Korean War. In WWII and Korea, the US Army practiced a system of individual replacements, rotating soldiers in and out of theater while keeping the "unit" deployed. Conversely, the British rotated entire units. Both systems had strengths and weaknesses. However, contemporary conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are more similar to the British replacement system, with US Army units rotating according to a patch chart.¹²²

Incorporating Aspects of the Regimental System into the US Army

Incorporation of aspects of the British regimental system is not a novel proposal. Periodically, individuals of high rank and influence (among others) have made serious attempts to incorporate different aspects of the regimental system into US Army manning philosophies. As recently as 1980, the commander of Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) General Donn

¹²¹ Donald E. Vandergriff, *Digital War: A View from the Front Line*, ed. Robert L. Bateman (Novato: Presidio Press, 1999).

¹²² Douglas M. Chalmers, *British Army Units under US Army Control: Interoperability Issues* (Fort Leavenworth, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2001), 32-43.

Starry supported a proposal called *Application of the Regimental System to the United States Army's Combat Arms*, which proposed refurbishing the Army's personnel system using the British system as a model.¹²³ Adoption of the Regimental system was usually proposed in the context of a method to heal the morale and discipline problems in the immediate aftermath of the Vietnam war.¹²⁴

It is important to distinguish between previous, unsuccessful, attempts to adopt elements of the Regimental system and what is being proposed in creating stabilized RADs. Previous attempts to adopt the Regimental system were primarily focused on improving recruiting, retention, esprit de corps, and discipline during periods of turbulence.¹²⁵ Proponents of the Regimental system sought to incorporate both the local procurement of forces and the creation of stable military families. Local procurement was rejected because the scale of the modern US military, and the demographics of the United States do not support such a system with regard to basing locations.¹²⁶ The stabilized RAD concept makes no effort to change how soldiers are recruited, trained, or apportioned to their *first* duty station.

Previous attempts to adopt aspects of the Regimental system were also rejected to prevent the creation of “tribes” within the US Army, and to ensure that there was equal opportunity for career advancement.¹²⁷ The stabilized RAD concept will face similar criticism. However, analysis will demonstrate that the negative aspects of stabilizing soldiers within a RAD are either no longer valid in the modern Army, or can be mitigated without further disruption to existing

¹²³ P. W. Faith, D. I. Ross, *Application of the Regimental System to the United States Army's Combat Arms* (Fort Leavenworth: TRADOC, 1980), p. 1-51.

¹²⁴ Gustav Person, "Regimental System," *Infantry Magazine* (1982), p. 1-2.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Vandergriff, *Digital War: A View from the Front Line*.

¹²⁷ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, 1870-2000* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 346.

personnel systems. Analysis will also demonstrate that the positive outcomes of a stabilized RAD architecture outweigh any residual negative effects.

Anticipated Concerns Regarding the Stabilized RAD Concept

The creation of stabilized RADs will be controversial. The arguments against the concept generally fit into one of three categories: concern for the lethality and flexibility of the Army, feasibility of the proposed system, and concern for soldier and family quality of life. The following discussion attempts to highlight some of the more probable, and impactful, concerns opponents might use, as well as thoughts on how these concerns are mitigated.

Arguably, the most important concern to address is whether the stabilized RAD system will reduce the lethality and flexibility of the Army, thereby degrading the Army's ability to fight and win the nation's wars. There will be concern that stabilized RADs, like the Regimental system it is modeled on, will create "tribes" within the Army. Critics will argue that soldiers will become excellent at operating according to the TTPs and equipment sets used in their region while losing the ability to execute Decisive Action against a thinking enemy in war. Further, these tribes will narrow the breadth of experiences and leadership styles available to officers and their soldiers. Critics will also argue that this will stifle creativity, decrease competence, and promote groupthink. Similarly, there will be fewer opportunities for advancement. Senior leaders within the RAD will hand pick those junior leaders that think and act like them, while forcing out those that don't.

The stabilized RAD concept *might* create the feared tribal attitudes associated with the British Regimental system, but there are compelling reasons to believe this will not happen, as well as strong mitigations that can be emplaced. First, individual RADs will not create their own doctrine, and will continue to train against the same DATE scenario used across the Army, *as the*

*RAF units have done thus far.*¹²⁸ Standard Army training progressing from individual skills to collective tasks (e.g. platoon/company live-fires or gunnery tables) will not disappear. Units will still be expected to cycle through the CTCs to fight a hybrid enemy. The only differences might be the “nationality” of the civilians on the battlefield, and the TTPs used for interacting with those civilians.

The development of regionally specific TTPs and equipment sets should be viewed as a positive. Any major conflict outside the United States will require the Army to execute combat operations among an indigenous population, in an environment unlike the United States. TTPs and equipment sets that have already been validated “on the ground” through multiple deployments will save invaluable time and resources. This principle was demonstrated during the examination of the French deployment to Mali in 2013.

A corollary concern would be that units assigned to a RAD would bear exclusive responsibility for executing combat operations in that region. For example, only the stabilized RAD assigned to CENTCOM would execute the enduring mission in Afghanistan. This should not be the case. The mission in Afghanistan falls under the umbrella of overseas contingency operations, which is a different mandate and a different pot of money from RAF.¹²⁹ Contingency missions would rotate among brigades as before. However, brigades deploying to combat from other regions would benefit immeasurably from trainers and experts from a RAD who could assist in rapidly incorporating regionally specific training into the preparation for war.

Second, the pressures to become tribal are significantly weaker in a stabilized RAD vice the British regiment due to differences in unit size, recruitment, and basing. A British regiment is

¹²⁸ Government Accountability Office, “Regionally Aligned Forces,” *GAO Highlights* (August 2015), 44-46.

¹²⁹ Department of Defense, “FY2015 Budget Amendment: Overseas Contingency Operations,” (June 2014), 15.

(generally) locally recruited and locally stationed.¹³⁰ US soldiers are nationally recruited, and there is no reason why the brigades assigned to a RAD cannot be geographically dispersed. There is no requirement (except ease of administration) for a stabilized RAD to align with an existing division in its purity. Secondly, a US Army division is significantly larger than a British Regiment. Ensuring soldiers move between the brigades of the RAD along the same movement cycle currently in use will mitigate tribalism.

The question of limiting a soldier's experience is more complex. In some respects, that is the point. As discussed in the section on adult and organizational learning, there needs to be a repetitiveness within training and deployment – in a positive way – to reinforce the desired cultural and linguistic competency. However, soldiers and officers will still have access to the same menu of broadening opportunities that exist now. Also, organizations that support the Army writ large such as Training & Doctrine Command, Forces Command, and the like would not be regionally aligned. Professional military education for NCOs and officers, which pool students from different branches, units, and (often) duty stations, would similarly offer opportunities to network with professionals assigned to other regions. Simply working on a post with brigades aligned to different regions would provide opportunities for broadening a soldier's perspectives through social interaction.

The Mali case study demonstrates the logistical benefits of a RAD system. RADs would develop a vetted set of equipment needed for the RAF deployment, enabling that RAD to maintain a theater specific equipment. This equipment, either maintained at home station or at a forward location (either in a habitual partner nation e.g. Germany or afloat), would reduce the cost of repeated deployments to a region, reduces the time required to respond in a 'real world' crisis, and inform Army procurement in the event of a large scale conflict.¹³¹

¹³⁰ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, 1870-2000*, 346.

¹³¹ Shurkin, *France's War in Mali*, 1-14.

Another concern is how best to represent combatant commands such as NORTHCOM that require significantly fewer deployments, and no additional cultural and linguistic expertise. These concerns are easily mitigated. NORTHCOM has a unique mission due to the fact that it encompasses the continental United States and its approaches, parts of the Caribbean, and the two stable, friendly nations that share our borders. The NORTHCOM commander could easily continue to be provided brigades on a rotational basis from the other geographic regions.¹³² A different approach would be to provide NORTHCOM their own RAD comprised entirely of National Guard and Reserve units, (many who are uniquely trained to execute Defense Support to Civil Authorities, which comprise the core of NORTHCOM's responsibilities).¹³³

Admittedly, not all geographic combatant commands will require the same number of deployments within the RAF program. How the Army is used, and when it is used, is based upon discourse between the federal government, adjacent agencies (most often the Department of State), and the foreign governments that would potentially act as host nation – all of which is beyond the scope of this discussion. The stabilized RAD concept can be scaled to fit US policy aims for that region.

A final concern that has been raised is that some commands, and therefore some stabilized RADs, have “better” duty stations. The implication is that a soldier assigned to a RAD outside PACOM might not have the opportunity to be stationed in Hawaii; a soldier assigned to a RAD outside EUCOM might not have the opportunity to be stationed in Europe – (subjectively used as desirable locations). This is the weakest of the controversies. The Army already has such discrepancies based on a soldier's branch, rank, and skills. Second, such concerns are based on unproven assumptions about how the Army will assign units to stabilized RADs.

¹³² US Northern Command, “About USNORTHCOM,” (2016), accessed February 4, 2016, <http://www.northcom.mil/AboutUSNORTHCOM.aspx>

¹³³ Ibid.

In a broader sense, looking beyond “desirable” duty stations, is the idea that soldiers in a stabilized RAD will only have a handful of duty stations open to them. This is a valid assumption, and probably a fact. This will be both positive and negative. The negative aspects of limiting soldiers to only a handful of duty stations through their career is offset by the increased predictability for families and opportunities to become members of a community.

Implications Across the DOTMLPF

In 2007, the US Army Training and Doctrine Command commissioned the US Army Research Institute, to study the efficacy of the Army’s Cultural Understanding and Language Proficiency (CULP) program, and to make recommendations for its improvement. The findings section of the report succinctly describes the DOTMLPF implications of the CULP program. *“It is not enough just to incorporate culture into training and professional military education. Cultural capability must be addressed in an overall strategy addressing doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leader development, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF). In particular, a broad and enduring cultural capability will not be achieved until the relevant competencies are recognized and rewarded through the personnel system.”*¹³⁴ When this report was commissioned there was no Army RAF program, only an awareness of the importance of building cultural competency as a force multiplier.¹³⁵ Yet, this findings statement remains as true of the proposed RAD concept as it was of the CULP program in 2007. Similarly, Admiral Mike Mullen stated in 2010, the current era of persistent conflict required “different ways to promote, different ways to educate, different ways to train, compared to what we’ve done in the past.”¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Abbe, “Building Cultural Capability for Full-Spectrum Operations,” v-7.

¹³⁵ John F. Campbell, “Execution Order 052-13 (ISO Regionally Aligned Forces),” 2012.

¹³⁶ Abbe and Halpin, “The Cultural Imperative for Professional Military Education and Leader Development,” 26.

These two statements, of many similar, by Army think tanks and senior military officials point to a trend acknowledging that there is a gap between what the current DOTMLPF provides and what the future force requires. This trend of thought is consistent with the earlier discussion on adult and organizational learning theory which advocates an architecture that facilitates knowledge capture and transmission and then codifies that knowledge in institutional change.¹³⁷ However, as the adage states “if it isn’t broke, don’t fix it.” Changes to the DOTMLPF should be minimized to what is necessary to bridge the gaps already identified by senior leaders. Adoption of the stabilized RAD concept would require the following modifications of across the DOTMLPF:

Doctrine: Adopting the RAD concept should have minimal impact on Army doctrine. As stated earlier, BCTs assigned to a RAD would train to master the same Army core competencies and be tested against the same Decisive Action scenario. The only recommended changes would be to update *Army Doctrinal Publication 1: The Army* (specifically chapters 1, 4, and Appendix A) to reflect the new organizational structure and mission sets.¹³⁸ Additionally, *Field Manual 3-22: Army Support to Security Cooperation*, need to be updated along similar lines.¹³⁹

Organization: Adoption of a RAD concept would entail significant changes to Army organization. The Army would need to determine if it is better to use existing divisions or to build RADs by selecting brigades piecemeal for the capabilities they provide. Both courses of action come with challenges and opportunities. (The most painful for traditionalists would be to build RADs piecemeal, assign an existing division headquarters and then reflag all the brigades to their new division). Adopting the RAD model would enable a habitual relationship between the

¹³⁷ Goh, “Toward a Learning Organization: The Strategic Building Blocks,” 15-22.

¹³⁸ Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 1, *The Army* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012).

¹³⁹ Field Manual 3-22, *Army Support to Security Cooperation* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2013).

supported combatant command and the brigades ultimately executing the mission. This would facilitate concurrent planning of mission objectives and needs, leading to a shared understanding of the desired outcomes and better prepared brigades.¹⁴⁰

Training: The Army core competencies, unit training regimes, and training center scenarios would remain consistent across the force, as they are today. Similarly, basic training and advanced individual training would be unaffected. All soldiers require the same foundational skills, and each branch controls their advanced training. However, the Army must also institutionalize region specific training to a large degree. As discussed earlier, handing cultural and linguistic training to brigades (or RADs) will result in uneven efforts across the force.¹⁴¹ The combatant command and RAD leadership should absolutely have a role in tailoring their training regime given their familiarity with their operational environment. However, only senior Army leadership can prioritize the resources and personnel to ensure quality training at all duty stations. Funding for this training should be a shared responsibility between the unit, the combatant command, and the Army. Training and Doctrine Command should explore ways they can further facilitate regional specific training.

Materiel: Each RAD requires a unique set of equipment in addition to general purpose issue. This region specific equipment should be limited to equipment necessary to operate in an expeditionary manner, and should provide functionality not found within the existing Army inventory. The cost of these equipment sets could be reduced by creating – where possible – a shared equipment pool, ideally in theater. As previously discussed, these equipment sets, repeatedly validated, would inform Army procurement in the event of future armed conflict.

Leadership: Although not a change, adopting a RAD concept will be a major test of Army leadership. Even a phased adoption will fundamentally change the careers of thousands of

¹⁴⁰ Government Accountability Office, “Regionally Aligned Forces,” 44-46.

¹⁴¹ Government Accountability Office, “Regionally Aligned Forces,” 40-46.

soldiers. Army leaders will need to proactively address concerns, overcome the unavoidable administrative challenges, and generate buy-in among junior leaders. The RAD concept requires no changes in terms of leadership philosophy, education, or structure already in place. The concern that leadership opportunities would be limited are unfounded. Command opportunities within the RAD would be fewer, but the pool of competing peers for those opportunities would be smaller. Leadership opportunities outside the RAD (e.g. TRADOC, etc.) remain unchanged.

Personnel: The personnel system will require the most significant changes, and for the soldiers already serving, will constitute a significant emotional event. The Army will have to determine when and how soldiers will be assigned to the RADs. This will require changes within the recruitment process. Additionally, the RAD concept requires Army Human Resources Command to redesign how they manage soldiers' careers while meeting the needs of the Army. This will also require a change to the promotion board system to ensure that promotions within a peer group are not overly weighted in one region to the disadvantage of another. Professional education and broadening opportunities will have to be similarly allotted quotas from each of the regions depending on the size of the RAD(s) allocated.

Facilities: In some regions it will be prudent to develop additional, permanent facilities to house pre-positioned equipment sets and provide facilities for the receipt and integration of units flowing in and out of theater. The lack of such facilities was highlighted in the earlier discussion of lessons learned by units conducting the current RAF mission. Models for such facilities already exist in enduring mission locations such as Europe, Korea, Japan, Afghanistan, and Kuwait. Additionally, the RAF mission would benefit from further development assistance projects to improve or construct training facilities in partner nations.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Inquiry

Army doctrine acknowledges that future conflict will be fought by people, against people, and among people.¹⁴² Whether getting inside the head of an enemy during combined arms maneuver, balancing security and restoration of normalcy in stability operations, or deterring conflict by shaping the environment and building relationships in “phase 0,” there is a growing consensus Army leaders that cultural and linguistic competency is not only useful, but critical to achieving national policy aims.¹⁴³ Some of this sentiment is captured in the Army’s RAF program. Yet the required cultural and linguistic skills are difficult to build proficiency in, let alone master. The Army could better foster these skill sets by adopting specific elements of the British regimental system that would stabilize soldiers within a set of

Adult and organizational learning theories support stabilizing soldiers within a single regional alignment. Learning complex concepts such as language and culture require repeated exposure and opportunities to exercise the skillset while receiving feedback. In addition, the individual must make an effort to grow and maintain their skills which will only occur if there is a sense that these skills are important – not only to mission success, but to career success.

The French experiences in Afghanistan and Mali demonstrate that cultural empathy and understanding is in fact a major force multiplier. This is especially true when it enables relationships to be built with regional partners before conflict erupts. This element of proactive environmental shaping is at the heart of the Army’s intent for regionally aligned forces. The French experiences also highlight tangential benefits in developing TTPs and logistic programs that make responding to a crisis less costly and less uncertain.

The US Army can replicate many of the benefits of France’s post-colonial relationships through the RAF program. However, due to the scale of the US Army, and the scope of its global

¹⁴² ADP 3-0.

¹⁴³ Abbe, “Building Cultural Capability for Full-Spectrum Operations.”

engagement, it is unreasonable to expect soldiers to be proficient in all the possible cultures they will interact with. By adopting specific elements of the British regimental system, the US Army can stabilize soldiers within a single regional alignment without hurting the development and career of those soldiers and without negatively affecting the readiness or lethality of the Army overall. One option would be the creation of regionally aligned divisions.

Any form of stabilization would require the Army to change aspects of the organizational structure. Most notably would be changes to personnel management and promotions. These changes would support the development of cultural and linguistic knowledge by tying career success to individual and organizational learning.

The creation of regionally aligned divisions is not a panacea to the development of cultural competency, nor does it solve all of the problems associated with shaping the operational environment, building partner capacity, or operating in an among an unfamiliar population. Even within regions, the Army will have to prioritize which cultures and languages soldiers should focus on. This discussion focused narrowly on the importance of cultural and linguistic competency in support of the RAF concept for furthering strategic shaping of the operational environment. This is only a single facet of the RAF program, thus, this discussion has not been a comprehensive exploration of a complex issue. The writing of this monograph revealed several other aspects of RAF that would benefit from open and honest discourse among the various stakeholders. Some areas requiring further inquiry include:

The relationship between combatant commands, the Offices of Security Cooperation, and the RAF. This area of inquiry dovetails the RAF concept with the wider concepts of whole of government and unity of effort. How might the various departments within the executive branch develop cooperative aims, and how can the use of RAF deployments further those aims? Cooperation among interested parties would help ensure the RAF missions work to stabilize the host nation (and the region) without overbalancing the capacity of that nation's military in such a

way that it subverts the relationships among the host nation's national institutions. The US doesn't want the next coup to be as a result of our mil-to-mil partnership efforts.

Similarly, the relationship between the Department of Defense and the Department of State writ large in support of national policy aims should be reevaluated. There must be a concerted effort to ensure that both organizations are providing the same aims to their regional representatives. As best as possible, combatant commands and country teams need to have consensus on who is going to do what, where, when, and under what circumstances. This type of transparency would benefit all stakeholders, most especially the units that must execute the mission, and also navigate through the bureaucracy of obtaining passports, etc.

Lastly, the Army needs to continue its study to determine how best to support the cultural and linguistic education of the RAF units. What is the proper mix of institutional and home station training programs for culture and language? What resources already exist the Army, and how well are advertised? How user friendly are they? What does a successful training plan look like? How will cultural and linguistic competence be defined?

The underlying intent behind regional alignment is an understanding that the nature of warfare is evolving alongside the evolution of the global society and international norms of jus ad bellum and jus in bello. Regional alignment also supports a belief that building relationships and trust with regional actors will prevent conflict from erupting. When conflict does erupt, those relationships will provide access to the region, greater international legitimacy, and a coalition of partners to help bear the burden of response. These are lofty goals. If they are serious goals, then the US Army can do more to set the conditions for attaining those goals by making structural changes that empower both the regional combatant commands, and the units and soldiers supporting them.

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