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Intercultural Competency at the Geographic Combatant Command Level

By

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Major, United States Army

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

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

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Abstract

There has been a failure to incorporate available intercultural competency assets at the GCC level to leverage existing cultural expertise: Foreign Area Officers (FAOs), DoD Academic Teams and foreign Embassy Country Teams. Under the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap (dated January 2005), the Department of Defense has identified the requirement for intercultural competency to improve both coalition relations and operations within foreign countries. The Defense Foreign Language Steering Committee (DFLSC) has specifically identified foreign language speaking Department of Defense (DoD) personnel, but have not successfully improved the intercultural competencies of GCCs. The sheer number of personnel involved in contingency operations around the world that work closely with coalition forces makes it impossible to ensure intercultural competency for each individual. The solution is that key personnel, leaders and planners, can achieve a superior cultural awareness and better leverage the expert cultural assets available to incorporate those necessary skills into Operational Plans (OPLANs) that will then have a trickle effect for intercultural competency throughout a regional force.

Introduction

“Our operational environment requires an agile and dynamic force, both today and in the future. That force must be capable of operating across the full spectrum of conflict, in an increasingly multicultural environment. To provide this capability, the Army envisions an end state where Soldiers, leaders, and units have the right blend of culture and foreign language knowledge, skills and attributes.” Brigadier General Richard Longo, Director of Training for the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G3/5/7, testified before the Committee on House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations on September 10, 2008.¹

It is the growing interaction with coalition forces and foreign nationals in light of the events of 9/11 that has led to the identification of the necessity for not just an awareness of foreign culture within the military, but an organic understanding and intercultural competency. Under the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap (dated January 2005), the Department of Defense (DoD) identified the requirement for foreign language and cultural expertise within the services to improve both coalition relations and operations within foreign countries. It goes so far as to plan the gradual introduction of a foreign language ability criterion as a competitive requirement for flag officer consideration. The Defense Foreign Language Steering Committee (DFLSC) has been able to identify foreign language speaking Department of Defense (DoD) personnel, but has not successfully improved the intercultural competencies for Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs). There remains a failure to incorporate available assets at the GCC level to leverage existing cultural expertise: Foreign Area Officers (FAOs), DoD Academic Teams and U.S. Embassy Country Teams.

Geographic Combatant Commanders can better utilize the cultural expertise and assets currently available to incorporate those necessary skills and attributes into operational planning that will then highlight and improve the cultural competency of their regional forces. It is not enough to simply speak the same language, but an intercultural understanding is essential. Language is clearly needed to communicate basic ideas and has become the most popular and easily identifiable means toward gaining a cultural understanding of a foreign people, but the need for intercultural competency goes beyond simply knowing the words. “Cross-cultural competence training ‘is basically equipping

¹ Longo, Richard. *Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities in the Military*. Congressional Quarterly Congressional Testimony, September 10, 2008.

people with the skills to understand what culture is, how people use culture, how they interact with each other within their culture,’ explains Gail H. McGinn, Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Plans during an interview with the Pentagon Channel. ‘Wherever they are – deployed in the world or with host populations or with our allies – that we understand that people operate differently based upon their cultural backgrounds.’”²

The intent, within the scope of this paper, is to first identify and define the problem as a need for not just language proficiency, but intercultural competence, as future operations will continue to involve coalition partners in foreign countries. The requirement that intercultural competency (often referred to as cultural understanding) must be incorporated into GCC level planning and operations will be analyzed to take full advantage of regional cultural norms and ensure that cultural misunderstandings are avoided so as not to inhibit operational progress. Lastly, recommendations will be provided to answer the question of how to go about better incorporating intercultural competence at the GCC level of planning and operations.

Current trends emphasize cultural awareness integration within the professional military education system, especially for officers and senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Whereas this is certainly beneficial, it requires some time for maturation before results can be seen at the GCC level. The more immediate remedy with quick results is to better utilize the assets currently available: Foreign Area Officers (FAOs), DoD Academic Teams and U.S. Embassy Country Teams. Interagency assets within the Department of State, and Central Intelligence Agency could also be leveraged to improve international military relations.

This paper does not argue the value of a long-term investment emphasizing intercultural awareness integration within the professional military education system, especially for officers and senior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs). Whereas this is certainly beneficial and would have the

² Gilmore, Gerry J. *Pentagon Officials Plan Cultural Awareness Training*. American Forces Press Services. <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123163135>. Accessed 21 February 2011.

desired end state of organic intercultural competency at GCC level planning, it requires considerable time for maturation before any initial return on investment would be seen. The more immediate remedy with faster results is to better utilize the intercultural assets currently available.

The answer to remedy the intercultural competency shortages is two fold. First, the integration and reinforcement of intercultural competency training within the DoD military services Professional Military Education (PME) systems will incorporate intercultural competency in the natural professional progressive development of personnel. Second, and the emphasis for this paper, is the immediate, organic incorporation of FAOs, Attachés and/or Embassy liaisons on the senior GCC staff in a more permanent manner. Establishing senior staff positions for FAOs, Attachés and/or Embassy liaisons within the CJ2 cell, for example, provides immediate incorporation of cultural expertise to shape planning and operational guidance within the Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Environment (JIPOE) that will be further incorporated during the Joint Operations Planning Process (JOPP).

There is a problem.

“I asked my Brigade Commanders what was the number one thing they would have liked to have had more of, and they all said cultural knowledge.” Lieutenant General Peter Chiarelli, Commanding General, Multi-National Corps-Iraq, commented on the need and value of cultural competence.³

The United States has been engaged in and working with foreign countries since its inception. The DoD, more specifically, is involved with foreign countries’ military and civilian populations during operations stemming from high intensity conflict to stability operations, to include humanitarian aid and disaster response. With any international interaction, the cultural differences that guide conflict resolution and interpretation will vary for each participant. A nation’s culture is a guiding factor in its national level decision-making. Acknowledging this fact led the leaders within the DoD to make a number of assumptions in the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap: “robust foreign language and foreign area expertise are critical to sustaining coalitions, pursuing regional stability, and

³ Numrich, S. K. *Human Terrain: A Tactical Issue or a Strategic C4I Problem?* Institute for Defense Analyses. 20 May 2008. <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA502914>. Accessed 29 April 2011.

conducting multi-national missions especially in post-conflict and other than combat, security, humanitarian, nation-building, and stability operations; changes in the international security environment and the nature of threats to U.S. national security have increased the range of potential conflict zones and expanded the number of likely coalition partners; adversaries will attempt to manipulate the media and leverage sympathetic elements of the population and opposition politicians to divide international coalitions.”⁴

The fact of the matter is that visible trends lead to what has become a safe assumption; future military operations will continue to be on foreign soil and/or in foreign waters with international coalition forces. The United States military must consider the different cultural approaches and beliefs of these coalition partners, potential foreign nation adversaries and world regions. “The need for cultural competency has developed as the United States has moved away from its isolationism tendencies over the past 120 years and engaged in other countries’ affairs around the globe. The character and duration of the conflicts in which the U.S. is engaged, coupled with evolving American attitudes and views on diversity towards other peoples have helped identify a need for cross-cultural competence.”⁵

The path to improved intercultural competence does not come without challenges. The sheer volume of DoD personnel involved in contingency operations worldwide make the idea of 100% competency impractical. The primary directive from the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap expressed guidance and concern only for language skills, never delving into any further requirements for in-depth cultural competence.⁶ The Army is developing the Human Terrain System (HTS) program to better leverage cultural skills already available from within the services and American

⁴ Department of Defense. *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*. January 2005.

⁵ Lewis, Brett G. *Developing Soldier Cultural Competency*. USAWC Strategy Research Project, 15 March 2006.

⁶ Department of Defense. *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*. January 2005.

society in general.⁷ This program enables those operational units in Afghanistan and Iraq to incorporate a team of cultural experts into their planning. This would, on the surface, seem to properly address the identified shortage of cultural awareness; rather, it more definitively highlights the fact of there being a legitimate issue of a shortage of intercultural competence that demands more than just a bandage to fix.

Intercultural competence has growing relevance because of ever-expanding international military interaction. Just as joint certification has begun to blend the borders of the U.S. military sister services for improved cooperative activities, intercultural competence will help ease and eventually erase the tensions from coalition operations. The phenomenon of globalization will only continue to expand international military interaction as more countries become involved internationally, beyond just their immediate neighbors to interact within their region or across the world. History reflects that a better knowledge of other cultures will allow for improved planning. An immediately identifiable example is that a deeper understanding of Islamic and tribal culture will continue to drive improved methods of interaction within both the Iraqi and Afghan societies today. Potential developments and interaction with China or Iran in the future could be better served with improved intercultural competency.

What exactly is intercultural competence?

Intercultural competence can be defined as the ability to communicate successfully with people from different cultural backgrounds. An interculturally competent individual is able to grasp and understand the thinking, different perceptions, feelings and potential actions of people from foreign cultures. But a variety of different research approaches in the area of cultural competence has led to some confusing definitions. For the purpose of this paper, we will adhere to the Army Research

⁷ Department of the Army. *Welcome to the HTS Home Page*. www.army.mil, The Human Terrain System. <http://humanterrainsystem.army.mil/>. Accessed 19 March 2011.

Institute's approach by dividing intercultural competence into three interacting subcategories:

Regional Expertise, Language Proficiency and Cross-Cultural Competency.⁸ Understanding of each of these aspects, when dealing with a coalition partner or working within a foreign country, must be incorporated into all operational planning.

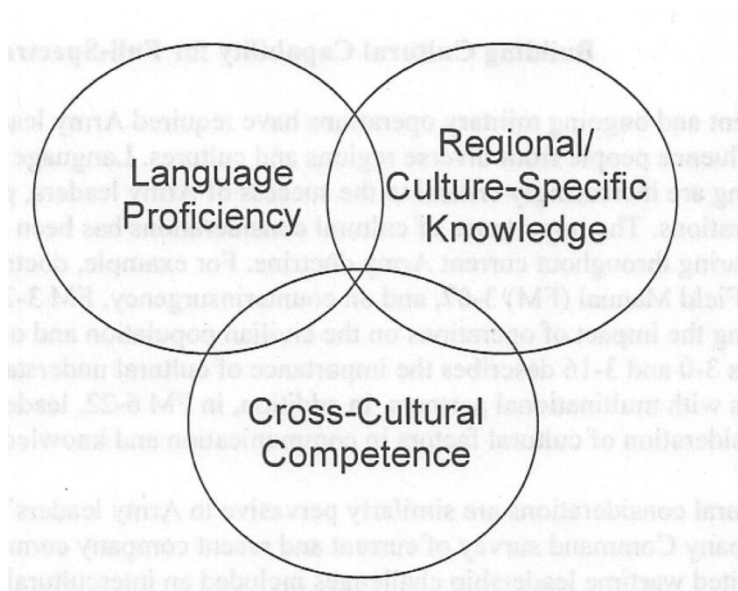


Figure I: Components of Intercultural Competency (Courtesy of Allison Abbe, *Building Capability for Full Spectrum Operations*. U.S. Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences. January 2008.)

Regional expertise may begin with simply reading about the nation state that is involved, but goes further. Residence within a foreign country that equates to immersion within that foreign culture is ideal, but understandably not always possible. A thorough understanding of the nationalism, tribal affiliations, dominant religious beliefs and practices, and significant historic events all have importance when working within an environment where foreign cultures intersect. An emphasis on growing experience through cultural interaction has a large beneficial impact on an individual's regional expertise.

⁸ Abbe, Allison. *Building Cultural Capability for Full-Spectrum Operations*. United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, January 2008.

“While language is a necessary tool for the exchange of information and ideas, it also can be a window into the culture of a foreign people.”⁹ Language proficiency becomes relevant when directly interacting with foreign personnel. Obviously, the necessity to understand one another overshadows all other cultural awareness. The ability to accurately communicate ideas and intent is the cornerstone of interaction; a common language seems the best method toward that understanding.

“Cross-cultural competence (occasionally shortened to 3C) is the knowledge, skills, and motivation that enables an individual to adapt effectively in multi-cultural environments: an individual capability that contributes to intercultural effectiveness regardless of the particular cultures intersecting.”¹⁰ Of the three interacting subcategories, the cross-cultural competence attributes are the most important. Consisting of general cultural knowledge (awareness), motivation (attitudes, and empathy), and skills (interpersonal skills and flexibility), cross-cultural competence reflects the variables that contribute to effective intercultural interaction,¹¹ not just the ability to communicate or a knowledge of the region. 3C is the more general knowledge of how culture impacts relations. It is the awareness and incorporation of cultural attitudes. Evidence from studies suggests that the core attributes of 3C will enable an individual to adapt well and relatively quickly to any culture.¹² 3C is the foundation to grasp cultural impact while regional expertise and language proficiency provide specific country related skills.

With cultural knowledge comes cultural awareness: the understanding that culture shapes the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a society, and that an individual’s own beliefs, values and behaviors will tend to reflect his/her own cultural background. Motivation incorporates an open mindedness (non-ethnocentrism), and the ability to appreciate someone else’s perspective (empathy). Some unique

⁹ Kruzel, John J. Mullen: *U.S. Military Benefits From Language Training*.

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=55448>. Accessed 22 February 2011.

¹⁰ Abbe, Allison; Gulick, Lisa M. V., and Herman, Jeffrey L. *Cross-Cultural Competence in Army Leaders: A Conceptual and Empirical Foundation*. United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, October 2007.

¹¹ *ibid*.

¹² Hammer, M. R. *Behavioral Dimensions of Intercultural Effectiveness: A Replication and Extension*. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 11, 1987. Pages 65-88.

skills, when fostered, can contribute to the improvement of 3C: the ability to create relationships (interpersonal skills) and to change regular behavior in response to certain cultural cues (flexibility).

“3C provides a culture-general capability, while regional expertise and language proficiency provide culture-specific capability.”¹³ Ideally the services would develop individuals with regional specific intercultural competence, whether it be through formal training, exchange programs, repeated deployments or forward assignments to the region, or a combination of all these. This may very well be the underlying goal to achieve some kind of organic intercultural competence within GCC headquarters, but the notion that an individual possessing the critical 3C attributes is able to better adapt and interact with coalition forces or in a forward deployed foreign environment puts less emphasis on regional expertise and language proficiency and a priority on culture-general capabilities. Skills like cultural awareness, cultural open-mindedness, and cultural empathy are coalition operational enablers.

An Historical and Growing Requirement

The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 brought about the integration or ‘jointness’ of the military services. This was the result of witnessed service interoperability problems and inter-service rivalry that became most apparent within the DoD during the Vietnam War. The services could not communicate and cooperate well. The resulting joint education requirement contributes to the interservice cultural competency of the DoD.

Just as joint certification has blended the borders of the U.S. military sister services for improved cooperative activities, the incorporation of intercultural competence throughout the services’ PME and especially at the GCC level of planning and operations will first ease and gradually erase unnecessary tension between coalition partners. Many foreign countries currently exchange personnel

¹³ Abbe, Allison; Gulick, Lisa M. V., and Herman, Jeffrey L. *Cross-Cultural Competence in Army Leaders: A Conceptual and Empirical Foundation*. United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, October 2007.

to attend a variety of U.S. military schools, in essence doing the exact same 3C building in reverse, allowing for the ease of operational tensions with their interaction with U.S. personnel.

“Lengthy deployments to areas with other cultures are not new. Since the end of World War II, the United States military has experienced many long lasting operations on foreign soil. Attempts are made to instill in deployed forces an awareness of the societal and cultural norms of the regions in which they operate. While these programs have proven useful, they fall short of generating the tactile understanding necessary for today’s complex settings, especially when values and norms are so divergent that they clash.”¹⁴ Continued efforts against extremist terrorist organizations in the foreseeable future imply a requirement for foreign and coalition interaction. Relations with fragile states (Somalia, Burma, Sudan, etc.) that provide potential safe-haven training grounds also demand implicit foreign and coalition interaction. Additionally, historic trends reflect the necessity to prepare for continued operations overseas. Conflicts and stability operations from World War II to the present (Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Bosnia, Kosovo, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn) have all required intercultural competence, and the lack thereof in cases only serves to further emphasize the need.

In Iraq and Afghanistan alone, interaction that may have been thought the expertise of Special Forces has become tasks for the conventional forces. Specifically the training of the police and military defense forces is a large cog in the reconstruction machine for the infrastructure in both countries. Interviewees in the study conducted by Barak Salmoni (et al.) in his article, *Growing Strategic Leaders for Future Conflict*, reiterated the need for foreign cultural exposure and competency. “Individuals should seek international exposure at various points during their career, whether with NATO partners, through foreign education, hosting of international officers at school, or

¹⁴ McFarland, Maxie. *Military Cultural Education: Necessary Part of Soldier-Development Programs*. http://www.redorbit.com/news/technology/232415/military_cultural_education_necessary_part_of_soldierdevelopment_programs/index.html. Accessed 21 February 2011.

in more autonomous ‘FAO-like’ contexts. These experiences teach officers how to interact with other cultures, cultural patience, humility, and curiosity.”¹⁵

Any future conventional warfare will involve a foreign nation with its own unique cultural features. Concerns for growing nations with aggressive military posture (Iran, China, and North Korea for example) demand planning for potential interaction and/or conflict. Without the intercultural competency available to participate in planning and war-gaming, our vision of what courses of action (COAs) they may take would be lacking.

Planning for major operations and campaigns must incorporate the larger cultural aspects of not just the adversary in question, but also the trends of their allies and potential coalition partners. There are a number of variables that researchers have identified to capture the differences between cultures. “These variables are often referred to as dimensions of cultural variability.”¹⁶ Planners must be aware of these tendencies and how they impact interaction and likely decisions within a culture. There are primarily five variables: individualism versus collectivism, direct verbal communication versus physical and unspoken cue communication, hierarchy of respect based on experience (respect for elders) versus expertise and accomplishment (egalitarian), tolerance of ambiguity (when dealing with members of a different group), and masculinity versus femininity.¹⁷ These variables tend to be seen on a scale with general cultures characteristically sitting closer to one side.

Individualistic cultures value self-reliance and initiative. Competition is generally accepted and expected. Collectivistic cultures tend to favor contributions to the larger group over personal accomplishment. “Individualistic groups value applying the same standard to all people, whereas collectivistic groups have different individual standards based on their group membership.”¹⁸ An obvious example is the collective thinking of Soldiers for other Soldiers, or parents for children as

¹⁵ Salmoni, Barak A.; Hart, Jessica, McPherson, Renny, and Winn, Aidan Kirby. *Growing Strategic Leaders for Future Conflict*. Parameters, Spring 2010.

¹⁶ Gudykunst, William B. *Bridging Differences: Effective Inter-group Communication*. Newbury Park: Sage Publication, 1991.

¹⁷ Lewis, Brett G. *Developing Soldier Cultural Competency*. USAWC Strategy Research Project, 15 March 2006.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

opposed to the individualistic thinking of real estate agents or stock investors. A significant historic example of collectivistic culture is the Japanese. During World War II, their emphasis was on the empire. This, coupled with their warrior ethos (bushido), saw the development of kamikaze pilots that sacrificed themselves in a final effort to contribute to victory for the empire.

The manner in which information is distributed or communicated will have an impact on how a person receives it. Some cultures favor less direct communication mixed with physical unspoken cues over direct verbal communication, seeing the more direct approach as abrupt and rude. The methods of communication play a significant role for information operations. How to best distribute information will impact the rate of successful messages. It is also important to understand unspoken body language and how it can impact message reception. For example, many cultures consider avoiding eye contact (looking at the ground when talking) a sign of respect. Americans tend to associate such body language as a display of deception, shame or boredom. World War II Pacific Theater American prisoners of war (POWs) were brutalized for looking their Japanese captors in the eye, relating back to body language and its association to communication. The Japanese considered it disrespectful to be looked in the eye by a POW while the Americans were accustomed to the opposite.

Understanding if the cultural hierarchy of respect is based on experience (respect for elders) versus expertise and accomplishment (egalitarian) will provide signs to local leadership and key personnel to target for stability or counter-terrorism operations. “Understanding and respecting the importance of the village elder in countries such as Afghanistan has helped stability operations tremendously.”¹⁹

Identifying with an organization or cultural hierarchy will many times also allow planners to determine a society’s level of tolerance toward ambiguity (when dealing with members of a different group). Achieving acceptance into certain groups will ease tensions. In an experience based

¹⁹ McFarland, Maxie. *Military Cultural Education: Necessary Part of Soldier-Development Programs*. http://www.redorbit.com/news/technology/232415/military_cultural_education_necessary_part_of_soldierdevelopment_programs/index.html. Accessed 21 February 2011.

leadership structure where elders are highly respected, better results may be obtained by ensuring senior military personnel are available for any discussions because younger, junior personnel are less likely to be accepted.

Different treatment based on expected gender roles can be a very sensitive point of interaction between two different cultures. The American pursuit of equality for all is not a globally accepted goal. “In the Muslim countries of Iraq and Afghanistan, female service members now play a key role in dealing with women.”²⁰ The U.S. Army Special Operations Command has created Cultural Support Teams (CST) and the U.S. Marine Corps has created Female Engagement Teams (FET) as an avenue to integrate females into infantry units in order to interact with the local female population where males, because of cultural constraints, cannot.

Knowing and incorporating these five general cultural tendencies will enlighten planners, and the need for cultural competency is not going to go away. Continued interaction with allies from NATO alone demands cultural understanding. Unfortunately, the current corrective emphasis has mistakenly been placed solely on the individual’s PME and little attention has been given to improved utilization of the assets currently available.

Better Utilize the Assets Available

“As we engage in the world today, much like we have the past couple of centuries, our capacity to identify the challenges in each individual culture, to be able to interact within, and then embrace the challenges of the day to create an effect requires us to understand the culture of both the target country and our own culture so that we can better be able to accomplish what we need.” Major General Robert R. Allardice, Director of Strategy, Plans and Policy for U.S. CENTCOM, spoke at the 2009 Defense EO Management Institute Symposium.²¹

The most readily available asset to assist with the intercultural competency required for overseas contingency operations is apparent within the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Program (also called Air Force Regional Affairs Strategists [RAS], Political-military Affairs Strategist [PAS], and International Affairs Specialist [IAS]). FAOs are trained in a foreign language, political-military

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Jagirdar, Sarabjit. *Total Force Cross-Cultural Competence Examined at Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute Symposium*. U.S. Federal News, 14 July 2009.

affairs, and familiarized “with the political, cultural, sociological, economic, and geographic factors of the countries and regions in which they are stationed.”²² They will earn graduate level degrees, gain fluent proficiency in a foreign language and conduct In-Country Training (ICT) prior to their assignment on “staffs of Geographic Combatant Commands, Defense Agencies, and DoD military-diplomatic offices (Defense Attachés) at U.S. Embassies.”²³ Currently, the focus of an FAO’s mission tends to be working in or as a liaison for the U.S. Embassy of their particular country or region (“as Attachés in U.S. Embassies or as advisors to foreign militaries”²⁴).

In fact, that U.S. Embassy country team is another available asset for intercultural competency within their region. The U.S. Ambassador, or Chief of Mission, is the lead on the country team. There is an inherent connection between the GCC and U.S. Embassy because the goals of both organizations stem from the same National Security Strategy. A disconnect that leads to poor utilization or sharing of intercultural competency assets is the focus of both organizations. The U.S. Embassy, with the FAO Defense Attaché, is focused on the coordinated efforts of government agencies toward a diplomatic end. Although the U.S. Embassy traditionally provides political and national security advisors to the GCC, personnel are not incorporated into military operational planning. Advisors tend to be more sources of information to be referred to as needed, but not necessarily active participants in the JIPOE. Up until recently, the FAO as Defense Attaché, worked for the U.S. Ambassador as a representative for the DoD on the country team. The focus is not to provide any cultural guidance toward the GCC operational planning process but to act as the lynch pin between the Embassy and GCC operations to ensure cohesive effort and complimentary results. The effort for the FAO was directed toward the U.S. Embassy’s efforts, not the GCC.

²² Department of the Army. *FAO Program*. FAO Proponent Office. <http://www.fao.army.mil/proponent.asp>. Accessed 1 April 2011.

²³ Department of the Navy. *Foreign Area Officer Community*. Navy Personnel Command. http://www.npc.navy.mil/Officer/Intelligence_Information/ForeignArea/ (Page updated 23 November 2010). Accessed 1 April 2011.

²⁴ Mouton, Daniel E. *The Army’s Foreign Area Officer Program: To Wither or to Improve?* Army Magazine, March 2011.

LTC Daniel Mouton goes one step further in his concern for the utilization of FAOs: “Many units receive FAOs whose skills are imperfectly relevant to the deployment, such as the instances of non-Arabic speaking FAOs serving in Iraq on military transition teams. A well rounded officer with the appropriate language and cultural skills would serve as an essential enabler in a deployed headquarters or on a transition team.”²⁵ So not only are the culturally savvy assets of the FAO being utilized outside of the essential planning group, but there remains a challenge to attain the properly regionally oriented personnel.

A third potential interculturally competent asset available to the GCC can be called the DoD academic team. It is not unheard of for instructors from the various service war colleges or the Defense Language Institute to deploy for periods of time to assist with analysis, research, instruction or evaluation and suggestions for continued advancement of efforts. But again, the specific middle-eastern culturally competent personnel are limited and there is no recurring relationship. Just as there are English teachers deploying in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) through the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA)²⁶, so too there should be programs established to incorporate anthropologists and sociologists into operation planning positions.

Answers Abound

Some would argue that the DoD has already created a program that incorporates interculturally competent personnel into the GCC staff, that being the Human Terrain System (HTS) Project. “The HTS Project is an Army led initiative to recruit, deploy and integrate small (five member) military and civilian personnel teams with regional studies and social science backgrounds into the command staffs of Brigade Combat Team (BCT), Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), corps and theater levels.”²⁷ Their mission is to improve the command’s overall understanding of the local populace and

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Wilson, Elaine. *DOD Teachers Take on Mission in Afghanistan*. U.S. Department of Defense News, American Forces Press Service, 13 January 2011. <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=62433>. Accessed on 2 April 2011.

²⁷ Department of the Army. *Welcome to the HTS Home Page*. www.army.mil, The Human Terrain System. <http://humanterrainsystem.army.mil/>. Accessed 19 March 2011.

incorporate cultural research and analysis in the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP). This project has met with a great deal of positive support from key military leaders, as is evidenced by comments available on the HTS website:

“Detailed knowledge of host populations is critical in areas where U.S. Forces are being increased to conduct counterinsurgency and stability operations in Iraq. U.S. Forces continue to operate in Iraq without real-time, detailed knowledge of the drivers of behavior within the host populations. This greatly limits Commanders’ situational awareness and creates greater risks for forces. This human terrain knowledge deficiency exists at all command echelons.” Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, Commanding General, Multi-National Corps-Iraq, commented on the value of the HTS Project within Iraq.²⁸

This project, however, more resembles a traditional DoD knee-jerk reaction in effort to remedy an ongoing problem as quickly as possible. The HTS Project focuses on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, obviously because that is where the immediate need lies. Unfortunately, there are no Human Terrain Teams (HTT) present in any other GCC area. This project is an incomplete response to the overall lack of intercultural competency within OIF (and follow-on OND) and OEF, but has not been expanded or positioned to allow for any cultural analysis incorporation in operational planning prior to significant lethal interaction.

John Stanton, a Virginia based writer that specializes in national security topics, is critical of the HTS program, citing that it is underdeveloped, and poorly integrated. He expresses a concern for the safety and welfare of HTTs. His research reflects ill prepared social scientists functioning independently of their supported units. “One source indicated that a social scientist stationed with the US Marines in Al Anbar is ‘chasing IED’s’ while another went out on a shopping adventure days after arriving in-theater. The social scientist, who holds a graduate degree in communications, boasted in a blog about an escape from danger in Iraq by speeding recklessly through the streets of Baghdad with loud music blasting from the car. Another commented that ‘we are all islands of autonomy ... doing

²⁸ *ibid.*

what we want.”²⁹ It would seem that further, and in-depth coordination must be done to fully incorporate intercultural competency.

It's just too large a dilemma to fully overcome.

Naysayers have gone so far as to express the belief that the excessive number of personnel involved with operations in foreign countries makes it impossible to provide ample training for everyone. The reality that a GCC Area of Operations (AO) encompasses multiple, potentially dozens of countries brings the question of how to prioritize those countries in regard to cultural awareness. Are key staff personnel to learn every language for the entire AO? Due to the simple magnitude of the task, it cannot be resourced.

The concepts of intercultural competency (regional expertise, language proficiency and 3C), although required for each individual, do not require all personnel to be experts or fully proficient. It is true that a general regional awareness, some language skills, and the awareness of cultural attitudes would benefit each person in the AO, but only key personnel in key billets require the regional expertise, language proficiency and cross-cultural competency for the entire GCC planning cell to benefit. That limited number of personnel can be trained either as FAOs (better utilized) or as secondary skills for specifically designated individuals. Until that training can be fully incorporated, and to augment it, the use of academic experts and HTTs has been shown to produce positive results, as long as they are integrated properly.

Additionally, there is debate over the guidance from the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap. Some believe that it is specific in regards to language alone, citing that there is no real requirement for intercultural competence. We have relied on contracted translators in the past to fill the void in language proficiency and cultural awareness and have done remarkably well. They may have done so well, in fact, that a requirement for language proficiency is not a priority. This line of

²⁹ Stanton, John. *US Army's Human Terrain System: Madness, Mayhem and Troughs of Cash*. <http://cryptome.info/0001/hts-madness.htm>. Dated 06 October 2008. Accessed on 2 April 2011.

thinking reflects the reasoning behind the lack of resourcing. “Despite some progress, the overall disconnect between the DoD’s goal and the services’ approach ‘calls into question whether the two even agree on what they are trying to accomplish,’ argues the House Armed Services oversight and investigations subcommittee. It urges DoD to work more closely with the services to achieve a common understanding of the language and cultural knowledge requirements for today’s force.”³⁰

That the House Armed Services oversight and investigations subcommittee is inquiring into the progress of the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap initiatives shows the appreciated value of language proficiency. “Today’s military establishment must be trained and ready to engage the world with an appreciation of diverse cultures and speak directly with the local populations.”³¹ But the subcommittee went further to address the value of intercultural competency, “most notably, DoD must clarify its policy of characterizing foreign language, regional expertise and cultural awareness as critical or core competencies essential to department missions. Pentagon officials should develop a comprehensive foreign language, cultural awareness and regional expertise strategy that includes prioritizing efforts and resources.”³² If the House Armed Services Committee is emphasizing the value of organic intercultural competency, then continuing to rely on contracted translators will not suffice.

An organic answer exists within the DoD. Efforts are already underway to improve the intercultural competency within the GCC staff. Because the development of leadership takes time and experience, especially with regards to intercultural competency, the immediate focus cannot be solely on PME and development. The tools (FAOs, U.S. Embassy Team Liaisons, Academic Teams and HTTs) already exist within the DoD to significantly improve intercultural competency. They must simply be used better to ensure the most advantageous results.

Recommendations for the Way Ahead

³⁰ Sheikh, Fawzia. *Report: Pentagon, Services Differ on Linguistic, Cultural Skills*. Inside the Pentagon, Volume 24, Number 48, 27 November 2008.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

“Cultural understanding is extremely important to our ability to affect positive outcomes. As we pursue our national interest in an interconnected, globalized world, we must be cognizant not only of socio-economic and political institutions; we must genuinely and increasingly appreciate linguistic, regional, and cultural constraints.” General Norton Schwartz, Air Force Chief of Staff, remarked at a January 2011 Department of Defense briefing.³³

The remedy for the lack of intercultural competency is two fold. The first is the integration and reinforcement of intercultural competency training. A clear and publicized effort is already underway to improve the intercultural training for leaders across the services. For these improving efforts to come to fruition, the focus must not simply be language proficiency, but intercultural competency. Cultural expertise requires a significant amount of invested time, but the return on investment is clear when operations run free of cultural clashes.

Cultural awareness training must be incorporated into the PME system. “The officer corps should begin training while in pre-commissioning programs. Courses in regional studies and language training would be an excellent beginning, potentially expanding into travel and study abroad opportunities in specified foreign countries. Programs of this nature already exist within the Foreign Military Studies Office at West Point and the country studies program at the Army War College and could be used as models or expanded to incorporate more than just the resident students.”³⁴ Intercultural competency must be incentivized or mandated to ensure its attainment and continued pursuit. Bonus pay for language skills is currently available, but mandatory proficiency for promotion consideration is another potential option.

The second means to improve intercultural competency within the DoD is the better utilization of the assets currently available. Establishing senior staff positions for FAOs, and/or U.S. Embassy liaisons within the GCC staff, potentially the CJ2 cell, provides the immediate incorporation of cultural expertise to shape planning and the JIPOE. Region specific deployment opportunities for FAOs must

³³ Schwartz, Norton. *Prepared Remarks of Air Force Chief of Staff, General Norton Schwartz at the Language and Culture Summit: Subject: “Strengthening Air Force Language Skills and Cultural Competencies”*. Federal News Service, Department of Defense Briefing, 26 January 2011.

³⁴ McFarland, Maxie. *Military Cultural Education: Necessary Part of Soldier-Development Programs*. http://www.redorbit.com/news/technology/232415/military_cultural_education_necessary_part_of_soldierdevelopment_programs/index.html. Accessed 21 February 2011.

be identified and expanded at the GCC level. Not only should FAOs function as liaisons for the U.S. Embassy of their particular country or region, but within the primary staff of the GCC. Operational level commanders must stay cognizant and demand the appropriate regional and country specialty for their staff personnel. U.S. Embassy country team personnel must also be made available to provide intercultural insight for operational planners. All too often their focus is diplomatic or political goals with no thought for the potential assistance they could provide the GCC military elements.

Academic teams have been successful with regards to their specific mission set. They respond to specific requests for assistance. Formally documenting their relationships to develop and remain habitual is essential for long-term benefits. Pairing unique regional expertise with the proper GCC region seems self-evident but when ensured, it will provide full spectrum, continued collaboration with known entities. Collaboration with specific schools in regional development efforts can go a long way.

HTTs are an excellent source of intercultural competency, but they must be fully integrated within their supported unit headquarters. Permanent, habitual working relationships should be developed to incorporate these teams at the GCC level. The Human Terrain System can't only be for the CENTCOM region, but must expand to have representation and assets in every GCC region. The planning that requires these assets doesn't just happen during engagements, but prior to and following as well. A longstanding relationship will ensure that cultural knowledge is always available.

The DoD has come a long way in incorporating intercultural competency into the GCCs. There is no quick fix for developing cultural awareness in future leaders, but the seeds are planted to allow for continued improvement. Emphasis must be maintained to ensure that cultural awareness grows. Assets like FAOs, U.S. Embassy country teams, Academic Teams, and HTTs have already been developed and can be more readily accessed, but they must be better integrated and incorporated into habitual relationships to best utilize their intercultural competencies. The U.S. will continue to interact abroad, and intercultural competency will only become more critical with each foreign operation.

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