

MNE-6, OBJ 4.3 “CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS”



**GUIDELINES
FOR COMMANDERS AND STAFFS:**

**HOW TO ENGAGE WITH
LOCAL SOCIETIES DURING
MILITARY OPERATIONS**

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PREFACE

The current guidelines are the result of the research performed under the umbrella of the MNE-6 objective 4.3 “Cross-Cultural Awareness”. Those works has been focused on exploring the best practices when it comes to engage with local authorities and ordinary people in order to ease the activities conducted by the military Staff most populace-oriented branches (PSYOPS, CIMIC, INFO OPS..) to better achieve the mission success.

Therefore, this guidebook aims at helping the decision-makers and militaries to take into considerations the key cultural features and elements when interacting with different cultures during the military tasks so as to not trigger undesired effects or produced collateral damages that can seriously hinder the overall pursued end-state..

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HOW TO ENGAGE WITH LOCAL SOCIETIES DURING MILITARY OPERATIONS

1. WHAT AND WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide's intent is to take into consideration the socio-cultural granularity when conducting out-of-the-area operations at tactical level, above all when it comes to interact with the local populace, either key leaders or ordinary people. The purpose is to prevent the military forces' actions from producing undesired effects on the population which may be deemed as detrimental on the grounds of culture. The present guide provides a number of basic criteria relating to cultural issues which may be particularly sensitive (don't touch issues) and, consequently, require specific information and need to be approached through a question-answer procedure before the decision making process is complete.

The guide is intended for use by decision makers at the tactical level. However, it should be borne in mind that the resulting decisions must comply with the strategic policy which frames the overall effort aimed at achieving the objectives pursued.

2. WHAT'S CULTURE?

It is not easy to define culture precisely. However, in the realm of this guide, culture refers to all the elements (features, traits, hallmarks, etc.) a given society considers the basis of their collective identity. Culture involves a great variety of fields: language, historic narratives, social and family structures, the role of individuals within social groups, ways of trade, food habits, etc. In broad terms, culture determines the routine behaviours of its members. Within a theatre of operations, conflicts may arise due to cultural differences between the local culture and the cultural systems of the participants, whether military or not, in the mission.

3. WHY SHOULD THE LOCAL CULTURE BE CONSIDERED IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS?

The main reason is to achieve mission success. Additionally, there are also crucial secondary reasons: building trust with the local population so that our actions can be effective; overtly showing respect for local groups and their members; avoiding unsought effects which may have a negative impact upon the objectives or personnel participating in the operation.

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4. HOW CAN LOCAL CULTURE BE CONSIDERED IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS?

We could state that the application of Cross-cultural Awareness is the means.

5. WHAT'S CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS?

Cross-cultural Awareness is a practical tool which helps consider culture as a key element within the decision making process in order to make effective decisions and to prevent or minimize damages to the personnel and to the goals of the mission.

Cross-cultural Awareness can be acquired through three different ways:

1. Predeployment training, which will provide specific knowledge about the country or region where forces and other interagency actors will deploy;
2. The experience gained by previous contingents (be it the case) and personal experience from other missions;
3. Empathy skills of the personnel deployed, i.e., their ability to discern important elements from accessory ones in the behaviours exhibited by the local population. This requires a type of learning which can only be gained during the unfolding of the mission; empathy is a personal ability which must be fostered and implies the development of sensitiveness towards the effects decisions may have upon the local population.

6. ARE ALL CULTURAL ELEMENTS RELEVANT FOR THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS?

Definitely not. Culture is a complex system by which social systems cohere and are affected. However, the core cultural idiosyncrasies do not have an impact upon every individual action but there is rather a degree of flexibility.

Some cultural facts as it is the case of religions, which are a system themselves, are linked to individual decisions, even indirectly, since they may be a source of ethical values for society. Nonetheless, every individual action is not religious in character even though it may seem as such when it is exhibited. This fact may be due to the limitations of social language. A clear example is that of the relationship between Islam and the Arabic language: some daily religious expressions become of common use after having been deprived of its religious value. Their use does not necessarily mean that the individual is a practicing Muslim or religious. A positive assessment of religions along with avoiding linking religious feelings with a lack of commitment to build a society (fatalism) may be valuable starting points.

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Some customs may have also been imbued with cultural prestige: social protocol, polite expressions, eating habits, costumes, etc. However, all of them can be reconsidered without altering the social essence of the group.

It is frequently difficult to distinguish between the essence and what is important; but their boundaries may be relaxed. In such cases, it is necessary to have the appropriate counselling and bear in mind that what really matters is to achieve mission success.

7. WHY IS CULTURE IMPORTANT FOR US AND FOR MISSION SUCCESS?

It is impossible to carry out the goals of the mission if the local population does not collaborate and comply with your efforts. If whatever element disrupts the relationship between the local population and the personnel deployed, the achievement of the end state will be severely hampered. The progress made can even be rolled back and the objectives may become unattainable.

It is the decision makers' responsibility to avoid that the cultural differences between the personnel deployed and the local population become the core of conflict. Similarly, decision makers should make their personnel aware of the fact that not respecting the essential cultural elements of a society may jeopardize their lives and the whole effort. Disrespectful actions against a culture may contribute to escalate the conflict and make the personnel become targets in the conflict.

8. WHERE CAN THE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE LOCAL CULTURE BE APPLIED TO?

It can be applied to all the activities involved in the planning and conduct of military operations. It is particularly valuable when it comes to activities such as the ones carried out in the area of Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) or Key Leader Engagement (KLE) where the interactions with the local population are paramount and sensitive issues; and empathy is a crucial tool for success. However, as already mentioned culture is complex and affects all the social areas. Therefore, when planning any military activity or operation (PSYOPS, INFOOPS, etc.) it is necessary to take into consideration the essential elements of the culture in question. It is even important to be able to foresee second and third order effects, which requires having appropriate counselling. If the local population misperceives the actions carried out by the personnel, locals may set out to undermine all our efforts.

MNE-6, OBJ 4.3 “CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS”**9. WHAT ARE THE RESOURCES AND TOOLS AT MY DISPOSAL TO INTEGRATE CULTURE INTO THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS?**

The main tool, as already said, is Cross-cultural Awareness along with all its components: training and education; personal and collective experience; and empathy abilities. In order to have a more profound cultural knowledge, i.e., cultural competence, the assistance of cultural experts (cultural SMEs) may be sought (S. Guidelines for Commanders and Staffs: Operationalization of Culture into Military Operations).

All in all, the most important fact is that culture should have been considered essential in the decision cycle and should have been integrated accordingly. Otherwise, the effects produced by the actions may set at risk the achievement of the end state. A decision which may be viewed as wrong by the local population can do away with all the previous good work and break the existing bonds. Consequently, one of the main tools is using common sense in order to prevent undesired effects since the objectives pursued will be at the core of any decision.

10. HOW CAN THE PERSONNEL BE TRAINED FOR OPERATIONS?

Training should be a career long process and stems from a basic premise: all the personnel should be well aware of themselves and of their initial role in the theatre of operations. Self awareness is fundamental in order not to lose sight of our objectives. Secondly, it is capital the personnel be able to recognize the other —the local population— as a member of a genuine culture, which may include bizarre elements to our eyes such as discrimination or social differences among others. By no means should the local population be considered an object. The local population is comprised of individuals who have objectives, expectations and ambitions for the future according to local models, like our personnel. When that is acknowledged it is easier to establish relationships with the local population.

Therefore, the training should rest upon three basic premises:

1. All individuals taking part in the mission are essential for achieving mission success since their actions are meaningful and have consequences.
2. The local population is composed of individuals with genuine values which guide their behaviours in accordance with a cultural system.
3. Communication is only possible if parties, the local population and the personnel deployed, respect each other.

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Under those circumstances the transfer of knowledge may be effective. The components of Cross-cultural Awareness will be the means employed to carry out such transfer of knowledge: education and predeployment training, shared experiences (individual and collective), and the fostering of empathy. Furthermore, cultural SMEs should be in place to advise and help integrate culture in order to have a higher cultural competence. They may either provide general guidelines at the disposal of the personnel who may require them to carry out their duties, or be directly involved in the decision making process at the tactical level.

The main goal of the training is to help the personnel adapt to the environment in a seamless fashion, and to make them be aware of the human terrain.

11. WHICH ARE THE MOST SENSITIVE CULTURAL ISSUES IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS WHEN CULTURE IS CONSIDERED CAPITAL?

Basically, all of them are important. Nonetheless, as aforementioned, not all the cultural elements are absolute and insurmountable obstacles; there is a degree of flexibility which makes holding dialogue possible. In spite of that fact, there are cultural issues which due to their cohesive character have a lesser degree of flexibility. The decisions affecting those fields should be conveniently pondered since if conflict arises out of the intended actions severe problems will ensue. In such cases it is necessary to receive appropriate advice before making the decision.

The inflexible or quasi-inflexible cultural issues which may be deemed as conflictive in the theatre of operations at the tactical level are the following:

1. Corruption: Power relationships along with the application of law within the local society are considered to be important, i.e., what is permitted and non permitted. It refers to “political and social practices which comply with a local protection and clientelism model, which may seem illegal to the eyes of an observer but approved of by the ethnic group in question”.
2. Gender: It is important to respect the men and women’s position in the social and family structures, their access to education, social roles and their capacity of decision.
3. Legitimacy: Recognizing the valid interlocutors is not always an easy task. The main reason is that a rational organization articulated in the form of laws does not necessarily underlie the social structure of authority. There exist non-rational norms and rules which must be known in order to be able to identify the legitimate actors to hold dialogue.
4. Discourse: The goals of the mission, which are based upon a rational thinking style, and the local culture, which generates mythical explanations for people’s behaviours, attitudes and actions, may come

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into conflict. In fact, the local population may resort to mythical narratives to achieve particular and rational objectives by capitalizing on the personnel's lack of knowledge about their cultural system. It must always be borne in mind that the objectives of the mission are intended to prevent conflicts.

5. Honour: This is one of the most important issues. The main reason is that if a key member's honour is undermined, whether on purpose or not, it will trigger a social reaction which may neutralize all the previous good actions and hamper the achievement of mission success. Generally, honour rests upon two pillars: tradition and customs, and confidence —be it understood as propinquity and assurance regarding the actions from the corresponding actor—.
6. Ideology: It is an important issue in modern societies. However, in less developed or traditional societies ideology may just be an adaptation of discourse. This means that traditional societies can learn and adapt themselves to the International Society's rational discourse by resorting to ideological argumentations to achieve their objectives.

The first five conflicting cultural factors can be summarized in the table below.

1. In the left column, a broad definition of the cultural factor is given.
2. In the centre column, the most outstanding elements of the factor are described. These elements may become conflicting if the local culture is not properly understood or if the local society ascribes a different meaning to them.
3. On the right column, some issues related to the cultural factor are presented. They may serve as indications that we are facing a “don't touch issue”.

DON'T TOUCH ISSUES	MAIN ELEMENTS	RELATED TO
Corruption Corrupt: from Latin <i>corrumpere</i> 'mar, bribe, destroy' 1. willing to act dishonestly in return for money or personal gain.	Power/authority	Networks of solidarity/Networks of selfishness Family/Tribe/Clan Gifts/Tithe (assistance into the kin group) Transactional costs/Benefits Confidence Loyalty
	Law	Legal/Illegal Individual good/Collective good Private good/Public good

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<i>Compact Oxford Dictionary</i>		Transactional costs/Benefits State/Insurgency Social legitimacy on Public goods
Gender From old French <i>gendre</i>, from Latin genus ‘birth, family, nation’. 2 the state of being male or female (with reference to social or cultural differences). USAGE The words gender and sex both have the sense ‘the state of being male or female’, but they are typically used in slightly different ways: sex tends to refer to biological differences, while gender tends to refer to cultural or social ones. <i>Compact Oxford Dictionary</i>	Marriage position	Marriage (single/divorced/married/widow) Family Religion/Tradition Social control Honour Sexuality/Reproduction Values/Norms Role
	Educations/ Socioeconomic position	Age Social change Poverty
Legitimacy Legitimate from Latin legitimare ‘make legal’. 1 conforming to the law or to rules. Compact Oxford Dictionary	Tradition/ Charisma	Age Recognition/Prestige Networks/Family Honour Confidence Power/Authority/Leadership
	Law/ Rationality	Values/Norms/Law Legal/Illegal Corruption Symbols Social services Sense of belonging Professionalism Public goods/Private goods

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Discourse from Latin <i>discursus</i> ‘running to and fro’, from <i>discurrere</i> ‘run away’. 1 written or spoken communication or debate. <i>Compact Oxford Dictionary</i>	Rational Narrative	Power Law/Norms Transactional costs/Benefits Welfare Needs Hierarchy Credibility Solidarity Motivations Loyalty Employment/Development Education (...) Modernization
	Mythical Narrative	Authority Fatalism/Tradition/Religion Symbols Honour Respect/Recognition Sense of belonging Leadership Networks (...) Traditionalism
Honour from Latin <i>honor</i>. 1 high respect. 2 pride and pleasure from being shown respect. 3 a clear sense of what is morally right. 4 a person or thing that brings credit. 5 a thing conferred as a distinction. <i>Compact Oxford Dictionary</i>	Tradition	Religion/Tradition Family/Tribe/Clan Socioeconomic position Education Marriage Respect/Recognition Norms/Values Behaviour Age/Gender
	Confidence	Loyalty Solidarity Sincerity Networks

The sixth factor, ideology, will depend on the scenario and will be determined by the conflicting ideologies. Collecting information about the conflicting ideologies is relatively easy with due training. However, it is more difficult to know how ideologies impact on the field. It will also be necessary to check whether they

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affect the discourse or not, and if they are used as an instrument to defend from or oppose to different communities or ethnic groups –invaders and invaded–... Therefore, we will have to proceed case by case.

Generally, when dealing with issues such as the above ones the instruction is straightforward “ask before making a decision, check before acting”.

12. HOW CAN WE PREVENT CONFLICTS ARISING FROM THE UNAVOIDABLE ACTIONS NECESSARY TO ACCOMPLISH THE MISSION?

Some effects are foreseeable and are not due to neglecting culture during the decision making process. Therefore, we must distinguish between the effects which derive from the conflict's dynamics and those which stem from the actions carried out by the personnel. To do so, it will be necessary to have specialist counseling.

13. IS LANGUAGE A CONFLICTING ISSUE?

Language is a difficulty when it is not the one used by the contingent's personnel. In such cases, interpreters, who should be able to account for the cultural differences, are needed. There are two types of interpreters: local and foreign.

1. Local interpreters: They know the local culture and, apart from the language, they can also help interpret social symbols. However, local interpreters also need some training to be acquainted with the basics of the contingent's personnel's culture. They serve as a link to the local population and as a means for transferring information both ways. It is important to treat them respectfully in order to establish a dialogue among equals in order to prevent instrumentation.
2. Foreign interpreters. A disadvantage is that locals perceive them as foreign and their attitudes are cardinal for establishing engagements in order to reach an understanding.

Generally, interpreters are particularly sensitive to the local culture and may be key to achieve mission success when communicating with the local population. Not only do interpreters convey messages but also attitudes.

14. WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO ASSURE MISSION SUCCESS WITH REGARDS TO THE INTEGRATION OF CULTURE IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS?

Principally, avoid making mistakes. At times, this will not be possible since all the necessary information may not be at your disposal though. In such cases,

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the attitude with which the problem is approached matters more than other factors as it is also the case of how a necessary decision may affect the unfolding of the situation. If we cannot count on all the information needed, we should be aware, at least, of the effects that can be prevented by providing information to the local population. Dialogue is the main tool for achieving the objectives pursued and mission success.

As already mentioned, proper dialogue can only be held if both parties recognize each other. This type of recognition rests upon three basic pillars:

1. BE: The personnel deployed should raise self cultural awareness. They must be cognizant that they are in a foreign context they must know in spite of the attempts to recreate home conditions in the bases.
2. RECOGNIZE: Knowledge about the culture of the host society. Recognizing the other as an equal interlocutor along with the differences between us may well serve as a starting point to carry out the necessary activities or operations.
3. TALK: Dialoguing is the main objective and the only tool which can avoid undesired effects. Given that it we cannot count on all the information needed to make decisions whose actions will affect the population, talking to legitimate leaders will help explain in comprehensible terms the objectives pursued to the population. The aim is to prevent damaging perceptions and rejection towards us.

Holding dialogue with the main actors will help both the local population and the personnel deployed to adapt to the new environment and will also create the conditions to achieve our goals.

15. HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THE ATTITUDES OF THE PERSONNEL DEPLOYED TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO HOLD DIALOGUE WITH THE LOCAL POPULATION?

Basically, we must take into account the essential factors which enable communication, the establishment of relationships and how the local population's hearts and minds can be won, i.e., improve their attitudes towards our mission. (The following ones are factors applied to the Afghan context.)

1. Essential factors to improve communication and relationships:
 - enhance security;
 - empathy;
 - common sense;

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- respect and, particularly respect for their religion;
- be extremely polite;
- avoid superiority;
- show closeness;
- patience (during conversations);
- know behavioral norms (courtesy);
- attitudes;
- confidence;
- accept food offerings;
- speak some words in their language;
- treat women as invisible.

2. Means to gain wills (hearts and minds):

- don't do anything they do not want to;
- do not impose things from a Western point of view;
- they should not perceive their traditions or customs are at risk;
- grant security and development;
- support Afghan leadership;
- know the needs to be met (meet basic needs).

16. WHAT BASIC KNOWLEDGE SHOULD WE POSSESS ABOUT THE AFGHAN CULTURAL SYSTEM?

Here we present some basic indications concerning culture which have an impact upon the social system and the conflicting factors alike ("don't touch issues). They will just be an approach showing the paths to follow to make the personnel adapt to the new environment. The purpose is twofold:

1. become familiar with the environment;

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2. raise discussions on themes of interest for the personnel to participate in.

17. WHAT'S THE SITUATION WE FACE IN AFGHANISTAN WITH REGARD TO CULTURE?

It is deemed that a massive and quick economic and political change may affect the basic symbolic representations of a people though the influence exerted by these objective conditions is unequal and difficult to foresee.

The periods of crisis are normally favorable to develop new practical ideologies concerning core and deeply rooted issues such as lineage, family, kinship, group membership or religious beliefs.

It is worth noting that all these concepts have potential for change in spite of the fact that their rhetoric may demolish a spectator's arguments.

It is important to understand the traditional economic structures and the changes affecting them as the prevailing values are probably based on such a reality. Regarding the Pashtun majority in Afghanistan (40%), this reality can be summed up in the so-called Pashtunwali, which is a social/moral code dating back to the times when the Pashtun were semi-nomadic shepherds —at present this economic practice only account for a 10% of the total—.

Afghanistan's geography also plays a major role as an element forging identities since the mountains serve as sheltering areas where values and customs are more unlikely to change.

It is paramount to identify the tensions arising between the cities and the country as well as the population movements as a result of clashes and extended violence. However, values and society have changed little, if at all.

Nonetheless, the overlapping and complementarity of practices give rise to interdependences which hamper the identification of key behavioral patterns — key individual attitudes should be borne in mind—.

THE ETHNIC/NATIONAL ELEMENT

It is worth noting that the ethnic element is a cultural product though it is considered a pillar of national identity in this area of Asia.

The ethnic identity is also widely affected by the influence exerted by Islam, which binds together tribes from different areas to counter the occupying power (the former Soviet Union at a time).

The emphasis on the Islam to the detriment of ethnic elements is resorted to account for the Taliban movement and to assert its religious legitimacy.

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However, this fact does not imply that Islam has been a core element in the forging of Afghanistan's ethnic or tribal identity.

When facing the diversity of ethnic groups in the region, one may wonder: Is Afghanistan a Pashtun territory? Although there exist other ethnic and linguistic groups, the Pashtuns are considered to be the prevailing one—even the Taliban, within which the Pashtuns do not account for the majority, share a set of values and moral codes with the Pashtun, except for the political and coercive use of the religious identity—



The following are some of the features of that extended moral code called Pashtunwali, (though mythicized it is ruling):

- Melmastia (hospitality) - to show hospitality to all visitors, regardless of whom they are, their ethnic, religious, or national background, without hope of remuneration or favor.
- Badal (justice) - to seek justice over time or over space to avenge a wrong. This applies to injustices committed yesterday or 1000 years ago if the wrongdoer still exists.
- Nanawatay (settlement) - derived from the verb meaning to go in, this is used when the vanquished party is prepared to go in to the house or hujra of the victors and ask forgiveness.
- Nang (honor) - the various points below that a tribesman must observe to ensure his honor, and that of his family, is upheld.
- Lashkar - the tribal army. It implements the decisions of the jirga.

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- Jirga - an assembly of tribal elders called for various purposes whether waging war or composing peace, tribal or inter-tribal.
- Chalweshti - derived from the word for forty, this refers to the tribal force that would implement the decision of a jirga. Every fortieth man of the tribe would be a member. A shalgoon is a force derived from the number twenty.
- Badragga - a tribal escort composed of members of that tribe through which the travelers are passing. If a badragga is violated a tribal feud will follow.
- Hamsaya - a non-Pashtun dependent group who attaches themselves to a Pashtun group, usually for protection. The Pashtun protector group is called a naik. Any attack on a hamsaya is considered an attack on the protector.
- Malatar - literally, tying the back. This refers to those members of the tribe who will actually fight on behalf of their leaders.
- Nagha - a tribal fine decided by the council of elders and imposed upon the wrongdoer.
- Rogha - settlement of a dispute between warring factions.
- Hujra - a common sitting or sleeping place for males in the village. Visitors and unmarried young men sleep in the hujra.

LOYALTY TO THE STATE

Group identification is mainly based on linguistic and cultural factors rather than on political filiations or state boundaries. This means that loyalty is due to the local leader or to the tribe rather than to Afghanistan as a political nation.

Nevertheless, some politologists argue that the failure of the Afghan state is not due to the primary loyalties to the group but to a number of misunderstandings and manipulation of the ethnic, religious or linguistic differences on the part of central governments, which has exacerbated or strengthened primary loyalties.

The centrality of the Afghan state –though politically constructed– does not seem to be appropriate to govern or to forge national loyalties where there exist close and cohesive rural communities. Granting a higher degree of autonomy to local governments could enhance the control over the territories.

Some authors consider that the weakness of the Afghan state stems from the fact that there are three conflicting systems or moral codes: code of honor —

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which is ultra-individualistic despite being regarded as the base of the tribe—, Islam as a universalist moral code, and the code proposed by the government.

LOYALTY TO THE TRIBE

As it is the case with other social constructions (for example, the family), tribal relationships cannot be taken for granted. We must be on the alert for the combination of tribal logics with other logics (differences between urban and rural environments, having or not been a refugee, cultural and socioeconomic levels...).

Within the Afghan context, a tribe should be considered and understood as qawm (often translated as “nation”). Qawm refers to a group of people who are socially and territorially linked basing on agnatic kinship (descendant to one father’s lineage which may be genealogically close or distant).



An ideal qawm would combine the social and territorial bonds with a common belief system and political framework together with kinship and religious rites. The degree of membership to a group relies more heavily on territorial and political issues than on blood relationships.

The most prominent feature of the Afghan concept of tribe (qawm) is the shared notion of relationship held by its members.

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It is worth noting that the ideology linked to the notion of tribe includes elements and values which apparently may seem contradictory—which account for the violence and rivalry within the group—such as the fight for controlling the resources, which lead the weak elements to lose their honor and the control over the resources. Consequently, they become more weakened to exercise their political and communitarian duties.

The family (kala) lies within the context of the group. It refers to a group of people who live in the same house and are economically centralized (the adult male is responsible for making the decisions while the adult female is responsible for the domestic affairs).

THE GENDER QUESTION AND THE FAMILY

In most societies, kinship determines the relationships between people, controls and legitimates their movement in the public and private sphere, and conditions social practices.

Although a biologic basis underpins kinship, it is worth noting that there are other factors which complement and strengthen it (every group makes their own decisions regarding the relevance of blood relations), as it was the case with tribes.

Apart from blood relationships, kinship may also arise from sharing a vital space in a particular location—town or neighborhood in a city—, from established patronage links, or from friendship or families affinities. It is not uncommon to call a partner's father "uncle" or "cousin" an old neighbor. The employment of such terminology should not prevent us from distinguishing between a kinship relationship and one of a different type. Similarly, the relationships within the family itself (father/son, mother/son) give rise to commitments and duties which may differ from those known by the personnel deployed.

Islamic societies' family structures are patrilineal and based on patriarchy, which is a form of social organization in which the family members are hierarchically distributed, and power relationships marked by the supremacy of man over women are created. However, androcentrism refers to a form of patriarchy in which men socially control women basing on a kinship structure that relies on patrilineality, patrilocality and eventual polygyny, and on the fact that the man is responsible for the family's welfare and business in practice and by law.

Patrilineality refers to the fact that descendants are named after the male lineage, whereas patrilocality is the practice whereupon a married couple live with a husband's kin group—it does not necessarily involves sharing the house with other couples in the community—. Finally, polygyny—commonly known as polygamy—is the possibility of a man to be married to more than one woman (it does not presuppose polyandry as well).

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Within the Islamic context, the family is characterized by being hierarchical and stratified according to gender and age as well as by the activity and spatial separation of the sexes.

Young men have traditionally obeyed elders and have tried to fulfill their expectations, while women have been subordinated to men and their roles were limited to the household area according to a religious judicial system.

The topic relating to the role of women within the social and family environment in contemporary Islamic societies has been thoroughly dealt with. It is widely accepted that there exists women's subordination; however, there is no common agreement on the scope or origin of the situation, nor on how it is coped with or the reforms needed. There are three main approaches concerning this issue: the traditional, the reformist and the liberal one. Within the Afghan context, rather than a shared idea of women's subordination to men, the legitimacy for such a condition may derive from all the three approaches mentioned.

Traditionalist Muslims, basing on religious texts, consider that women must have a subordinate role within the family due to nature and God's will. The reformist approach argues that women's subordination is due to a wrong interpretation of the Islam (not the Islam itself) and puts the emphasis on the revolutionary character of the Islam in its inception. Islam granted women the right to education, property and work (according to the Koran, a woman should inherit half the part of a man's, which is regarded as an advancement for women at a time when they were deprived of any right). On the contrary, the liberals reject the conciliatory and apologetics visions of reformists and claim the emancipation of women.

It should be taken into account that in the Afghan society honor issues are closely related to gender ones as well as to the position of individuals within the tribe. This confers them legitimacy to participate or have a voice in the decision making process, and make social and political practices be coherent.

CORRUPTION, LOYALTY AND LEGITIMACY

In Afghanistan, corruption is perceived as a culturally deep rooted practice. For local leaders, some actions may be just an exchange of privileges or presents while for Western military forces it is outright corruption.

Military forces consider that giving presents to local leaders is a matter of bribery or blackmail. The local population's assessment drastically differs from the previous one. Presents are a key element which serves as a recognition of the leader's decision capacity, whether the action is beneficial or detrimental to the local population's interests. All in all, presents are the rewards for holding a post (what they deserve for carrying out their duties).

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What the local population perceives as corruption may be viewed as “help to the family or clan”. It is assumed that close people deserve help, but it is not to be provided to the general community. The community will get help in exchange for work or services provided to the traditional leader, or by being loyal to him. So, the aim will be to preferably benefit relatives. Corruption is then perceived as beneficial for a close group which is given privileges. It contributes to create networks which will support the leader in case his legitimacy or power are put at stake. It is very similar to the studies on family, clan and tribal networks in Africa, the politics of the belly, whereby close people should not suffer from needs.



In broad terms, corruption is conceived as any abuse of a public post aimed at obtaining private benefit or profit. International agencies and actors on the ground have reported corruption in Afghanistan. According to the World Bank Institute, Afghanistan ranks among the first four most corrupt countries in the world, which is one of the biggest obstacles to investments in the country. Analysts relate corruption and the opium market though the availability of resources from international aid programs is aggravating the problem. There exists the risk of generating corruption associated to the State or to the exercise of politics.

Beyond economic or security costs —threats, insecurity, intimidation—, corruption may take a heavy toll in terms of how difficult it may be for the Afghan state to exercise power in the short term. The aim of the study does not solely rely on describing corruption as an everyday activity. It is also an attempt to understand how corruption is perceived by the Afghan population and by the rest of actors.

Today's rates of corruption undermine the image of the state as well as the trust on it —particularly though not exclusively the corruption related to drug

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trafficking. Corruption can be observed in a wide number of domains: health, services such as electricity or water supply, education, justice, local organizations, etc.

In a survey by Integrity Watch Afghanistan (2006), the interviewees associated corruption with the civil servants' low income. So it was common practice to pay the mushkiltarashi (tip) for the services provided. These corrupt practices are so widely spread that there exists a number of different words to refer to different types of corruption. In Dari the term fisad-i-edari refers to administrative corruption and bakshish to “tip”. Wasita is used when the idea is to facilitate a contact; jazia is used for extortion, ekhtelas for fraud, fisad-i-siyas for political corruption and fisad-i-akhlaqi for moral corruption. Eighty-one percent of the interviewees consider that by applying the sharia (Islamic law) corrupt practices could be prevented since Islam bans making a profit out of a public host.

Local leaders are generally unable to perceive the community's needs, so they do not even bother to collect the taxes. They are funded by corrupt practices and presents, as already mentioned. The community's welfare, the public sphere, solidarity, responsibility for the community's well being, need for the other, etc. are issues with a very different meaning for the Afghan population and for the coalition's forces. The Western and the local perspectives clash when dealing with social issues.

On the other hand, the Afghan locals' perception of material and social needs also differ from the Western perceptions. Cultural clashes sometimes occur because real needs are ignored and local leaders give priority to secondary needs instead of primary ones: water, food, health, security, education, infrastructures (local leaders lack self critical awareness). The task becomes more complex when it is not possible to explain which are the most urgent needs to meet. So, it will be necessary to have a wide cultural knowledge related to economy, for instance.

The loyalties of the local leaders to the coalition's forces are dependent on a material exchange. All in all, loyalties are “rented” and personal. There is no loyalty to any kind of official institutions, so the contingent should help them be perceived as genuine institutions of their own.

The relationships between the subjects are highly individualized and do not conform to objective criteria. Thus, it is very easy for traditional leaders or other key actors to break agreements. The personnel deployed also perceive friendship as interest in the Afghan context. It is not viewed in the light of altruism among individuals. Even affective gestures (such as holding hands) are understood as symbols of interest.

So, the relations can always be perceived from a mythical perspective rather than from a rational one by both the personnel deployed and the locals. By adopting attitudes that foster knowledge and dialogue, mutual mistrust can be overcome, which will prevent rational interest relationships from being

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misinterpreted. Things get worse when the local population employs their “culture” as a means to justify actions or denials. Only appropriate counseling, which may help interpret the information, can prevent such an employment of culture by locals.

18. WHICH ARE THE MAIN ISSUES THAT MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHEN ASSESSING CULTURE AS A KEY FACTOR TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS?

Firstly, it must be borne in mind that having knowledge about the other, their culture and society is the best way to prevent conflicts. Similarly, it is important the personnel deployed be aware of the different perceptions concerning the most troublesome issues (“don’t touch issues”), according to their particular needs.

Secondly, having piles of information does not imply that it can be conveniently interpreted. If in doubt, you must seek appropriate counseling as soon as possible since time may be critical for the mission success when making decisions is at stake.

Special emphasis must be put on holding dialogue among equals avoiding any sense of superiority. The locals employed as workers will project the contingent's attitudes towards the local society and their culture.

Finally, the most important is to achieve mission success. That should be the goal of all the decisions. We must strive to integrate culture and, at least, be able to provide the local population with the necessary information so as to avoid misunderstandings and reactions against our interests.