

Commandant's Note

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CULTURAL AWARENESS AND COMBAT POWER

Observations and feedback from our combat theaters indicate a requirement for more cultural awareness training and education. We have accumulated a wealth of individual and unit experience that confirms the tremendous impact a friendly, neutral, or hostile civilian populace can have on military operations and our ability to consolidate and achieve operational U.S. objectives. Unfortunately, a significant amount of our common understanding is the result of mistakes in cross-cultural interaction inherent to stability operations; of which counterinsurgency is a subtype. Our desire to be responsive to the needs

of deployed and deploying units has led to some very focused regional studies and resulting products that we are now using across the force to make our Soldiers and leaders more aware and better prepared to adapt to cultural differences in order to facilitate rather than impede mission accomplishment. Despite their usefulness in the near term, these focused products are not the total answer for our tactical level combat leaders. Our real, long term, dilemma is defining the significant military aspects of culture as they might apply in any theater and further determining how these various aspects of culture manifest themselves and might influence tactical operations. The complexity of the contemporary operational environment (COE) demands that we provide our tactical commanders a robust analytic tool and not just a list of cultural dos and don'ts.

Cultural awareness is not a new concept for our Army and we are certainly not alone in our struggle to understand its significance to military operations. During and since the second World War, language, political, and cultural instruction have all been part of the U. S. Army's preparation for deploying Soldiers, both to prepare them for what they would find in a — presumably friendly — host nation and to help them better understand the motivations, values, and prejudices that drive the enemy. While cultural understanding pays enormous dividends, the lack of it can likewise have dire consequences as the catastrophic mistakes of some of



our enemies have shown. Prior to World War II, Japanese leaders failed to understand the resolve of America once attacked or the unifying effect such an event would have on the American people. Likewise, they grossly underestimated both the industrial might of this nation and the speed with which it could be mobilized against anyone who attacked us. More recently, on 11 September 2001, al Qaeda's attacks costing thousands of American lives and those of citizens of other nations in New York City, in Washington, D.C., and in Pennsylvania ignited responses far different than those which our enemies expected. Two brutally

repressive regimes, in Afghanistan and in Iraq, were toppled and replaced by democratically elected bodies, thousands of enemy have been killed, and their leaders are either themselves dead, awaiting trial, or are fleeing for their lives.

As an Army, we bring the elements of combat power to this fight: maneuver, firepower, protection, leadership, and information. Properly applied, our use of combat power is decisive in tactical engagement after tactical engagement. We have proven time and again that our critical analysis and understanding of mission, enemy, troops, terrain, and time is inherent to successful tactical planning and execution. But the acronym is now METT-TC, and in the COE we must continue to improve our ability to analyze the impact of civil considerations, of which culture is a subset, on tactical operations. Cross-cultural interaction typified our operations in Bosnia and Kosovo and will definitely continue to characterize our stability and counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Every side in this struggle needs the population for recruits, information, support, and most importantly legitimacy. In order to win the war, we must win the people first. A hostile population, regardless of our good intentions, undermines every military success. Our actions must never alienate our source for legitimacy and final stability.

Cultural awareness goes far beyond the discussion of customs, habits, taboos, values, and other factors we have historically

associated with getting to know another culture. It includes a comprehensive understanding of the organizations; infrastructure; populations; environmental, economic, and religious issues; and events — contemporary and historical — within the area of operations. The civil affairs personnel and foreign area specialists assigned or attached to our formations can be invaluable in this regard, both for the advice they can offer and the foreign language skills they possess. Do not ignore them. The indigenous population can be supportive, neutral, or hostile to our efforts, and through coordination with our own civil affairs experts we can often influence which of these attitudes the population chooses to follow. The manner in which we employ information is crucial to influencing the population, and timeliness is essential. Correcting misinformation spread by the enemy is far less effective than beating him to the punch with the truth, and psychological operations teams are a combat multiplier, both for the media assets they can employ and their finger on the pulse in the area of operations.

Cultural awareness will not necessarily always enable us to predict what the enemy and noncombatants will do, but it will help us better understand what motivates them, what is important to the host nation in which we serve, and how we can either elicit the support of the population or at least diminish their support and aid to the enemy. Today our adversary has chosen to fight on the urban battlefield, regardless of the collateral cost to the nation's people and infrastructure. We in turn have gone after him wherever he hides and fights, and are successfully rooting him out from his bunkers and lairs in the classic infantry fight. As we support Iraqi and Afghan civil authorities in the establishment of stable democratic governments and the functional infrastructure to meet the needs of the population, we find that it is often the civilian considerations that define the mission.

We are making steady progress in cultural awareness training at the Infantry School. We are laying the groundwork for this in instruction to students in the Infantry Captain's Career Course (ICCC), Infantry Officer Basic Course (IOBC), the Advanced NCO Course (ANCOC) and the Basic NCO Course (BNCOC), and to

all personnel deploying from Fort Benning, either through the CONUS Replacement Center or as part of Benning-based unit deployments. Given the immediacy of the present war, we are focusing on the threat posed by radical Islamic fundamentalism and conducting cultural awareness training based on the present geographical area of interest. We recognize the need to present instruction beginning with initial entry training (IET) and continuing throughout the NCO and officer education courses resident at Fort Benning. In order to enable and focus self-development, we will also develop and maintain a subject-specific, prioritized reading list to supplement students' in-class instruction that complements their formal instruction.

We will further integrate cultural awareness into the instructional fabric of the Infantry School and the Army. To achieve this, we are developing a military cultural aspects model that properly and definitively isolates those components of culture that enables us to interpret, analyze, and evaluate their impact on generating and sustaining combat power. We must make the intangible tangible and define abstract ideas into concrete terms. We are looking for a mental model with the clarity and utility of OAKOC for terrain analysis. Once we have the model, we will integrate it into our doctrinal instruction to define the military aspects of culture and include practical exercises in our teaching scenarios that reinforce the teaching points and learning objectives of the model.

Cultural awareness is too important to be left to chance, and that is why it will remain a part of the Infantry School curriculum. We are refining our considerable and ever-expanding data base of cultural resources, and will infuse it into our programs of instruction. The thousands of Soldiers and leaders who graduate from Fort Benning each year will carry with them the tools they need to defeat the enemy and protect and sustain the establishment of democracy. At the United States Army Infantry Center and School we train for the fight even as we educate for the future. We owe our Nation and the Soldiers who defend her nothing less.

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