

Commandant's Note

MAJOR GENERAL WALTER WOJDAKOWSKI

CULTURAL AWARENESS CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION TODAY

The war in Iraq and Afghanistan represents a microcosm of America's earlier and larger wars, in which we committed ourselves to military victory while planning for a stable and lasting postwar peace. With the defeat of Iraq's armed forces and the Taliban, the center of gravity shifted to the people as they prepared to assume control of their destiny. Today, the host nation populations are the key terrain that we must secure in the global war on terrorism. We have developed greater cultural awareness of the geographical and civil considerations under which we operate. As we have become more knowledgeable of the local populations and their environment, we have become increasingly adept at getting inside our adversary's decision cycle, interdicting his actions, and inflicting losses upon him faster than he can replace them with local resources. This is due in large part to information provided by local civilians and military. In this Commandant's Note I want to talk about cultural awareness, its historical contribution to the Army's mission, and how we are applying it today as we prosecute the global war on terrorism.

Cultural awareness plays a pivotal role in the gathering and assessment of the human intelligence we need. Credibility of refugees, informants, and centers of influence will always carry its burden of uncertainty, but the information they offer will complement that gained by electronic and other intelligence gathering methods. Today's deployed formations are fighting amid local populations whose reaction to the U.S., her goals, and the presence of our Soldiers may be supportive, neutral, or hostile, or a combination of these. This is determined by the nature and extent of their contact with our Soldiers, or their civilians' exposure to the insurgents' propaganda efforts. Our own understanding of the host nation's geography, history, tribal and sectarian concerns, economic system, infrastructure, and religion enables us to move freely among the population and destroy the insurgents.

The use of cultural awareness as a combat multiplier is nothing new in counterinsurgency. During campaigns against the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Apache in the late 19th century, General George Crook — a Civil War veteran of battles at Second Bull Run and Chickamauga and a skilled guerilla fighter — understood the culture and tribal dynamics of the Apache so well that he could exploit conflicts and relationships within the tribes. Today our own knowledge of subtle motivations in Iraq and Afghanistan has likewise created opportunities for success. During World War II, anthropologist Margaret Mead and her behavioral science colleagues investigated the cultures of enemies and allies alike; their and General Douglas MacArthur's knowledge of Asian culture were factors in the decision to retain Emperor Hirohito as

Japan's titular ruler. This facilitated the stable transition to a postwar form of government free of any insurgency that would have been costly to Americans and Japanese alike. When we consider

General Joseph Stilwell's operations in China, Burma, and India, our special operations forces' actions during Desert Shield and Desert Storm, or their work with the warlords and tribal leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan, the value of cultural awareness as a combat multiplier is clear.

The war on terrorism is world-wide, but our Soldiers often find themselves dealing with issues that are more regional and local. Coalition commanders and Soldiers need to identify and understand the many complex relationships within their areas of operation. Insurgents attempt to recruit members and support by many means, and we need to understand how they do this so we can defeat them. Our enemy is opportunistic: within eight days of the 2004 Indonesian tsunami, regional militant surrogates of al-Qaeda had begun establishing four base camps in Aceh province and gaining press and media attention. The insurgent is persistent, and we can be no less vigilant in anticipating his moves, understanding his goals and motives, and in destroying him before he can act.

Our Soldiers have made great strides in expanding their cultural awareness. Cultural awareness training is now an integral part of our students' experience at Fort Benning, and we will continue to stress it as we identify additional requirements and resources. We have drawn upon the resources and expertise of the Defense Language Institute (DLI) Foreign Language Center to take advantage of available programs such as DLI's own area studies; self-assessment tests, pronunciation, and basic language guides; and the Rosetta Stone foreign language program. Our revised reading lists for junior and senior noncommissioned officers, lieutenants, and captains includes books focused on cultural awareness. *Infantry Magazine* has included cultural awareness as a recurring feature. We complement our training with products of the Combined Arms Center and U.S. Army Intelligence Center. Cultural factors are part of the battlefield, and by including them in our training, planning, and operations we will ensure that in winning the war we will secure a lasting peace. Insurgencies take a long time to develop, and defeating them demands our patience, resolve, and commitment.

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