

Running Head: LANGUAGE, CULTURAL, AND EDUCATION

Language, Cultural, and Education Barriers in the Global War on Terrorism

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## ABSTRACT

The Global War on Terrorism has specific challenges that persist to impede our progress in defeating terrorism. The large challenges we face are language, cultural, and education barriers among United States joint forces, and coalition forces. The inability to effectively communicate on the battlefield has not only hampered our success, but cost many friendly force lives. It is imperative that a universal method of communicating be established to defeat an enemy that is out numbered and out resourced, but persists to exist and cause both terror and death.

### Language, Barriers, and Communication

The Global War on Terrorism can be won if joint and coalition forces overcome language, cultural and communication barriers. Department of Defense personnel are sent to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey DLI, California for months to obtain foreign language training and qualification. The average length of time spent at DLI is between six and twelve months and is a great program that we cannot afford to all of our forces.

The Army offers the language training software called Rosetta Stone through Army Knowledge Online (AKO). Rosetta Stone is currently only offered to the U.S. Army through an internet based platform called Army Knowledge Online (AKO), but should be offered to all of our forces because they all are involved in fighting the Global War on Terrorism. This software should be provided to all Department of Defense personnel to include civilians so that they have access to language training when or where they need it. Ideally, language training should be conducted months prior to deployments so that soldiers can concentrate on the tactical aspects of their mission without the preoccupation of trying to understand local population and letting their guard down. Language skills at that point should be adequate for simple conversations or for giving instructions.

Joint force operations are successful, but often the high and unacceptable cost of fratricide due to inaccurate communication, errors in battlefield identification and reporting procedures, and target identification mistakes. Some of the coalition forces do not have the support of the people from their nation and the public looks for reasons not to be involved with the Global War on Terrorism. One headline reads "A U.S. fighter pilot involved in a "friendly fire" incident that killed four Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan (2002)." The story unfolded to be that the Canadians were conducting a live-fire exercise near Kandahar Airfield and the U.S. pilot

thought that he was taking ground fire. There are many more supporting examples of this type of poor communication and battlefield identification between friendly forces.

Fratricide or the possibility of fratricide is enough for some nations to withdraw their forces due to public opposition and outcry. Not only do these catastrophic mistakes give the United States and coalition forces a black eye, but also create great political divides between our coalition forces and their home nation public support for GWOT.

The contributions from Coalition member nations range from: direct military participation, logistical and intelligence support, specialized chemical/biological response teams, over-flight rights, humanitarian and reconstruction aid, and political support. We can't afford to lose any of our allies in the fight against terrorism. Currently, Forty-nine countries are publicly committed to the Coalition. You can imagine the vast array of languages, terminology, procedures, cultural differences, and military organizations from Forty-nine countries that have to effectively communicate without concentric standards to GWOT. We are fighting an asymmetric war, but we should not be using asymmetric communication among our joint and coalition forces to accomplish the mission, which is to defeat terrorism.

We can win the Global War on Terrorism if coalition forces develop certain battlefield protocol and procedures that are very similar or identical. No critical communications procedures should be left open to interpretation or errors. We have witnessed fratricide on coalition forces on too many occasions. Fratricide is due to lack of both battlefield friendly force identification protocol and coalition allied forces failing to communicate their locations on the battlefield. Not only do we needlessly lose valuable warrior resources, but create a rift between friendly forces over these incidents causing even less popularity of an almost infamous war

situation. Collaboration and development of coalition centric battlefield procedures will catapult the United States and coalition forces toward victory over terrorism.

Net-centric Warfare is a strategy to network all Department of Defense systems to provide information to the end user; information they want, when they want it, where they need it. This idea is certainly on track with what is needed to combat terrorism; however, its use is limited to Department of Defense personnel. Similarly, key US allies and coalition partners are placing an increased emphasis on NCW or Network Centric Operations (NCO)<sup>2</sup>, or their equivalents like Network Enabled Capabilities (NEC) in the United Kingdom.

The Force XXI Battle Command Brigade & Below system (FBCB2) is the principal digital command and control (C2) system for the US Army at brigade level and below (US/UK Coalition Combat Operations, 2005). FBCB2 is currently used by the U.S. and the British only. The British initially leased the FBCB2 systems from the U.S. prior to the Iraq War. The use of FBCB2 either needs to be expanded to more coalition forces, or a GWOT Centric system is what is needed to combat and win the war on terrorism. The government has requested “\$1.6 billion for combat communications (Committee on Armed Services [2007])” an increase of \$40 Million. There is certainly a budget to support a wider use of Net-centric capabilities to support GWOT. The idea is similar to the Homeland security act that brings information sharing and information reporting together so that efforts are directed, and not repeated.

This war is foreseen to last for an undetermined amount of years to come, so now is the time to develop such a system. Clear and effective communications within our joint forces and ultimately within the coalition forces is an absolute necessity to win the Global War on Terrorism. The single most important element to win any battle or war is the ability to communicate. The terrorist’s network is living proof of this factor. Coalition forces have air

superiority, ground superiority, far better equipment, superior training, and yet they persist to exist and threaten global security because of their ability to communicate.

### Cultural Challenges

Check-point operations and interrogations would be more successful if we could speak the indigenous language of the country that we are in. Relying on interpreters instead of English language capabilities throughout our joint and coalition forces has hampered our progress toward defeating the terrorists. We often have to blindly trust our interpreters when they conduct interrogations and question the indigenous people for information. We do not know if they are collaborating with the enemy, or whether the interpreters have their own intentions aside from the mission of eliminating terrorism. We rely heavily on facial expressions and body gestures to help us understand and analyze situations rather than understanding the language of the populace, but we are not knowledgeable enough to discern what is really happening or being said.

Knowing that there is a great divide amongst religious sects, we must educate all forces on cultural awareness and the differences between the cultures that we operate amongst. The cultural awareness taught to warriors at the Soldier Readiness Centers before they deploy is certainly inadequate and too late.

We cannot assume that all coalition forces are friendly toward each other just because they are on the same team. Coalition forces often have political and cultural differences that influence how they conduct operations with one another. When warriors from other nations do not play the game the same, there is certainly conflict in the coalition ranks.

### Education Challenges

Levels of professional training vary at different ranks within individual forces, both United States forces, and coalition forces. Efforts are made everyday to improve the curriculums that we implement to enhance the expertise and readiness in our armed forces. Our allies are extended the opportunity to attend our schools to experience the U.S. Army's premiere training programs first hand, and learn how we conduct our formal training and education, and so that we in turn can learn from them and maybe add to our repertoire of military knowledge. The United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA) is a prime example of this type of partnership exposure and synergistic training environment. Attendance at USASMA is provides a great cultural awareness for both U.S. Military students and foreign students. USASMA Class 58 remarkably has 49 foreign students from 37 different countries. Instructors from USASMA travel worldwide to conduct and facilitate similar abbreviated training in host nations to assist in their non-commissioned officer education systems.

The United States Army Sergeants Major Academy is certainly on the right path exposing Sergeants Major to education with sister services and our allied forces, but more needs to be done at the younger ranks to truly influence and exact victory over terrorism. This type of foreign exchange training should be expanded to include junior enlisted ranks Private and above. Sergeants Major are not the rubber that meets the road; it is the junior enlisted and above that have the greatest impact on the streets in a combat zone. The process should be started at the earliest stage to equip our young warriors with the tools requisite to operating in both the joint and coalition environments.

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