Cultural Intelligence: A Required Capability for Marine Corps Expeditionary Operations

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Cultural Intelligence:
A Required Capability for Marine Corps Expeditionary Operations

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Conducting expeditionary operations means operating in foreign, and increasingly urban, cultures; foreign not simply in the sense of other countries, but cultures with which the Marine Corps has little to no understanding or even the foundation or tools to develop an understanding sufficient to conduct successful expeditionary operations. This is a critical shortfall for the Corps as the self-proclaimed "premier expeditionary `Total Force in Readiness.'"[1] The nature and complexity of recent, current and likely future missions demand a cultural intelligence capability that often has been neglected or to which has only been paid lip service. To be an effective expeditionary force in today's world, the Marine Corps must pursue an advanced cultural intelligence capability by developing it organically, contracting for it, coordinating with sister services and other agencies for a joint capability, or some combination.

Expeditionary Operations Requires Cultural Expertise

Expeditionary operations are those "conducted by an armed force to accomplish a specific objective in a foreign country . . . [that] encompass the entire range of military operations . . . ."[2] Such operations have become, and will become ever more

[1] U.S. Department of the Navy, Headquarter U.S. Marine Corps. Marine Corps Strategy 21 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2001), 1.
[2] U.S. Department of the Navy, Headquarter U.S. Marine Corps. Marine Corps Operations MCDP 1-0 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2001), 2.4

complex enterprises within completely foreign, labyrinthine cultures of increasing density.[3] They will become more complex not only in terms of the mission or objective,[4] but, perhaps more importantly, with respect to the operating environment.

A key word in the Marine Corps' doctrinal definition of expeditionary operations is "foreign." This word refers to operations within a culture with which Marines have little to no understanding. As a result, they are culturally ignorant with respect to the environment in which they must operate. Cultural ignorance can be just as or even more devastating in operations other than war, such as rebuilding or establishing democracy or merely restoring stability, than ignorance of the terrain or the enemy's armor capability. In order to combat cultural ignorance, "a serious study of the people, their racial, political, religious, and mental development" is required.[5]

Cultural Complexity in Urban Areas

Additionally, global ubanization, particularly along the littorals, exacerbates the problem of cultural ignorance. That

[3] Density here refers more to demographic characteristics, such as population, religion, language, etc. than infrastructure.
[4] Such missions have and will continue to range from simply being a presence in order to maintain order, as in Beirut, to regime change and nation building, as in Afghanistan and Iraq.
[5] "The motive in [such operations] is not material destruction. It is usually a project dealing with the social, economic, and political development of the people. It is of primary importance that the fullest benefit be derived from the psychological aspects of the situation. That implies a serious study of the people, their racial, political, religious, and mental development." *Small Wars Manual, United States Marine Corps, 1940* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower University Press, 1972), 1.1.

urban littorals are likely to be the locations of the majority of the Marine Corps' future operations has been the subject of much doctrinal discussion to the point of universal agreement. A city already ethnically, religiously and occupationally diverse, takes on even greater complexity and density with the influx of people with further ethnic, religious and occupational differences from rural areas.

The urban melting pot becomes more of a cultural pressure cooker or like adding new threads, or cultural differences, to an old "tapestry of existing relationships."[6] Understanding the myriad dyes, how they are developed, their individual meanings, how the threads are woven, and the new colors integrate with the older colors (including bleadover), their meaning as an entire tapestry, as well as various scenes or symbols within the tapestry, much less how to integrate new threads into it, requires a thorough indoctrination into the production process, not merely through classroom study and tourism, but through prolonged experience with the actual process.

Likewise, "cities are systems and parts of larger systems. Effectively conducting urban operations therefore demands an understanding of" the population, the population's role as part of a greater system, and the interactions of the involved

[6] LTG Claudia Kennedy, U.S. Army, quoted in Jamison Jo Medby and Russell W. Glenn. *Street Smart: Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield for Urban Operations*. (Santa Monica, Cal.: RAND, 2002), 7.

elements.[7] This does not mean simply identifying the threat, but analyzing the entire population (not only the city proper, but the outlying regions and country and neighbors as a whole) for its human effect on operations. [8] Such is "the greatest challenge to intelligence preparation of the [battlespace]" (IPB).[9]

The Complexity and Importance of Population Analysis

The population, particularly an urban one, is not composed simply of the enemy insurgents, neutral shopkeepers and friendly host nation government officials, but rather myriad population and subpopulation groups that can be categorized along a "Continuum of Relative Interests" as adversary, obstacle, neutral, accomplice or ally.[10]

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[7] Russell Glenn and Sidney W. Atkinson, Michael P. Barbero, Frederick J. Gellert, Scott Gerwehr, Steven L. Hartman, Jamison Jo Medby, Andrew W. O'Donnell, David Owen, Suzanne Pieklik. *Ready for Armageddon: Proceedings of the 2001 RAND Arroyo-Joint ACTD-CETO-USMC Nonlethal and Urban Operations Program Urban Operations Conference*. (Santa Monica, Cal.: RAND, 2002), 7.

[8] "There is no doctrinal definition of `threat" [a]s identified in JP 2-01, *Joint Intelligence Support to Military Operations*, FM 100-5, Operations, FM 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, and FM 34-130/MCRP 2-12A, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield*." A workable definition of threat is that which has the capability and intention to inflict harm coupled with a vulnerability to said harm. Medby, 92 and 96.

[9] Medby, 55

[10] Adversary: "A population element with the capability, interest, and intent to exploit a friendly vulnerability." Obstacle: Has "an active capability to exploit a friendly vulnerability. Current interests may or may not be compatible with friendly force goals, but there is no intention to interfere with friendly force activities." Neutral: "interests do not conflict with either the friendly or the adversarial force. Capability to affect the friendly force mission may exist, but it is currently inert." Accomplice: Has the "capability to capitalize on a friendly or adversarial vulnerability whose intentions are compatible with friendly force objectives." Ally: "interests and intent is to assist in accomplishing friendly force objectives." Medby, 92-101.

Each group, as well as alliances of groups, and individual persons, can have an unique effect on operations. Moreover, these groups and the relationships among them and with friendly forces are not static. They move along the continuum.[11] The reasons for their initial positions, movement along the continuum, and consequent effects on friendly operations, may be religious, ethnic, economic, subsistent, power driven, or historical, among unlimited others.[12]

A controversy between Marines and a local tribe could simply be a misunderstanding of language or actions concerning cultural mores that could be different from one block to the next as "cultural meanings are typically not shared uniformly by an entire society, and they are not shared precisely."[13] "Friendly activities intended to be benign or benevolent might have negative results if a population's perceptions are not first investigated [,analyzed] and subsequently measured or managed."[14] Such a misunderstanding could deligitimize an operation causing its failure.[15] Therefore, "[t]he density of

[11] Medby, 100-101.
[12] Medby, 48-50, 59-66 and 100-101.
[13] P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang. *Cultural Intelligence: Individual Interactions Across Cultures.* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 97.
[14] Medby, 64
[15] "Accommodating the social fabric of a city is potentially the most influential factor in the conduct of urban operations . . . . The fastest way to damage the legitimacy of an operation is to ignore or violate social mores or precepts of a particular population." Marine Corps Intelligence Activity. *Urban Generic Information Requirements Handbook* (MCIA-1586-005-99, 1998), quoted in Medby, 54.

civilians and the constant interaction between them and U.S. forces greatly increases the importance of social considerations.[16] Information operations can influence those perceptions, but only if the culture is understood. Individual courses of action (COA) for different groups or alliances may be required. Again, a firm cultural understanding is required for something so complex as a COA of multiple COAs within a single city.[17] Perhaps the cultural aspects of IPB should dictate something as fundamental, albeit critical, as the establishment of boundaries according to demographic and cultural analysis instead of conventionally according to geographical features.

Cultural Expertise and The War on Terror

Sun Tzu's maxim, "Know the enemy, know yourself; your victory will never be endangered. Know the ground, know the weather; your victory will then be total,"[18] is certainly applicable to expeditionary operations in urban areas, but necessitates extension along the continuum of relative interests. This is especially true concerning the War on Terror, which is more appropriately termed a war on radical ideology. In such a war, as well as any insurgency, the battlefield of ideas replaces the traditional battlefield, and the primary weapons used are messages sent through terrorist

[16] Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, cited in Medby, 55.
[17] Medby, 7-8.
[18] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Grifith (Oxford, 1963) quoted in Medby, 1.

acts to influence population groups. Therefore, the focus is not as much on the enemy, ground or weather, but on the targeted population groups.[19] Consequently, because ideological conflict is likely to be the predominant characteristic of any urban operation, one must clearly understand the culture of those groups in order to effectively wage an information war. The requisite cultural understanding for such operations comes not merely from demographic analysis, but the application of a mature cultural intelligence capability.

Cultural Intelligence

The term cultural intelligence (CQ) has been developed primarily within the business community as a concept that essentially encompasses individual interactions across cultures as they relate to the facilitation of better and more profitable international business interaction. Earley and Ang define CQ as "the capability to adapt effectively to new cultural concepts."[20] This is not saying simply the correct thing based on content-specific knowledge of a given culture. Rather, it is the ability to "learn to learn" the cues in a "radically unfamiliar social environment" and respond appropriately based a maturely

[19] Maj G. John David, USMC, and Capt E. Lawson Quinn, USMC, "A Tactical Staff Structure for an Ideological War" (Accepted for publication, Marine Corps Gazztte, 2005).

[20] "Thus, we define cultural intelligence as: A person's capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar settings attributable to the cultural context…where the locus of intelligence is positioned at the interaction between the individual and the environment." Earley, 9 and 58; David C. Thomas and Kerr Inkson, Cultural Intelligence: People Skills for Global Business (San Fancisco: Barrett-Koehler, 2004).

developed cultural understanding, motivation or commitment to respond, and repertoire of correct behavioral skills.[21]

The defense community[22] is attempting to apply the CQ concept within the context of intelligence preparation of the battlespace, operational planning and military training. However, neither the Department of Defense nor its component services have established a doctrinal term or definition for the concept.[23] Nevertheless, the RAND Corporation has made it clear that CQ is not simply demographic analysis, but rather adds meaning to demographic analysis in order to provide an understanding of a population so that a military force can effectively conduct urban, or any, operations according to reality.[24]

> Demographic analysis is [d]eveloping a clear picture of a city's population [by] delineating its primary attributes, such as age, wealth, gender, ethnicity, religion, and employment statistics. . . . [CQ] describes the process by which cultural information—food preferences, mores, values, relationships, and rivalries between particular groups, to name a few, is incorporated with demographic information to uncover the underlying characteristics of the population . . .

[21] Earley, 9, 16-22 and 91.
[22] The defense community includes not only the Department of Defense, but also private corporations and groups significantly involved in defense related activities such as the RAND Corporation.
[23] LTC William Wunderlie, U.S. Army, Middle East Foreign Area Officer, Army Research Fellow, Rand Corp. "Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: Planning Requirements in Wielding the Instruments of National Power." Cultural Intelligence Conference Briefing, Crystal City, Va., November, 2004; LtCol John M. Walls, USMC, Marine Air Ground Task Force Staff Training Program, author's interview, January, 2005.
[24] Medby, 55-56.

> . Demographic analysis describes *what* conditions exist. [CQ describes] why conditions exist.[25]

Rand's description of CQ is entir6ely consistent with that of Earley and Ang. This is no small task, however, and likely may be the most challenging aspect of an operation.

Obtaining a Cultural Intelligence Capability

Effectively applying CQ in a given expeditionary operation requires the mastery of a culture that can only be achieved through the intense study and mastery of many different fields such as human reactions, the history and language of an area, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and most important, through physical immersion for a prolonged period of time in the culture.[26] The question now is how does the Marine Corps obtain such a capability.

The Corps can develop it organically, contract for the capability, or coordinate with the Department of Defense to develop a joint cultural intelligence capability. Developing such a capability organically would require more training investment than the two years of language and cultural study and one year of assignment in country that is invested in a foreign area officer. Furthermore, considering the limited personnel resources of the Marine Corps, it would require investing CQ

[25] Medby, 55; Thomas, 68-69.
[26] Small Wars Manual, 18.

training with respect to only those countries or regions that would be the most likely targets of operations.

The U.S. Army has such a capability in its Strategic Studies Detachment within the Fourth Psychological Operations Group. This detachment is composed of civilian Area experts with doctoral degrees in their respective geographical areas of expertise who conduct target area analyses in support of Army psychological operations.[27] The Corps could contract for a similar capability or negotiate with the Army and other sister services to expand and transform that detachment into a larger joint organization to support joint and single service expeditionary operations.

Conclusion

Conducting successful expeditionary operations requires not merely knowledge of and limited experience with the foreign culture in which such operations are conducted, but a deep understanding of it. This is particularly true in the ideological war on terror and insurgencies in general. Such understanding can only be found in those possessing high cultural intelligence, which requires an enormous investment in time and resources in the right people. As the country's self-

[27] U.S. Army, First Information Operations Command (Land), Information Operations Capabilities, Applications and Planning Course, February 2005.

proclaimed premier expeditionary Total Force in Readiness, the Marine Corps must develop or otherwise obtain a CQ capability.

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