REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)* 27-10-2010	2. REPORT TYPE FINAL	3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)*

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
Taking Culture to the Next Level: Understanding and Using Culture at the Operational Level of War	
	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER

6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
LtCol W.H. Reinhart, USMC	
	5e. TASK NUMBER
Paper Advisor: CDR Paul Matthews, USN	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207	

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the Naval War College faculty in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.

14. ABSTRACT
It is now conventional wisdom that cultural awareness is a prerequisite to successful expeditionary operations in the contemporary operational environment. Since 9/11, each service has stood up a cultural learning center; veterans returning from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other theaters of operation are continually documenting their cultural experiences in lessons learned archives and professional journals; and the Department of Defense is employing civilian social scientists in various capacities to support cultural training and education. These efforts, while extremely useful, have their best utility at the tactical level of war. As very little research exists regarding the integration and employment of cultural knowledge at the operational level of war, this paper explores the efficacy of incorporating cultural analysis in the planning and coordination of military operations at the operational level of war. It briefly reviews three historical cases for relevant experiences, defines differences in the application of cultural knowledge between the tactical and operational levels of war, examines the relationship of culture to Operational Art, and reviews the adequacy of current doctrine with regards to utilizing culture at the operational level of war. It concludes with recommendations and general remarks regarding the importance of properly applying cultural knowledge at the operational level of war.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Culture, Cultural Awareness, Cultural Competency, Cultural Knowledge, Operational Level of Command, Operational Level of War

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Dept
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED		28	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER *(include area code)* 401-841-3556

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

<u>TAKING CULTURE TO THE NEXT LEVEL:
UNDERSTANDING AND USING CULTURE AT THE
OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF WAR</u>

by

William H. Reinhart

Lieutenant Colonel, USMC

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

27 October 2010

Contents

Abstract

Taking Culture to the Next Level: Understanding and Using Culture at the Operational Level of War

It is now conventional wisdom that cultural awareness is a prerequisite to successful expeditionary operations in the contemporary operational environment. Since 9/11, each service has stood up a cultural learning center; veterans returning from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other theaters of operation are continually documenting their cultural experiences in lessons learned archives and professional journals; and the Department of Defense is employing civilian social scientists in various capacities to support cultural training and education. These efforts, while extremely useful, have their best utility at the tactical level of war. As very little research exists regarding the integration and employment of cultural knowledge at the operational level of war, this paper explores the efficacy of incorporating cultural analysis in the planning and coordination of military operations at the operational level of war. It briefly reviews three historical cases for relevant experiences, defines differences in the application of cultural knowledge between the tactical and operational levels of war, examines the relationship of culture to Operational Art, and reviews the adequacy of current doctrine with regards to utilizing culture at the operational level of war. It concludes with recommendations and general remarks regarding the importance of properly applying cultural knowledge at the operational level of war.

INTRODUCTION

The campaign plan and strategy must be adapted to the character of the people encountered.

---Small Wars Manual

On October 7, 2010 the United States entered its 10th year of sustained counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. While Operations IRAQI and ENDURING FREEDOM are not the first occasions where the United States has deployed its military into hostile environments, this period is unique in two respects. First, it represents the longest period that the United States has conducted sustained combat and stability operations of this scope in an expeditionary environment. Second, due to the nature of the political and military objectives, the radically different cultures of these regions and countries have significantly impacted the conduct of military operations. Essentially, the wide cultural gulf between American servicemen and the members of the host nation populations of Iraq and Afghanistan contributed to multiple missteps and lost opportunities. Significantly, these miscues have extended beyond the tactical level of command, broaching the operational level of command and diminishing the effectiveness of campaign design.

Bridging the cultural gulf, whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, or any other current or future operational environment is considered a critical requirement within military circles. Each service has established a cultural learning center that serves as one stop shopping for culture specific training and education assistance. Veterans returning from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other theaters of operation are continually documenting their cultural experiences in lessons learned archives and professional journals. Additionally, the Department of Defense is

employing civilian social scientists in various capacities to support cultural training and product development.

The sum of these efforts is a clearer, more comprehensive understanding of what culture is, and how host nation cultural factors can influence the conduct of expeditionary military operations. However, advances in the use of cultural knowledge have primarily benefited units and individuals operating at the tactical level of command and war. Understanding and using culture at the tactical level, while important and beneficial, will ultimately have limited utility unless corresponding improvements are made in applying cultural awareness and knowledge at the operational levels of command and war. By providing greater emphasis on the importance of culture in the joint planning process, to include clarifying differences in using culture between the tactical and operational levels of war, and establishing cultural considerations as an element of Operational Design, cultural knowledge will be more effectively utilized in the planning of campaigns and major operations.

COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

One could argue that given the nature of the contemporary operational environment, the focus of intellectual and material resources toward developing cultural competence, as well as the application of cultural knowledge, should be at the tactical level of war. By examining the United States" use of the military instrument of power over the most recent two decades, it is readily apparent that employing military force in a conventional (against an adversary using similar equipment, weapons, doctrine, and tactics as the United States) has

been the exception vice the rule.[1] With stability, peace, foreign humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, counterinsurgency, and hybrid events likely to remain prevalent, two factors would support maintaining the cultural focus at the tactical level of war.

The first factor is connected to where the intersection of a host nation‟s indigenous population and American service members occurs. Senior personnel at the operational level will by and large have less frequent contact with the local populace. When they do interact, they very likely will have time to prepare for contact with host nation individuals and receive cultural instruction specific to the situation from support staff.[2] Conversely, the majority of personnel engaged in day to day contact with the host nation population, are likely to be members of units operating at the tactical level of war.   These service members, more likely younger and less experienced, are living in the world of the host nation culture and can ill afford to learn "on the fly", as cultural mistakes could incur long term damage to their missions. Therefore, the focus of cultural training and education is appropriately placed at the lower level of war.

Second, the diverse nature of culture groups within an operational environment could also be cited to justify the emphasis of cultural awareness at the tactical level of war. The contemporary operational environment requires U.S.forces to disperse throughout their area of operations to establish contact with the indigenous populace. As units disaggregate, it is likely that they will encounter a wide variety of behaviors, beliefs, and outlooks rooted in local cultures. For this reason, tactical units are best suited to focus on how their presence and actions will be perceived in their local areas of responsibility. Further, a diverse array of

---

[1] A strong argument can be made that this phenomenon applies not just to the United States for the past 20 years, but also as a general rule throughout the history of armed conflict.
[2] Defense Science Board, *Understanding Human Dynamics*, Defense Science Board Task Force Report (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, March 2009), 94.

culture groups within an operational environment will limit options for the operational level of command to culturally influence operations. For example, the country of Afghanistan contains four major, plus multiple, smaller ethnic groups.[3] While each of these ethnic groups possesses similar cultural characteristics, they also have considerable differences. In light of this, it would be difficult for the International Security Assistance Force staff to design policies and plans with uniform, broad cultural themes.

A second counter-argument can point to the recent revisions to joint and service doctrine, which address culture in greater detail than their predecessors. The draft Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operations Planning,* released in January 2010 presents a new construct for analyzing an actual or potential operational environment. This construct advises that political, military, economic, social, and information elements are examined to gain a more thorough understanding of the operational environment.[4] The draft Joint Publication 5-0 further discusses the importance of understanding how and why individuals and groups act within and across the aforementioned categories, and how that knowledge can help estimate probable behavior of these actors .[5]

The FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency,* contains 61 instances of the word culture and 79 instances of the word cultural. It states in its introduction that cultural knowledge is essential in a counterinsurgency campaign as the American social perspective of reality is not a universal outlook.[6] Further, Chapter 3 of the manual, devoted to

---

[3] U.S. Marine Corps Center for Advanced Culture Learning, *Afghanistan: Operational Culture for Deploying Personnel*, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, May 2009), 12.
[4] Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations Planning*, draft, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0 (Washington, D.C.: CJCS, January 2010), III-17.
[5] Ibid., III-19.
[6] U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual (FM) 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5, (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006)1-15.

intelligence, contains a detailed discussion of using cultural considerations to define and understand the effects of the operational environment.[7]

The draft Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operations Planning,* Chapter 4 of the FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency,* MCWP 5-1, *Planning,* and FM 5-0, *The Operations Process* incorporate design theory into joint and service planning processes. The intent of incorporating design theory into the doctrine hierarchy is to ensure that commanders and planning staffs invest the appropriate amount of intellectual energy into understanding the operational environment and correctly identifying the problem at hand. The impetus behind the design effort was the difficulties encountered in the post major combat operational environments of Iraq and Afghanistan. As such, design recognizes that "human variables, interaction, and relationships are frequently decisive."[8]

DISCUSSION

Culture Defined

Academic definitions of culture are as numerous and varied as the diverse societies they attempt to explain. One of the earliest definitions of culture describes it as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[9] Geert Hofstede, a respected Dutch social psychologist, defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another."[10] These

---

[7] Ibid., 3-4.
[8] U.S. Army, *The Operations Process,* Field Manual (FM) 5-0 (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, March 2010), 3-5.
[9] Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (New York: J.P. Putnam and Sons, 1920), 1.
[10] Geert Hofstede, "National Cultures and Corporate Cultures," in *Communication Between Cultures,* eds. L.A. Samovar and R.E. Porter. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1984), 51.

samples are but two of literally dozens that can be found in a cursory literary search of the topic.

The academic world's many definitions of culture contribute to an equally wide assortment of definitions found in military literature. One author remarks that "culture is the lens through which its members see and understand the world."[11] FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 contains a detailed (two and one half pages) treatment of culture that encompasses multiple elements to include identity, beliefs, values, attitudes and perceptions, belief systems, and forms.[12]

While definitions are many and varied, they are not entirely disparate. Common attributes among academic and military definitions of culture address outlooks toward external groups, thought processes as they relate to decision making, acceptable or unacceptable personal behavior, tangible and intangible items of value, and internal and external social relationships. Additionally, three other important and fundamental concepts consistent in most interpretations of culture are worth highlighting, as they hold critical importance when evaluating culture from the perspective of the operational level of war.

First, culture, and all associated sub-elements, is communal; members of a group will by and large adopt and practice the values and beliefs resident in the culture of that group.[13] A caveat to this general rule is that while culture may be communal, it may not be uniformly consistent throughout an identified social group. In large social groups, such as nation-states,

---

[11] William D. Wunderle, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: A Primer for U.S. Forces Deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries* (Washington D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2006), 9.
[12] U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual (FM) 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5, (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006)3-6 to 3-9.
[13] Defense Science Board, *Understanding Human Dynamics*, Defense Science Board Task Force Report (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, March 2009), 69.

there will normally be deviations in cultural characteristics amongst smaller "sub-cultures" that reside within the broader framework of the parent culture. These differences may often lead to conflict within the larger social group. Thus, an ethnically homogenous group may not have a uniform outlook toward foreigners due to internal differences in its belief system.

Second, culture is learned rather than genetically programmed behavior.[14] Individuals absorb specific cultural characteristics through association with their social group. Since culture is not inborn, it is subject to change over extended periods of time – however, the rate at which a society"s or group"s culture changes is governed by a wide array of cultural factors and should not be construed as certain or subject to external influence.

Finally, culture, and the characteristics that comprise it, should not be confused with a society"s social structures; which encompass groups and ethnic groups, tribes, clans, organizations, institutions, and networks.[15] These entities, such as clans and tribes, provide a framework for the distribution of power and authority amongst individuals and smaller groups. How that power and authority is distributed, will be governed to an extent by that group"s culture.

A comprehensive understanding of how these cultural characteristics manifest themselves in a given contemporary operational environment is important. For one, it will assist commanders and staffs at the operational level of war understand what is feasible in relation to the host nation culture they are presented with. This understanding of what will work, or not work, given the reality of the cultural framework, will contribute to the design of campaign plans with a higher probability of success. To better understand this dynamic, it

---

[14] Defense Science Board, *Understanding Human Dynamics*, Defense Science Board Task Force Report (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, March 2009), 69.
[15] U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual (FM) 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5, (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006), 3-5.

is useful to review three historical examples of where cultural knowledge was either poorly, or effectively, utilized in the planning and execution of military operations at the operational level of war.

Cultural Awareness at the Operational Level of War: Three Historical Experiences

On 25 August 1982, two months after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the United States Government began a series of Marine Amphibious Unit deployments to Beirut that lasted until February 1984. Initially designed as a short term presence to facilitate the withdrawal of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the Marines withdrew from Beirut approximately three weeks later. By early October 1982, however, the Marines returned following the assassination of Lebanese president Bashir Gemayel and the massacres in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

Sent to Lebanon with the national strategic objective of "enabling the Lebanese government to restore full sovereignty over its capital, the essential precondition for extending its control over the entire country," the Marines were initially to act as a "presence" in support of the Lebanese central government.[16]   Within two months, the Marine's "presence" mission expanded from security patrols to, at the request of the Lebanese government, actual training of Lebanese army units. This training was comprehensive and included tactics, techniques, and procedures for close combat skills, small arms, physical fitness, air assault, and artillery support.[17]   Within one year of the commencement of this training program, the Marine barracks at the Beirut International Airport was destroyed in a truck bomb attack, killing over 240 Marines and Sailors.

---

[16] Thomas L. Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1989), 186.

[17] Benis M. Frank, *U.S. Marines in Lebanon: 1982-1984* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters U.S. Marine Coprs, USMC History and Museums Division, 1987), 39-41, http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/ (accessed 3 October 2010).

The root cause of the barracks bombing was a failure, at the operational level of war, to fully appreciate the cultural implications of the Lebanese operational environment. The extensive training program was conducted with the best of intentions; to help professionalize an organization that was part of the duly seated Lebanese government – a perfectly reasonable assessment through American eyes. Yet, what the operational level command that directed the Marines to execute this program failed to understand was that the Lebanese army, although an institution of the Lebanese government, was viewed by the Shiite Muslim and Druse communities as nothing more than a personal militia for the Christian president of Lebanon, Amin Gemayel. As the training program continued throughout 1983, the Marines became more and more enmeshed in the decades old communal war between the country's Christian, Druse, and Shiite Muslim populations.[18] The blurring lines between the Marines and the Christian faction became completely non-existent on 19 September 1983, when naval gunfire was used in direct support of Lebanese army units battling Druse and Palestinian militias for control of a village in the Shouf mountains. Now viewed as full partners of the Maronite Christians, the Marines' barracks was attacked one month later.

A second failure to incorporate cultural considerations at the operational level of war was the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The absence of a comprehensive understanding of Iraqi culture was a major factor in the mismanaged transition from combat to stability operations. Nuances of Iraqi culture regarding social structures, especially the Sunni tribes, were not considered by operational level planners to any great extent – and thus were not integrated in the overall campaign design. In effect, there was a cultural misunderstanding of Iraq by the United States at the operational level of war. This misunderstanding was exemplified by the

---

[18] Ibid, 194.

failure to engage Sunni tribal leaders in a coherent manner across the Multi National Force-Iraq area of operation.

Sunni tribal structures in Iraq date back at least 1,300 years, and form a significant part of how social power is distributed in the Sunni dominated provinces.[19] In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in April of 2003, American forces entering Al Anbar province were unaware of the stature and influence held by the tribal sheiks in the Sunni culture. Consequently, the sheiks were ignored, or in many cases arrested.[20] As the occupation established operational level of command structures at the Coalition Provisional Authority and Multi-National Forces Iraq, the bypassing of the Sunni tribal sheiks continued. With representative democracy as the objective, the effort at this level focused on organizing and executing national and provincial elections as soon as possible – again, a perfectly reasonable goal in terms of the American experience. The tribal leaders in this construct were viewed as "anachronisms", essentially throwbacks to the feudal age, and were thus ignored.[21] Although tribal engagement was occurring at the tactical level throughout 2004-2006, the absence of emphasis and direction at the operational level of war dissipated the overall effect of these efforts. As a result, the coalition lost a valuable opportunity to deny material support and safe havens to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.

A positive example of using cultural awareness at the operational level of war can be found at the end of World War II. In August of 1945, U.S. occupation forces began a mission that at the outset troubled senior political and military leaders concerned over what

---

[19] Hussein D. Hassan, *Iraq: Tribal Structure, Social, and Political Activities,* CRS Report RS 22626 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 2.
[20] Timothy S. McWilliams and Gary W. Montgomery, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening,* Vol II, *Iraqi Perspectives: From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009), 87.
[21] Greg Jaffe, "To Understand Sheiks in Iraq, Marines ask „Mac‟," *Wall Street Journal*, 10 September 2007, http://www.leatherneck.com/forums (accessed 14 September 2010).

they perceived as a strong potential for failure. The fanaticism of the Japanese, the brutal violence that characterized the war in the Pacific, and the dramatically different Japanese society convinced many observers that resistance would continue, despite the Emperor's edict to cease all military activities against the Allies.[22] However, the occupation that ensued until 1952 is widely considered a success. A key factor in this outcome was the ability of the Supreme Commander for Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur, to oversee the integration of cultural understanding into his command's planning routine and daily execution of operations.

General MacArthur's background made him ideally suited to lead the occupation from a cultural standpoint. When the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, MacArthur had spent nearly half of his professional career in the Far East. His in-depth understanding of Asian culture guided his thought process on decisions of enormous consequence; the most well known being the retention of the Japanese emperor. MacArthur's cultural acumen was so great it led one of his subordinates to remark "There isn't any question that Douglas MacArthur was the greatest military figure in the Orient since Ghengis Khan….He really knew the oriental mind…remember, he was with the Japanese Army in the Russo-Japanese war."[23]

MacArthur's emphasis on cultural understanding extended to how he constructed his occupation staff. In addition to filling key staff positions with Japan experts, two sub-sections of his organization were dedicated to cultural analysis. The Research and Analysis branch of the Civil Intelligence section, and the Public Opinion and Social Research Division of the Civil Information and Education section were responsible for the collection,

---

[22] Michael B. Meyer, *A History of Socio-Cultural Intelligence and Research Conducted Under the Occupation of Japan,* Carlisle Papers in Security Strategy (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, April 2009), 3.
[23] Ibid, 5.

processing, and analysis of cultural information.[24] This construct ensured that MacArthur

received assessments and recommendations, evaluated with regard to cultural implications,

on all types of policy initiatives. Further, this advice was being produced by civilian and

uniformed analysts and managers with strong backgrounds on Japan and Japanese culture.

While these historical cases present good examples of outcomes - how the proper or

poor application of cultural knowledge at the operational level of war contributed to success

or failure – several questions related to the differences between using culture at the

operational or tactical levels remain open. These questions include: are there different types

of cultural knowledge required by a squad leader or platoon commander operating in a

remote village, compared to say that which is necessary for a plans officer in a joint or

combined command structure? Is the knowledge all the same, but just used for different

purposes at each respective level of war? If so, do these different purposes require a

practitioner to master and utilize different skill sets when employing cultural knowledge?   Is

applying cultural knowledge in the pursuit of identified objectives any harder at one level

compared to the other? Exploring these questions, and attempting to provide answers to

them, will provide additional clarity to the distinctions between using culture at these two

levels of war.

Perspectives on Culture: The Tactical vs. The Operational Level of War

Culture, as defined in multiple academic and military interpretations, may evolve, but

normally at a slow rate of change.[25] In this respect, culture will remain constant across the

levels of war at a given point in time. Therefore the cultural characteristics of a social group

---

[24] Ibid, 6.
[25] U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual (FM) 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting
Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5, (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006), 3-6.

that manifest themselves when a platoon leader meets with a village council will be the same cultural characteristics that are observed by a Joint Force Command planner analyzing the exact same social group. However, the manner in which the planner applies the knowledge of the social group's cultural characteristics will differ from how the platoon commander utilizes that very same knowledge. This dynamic is due to the simple fact that each individual, the platoon leader and the planner, have different purposes and different ends in acquiring and using cultural knowledge.

For the platoon leader, or any other Marine or soldier participating at the tactical level of war, a measure of cultural awareness is arrived at from the study of their operating environment (history, social structures, geography, infrastructure, languages, religion, and shared outlooks of locals.) This academic understanding is not important in and of itself; its significance lies in the fact that it is a necessary precursor to enabling tactical level personnel to understand the local problems and to build relationships with the host nation populace.[26] The priority of effort will be weighted toward the building of relationships, for this ultimately provides the tactical level operator a higher probability of achieving acceptance by and acquiescence from the host nation civilian population. .

As a premium is placed on relationship building, the development of interpersonal skills in concert with cultural awareness becomes a critical training requirement and focus area for using culture at the tactical level of war. Social etiquette, questioning techniques, survival language skills, social networking, conducting a negotiation, and using an interpreter are areas of emphasis in pre-deployment training programs and become core skills once deployed to the conflict zone. Education governing general cultural awareness – what a

---

[26] David J. Kilcullen, "28 Articles: Fundamentals of Company Level Counterinsurgency," *Iosphere,* Summer 2006, 29-30, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/info-ops/iosphere/iosphere_summer06_kilcullen.pdf (accessed 16 September 2010).

social group believes and why it acts in certain ways – remains important, but is done so with the intent of facilitating interpersonal skill expertise.

While the application of tactical level cultural knowledge is focused on personal engagement with local nationals, cultural knowledge is subject to a broader application and more complex demands at the operational level of war. This is due primarily to an operational level command"s responsibility to provide overall coordination and oversight for its theater of operations, and simultaneously be responsive to requirements from the theater strategic level of command. Additionally, the operational level of command is further removed from the point of execution of plans, programs, and policies, thus experiencing infrequent personal contact with the host nation civilian population. To appreciate more fully the implications of culture at the operational level of war, it is necessary to examine the relationship of cultural knowledge and awareness to operational art.

Culture and Operational Art

Operational Art is an overarching doctrinal term that, at its essence, describes a relationship between people (commanders and staffs), and the products that those people produce (plans for campaigns and major operations). Operational Art also provides a cognitive framework to connect and shape actions at the tactical level of war with operational or strategic objectives.[27] Culture, no matter the definition that one ascribes to, is fundamentally about explaining human behavior. In the contemporary operational environment the human behavior of the host nation population assumes a central role for operational planners, as desired outcomes in that behavior will more often than not be a prerequisite for achieving operational or strategic objectives. Operational Art, then, provides

---

[27] Milan Vego, *Operational Art: Theory and Practice* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 2007), I-9.

the doctrinal context and impetus to ensure cultural knowledge is appropriately applied at the operational level of war.

But what exactly does "appropriately applied" mean? If at the tactical level of war cultural knowledge is applied toward enhancing the quality of relationships between U.S. forces and the host nation population, what are the considerations at the operational level of war?

For one, the scope of responsibility at the operational level of war is far greater than at the tactical level. This characteristic manifests itself in two ways with regard to culture. From a quantitative aspect, the sheer number of cultural factors that must be accounted for will be far greater. The platoon leader working in one or two villages will naturally have less religious, tribal, and political leaders to deal with, as well as less social networks to decipher. From a qualitative standpoint, that same platoon leader is likely to have a far more homogenous cultural group to work with in terms of values, beliefs, and attitudes regarding foreigners. Conversely, a theater of operations will encompass an exponentially greater number of social and political networks, ethnic groups, religions, and belief systems. Also, with a larger number of cultural factors, will come a wider variety of relationships to sort out, making it more difficult to determine who the decision makers are, and who can influence the population throughout the theater of operation.

Secondly, one of the primary purposes of an operational level of command is to design and plan campaigns and major operations. In its analysis and synthesis of the cultural characteristics resident in the theater of operations, the operational level of command must ensure that the campaign plan and strategy are built to accommodate the nature and character

of the indigenous population.[28] Or, put another way, the operational level of command must prevent occurrences of mirror imaging. Mirror imaging, even well intentioned mirror imaging, is the cardinal sin when operating in a foreign culture. Attempting to override the realities of the existing cultural framework with one"s own cultural expectations will result in wasted resources (for programs the host nations does not care about), and will very likely alienate the host nation population.

A third consideration is the role of leadership. Given the progression in quantitative and qualitative cultural complexity from the tactical to the operational levels of war, the role of the commander at the operational level becomes crucial. This is not to discount the importance of leadership with regards to cultural matters at the tactical level. However, cultural issues that will present themselves at the operational level of war will be large in number and diverse in nature. The operational commander who is both experienced and well educated regarding the cultural dynamics of the theater of operations, will be better equipped to navigate the complex cultural terrain.   As the respected strategist Milan Vego notes: "An operational commander should possess extensive knowledge and understanding of political, economic, diplomatic, ethnic, religious, legal and other aspects of the situation in his theater, otherwise, he will not be successful in accomplishing his primary responsibilities in peace and war."[29]

Response to the First Counter Argument

The first counter-argument states that the study and application of cultural knowledge should reside at the tactical level of war as: the tactical level is where the vast majority of

---

[28] U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual,* Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication (FMFRP) 12-15 (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 1940), 75.
[29] Milan Vego, *Operational Art: Theory and Practice* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 2007), XI-4.

inter-personal contact within a host nation population occurs, and the likely cultural diversity of an operational environment renders an operational level of command unsuitable for involvement in cultural issues.

Subscribing to this rationale requires one to disregard essential distinctions between using culture at the different levels of war. The purpose for which those at the tactical level seek knowledge of a social group"s culture is dedicated to facilitating frequent and sustained periods of personal contact. The operational level applies cultural knowledge more broadly, seeking to ascertain how commonalities and differences in culture across a theater of operation respond to the presence of U.S. forces. The understanding of this dynamic, along with other relevant elements of culture, then shapes campaign design.

The skill sets required to properly apply cultural knowledge at the two levels will also vary. The tactical level, attempting to connect at a personal level with culture groups, relies on communication and negotiation skills. U.S. forces at this level are ultimately trying to convince the host nation population to accept a foreign presence in their country. How well those forces interact with the populace, and how well they balance expressions of empathy with the application of leverage, are critical to obtaining that support.

At the operational level, inter-personal skills are important, but the number of service members required to interact with host nation personnel will be restricted to the senior leadership. At this level, attributes associated with analytical skills and extensive knowledge of and personal experience in the operational environment will be in high demand. Due to the complexity of cultural issues at the operational level of war, this knowledge and experience is required to discern meaningful themes and key players in the theater of operation.

While the study of culture and its application in military operations has a place at the tactical level of war, it is clear this is not the only place where cultural knowledge can influence military operations. The roles and functions of the operational level of command within the framework of Operational Art make the use of culture at the operational level of war both relevant and integral to the planning and conduct of military operations.

Culture and Doctrine: A General Overview

Military doctrine is written guidance that provides purpose and structure to military activities - serving as a bridge between theory, and the implementation of that theory, into practice.[30] Culture, an undeniably human phenomenon, is critical to understand as armed conflict is fundamentally a clash between social groups (whose decision making processes are governed by cultural factors.) Culture, as a field of study, tends to lean toward the abstract, vice concrete realm, when attempting to explain human behavior. Because culture can be a difficult subject to grasp, it is important that doctrine provide a comprehensive explanation regarding the study and application of culture at the operational level of war. As previously stated, recent doctrinal publications have placed additional emphasis on the role of culture in the planning and execution of military operations. While these improvements are helpful and welcome, they fall short with regards to addressing the role of culture at the operational level of war.

Culture & Current Doctrine: Where improvement is needed

The emphasis on the acquisition and application of cultural knowledge at the tactical level of war is one area requiring improvement. FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5,

---

[30] Seminar 17 discussion, moderated by Prof. Ivan Luke, 19 August 2010

Counterinsurgency and the Marine Corps‟ *Operational Culture for the Warfighter* are excellent resources for understanding and interpreting culture in military operations. However, the emphasis of these two publications is on gaining a better understanding of indigenous populations in order to enhance relationship building. This goal is a worthy one, as accomplishing it is a necessary precursor to building trust. However, an excessive emphasis is unhealthy, as it contributes to the neglect of understanding the broader implications of culture in military operations at the other levels of war.

The draft Joint Publication 5-0, *Operations Planning*, directs the consideration of political, military, economic, social structures, infrastructure, and information when determining the nature of the operational environment. The draft doctrine further advises that "analysis should define how these systems interrelate with one another, in order to produce a holistic view of the relevant enemy."[31] While this is a very useful approach, it falls short in describing how these "relevant relationships" between systems and actors can be deduced. Because of this shortcoming, the various categories (political, economic, military, etc.), despite the urging to the contrary, may end up being viewed by planners as distinct and separate entities.

Additionally, the draft Joint Publication 5-0 discusses analysis of the non-military aspects of the operational environment prior to mission analysis, during the initial planning to better understand the environment and define the problem at hand. Once the formal Joint Operations Planning Process has been initiated with mission analysis, there is no formal mechanism to ensure cultural considerations of the battle space will continue to be evaluated.

---

[31] Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations Planning*, draft, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0 (Washington, D.C.: CJCS, January 2010), III-17.

Response to the Second Counter Argument and Recommendations

The second counter argument proposes that culture is sufficiently addressed in current and pending doctrinal publications. While there has been progress made, a more comprehensive treatment of culture in current doctrine, specifically its place in relation to the operational level of war, is needed. Improvements can be realized by providing greater details in Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning,* regarding how culture impacts the operational level of war, how cultural analysis can be incorporated into an assessment of the operational environment in order to determine relationships between key elements of the social, political, and economic structures, and by incorporating cultural considerations as an element of operational design. These improvements will enhance the effectiveness of using culture at the operational level of war in the short term, and also serve to mitigate serious shortcomings resident in how the U.S. military establishment trains, educates, and assigns personnel in the context of the contemporary operating environment.

FINAL REMARKS

The March 2009 Defense Science Board report on Human Dynamics observed that in order to successfully accomplish political and military objectives in a modern operational environment, the United States must apply cultural knowledge at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war.[32] While neither new nor dramatic, this observation is striking in the following sense: the remainder of the report offers several examples of culture impacting operations at the tactical and strategic levels, but not at the operational level.

---

[32] Defense Science Board, *Understanding Human Dynamics*, Defense Science Board Task Force Report (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, March 2009), 3.

This omission is telling as it indicates a low comfort level with analyzing and understanding how culture is related to the operational level of war. Unfortunately, the consequences of failing to properly connect cultural implications of an operating environment with the operational level of war are far reaching and profoundly negative. One only has to look Afghanistan in 2010 to see the repercussions of failing to integrate and exploit cultural understanding of the operational environment into the operational idea and plan.

Upon assuming command of International Security Assistance Force General David Petraeus remarked "We have never had the granular understanding of local circumstances in Afghanistan that we achieved over time in Iraq."[33] Contrary to this opinion, it could be argued that over the years we have developed a very good understanding of cultural factors in Afghanistan: but only at the local (tactical) level. Where the failure has occurred is in understanding how to analyze and ultimately understand a diverse body of cultural information, encompassing all shapes and forms of social, political, and economic elements, across several different ethnic groups, at the operational level of war. This shortcoming with regards to exploiting cultural knowledge ultimately contributes to shortcomings in attaining objectives, and, of course, failure or only partial success in attaining objectives at the operational level of war translates into failure or only partial success at successively higher levels.

Viewed from this perspective, the stakes are high with regard to improving and optimizing the employment of cultural knowledge at the operational level of war.

---

[33] Julian E. Barnes, "Petraeus: „U.S. Lacks Afghan Tribal Knowledge‟" *Wall Street Journal*, 2 September 2010. http://online.wsj.com/article/ (accessed 10 September 2010).

Fortunately, the U.S. military establishment now realizes the importance of understanding foreign cultures, and how those cultures impact the conduct of expeditionary military operations. Considerable resources have been dedicated to cultural training and education programs benefitting operators at the tactical level of war. What is required now is the recognition that cultural knowledge properly applied at the operational level of war is essential to accomplishing operational and theater –strategic objectives. This recognition is a necessary first step toward enabling necessary changes first in doctrine, and ultimately in recruiting, personnel systems, and military education that will improve how the U.S. military establishment uses cultural understanding at the operational level of war.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alrich, Amy. *Framing the Cultural Training Landscape: Phase I Findings.* IDA Document D-3709. Alexandria, VA: Institute For Defense Analysis, December 2008.

Barnes, Julian E. "Petraeus: „U.S. Lacks Afghan Tribal Knowledge‟" *Wall Street Journal*, 2 September 2010. http://online.wsj.com/article/ (accessed 10 September 2010).

Bore, Henri. "Cultural Awareness and Irregular Warfare: French Army Experience in Africa." *Military Review* (July-August 2006), 108-111.

Connable, Ben. "All Our Eggs in a Broken Basket: How the Human Terrain System is Undermining Sustainable Military Cultural Competence." *Military Review* (March-April 2009), 57-64.

Defense Science Board. *Understanding Human Dynamics*. Defense Science Board Task Force Report. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics. March 2009

Frank, Benis M. *U.S. Marines in Lebanon: 1982-1984.* Washington, D.C.: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, History and Museums Division, 1987.

Friedman, Thomas L. *From Beirut to Jerusalem*. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1989.

Hassan, Hussein D. *Iraq: Tribal Structure, Social, and Political Activities.* CRS Report RS22626. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2007.

Hoffman, Frank G. *Small Wars Revisited: The United States and Nontraditional Wars.* London: Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol. 8, No. 26, December 2005.

Hofstede, Geert. "National Cultures and Corporate Cultures." In *Communication Between Cultures,* edited by L.A. Samovar and K.E. Porter. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1984.

Jaffe, Greg. "To Understand Sheiks in Iraq, Marines Ask „Mac‟." *Wall Street Journal, 10 September 2007.* http://www.leatherneck.com/forums (accessed 14 September 2010).

Karcanes, James A. "Cultural Competence and the Operational Commander: Moving Beyond Cultural Awareness Into Culture-Centric Warfare." Research paper, Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department, 2007.

David J. Kilcullen, "28 Articles: Fundamentals of Company Level Counterinsurgency," *Iosphere,* Summer 2006, 29-30, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/info-ops/iosphere/iosphere_summer06_kilcullen.pdf (accessed 16 September 2010).

Krulak, Charles C. "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War." *Marines Magazine*, Vol. 28, No. 1, January 1999), 28-34.

McWilliams, Timothy S. and Kurtis P. Wheeler, eds. *Al Anbar Awakening*. Vol I, *American Perspectives: U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009.* Marine Corps University Press, Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2009.

McWilliams, Timothy S. and Gary W. Montgomery, eds. *Al-Anbar Awakening.* Vol II, *Iraqi Perspectives: From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009.* Marine Corps University Press, Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2009.

Meyer, Michael B. *A History of Socio-Cultural Research Conducted Under the Occupation of Japan.* Carlisle Papers in Security Strategy. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, April 2009.

Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel. *The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America's National Security Needs in the 21st Century, The Final Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel.* Washington, D.C.: USIP, 2010.

Salmoni, Barak A. "Advances In Predeployment Culture Training: The U.S. Marine Corps Approach." *Military Review* (November-December 2006), 79-88.

The Peace Corps. *Culture Matters: The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook.* T0087. Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps Information Collection and Exchange.

Tylor, Edward B. *Primitive Culture.* New York: J.P. Putnam and Sons, 1871.

U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps. *Counterinsurgency.* Field Manual (FM) 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5. Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006.

U.S. Army. *The Operations Process*. Field Manual (FM) 5-0. Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, March 2010.

United States Government Accountability Office. *Hybrid Warfare: Briefing to the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives*. Report GAO-10-1036R. Washington, D.C.: Government Accountability Office, 10 September 2010.

U.S. Marine Corps. *Small Wars Manual*. Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication 12-15. Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1940.

U.S. Marine Corps Center For Advanced Operational Culture Learning. *Afghanistan: Operational Culture for Deploying Personnel*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, May 2009.

U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Joint Operation Planning.* Joint Publication (JP) 5-0. Washington, D.C.: CJCS, 26 December 2005.

––––*Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms.* Joint Publication (JP) 1-02. Washington, D.C.: CJCS, 31 July 2010.

––––*Joint Operation Planning.* Draft. Joint Publication (JP) 5-0. Washington, D.C.: CJCS, January 2010.

Varhola, Christopher H. and Laura R. Varhola. "Avoiding the Cookie Cutter Approach to Culture: Lessons Learned From Operations in East Africa." *Military Review* (November-December 2006), 73-78.

Vego, Milan. *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice.* Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 2007.

––––*Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice.* Addendum to Vol. I. Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 2010.

Wunderle, William D. *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: A Primer for U.S. Forces Deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries.* Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2006.