

Aircrew Negotiations with Allied Partners
Francis S. Gay 3/19/10

Negotiating across cultures can be very challenging. In fact, there are many different definitions for culture itself. For the purpose of this paper, the definition of culture is “the shared values and beliefs of a group of people.”¹ Different cultures fall along a scale from low context to high context based on five main factors. Those factors are power distance index, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and view of time.² Adding a military context to cultural negotiations only makes the negotiations even more complex.

United States (US) military airmen are responsible for coordinating many different tasks with allied partners. Two major tasks that involve allied negotiations are ground support and airspace usage. These two issues can be highly contentious and they have led to numerous problems for airmen. First, this paper further defines the five main factors of high and low context cultures, and uses these factors to define the US culture in general. Next, this paper examines how US airmen can more successfully negotiate airspace and ground support with its allies by looking at four different partners (Germany, France, Japan, and Iraq) which span the low to high contextual cultural scale.

Power distance index, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and view of time are the five factors that define high and low context cultures.³ Power distance index is the degree of which a society is either egalitarian (low context) or hierarchical (high context). Individualism focuses on how much the society values the individual (low context) versus the community (high context). Masculinity is the degree of which a society is male dominant, with high context cultures being very male dominant. Uncertainty avoidance deals with risk and face. Higher context cultures are less likely to take risks because losing face due to failure to complete obligations could have dire personal impacts. This leads to higher context cultures to communicate more indirectly than low context cultures. Finally, high context cultures take the

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long view of time and tend to be more passive because they feel that they can't control nature, only work within it. Low context cultures are the opposite, valuing time to the extreme at times because they feel that they can control nature and therefore are responsible for their actions.

In order for US airmen to successfully conduct cross-cultural negotiations, they need to understand their own culture. Here is how the US rates in the five main factors. The US has a low power index since the US views everyone as an equal and each person has the ability to raise his or her individual status. This also makes the US highly individualistic focusing on personal rights over community needs. The US has a history of being masculine but today it sees little difference between men and women. People in the US take lots of risks because the US bases face on achievement and it is very accepting of failure. This also leads to a great deal of directness in negotiations. Finally, the US is extremely time sensitive. The US views time as one of its most precious commodities and a correlation of this is the US feels that it can control almost everything. Therefore, the US is a very low context culture.

With an understanding of US culture in mind, this paper now moves on to applying this knowledge to two typical aircrew negotiations with allied partners. The two common negotiations for US aircrew are ground support and airspace usage. Ground support negotiations entails things like ramp space parking, maintenance support, and refueling. Airspace usage involves getting the permission to fly aircraft where and when the US wants them to fly. These two issues can be very contentious. They are critical to airmen because the airmen are likely to negotiate them directly with allied representatives. This paper examines ways that airmen can get better results in these two negotiations by looking at four current allies that vary from low context to high context. The two low context countries are Germany and France, and the high context ally is Iraq, with Japan falling somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. If airmen can

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understand their own culture and the culture of the allies that they are dealing with, then they are more likely to be successful in negotiating ground support and airspace usage.

The first country examined is Germany. Here is how Germany rates using the five cultural factors. Germany has a very low power distance index since they base status on logic and reason. Germany does have a sense of individualism but there is also a sense of community based on their history and need for reliable associations. Traditional Germany was very masculine but today it is much more sexually indifferent. Germany is more risk adverse since it uses logic and reason to mitigate risk. Finally, Germany does not waste any time and state their thoughts directly.⁴ The Germans base their negotiations on logic and reason. They prepare extensively for negotiations and attempt to use reason to convince the opposition to accept Germany's position. They do this very directly. They can be flexible but require compromises based on logic.⁵ Germany is a low context culture and has much in common with US culture.

There are many similarities between the US and Germany that airmen can use in negotiations. First and foremost, Americans are very logical. If airmen can support their position with sound reasoning, they stand a good chance of getting their way. An example of this might be, "the US needs to park the aircraft over here because it is carrying ordinance and this is the safe distance from any vulnerable structure in case there is an explosion." Americans can also play on Germany's need for efficiency. An example of this might be "if you can give the US the extra power cart to use, then the US will be able to start our aircraft without any additional support and the US will spend less time taking up valuable ramp space." Finally, American's could attempt to play on Germany's Dialectic logic. Dialectic logic means that every idea has its own opposite and that the discrepancy would be resolved at a higher level.⁶ An example of how this might be useful would be to argue "flying in that airspace at that time

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might be against the regulations because of noise restraints, but it is necessary for the overall defense of the country because it gives the US critical training that it can't obtain elsewhere."

Though, this approach is a more complex and airmen should only attempt it with thorough knowledge of the situation. All these approaches have one thing in common, logic and reason, which is the key to negotiating with the Germans.

France is very similar to Germany. The French rate the following using the five cultural factors. France has a higher power index than the US, since it still has some hierarchy in government elites, but it is still very egalitarian. France also is more socialist than the US and France's motto, "Liberty, Fraternity, Equality," represents this feeling well, but there is still a good chance for individuals to excel. Like Germany, France has a history of being masculine but today it is very gender neutral. France is open to risk on roughly the same level as the US. Finally, the French do value time but not nearly as much as the US. The French use Cartesian Logic in their negotiations. This means that they look at the big picture and then reason down to the details. They are not very open to compromise since they are always correct using their logic. This means that they also tend not to have a backup plan when disagreements arise. Finally, the dichotomy of the Grand Nation and the Underdog further fuels the resistance to any concessions.⁷ Overall, France is a low context culture similar to the US.

Given France's unwillingness to compromise, it would seem that France is a nearly impossible negotiating partner. Though, there are some things that airmen could do in order to more successfully negotiate with the French. First, they can try to appeal to Cartesian logic by showing the French how the US's request meets their principles. An example of this might be "the US requests over flight access of France of aircraft going to Afghanistan to support its troops, which in turn helps protect French citizens." Another possible technique is to appeal to

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their ego. If airmen can reinforce the fact that the US is working with France as an equal partner, they might get more concessions. An example of this might be “why don’t the US and France pool our ground maintenance support since we are all fighting together.” Finally, airmen should always have alternative ready when dealing with the French, because they probably don’t have one. An example of this would be “since France won’t let the US land its planes at base ‘X’ and we need to land them somewhere, then what if we were to land them at base ‘Y.’” The US needs to do all this with great care and respect as to not come across as condescending to the French. France is a tough negotiator, but understanding the French will help US airmen in their negotiations.

Japan has been an ally of the US since the end of World War II. The US had a large role in shaping current Japanese culture by blending traditional Japanese culture with US culture, when the US rebuilt Japan after the Second World War. The Japanese culture is very hierarchical but there is some room for raising social status based on merit. The Japanese culture is extremely communal seeking harmony and building consensus. The Japanese are somewhat masculine but are becoming more gender neutral. The Japanese are risk adverse and tend to examine the situation thoroughly prior to making any decisions. They tend to communicate indirectly. One example of this is their reluctance to say “no.” Finally, Japan is time sensitive but it is willing to take the long view to try to wear down its opponents during negotiations.⁸

Normally, the Japanese attempt to avoid negotiations especially with the US. They see negotiations as a last resort and the worst alternative because they feel that if they negotiate, the opposition will force them to make concessions. Also, the Japanese extensively use back channels to avoid losing face in public negotiations. Japanese negotiations are also time-

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consuming because their sense of community needs to build a consensus to any change in an agreement.⁹ Overall, the Japanese culture fits somewhere in between high and low context.

The greatest trait for US airmen dealing with the Japanese is patience. US airmen need to resist the initial temptation to attempt to impose their will on the Japanese. This technique might be necessary as a last resort in critical situations, but it will only reinforce negative feelings between the US and Japan. Airmen should look for ways to use back channels in order to get their requirements met. A good way to do this would be to float ideas to a Japanese equivalent. An example of this might be going to Japanese base operations and saying “what if the US was to park its planes here during this exercise” or “do you think this flight plan will make it through your system.” Once again showing respect and patience is essential. When time constrained, the best solution might be to use the chain of command. Since Japan is hierarchical, then someone higher in the chain of command might be able to get better results. Airmen need to understand the Japanese in order to get better results when dealing with them.

After Operation Iraqi Freedom, Iraq changed its status from adversary to ally. Though, this didn't completely resolve the conflict between the two countries. Iraq is a very traditional country and here is how it rates contextually using the five cultural factors. Iraq has a very high power distance index. The leadership is extremely hierarchical and the population is born into castes with little hope of changing their social status. Iraq is very communal focusing on things like family and tribe loyalty. Iraq is very masculine but there is some gender neutrality in the secular government. Iraq is extremely risk adverse and Iraqis fear losing face. Finally, Iraq very long term oriented and the Iraqis believe that they have little control over events in their lives. When Iraqis negotiate they will avoid pinning down details to avoid losing face.¹⁰ A corollary of this is that they focus on relationships verses tasks in negotiating. Also, their hierarchical

structure leads to cronyism and what the US might call corruption. Finally, the Iraqis use a great deal of indirect communication. Combining this factor with their feeling that they are not directly responsible for outcomes, these two factors lead to situations where the Iraqis may agree to a deal but fail to implement it.¹¹ All these factors make Iraq a high context culture and they show the great differences between the Iraq and the US.

US airmen might see Iraq culture as completely foreign. The best thing that airmen can do when negotiating with Iraq is to try to prepare for the differences. Even minimum education on Iraqi culture, could prevent many problems. Airmen can prepare for circumstances like not receiving the ground support they were promised. Education also helps them respect the differences between the two cultures, which in turn leads to better negotiations. Also, airmen should focus on developing relationships with their Iraqi counterparts. These relationships will lead to better outcomes and implementations. Finally, airmen need to adapt to work with the Iraqi system. An example of this might be focusing on an informal agreement for airspace usage which allows for the US to use the airspace most of the time, but also lets the Iraqis take the airspace when needed to avoid losing face. For airmen this will be challenging, but by taking a little initiative, airmen can significantly increase their chances for mission success in Iraq.

Dealing with allied partners can be very challenging, even when they are similar to US culture. This paper used four examples (Germany, France, Japan, and Iraq) to show how US airmen could improve mission success by negotiating in two key areas (ground support and airspace usage). This was only a cursory examination and airmen should do more preparation prior to attempting to negotiate with these allies. Though, one theme runs through all these examples. Airmen need to educate themselves about the different countries and their respective cultures. Also, they need to prepare for these negotiations, if they want to ensure mission

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success. This is the lesson that airmen need to learn and it applies well beyond ground support and airspace usage.

¹ Lewicki, R., Barry, B., & Saunders, D. *Essentials in Negotiation*, 4th ed. New York, NY: MacGraw-Hill/Irwin, 2007. p. 229.

² Hofstede, Geert. *Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions*, Cultural Negotiations Seminar ELB1, 2010.

³ Hofstede, Geert. *Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions*, Cultural Negotiations Seminar ELB1, 2010.

⁴ Smyser, W. R. *How Germans Negotiate*. Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2003. p.11-53.

⁵ Smyser, W. R. *How Germans Negotiate*. Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2003. p. 55-56.

⁶ Smyser, W. R. *How Germans Negotiate*. Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2003. p. 23.

⁷ Cogan, Charles. *French Negotiating Behavior*. Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2003. p. 10-17.

⁸ Blaker, Michael, Paul Giarra, and Ezra F. Vogel. *Case Studies in Japanese Negotiation Behavior*. Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2002. p. 147-156.

⁹ Blaker, Michael, Paul Giarra, and Ezra F. Vogel. *Case Studies in Japanese Negotiation Behavior*. Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2002. p. 147-156.

¹⁰ Wunderle, William D. (LTC, USA). "Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: A Primer for US Armed forces Deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries." Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press. p. 39-41.

¹¹ Nobel, Orly Bem-Toav, Brian Wortinger, and Sean Hannah. "Winning the War and the Relationships: Preparing Military Officers for Negotiations with Non-Combatants." West Point, 2007. (selected readings).

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