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Culture & Cognition in a Complex Megaorganization: Implications for Military Leadership

Breena E. Coates and Charles D. Allen

Political scientist, Samuel Huntington (1993) posited that future global politics and conflicts would center on clashes between civilizations. Indeed, his prophetic words were realized in 2001 when individuals from a radical Islamic movement were willing to kill themselves and thousands of other innocent people in just such a clash of cultures and ideologies (Van Otten, 2005). The U.S. military commander, General Stanley McChrystal (2009) in testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, stated that despite many deployments

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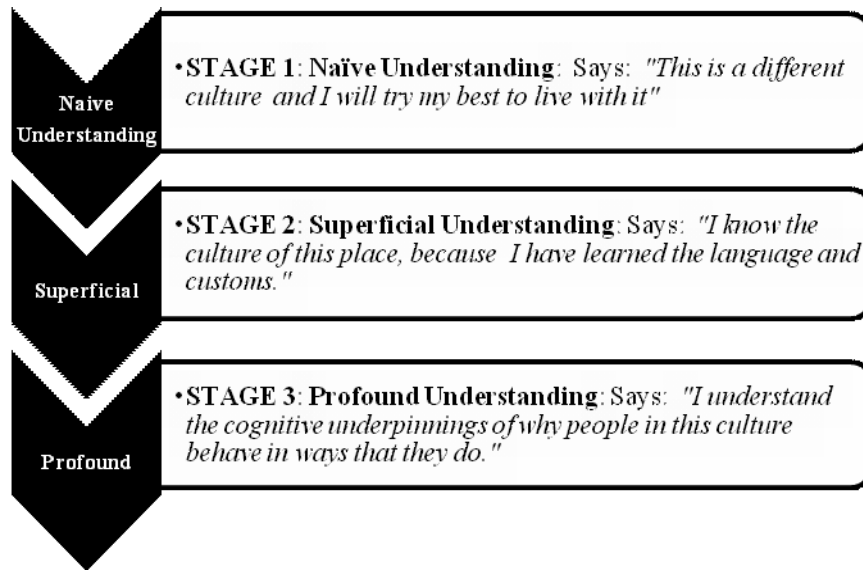
to the region, there is “much in Afghanistan I do not know.” Though well-versed in military arts, the general’s comment appeared, at least in part, to refer to the often baffling norms of the multicultural environment in Afghanistan. The recent 30,000 military personnel surge in Afghanistan announced by President Obama on December 1, 2009, and the \$10.6 billion in budget supplementals for 2010 atop the \$14 billion spent since 2001, calls for renewed analyses on why conflict and chaos in the region has not subsided with both Soviet and American traditional use of overwhelming military force—hard power.

It is essential that the U.S. military adapt and accommodate interactions with other cultures and societies (Conway, 1995). Cultural understanding does not necessarily occur even after living in a given culture. We suggest that understanding comes in comes in successive stages as illustrated in Figure 1. When organizational leaders appreciate and seek to progress through the stages, cultural understanding can be accelerated with positive

effects. After nine years of military engagement, the U.S. collective understanding of the Afghan culture appears to have progressed beyond naivety to Stage 2, Superficial Understanding. The lack of sustained results and ongoing challenges in the region require U.S. civilian and military leaders to develop a Profound Understanding of the Afghan people and their society. Doing so may generate acceptance and commitment of the varied stakeholders and ultimately support the U.S. strategic vision for Afghanistan to become a secure and stable democratic nation. Profound understanding involves not just understanding the verbal, but also the non-verbal communications. The latter requires greater sophistication in reading communications and actions by key players, which will be addressed later in this paper.

How can America better win the hearts and minds of people from such distant civilizations and traditions as Afghanistan since the use of traditional military force as hard power has not worked? Nye (2008) argued that the crisis in the Middle

Figure 1
Stages of Cultural Awareness



East points to the sophistication in reading communications and actions by key players, which will be addressed later in this paper.

How can America better win the hearts and minds of people from such distant civilizations and traditions as Afghanistan since the use of traditional military force as hard power has not worked? Nye (2008) argued that the crisis in the Middle East points to the ineffectiveness of hard power and thus, other elements of power should be employed. Nye offered that global situations require a judicious combination of hard power that attempts to coerce and soft power that seeks to persuade. This integration becomes effectively SMART power designed to achieve strategic goals and interests. While the U.S. expends significant time, efforts and resources on the coercive elements of national power to keep its

military without peer, the nation has tended to pay less attention to the softer elements of national power, which require awareness of cultural aspects in order to have successful combat operations and for the conduct of subsequent nation-building activities. We contend that cognitive influence on culture as part of soft power is another tool the military can develop to advance national security interests. This paper expands the notion of soft power into the realm of international relations.

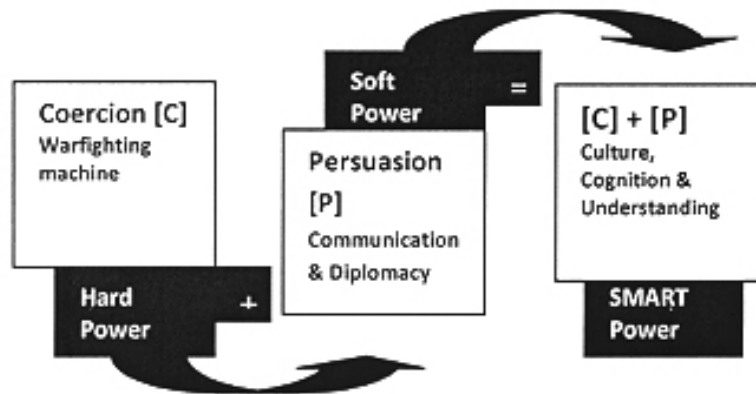
Cognitive Underpinnings of Culture

When the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and other high ranking general officers search for SMART forms of power to use, it is important to place culture within a cognitive framework; for it is in the human mind that cultural synergies and

conflicts arise. While the idea that culture matters in international relations has been emphasized to our military personnel, many may lack the cognitive underpinnings of how and why there are differences in ways that cultures express meaning. Increasingly, the security of our nation in no small measure depends on how military leaders rapidly analyze and adapt to other cultures, which require a sophisticated depth of cultural understanding.

Culture does not exist as a factor distinct and apart from the human mind, rather humans in their interactions actively construct meaning about their environments based on cognitive interpretations. As noted by Clifford Geertz (1973: 5), "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance." These *webs of significance* created by human minds about their environment influence what

Figure 2
America's Multiple Sources of Power



is called “culture”— to include that shaped by national, regional, professional, military service, and organizational experiences. These experiences are symbolically portrayed in Figure 3. We propose five essential kinds of cognitive and cultural understandings for military leadership and Department of Defense decision makers. First, the U.S. forces must interact in significant ways with cultures in the countries where they are deployed, which includes national as well as regional cultures. Second, they will likely be working together with multinational forces—i.e., other military organizations representing their countries. Third, military personnel must understand inter-cultural differences between service branches, along with the various meanings and symbols associated with each (Builder, 1989). More than ever before, they must appreciate the “joint” environment in its similarities and differences.

Fourth, they will have to be cognizant of professional cultures—engineers, for example, do not think like military sociologists and combat officers do not think like chaplains. Fifth, military personnel must understand themselves through the application of critical and reflective thinking. Within the United States, social and environmental changes have resulted in substantial cultural diversity and a broad mix of ethnic groups is now a part of America’s armed forces (Breslin, 2000).

It helps to recognize that military personnel inhabit intersecting worlds. This requires thinking styles of flexibility and adaptability. In today’s military environment, recognition of the need to think outside the box is captured in the article title, “*Adapt or Die*” (Fastabend & Simpson, 2004). U.S. Army Colonel Deborah Cusimano recalled a time when she was assigned to working with a

Turkish Colonel in NATO, as well as supervising female non-commissioned officers (NCOs) from Turkey. Colonel Cusimano remembered that “serving as a female officer in a predominantly Muslim country further challenged my personal adaptability and professional sophistication” (Cusimano, 2009). To adapt “gracefully,” she “studied Turkish customs, such as clicking her heels, and engaging in various cultural courtesies. She noted that she intuitively began to master “the art of non-verbal communication to compensate for language barriers between me and the NCOs” (2009). From Figure 1., Col. Cusimano was at Stage 3, Profound Understanding. It was no wonder that she reported that her reading of words, gestures, and facial expressions helped build trust and good relationships with her Turkish colleagues and superiors.

Building on the concepts associated with the stages of

Figure 3
Cognitive Underpinings of Cultural Awareness in the Military Megaorganization



cultural awareness and soft power just described, this article now explores the concept that there is a symbiotic relationship between cultural manifestations and cognitive patterns. The article will then examine the role of culture in shaping attitudes and attributions. Finally, the influence of culture on a leader's thinking is illustrated by its impact on different aspects of communication and decision-making.

Influence of culture on cognition. *Culture* is a complex construct that has its roots in the discipline of anthropology, from where it has influenced the field of management, along with other domains of learning and inquiry in the social and behavioral sciences. While no consensus has evolved for a single definition of culture, Ferraro's definition that, "Culture is everything that

people have, *think* [italics added], and do, as members of their society," emphasizes thought patterns and associated manifestations (1990, p. 18). Another way to think of culture is to view it "as a pretested design, a store of knowledge and an entire system of coping skills that has been crafted by humans who have gone before..." (Fisher, 1988, p. 44). International management scholar David Holt (1998, p. 362) explained that collectively, "...shared thinking patterns help explain religious preferences, political mandates, customs, and a wide variety of social relationships." Others, such as David Holt, explain that collectively, "...shared thinking patterns help explain religious preferences, political mandates, customs, and a wide variety of social relationships (Holt, 1998, p. 362). In these four different

definitions, a unifying theme is that shared relationships associated with interwoven systems of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that determines one's culture have a *cognitive*, or *knowing*, aspect.

"Thinking" and "Knowing" are complex, veiled, clandestine, and often unconscious processes that occur each human mind. How does one "see" hidden and abstract cognitive workings of the mind, such as one's own consciousness and that of other people? Following Kant, the data of human consciousness, though unseen, can indeed be comprehended through individual behavior. When viewed collectively, cultural manifestations are simply actions and behaviors of groups stemming from systems of thought. With the growth of psychological theory in the 19th century from the works of Freud,

Jung, and their followers, we have learned that hidden dimensions of human constructs, such as self-esteem, introversion and extraversion are made known through actions related in some manner to one's interactions within social systems. Examples of these actions within social systems include: power distance or one's relationship to authority figures, avoidance of uncertainty (Hofstede, 1980), feelings of obligation (Trompenaars, 1993), and mono-chronic versus poly-chronic time management (Deresky, 2006, 127). These actions might then be evident in the way one explicitly communicates verbally, or indirectly communicates, through facial expressions, bowing, hand gestures, or eye movement.

General officers and their followers, deployed around the world, cannot fail to notice the importance of the simple statement: "all people are not necessarily led by the same evidence to the same conclusions" (Fisher, 1988, p. 1). Social constructions of reality differ, and thus we see how human thinking and subsequent reactions to universal concerns such as life threats, human rights, or bribery, are often culture-specific. Furthermore, these universal concerns may have quite different expressions in language, symbols, and artifacts across the geopolitical spectrum. For the military leader, it is important to understand these differences to facilitate

positive interaction with others from different nations and cultures. This is especially important when conducting multinational operations and negotiating with, or fighting against, an adversary. To understand others, it is essential for leaders to think critically about, and be aware of, their own socially-constructed, culture-based thinking. These cognitions are manifested in leaders' biases, attributions, prejudices, and assumptions employed in sensemaking of the environment. The military leader will also be challenged by different approaches to reasoning encountered from home-country nationals, as their cognitive responses are further shaped by military branch, service or inter-governmental organizational affiliation.

Cognition, attitudes and attributes. Mental models or maps created by cultural thinking are a form of shorthand by which the brain interprets its environment and discerns a behavioral reaction. These mental models are created over time through social learning and experience. The equation $B=f(P,E)$, derived from the work of noted organizational behavior theorist, Kurt Lewin (1946), expresses the idea that *Behavior is a function of the Person and the Environment*. As such, the person is active in this relationship, influencing and in turn being influenced by it. The field of interactional psychology sheds light on this

relationship and presents the basis for understanding how shared cultural meanings of the environment create attitudes. Attitudes are hidden phenomena but are effectively revealed to others through enacted behaviors over time. Attitudes are not immutable; rather they are socially-learned constructs that can be changed. Such changes, however, can be difficult due to social pressures for conformance and punishments for defection. Put simply, attitudes are the interpretation of the environment based on how one views a particular situation with favor or disfavor (Nelson & Quick, 2006).

Cultures are embedded with artifacts and actions to symbolize attitudes. For example, the range of actions to include bowing and use of deferential words toward the aged in Japan shows that society's reverence for elderly people. Not all cultures, especially Western ones, celebrate age and the day-to-day focus is more on youthful qualities manifested in dress and cosmetics. Similarly, in the U.S. there is an appreciative attitude toward rugged individualism, whereas in Japan an attitude of collectivism prevails. This is captured in the popular Japanese slogan "the nail that sticks out gets hammered down." It is critical for military leadership to recognize that in Iran and other countries where Islam is predominant are collectivist cultures where there is little

tolerance for ambiguity, high need for structure, and a willingness to sacrifice for the good of society (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). These attributes follow the Islamist values of belongingness, social good, and humility (Ali & Amirshahi, 2002). Leaders must take these attributes into account when interacting with other nationalities and cultural groups.

One aspect of cultural sensitivity is to recognize that, in a sincere attempt to accommodate another culture's traditions, one might not understand the subtleties of the other culture. A colonel from an Eastern European (EE) military gave the following humorous story of being hosted by Western European (WE) officers. Both the WE and the EE officers were intent upon expressing goodwill but were caught in an unintentional cultural blunder. At each meal—breakfast, lunch and dinner—the WE served vodka. The EE officers were surprised, but happy at first, and enthusiastically toasted health of the Head of the WE country, and the President of their own EE country, alongside their WE colleagues. While the same group of EE officers attended each meal, a different set of WE officers served as hosts each time. Thus, the EE officers had more occasions to drink the toasts. Feeling a bit taxed after a few days of this, the EE senior officer suggested to his WE contact in charge that the vodka be

decreased. His EE officers, he explained wanted to respect the WE custom of drinking vodka with each meal, but for his officers to drink vodka for each meal was not a good idea. He informed the WE officer that EE officers did not usually take vodka with their meals. "To his surprise, the WE officer said that the WE officers also do not drink vodka with their meals! They were only trying to respect what they thought was an EE tradition." (Mitrega, 2009). This example illustrates Stage 2, or Superficial Understanding of the Western European hosts of their Eastern European guests, as depicted in Figure 1.

When confronted with difference in expectations within a foreign culture while having to conform to one's socially-prescribed work rules and behaviors, a leader could experience the discomfort of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). This dissonance occurs when a state of tension is created due to an inconsistency between attitude and expected behavior. For example, a leader might be required to pay "grease money" to a person acting as an intermediary to gain audience with a higher authority figure as an accepted social or cultural business practice in a particular country. This action, however, may go against the leader's value system, which considers such payment unethical. The leader has to decide whether to not have the

meeting or reconcile the attitude to match the needed behavior. This often may require cognitive rationalization, such as: the intermediary is expending time and energy to mediate the substantive issue between the two cultures. Thus, the person is performing the service of a consultant. This sort of thinking lessens the dissonance. Military personnel often experience such cognitive dissonance. A U.S. Navy Commander gave this example of a common cause of cognitive dissonance. "In the military, T.E. Lawrence's maxim is often advised: 'Better to let them do it imperfectly than do it perfectly yourself, for it is their country, their way and your time is short'" (Bowers, 2009). Commander Bowers, like Colonel Cusimano, could be assessed to have reached Stage 3, or Profound Understanding of cultural differences.

Attributions and mental models. Attributions about human motivation underlie attitudes. Humans have a tendency to attribute their own successes to internal factors such as intelligence or ability, while at the same time they may excuse their own poor outcomes by attributing the cause to external agents. This could lead to a cognitive bias. The statement, "I got an A, *the teacher* gave me a C" is a good example of the concept of *The Fundamental Attribution Error*—a bias held by many people (Ross, 1977). This error is closely linked to egocentrism or

what is known as the *Self-Serving Bias* whereby one is more likely to attribute good to one's own kin, race or nation, and view others—whether they are from particular families, ethnicities or nations in a less favorable light depending on the issue. This becomes particularly salient when one has serious disagreements with the other group as is common in military situations overseas. In the more complex arena of geopolitical intelligence-gathering, cognitive biases occur in the evaluation of evidence and perception of cause and effect. This is specifically addressed in a Central Intelligence Agency publication that states such bias "... does not result from any emotional or intellectual predisposition toward a certain judgment but rather from subconscious mental procedures for processing information. ... a mental error that is consistent and predictable" (Heuer, 1999, p. 14). Awareness of attributions are particularly important in foreign affairs because unconscious misinterpretations of motives are prevalent and "...the most intractable misattributions are the products of mindsets of which the actors are unaware" (Fisher, 1988, p. 32).

Mental constructs related to such selected perceptions such as communications codes, attitudes, values, and beliefs are socially-constructed, and thus are also culturally-related. It is not the external stimulus

that produces reaction but, human perceptions of it that drive corresponding behavior (Singer, 1998). Because the human mind is bombarded by millions of impressions at a time, anything that makes a single impression stands out and increases the probability of it being noticed by the mind. The mind notices those impressions with which it has had previous experience—particularly those related to the cultural values and beliefs in social system. The mind is also selective in its perception to avoid disturbing the cognitive structure it has established over time (Fisher, 1988). Selective perception is a kind of shortcut to action. It is a way for the "software of the mind" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) to sort out what needs to be attended to and what is worthy of its attention. Since there can be severe problems with this process of selective perception, a U.S. General Officer or Colonel must be self-reflective about the way culture implicitly and explicitly affects perceptions.

Cultural Influence on Communication

Human beings convey their cultural identities through multiple channels of verbal and non-verbal communication. These channels convey meaning on how we perceive and interact within our environments. Singer (1998) observed, "it is *not* possible *not* to communicate." Humans function as

message encoders whenever we communicate and cognitive coding is based upon cultural perspectives. Furthermore, how the message is decoded is dependent on the perceptual screen of the listener, and this screen is likewise influenced by culture. The virtual space between the encoder and decoder is believed to contain cultural "noise," which is often the source of misunderstandings between communicators. Since the message is not always verbal, nonverbal mechanisms such as kinesics, proxemics, and eye movement are also interpreted. Examples of how thinking affects communication means emphasize the importance of strategic communication and building relationships with leaders from other cultures.

Word choice matters a great deal for military leaders in international settings. Consider the terms of deterrence and threat. Stockpiling nuclear weapons by one nation-state may be seen by that state as "*deterrence*" against a future attack, while another state could view such a stockpile as a "*threat*." The words associated with describing the War on Terrorism in certain strategies has, on occasion, created controversy within Islamic cultures. Military leaders sometimes make unintentional mistakes with language when trying to build inter-cultural relationships. Some words that might seem innocent enough to one culture could

be incomprehensible or offensive to others. Something as ubiquitous and innocuous as the word *Coca Cola* to an American translates literally into “bite the wax tadpole” in Chinese. The soft drink *Fresca* in Mexico is a term for lesbianism (Holt, 1998). Electrolux, a European appliance maker used the slogan “nothing sucks like an Electrolux!” in advertising its vacuum machines in the United States (Peng, 2009: 106). An American expatriate in Malaysia was introduced to a “Rajah” which is the name for a king, or nobleman, in that country. The American mistakenly thought the name was Roger, and proceeded to call the man, “Rog” in an attempt to be affable. The Malaysian nobleman was offended and walked away from the negotiation (Peng, 2009: 14). From Figure 1, this person would demonstrate Stage 1, Naïve Understanding.

Non-verbal communication and implied meaning. For military leaders in Afghanistan, Iraq and Asian nations, implied meaning is important to consider in international exchanges. This does not apply to verbal conversation alone. Sometimes even silence gets interpreted incorrectly, as noted by one expert: “In some cultures silence is golden; in others, it makes people uncomfortable” (VanOtten, 2005, p. 34). Interpretations of implied meaning can cause diplomatic misunderstandings. A Department of Defense official related the

following incident during a class on culture and cognition at the U.S. Army War College.

In 2008 South Koreans became fearful of U.S. beef and this was exacerbated by propaganda from North Korea to damage U.S. and S. Korean relations as well as hyperactive internet rumors. Text messages began to be exchanged: ‘Why must I die like a mad cow,’ and suggestions were made to ‘swallow cyanide, but don’t eat U.S. beef.’ A Korean T.V. station captured a statement and televised it in which a high-ranking officer in the U.S. Embassy made a remark, “So we hope that the Koreans will begin to learn more about the science and about the facts of American beef and that this issue can be addressed constructively, (Chung, 2009).

The remark, however, was misinterpreted as ‘Korean people need to study science.’ The political opposition party in Korea used his facial expression accompanying these words as looking down on Koreans in an arrogant way (Chung, 2009). This incident shows that facial expression and non-verbal language are powerful communications

tools and must be used with care in host countries. There are also other forms of implied mis-communication such as sarcasm, which can be easily misunderstood across cultures and are best avoided in international dialogue.

Non-verbal language constitutes about 90 percent of all meaning in communication. One of the most important of these is eye-movements, which provide, in most cases, a rich expression of the person’s inner being. How one looks at another while speaking is also meaningful. Looking squarely at the listener is natural in Western cultures. However, a hard stare and direct gaze may be inappropriate elsewhere. In some cultures one might look at the speaker directly and then look away occasionally, as a stare could be perceived as disrespectful—especially between individuals who do not have the same social status—and could be interpreted as rude or even threatening. In some cultures, such as the Chinese, the “inscrutable face,” and the military “poker” face, are either deliberate or unconscious methods to avoid transmission of meaning, perhaps as a protective device against misunderstanding.

Proxemics, which describes how close or far one stands or sits from another person, should be understood when interacting with others in formal or social settings. People from western societies

prefer not to be crowded, and they stand and talk to each other about an arm's length away. Latin cultures prefer closer proximity and will often draw closer to their western counterparts while speaking. For example, in an international conversation in Mexico, the Mexican might move toward the American. Very likely, the American will take a step back to maintain a comfortable distance. The Mexican may then move forward to close the gap, and an unwitting game of pursuit might ensue.

Kinesics consists of body, hand, finger or foot gestures, which significantly differ across cultures. Thus, while a military counterpart in Japan may nod his head vigorously, and even say "yes" while during a conversation, one should beware of being deluded into the perception that he is agreeing. That behavior might simply mean: "Yes. I hear you." Cultures, we learn, are also defined by *high-contact* and *low-contact* modalities (Deresky, 2006, p. 126). Americans tend to use a firm handgrip when shaking hands, in some other cultures this may be seen as aggressive. In some countries, such as in India, handshakes are seldom used as greeting. Instead, people might clasp their own hands together, bow and say "Namaste." The Japanese culture, says Deresky is considerably less haptic than others (Deresky, 2006), and thus in a business situation when confronted by the enthusiastic hugging of a

Spanish counterpart, this could create discomfort for the Japanese businessman. Again, while a person from a Latin culture might be very comfortable embracing and kissing even those of the same gender, an Englishman would recoil from such contact.

The richness of medium by which the message is delivered is also a critical factor and may indicate the importance one really places on the issue. The least rich medium is a memorandum sent electronically, as one cannot see expression, intonation, and other aspects available to interpretation in face-to-face speech. Going one step further from the memorandum, an audio conference allows one to interpret voice inflection but leaves out the visual. Next in line of richness is a video conference where one is able to not only hear but also see, although in a somewhat limited manner. The richest medium by far is a meeting where listener and speaker can fully see and hear each other. In some cultures, a meeting is the only way to fully communicate and be understood.

Finally, those who become totally immersed in another culture run the risk of being perceived as having "gone native" (Singer, 1998). Military personnel are routinely reassigned and rotated to others region, hence the need to reflect upon and appreciate how one's culture influences our internal communications is essential.

Cultural Influences on Decision-Making

The GLOBE mega study (Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007) on cultural impacts upon societal and organizational processes, extends Geert Hofstede's classic studies on dimensions of culture (1980). The GLOBE Project also provided finer distinctions and more subtle understandings of organizational cultures than did the original Hofstede research. The study also developed several other cultural dimensions beyond those discussed in the Hofstede studies which are not a focus of this paper. In this article we examine of four of the Hofstede and GLOBE cultural dimensions for military and diplomatic leadership in international settings: 1) Individualism vs. Collectivism, 2) Power Distance, 3) Uncertainty Avoidance, and 4) Orientation to Time, to help understand how culture and cognition affect decision making. These particular cultural dimensions were chosen for their influences on U.S. and multinational operations where there are increased connections of countries, and dynamism of international competition (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta House, 2004) that inevitably contribute to American successes and failures in the global arena.

Individualism vs. collectivism. In the GLOBE study, two components were discovered—*Institutional*

Collectivism and In-Group Collectivism. The former (institutional collectivism) represents the extent to which the organization encourages participation through rewards and resource distribution. The latter denotes individual loyalties, pride, and cohesiveness in their organizations. The Greek term *philotimo* is used for the extent to which an individual conforms to the values and standards of his in-group (Triandis, 1972). In a collectivist culture, it may take longer to make decisions, but the decisions will likely be thoroughly developed. In contrast, American decision-making is often quickly derived, but the decisions may need several incremental tweaks *ex post facto* to make it workable. Collectivist cultures, like that in Japan, prefer group consensus decision-making. Thus in Japan, the *ringi-sho* method of bottom-up decision style is quite common (Deresky, 2006). Decision-making processes also translate into how people are rewarded. For example, in the modern Japanese workplace, organizational rewards and recognition are group-based in nature. By contrast, Americans like to think of themselves as individuals and so seek to be recognized as such for their contributions. Professional cultures, such as the military, view collectivism as a useful device for unit cohesion. While this is important in many venues in which military personnel are engaged, at other times it might serve as a device to

thwart dissent, and in its extreme form can result in groupthink (Janis, 1972). Gerras, Wong, and Allen (2008, p. 12) reported “the ‘Army of One’ slogan, in the words of one interviewed soldier, ‘just goes against everything they taught us.’”

Power distance. In their studies on “power distance,” Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) have shown that some folks are more equal than others in any given society—including an organizational society. At the decision-making level, we speak of power distance as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 1991, p. 28). The GLOBE study indicates the levels at which organizational societies accept and legitimize authority, power and status differences. Thus, in countries where there are strong hierarchies of class and caste, such as in India and Britain, we find that there is separation or “distance” between organizational elites or leaders and ordinary citizens. In other countries such as Thailand, leaders are revered and given extraordinary respect.

In organizations such as the military, there are hierarchies that determine status and information flow. Hierarchies can create challenges for leadership. For example, if subordinates believe they are existentially unequal, they may fail to give timely and necessary advice to a leader out of fear, deference, or feelings of

insignificance. A military leader needs to appreciate this dynamic and take measures to encourage an unfettered information flow to prevent mission failure because of misplaced deference. The GLOBE research shows that while some level of power distance is necessary for command, and that greater benefits accrue to organizations that lessen this distance. Brigadier General Fastabend and Robert Simpson (2004, p. 22) observed the tension in the Army culture “between essential centralized control and necessary, decentralized innovation.” The findings of the GLOBE study suggest that the insights of junior officers be given legitimacy without “overbearance by superiors” (Gerras, Wong & Allen, 2008, p. 15).

During the tenure of Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense, there was a higher level of power distance shown by senior civilian leaders at the Department of Defense (DOD) toward their “junior” subordinate military officers—the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other general officers. Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling (2007) in his article on a failure in “generalship” noted the high power distance of the military establishment in relationship to its civilian superiors. The indication of a high power distance culture and cognition at DOD is illustrated in Lt. Col. Yingling’s (2007, p. 23) comment: “While the physical courage of America’s generals is not in

doubt, there is less certainty regarding their moral courage. In almost surreal language, professional military men blame their recent lack of candor on the intimidating *management style of their civilian masters*.” Yingling goes on to say that, “Moral courage is often inversely proportional to popularity and this observation is nowhere more true than in the profession of arms. The history of military innovation is littered with the truncated careers of reformers who saw gathering threats clearly and advocated change boldly. A military professional must possess both the physical courage to face the hazards of battle and the moral courage to withstand the barbs of public scorn. On and off the battlefield, courage is the first characteristic of generalship” (p. 18) Perhaps taking note of Yingling’s well-known commentary might have prompted Secretary Gates (Rumsfeld’s successor) to offer in a speech to cadets at West Point, “listen to me very carefully—if as an officer you don’t tell blunt truths or create an environment where candor is encouraged, then you’ve done yourself and the institution a disservice” (Gates, 2008).

Uncertainty avoidance.

While the original phrase “uncertainty avoidance” was developed by Cyert and March (1963) to describe organizational risk-taking phenomena, Hofstede (1991) extended the concept to culturally-based phenom-

ena. In his view, uncertainty avoidance is “the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations” (Hofstede, 1991: 118). In his study of 74 cultures, Hofstede ranked the U.S. as low on uncertainty avoidance at a score of 62. The GLOBE study has commented that while it is common to the human condition to live through uncertainty, ambiguity, and change, the authors have questioned whether people are ever emotionally at ease in those situations. The question is how emotionally comfortable people are in those circumstances (House et al., 2004). This is an issue for our military leadership in Afghanistan and Iraq to consider—i.e., how much uncertainty can a population be expected to stand before negative spillovers flow out from the civilian population and thwart military missions and goals. The GLOBE study also noted that in low uncertainty avoidance cultures like America the leader is recognized “as a heroic warrior... admired for their taking off for uncharted territory and willingly facing great risks without guarantee of a successful ending” (Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007: 509). Arguably, after a decade of being at war, the U.S. citizenry can be said to be more skittish, and less tolerant of risk, as it relates to loss of life on the battlefield. Sgt. Michael Hanson (2008), U.S. Marine Corps, commented that risk aversion that has had a

negative impact on his Marines:

Our Marines are overloaded. This weight limits their speed, mobility, range, stamina, agility and all around fighting capability. They can’t go out far and they can’t stay out long with all of this gear. It is simply too much. Combat patrols are typically four hours, and even that short amount of time is exhausting. Our Marines are being consistently outrun and outmaneuvered by an enemy with an AK [rifle], an extra magazine and a pair of running shoes, (Hanson, 2008).

In the modern era of irregular warfare a military leaders more than ever needs to understand the enemy’s level of risk tolerance as well as that of their own.

Time orientation. In America, time is viewed as a previous commodity, to be utilized efficiently and effectively: “hence the impatient, ‘I got it’” or the exhortation to “cut to the bottom line” (VanOtten, 2005: 32). Within other cultures, the bottom line is not so critical and to invoke it in a conversation or to “cut to the chase” may appear to be rude and uncultured. Such societies take a long-term view as evident by the belief that what does not get done

today can be done tomorrow or in a week. The GLOBE study noted that cultures with low future orientation are more willing to “enjoy the moment.” In the American culture, time is experienced in linear fashion, as a commodity that is limited and must be utilized efficiently. Such cultures, according to the GLOBE study have “high future orientation with a strong capability and willingness to imagine future contingencies, formulate future goal states, and seek to achieve goals and develop strategies for meeting their future orientations” (Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007: 282).

In the arena of international bargaining, or the military-diplomatic world, an American Colonel of Department of State diplomat may want to come to a negotiated settlement in a rapid manner, whereas his counterpart in Brazil may wish to pursue relationship-building prior to negotiation. The Brazilian’s decision-making strategy is likely to be to focus on building trust in the relationship first, and then to attend to the legal and formal agreements. To the Brazilian, if there is a poor relationship between the parties then the formal agreements will not likely stand up to the test of time (Deresky, 2006). Relationship-building, however, is a time-consuming task, and it displays a willingness to commit time and effort to achieving it. Hence, a military leader needs to understand how coalition

partner’s thinking associated with time affects planning military operations. Colonel Michael Lewis (2009) spoke at a War College class on the value of patience and relationship-building that he observed while in stationed in Iraq.

During our meetings with the Iraqi officers nothing of substance occurred until the Iraqis felt a relationship had been formed, coffee and tea served, stories of families and friends were shared, and small talk comprised the entire first three meetings. Once the Iraqis felt comfortable, the business of understanding each other and working to solve common problems began. The Iraqis sent the same six officers each time. Our mistake was changing our coalition officers after the fourth meeting to allow more coalition officers to participate. Immediately the dynamic changed, and the meetings reverted back to the initial stages of small talk and relationship building. At the start of the fourth meeting the coalition officers could sense something was different about the Iraqi’s willingness to discuss business

and to begin where we previously left discussions. After the meeting our coalition translator was approached by the senior Iraqi officer and asked to be informed of the names of the participating coalition officer prior to the next meeting. We immediately realized why the dynamics had changed; we would have to start from the beginning and build that bond or relationship again before any further information sharing could occur in any meaningful way, (Lewis, 2009: XX).

Conclusion

This article began by identifying the need for military leaders to understand ways how cognition influence thinking about issues that may have strategic importance and the need for this cultural understanding of ourselves, as well as our allies and enemies in order to effectively use SMART Power to achieve favorable outcomes in Afghanistan and in other regions. Within the U.S. and coalition military organizations, leaders must seriously reflect on how their thinking is influenced by their cultural perceptions. Such reflection is necessary to reveal cognitive and cultural blind spots that could prove detrimental to achieving U.S. national security interests and thereby

undermine its influence in the global arena. The authors offer this conceptual paper to generate further study on the impacts of cognition on culture for use in the implementation of U.S. national strategies and policies.

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