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Welcome to the Fall 2017 Issue of the Journal of Culture, Language and International Security. Since our last issue, the world hasn’t gotten any less complex or less combative it seems. A critical enabler to understand and then act accordingly in such a complexity is the continued development of foreign language and cultural capability in the Department of Defense, especially in populations such as Special Operations Forces (SOF), Foreign Area Officers (FAOs) and defense attachés, and the newly emerging regional brigades being stood up by the Army, among others. However, it just isn’t the DoD that promotes language and culture capability. With the reduction in budgets and personnel at the Department of State, more foreign service officers and country team support staff will need to have that capability due to the fewer number of actual staff on the ground. The Department of Education has promulgated an approach to synching global competence in a K-16 learning-long curriculum and recently, Robert Greene Sands was one of four Ted-like Talks presenters at the Department’s Global Competencies and National Security and Diplomacy event.

The Journal offers up this issue to explore different dimensions of language and culture from a variety of authors and perspectives. The first two articles explore learning development in language and culture in the DoD. Waldvogel and Pearl’s article, “Foreign Language and Education and National Security: the State of Foreign Language Education in the US Military,” advocates for career long language learning for leaders of population-centric warfare. Sands’s effort, “Note #2: When Language Met Culture: The Story of an Anthropologist and His Military Students in a Disruptive and Innovative Language and Culture Learning Program,” details the approach and delivery of a blended language and culture learning program. Matsuda’s article on ethics of Human Terrain Teams, “The Military and Social and Behavioral Science Ethics: A Human Terrain System Case Study,” explores the ethical tightrope that human terrain teams faced when deployed and offers case studies to better understand how to navigate that precarious environment.

The second set of articles features three papers taken from upper division undergraduate students in the Strategic Studies and Defense Analysis program at Norwich University. All three students are current or former SOF personnel. Each of the articles covers three distinct regions of the world and offers new or different perspectives on what has been traditionally perceived as common understandings in living or past culture groups. The papers consider the perspective of Michael Agar and his notion of cultures being dynamic collections of people whose identities coalesce around temporary or long-term affiliations or identities, or somewhere in between (Agar, 2006). Rich points signify when these “culture groups” differ in terms of understanding behavior of others. To learn or understand others, one must first recognize a rich point for what it is, a point of difference as well as a signpost to dig deeper to understand more (Agar, 2006). The three papers all utilize rich points to suggest the need to reconsider culture groups in North Korea, Rwanda and traditional healers in Africa.

McHarney, in his paper, “North Korea,” suggests a surprisingly diverse society behind it’s supposed closed borders. In “Moving Forward: Recognizing Traditional Healers as a Global Asset,” Conklin advocates for re-envisioning the role of traditional healers in DoD operations. Lastly, Nikusi provides a more nuanced
view of Rwandan tribal identities leading up to the 1994 genocide. In “Decoding Rwanda Ethno-Cultural and Political Conundrum,” he points out the effect the Germans and then the Belgium colonizers had on shaping and then after independence continued to have on identity formation.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

Robert Greene Sands & Pieter DeVisser, Editors

References
A SMALL TRIBUTE TO A MAJOR INNOVATOR

ROBERT R. GREENE SANDS

Last month, quietly, Yvonne Pawelek left her office in the Joint Base Lewis/McChord Language and Culture Center for the last time. She shut her office door behind her in the old two-story building that has served as JBLM’s LCC for over a decade. She started at JBLM in 1982 as a language instructor, after first starting in government service in 1974 as an ESL instructor at Defense Language Institute English Language Training Center, Lackland AFB, Texas. She walked down the narrow hallway with the old rickety floor and high ceilings on the first floor and passed walls where artwork and cultural artifacts from her travels around the world had graced the walls and given “culture” to the Center. She was walking in a pace that was more sedate then the usual blur of movement that for over 30 years had signaled most of her day as she went about running one of the DoD recognized centers of excellence that now trains the Total Army in seventeen foreign languages. The hallway led to the center of the building and a front and back door and stairs leading up to second floor and diving down to the basement. Classrooms and offices were upstairs, a kitchen, a language lab were downstairs, where in a room off the kitchen was housed the hardware that supported the Learning Management System, the technological brain of the Center’s operation.

She ducked into the admissions/admin office probably to say goodbye to the staff in there who supported her work, not just as an innovative language and culture director, but also her other efforts supporting the installation as the Contracting Officer’s Representative for the various language contracts over the years, but also managing the FOUNDRY training program for JBLM.

She exited the office and again was faced with the possible options for going up or down or out. Yvonne had always chosen the path of serving the soldiers and their mission as best as she could, while always looking for how she could serve that mission better, more efficiently and cost effectively. Yet Yvonne was always an innovator, the status quo was only as good as yesterday. Over the years, Yvonne had participated in pilot projects such as the first courses to be delivered from the Defense Language Institute (DLI) via video teleconferencing, ISO-Immersion training for the Special Forces and National Guard; a ten-month Language Enabled Soldier (LES) Arabic/Dari and Pashto program for Stryker Brigades preparing for deployment; the development of an Arabic familiarization program for the Marine Command and Staff College at Quantico, VA.

She spear-headed a distance learning initiative for foreign languages that is on the cutting edge of authoring foreign language lessons for digital distribution. The Defense Language Institute has outsourced the development of web based lessons to the LCC at JBLM and over 70% of the lessons currently on the DLI GLOSS website were developed at JBLM.

I knew which way she was headed, out the back door to the parking lot, because I had walked with her through that door many times before. Over the last four years, I had joined with Yvonne and co-editor of this issue, Pieter DeVissers, along with her staff to chart a path of bringing culture and language together in learning events. She led the effort to develop Language and Culture training for General Purpose Forces (GPF) that included cross-cultural competence and communication. This Cultural Regional Expertise and Language (CREL) program was the first of its
kind in FORSCOM, with several languages covered in multiple courses. Yvonne and I, with Pieter at times, had written on the program and given plenaries to such organizations as the Interagency Language Roundtable to promote the valuable synergy produced when language and culture come together in formal learning events.

Yvonne never forgot her teaching roots and provided teacher training to the National Cryptologic School (NCS) and was an NCS Adjunct Faculty member for three training and linguistics courses. She served on an Advisory Board for Language Learning at the University of Washington and Yvonne was awarded the Knowlton Award.

Yvonne turned toward the rear door. It was time. She was coming back to help out in the transition of all of her efforts she was involved in at JBLM, but this day for the last time she was walking out the back door as the Language and Culture Center Director. She was leaving as one who created and sustained one of the best language programs in the Army, perhaps the DoD, and as one admired for her dedication to the mission and her soldiers.

I wasn’t there to witness her exit from the Center, but I know although it was a quiet step out the door, the influence she had on language and at the end, culture, training will reverberate profoundly for years to come.

Our Language & Culture Dream Team

For over four years, we four collaborated to drive innovations not only for the JBLM language and culture program but for that of the entire DoD. Officially only a “local” program to support primarily the Army’s I Corps, the effects of Yvonne’s efforts have had a profound impact throughout the DoD and the JBLM Language & Culture Center serves as a model program that truly warrants the moniker “center of excellence.”

From left to right: Pieter DeVisser, then DLIFLC Liaison to JBLM; SFC (now Retired) Kevin Glymp, JBLM Language & Culture Center NCOIC; Yvonne Pawelek, JBLM LCC Director; Robert Greene Sands, PhD.
FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY: THE STATE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE U.S. MILITARY

DIETER A. WALDVOGEL
SILVIA M. PEART

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force Academy, the Air Force, the Department of Defense, or the US Government.

Abstract

In a shrinking and highly interconnected world where the international discourse is dominated by increasing threats of terrorism, growing political and military unrest, and the rise of populist and nationalistic governments, the deficit in foreign language skills among the US armed forces is nothing short of a threat to our national security. This paper addresses the current state of foreign language education in the U.S. military and argues for mandatory career-long language education for all military officers who may be charged with leading population-centric operations abroad. It also evaluates the results from a survey of U.S. service academy cadets and midshipmen concerning foreign language education for military leaders.

Key words: foreign language education, foreign language in the military, national security, foreign language service academies, learners’ beliefs.

In a 2010 issue of Foreign Affairs, a magazine published by the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, writer Seth Jones describes an interview with Abdul Salam Zaeef, a former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan and former U.S. prisoner in Guantanamo, Cuba. In the interview, Zaeef describes what he viewed as the United States’ myopic understanding of Afghanistan; “How long has America been in Afghanistan? ... And how much do Americans know about Afghanistan and its people? Do they understand its culture, its tribes, and its population? I am afraid they know very little” (Jones, 2010). Here then, we pose the question; how well do the U.S. government and its military leaders know and understand its adversaries?

In many well documented cases (see Kruse, McKenna, Bleicher, Hawley, Hyde, 2008, Synovitz, 2008, Waldvogel, Youtz, Laser, 2013 and Mason, 2017), U.S. troops’ inability to successfully communicate with Iraqi and Afghan civilians and military personnel with the use of often unreliable interpreters, or “terps” as troops called them, contributed greatly to the alienation for potential U.S. supporters and allies on the ground and the prolongation of the conflict in the region. By 2010, the underqualified and inexperienced contracted local interpreters the Army was using in Afghanistan became so ineffective and counterproductive it led
to congressional investigations (Mosk 2010). As U.S. Army Major Kenneth Carey, an Iraq war veteran stated, “If our soldiers spoke Arabic we could have resolved Iraq in two years. My point is that language is obviously an obstacle to our success, much more than cultural. Even a fundamental understanding of the language would have had a significant impact on our ability to operate (as cited in Kruse et al., 2008, p. 5).”

First in 1957 when the Soviet Union caught the U.S. by surprise by successfully putting in orbit Sputnik I, the first ever satellite, and then again after the terrorist attacks of 9-11 on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the U.S. government was forced to confront the reality that our business, political, scientific and military leaders – and the nation as a whole – lack the foreign language (FL) skills and the cross-cultural competence necessary to effectively communicate and engage with allies and to be able to understand adversaries’ intentions and motives in order to potentially avert conflicts.

Shortly after the successful launch of Sputnik I by the Soviet Union, U.S. legislators signed into law the National Defense Education Act of 1958 which provided federal support for FL programs in post-secondary education. Title VI of this act focuses on the teaching of less-commonly taught languages the training of language teachers, and the development of teaching materials and tests (Kramsch, 2005). “The Soviet satellite was a wake-up call that launched a wave of innovation and reform in American schools, particularly in math, science and language instruction” declared former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in 2010.

Forty years later, however, the FL education crisis in the U.S. had not been resolved. In 2003, in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks of 2001, the Modern Language Association (MLA) of America’s Executive Council created an Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages charged with examining the FL education crisis that occurred in the U.S. as a result of 9-11 and to consider the effects of this crisis on the teaching of FL in colleges and universities across the U.S. (Geisler, Kramsch, McGinnis, Patrikis, Pratt, Ryding, Saussey, 2007). The committee’s 2007 report stated that “The United States’ inability to communicate with or comprehend other parts of the world became a prominent subject for journalists, as language failures of all kinds plagued the United States’ military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq and its efforts to suppress terrorism” (Geisler, Kramsch, McGinnis, Patrikis, Pratt, Ryding, and Saussey, 2007).

Lessons learned from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation New Dawn (OND) proved FL skills and cultural expertise “save lives and facilitate mission effectiveness throughout conflict, confrontation, and stabilization operations” (CJCSI, 2013, A-1). These operations have brought to light the fact that FL skills are critical core warfighting competencies that are insufficient among U.S. military personnel. As a result, there has been a slow but steady increase in calls for and proposals to increase and even mandate FL training for all military members. Bettwy (2014), a professor of law at the Thomas Jefferson School of Law, for example, proposes that FL training should be mandatory for all U.S. military members, arguing that “unlike other agencies such as the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, [the] DOD has instituted no programs to develop home-grown foreign language speakers.

1 Cross-cultural competence has been conceptualized in many ways, but most definitions center on the ability to quickly understand and effectively act in a culture different from one’s own (Abbe, Gulick, & Herman, 2007).

2 The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) defines less commonly taught languages as all of the world’s languages except English, French, German, and Spanish.

3 Founded in 1883, the Modern Language Association of America has worked for more than a century to strengthen the study and teaching of languages and literatures. https://www.mla.org/
It meets only its immediate needs with linguists and local nationals (p. 1).

In 2013, Waldvogel, et al. argued for a substantial increase in FL training for all U.S. Special Operations Forces—the tip of the spear forces—who are usually involved in population-centric operations around the globe. In the same way, the need for language proficiency and effective communication has been particularly acute in UN and NATO peacekeeping operations where linguistic misunderstandings have led to mission failure and casualties (Crossey, 2005).

According to the Department of Defense (DOD) Defense Manpower Data Center, in 2016 there were over 150,000 U.S. troops (out of 1.3 million total) stationed in 156 countries around the globe. These statistics highlight the global nature of today’s military operations. It is all but guaranteed that U.S. military personnel will continue to operate in joint, multinational environments, and that the future of irregular warfare will require U.S. military forces to work alongside multinational allies and among local populations to accomplish military and diplomatic objectives; objectives ranging from building partnerships in counterterrorism operations to providing humanitarian assistance abroad (Waldvogel, et al., 2013).

According to a 2008 U.S. House of Representatives investigative report on FL skills in the U.S. military (Kruse, et al., 2008), the DOD had identified over 33,000 military jobs that were coded as requiring some degree of FL proficiency. However, at the time, only 18,000 of those jobs were filled with service members receiving foreign language proficiency bonus (FLPB) pay, a gap of 15,000 which the report states, was likely much larger. Granted, correlating the number of FLPB recipients with the number of active duty personnel with FL proficiency is erroneous since the FLPB system remains significantly flawed.

According to the 2008 government report, “the subcommittee’s main concerns were not with military officers in FL-requiring career fields or MOS, but rather the capabilities the [DOD] and the Services are planning to develop for personnel performing tasks in the field, such as conducting street patrols, manning checkpoints, screening detainees, performing maritime security operations, training other nation’s forces, participating in stability and reconstruction activities with local populations, and other operations aimed at winning hearts and minds.” (Kruse et al., 2008, p. 15).

In addition, according to some estimates (see Best, 2008), roughly 217,000 U.S. service members have some level of proficiency in a FL other than English, which constitutes fewer than 17 percent of the roughly 1.3 million active duty service members. Comparing these numbers to the 2010 national census which shows that roughly 20.7 percent of Americans in the U.S. speak a FL other than English (Ryan, 2013), we see how the number of U.S. military personnel with FL skills is below that of the already low percentage of U.S. residents with FL proficiency. It is worth highlighting that the majority of bilingual or multi-lingual active duty members are proficient in languages that are not necessarily in high demand in the armed forces, such as Spanish, German and French.

As evidenced by past experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan highlighted in this paper, along with highly publicized recent intelligence failures in Syria, Crimea, Benghazi and North Korea, it is apparent that in a shrinking and highly interconnected world where the international discourse is often dominated by increasing threats of terrorism, growing political and military unrest, and the rise of populist and nationalistic governments, this lack of FL skills within the U.S. armed forces is nothing short of a threat to our national security. The question remains, however, whether it is feasible or even desirable by DOD leaders to implement and mandate FL education and language sustainment programs for all military officers whom at some point will likely be called to lead population-
centric operations abroad. If the Defense Department budget is increased significantly, it would be wise to use a percentage of this funding increase to improve FL proficiency among military leaders. In this paper, we address the current state of FL education in the DOD, we make a case for substantial increases in FL education programs for all military officers along with career-long language sustainment programs, and we examine the opinions and perspectives of future military officers in training at the U.S. Air Force Academy and the U.S. Naval Academy—future military leaders who will be required to learn and maintain FL competence throughout their careers if the DOD implements these proposals.

The Current State of Foreign Language Education in the U.S.

According to the most recent U.S. Census data, an estimated 60 million U.S. residents over the age of five, about 20.7 percent of the U.S. population, speak a language other than English at home. However, only about half of these people, 1 in 10 U.S. residents, speak two or more languages with an advanced level of proficiency in each. In contrast, approximately 53 percent of all Europeans are fluent in more than one language. According to a report by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences (AAAS) Commission on Language Learning (2016), 57 percent of U.S. residents who speak more than one language are foreign born. An estimated 45 percent of these immigrants who arrived in the U.S. as children are proficient in their heritage language, but by the third generation, less than 10 percent are proficient in a language other than English (Flaherty, 2016). Furthermore, of that 20 percent of U.S. residents with proficiency in a FL, approximately 13 percent are Spanish speakers and only 7 percent are proficient in a language other than English or Spanish (AAAS report, 2016). According to the report, only 1.5 percent of U.S. residents are proficient in Chinese, Arabic or Russian, three of the most critical and sought after FLs in the DOD.

Language loss is rampant in the United States and the census statistics and Pew Research Center analysis show this trend. While nearly 80 percent of all people who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino spoke Spanish in the previous decade, only about two thirds (66 percent) will speak the language by 2020. Furthermore, the data shows that 25 percent of Hispanics spoke only English at home in 2010, this number is estimated to climb up to 34 percent by 2020. Even in California, a state with strong ties to Hispanic history and cultures, shows a declining trend for Spanish, and this trend is most evident in their schools, where the numbers of English language learners who are able to speak Spanish has dropped from 1.4 million to 1.1 million in the past decade.

Studies in child and adult second language acquisition (SLA) research indicate that the length of exposure may influence SLA in a favorable way; although longer exposure to FL does not guarantee better outcomes automatically. However, the argument for early exposure to FL is a strong one because in a globalized world, early FL learning may contribute to understanding and appreciating different cultures, values, and speakers of other languages. Furthermore, the ability to use two or more languages may enhance cognitive development and metalinguistic awareness, and thus, may influence the native language (L1) favorably through raising awareness and may encourage the further language learning. Unfortunately, the number of U.S. public elementary schools that offer FL education has been decreasing steadily over the past decade (AAAS, 2016). In recent years, high schools, colleges and universities across the U.S. have seen their federal and state budgets drastically reduced; as a result, foreign languages are usually the first programs to be cut. In the 1994-1995 academic year, for example, 67.5 percent of higher education institutions required FL study for a baccalaureate degree; in 2009-2010 the
percentage was down to only 50.7 percent (Skorton & Altschuler, 2012). Since 2009, FL education in the U.S. has suffered severe cuts in federal funding for Title VI grants, Foreign Language Assistance Programs and other federally funded educational programs, and the number of college students enrolled in FL courses between 2009 and 2013 declined by more than 111,000 (Friedman, 2015). As a result, Friedman states, only 7 percent of today’s college students in the U.S. are enrolled in language courses. Furthermore, of all the college students in the U.S. enrolled in FL courses, only 7 percent, or 0.5 percent of all college students nationwide, are enrolled in either Arabic, Persian, Korean, Chinese, or Russian language courses (AAAS, 2016), currently the five languages with the highest demand in the DOD. According to a statement by former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, the federal and state funding cuts for FL education constitute a threat to our national security. “To prosper economically and to improve relations with other countries,” Duncan declared in 2010, “Americans need to read, speak and understand other languages” (as cited by Skorton & Altschuler, 2012).

The current State of Foreign Language Education in the U.S. Armed Forces

Currently, only a small percentage of military officers in FL-requiring career fields or military occupational specialties (MOS) receive targeted FL training, most of it through the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) in Monterey, California. While DLIFLC is managed and operated by the U.S. Army, it is officially a joint-service school. This Joint DOD school has roughly 1,800 FL instructors responsible for teaching 17 languages to approximately 3,500 soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen, as well as select DOD and State Department members (DLIFLC, 2016). Unfortunately, only a small percentage of DOD personnel in FL-requiring career fields, less than one percent of the total force, have the opportunity to attend DLIFLC to learn or improve foreign language skills.

The DOD has recently taken steps to address this lack of FL skills, regional expertise, and cultural awareness within the services. In 2005, the Department published a number of initiatives, most notably the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap. Under this plan, four goals for FL transformation were submitted to the Under Secretary of Defense:

1. Create foundational language and cultural expertise in the officer, civilian, and enlisted ranks for both Active and Reserve Components.
2. Create the capacity to surge language and cultural resources beyond these foundational and in-house
capabilities.
4. Establish a process to track the accession, separation and promotion rates of language professionals and Foreign Area Officers (FAOs).

In order to incentivize FL proficiency in languages and dialects of strategic importance to DOD, the Under Secretary of Defense implemented the Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus (FLPB) for service members with FL proficiency levels between 2 and 5 as defined by the Federal Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) rating scale (DODI, 2013). The monthly FLPB pay may reach up to $500 per month for a single foreign language or dialect, or $1,000 per month for two or more foreign languages or dialects, depending on proficiency levels. Again, however, only a small percentage of DOD service members, less than one percent of the total force, currently qualifies for FLPB pay; far below the demands imposed by today’s joint, global military operations. Even in operational career fields that require some degree of FL proficiency such as U.S. Special Operation Forces, the Army’s Foreign Area Officers (FAO), and the Air Force’s Regional Affairs Strategists (RAS), among others, there is a shortage of personnel qualified for FLPB.

In February of 2011, six years after the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, the DOD hosted a Language & Culture Summit with over 300 representatives from across the government, industry and academia to address these problems, discuss progress, and to propose new and bold initiatives to improve FL, regional and culture expertise throughout the DOD. Senior leaders and participants agreed that these skills and capabilities must be viewed as a long-term goal and must be resourced accordingly. In the end, the Summit produced a series of detailed recommendations (Under Secretary of Defense Memorandum, 2011) which fell under four broad areas of improvement:
1. The DOD must adopt a holistic, joint and interagency approach to resolving language, regional and cultural challenges.
2. The DOD must value language, regional, and cultural skills and endorse them as core competencies -- as important as all other warfighting competencies. At a minimum, all DOD personnel should have the right mix of language, regional, and cultural competencies to support overall mission readiness.
3. The DOD must make a significant paradigm shift in the personnel management system to reflect the organizational value of language, regional, and cultural skills.
4. Language and culture skills are a national security and economic imperative. The DOD can serve as a national model for pre-k through 12 language and culture learning with pilot programs in DOD Child Development Centers and DOD Education Activity schools.

As a result of these DOD initiatives and mandates, in 2006, the U.S. Air Force created the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) responsible for culture and language training, as well as education, across the entire service. In 2009, the AFCLC initiated the Language Enabled Airman Program (LEAP), a career-spanning program to develop a cadre of Airmen across all specialties with working-level foreign language proficiency. The LEAP program is designed to “sustain, enhance and posture for utilization the existing language skills and talents of Airmen” (AFCLC, 2017). So far, this program has been successful at identifying airmen with FL aptitude and skills, and grooming them for Air Force jobs and temporary duty assignments requiring FL skills and regional expertise. However, only a very small percentage of airmen participate in LEAP, and this program is very much susceptible to budget cuts.
In 2007, the U.S. Navy opened the Center for Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (CLREC) in Pensacola, Florida with a mission to “deliver foreign language instruction and training on foreign cultures to prepare Navy personnel for global engagements, to strengthen ties with enduring allies, cultivate relationships with emerging partners, thwart adversaries, and defeat enemies” (U.S. Navy, 2017). According to the Navy’s CLREC website, in 2016 “CLREC provided language and culture support to over 80,000 Navy personnel (roughly 20 percent of the total force) and managed the Navy Foreign Language Testing Program at more than 100 testing facilities worldwide with more than 11,000 Defense Language Aptitude Battery tests, Defense Language Proficiency Tests, and Oral Proficiency Interviews” (U.S. Navy, 2017).

In 2012, the U.S. Marine Corps established the Center for Advanced Operational and Cultural Learning (CAOCL), which provides standardized FL and acculturation training to more than 33,000 Marines annually. CAOCL focuses on pre-deployment, mission-oriented tactical phrases that Marines are most likely to use during exercises and operations, and fulfills an operational capability gap not addressed by traditional professional language education (CAOCL, 2014). However, far from producing Marines proficient in a FL, CAOCL focuses mainly on training Marines on short-term, mission-oriented tactical phrases that will only be useful in certain tactical situations abroad. These much-needed skills, however, are not enough to allow Marines to accomplish their core mission of collecting intelligence, negotiating with local populations, winning the hearts and minds of local populations and building partnerships.

The U.S. Army, the service that has borne the brunt of U.S. military deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, still suffers from a significant disconnect between the number of language-coded billets and the actual needs of commanders in the field, and thus, troops on the ground still rely on many contracted linguists and cultural experts (Outzen, 2012). As a result, in 2009 the Army developed the Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy (ACFLS). The objective of ACFLS has been to provide “a holistic strategy for present and future culture and foreign language education and training programs needed to close the gap in capabilities. This strategy links individual leader and Soldier knowledge, skills, and attributes to unit capability to directly enable the execution of assigned missions or tasks. Follow-on work is needed to account for the career development of civilians by integrating a culture and foreign language strategy within the Civilian Education System” (U.S. Army, 2009, p. ii).

According to Colonel Outzen (2012), the Army has done a good job supplying language-enabled personnel to U.S. embassies and intelligence centers, but has not been able to adequately meet the needs of Combatant Commanders and deployed forces for military operators with sufficient language skills and regional expertise to enable them to successfully engage with local populations.

In 2012, the DOD tasked MITRE Corporation and the RAND National Defense Research Institute to jointly address questions concerning the DOD’s ability to measure and track the FL, regional and culture training and capabilities within the armed forces (DeCamp, Meadows, Costa, Williams, Bornmann & Overton, 2012). After interviewing hundreds of DOD Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) practitioners and policymakers, the report concluded that most interviewees believed that LREC capabilities are badly needed and critical to the readiness and effectiveness of some DOD units performing specific missions, but also argued that not all units or individuals need the same types and mixes of skills and knowledge (DeCamp, J. et. al, 2012).

In its 2016 budget, the U.S. Army cut $31 million
out of the $261 million earmarked for the DLIFLC (Osborn, K, 2015). According to Osborn’s report, a bipartisan group of lawmakers tried to persuade former Defense Secretary Ashton Carter to restore the $31 million cut to DLIFLC’s budget, expressing concern that vital FL training could be lost at a time when DOD linguists in several strategic languages are in high demand. These latest cuts in DOD funding for DLIFLC undercut the Department’s efforts since 9-11 to bolster FL, regional and culture education and training for active duty personnel and sends the wrong signal to military personnel and future military leaders in training.

In 2017, the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM) in Fort Belvoir, Virginia awarded a $10 billion, 10-year DOD Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise II (DLITE II) contract to nine companies which will run through March 16, 2027. The DLITE II program will provide interpreting, translating, and transcription services for Army missions around the world, but most of it will be “short notice and urgent” and include locations like Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Guantanamo Bay (Marking, 2017).

All these separate and uncoordinated efforts among each branch of the military services will likely exacerbate the problem the DOD as a whole faces to prepare young military leaders for tomorrow’s global challenges. More than an asset in today’s expanding joint and global military operations, FL skills among military leaders is a core warfighting competency. As stated in CJCSI 3126.01A, FL skills, regional and cultural expertise are considered “enduring warfighter competencies critical to global mission readiness and integral to joint operations” (p. A-1). The consequences of the current disconnect between the number and type of language-coded billets and the actual needs in the field can result in “lost tactical opportunities, garbled intelligence, frustrated negotiations, damaged partnerships...” (Outzen, 2012, 2), and as a result, constitute a threat to U.S. national security. Based on the sheer scale of the need for FL-proficient military leaders in the battlefield, in humanitarian assistance operations, in counterinsurgency operations, in winning the hearts and minds of local populations; short of mandating and incentivizing FL education or training for all military leaders, it is difficult to see how the DOD can fully meet the dire need for FL and regional expertise to address the national security needs of the DOD.

**A Survey of the Future Military Officers at U.S. Service Academies**

In the spring of 2017, an exploratory survey was conducted among cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy and midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy in order to determine what these future military leaders believe about FL education in the military and what they expect concerning FL education and training opportunities throughout their military careers.

**Learner’s beliefs on Foreign Language Education**

In the last decades, second language acquisition (SLA) research has shifted its focus from the foreign language teacher to the learner. This learner-centered approach has impacted the focus of research in language learning and teaching. Accordingly, numerous studies have been conducted from the learner’s perspective, investigating how language is processed and what beliefs are involved in this complex process.

Since the mid-1980s, learner-centered research has attracted considerable interest in Applied Linguistics. Elaine Horwitz (1987) conducted a seminal study on learner’s beliefs about foreign language education. Her investigation generated considerable interest, and since then, a multitude of research studies has been conducted in this research area (Park, 1995; Alanen,
Like language aptitude and motivation, beliefs influence not only the process of language learning but also the product of that process (Ellis, 2008). Learner’s beliefs or personal opinions, perspectives or preconceived ideas, are important individual differences in FL learning, because from the basis of personal views one chooses how to proceed (McDonough, 1995). Furthermore, these predispositions to action may somehow account for learning progress and ultimate achievement (Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 2008).

Victori and Lockhart (1995, p. 224), define learner beliefs as “general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning, and about the nature of language learning and teaching”. Additionally, learner beliefs are both dynamic and situation specific, which means that, beliefs change over time as a product of new situational experiences (Ellis, 2008; Tanaka, 2004; Zhong, 2010). Given the complex and multidimensional nature of learner beliefs, research evidence points to the conclusion that the preconceived ideas FL learners indeed hold may not only influence the way they approach FL learning but also affect the way they respond to particular teaching methods and classroom activities. This is why it is important to explore learner’s beliefs about foreign language education. Learner’s beliefs may influence their motivation, their expectations, their perceptions about language learning, and they may also impact the strategies they choose for this endeavor.

To better understand learners’ beliefs and their role in SLA, researchers have investigated diverse variables associated with these preconceived ideas. However, the complexity and abundance of variables influencing FL learners’ beliefs makes this area difficult for researchers. To date, research into learner beliefs about language learning has provided us with valuable insights that may have important implications for FL teaching, even though other important factors have been overlooked. Furthermore, to date there is no study that focuses on learners’ beliefs and perceptions of foreign language education within the armed forces. This present study focuses on this understudied area to foster better FL education for our future military leaders.

Research Questions

Drawing on the results of the research to date, the present study focused on the following research questions:

1. What beliefs and perspectives do learners hold about foreign language education in regards to their careers as future military officers?

2. Are there any differences in beliefs between students from the U.S. Air Force Academy and the U.S. Naval Academy?

Participants

A representative sample of 506 cadets and midshipmen from both the U.S. Air Force Academy (49.6 percent) and the U.S. Naval Academy (50.4 percent) provided input on this topic, roughly 7 percent of the entire student body at both institutions. Students of both institutions gave their consent before participation, and immediately after, they completed a Likert-scale student questionnaire that focused particularly on their beliefs on foreign language education and its impact on their overall education and future career as naval and air force officers (See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire).

The 506 service academy students who volunteered to anonymously participate in this survey constitute a representative sample of all students at both service academies from across all academic majors offered at these two institutions; 16.6 percent from Basic Sciences and Mathematics; 22.73 percent from
Engineering; 39.72 percent from Social Sciences; 6.13 percent undecided, and 14.82 percent “other” majors. In addition, 67.59 percent of respondents were male students and 32.41 percent were female students. This male-female ratio is not unusual considering only 21 percent of students at both academies are females. Furthermore, 90 percent of respondents were either enrolled in, or had already completed their FL course requirement at their respective institutions. The other 10 percent had not taken a FL. Finally, of the 506 participants, 34.58 percent self-reported at a Novice level in their FL proficiency, 31.23 percent self-reported at an Intermediate level, 26.28 percent self-reported at an Advanced level, and 7.91 chose “none.”

Instrument

In SLA research, learners’ beliefs have traditionally been measured statistically within a quantitative and qualitative research framework. In order to examine learner beliefs, most research studies employ some kind of self-report as data collection instrument, such as Likert-scale questionnaires or interviews where learners self-report their beliefs. In this particular study, the student questionnaire was developed by the researchers and it was constructed based on “Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)” developed by Horwitz (1987). The questionnaire used in the present investigation had 18 items, and students indicated their degree of agreement or disagreement with several statements using a Likert-scale.

Apart from five demographic questions, cadets and midshipmen were asked to provide their level of agreement or disagreement with 12 statements concerning FL education in the military and the role of FL education as a national security issue. Using a Likert scale online survey with responses ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, participants responded to the following statements:

1. I am highly motivated to become proficient in a second or foreign language.

2. In the future, I plan to pursue a military specialty or career field related to foreign or regional affairs, international studies or in foreign relations (e.g. foreign area officer, regional affairs officer, Pol-Mil officer, embassy duty, military/defense attaché, foreign exchange officer, etc.)

3. For Americans in the U.S., being proficient in a second language IS NOT as important in today’s world in which English is the core language of commerce, business, aviation, tourism, international relations, etc.

4. Being proficient in a second language will make me a better military officer and a better leader.

5. The DOD should mandate and provide some level of foreign language education or training for ALL military officers throughout their careers.

6. Foreign language education or training should be mandatory for ONLY a small cadre of intelligence, foreign or regional affairs officers, or officers pursuing careers in these areas.

7. Foreign language proficiency SHOULD BE a factor considered in all officer promotion boards.

8. Most foreign military officers are required to learn English, and thus, there is no real need for U.S. military officers to learn a foreign language.

9. Today’s joint, multinational, and global military operations require that ALL military leaders have a minimum level of proficiency in a foreign language.

10. Many military conflicts may be prevented if U.S. military leaders are able to better understand and communicate with our allies and adversaries in their own language.

11. I believe that the lack of foreign language skills among our military forces constitutes a threat to our national security.

12. I consider foreign language skills to be a critical Core Warfighting Competency for today’s military leaders.

In addition, at the end of the survey, students
had the opportunity to write a comment about their personal views and opinions on the topic; 19.3 percent of participants chose to provide additional comments.

**Survey Results**

In this section an analysis of the 12 statements concerning FL education in the military and the role of FL education as a national security issue are presented and discussed.

*I am highly motivated to become proficient in a second or foreign language.*

Out of the total population surveyed, 72.88% of cadets and midshipmen either agree or strongly agree with this statement. These totals 78.82% of midshipmen and 66.94% of Air Force cadets, respectively; which shows how highly motivated these particular students are to become proficient in a foreign language. See Figure 1.

For Americans in the US, being proficient in a second language IS NOT as important in today’s world in which English is the core language of commerce, business, aviation, tourism, international relations, etc.

Regarding this statement, only 35.93% of cadets and midshipmen either agree or strongly agree with it. In contrast, 59.22% of midshipmen and 68.93% of Air Force cadets either disagree or strongly disagree. These answers may lead us to infer that cadets and midshipmen value the importance of learning foreign languages regardless of the fact that English is spread worldwide. See Figure 3.

Being proficient in a second language will make me a better military officer and a better leader.
Remarkably, a total of 90.9% of cadets and midshipmen either agree or strongly agree with this statement, totaling 92.55% of midshipmen and 89.24% of Air Force cadets. These answers show how students in these service academies perceive FL education and its importance for their future military career. See Figure 4.

The DOD should mandate and provide some level of foreign language education or training.

A total of 63.43% of cadets and midshipmen either agree or strongly agree with this statement, and there is a similar percentage in each service academy, 64.31% of midshipmen and 62.55% of Air Force cadets. See Figure 5.

Foreign language education or training should be mandatory for ONLY a small cadre of intelligence, foreign or regional affairs officers, or officers pursuing careers in these areas.

A total of 54.57% of cadets and midshipmen either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. In this case, there is also a similar percentage of students in each service academy with 51.38% of midshipmen and 57.77% of Air Force cadets. See Figure 6.

Foreign language proficiency SHOULD BE a factor considered in all officer promotion boards.

In this particular case, just under half, 45.28% of cadets and midshipmen either agree or strongly agree with this statement, with a total of 41.57% of midshipmen and 49% of Air Force cadets. See Figure 7.

Most foreign military officers are required to learn English, and thus, there is no real need for US military officers to learn a foreign language.

The majority, or 91.31% of cadets and midshipmen either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement, with a total of 89.8% of midshipmen and 92.83% of Air Force cadets. The responses to this statement strongly support the idea that FL education is perceived by these
students as an important asset for this professional career. See Figure 8.

Today’s joint, multinational, and global military operations require that ALL military leaders have a minimum level of proficiency in a foreign language.

Regarding this particular statement, a total of 61.09% of cadets and midshipmen either agree or strongly agree with it. A similar response is presented by students of both service academies with 58.04% of midshipmen and 64.14% of Air Force cadets. See Figure 9.

Many military conflicts may be prevented if US military leaders are able to better understand and communicate with our allies and adversaries in their own language.

In regards to this statement a total of 67.2% of cadets and midshipmen either agree or strongly agree with this statement. This also shows how valuable students think FL education is. Both groups of students offer similar percentages with 66.67% of midshipmen and 67.73% of Air Force cadets. See Figure 10.

I believe that the lack of foreign language skills among our military forces constitutes a threat to our national security.

In this particular case, just under half, 47.43% of cadets and midshipmen either agree or strongly agree with this statement. Although previous responses still show a strong positive perception of FL education, not all future officers would agree that this is a matter of national security. It is worth noting that almost equal numbers at each academy have this perception, 47.45% of midshipmen and 47.41% of Air Force cadets. See Figure 11.

I consider foreign language skills to be a critical Core Warfighting Competency for today’s military leaders.

In this last item, a total of 64.42% of cadets and midshipmen either agree or strongly agree with this statement. Regarding this item, almost an equal number of students showed similar perceptions at both academies with 64.31% of midshipmen and 64.54% of Air Force cadets. A
total of 14.23% responded with “I do not know” to this statement. See Figure 12.

Figure 12. Questionnaire item 17

Discussion

As evidenced by the results from this survey, future military leaders at both service academies believe that being proficient in a second language will make them better military officers and better leaders. Furthermore, 91 percent of cadets and midshipmen either disagree or strongly disagree with the idea that there is no real need for U.S. military officers to learn a foreign language in today’s global environment.

Both cadets and midshipmen who participated in this study, agree that they are highly motivated to become proficient in a foreign language. A total of 72.92% either agree or strongly agree with this statement. This shows that students in both institutions find professional value in learning a foreign language. Conversely, 61% of participants from both institutions agree or strongly agree with item 9 which states the need for all military leaders to have a minimum level of proficiency in a foreign language. Furthermore, 67.2% of participants either agree or strongly agree with item 10, which states that military conflicts could be prevented if military leaders were able to understand and communicate with others in their own language. Additionally, 64.4% of participants either agree or strongly agree that language skills are a critical Core Warfighting Competency for today’s military leaders. This also shows that students value language skills as a practical and critical part of their military training.

However, despite the fact that the majority of participants positively value foreign language education, less than half of respondents (47.4 percent) believe that the lack of foreign language skills among military forces constitutes a threat to our national security. They agree that FL education is critical for warfighting, but they would not go as far as to consider the lack of FL education in the armed forces a “national security threat.” In the end, 63 percent of participants at these two service academies believe that the DOD should mandate and provide some level of foreign language education or training for all military officers throughout their careers.

It is clear from this survey that future DOD leaders at these two service academies believe that FL proficiency is critical in today’s geopolitical and military environment, and thus, the DOD should invest in improving this core warfighting skill.

In terms of the second research question, there are no significant differences between both institutions despite the fact that at the Naval Academy only the Humanities Majors are required to take a foreign language, and all cadets at the Air Force Academy are required to take at least two semesters of a foreign language. There was just one instance where a difference of ten percent or more emerged between the two institutions; statement #3, where 59% of midshipmen and 69% of Air Force cadets either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. Clearly Air Force cadets are more inclined to believe that it is important to be proficient in a second language, despite the fact that many in the world speak English. Smaller differences appear in statement #6, where 51.3% of midshipmen and 57.7% of Air Force cadets disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. Based on the responses obtained for this statement, it seems that Air Force cadets agree that a wide range of military officers should have some proficiency in a foreign language, not only a small cadre of officers. Finally, the other sizable difference emerged with statement #7,
where 41.5% of midshipmen and 49% of Air Force cadets agree with the statement, which shows that half of all Air Force cadets believe that FL should be a factor to consider in all officer promotion boards, as opposed to only 4 out of 10 midshipmen. Although the few differences registered are not significant, the fact that all cadets are required to take a foreign language at the Air Force may account for the differences in perspectives and beliefs recovered by the survey in this study.

**Recommendations**

In the same way that the Soviet launch of Sputnik I in 1957 resulted in the passing of the National Defense Education Act of 1958, which provided federal support for FL programs in postsecondary education, and the 9-11 attacks in New York City and the Pentagon eventually resulted in the 2005 Defense Language Transformation Roadmap recommendations; extended conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, along with the ever increasing threats of global terrorism and nuclear proliferation, should spur a renewed national emphasis on improving foreign language and culture education among our next generation of military leaders. Furthermore, history has shown that band-aid approaches (See Outzen, 2012.) do not yield desirable results in terms of FL education. On the contrary, a more sustained and stable effort to foster competent leaders with FL skills will, in turn, produce officers who will be able to better understand the global challenges and find common ground with allies and adversaries alike.

Based on this review of FL educational programs in the DOD and the results from the FL education survey at the two service academies, we propose the following recommendations:

1. The DOD must consider FL skills, along with culture and regional expertise, as important factors in selecting candidates for ROTC scholarships, appointment into the service academies and officer candidate/officer training school selection.

2. The DOD must require no less than two semesters or six credit hours of FL courses for ALL service academies and ROTC students prior to graduation.

3. The DOD must offer FL sustainment programs and immersion opportunities throughout an officer's career in order to promote and facilitate continuing FL education and regional expertise as part of officers' Professional Military Education (PME).

4. The DOD must incentivize FL education by requiring all DOD officers to take the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) at least every 3 years and achieving a minimum standard of 1/1 ILR proficiency score (Intermediate-Low ACTFL scale) in a language other than English in order to advance to the higher pay grades of O-4 and above. This minimum standard of FL skills allows service members to be “able to satisfy minimum courtesy requirements and maintain very simple face-to-face conversations on familiar topics” (ACTFL Standards, 2012).

5. The DOD must offer monetary and promotion incentives for officers who reach a higher level of proficiency in any FL, including larger incentives for category III and IV (less commonly taught) languages.

6. Similar to the Army's Foreign Area Officer (FAO) military occupational specialty, all DOD services must have primary career specialties that require language, culture and regional expertise, and these officers must be given the necessary training, graduate studies, and advancement opportunities to continue and excel in this field.

These recommendations may sound excessive and expensive, but faced with the global challenges confronting the U.S. military, anything less that mandating some level of FL proficiency for all military leaders will likely fall short of achieving the minimum standards needed to successfully meet tomorrow’s global challenges. Additionally,
the federal government should offer financial incentives to all public colleges and universities in order to increase availability of FL courses for students and increase the pool from which the DOD and other federal agencies can recruit linguistically-able men and women willing and able to serve their country.

**Limitations of the Present Study**

This investigation was developed as a pilot study to explore primarily the perceptions of FL education within the service academies (Air Force and Naval academies). Although a large, representative size of cadets and midshipmen participated in the study, this population sample is not representative of all current and future military leaders. This survey was not distributed to enlisted and/or other active duty personnel. While certainly relevant, they were out of the scope of this pilot study.

It is worth noting that the instrument used in this study was created for this particular study based on similar previous investigations, but it may need further revisions in the case of similar empirical studies. Although a study of this kind has never been conducted in both the Air Force Academy and the Naval Academy, the results yielded in this investigation are limited, which warrant further investigation in this particular area of FL education. However, it is worth noting that students in both institutions recognized the importance of FL education in their present and future careers, as well as the contribution of FL to their leadership roles in the U.S. Armed Forces.

**Conclusions**

We live in a highly interconnected world where FL skills are essential to facilitate communication and mutual understanding. The lack of FL skills within the U.S. Armed Forces hinders our ability to effectively communicate and strengthen ties with our allies. Even young and inexperienced cadets and midshipmen at the service academies understand the importance of being proficient in a foreign language. The question remains, however, whether it is possible and viable to implement and mandate FL education and language sustainment programs for more military officers. This would be an investment that would likely result in lives saved and conflicts avoided.
References


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Appendix A

Student Questionnaire: circle the option that best describes you

1. Your institution
   a. US Air Force Academy
   b. US Naval Academy

2. Gender
   a. Male
   b. Female

3. Your Major or Academic are of concentration
   a. Basic Science & Mathematics
   b. Engineering
   c. Social Science
   d. Undecided

4. Foreign Language course enrollment (if in two or more, select the foreign language in which you are the most proficient)
   a. Spanish
   b. French
   c. German
   d. Portuguese
   e. Chinese
   f. Arabic
   g. Japanese
   h. Russian
   i. OTHER
   J. NONE

5. Current level of Foreign Language proficiency (chose the foreign in which you are the most proficient, or which you’re currently studying)
   a. Beginner (100-level courses)
   b. Intermediate (200-level courses)
   c. Advanced (300+ level course)

6. In the future, I plan to pursue a military specialty or career field related to foreign or regional affairs, international studies or in foreign relations? (e.g. foreign area officer, regional affairs officer, Pol-Mil officer, embassy duty, military/defense attaché, foreign exchange officer, etc.)
   a. Likely
   b. Unlikely
   c. I do not know
7. I am highly motivated to become proficient in a second or foreign language.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

8. For Americans in the U.S., being proficient in a second language IS NOT as important in today’s world in which English is the core language of commerce, business, aviation, tourism, international relations, etc.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

9. Being proficient in a second language will make me a better military officer and a better leader.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

10. The DOD should mandate and provide some level of foreign language education or training for ALL military officers throughout their careers.
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Agree
    c. Disagree
    d. Strongly disagree

11. Foreign language education or training should be mandatory for ONLY a small cadre of foreign or regional affairs officers, or officers pursuing careers in these areas.
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Agree
    c. Disagree
    d. Strongly disagree

12. Foreign language proficiency SHOULD BE a factor considered in all officer promotion boards.
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Agree
    c. Disagree
    d. Strongly disagree
13. Most foreign military officers are required to learn English, and thus, there is no real need for U.S. military officers to learn a foreign language.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

14. Today’s joint, multinational, and global military operations require that ALL military leaders have a minimum level of proficiency in a foreign language.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

15. Many military conflicts may be prevented if US military leaders are able to better understand and communicate with our allies and adversaries in their own language.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

16. I believe that the lack of foreign language skills among our military forces constitutes a threat to our national security.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

17. I consider foreign language skills to be critical core Warfighting Competency for today’s military leaders.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

18. Please offer any additional comments or options you may have about this topic.
About the Authors

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The Human Terrain System (HTS) provided little in the way of fieldwork ethics training to the Human Terrain Team (HTT) members who prepared for deployment. The HTS values statement, “By developing an understanding of the societies and cultures in which we are engaged, HTS believes that the U.S. Military can reduce the need for, and negative repercussions of lethal force,” is important, but no substitute for a well thought out, peer reviewed ethical guidelines statement (EGS). Because the HTS did not, during my service, provide an ethical teaching tool or a practical “down range” guide, the first deployed HTTs in the Middle East and Southwest Asia were on the ethical frontier of military ethnography.

Reports from the field indicate that for the most part there was an ethically defensible “do no harm” collaboration between the military and the first HTTs. There were however disturbing exceptions as a few leaders and members lost sight of HTS non-lethal, or white, values and used operational cultural knowledge to provide targeting information for HTT black ops.

HTS’s Dr. Montgomery McFate called for the formation of an Ethical Guidelines Statement (EGS). She appointed me to create an Ethical Guidelines Committee (EGC). EGC members were to formulate an HTS EGS that integrated pre-existing social and behavioral science codes with the practical experience of HTT members. Despite the EGC’s best efforts, the EGS was never allowed out of committee. The following EGS represents the EGC’s efforts to formulate and distribute a teaching tool, and practical down range guide to conflict zone ethics. The EGS, now a time capsule of good intentions, remains, like the HTS, an unfinished and imperfect experiment in the application of social science ethics on the battle-space.

Towards An HTS Ethical Guidelines Statement

The HTS EGS is a common set of enduring principles and standards that illuminate the professional responsibilities of HTTs and their military, civilian and Local National (LN) team members. As a guideline, the EGS is not comprehensive or universally applicable, but is intended to cover common ethically challenging situations encountered by HTTs. Because this is not an all encompassing, one size fits all formula, HTT members must as individuals and/or teams still make carefully considered ethical choices.

As a statement, the EGS is meant to inspire HTT members to uphold the highest ethical standards. It is intended to provide HTT members with the ability make educated ethical choices and to counter the influence of individuals and groups who would coerce them to compromise informant relationships based on ethics and trust and to misuse and abuse operational cultural knowledge collected through social science protocols.

As an EGS this work is meant to:

1. Unify hybrid military, civilian and Local National (LN) teams (comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds with strongly held convictions borne of prior experience) under a common set of applied ethical freedoms and constraints;
2. Identify individuals who cannot separate personal conviction from ethical mission;
3. Provide the basis for an Ethical Review Board empowered to call to account those who recklessly disregard or remain willfully ignorant of the HTS EGS and, if necessary;
4. To dismiss those who fail to uphold its research protocols and ethical boundaries.

This EGS is superseded by the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) which stipulates in Section 802. Article 1, 2…, (And here for the sake of clarity I paraphrase and combine passages), that … ‘[P]ersons serving with, employed by, or accompanying the Armed forces outside the United States … have submitted voluntarily to military authority … and are subject depending of the severity of the transgression, to either non-judicial punishment (Restriction, confinement, corrections, forfeiture and reduction), or adjudication by Courts Martial.’

As of this writing, no individuals and/or groups on militarily sponsored social science missions have been granted formal confidentiality exceptions similar to those that protect the Press’ (Reporter-source), Psychologists’ (Patient-client) and Chaplains’ (Parishioner-confessor) relationships.

**HTS Ethical Guidelines Statement**

HTS Ethical Guidelines provide a framework -- and not a one size fits all equation -- for making ethical decisions. HTS Ethical Guidelines require all HTT members to strenuously avoid even the appearance of engaging in kinetic effects, lethal targeting, and covert and/or coercive Intelligence gathering.

**Exception**

If, during the course of fieldwork, an informant or resource person wants to divulge lethal targeting information, the interviewer should make clear the following:

- That, that is not HTT’s mission.
- Interviewer states HTT ethical policy, politely declines to take information without offering advice and lets the LN decide on their own whether or not to come forward.
- If the LN so desires, the HTT interviewer will introduce them to a qualified military liaison after the interview.
- Handoff from HTT to military liaison should occur only with a trusted source.

There is the very real possibility that the interviewer can be manipulated into doing someone’s dirty work for them. For example, a sheikh who wants to consolidate power uses HTT to turn over his innocent competition to the Coalition Forces CF (CF Defined). The sheikh is now an unchallenged strongman, the HTT is seen as an easy mark for passing false information, and the CF gets the blame for detaining an innocent LN.

HTS Ethical Guidelines require all HTT members to collect and distribute knowledge to stakeholders in an ethical manner. HTS Ethical Guidelines require interviewers to fully disclose the scope, intent and possible repercussions of their informant’s participation. HTT interviewers are required to insure that all who participate in research do so with (I) “informed consent” because their information may be viewed by multiple (non-lethal and lethal) audiences.

**CIVILIAN EXAMPLE:**

A young, starving actor consents to compromising photos. S/he is assured that the images when used will be non-identifiable. Hidden in the fine print is a clause that stipulates the actor’s signature and acceptance of payment relinquishes any rights to and control over their image. This photo comes back to haunt the actor later in life.

**MILITARY EXAMPLE:**

Before working with a LN, HTT interviewers assure him that his identity will remain anonymous and his information will be held in confidence. The HTT interviewer neglects to explain the limits of their promise; that what informants reveal may be compromised unintentionally. Despite
the interviewer’s best efforts Intel recognizes the informant from their information and develops and acts on a target package.

HTT interviewers are required to explain to informants the possible consequences of their information being unintentionally used for Intelligence, target package and kinetic effects;

CIVILIAN EXAMPLE:
A well meaning social scientist introduces native peoples with knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants and animals in their ecosystem to representatives of a pharmaceutical corporation. Tribal healers are questioned, sign a contract they do not fully understand and are paid a one-time fee for their services. Months later they receive a legal document that states the tribe has signed over rights to their knowledge and, according to patent law are no longer allowed to use local plants and animals in the prescription and concoction of traditional medicinal remedies.

MILITARY EXAMPLE:
Despite their best efforts to scrub information of a key Actor’s characteristics, Intelligence discovers an HTT source’s identity. The source’s confession to an HTT Interviewer about a family member’s former involvement with a militia leads to detentions and arrests. Efforts on behalf of family and friends cannot uncover the whereabouts of their loved ones who are in a prison holding close to 20,000 people.

CAUTIONARY EXAMPLE:
Information transferred to HTT is often done so on the basis of trust. Informants must be made aware of the potentially detrimental consequences (second and third order effects) of archived information from face to face interviews, and voice and image recordings.

HTT interviewers are required to (II) “do no harm” by offering anonymity and confidentiality to those who participate in their research.

MILITARY EXAMPLE: Thou Shalt Not....
As part of a presence patrol, HTT visits a small village. After explaining that they are scientists, who can ethically “do no harm,” residents reveal the identity of a supposed militia leader. HTT members coerce villagers into identifying the man and assist in his roll-up, interrogation and subsequent detention.

MILITARY EXAMPLE: Thou Shalt....
An official with the Office of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) comes forward, under a grant of anonymity and confidentiality, to say that the number of IDP has been undercounted due to a cultural misunderstanding. The LN total of 6,000 IDP is based on a heads of household only count, and not, as CF believe, on entire families. The extent of the discrepancy is potentially catastrophic as the real number of IDP is 6,000 heads of households times 7 additional family members per household, or 7 X 6,000= 42,000. Identity protected, the official is able to prevent a humanitarian disaster and keep his job.

What Does HTT Bring to the Fight?
Military Example: Do no harm does not mean that HTT does not do good. (III) Just Compensation. Cordon and Knock patrols enter a neighborhood at 11:00AM. As a defensive perimeter is set around a particular dwelling. Male soldiers accompany the wife/mother into the household where she is alone and out of sight with strangers; A zina, or sexual impropriety according to tribal customs. Later that day, when the husband returns home from work, relatives and friends tell of his wife’s impropriety. To restore family honor he is forced to beat his wife in public so everyone can see and hear her punishment. Next day as the patrol passes by the same household they notice the same woman has a black-eye. Several soldiers comment on the savagery of Iraqi men. HTT asks the patrol leader for time to reinterview the family. At home on his day off the husband says to HTT,
“Please do not come when I am not home as I am then bound by aleadat wāl’āerāf alqabāliā (tribal custom), to beat my wife for being without a wali (custodian) and alone with strange men. As per HTTs suggestion, next morning the patrol goes door to door at 7:00AM. Soldiers give the families bags of food and medicine as they politely inform the men of each house that they must stay home until the patrol completes Cordon and Knock operations. Female: soldiers; LN; and/or; HTT interview the lady of house when related males are not present. Over the next weeks incidents of wife beating drop to zero and relations between LN and CF steadily improve.

LN’s invest an enormous amount of time and energy in HTTs. Success was due in no small part to the LN’s who patiently worked with HTT to help them to get it right. Just compensation for LN’s involved HTTs returning the favor by using what they were taught to promote mutual understanding conflict resolution, and social justice. Interviewers should whenever possible require LN Interpreters, or terps, in their employ to respect the anonymity and confidentiality of HTT informants.

MILITARY EXAMPLE:
HTT on mission to a Joint Security Station (JSS) asks for and are granted one time use of an interpreter from the Interpreter Pool. As the terp belongs to the host unit and not to the HTT, it is not appropriate or possible to ask the interpreter to keep the name of informants and the nature of their information anonymous and confidential.

MILITARY EXAMPLE:
HTT secures the dedicated use of an interpreter. This Interpreter becomes a trusted member of the team and fellow HTT work to build this interpreter’s marketable ethnographic skills, capacity to acquire cultural operational knowledge and to improve his quality of life. It is both reasonable and appropriate to ask this dedicated interpreter to refrain from discussing team business with others. What happens in the team stays in the team.

HTT interviewers are required when necessary, to protect their informants identity by sanitizing information, without sacrificing the content and value of what was said.

SOCIAL SCIENCE EXAMPLES:
Social Scientists often code the names, even change the pronouns and ages of their resource persons, so that their identities are not compromised. In addition, social scientists create composite individuals who combine the multiple views of many informants. By combining information into to an everyman or everywoman character, HTT interviewers can safeguard the identity of their informant(s).

Exceptions to the informed consent guideline are, according to the American Psychological Association:
• Where research would not reasonably be assumed to create distress or harm;
• The study of normal practices;
• Naturalistic observation;
• When disclosure would not put participants at risk.

Participation in HTT research is voluntary and interviewers are prohibited from coercing or offering incentives to potential informants; HTT interviewers need not avoid hospitality when it is offered, but should take steps to strenuously avoid letting others gain undue influence over their work with lavish gifts, food, money... HTT interviewers avoid favoritism, but are not prohibited from offering “just compensation” that benefits the common good;

MILITARY EXAMPLE:
HTT was asked by a young and inexperienced Captain to aid in crucial negotiations between sheikhs. When the negotiations were over and justice (Just compensation in this case) was restored, the winning side offered HTT wives, a
feast and adoption into their tribes. HTT politely declined each of the offers and said, “We belong to all the tribes of Iraq. In order to be loyal friends and, if necessary, formidable opponents to all, we must show favoritism to none.

CAVEAT:
During contentious negotiations, it may prove necessary for CF to advocate for a position or to take sides. However, once the negotiations are over, it is highly recommended that the traditional tribal order be preserved. General sheikh may have been caught with his hand in the cookie jar, but he is still (by virtue of relative honor, power and influence) the acknowledged tribal leader.

MILITARY EXAMPLE:
CF wanted a needs assessment of a village in order to effectively focus development. As per the request of a high ranking embedded Political Reconstruction Team officer, HTT asked council members if the village had an agricultural association. HTT was politely told that villagers would no longer be jumping through Government or CF hoops for the promise of aid that would never materialize. Next day HTT asked the villagers to start an agricultural association. As the council members prepared another polite brush-off, HTT said “We are going to explain to you the American mindset so that you can get the development aid you need.” Council members sat in stunned silence. No green suiter had ever offered such information before.

HTT proceeded to explain the CF mindset:
1. CF are always on the look out for leaders or representatives. First it was Native American chiefs, then it was sheiks and now it is the agricultural committee. CF do not want to talk to every okra or palm grower, but to someone who can speak for and make deals on their behalf;
2. CF are always looking to pattern and replicate success. Look to the town down the road which has had great success with CF development and copy what they do. This includes an agricultural association;
3. Do not reinvent the wheel. Model present contracts on past successful contracts, and;
4. Make contracts so complete that all CF Command has to do is sign them.

The battalion commander asked HTT if giving LN the CF mindset was tantamount to losing control of the battle space. HTT replied that relationships are successful when partners share knowledge and goals. His Captain and First Lieutenant replied that during the next agricultural council meeting village leaders were saying “We must do exactly as HTT says so that there is no delay in getting aid.” Recent phone calls to village council members confirm that knowing the CF mindset has helped them understand American concepts of partnership and development. This understanding (just compensation in this case) has led to unexpected success. Other nearby villages have sent delegations to find out how to partner more effectively with the CF.

In closing, HTT interviewers are required to adhere to the written letter and the spoken spirit of the aforementioned HTS Ethical Guidelines, but are not required to go through the same lengthy explanation of standards, principles and precautions during successive interviews with the same individuals and/or groups once a long term, trust based relationship has been established. By following the HTS Ethical Guidelines, HTT members insure the integrity of past, present and future research protocols, fieldwork and collection methods, and insure the safety of their fellow practitioners and themselves.

Culture?
As of this writing the HTS is largely gone, but not forgotten. In its place are several Department of Defense (DoD) policies that focus on language as the key ingredient of the Human Domain. The downgrading and/or near absence of culture in these policies is short sighted, because languages
and cultures cannot exist without one another. Languages are symbols, systems humans use to communicate. But without cultures what would humans communicate about? Cultures--our more or less shared worldview--provide the contexts in which linguistic symbols, or languages, are understood. For example, many in the Middle East speak Arabic, but the Arabic they speak is interwoven with and contextualized by their culture; a peoples historic and contemporary tendencies towards internal and external cooperation, conflict, compromise, conquest.... It is through cultures that human symbols are infused with meaning and context. Note to the DoD, languages do not exist without the cultural contexts in which they are spoken.
Dr. David Matsuda is doctor of Anthropology, Social and Behavioral Sciences, and a passionate teacher. Dr. Matsuda, or Doc, has conducted extensive fieldwork in Latin America, the Middle East and SW Asia. A recipient of grants from the Pew Trust for Education, the Princeton Ford Foundation, California State University Doctoral Incentive Program and The Organization of American States, Doc brings to Norwich University a strong belief that social action research is about going to the source and getting the ground truth.

The Chief Cultural Officer of Cultural Advisory Services Doc advises on matters of national security, diversity, social networks, and organizational culture. Recently Doc’s pioneering research on the link between toxic leadership and suicide in the Army was featured on National Public Radio.

Dr. Dave Matsuda recently returned to the United States from overseas deployments where he served as a civilian Cultural Advisor at tactical, operational and strategic levels. Doc resides in San Francisco with Kristi, his wife of 30 years, and his daughters Katie and Kimi who are, proudly, both fourth generation San Franciscans.
Note #2: When Language Met Culture: The Story of an Anthropologist and His Military Students in a Disruptive and Innovative Language and Culture Learning Program

Robert R. Greene Sands

Language and culture training to populations such as Special Operations Forces (SOF), Foreign Area Officers (FAOs), Defense Attaches, and military and intelligence linguists in the Department of Defense (DoD) reveals a learning approach that relies on the pre-eminence of foreign language instruction that factors in culture (and region) only secondarily. This approach often does not include braiding theoretically-informed universal elements of human behavior into the curriculum, nor does it advance skill-based cross-cultural competencies to promote critical understanding of “linguistic and cultural others.” Specific social and cultural data are provided within the confines of language instruction, but that knowledge has very limited utility. It is perishable and offers little transference to other groups in a local area or in future missions. Moreover, it is often folded into instruction by curriculum designers and then delivered by “native” or heritage language instructors who lack pedagogical training/expertise or social science backgrounds.

This Note #2 follows Note #1, “Language & Culture Note #1: On the Gray Zone and the Space Between War and Peace,” (Sands, 2017), an earlier publication in Small Wars Journal that looked specifically at how the DoD views and labels culture groups and their behavior through an organizationally-biased lens. Note #2 provides an exploration of an approach to language and culture learning that can mitigate bias while developing a cross-cultural capability that includes foreign language instruction as only one component of a greater capability. This approach expands on the learning opportunity afforded by extended language instruction to develop a synergistic and braided learning program that promotes a suite of general social, cultural, and behavioral knowledge and skill-based competencies that are critical to learning about, interacting with, and understanding, influencing and forecasting behavior of local culture groups. I have written and presented elsewhere on this approach conceptually as well as reported on the application of the approach to specific learning programs (Sands, 2016, Sands and DeVisser, 2015). This Note explores the actual learning that takes place in such an event, as well as elaborates on the components of cross-cultural capability. I also reflect on programs outside of the DoD where efforts exist to develop a similar capability.

The Classroom

“So, Steve, what is kinship and what does it do in a society?” [Steve is not his real name for matters of
Steve’s face partially filled my computer screen as Skype offered him and his thoughts to me from 3000 miles away.

“Kinship acts to bind groups together, sort of like a skeleton. It creates a series of obligations and responsibilities that reinforce its identity and acts to perpetuate it now and into the future…” Steve was an earnest sort and always had distilled the module’s content before our session. Steve was also a 1st Lieutenant in the US Army and he was soon off to someplace in the Middle East on a deployment.

“Dave, does your kinship system work like that?” I asked the second soldier, also a 1st Lieutenant in the same command as Steve, with the same orders. [And also not named Dave.]

“Not mine, I don’t have a lot of family obligations. Not a lot of extended family.”

“Do you have some minimal sense when you get together with them? For instance, do you feel a pull, maybe more like a nudge toward your family?” I encouraged.

“I know where you are going with this, Dr. Sands,” Dave offered and smiled. “First, I know even though my family and many others can’t trace our roots back very far, we still have some sense of connectedness. But I also know I have to “think differently” when it comes to understanding family and kinship elsewhere and step outside my own cultural bias to understand how kinship and family works where I may be deployed.”

Steve, not to be outdone, but more wanting to add to Dave’s observation, piped in, “After reading the kinship and conflict section, it was apparent we failed to see the depth and extent of kinship in Iraqi society during the war there... and also in Afghanistan.”

So begins another twice a week conversation I have with Dave and Steve on all matters “culture” in the midst of their four weeks of six-hour days learning survival Arabic at Joint Base Lewis/McChord (JBLM). Our conversation doesn’t stop when we sign off of Skype, as it extends to their twice a week 500-word essays they send to me where they are required to synthesize this week’s module content so they can better manage the effects of cultural and social biases while advocating perspective-taking. I mark-up their essays, not because they are “wrong,” but because I never miss the chance for learning opportunities. This culture conversation doesn’t end with my involvement; it also continues with their Arabic instructor as they apply culture-general knowledge to what culture-specific information is being provided in the language class to advance their training. Abdel - the instructor (also not his real name) and I have worked together, along with other language instructors, over the last three years as we developed and perfected this innovative language and culture approach - sits in on our Skype sessions. He turns on Skype and usually gets his fingers in the way of the camera, or sometimes must figure out why we can’t see each other, or can’t hear, or some glitch like that. Abdel has at least a basic understanding of the connections between how general cultural systems work and their expression in Arab society.

Steve and Dave are our guinea pigs this session as we manipulate the curriculum and their learning experience. We make sure they leave our clutches knowing more than just Arabic words, and some strings of words, that might be useful in signaling to those they interact with that they truly come in peace. Four weeks of Arabic after not knowing the language at all doesn’t get you much in understanding what drives and motivates the behavior of those they engage with while involved in building relationships. Even ten weeks of Arabic doesn’t get you that far. We also make sure that Dave and Steve leave with a healthy beginning of a range of pertinent knowledge and skills, or what I call cross-cultural capability. This capability includes understanding universal cultural components and some general commonalities across cultures, such as kinship, gender, identity, and health systems (we never know when the next earthquake will happen or the
next Ebola-like virus will pop up). We also seed them with skill-based cross-cultural competencies such as cultural self-awareness and perspective-taking, and we take a run at getting them to “think differently” when it comes to fathoming the behavior of others, as well as their own behavior. It’s not that manipulative really. We tell students up front what mad social science we are going to do on them and then we take that science and make them willing participants.

At the center of this effort sits the Learning Management System (LMS) that allows the whole operation to run somewhat seamlessly. We call our approach “language, region and culture (or LRC for short) learning.” The eight culture modules feature videos we have made, articles we or others have written, a discussion area, and a beginning assessment program that begins to assess cross-cultural performance in a learning environment. We have several more modules and accompanying videos for longer learning events, and thus customize the course content based on mission need. The LMS allows all of us “instructors” (our cadre of facilitators) involved, including the language instructors, to collaborate in order to ensure Steve and Dave depart with a coordinated start at building a level of cross-cultural capability. This operation reminds me of the commercial where all of the people involved in making the person safe in his/her car line up behind the new car owner. That is the power of a synergized set of experts who facilitate through an LMS the development of cross-cultural capability. Students drive away with more than a functioning car. They drive away in a car that is prepared for driving contingencies that may befall them.

Why is this braided approach so necessary now in the DoD? Bear with me.

**DoD Goes to War**

The Trump Administration’s foreign policy approach regarding how to address uncertainty in the world reflects a dramatic departure from the last several administrations – as well as from the largely bipartisan consensus on geopolitical matters. Administrations dating back to Eisenhower have partnered defense with efforts involving the Department of State (DoS) and other agencies, such as US Agency for International Development (USAID), with the overarching goal being to oversee and coordinate a robust program of defense, foreign aid, and development for allies and partner nations.

However, the current Trump doctrine, as it has somewhat conceptualized, bends toward building up the military while significantly gutting the non-military programs that have been the staple of how the US approaches its overall security in the world. For example, the Trump Administration is pushing for a $54 billion increase in DoD funding (Shear and Steinhaur, 2017). Touted in this increase are weapons sustainment and force readiness. Several non-DoD agencies, such as DoS and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), face severe reductions in programs and staffing. In particular, DoS is facing a potential initial 29% reduction, with two percent per year after that for ten years (New York Times, 2017). This will further burden DoD organizations with missions and operations that feature non-kinetic knowledge and skills. Even though the DoD enterprise will expand, and other governmental agency reductions might turn out to be less than announced, the intent to “restructure” the traditional interagency structure regarding national security still portends a dramatic, and to many, dangerous reversal.

Locations where non-kinetic missions will be required with less interagency support are in multiple hot-spot locations around the world. For example, a critical region with a number of hot spots is the Middle East, with Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Libya, to name the most pressing. Syria represents the new normal; a toxic blend of state and non-state actors with a weakened central government facing multiple insurgencies and counterinsurgencies, failing borders,
a proxy war, and myriad culture groups that form around beliefs anchored not just to the region but to a rich history, a customized belief system, and an adept skill at using social media to radicalize and recruit members. The other hot spot locations are eerily akin to the challenges plaguing Syria and will require a different approach to missions. And, with those approaches, new/additional skill sets and training in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. And it isn’t just the Middle East where turbulence reigns. Practically anywhere in Africa is at risk, and the increasing volatility in parts of the old Soviet Union with renewed Russian aggression features such activity, not to mention China’s military advancement in the South China Sea.

This is important to consider. If these cuts go through, the DoD will face the repercussions of not having an adequate “soft power” approach, whereas rival powers will then fill that vacuum. And, more significantly, the soft power we advance may have to be delivered by the DoD and its existing partnership activities. This echoes the situation that ensnared the DoD after the invasion of Iraq, and continued through Afghanistan. Counterinsurgency (COIN) in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) started as nation building. The DoD was just one of several interagency organizations that were involved in a host of missions that supported building new infrastructure, training national military and police, and establishing meaningful governmental and democratic institutions. Clearly, the DoD, among all the interagency organizations, was not prepared for these new roles. There was no meaningful preparation and learning involving language and culture skills, including the building of an adequate knowledge base to handle the cross-cultural complexity encountered in handling contractors, building roads and schools, engaging a host of key national, provincial or even village leaders, and many other tasks that the last decade or more of COIN demanded.

Currently, there are no ongoing traditional ground missions involving the troop strength seen at the height of OIF and OEF. Instead, efforts include precise and focused kinetic operations. A larger role is now played by elements of Special Operations Forces (SOF) that engage and support allies and partner nations in helping establish and train security forces to handle their own security issues (for example, Green Berets provided support to the Ugandan military to hunt down the remnants of Lord’s Army (SOFREP, 2017). In fact, Special Operations Command (SOCOM), once numbered at 33,000, now is projected to be 70,000 strong, with a budget of 10 billion dollars (Turse, 2017). The remainder of the force more generally is now in a “peace-time” (misnomer for sure given the current state of many regions of the world) mode, with the four or five or even more deployments for hundreds of thousands of military personnel and some civilians to Iraq then Afghanistan are in the rearview mirror. In this peace-time stage, traditionally, the General-Purpose Forces (GPF) re-group, train, and “re-adjust fire” for potential future missions.

This peace-time stage is different than those seen after World War I, World War II, the Korean War, even Viet Nam; it is much more volatile and uncertain. Threats are constant and pervasive and constitute major concerns in the next decade. Failing or imploded nation-states, many with borders colonially-drawn, have become active sites that feature an array of interests, proxy-backed insurgencies and counterinsurgencies, civil wars, and terrorist groups. US security interests in Syria prior to Trump was a limited manpower effort, backed by a much larger support and intelligence mission. Trump promised a concerted effort to “wipe ISIS from the face of the earth,” and indications seem to be a troop increase, but one that is primarily borne by SOF, for now.

Throw a dart at a world map and one is likely to land on a “hot spot.” Each location has localized social and cultural variables to consider and “interpret,” as well as a contemporary geopolitical state and non-state
actors that complicate the picture with differing belief systems, motivations and behavior - think Ukraine, West and Central Africa, anywhere in the Middle East, Philippines, etc. Adding to this conflict-prone milieu are deep-seated social and cultural biases of those involved, including the US, that indict actions and behaviors of actors based on adherence to singularly perceived “cultural characteristics,” such as Islam.

“What about kinship and alliance did we fail to account for when we got to Iraq?” I pressed Steve.

“The module explains that kinship systems in most societies act as a support network, in more ways than one. They often act as their own little societies, you do business with kin, you worship with kin, you marry kin, in some cases,” …. Dave broke in, “and in some cases, you marry out of your kin to create alliances.”

I smiled; this is the way our classes went: learning opportunity surfaces in our discussions.

Steve was not finished. “I kept thinking of the Hatfields and the McCoys when I read the section on kinship and conflict.” He should have, I had written that example in.

“In immediate kin groups, remember, there are more immediate and smaller associations like family, extended family, lineage, clan, tribe. Disagreements, slights of behavior, and wrongly perceived actions can escalate quickly into conflict,” he said. “In fact, this conflict can energize retribution across generations, kind of a nuclear option for those families.”

I stopped him with a nod and my hand held up in the air, which on Skype, resembles this giant hand coming out of the monitor (which for them is a giant TV screen). I can be somewhat passionate during my teaching, and I forget at times that pointing a finger at one of them to talk more, or reflect, is a lot more threatening when the finger replaces my face.

“So, Dave, not to steal Steve’s thunder, who mediates the disagreements if they are mediated?”

“That’s the fission part of the whole fission/fusion puzzle of kinship. Kinship breaks apart at a lower level, but at the next level up, in this case, the lineage leaders do, as that is the next level up from that extended family, or if it is at the level of lineage, the clan leaders.”

“What’s the fusion part of it?” I asked him.

“Well, this must have been hard for us to understand when we got over there. If there is external force, say coalition forces, that threaten a family, a lineage, or even a tribe, all members of that next lowest level unite to face the outside force. There is a built-in trigger that guarantees a united effort; burying any existing disagreements between families or lineages. You harm or threaten a cousin or a clan member, you harm or threaten me.”

Another learning point was fast approaching.

“So, Steve, what do we need to know to at least understand, say, this kind of behavior in Iraq?”

“Well, first, I think as we are learning here, you need to know generally how kinship seems to work across cultures, and then knowing that, you can apply that to local areas, using it as a guide to figure out how it works locally.”

Mission accomplished, but like a never-ending journey of learning, there is always the next learning opportunity.

“Dave, you saw the 20-minute video linked from the module of me talking to Abdel about his kinship system (Abdel is a Palestinian), right?” He nodded. There was no real delay across the Skype distance; I was almost there.

“Tell me about it....”

**Clash of Cultures**

By 2014, certainly with no appetite to face another large land incursion like we faced in OEF or OIF, it was clear the cross-cultural knowledge and skills that were critically lacking when we first went into Iraq and continued to be important through the duration of COIN were necessary for the success of missions, even when nation-building stopped being the goal. Now in 2017, there is the heightened attention to the traditional
major powers of Russia stretching back across the years to reel back in former Soviet Bloc countries, China as they build power platforms in the China Sea, and finally North Korea and the acceleration of their nuclear flexing. Yet, it isn’t the Cold War revisited. Now, in so many ways, the traditional powers are intimately intertwined with each other economically, culturally, and socially. Attacks on our security will involve cyber events, such as the Russian involvement in the 2016 national election.

The US military is by far the most powerful in the world; in technology, weapons advancement, and military training, bar none. US defense expenditures represent the largest spent of any nation. Not too many in and outside the DoD would question the need to advance, sustain and maintain our defense capability, especially given the threats across the world. But many experts would also agree that more is needed than an improved Joint Strike Fighter and updating our nuclear arsenal to handle future efforts. These advancements don’t do much to support months-long missions with the Nigerian military to track down Boko Harem, support efforts by the Ugandan military to reduce the Lord’s Army footprint in remote Ugandan countryside, or to understand the incredibly complex cultural puzzle that is Syria.

It is imperative one understands social and cultural reality of local and provincial, even national identities and groups, and how elements of that reality intersect and adapt due to many variables, chief among them is local context. In addition, there is the need to engage with that reality to be able to better forecast future behavior and ultimately prepare for and influence local behavior. Here is the truth, and one I argued for in a recent critique of Huntington and Clash of Civilizations, a primary role of the DoD today and in the future, will be in mediating a Clash of Cultures that break out based on local personalities, beliefs and deep history.

“If anything, the clash of civilizations has become a clash of cultures (the use of clash here has no relevance to the expected violence from the West and Islamic apocalypse), where groups align based on local beliefs and features like kinship, land, or shifting alliances based on cultivation or herding of lands that do have antiquity. Or, perhaps their alliance is based on religion that is a mix of local ritual and belief, whereas connections to any ideal monotheism may be in name only. These are the variables that define cultures, and clashes do erupt and run the gamut – from violence to negotiations.

In fact, lose entirely the label of domain and instead consider just how intricate and messy the relations are between families and lineages, between villages, between communities and essentially everywhere. Now consider the various identities that form around ethnic and tribal affiliations, history, and yes, even religion. They are not mutually exclusive, but are drivers of behavior when engaged, such as when these identities interface with kinship. Then consider the various mechanisms of social control that define local behavior, and consider how family, religion and gender, for example, also are factored into social control. This is just a start to trying to untangle and tease out the meaning of culture groups; not touched were notions of conflict, honor, shame, a sense of what is family, and myriad other elements. Suffice it to say that the ramifications of behavior are deeply contextualized and layered” (Sands, 2015, pp. 24-25).

In the Philippines rainforest or supporting one rebel over another in the baked Syrian desert, the blue-collared, relationship-heavy, and time-intensive efforts, amid all kinds of cross-cultural complexity, have become the 21st century “infantry grunt work.” You tell me what knowledge and skill are critical for missions and the goal of long-lasting influence in world that spins on a different axis then when ICBMs stood ready and B-52s roamed the skies like giant pterodactyls.
Hint, think global and transferable knowledge and skills, then act locally.

The Right Kind of Language and Culture:
What is needed: A Polyglot PhD with years of fieldwork in Amazonia that can Win Bar Fights?

“The interview was enlightening, to say the least,” Steve offered.

“You don’t need to walk a fine line here, since the two in that interview are either in the room or peering at you from a giant monitor,” I said to assuage any thoughts about speaking ill of the actors. I wished we had a couple of takes at filming, but the natural flow of conversation carried a powerful message about what banded people together over time and space.

“No, I really mean it was interesting. I am not just saying that. Abdel especially.” He was pretty good.

“What did you get from it? That’s the important part, besides an Emmy for Abdel.”

“When we look at how Iraqis, now remember, I use Iraqi generally,” and he smiled. We had already gone down the path earlier. It was easy to create a “global” identity of an Iraqi or Afghan, but that existed only in our head and what we wanted to happen on the ground, one big happy centralized government with some artificial “national” identity that gathers all into an umbrella of patriotism. The “reality” wasn’t a political reality that Americans wanted to see; it was a social and cultural reality that was driven by kinship and alliances formed and re-formed over centuries. I suspected some of this was coming in Steve’s essay and it would just reinforce what we had talked about, which of course, in a classroom, brick and mortar or virtual, is one way we track progress.

I smiled back. I love when learning points take hold.

“We didn’t grasp the deep history of the region, or the integrated nature of how localized variants of Islam, Shi’a and Sunni, locally looked different; but maybe more importantly, how kinship and alliances drove behavior.” Music to my ears. “But what really grabbed me was toward the end of the interview, you teased out of Abdel, that these kinship bonds today exert pressure on behavior away from the homeland, in other regions of the Middle East, they even follow kinship members to the US. Cell phones, the internet and social media act to keep those ancient bonds alive.” A symphony.

Strike while hot. “Dave, I know you read Atran’s article on Jihaddism.” He nodded. From Dave, that was tantamount to a vigorous shake of the head. “What did Atran say that lines up with Steve’s revelation?”

“Well, I think you want me to say that Atran thinks one of the draws of potential jihadists is the reliance on fictive kin that draws susceptible recruits in; since many of them are foundering in a globalized marketplace, young, no job, no feeling of hope; Agar actually used the “band of brothers” as a metaphor for it. And the internet acts as way to connect the lost souls across borders and oceans.”

“Dave, or Steve, as we close this session out, I know you want to get back to conjugating Arab verbs...” my little running good-natured joke with Abdel, “what is the important takeaway here?”

Steve jumped in as I knew he would. “Blood is thicker than water... still. Even made up blood.”

To Steve, this captured what he pulled from the module, readings, video and class discussion with me and in the language class, even some of his offline conversations he had with Abdel.

I couldn’t wait till I read Steve’s essay, and Dave’s too. The last chance to sink learning through “reflection.” 500 words may not seem like a lot, but in the essay question, I lean on getting them to write about their own cultural “frame” while pushing them to consider other perspectives.

“Dave? Any last thought?” He slowly repositioned himself in his seat; his mind was on fire, I knew, but it was a controlled burn. “Perhaps, Atran needs to do fieldwork in the Bronx or South LA, gangs do the same for their members. Crips and bloods, Hatfields and McCoys. It shouldn’t be that hard for us to understand
cultural influences on behaviors of jihadists when we see some of the same things in our own society.”

And that was the close of another twice a week culture Skype session. After a 10-minute break, Dave and Steve would be learning Arabic greetings to individuals from different stations of Arabic society, and would know that kinship powerfully shaped those individuals’ behavior.

“Later guys, don’t forget to read the last module on health systems for next class. You never know when the next earthquake rumbles or the next virus pops up, you might be involved in some way. And I can guarantee you kinship plays a role there too.”

“Will do, Dr. Greene Sands,” Steve said. Dave nodded too, his farewell. Then Abdel, out of sight except his thumb finding the camera one more time, said “Goodbye Dr. Sands and their classroom disappeared.

Up to this point, it is assumed the reader is aware of the types of knowledge and skills that make up “language and culture” and are considered a part of that approach. I am not alone in using that phrase or similar “catch” phrases to capture without specifying what is included in labels or by default, what defines critical knowledge and skills. In fact, the DoD has a history of attempting to capture meaning and intent of “language and culture” with various labels and acronyms that resist standardization across the Department and Services. In other words, the DoD needs to think differently how to engage and fold theory, methods and approaches that deal with social and cultural aspects of human behavior into learning and application to mission. After spending a decade in developing, delivering and assessing language and “culture” learning programs, the DoD needs to also look at how academic and other applied programs develop and engage in research, learning preparation and sustainment of language and culture application to mission. The DoD is just one of many governmental, non-profits and other organizations that work in social and culturally complex and uncertain environments across the globe. The bottom line is that every organization may have slightly different or very different missions, but the underlying foundation for all missions is to understand and then be able to interact and make sense of behavior of all social and culture groups that are engaged directly or indirectly with the mission.

The Right Kind of Language and Culture Foundation: Cross-cultural Capability

To be successful in cross-cultural complexity involves a mixture of knowledge and skills that:

- accesses understanding self and others and the commonalities that bind us as humans, and the differences that reveal belief systems (much more than ideology) that are powerful motivators for behavior;
- promotes thinking differently about how we approach cross-cultural complexity due to oftentimes an array of implicit and not so covert biases;
- allows useful communication, including language use, to provide keys to understanding others, but as well the perfect the many ways we communicate beyond words.

I call this bundle of knowledge and skills cross-cultural capability, or “the ability to navigate in complex interpersonal situations, express or interpret ideas/concepts across cultures, and make sense of foreign social and cultural behavior.” At the end of the day what DoD language and culture programs should advance is the ability, means and potential to do a mission, prepare for many different missions in a single location with one or many culture groups, or even engage in a single mission in different locations or multiple missions in a variety of locations and contexts with different groups. In other words, knowledge and skills should be transferable to context and not siloed to a specific culture group, dialect, or location. The DoD is expeditionary, their approach to language and culture should be as well. It only makes sense.
“Tell me about borders and Ebola, Steve, and why we love borders but others don’t return the love.” We have virtually convened for the next module discussion, and not much has changed with the room, the students, Abdel’s thumb or why we are there.

“Well, from the module, the concept of geopolitical borders didn’t translate well. And if you spend some time thinking about it, why should it?”

“You have me intrigued, keep going.”

“Borders to us, as a military, even a society, mean separation and demarcation. They assign responsibility and define inhabitants. They also can be shut down to keep people in or out. But in West Africa, those national borders were drawn with adherence to that kind of perspective by the British and French. And in reality, borders were inconsequential to managing who crossed them; people who lived in Liberia, Guinea or Sierra Leone traveled along their kinship line, and yes, Dr. Sands, there is kinship again.” I smiled but laughed inside.

“Dave, where was the disconnect when it came to confronting Ebola?”

“Basically, Ebola wasn’t stopped by borders, because the people who had or carried the virus weren’t stopped by them. And it wasn’t because everyone was rushing the borders and overcame security; it was because the borders never were much of an obstacle to visit and reside with extended family and kinship.”

“Good, that is how the people perceived the borders that were there. So do you think there was a hint of underlying cultural bias when at one point in time, there was serious discussion by the aid effort to “closing” the borders as an attempt to quarantine the virus?”

Take me deeper into this Dave, I thought. If we thought closing the border was appropriate and possible, what were we not thinking about and that we kept coming up against as we struggled to control the virus?

“Easy, Dr. S, we weren’t thinking of how and why people traveled across borders, just how to stop them, and one of the reasons was the influence on kinship as a motivator to travel; or more importantly, I guess, of the power of kinship to disregard the borders, what borders they were.” Bingo.

Components of Cross-Cultural Capability

Several disciplines are important in developing cross-cultural capability: linguistics, foreign language instruction, anthropology, human geography, sociology, cross-cultural communication and the behavioral sciences. For ease of discovery, I will tease out the different components of this capability, but know that separating out the components should not indicate by any means that to develop and sustain this capability is simply an additive process. It’s not. A SOF soldier tramping through a Colombian jungle, coordinating a search mission with his counterparts, while also having to navigate through the villages and outposts of rural Colombia seamlessly should utilize this capability. The SOF individual should project a powerful set of knowledge and skills that promotes understanding of the authentic social and cultural reality of those interacted with, engages a communication of meaning about the experience, and provides on the spot analysis of a dynamic and evolving situation that considers intent and motivation of all the different groups that are engaged that day, the past and into the future. There is research now ongoing to develop an “iron man” suit for SOF to provide a host of sensors, knowledge augmentation, and communication “capability” to take into battle (Special Operations.com, 2017). The irony is for a fraction of the cost of this research, the development of the prototype and the testing, etc., the right kind of learning program can make this SOF soldier the most effective in promoting cross-cultural capability.

I know there is the perspective in the intelligence community that language proficiency is the only need because intelligence analysts only listen and/or read foreign communications or analyze human intelligence (HUMIT) or signal intelligence (SIGNET). They write
and produce products and they never venture a foot into a Ugandan jungle, build partnerships through exercises, or work only at an embassy and not immerse into the surrounding community. To that perspective, I counter with at the heart of much of the DoD mission is understanding others, allies, partners, adversaries and maybe adversaries and cross-cultural capability is critical to someone sitting at a desk or listening in on a surveillance sweep. I will explore in the following section what makes up cross-cultural capability.

**Language**

I have had many conversations with those who advocate for the primacy of language in DoD training and preparation, funding and resources. No one would deny its importance in navigating cross-cultural complexity. In addition, no one would argue also that learning a foreign language is time-consuming and maintaining language proficiency is critical, as it is a perishable skill. Language skill is measured in the DoD by proficiency levels, 0-5, with 0+ being the lowest level of a measurable use, and 5, the highest. To be frank, anything below 1+ provides the speaker with only a rudimentary ability to interact with speakers and can provide only limited comprehension of understanding of behavior and motivations. Depending on the difficulty of learning the language, getting to even those elementary levels requires weeks of concentrated learning. Ten weeks of instruction in Thai, from knowing little or no Thai language, will get you to a 1. Language educators and professionals will also tell you that spending 10 weeks in language instruction will get you a similar or maybe even greater return in cultural understanding. Not even close, I say and have written. This is due to the very specific cultural information introduced, the lack of an appropriate learning lattice to contextualize the information and the fact that what cultural instruction is designed into and taught comes at the hands and words of the instructor who has no or little expertise in social sciences. The kind of culture being provided may also lack accuracy, validity, timeliness and perhaps the most important deficit, lack of theoretical understanding from the instructor. Even with these shortfalls, I still think language is a critical element of cross-cultural capability for its utility in promoting that capability, but also for the time in instruction and the budget it carries in the DoD. I see language learning providing the space and effort to develop cross-cultural capability, certainly not traditionally considered as a goal or purpose for language learning in the DoD.

**Culture and Region General Knowledge**

Culture/region general consists of a universal set of knowledge that apply to most cultures, groups and places and offers some sense of regularity no matter the group or the location. If culture is considered patterns of meaningful behaviors, then elements such as kinship, identity, religion, exchange, law and order, and others become a means of framing expectations of behavior. Likewise, how groups of people impact geography and how geography and environment impact and influence behavior are critical to understand, as no group exists in a social or natural vacuum. In learning how to fly a plane, the novice pilot advances through ground school to first learn how a plane flies through general principals of flight. More specifically, instruction then provides the factors and variables that need to be considered and understood about flying and the environment, to include weather. One doesn’t jump in from the beginning learning specifically about how to fly a Cessna 150. That comes later in the ground school preparing to fly a 150. In this example, the pilot is after patterns of actions and results.

In culture/region general, the emphasis is on explicating patterns of behavior. Knowing these patterns will prompt rapid and greater comprehension when encountering like or similar patterns no matter where one finds the mission, or the language spoken. Less visible, but of import, is what motivates those patterns. Undergirding behavior are beliefs, or ideas,
that are held to be true and meaningful to individuals and culture groups. The most meaningful beliefs I label as core beliefs, although others call them values or even sacred values. Don't get the notion of belief wrapped solely around religion, because our understanding of religion tends to be narrow in its scope and limited to how it plays out in our society. To really understand a people and their behaviors, you need to access and understand their core beliefs because it is this system of beliefs which define and promote those universal elements such as kinship and family, exchange, gender roles, governance, and others. And it is this system of beliefs which is activated and mobilized for resistance and change - think insurgency and counterinsurgency. Beliefs are accessible and it takes all the elements of cross-cultural capability to discover them. Beliefs are the motherlode of what is the greatest utility for most DoD missions. Find and understand the beliefs and you have the blueprint for understanding behaviors.

“Dave, just so Steve doesn’t think I always pick on him, tell me about the core belief of causal agency and its role in the spread of Ebola.” It was close to 1PM in Alexandria, VA, where I was holding court with the guys, and just about 10AM there. I had them in the sweet spot of attention and interest; the coffee had jump-started their minds. Just then Bella, one of our dogs decided to put her paws on my desk, stare into the screen and make sure Dave answered.

“Hi Bella,” he said. Obviously, Bella was not a first-time observer. “Well, in the States, most of us believe that if we get sick, there is a germ or virus that has invaded our bodies, and to get well, we need to get it out of there. In West Africa, the reason folks get sick is because somehow, someone or some force made them get sick, either through sorcery, ancestor spirits, magic, or others super naturalistic means. To us, how we get better is primal, less is how we got it. To West Africans, how they got it, or who was responsible for making them sick is important. That knowledge then provides the healer information enough to apply the right kind of ritual to make the person better.”

Pretty good answer I thought. So too did Bella as she dropped down to the floor and found her bed. “Neat answer Dave (yes, I used neat). “Steve, so which is the right approach to agency in this case?”

“Fooled more than once, Dr. Sands, not anymore,” he shot back and laughed. “I believe you once told us, and then kept telling us, that beliefs are ideas held to be true by the people who believe them. Therefore, neither are wrong from the perspective of the people that hold them. I remember the module saying that even if we from a Western biomedicine perspective think that sorcery or witchcraft or the rituals to cure it do not hold water, imagine what West Africans thought when the aid or health care worker told them that there were tiny little bugs or viruses living inside their blood that were making them sick and we needed to get them out, and that those molecules of virus came from a monkey they always eat, and never get sick from. Pretty far out to them. I think the message here is you have to know the core belief that motivates the behavior and the cultural context, or reality that frames it before you can work to influence their actions.”

I wish I had a cigar; you just have to love it when a plan comes together, or students get the learning point.

**Culture/Region Specific Knowledge**

Providing specific information, facts and overviews of a country was the approach taken early on in COIN. SMART Cards, field guides, PowerPoints and two-hour air plane hangar sessions for 700 strong on what is an Afghan or explaining Islam to soldiers who were predominantly Christian, while highlighting some of the features of Arab life like the infamous “don’t show the souls of your feet, or shake with your left hand” was all that could have been done on the short notice to “train up” the battalions that deployed to Iraq and later Afghanistan. Disseminating this kind of specific knowledge about a place or people became more
elaborate as COIN progressed with simulations and full length live actor video productions. Yet, what was lacking was the blueprint of culture/region general to provide the skeleton to the specific bits of flesh that were being tossed out (Sands, 2014). I was Chair of Culture at the Air Force Culture and Language Center from 2008-2011 and knew the urgency of getting information to the troops that was of value, any kind of knowledge.

In developing cross-cultural capability, understanding the authentic social and cultural reality of the culture groups encountered is critical for populations like SOF. This understanding involves discovering how those universal components, such as kinship and family, work in that village or how local people approach health and wellness as Dave and Steve discovered. The danger in relying on just feeding bits and pieces of information about a specific place or people without the skeleton limits the understanding and utility of the information and becomes even less useful, or even dangerous if applied to the next valley over, or in the next province or to members of the tribe that live across failing borders. Culture-specific information is also only as good as the location, the local population and the context that shaped the perspective provides. It is dependent on the perspective and validity of the source of the information, and how and who presents it.

A culture-specific approach is seeded in language learning. Elements of behaviors, local customs, climate, holidays, etc. are used as content to “teach” the language at the lower proficiency levels (initial acquisition training, IAT, or survival language). The more advanced the learning, the more in-depth and detailed the “culture” instruction can be with the language to provide further discovery and opportunity to learn more.

The assumption of language instruction is that the greater fluency provides a greater understanding of culture; language becomes the purveyor of understanding. However, the fallibility of language learning as cultural instruction is the limits of culture-specific knowledge and the lack of theoretically-informed language instructors providing social and behavioral science to their students. In addition, the fallibility also includes the instructor’s own implicit and explicit biases carried in the information provided to the students. An important part of cross-cultural capability, and is planted in its development, is learning how to think about how you think. Learning the language can help you access social and cultural reality, and that is a primary reason why language is a critical component of cross-cultural capability. Also needed for cross-cultural capability is cross-cultural competence (3C), a suite of skill-based competencies that are critical to “re-wire” how we think about others, and ourselves.

Cross-Cultural Competence

What makes someone successful in cross-cultural complexity is what is done with knowledge about others that can be useful in strategy, plans, assessment, and other uses. 3C is made up of four skill-based competences that gives the individual the tools necessary to understand, act, perceive, communicate, influence and even potentially forecast in missions with cross-cultural complexity. I look at these “skills” as being cognitively-based and developed “within” an individual, like a “self-betterment” program. As such, these skills can facilitate how one interacts with their cross-cultural environment. Mitigating biases that are an inherent part of how we see the world is one theme that runs through thinking differently and what 3C helps minimize. I also use the tag-line, thinking differently, to help encapsulate what 3C promotes: managing the unintended consequences of human cognition – bias – and its operation when considering those who are socially and culturally different.

The four competences play into our ability to face cross-cultural complexity through sets of behaviors and actions found in an array of circumstances, both immediate and distant. In other words, as an individual, 3C helps put you in a place to be successful in cross-
cultural interactions. The components of 3C are (Sands and Greene-Sands, 2014, Sands, 2016, Sands 2013):

**Cultural Self-awareness:** The cognitive awareness of one’s own worldview and belief system, the biases that are interwoven in those beliefs, their influence on others from the same culture groups, or those from different or foreign groups, and how to self-regulate when appropriate;

**Cultural Learning:** The skill of learning about one or more cultures through observation, reflection, and research, to include the learning of “culture-general” concepts utilizing learning and data acquisition techniques to gain cultural and regional knowledge;

**Perspective-taking:** The ability to perceive events the way others do and understand how other people’s cultural values and assumptions affect their behavior, paired with the ability to suspend judgment and withhold personal or moral judgment until sufficient evidence and/or data becomes available. This requires insight into others’ thoughts, motivations, and concerns and enables understanding of cultural behaviors. Engaging in perspective-taking promotes the forecasting of others behavior or reactions within their cultural context;

**Participation/Observation:** The use of participation and observation skills necessary to elicit the kinds of sociocultural data from culture members to help reveal patterns of behavior and their meaning. Participant-observation (PO) is the foundational qualitative research method for social and even behavioral sciences. More than just a means to directly elicit data, successful PO offers a means for creating and sustaining cross-cultural relations while also providing an approach to gather and validate the perspective of those individuals and groups integral to mission success. PO can promote sense making and mindfulness, especially when the individual encounters foreign or novel cultural behavior that surprises or confounds the existing understanding of cultural reality.

In the JBLM learning program, these skill-based competences are braided throughout all the curriculum; in the module text, in the readings, in the knowledge checks, situation judgement exercises and in the essays. Materials and discussion whether online or in the classroom consider reinforcing competencies. Students leave the learning event, depending on duration of instruction, with a working knowledge of 3C and how competences are applied in a variety of learning situations.

The final piece to cross-cultural capability is developing non-linguistic communication skills that aid in reducing misunderstanding in social interactions while increasing the likelihood of eliciting critical information in culturally diverse environments. These skills are rooted in actions and behaviors that are intentionally repeatable and goal-directed during interaction and use appropriate and effective communication processes to successfully navigate an intercultural encounter.

“Okay fellas, one last point to make from the Ebola example and that deals with non-verbal communication. Steverino (4 weeks of contact breeds some familiarity of knowing, also, an important element of promoting learning), what about touching that accelerated the spread of Ebola and how did that impact West African culture?”

Steve didn’t need much prompting. “West Africans touch each other a lot more than we do, and not in a bad way. That is their way of showing affection and social bonding. Touching is also big at funerals. So, you can see if Ebola is spread through close contact, there is certainly ample opportunity for contamination in their social interactions.”

I nodded, and wanted him to continue, but was a
bit surprised David interjected instead. It was always like this toward the end of the course, the students were starting to think differently about how to look at and parse cultural behavior.

“So I read this section of the module and really tried to understand how finding out that your whole approach to greeting, to talking, to communicating would have to change because of the virus. You wrote that this kind of communicating, the non-verbal way, was a seal and a bonding, and if there wasn’t this kind of additional communication, what was the word you used,” and he furrowed his brow, “channels, further behaviors like trust and care, and others would be difficult to find traction. I guess in a way, without that kind of communication allowed, or feared, it could change their whole culture. Man, it is all wrapped up together, and if you mess with one thing, the effect ripples across others.”

My job here was done, I thought with an inner chuckle. Both Dave and Steve now had seeded in them a discerning approach to understanding others’ (and their own) behavior.

Cross-Cultural Communication Competence (4C)

Adding one more layer to this set of skills is cross-cultural communication competence (4C). 4C reduces misunderstanding in social interactions while increasing the likelihood of eliciting critical information in culturally diverse environments. These skills are rooted in actions and behaviors that are intentionally repeatable and goal-directed during interaction and use appropriate and effective communication processes to successfully navigate an intercultural encounter. MacKenzie (2014) posits five 4C skills that are transferable across cultural and linguistic divides:

1. Leveraging communication style
2. Employing effective interaction skills
3. Active and appreciative listening
4. Managing paralanguage use and perception
5. Decoding nonverbal messages

These skills are critical to learn and manage especially when mission is dependent on the ability to communicate intent and understand meaning. In qualitative approaches, especially in engaging methods that depend on extracting socially-based knowledge, the quality of communication is connected to the quality of the relationships.

4C offers the ability to effectively grasp the “types” or channels of non-verbal and extra-linguistic communication and to compare across cultures. Inherent in this competence is the act of conveying and understanding meaning with people from two or more cultures different from one’s own. 4C involves a comparison of interactions among people from the same culture to those from another culture. This type of communication competence allows for skill and knowledge development to better communicate with more than one culture group. Learning a language only gets you part way to being able to understand and get the most out of what is being communicated, both in intentions and meaning.

In summary, the benefit and value of cross-cultural capability is only as good as the learning program that designs, develops, delivers and assesses it. In addition, how an organization, such as the DoD, promotes learning, and even “labels” efforts, such as training, can impact greatly the effectiveness and sustainability of learning.

A Final Note - Training and Learning / Proficiency vs. Capability

Promoting a robust, theoretically-informed learning program in cross-cultural capability is constrained by the need to address it as training. I have argued against the use of the label training to address the development of cross-cultural capability as training circumcises the acknowledgement that the development of the components of cross-cultural capability require a deeper understanding of knowledge and application of skill sets and thus, requires a more comprehensive approach that I have referred to as learning, others
agree.

“When we think of training, we think of adherence, testing, drills, exercises, and standards. When we’re being formally trained, we’re being groomed to perform according to a set of expectations. “Learning” is a generous canopy. When we think of learning, the following comes to mind: thinking, exploration, absorption, creativity, purpose, education, curiosity, and growth. When we’re learning–formally or informally–we’re not only acquiring new knowledge and skills, we’re also blazing a new path by cultivating our own understanding.

There is a time and place for training. We view training as one component of the learning plan. For example, a company’s employees might need to learn about compliance requirements or processes. But to make the learning a comprehensive experience, we also must provide opportunities to modify behavior and on-the-job performance. There’s definitely an opportunity for skills training here, but learners also need to practice what they’ve learned and demonstrate their knowledge in meaningful ways in order to round out the learning experience” (Idea Learning Group, 2011).

Dropping the notion that all you need is training to get you ready for cross-cultural complexity opens the aperture to consider appropriately all knowledge and skills important to success. Training also implies that there can be developed a “proficiency” to mastering skills. Proficiency fits well into the metric-centric DoD approach to training, and much money has been spent, and is still being spent, on developing proficiency levels for foreign language instruction in the DoD. The Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) is an approach that provides “levels’ to measure one’s speaking ability at a given time.

The proficiency levels have also been translated into levels for regional expertise, and among the language community and those associated with it, and there have been attempts to assign these same “levels” to culture. It has become the official and unofficial individual and organizational quest for LREC programs to align culture with similar levels, since there are not any “proficiency” measures, or even assessment tests or means to assign to regional expertise or even more elusive, that of “culture.” The fact that there are no proficiency levels or assessment measures does not mean they just haven’t been built. It indicates more that attempting to take the notion of proficiency and applying it to other components of cross-cultural capability provides little value to the notion of capability. Efforts that go into developing assessment measures cost time and money and divert critical resources to a deepening rabbit hole. Elsewhere Pieter DeVisser and I have argued for a performance-based learning-driven assessment. This certainly is one of several ways that can be developed to “assess” someone’s cross-cultural capability that isn’t a test applied at a single instance with no connection or context to a learning program or means to alleviate deficiencies (Sands and DeVisser, 2015).

The Tie to a Global Competence

Recently, in higher education as well as K-12 public education, the notion of a “global and cultural competence” has been advanced. In January 2017, the “Framework for Developing Global and Cultural Competencies to Advance Equity, Excellence and Economic Competitiveness” was published by the Department of Education (Department of Education, 2017). The framework was the result of the Department’s International Strategy addressing what it saw as a both a deficiency and a need in preparing students of all ages for a much more diverse world.

“...its commitment to prepare all U.S. students to succeed globally through international education and engagement. Today, more than ever, our students need to be equipped with the critical thinking, communications, socio-emotional and
language skills to work collaboratively with their counterparts in the United States and all over the world. Understanding and appreciating other parts of the world, different religions, cultures, and points of view are essential elements of global and cultural competence” (Department of Education, 2017).

Global and cultural competence consists of competences similar to those found in cross-cultural capability:

“Proficient in at least two languages;
Aware of differences that exist between cultures, open to diverse perspectives, and appreciative of insight gained through open cultural exchange;
Critical and creative thinkers, who can apply understanding of diverse cultures, beliefs, economies, technology and forms of government in order to work effectively in cross-cultural settings to address societal, environmental or entrepreneurial challenges;
Able to operate at a professional level in intercultural and international contexts and to continue to develop new skills and harness technology to support continued growth” (Department of Education, 2017).

The State of Kentucky has produced one such K-12 global competence program that features four distinct “competences”: investigate the world; weigh perspectives; communicate ideas; and act. A set of modules have been developed and are featured on the State’s education webpage complete with video and PowerPoint introductions (Kentucky Department of Education, 2017).

I recently took part in a panel sponsored by Rosetta Stone and Lead with Language (Rosetta Stone, 2017) that explored the role of language in connecting the nation (Rosetta Stone, 2017). Topics and issues brought up in the panel included developing a global and cultural competency for today’s students. In that panel, and audience, were mostly language professionals and educators. As I have found in my work and efforts, there was the feeling advanced by panelists and questions from the audience that language instruction offers the catalyst for the development of a larger set of competences that promote effective behaviors and outcomes when dealing with those who are different, both on a global stage, or considering the diversity of our society, in the next neighborhood or town.

Another overarching theme in the panel was the opportunity that blended learning offered to a multidisciplinary approach to developing global competence. The utility of developing a more robust distance learning capability was also featured in panel discussion in part to provide a platform for the need to bring disparate disciplines together as well as to begin to address the shortage of foreign language instructors in schools in the US. I have written elsewhere on the benefits of blended learning and distance learning to DoD and have provided experience with actual learning programs such as the one at JBLM (Sands, 2016).

A recent Inside Higher Ed article by Reisinger argues along a similar tact, “…intercultural perspectives can and should inform the teaching of academic content in many disciplines, making language study not only relevant but even indispensable (Reisinger, 2017).” Reisinger laments a few factors that have reduced the instruction and overall learning programs in world languages (Reisinger, 2017). The first issue is the significant drop in the number of higher education programs that require language study. A second issue, equally as pervasive, is the move in higher education from knowledge-based outcomes to more focused learning in service to careers, or as Reisinger quotes Robert Thompson,

“…the notion of higher education as knowledge in the service of society is being contrasted with, and sometimes replaced by, a neoliberal model that connects college education to economic needs, positing students as consumers. Fields of study are marketed based on their use in “the real world,” and our students feel
pressed to prioritize job placement over intellectual exploration (Reisinger, 2017)."

A third complicating issue related to the shift from knowledge to learning in service of economic gain is the renewed focus on STEM education at the expense of other programs such as the humanities. What has resulted, in effect, is the realization that there needs to be innovative and far-reaching efforts to not just make foreign language learning relevant to the new learning landscape, but to make leaders and administrators aware of relevancy and added benefit languages can bring to students.

Approaches like global competence “markets” the utility of language, while efforts such as integrating language instruction into disciplines and colleges within universities, or “Culture and Languages Across the Curriculum (CLAC), find new homes for foreign language instruction outside of a siloed and limiting traditional department to “meet students where they are.” Hybrid and interdisciplinary disciplines such as environmental or international studies reflect the recent trend to build programs based on contemporary need, and seeding language learning into these approaches only makes sense (Reisinger, 2017). Finally, adopting blended and distance learning instructional practices and methods brings disruptive innovation, and technologies to advance efficiency of learning. These approaches also reach into places and spaces where traditional learning programs and methods and a growing shortage of foreign language instruction and instructors conspire to circumscribe access.

Conclusion

Knowledge and skills critical for success in cross-cultural complexity are defined by capability. They are a constellation of elements that are critically linked to better understand, interact, build and sustain relationships and prepare for the dynamic and shifting nature of what drives human behavior as applied to mission. The knowledge and skills in the learning program at JBLM are connected and synergistically provide capability necessary for missions, known and unknown, circumstances and situations, known or unknown and performed, in challenging and risk-filled environments. All the components are the “long pole in the tent” and the gain on which components and how much of each is needed and learned is predicated on several factors, mission type and frequency, duration, budget, learning or training cycle, and others. If missions will take place in the current cross-cultural environments as seen in Syria, the general middle east, anywhere in Africa, or elsewhere in the future, it is shortsighted to offer only partial learning solutions developing and sustaining this capability. You can’t shoot yourself to accessing, understanding and influencing behavior. Finally, no matter what linguists and language professionals tell you, learning a language doesn’t make you anywhere near cross-culturally capable, although, while being introduced to other components of cross-cultural capability, learning a language, even what is called survival language, can certainly aid in making one more cross-culturally capable.

I find the parallels striking between how my colleagues and I have designed, developed and delivered a cross-cultural capability and the recent direction in language and culture learning in K-12 and higher education. As such, programs can have real and sustained effects on student learning. Efforts such as CLAC and new directions in curriculum development and delivery call on innovative efforts that adapt and merge critical knowledges with lifelong skills and skill-based competencies. That is the intent, at least. Our program of cross-cultural capability promotes a suite of cross-cultural knowledge and skills that feature a multidisciplinary team of designers, developers and faculty that are engaged in one extended learning event that includes disruptive technologies (LMS and distant learning) and teaching methods, and a new perspective on proficiency versus learning performance.
Critical themes that run throughout our development and obtained from three years of teaching cross-cultural capability includes framing learning through the introduction of culture and region general concepts that builds a lattice to better capture and understand culture and region-specific knowledges. A second theme involves intertwining skills and competencies throughout all facets of curriculum and across the components. Finally, the intent of our program is to provide transferable knowledge and skills to DoD military and civilian personnel that facilitate success wherever they are deployed or assigned. The nature of global relations today for military, and for many other organizations, demands an expeditionary approach while depending on capability to build and sustain local cross-cultural relationships; think globally, act locally.

As a parting note, the DoD and efforts in education have much in common when it comes developing cross-cultural capability and global competence. There should be active collusion for at least best practices, if not for all facets of program development.

“Good morning class!” I said brightly.

Abdel’s thumb left my screen and revealed a new cohort of 5 Language-Enabled Soldiers, volunteered or voluntold, preparing for 10 weeks of Initial Acquisition Training in Thai. They will leave with much more with enduring professional and personal benefit.

“Good morning, Dr. Sands,” the chorus came back.

“I am an anthropologists and anthropologists love to listen to and tell stories. Let me tell you a story about an opium farmer and an Air Force master sergeant on a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan.” And so the next class begins.
References


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Endnotes

i This paper reflects the opinions and views of the author only. It does not necessarily represent or reflect official policy of the Department of Defense or the US Army.

ii This author would like to acknowledge the comments and opinions of the following colleagues Allison Greene-Sands, Mark Dye, Yvonne Pawelek, and Darby Arakelian. They provided insightful review. Any errors are those of the author.
Robert R. Greene Sands, PhD

Robert R. Greene Sands, PhD, is one of the foremost experts in cross-cultural competence (3C) and culture-general in the DoD and has worked closely with several DoD organizations to develop and deliver innovative blended learning programs in culture and language. Several iterations of his courseware have been utilized by different Services, Special Operations Forces, US Army, US Air Force, US Marines, and Foreign Area Officers, among others. Sands developed the first-ever Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in cross-cultural competence, Operational Culture: Thinking Differently about Behavior in the Human Domain.

Anthropologist Sands is currently Director of Learning Initiatives & Programs of LanguaCulture, LLC and adjunct professor at Norwich University. His prior experience includes positions at Air University and Air Force Culture and Language Center, Defense Intelligence Agency, and Director and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for the Study of Culture and Language at Norwich University and adjunct professor in the College of Graduate and Continuing Studies Program. Sands’s research and writing on the various aspects of culture and language is represented in seven books (with one in press), numerous journal and book chapters. He is also a preeminent speaker and lecturer and is often delivering addresses to various organizations and learning institutions on his research and experience, to include TEDx and other television and video appearances. His most recent book published by Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) featured a re-envisioning of the Special Forces language and culture learning program, Assessing SOF LRC Needs: Leveraging Digital and LRC Learning to Reroute the “Roadmap” from Human Terrain to Human Domain. Sands founded and is co-editor of the Journal for Culture, Language and International Security. Dr. Sands received his PhD in anthropology from the University of Illinois.
Abstract

This paper explores several scholarly articles, books and videos in an attempt to closely examine North Korean culture and how it compares to other societies, specifically with regards to its diverse nature. These articles not only examine the true meaning of culture, but also take a deep look into how North Korea is viewed by the Western world and an even deeper look into the realities that are the North Korean society of today. Ultimately, my intent is to prove that North Koreans, although isolated and largely shut-off from the rest of the world, possess just as much “cultural diversity” within their population as does any other society of today’s world.

Thesis Statement

North Korea is largely viewed by the rest of the world as one of the most (if not the most) secretive, closed-off, and least culturally diverse countries on the planet. This perception ultimately leads outsiders to stereotype, generalize and lump the entire population of North Korea into one specific type of “culture”. However, North Korea is, in fact, steeped in a variety of cultural differences and cultural markers not unlike the more than 200 countries that span the rest of the world.

What is cultural identity? How do we identify ourselves? Do we identify others in the same way that we identify ourselves? What’s the first means by which we typically identify others...by our sight...and that’s when the labels start. For most, it is much easier to simply “label” others or generally categorize, especially when they perceive them to be different, peculiar or contrary to their own beliefs and values system.

I will admit, it is rather convenient to quickly slap a label of “least culturally diverse country in the world” on North Korea and just move on. Since North Korea’s inception in 1948, it has been ruled by only three different leaders who established and have upheld a very totalitarian Stalinist type of dictatorship that was founded on the principle “Juche” or “self-reliance”. Additionally, the country produces its own crops, uses its own natural resources and relies very little on foreign aid which results in little to no relations with the outside world. All of this, combined with the fact that its borders are all but impenetrable and any sort of outside access to the country is tightly controlled, makes it all but impossible for any outsider to get a true, unfiltered look at what life inside North Korea is really like.

The philosophy of Juche, the restricted access to the country and even the polarizing “cult of personality” that surrounds the country’s “Dear Leaders” serve as significant barriers to an outsider gaining a better understanding of the citizens of North Korea. Regardless, those barriers don’t change the fact that there still exist numerous factors of cultural diversity within
North Korea, such as; religious beliefs, ethnicity, economic background, sexual orientation, physical appearance, education, geographic background, occupation, cognitive style, age, and so on. Furthermore, even though the North Korean population may not be comprised of peoples from a multitude of different civilizations (like the United States, for example), these different cultural markers exist in North Korea and must not be ignored, but rather, must be explored and examined further.

**Exploring Michael Agar’s Theory on “Culture”**

As Agar says, “Culture is one of the most widely (mis)used and contentious concepts in the contemporary vocabulary” (Agar, 2006). I could not agree more with this statement. As a member of the military for more than 24 years, I have heard more leaders use the word “culture” and attempt to define their organization’s “culture” then I care to remember. I have heard countless versions of questions, such as, “Do we have a healthy culture in our organization?”, “What is our culture?”, “How do we change our culture?”. I have also heard leaders point to culture as an indicator of organizational health or even use it as a reason why a unit is effective or ineffective. “That organization struggles because they have an unhealthy culture,” or, “Their culture is the reason behind their disciplinary issues”.

Recently, during one of our large unit gatherings, one of my subordinate military leaders posed a question. He asked, “Do you think we have a problem with the culture in our organization?”. I used his question as an opportunity to answer his question with a question of my own. I asked him “What is your definition of culture?” It was somewhat of a rhetorical question, but if I would have asked each member of my unit that question, I would have gotten a multitude of different responses. The point I was trying to make to him was that “culture” is a very dynamic concept, more so today than it has ever been in the past. As with many other entities and organizations throughout the world, the military has its own definition of culture and its own unique way of utilizing the word to describe the way their individual organizations operate.

**Languaculture**

Years ago, Agar introduced the concept of “languaculture”. The basis behind the establishment of this new concept was to educate people on the fact that language was more than just syntax or spelling or vocabulary. In his book, Language Shock (1994), Agar reminds readers that actually using a language involves all manner of background knowledge and local information in addition to grammar and vocabulary (Agar, 2006). This doesn’t just apply to languages of two people from different countries of origin (although it certainly does). This concept can absolutely apply to two individuals who speak the same dialect of an identical native language.

Agar explains languaculture by describing some of his own cultural markers. He describes himself as a native English-speaking Catholic male from California who graduated from college in the 1960s and goes on to describe his opposite as a native Spanish speaking Cuban Jewish female from Mississippi who graduated from college in the 1980s (Agar, 2006). All of the characteristics he describes are markers of what people could broadly or routinely call culture, but in reality, these characteristics cause an individual to speak from several different languacultures which could potentially cause complications depending upon the listener, the diversity of their background, and the way that they interpret or translate what is being said. These complications,
misinterpretations and misunderstandings ultimately result in “rich points” (Agar, 2006).

“Rich points” are cultural moments or even certain words or phrases that tap deeply into the context and psyche of a group of people. Furthermore, rich points are where the “insiders” and the “outsiders” of different cultures meet (Kerrigan, 2013). Agar goes further into this concept, defining “culture” as a construction or a translation between a source (LC1) and a target (LC2). The amount of material that goes into that translation will vary, depending on the boundary between the two (Agar, 2006). Additionally, in many cases, there will come a point during the interaction between the two where the LC1 will not possess enough information about the LC2 to understand what is happening in front of them and could potentially experience severe “culture shock” depending upon the amount of rich points encountered.

As I think about Agar’s concept, I can think back to countless encounters I have had over the years and the infinite number of rich points created as a result of those encounters. Some of the examples are quite clear and obvious choices such as my time spent (and subsequent engagements with indigenous peoples) in foreign countries; Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Japan, Korea, etc... It is not surprising that the stark differences between my cultural markers and the cultural markers of the people from those countries created substantial rich points.

My Experiences and Agar’s theory

From my experiences, culture is not a closed, coherent system of meaning and action in which an individual always and only participates... not anymore. Our world is way too connected and diverse for “culture” to be oversimplified in this way. “Culture” is not singular; it’s plural, in which its many differences and multi-faceted connections are brought out as different groups interact with one another, and so on and so forth. As such, “culture” will continue to re-invent itself over time.

To Agar, and I agree, culture only becomes visible when an outsider encounters it; what becomes visible depends upon the LC1 of the outsider or in other words, the “eye of the beholder” (Agar, 2006). From that perspective, culture is relational and only exists as a translation enabler between LC1 and LC2. In other words, without the differences, or rich points, there would not be a cause or a reason to place a “culture” label.

The fact is, that even within the most (perceived) closed-off groups of today’s world, there still exist significant differences and rich points which result in different translations between LC1 and LC2. This theory holds true for the small, closed-off “culture” of the small farming community where I lived during my high school years. It holds true for the closed-off “culture” of the U.S. military which makes up about 0.3% of the total population of the United States. It also holds true for the country of North Korea, which is widely believed to be one of the least culturally diverse countries in the world.

The West’s View of North Korea

When asked about North Korea, a Westerner is likely to give you many common responses. Some of those common responses include: oppressed, starving, isolated, subjugated, socialist. Additionally, there are several commonly referred to visual representations of North Korea, such as: one of their three “Dear Leaders” and displays of military might, such as missile systems. To Westerners, North Korea is viewed as an extremely closed-off society with very strict governmental
control. North Korea is also seen as a country with very unstable leadership that possesses one of the largest military forces in the world (Silva, 2017), which poses a threat to United States’ security and regional interests.

**Oppressed Nation**

Since North Korea was established in 1948, and ever since, its political system has most closely resembled the idea of totalitarianism. For nearly 70 years, it has had an absolute dictator with an elaborate ideology in which its people live in a condition of terror under the thumb of an extremely repressive and coercive apparatus with a centralized economy. Furthermore, the regime exerts almost total control over the mediums of mass communication. It is also important to note that a central element of the regime and the most critical element of the coercive apparatus is its military (Scobell, 2006).

**Communism.** Because of North Korea’s long-standing ties with Russia and China, the principles of Communism have dominated its political structure. Communism, which is also known as a command system, is an economic system in which the government owns most of the factors of production and determines the allocation of resources and what products and services will be provided. One of the basic principles of communism is to eliminate the exploitation of the masses by the few and that property should belong to the society (Spaulding, 2017). Communism also stresses and emphasizes the country’s self-reliance and discourages international trade and investment. This principle was strongly adopted by Korea’s first leader, Kim Il-Song, who established “Juche” or “self-reliance” in North Korea shortly after he took over as supreme leader of the country.

North Korea’s communist foundation and the practice of Juche is one of the biggest reasons why Westerners have a very short-sighted and stereotypical view of North Korea. The principles and practice of Juche keep North Korea very closed-off and inaccessible to the rest of the world. Gaining information about North Korea, particularly information that is not controlled by the North Korean government/censors is very difficult. Quite frankly, I believe most Westerners are content with knowing only what is easily accessible about the country and too lazy to make an effort to learn more.

**Strict Governmental Control.** To someone who is not accustomed to living in a communist society, North Korea appears to be a country that lives under strict governmental control. The examples of governmental control include, but are not limited to: a list of approved haircuts for both men and women, adherence to strict driving restrictions throughout the country, no internet access for the majority of the country, a state-run education system, compulsory military service, lack of religious freedom, and strict dress codes for the entire population. To an outsider, especially a Westerner, this appears to be a very isolated and subjugated society, but when described by certain people of North Korea, these measures taken by their “Great Leader” are necessary to protect them from the outside world (RT Documentary, 2013).

**Education.** All of the primary education, for children ages 5 to 15, is run by the state. The curriculum is standardized across the country in which students are indoctrinated into the communist ideology and taught about the greatness of their leaders. All students are also directed towards science and technology so they can
ultimately become future technicians, scientists and workers that the government can rely on to achieve the country’s goals (Spain Exchange, 2017). These principles are aimed at ensuring all citizens will become reliable communists and commit themselves to the North Korean way of Juche.

**Religion.** North Korea is also viewed by Westerners as a country without any religious freedoms. This is largely due to the fact that the principles of Juche and socialism (which are based upon Marxism), are counter to religious practice. Many North Koreans are in fact, agnostic. However, there are many North Koreans that practice religion in “state-sanctioned” churches around the country, although most of the churches reside in the capital of Pyongyang. Furthermore, although its Marxist roots cause North Korea to be largely agnostic, North Koreans worship of their leaders make them somewhat of one big religious nation in which Kim Il-Sung was the only God and has left its people captivated by a “folk religion”.

**Compulsory Military Service.** Military service is compulsory for all men in North Korea to the tune of a minimum of ten years (RT Documentary, 2013). Once their military service is complete, men have a choice of working within the government or becoming a farmer. The thought of compulsory military service would probably frighten most Westerners, but for North Koreans, it is a requirement to keep their country safe from the outside world. After all, they are considered to be a country still at war with South Korea in which active conflict could break out at a moment’s notice. Even farmers, who do their “fighting in the fields” consider themselves similar to soldiers and are happy to do whatever they can to help uphold the system and achieve the goals set by the government.

**Prison Camps.** Although not officially acknowledged by the North Korean government, prison camps have been in existence for over fifty years in North Korea and are believed to be directly inspired by similar camps in the former Soviet Union and China known as “gulags”. North Korean prison camps have been home to hundreds of thousands of prisoners where inmates are forced to participate in activities such as mining, logging, farming and industrial enterprises, often in remote valleys in the mountainous regions of North Korea. Abuse, starvation, and forced abortions are among other crimes reportedly (by defectors) associated with such camps. One doesn’t have to look too far on the internet to find numerous horror stories and accounts from these prison camps. It is easy to understand how these images would paint a very unhappy story of life within North Korea.

**Threat to United States and Regional Security**

North Korea is currently viewed as one of the biggest threats to U. S. national security and to U.S. interests in the Pacific. It has been this way since 1948. Whether it is due to the perceived unstable leadership of North Korea’s three supreme leaders over the past 70 years, to the size of their military, or to the propaganda campaigns against the U.S., Westerners absolutely view North Korea as a threat.

**Unstable Leadership.** It is very difficult not to view the leaders of North Korea as unstable when one considers the cult of personality that surrounds them, the way the people of North Korea revere them as “god-like”, and the consistent threats they make towards the U.S., South Korea and other entities in the Pacific. Ever since the
Korean split nearly 70 years ago, North Korea’s leaders have used U.S. presence within South Korea as the sole reason to maintain a military of more than 1 million members. North Korean leaders have also used U.S. presence in South Korea as a reason to develop a nuclear weapons’ capability and has conducted numerous tests (to include long range ballistic missiles) over the last few years, despite warnings from the rest of the world (China included) to cease their nuclear weapons program. With each test, North Korea comes closer and closer to developing weapons of mass destruction that could reach the U.S. mainland. As the primary and most readily identifiable face of North Korea, Kim Jung-Un represents a clear and present danger to the U.S. and, as such, so does the rest of North Korea.

**Strong Military.** North Korea’s military is more than 1 million active duty members strong with millions and millions more in the reserves, ready to be called to duty at a moment’s notice. Google North Korea and if an image of Kim Jong-Un or a previous leader does not pop up, an image of the military in some sort of display of power will. When Kim Jong-II took power in the mid-1990s, he made a deliberate power play to bolster the military and established the policy of “song-un” (military first). Furthermore, for the regime, the military is a source of inspiration, but most of all, “order”, in the precise way that society is organized. A society that remains on constant full combat alert (because of the narrative from its leaders) where literally everything is imbued with combat spirit (RT Documentary, 2013). From a Westerners’ perspective, one might say this is another method used to control the population. At any rate, the fact remains that North Korea possesses one of the largest militaries in the world and has a leader that, it appears, is ready to leverage it.

**Propaganda Campaign.** It is widely believed that anti-American propaganda starts at a very early stage in a North Korean’s life. In fact, it is reported that the indoctrination of anti-Americanism starts as early as kindergarten and is as much a part of the curriculum as learning to count. Conduct a quick search on the internet and one could find pictures of North Korean kindergarten classrooms where children attack a picture of a hapless U.S. soldier, his face bandaged with blood spurting from his mouth (Daily Mail, 2012). North Korean students are taught that they have two main enemies: the Japanese, who colonized Korea in the time leading up until and through World War II, and the U.S., which fought against North Korea during the 1950-53 Korean War. Students are also told that North Korea’s defense against outside forces (particularly the U.S.) remains the backbone of the country’s foreign policy. And while the anti-American propaganda posters in the capital of Pyongyang may have reduced over the past decade, the posters and curricula in kindergartens across North Korea remain intact.

Whether it is the perceived oppression of its people, the images and stories of the starving and struggling masses of the great famine, or the perceived threat to the United States, there is a common picture of what life in North Korea is like and what all North Koreans represent. This common picture has shaped the Westerners view North Koreans for decades. The fact that North Korea remains a very closed-off and inaccessible country only serves to “stove-pipe” these perceptions of North Koreans. However, there is more to North Korea and, more specifically, North Koreans than this very narrow perspective.
A Deeper Look

A deeper look into North Korea reveals much more than what is readily accessible and widely believed about North Korea by most of the western world. What is considered to be one of the least culturally diverse countries in the world is actually a multi-faceted society, within its borders, just as many other countries in the world. As Agar says, culture only becomes visible when an outsider encounters it and what becomes visible depends on the LC1 of the “outsider” (Agar, 2006). Sure, Westerners are outsiders to the North Korean culture, and I have no doubts that the rich points would be boundless were a Westerner to come in contact with it. To lump all North Koreans into the few categories that most Westerners do would be a lazy and/or arrogant oversight. Conditions absolutely exist, within North Korea where countrymen would be considered “outsiders” within their own borders and where more than just one “culture” is in play during a given interaction.

Religion

Religion plays an integral part in most societies around the world in how they carry out their day to day lives. Nearly every civilization can trace religion back to their most ancient beginnings and use it as a basis for their day to day activities and as a basis for their moral and ethical values. But, what about North Korea? How much does religion really play into their society? We have already established that religion is counter to founding principles of communism and Marxism of which the current North Korean society is based and that North Koreans, for the most part, are considered to be largely agnostic. Despite all of these facts, different facets of religious belief do exist in North Korea and further serve to segment the population into different categories.

Established Religious Groups. According to the UN Human Rights Commission, the North Korean government reports having protestants, Buddhists and Roman Catholics actively practicing religion within the country’s borders. In Pyongyang, there are four state-controlled Christian churches and the country also reports the existence of numerous religious organizations, such as the Korean Christian Federation, Korean Buddhists’ Federation, Korea Roman Catholic Association, Korea Chondoist Society, and Korea Religionists’ Society. It is also believed an additional several hundred thousand Christians practice their faith “underground” throughout the country (U.S. Dep State, 2011).

Shamanism. In addition to the “traditional” religions, it might be surprising to learn that many North Koreans have very strong concepts of ghosts or spirits. In fact, Shamanism, or human communication with the spirit world, is something that is very popular in North Korea and where it pops up most often is in the form of fortune-telling. As with anywhere in the world, when life gets too heavy or unbearable, people would like to know what is ahead of them. Spiritual beings can help in this regard and many North Koreans invest their money in fortune-telling since they would rather trust the spirits than the Party or nation. Furthermore, the spirit world simultaneously talks of reincarnation, which is something many North Koreans find comforting since they are unhappy with their current situation (especially those of a lower class) (Kang, 2016).

Regardless of whether it is a traditional religion or following the principles of Shamanism, religious practices are alive and well all throughout North Korea, despite being
labeled a society with Marxist roots and despite attempts by the government to control religious actions through its “state-sponsored” churches. Thus, the population of North Korea is even further diversified through the application and following of religion. This fact along with the multiple classes within “songbun” further divides the North Korean population into multiple different groups. But what about outside influences, external to the impenetrable North Korean borders? Does the government really have the ability to keep all of that information and influence out of North Korea? The answer is a resounding, “NO!”

Kim Il-Sung’s “Caste System Creation”

It is not unusual for a country’s modern day social hierarchy to be rooted in some sort of “caste-like” system. In fact, modern day India still utilizes its caste system as a way to separate its people into distinct social classes. Korea also utilizes a “caste system” to segregate its population. However, Korea’s current model is not based upon a centuries old model with ties to an ancient religion. Korea’s model is based upon a much more recent development and its roots are directly tied to Kim Il-Sung, North Korea’s first ruler.

Songbun. Since Kim Il-Sung took over the country in the late 1950s, there has existed a concept that drives North Korean livelihood. The concept is known as “songbun” and it drives the social structure within North Korea. Kim Il-Sung created songbun as part of a movement to consolidate power within North Korea. Basically, he completely flipped the social hierarchy that dominated North Korea for centuries.

Kim’s system based each citizen’s songbun, a term which translates as “ingredient” but can also mean “background”, on that individual’s actions, as well as that of his/her paternal ancestors during the Japanese colonial period and the Korean War. This system was largely utilized to purge Kim’s enemies, whether they were real or perceived, and to reward his supporters. Under this new system, Kim created three primary groups: the “core”, “wavering”, and “hostile” classes (each of which contained multiple subcategories) (Robertson, 2016). The people closest to Kim, their relatives, and the anti-Japanese resistance fighters became Kim’s “core” or ruling class. The new lower stratum or the “hostile” class contained North Koreans that had enjoyed high status under Japanese rule, from landowners to intellectuals to religious leaders and aristocrats. Millions of members of the hostile class were relocated to impoverished areas of the country’s north.

Occupation/Schooling. Within the guidelines of songbun, an individual did not get to choose their job, the regime chose it for them. If you had a low songbun, you would likely be put into grueling manual work, whereas if you had a high songbun, you might expect a relatively cushy Party cadre position. Additionally, if you were a student and your parents had a high songbun, then you were allowed to progress past primary school. But, if your parents had a low songbun, no matter how hard you studied, you would not progress academically. Those with high songbun go through the same schools, same colleges, and network within this pool for their mutual benefit (Sokeel, 2012).

Internal Exile/Food. Songbun also drove how the regime located the population. It has been reported that the regime, over a span of numerous decades, has systematically exiled upwards of hundreds of thousands of low-songbun undesirables to isolated and unfavorable mountainous areas where they are forced into
hard labor, subject to tighter controls and excluded from population centers. Furthermore, songbun status had a huge effect on food supply, particularly during times of scarcity. This was specifically noteworthy during the famine of the 1990s when the regime stopped providing food to the politically undesirable regions in order to concentrate food and resources on the higher songbun levels such as the Party, the government and the military.

**Medical Care.** The public health system all but collapsed in North Korea during the 1990s. However, special treatment is still available for the higher songbun classes, especially those that reside in Pyongyang. People of lower songbun are not allowed to access these facilities, even if they are independently wealthy. As a result, the best they can hope for is to “self-treat” with medicine bought on the black market. As a result of all of this, songbun basically institutionalizes the dominance of the ruling elite and their descendants over all other groups in society. Needless to say, the privileges of the core class have grown while others have suffered as this system has been in implementation for several decades now. It is also worth noting that it is all but impossible to improve your songbun, but you can easily drop levels if you get into criminal/political trouble, fail to cooperate with a regime official or if one of your family members gets into such trouble. This can create considerable fear of the regime, yet is an effective tool used to maintain control and power (Sokeel, 2012).

It is, however, very important to note the impacts that the 1990s had on songbun. First came the collapse of the Soviet Union and with it, North Korea lost critical economic support it had relied upon for decades. Then, between 1994 and 1997 came a series of droughts and floods that crippled the agricultural production and compounded the difficulties caused by Pyongyang’s long-standing mismanagement of the North Korean economy, driving the country into crisis. Hospitals exhausted their supplies of medicine, and as electricity and gas ran out, factories stopped working and eventually, North Korea’s distribution system for food and other essentials fell apart (Robertson, 2016).

As a result of the crisis, many North Koreans had to start making money on the side in order to survive. Market activities were illegal, but over the course of the famine, the government relaxed the enforcement of official controls on private commerce and many North Koreans began to trade on the black market. This black market activity would ultimately set North Korea on a new trajectory and open the door for significant change within the country, such as never experienced before.

**External Influences**

The North Korean regime has gone to great lengths, over the past 70 years, to isolate the people of North Korea. The regime has done this through a variety of means which include but are not limited to: strict control of its borders, limited access to the internet, state controlled broadcasting of television and radio stations, a “zero tolerance” policy of possession of any media that originates outside of North Korea, and other means. The only way to get outside media is either to smuggle it in to the country or through the black market. However, several events that have unfolded over the past couple of decades have increased outside influences within North Korea. The primary reason for this was “Jangmadang”, which was created as a result of the great famine of the 1990s.

**Jangmadang.** “Jangmadang”, which translates as “market place”, set North Korea on a path
of change shortly after the great famine of the 1990s, and has accelerated dramatically under the regime of Kim Jong-Un. Prior to the great famine of the 1990s and the associated effects on the economy, North Koreans relied upon the regime to give them what they needed, and for the most part, it worked. However, as mentioned previously, during the great famine, only the higher songbun classes were provided for, which left the lower classes to take drastic measures to survive. As a result, jangmadang emerged as a way for North Koreans to acquire goods since they could no longer rely upon the state’s socialist economy.

Although jangmadang was technically illegal, it was tolerated due to the fact that it was needed to sustain much of the population of North Korea (Chitrakorn, 2016). Once North Korea recovered from the famine and entered the 21st century, despite the efforts of then president, Kim Jong-Il, the black markets continued. Kim Jong-Il tried desperately to solve the food problem by socialist means and eliminate the markets. However, jangmadang survived and is still alive and well today. In fact, jangmadang has expanded to all sorts of goods, to include luxury goods, for which expenditures have doubled since Kim Jong-Un came into power. The “jangmadang generation” grew up during and after the famine of the 90s, is now 18 to 35 years old and makes up almost 25% of the population.

Jangmadang ushered in a new wave of North Koreans that operated differently than any other generation of North Koreans had operated before them. They became accustomed to different ways of spending money, acquiring goods and were also much less reliant upon the regime than previous generations. Furthermore, with Jangmadang and the associated access to illegal goods came an exposure to a different world that North Koreans had previously not seen or experienced. One of the biggest influences of the jangmadang generation is “hallyu” or the “Korean Wave” which has ultimately exposed North Koreans to South Korean movies, television, music and even foreign blockbuster films.

Hallyu

Hallyu, also known as the Korean Wave, is changing the face of reclusive North Korea. Aided by the global technology boom and growth of the black market, the spread of South Korean pop culture among North Korea’s citizens brings with it a growing influx of information from the outside world. A strong influencing agent is South Korean dramas and as increasing numbers of North Koreans are watching them, it is changing their lives. Despite the leadership’s unflagging efforts to block the perceived “anti-socialist elements” of South Korean media content, its interest only continues to grow.

Of concern to the regime is the fact that the cadres within the upper level classes of songbun secretly enjoy the dramas and are contributing to the expanding viewership. Not only do they loosely enforce the regulations against viewing the dramas, but they are directly involved in the production and transportation of the banned media as well. Both upper and lower classes have developed a strong affection for the dramas. This has led them to develop a strong interest in South Korean society, often emulating many of the practices and behaviors showcased in its cultural programming (Young, 2016), which includes mimicking speech patterns, fashion, and hairstyles of their favorite South Korean actors. Another source within the Ryanggang Province of North Korea noted that a number of eager customers are asking tailors to alter their clothes to “look just like an actor they have seen”.

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Furthermore, according to a source in South Pyongang Province, dramas and movies from the South have been popular among residents since around the turn of the century, but more recently, the media is reaching remote backwater regions of the country. To act as a riposte to the growing popularity of the Korean Wave, Kim Jong-Un has formed his female pop band, Moranbong, whose existence suggests a new acceptability of previously censored fashion styles such as short skirts and high heels (Korea Herald, 2017). In short, Hallyu, and the subsequent actions by Kim Jong-Un to combat the influence of “K-Pop,” has changed much about the way the next generation of North Koreans dress and communicate.

What Does the Future Look Like?

North Korea is changing. It is changing in a way and at a greater speed than at any point in its 70-year history and we have to look no farther than the birth of the Jangmadang generation for its catalyst. This generation, which makes up more than 25 percent of the population, has fresh and new ideas for the country that are far different from earlier, traditional North Korean values and, as a result, new frameworks are forming. Important to note is how this new generation views its leader. Previous generations viewed their “Dear Leaders” as fatherly figures, but the young generation views Kim Jong-Un as a leader that is not as concerned about the livelihood of the people (as his father and grandfather were). Additionally, as with Kim Jong-Un, materialism and individualism are prominent among the Jangmadang generation and more experience in capitalism and the market economy is creating a much different generational perspective (Arirang, 2016).

If the Jangmadang generation truly “unites its forces” and develops significant strength, it could pose a fundamental threat to the regime and its core foundation. I absolutely believe that the Jangmadang generation is a channel through which North Korea will reform and ultimately open up to the rest of the world. Their current leader is not stopping it. In fact, he is, in a way, promoting it. The real question is: will the strength of Hallyu and the rise of the Jangmadang Generation ultimately lead to unification with South Korea? Or, will the waning loyalty of the residents (especially the Jangmadang generation) cause Kim Jong-Un to become more volatile?

Unfortunately, despite much of the progress of North Korea’s private sector and the progress this new generation has made in undermining the central government’s control, it still stands and operates largely consistent with the way it always has. But, how long will the “old way” hold? Could this situation open the door for improved foreign relations with Kim Jong-Un? If the loyalty among the people continues to wane and Kim Jong-Un is unable to meet their needs, it may be necessary for him to relax the historical hardline stance of “self-reliance” and open up to the idea of cooperation with more foreign entities. Ultimately, he may have no choice but to acquiesce to improved foreign relations and to western influence as it is already changing the younger generation of North Koreans.

This deeper look into today’s North Korean society identifies numerous different possibilities for different cultural marker combinations. From the old generation that still remembers life under Kim Il-Sung to the newest members of Jangmadang generation that have been heavily exposed to Hallyu and the outside world, North Korea is indeed flowing with cultural diversity. I conclude that North Korea is as competitively diverse in Agar’s list of markers of what people routinely call culture (generation, gender,
religion, region, language, occupation) as many of the other countries in the world today. I admit, it would be easier to just stick with the common labels for North Korea as an oppressed, starving, weird country that has a strong military, a crazy leader and a proclivity for hating Americans. After all, that is the common narrative coming out of North Korea.

The fact is, any ethnographer that spent any time in North Korea would find just what he would find in any other country around the world. He would find a culture that is not singular at all. The ethnographer would experience a society of “cultures”, just as he would if he visited the small farming community where I was raised. The similarities between the two dramatically different societies are actually quite amazing.

I also acknowledge that North Korea may not have quite the diversity of say, the United States, but I feel quite certain that the “cultural condition” within North Korea reinforces and substantiates Agar’s stance on where the world, as a whole, is at today with regards to “culture”. What better country than North Korea to support Agar’s theory - North Korea, a country that the world views as the least “culturally diverse” country in the world?
References


Chief Master Sergeant Charlie McHarney is a Combat Controller and the Group Superintendent of the 724th Special Tactics Group, Pope Field, North Carolina. He provides combat control, pararescue, combat weather and tactical air control party expertise for analysis of special tactics requirements and techniques to ensure joint interoperability and equipment standardization. Additionally, he plans and conducts special operations, joint exercises, and training. Furthermore, he develops, tests, and disseminates special operations tactics, techniques, and procedures to ensure special tactics standardization of air traffic management, close air support, casualty evacuation, environmental reconnaissance and combat search and rescue across AFSOC and SOCOM.

Chief McHarney entered the Air Force in March 1993, under the delayed enlistment program, and began his active duty career in November 1993. After graduating from basic training, he spent 14 months in the Combat Control training pipeline and graduated in March 1995. His career has included assignments at the flight and squadron level and possesses several advanced qualifications such as static line jumpmaster, military free fall jumpmaster and military tandem master. Chief McHarney has participated in specialized operations in Africa and combat missions during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. He is married to the former Melissa Harrelson of Burlington, NC and they have three children, Caelan, Callie and Conlyn.
The word “alternative” can be thought synonymous with forward thinking or new age. Alternative medicine covers a range of therapies often regarded as “unorthodox” by Western medical practitioners. Traditional practices -- herbs, aromatherapy, homeopathy, acupuncture -- are classified as “unconventional” by the Western health communities. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines traditional medicine as, “diverse health practices, approaches, knowledge, and beliefs incorporating plant, animal and or mineral techniques and exercises applied, singularly or in combination, to maintain well-being as well as treat, diagnose or prevent illness” (WHO, 2010). Researchers have noted that one third of all U.S. adults use some form of alternative medicine, with 28% of them not telling their primary-care doctors about it (Renter, 2015). As Americans seek unconventional treatments, many people around the globe rely solely upon alternative medical therapies and practitioners.

Numerous types of alternative practitioners and healers reside in the countries of Africa, many of which have several specialties or modalities. Backgrounds and training of healers are different across the continent. There may be a combination of medicinal ingredients, procedure and treatment methods employed for each patient to prevent disease and bring an end to suffering. Healers may use bones and spirits of the ancestors to diagnose and prescribe medications for different physiological, psychiatric, and spiritual conditions. Traditional surgeons exist in many communities and are considered qualified to perform circumcisions on boys. Birth attendants are often older women, perfecting the skill of midwifery, through experiencing, witnessing, and assisting in many births (Courtright, Chirambo, Lewallen, Chana, and Kanjaloti, 2000). The term traditional healer will be used to describe the different varieties of healers, noting their importance to all Africans.

Traditional healers are the most accessible and affordable health resource, in the majority of African communities, and often the only source of medical attention. Previous colonizing entities introduced “modern medicine”, yet inhabitants of Africa continue to utilize traditional medicines, practitioners and therapies. A huge percentage of Africa’s total population -- 80% -- utilizes alternative herbal medicines to treat diseases such as AIDS, malaria, cancer, and lung infections (WHO, 2010).

The Continued Threat

The risk of deadly infectious diseases, spreading across several continents, has captured the attention and imagination of Westernized populations. Hollywood movies have contributed to the fear and reality of global epidemics. The most recent 2014 Ebola crisis underscored the risk of a global pandemic, placing this threat in the forefront of people’s minds. The United Nations Security Council declared the outbreak of the Ebola virus in West Africa, “a threat to international peace and security” (BBC, September 2014, p. 3). This
declaration was made many months after the initial outbreak was identified.

The WHO (2015) reported the first known case of the 2014 Ebola crisis was an 18-month-old boy in Guinea. The boy developed a fever, diarrhea with bloody stools, and other systemic symptoms in mid-December, dying two days later. By the second week of January 2014, several members of the boy’s family died with similar symptoms. The sick members of the host family were treated at a remote hospital staffed with traditional healers and their aides. Several of these care providers succumbed to the disease and its symptoms (WHO, 2015). In August 2014, the WHO, finally, declared an Ebola outbreak in the region, inducing an international dispatch of emergency response and surveillance teams.

Emergency control measures implemented in Guinea and Sierra Leone included the prohibition of practice by traditional medical healers. The outbreak worsened. Government authorities continued to struggle with containing the epidemic. Healers were brought back to help fight the virus. Local healers interfaced with dispatched biomedical personnel, playing an important role in educating people about how to properly avoid and treat Ebola (Al Jazeera, 2016). The outbreak was contained, but tensions between traditional healers and western medical practitioners remain, largely due to mistrust and misunderstanding.

The medical aid response by the international community included Western-trained doctors, ancillary medical personnel, supplies, construction of temporary and permanent medical facilities, and foreign military personnel to assist in security within several countries. Thousands of foreign military personnel from the United States, United Kingdom, China, France, Canada, and Germany were deployed to several affected countries to provide aid and construct Ebola Treatment Unit beds. Many of those killed during the Ebola outbreak in 2014 were local medical personnel assisting in the response effort (Al Jazeera, 2016).

After the international response, a panel of experts from the Harvard Global Health Institute and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine condemned the WHO’s response to the Ebola crisis, calling it an “egregious failure” (Plucinska, 2015, p. 1). The panel offered several recommendations to prevent similar epidemics from causing as much damage, stating, “We need to strengthen core capacities in all countries to detect, report and respond rapidly to small outbreaks in order to prevent them from becoming large-scale emergencies” (Plucinska, 2015, p. 1). The mistrust and lack of understanding between dispatched biomedical personnel and traditional healers slowed response and active communication.

**Thesis**

The objective of this article is to gain a better understanding of traditional practitioners in alternative medicine, their significance in a socially connected world and present arguments to support greater, more effective communication and surveillance. Secondly, the paper will explore the inclusion of traditional healers in future military response efforts to disease outbreaks. It behooves the international community and Department of Defense (DoD) to recognize and understand the significance of culturally manifested healthcare systems, often discredited due to misunderstanding. More than three quarters of the world’s population utilizes traditional medicine, and its practitioners, for primary healthcare. Effective collaboration between the two systems of medicine will strengthen response efforts and promote a mutually beneficial relationship.

**Mistrust from the Beginning**

Despite the plethora of varied media information, Westerners continue to perceive Africa as the dark continent, a remote jungle and wildlife park. Africa remains negatively regarded as uneducated, poor, culturally archaic, riddled with war, disease, famine,
ignorance, debt, corruption, mismanagement, and dictatorships.

Historically, and in a relatively short time, all of Africa was colonized and governed by European nation powers. Social dynamics changed dramatically as regional resources and their generated profits were extracted. The diamond, ivory, mineral trades highlight a few of the resources plundered for European markets, but perhaps the most pivotal, profitable and appalling was the extraction of Africans themselves -- transportation to various countries as slaves. America has the dubious distinction as the largest slave consumers.

European colonists of the nineteenth century sent expeditions into “unexplored” regions of the continent. These groups included scientists, explorers and religious figures tasked with gathering as much information as possible -- noting flora, fauna, topography, natural resources, indigenous populations. The missions created the erroneous impression that Africa was “just” being discovered (Grosz-Ngate, 2014). The information generated by anthropologists on these expeditions led most Europeans to view indigenous peoples as inferior, savage, with un-evolved societies.

Anthropology is the science of human beings, in detail, and in relation to the rest of nature. One early anthropologist, Lewis (1973), provided a definition of anthropology as, “the science of culture as seen from the outside” by which researchers, “snap the portrait as the only representative of our civilization who can, in adequate detail, document the differences, and help create an idea of the primitive which would not ordinarily be constructed by primitives themselves” (p. 2). These colonial scientists developed a culture concept by first observing then reporting the lives of a specific group.

Author Karen Flint (2008) believes colonial researchers, with limited knowledge of African realities, codified, classified, and defined African cultures to shape and influence a reality more easily understood by Europeans. The first inspection of traditional African medicine dates back to the works of the first British colonial anthropologists (Nguyen et al, 2008). These studies provided descriptions of medical practices influenced by religious belief. The rigid approach of these studies gave attention to “healing only with reference to magic and rituals” (Nguyen et al, 2008, p. 27). The successive inspections of traditional medicine in Africa continued under the rubric of magic, mysticism, and religion, maintaining the overall impression of “witchcraft” (Nguyen et al, 2008).

Flint (2008) believed systemic use of cultural information collected by anthropologists abetted European countries in the subjugation of African populations, inducing economic and political changes, confirming feelings of cultural superiority in Africa. An anthropologist would provide cultural information and advice, lending success to efforts of manipulation and control of non-Western worlds. These scientists were participatory in the process of colonization, especially in Africa. A legacy of mistrust was left with many subject groups (Flint, 2008). Terms and words were utilized to degrade the culture under observation, e.g. witch doctor.

Modern Approach to Understanding by Finding Human Universals

Anthropologists look for human patterns or human universals. Human universals are characteristics existing in all human populations -- culture, society, language, behavior, and psyche. Characteristics unique to human universals are education, family gatherings, hairstyles, body art, medicine, and many others. Ethnographic studies are a descriptive treatise of a population from the cultural point of view of those studied, and constitute a break from early anthropological works. Ethnographers “draw the picture” of their study groups from participation within the culture, and are,
therefore, not influenced by their own preconceptions and definitions. The anthropologist Michael Agar believes the human universal was enhanced by the world’s recent shift towards globalization. Data being gathered should no longer be a collection of differences, but must include similarities between ethnographer and subjects (Agar, 2006).

Agar describes “rich points” as situations that may challenge the understanding of the ethnographer but are no less “real” within the culture being investigated (Agar, 2006). Agar coined the term “rich point” to describe a cross-cultural intersection or the friction felt when a word, phrase, or situation prompts embedded social emotions. “Doctor” and “Witch Doctor” are two words that elicit immediate connotations and meaning, these being socially embedded. An American would read or hear “doctor” and have an image of professionalism, prestige, while feeling trust. Conversely, an American reading or hearing “witch doctor” or “healer” would conjure thoughts of superstition, mistrust, and strange behaviors. Early anthropologists utilized terms, fraught with bias, to describe traditional healers and the resultant clash with Western medical ideals continues today.

Moving forward, similarities or universals between medical practices -- traditional and Western -- should be sought. Identifying negative language predispositions will boost an understanding of the cultural significance of both medical systems, one for the other. Obliterating negative language bias opens the door for Western medical practitioners, responding to global crises, to embrace traditional healing methodologies, promoting trust and cooperation between cultures.

There are two main reasons why collaboration is important. First, it is important for responding health personnel to have an understanding of all the health services their patients may be accessing. Secondly, patients often use health personnel as an information source for all health and health related issues. Understanding traditional medicine, and its cultural contexts, enables Western practitioners to advise their patients appropriately. Developing an emphasis on similarities promotes greater understanding, creating a sphere where traditional medicine, biomedicine, and western medicine share cohesive practices and move forward.

**Importance of a Unified Front for African Struggles**

Civil wars and ethnic conflicts plagued newly independent African states when colonizers withdrew following World War II. Today, many African nations continue to struggle socially and economically. A lack of democratic ideal creates political instability. Countries holding free elections are in the minority. Food sources are often scarce, and drought affects many regions on a yearly basis. Disease quickly spreads throughout Africa, contributing to low life expectancy. Widespread poverty is prevalent. The WHO (2010) reports up to 62% of Africans live in slum conditions where traditional and modern lifestyles intersect. Slum housing is expected to rise as more Africans move from rural areas to cities.

The frequency of illness is closely tied to political and economic dynamics. Patterns of poverty are closely associated with patterns of disease (WHO, 2010). Research reveals that health is generally poor on the continent. The average life expectancy was 54 years in 2009 -- making the region the lowest life expectancy rate on the globe (WHO, 2010). The African continent has 11% of the world’s population and an estimated 60% of the worlds HIV/AIDS cases. HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death in adults. Communicable diseases; tuberculosis, malaria, respiratory infections, HIV/AIDS, along with complications of pregnancy and childbirth account for 72% of all deaths. These same diseases comprise only 27% of population deaths in all other regions combined (WHO, 2010).

Traditional healers abound in urban and rural areas
of Africa. They are tightly woven into the social fabric of communities offering information, counseling, and medical services to patients and family members. The unusual and deadly diseases they encounter integrate them solidly within the shared culture of their patients. The patient experience is personal as the healer is intimately familiar with their patient’s environment (Mahomoodally, 2013). There is a shortage of Western-trained health care personnel in state hospitals and clinics within Africa (WHO, 2014).

**Military Assistance**

Operation United Assistance was the name of the United States’ military response to Africa's Ebola crisis in 2014. This was the first US military operation in support of a disease driven, foreign humanitarian assistance mission since the Spanish Flu, in 1918 (JCOA, 2016). Over 5,000 foreign military personnel from the United States, United Kingdom, China, France, Canada, and Germany were deployed to several affected countries providing aid and constructing Ebola Treatment Unit beds. The United States DoD considered the mission a success, but several shortfalls were revealed during post mission analysis.

Cultural customs led to transmission of Ebola, in West Africa. The Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis JCOA (2016) report noted, “West African social healing practices and burial customs facilitated the spread of bodily fluid from the sick or deceased to caregivers and family members, enabling the disease to be passed from victim to caregivers and family members” (p. 51). Simultaneously, “traditional healers were largely ignored by the state and the international community throughout the early to mid-stages of the Ebola response,” said Richard Mallett of the Overseas Development Institute’s Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (Al Jazeera, 2014). The article reports, “when Ebola first came to Sierra Leone in May 2014, many people refused to accept that the disease could be tackled through Western medicine, opting instead for traditional treatments” (Al Jazeera, 2014). The lack of collaboration placed a heavier burden on an already weakened health system.

Miscommunication between responders and victims flourished. A one-sided approach of providing Western biomedical aid, “promoted partiality to crisis victim, one side is favored over another, thus violating two basic premises of aid response, neutrality and impartiality” (Sands, 2017, p. 24). Traditional healers enlisted to bridge the cultural gap between medical systems would serve two purposes. The enlistment acknowledges the importance, thus respect, of a culturally ingrained medical system while instilling trust in patients and healers. This response design is easily replicated.

According to the JCOA (2016) report, the DoD should enhance their ability to identify and leverage opportunities to gather medical intelligence, thereby enhancing disease surveillance. Information gained improves comprehension of disease prevalence in different geographic areas.

The first confirmed case of Ebola in the 2014 crisis came from a rural region with little to no modern infrastructure. Traditional healers were some of the first casualties of the outbreak. JCOA (2016) endorses the need to gain better intelligence on “hot spots” within the region. Traditional healers are an invaluable asset -- as human intelligence (HUMINT) sources using the first-person information collection model to generate information. A request by Western response teams for inclusion indicates to traditional healers and their patients respect and trust. Commands tasked with developing a response effort are more likely to function successfully with advice on cultural dynamics from traditional healers. Their position as patient advocates, will establish a bridge between unfamiliar biomedical aid workers and affected individuals. The communication can then accurately identify individuals presenting with symptoms. Traditional healers are assets that are currently unutilized by
the DoD.

**Conclusion**

Cultural boundaries shift over time and are porous by nature, particularly where cultural groups encounter each other with frequency. Social media has greatly enhanced this phenomenon by connecting the world on multiple levels. What was once clearly African, Asian, or European medicine has changed due to these social connections. There is potential for adoption of other cultural ideas, practices, and norms. The result could be a multicultural mixture of sorts, blending together various strands of influence, creating new patterns in the global cultural fabric.

Military policies need to address the cultural significance of traditional healers by incorporating their efforts in future military operations. The DoD understands the significance of sound intelligence but has yet to identify a solid source. Governments, multilateral institutions, and militaries should aim to build and strengthen a set of interconnected public health intelligence systems for outbreak prevention, preparedness, detection, and response by creating lasting relationships with traditional healers. To build the better relationship, the international communities must understand the healer’s importance in isolated communities. Utilizing the healers as medical intelligence assets will cover the gap between questions and actions.
References


About the Author

Kenneth S. Conklin

Ken Conklin is actively serving in the United States Navy as an Independent Duty Corpsman-medic. With over 15 years of service with the United States Marine Corps and Marine Corps Special Operations Command, Ken’s deployments include Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, South America, and Asia. A native of Melbourne, Florida, Ken has called the eastern North Carolina area home since 2010, where he resides with his wife and child. Looking forward to retirement, Ken hopes to continue his pursuit of practicing medicine, traveling, butchering Spanish, and most importantly surfing!
When it comes to understanding Rwanda and her people, colonial powers’ terminologies and assessment of Rwanda were intentional and very political in nature. To understand how this has impacted Rwanda today, one must accurately triangulate cultural markers and rich points in order to avoid falling victim to colonial administrators’ myopia. This paper has three main aims. The first is to study the Belgian period and their attempt to divide Rwandese people into three (3) artificial ethnicities. The next goal is to investigate what the identity situation was prior to that, and finally to explore why that identity configuration was continued post-independence. Additionally, a conclusion will offer some recommendations as a remedy to various ethnic conflicts in Rwanda and beyond.

Pre-Colonial Rwanda: The Kingdom

Rwanda is a nation of immigrants. Some of these immigrants came from faraway lands, while others moved into what is presently known as the Republic of Rwanda from the neighboring communities and kingdoms. Initially, Rwanda had three tribes, however, by the 1900s Rwanda had over 19 different tribes (McGrigor, 2006). Each group derived from a specific African geographical region. They brought their own cultures, tribes, languages and religious beliefs. Presently, the community of Rwanda has a diverse mix and no initial group can be described with a single label, all Rwandans are diversified in different ways. The majority of these tribes were land farmers. These farmers were attracted to Rwanda by the lush greenery around the Nile River. They followed the 4,258-mile-long Nile as it flowed through what is presently 11 countries, namely: Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, DRC, Kenya, both Sudan (south and north), Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Egypt, until they found its source and settled. Rwanda is that source (McGrigor, 2006). Later on, warrior herders followed in the footsteps of the farmers in search of the sustainment needed to feed their livestock. They too settled around the Kagera River (also known as Akagera) just as the farmers had done previously. With the arrival of livestock around Kagera, life began taking shape at an accelerated speed. Livestock manure provided the mineral fertilizers and soil conditioners farmers needed to increase their harvest (Rwirahira, 2011).

Colonial Era Rwanda

In 1893, when the Germans arrived in Rwanda, the king nor his inner circle knew anything about the implications of the 1885 Berlin conference. One would even argue that the local chiefs and kings knew there was such a country called Germany. On the other hand, when German, and later, Belgian soldiers arrived in Rwanda, they had sound geographical information as to where Rwanda was located and how it was governed. In my opinion, both arrived in East Africa with a clear mission in mind: Germans or Belgians would become the masters of East Africa. These newcomers’ ambitions were in direct conflict with local traditions and norms. Nonetheless, the locals were adaptive and hospitable towards the Germans who didn’t fail to exploit...
Rwandese hospitality. Additionally, the colonizers were very methodical. They first learned who the local rulers were and persuaded them to co-operate. For instance, my grandfather told me that: “With Germany military assistance, King Musinga expanded his kingdom to the north, which was not an endeavor easy to accomplish. Northern landowners and rulers were fierce fighters and expert marksmen with their bows and arrows.” (Nkusi, 1989).

The problems that existed between current ethnic groups Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda since the arrival of colonial masters are not easy to understand. During my research, we found out that this equation embodies a complex amalgamation of tribal hatred plus nationalist and political factors which are deeply rooted in history. Any effective diagnosis requires mastery in navigating between and through the thin lines of different cultures, ethnicities, and geopolitical interests by so many actors: local, regional, and international forces from afar. Because this case necessarily involves the aspect of war, it is fair to assess that some of the stories told in presenting the matter to the public are not backed by the facts. This premise is guided by Samuel Johnson's caution: “Among the calamities of war may be jointly numbered the diminution of the love of truth, by the falsehoods which interest dictates and credulity encourages.” (Johnson, 1758).

It has been accepted that the conflict in modern Rwanda and the Great Lakes region is directly rooted in colonialism. As a means to exert control over the region, European colonialism applied “divide and rule” methodologies. People who had been living in harmony, (despite their varying ethnicities, cultures, and religions) were exposed to artificial classifications that created boundaries between them where before there were none. This was predominantly the case between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda. Jim Fussell (2001) wrote in his online article that, “Most writers on the 1994 Rwandan genocide note the introduction of group classification on ID cards by the Belgian colonial government in 1933, an action most significant because it introduced a rigid racial concept of group identity to a region where it had not previously existed. Of greater significance, however, was the repeated decision by the post-colonial Rwandan authorities to retain the group classifications on ID cards.” (Fussell, 2001).

Moreover, a British Indian army officer, John Hanning Speke, was the creator of the racialist hypothesis known as the “Hamitic Theory”. In his writings, Speke suggests that the Tutsis are more European than the Hutus. He wrote that their “Caucasoid” facial features, combined with their smoother personalities were proof enough for him that they were more cultured than the Hutus. This theory was the basis for all racial and cultural division between the Hutu and Tutsi in later years. It made the specific definition as to how one race was superior to the other, therefore giving the perceived superior race much power and influence (Modern History Project, 2012).

After World War I, Belgium was given control over Rwanda. The Belgians increased the divide between the Hutus and Tutsis through the use of the eugenics, which was rather popular at the time (i.e. Nazi Germany). Skull measurements showing larger brain size, greater height, and lighter skin tones all reaffirmed the Tutsis’ superiority over the Hutus by providing proof of their apparent greater purity and closer ancestry to Europeans (Modern History Project, 2012).

According to my father, who was King Kigeli V’s advisor before he was forced into exile by the Belgium governor, the final step that Belgium took was implementing coffee production in Rwanda. Peasant farmers, for the large part Hutus, were obligated to grow coffee beans on their land on a punishment of death from Tutsi officials in a system of corvée rule. Corvée as a label is one step higher than slavery. The only difference is that in corvée rule, the ruler does not own the servant outright. For example, many Hutu farmers were subjected to a standard 10 lashes daily, before work, so as to remind them to maintain a solid
work ethic. The lashes were administered by the local Tutsis led soldiers. Essentially, by the time of Rwandan independence in 1962, the Hutu were an oppressed race, facing cruelty from Tutsi elite, who were manipulated by the colonists (Modern History Project, 2012).

The Unrest

After Germans’ defeat in World War I, they lost all their colonies including Rwanda. Due to the fact that Rwanda was previously aligned with Germany, the Belgians considered Rwanda ruling elites (The King, and Tutsi ruling elites) to be enemies because of this connection. I believe the local kings were not able to differentiate between Belgians or Germans, they just viewed them as Caucasians. However, because Belgians spoke a different language and had a different accent, the kings became confused. They later realized that these were two different people and they had different agendas. The Tutsis were aligned with the Germans initially. The Hutus later aligned themselves with the Belgians. The Belgians realized that the Tutsis were not on their side as their loyalty was with the Germans and as a result, they ensured to indoctrinate the Hutus. This caused a division in Rwanda and later led to unrest.

Yuhi V Musinga fathered many children, and two became kings: Rudahigwa and Ndahindurwa. The author became a close friend with Kigeli V Ndahindurwa. The author’s father had worked in his cabinet as an advisor. In 2014, the king asked that we meet during a visit to Washington, DC by the author. Below is a recollection of one such exchange between the author and the King Kigeli V which offers further details on this period.

Kigeli V: “How old are you, son? You look very young. Much younger than your daddy when he came to work for me before Paurdin (colonial Governor) kept me out of my own country.”

Nkusi: “Paurdin?” I inquired.

The king responded with an affirmative “YES!”

Kigeli V: “Son, your father didn’t tell you what we went through with the Belgium administrators of the time? They ruled as they saw it fit, and we could not do anything about it. They wanted to subdue us since Musinga was alive. We refused! Then, they exiled my father. When the people found out that the King was no longer living in Rwanda many of them started migrating to Congo” (Kigeli V, 2014):

This is how Banyamulenge ended up becoming citizens of the Congo. These were the Musinga and later Rudahigwa loyalists who refused to live under the colonial rule and moved out to the hills of Masisi inside the Congo (IRwanda24.com, 2016).

Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa were NOT tribes during pre-colonial Rwanda, said King Kigeli, they were simply social layers: employers, employees, and those who were less fortunate or lacked skills to care for cattle, or engage in agriculture – therefore, they became hunters and pottery makers. The King indicated rich individuals prior to Belgian colonization were called Umutunzi which later was re-named UMUTUTSI by the Belgian Authorities when they introduced identity cards.

Nkusi: “Did the Belgians like your brother, King Mutara?”

Kigeli V: “As soon as my brother returned from Europe, he did not allow nor accept to be manipulated by the local colonial administrators, or the Belgian governor himself [Jean-Paul Harroy]. He demanded the colonial authorities provide equal pay for all, and to abolish feudalism. When Harroy realized that he couldn’t manipulate my brother any longer, his mood changed, and he began to seek closer ties with Gregoire Kayibanda. He sent him to Belgium for two months of some kind of training. When Kayibanda returned to
Rwanda, he was given a post and assigned to the colonial press office and started writing political articles in Ikinyamateka [Catholic Church News Paper, and the ONLY News journal in Rwanda at that time]. His mistrust towards my brother intensified when the Belgians found out that Mutara had befriended Lumumba and other revolutionaries in the region who were seeking independence from colonial countries.”

Kigeli V reached into his briefcase and handed me a book and few pictures. The pictures showed Belgium soldiers and Congolese mercenaries shooting unarmed civilians (men, women, children, and elderly). The images were horrific to look at.

Nkusi: [After reading the above, then inquired] “Why did you not call in the UN and ask for independence as Lumumba had done?”

Kigeli V: The UN knew. I traveled to Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo [then Zaire] to meet with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöl. During my absence, a group led by the Hutu politician Dominique Mbonyumutwa [served on an interim basis as the first President of Rwanda, from 28 January to 26 October 1961], aided by the Belgian military, seized power and proclaimed that I shall never return to my homeland Rwanda. I have been a stateless person [refugee] since 1961.

Nkusi: Did the UN offer any assistance at all?

Kigeli V: The UN passed resolutions to allow me to return to Rwanda. However, the Belgian government refused the application and respect of the General Assembly Resolutions of United Nations: 1580(XV) of 20th December 1960, and 1605(XV) of 21st April 1961. As a result, the killings of my people continued under the watchful eye of Col. Guy Logiest and Archbishop André Perraudin.

Summary: My visit with King Kigeli V was educational with regard to ethno-political issues of Rwanda. Many of the stories of what transpired during this period have been engineered to support the Belgium colonial era biased political narratives. Very few Rwandese know of the above stated UN resolutions and what details they contained. Driven by poor cultural understanding fueled by political and economic ambitions, Belgians applied wrong formulas in mediating disputes among the peoples of Rwanda. The UN offered impartial resolutions to mitigate political unrest. However, the colonial officers selected to ignore the UN prescription to this problem. Instead, they took up on themselves to engage in power transfer by restricting free and fair elections to take place.

Post-Independence Ethno-Political Conflicts

[Effects of, and Continuation of Artificial Ethnic Identities in Rwanda]

The artificial identities continued after the independence as it was encouraged by the Belgian colonialists and nine Hutu elites who saw it as a tool to acquire and maintain power. Prior to independence, they declared this intention to retain these artificial classifications in the Hutu manifesto of March 24, 1957. The so-called leaders of post-independence continued to manipulate the locals by the way of racial segregation in order to maintain power. The anti-Tutsi rule Hutu elites painted the following in their manifesto: “Les gens ne sont d’ailleurs pas sans s’être rendu compte de l’appui de l’administration indirecte au monopole tutsi. Aussi pour mieux surveiller ce monopole de race, nous nous opposons énergiquement, du moins pour le moment, à la suppression dans les pièces d’identité officielles ou privées des mentions “muhutu”, “mututsi”, “mutwa”. Leur suppression risque encore davantage la sélection en le voilant et en empêchant la loi statistique de pouvoir établir la vérité des faits. Personne n’a dit d’ailleurs que c’est le nom qui ennuie le Muhutu; ce sont les privilèges d’un monopole favorisé, lequel risque de réduire la majorité de la population dans une infériorité systématique et une sous-existence imméritée.”
Translation: We are enthusiastically opposed, at least for the moment, to the suppression in the official or private identity papers of the mentions ‘muhutu’, ‘mututsi’, ‘mutwa’. Their suppression would create a risk of preventing the statistical law from establishing the reality of facts. [By “statistical” the authors meant dominance by the Hutu majority population group].

One of the nine authors of the 1957 Manifesto, Grégoire Kayibanda, became the first president of Rwanda in 1961, and under his leadership, the Rwandan carte d’identité (ID Card) continued to display the, “ubwoko / ethnie” group affiliation of the card bearer. Under the leadership of Grégoire Kayibanda, Rwanda’s first president, from the Party for Hutu Emancipation (Parti du Mouvement de l’Emancipation du Peuple Hutu) emerged as the spearhead of the revolution. Communal elections were held in 1960, resulting in a massive transfer of power to Hutu elements at the local level. And in the wake of the coup (January 1961) in Gitarama in central Rwanda, which was carried off with the tacit approval of the Belgian authorities, an all-Hutu provisional government came into being” (Nikozitambwirwa, 2006).

With Kayibanda in power, Belgians felt less threatened because he was their protégé. He needed them around for protection and administrative support. The independence was simply a window dressing political maneuver by the Belgians in order to minimize international pressure. In reality, they never granted a truer independence to Rwandans. What transpired was a power transfer from a monarch-into-the-hand of Hutu oligarchy with Gregoire Kayibanda at the helm. Ever since, Rwandese have been duped into subscribing to these artificial identities which resulted into 1994 genocide and the on-going political quagmire.

**Conclusion**

By examining the history of the Hutu-Tutsi relationship, one is able to understand that even before the colonial era, there were tensions within Rwandan society due to a number of different reasons, to include lack of understanding cultures. However, it would be far better, more accurate and succinct to conclude that the Rwandan genocide was the direct result of the negative influences of European colonists on Rwanda. By applying misguided formulas by John Hanning Speke, the creator of the racist hypothesis known as the “Hamitic Theory” suggesting that the Tutsis are more European than the Hutus; colonial administrator managed to manipulate the Tutsi elites into carrying out the colonial oppressive policies (cheap and forced labor), and thus created a lingering resentment within the poor communities (Hutus).

However, when King Mutara III visited Europe and saw how the Europeans had better living standards, he longed for the same for his country and demanded equal pay, better living conditions, and full independence for his people and country. The price was too high to pay for Belgium which was on verge of losing the mineral-rich Congo to Lumumba. Instead, they helped the Hutu usurp power from the Tutsi and conveniently left the scene, permitting the establishment of a regime of Hutu power, in which there would be frequent massacres of Tutsis (Kigeli V, 2014).

In the 1960s, Tutsis rebel groups mounted several insurgency attacks attempting to reclaim power. Nonetheless, all of their efforts resulted in chaotic failures. They were ill-equipped and lacked the firepower to go against Belgium backed, trained, and led Hutu commandos. Two decades later (October 1, 1990), Maj. General Fred Rwigema had successfully organized and trained Uganda-based exiled Tutsis and some Hutus into a formidable fighting force. Once all preparations and equipment were in place, they attacked Habyarimana regime forces. They were determined and were well-equipped militarily under the banner of Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF). This guerilla group was led by experienced guerilla warfare commandos who were battle tested and proven by actual warfighting.
These were men and women who had helped President Kaguta Museveni to fight against Idi Amin and had prevailed. Habyarimana military lacked actual war fighting experience and in the field of the battle were no match compared to RPF military commanders who had fought and survived many brutal battles. Eventually, as Habyarimana soldiers kept losing war from battle to the next, the ID cards which Belgium had successfully convinced Rwandans to subscribe to were used by extremists on both sides to identify those who had blood and/or name relations with those they considered enemies which culminated in the Rwandan Genocide.
References


About the Author

Eric S. Nkusi

Since youth, Eric has been leading a life of a seeker. Seeking knowledge, spiritual growth, and adventure. Mental and physical fitness has always been a priority in his life. He has devoted his life in serving others, and his country- US. He grew up in a very tough environment: senseless and sectarian wars, injustices, and so on. As a result, his commitment to justice and fairness is unquestionable. Today, he is a warrior diplomat, philanthropist, a proud father, and a commissioned Colonel. Prior to joining the US Army, Eric had 15 years of sales and customer service experience in banking, real estate, and non-for profit industries. He has served as a radio and TV show host, and advocated for low income families throughout northeast States as a community organizer.