

Chapter 9 – CONCLUSIONS

by

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9.1 GENERAL

Critical to the success of multinational military operations is a clear understanding of the varying cultural backgrounds of national contingents. Existing research suggests a host of different ways in which cultural differences may impact missions and jeopardize the successful completion of operations. This report has attempted to identify some of the major intercultural factors that may affect multinational military operations, as described in the literature pertaining to this area. While research examining some of these concerns has been ongoing over the period of the writing of this report, much still remains to be explored. However, what this review has shown are some of the ways in which many of these issues can be, and have been, addressed. What follows are some of the major conclusions drawn from the chapters of this report alongside recommendations stemming from this work.

9.2 KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.2.1 Organizational Factors

Differential salaries, conditions, and terms of employment among contingents were noted as a possible source of discontent in multinational military operations. While these conditions and terms are determined by each nation and cannot be changed for multinational missions, a greater awareness of these differences might allow commanders and other leaders in the field the ability to avert animosity or conflict related to these differences. It would prove useful, therefore, to retain an updated inventory of each nation's military conditions of employment as a reference guide. This could help raise commanders' sensitivity to differences between contributing nations and may help in the avoidance of conflict pertaining to these differences.

The fact that different nations have different organizational rules and regulations may present problems in operations. However, the research reviewed in this report indicates that just as concerning may be the differential application of rules by the various nations, with some operating more "by the book" than others. This has given rise, in some instances, to allegations of unfair treatment. Once more, awareness of the rules and regulations of each contingent would help form the basis of the development of a mutual understanding of how best to allocate sanctions. Such an understanding could form the basis of a more comprehensive stand on operational justice that would satisfy national needs and practices but allow for less disparity between contingents.

In operations, the use of English as the lingua franca appears to be fairly universal. However, the research showed that even fluent English speakers could have problems with the use of jargon, acronyms, and nonverbal communication. What clearly is needed here is the development of a common lexicon that can help ensure that some contingents do not feel left out. Furthermore, training for commanders to sensitize them in the delivery of both verbal communications and nonverbal communication could ease discomfort and heighten understanding. This could be assisted by the more formal use of liaison officers between national contingents. These specially trained individuals could assist in cross-cultural communications and ensure that commanders have a resource at hand for consultation. These officers could also help to cement relationships between contingents even before deployment. Such roles have been seen to be effective in helping to ensure that fewer integration problems occur between contingents posted at different times and for different lengths of deployment.

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The use of military contingents from increasingly diverse national backgrounds has also presented problems with regard to interoperability. Some nations use sophisticated weaponry and tools that are not available to other militaries. This can create difficulties for commanders in assigning responsibilities to various contingents. Research indicates that by understanding these limitations prior to deployments, commanders can better assign contingents to specific tasks in keeping with their national or cultural preferences and consistent with the most effective uses of their technology.

Not only need commanders understand the culture and traditions of host nations and other national contingents, but they increasingly must work alongside non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These latter organizations have different structures and modus operandi than military organizations. While work has been ongoing regarding the relationship between these non-military aid groups and the military, more research highlighting best practices and common problems needs to be undertaken. There is clearly also a need for the development of a greater awareness and appreciation of these aid organizations on the part of military commanders. This may be provided by way of secondments of military personnel to these groups and through continued exposure in operations.

9.2.2 Leadership and Command

The increasing prevalence and complexity of multinational military operations means that present and future military leaders and commanders will face a myriad of challenges, including the integration of culturally diverse groups and the establishment of effective command and control structures. The new security environment will demand a greater range of leadership skills and competencies than previously required, including the ability to overcome cultural barriers to effective teamwork, the ability to integrate diverse teams, and the ability to engender trust and mutual respect among often very diverse partners. Indeed, abilities in mediation, conflict resolution, negotiation, diplomacy, cultural sensitivity, and behavioral flexibility are all central to the task of leading a multinational military team. In short, increased cultural diversity within multinational military forces will increase the level of complexity in the military commander's task on many levels, and multiply the challenges involved. In the context of such operations, the focus will need to be toward achieving unity of effort or purpose, as opposed to unity of doctrine or command.

It is clear that with the increasing frequency and complexity of multinational military operations, there will be a strong need to identify the specific training and education requirements of multinational military leaders and operations. It is also clear that multinational training, in the form of multinational planning exercises and multinational immersion training for instance, and at different stages of deployment (e.g., both prior to and during deployment), may be beneficial. The principles contained within the global leadership training model (Graen & Hui, 1999), along with the integrating mechanisms and conditions proposed by Elron, Shamir, & Ben-Ari (1999), and the cultural lens model proposed by Klein, Pongonis, and Klein (2000), may provide a potentially rich basis for such leadership training and education. Further, commanders and leaders must introduce cultural diversity training to their teams with urgency and follow this up with action, for all personnel who are deployed in a multinational military operation should have training in the cultural aspects of their work. As mentioned above, liaison offices may also assist commanders and team members with cultural awareness. Although a great deal of work has been done in this area, more work in the education and training of multinational military leaders and teams, particularly in terms of cultural diversity, will be needed, as these challenges promise to become even more complex in the future.

9.2.3 Multinational Military Teams

Military units seek to engender a strong sense of belonging to a "team." Developing this loyalty to a group for whom one would be prepared to make sacrifices has been critical in ensuring group cohesion and solidarity. This can, however, lead to ethnocentrism, social isolationism, prejudice and stereotyping,

and marginalization. In multinational missions, these attributes run counter to the desired goal of unity of purpose and effort. The concept of a team, in such environments, must encompass a wider group and allow for the inclusion of others with sometimes vastly different cultural outlooks and traditions.

Key components to building a sense of team among a wider group include a host of inter-group activities. Inter-group planning has been seen as a critical factor in ensuring that all contingents feel a part of the operation. Research indicates that the greater the inclusion of all contingents in the planning phase prior to deployment, the lower the likelihood that cultural issues will arise in theater. However, the same is true throughout all phases of an operation. Greater coordination and communication between contingents can ensure that all teams feel included in the operation and that all are valued. This can also assist in building trust, overcoming stereotypes, and lessening the negative impact of cultural differences. This goal can also be achieved through inter-group training. Personnel can begin the process of debunking stereotypes and creating team spirit and group cohesion through multinational training efforts prior to serving together in operations. This can also minimize disruptions to operations, as it allows for the identification of issues in a safer environment than in the heat of the theater.

Some key barriers to teamwork exist in military and non-military settings. One of these is the cultural dimension of power distance (Hofstede, 1983). Some cultures value a more egalitarian approach to power and allow for a more collaborative and interactive approach between leaders and their team members. Other cultures provide leaders with more directive power. Team members used to the former approach may resent what they see as too restrictive a relationship when dealing with those who are used to the latter power relationship. Another cultural barrier to teamwork involves the varying tolerance for uncertainty. When working alongside contingents or individuals from cultural backgrounds that have a higher tolerance for uncertainty, team members may be uncomfortable and unwilling to consider options that they consider too risky. Similarly, contingents with a high tolerance for uncertainty may dismiss the low-risk orientation of other contingents as too restrictive.

Some cultures engender greater individualism than others, which have a more collectivist outlook. This does not mean that those from more individualist cultures cannot or will not engage with others as members of a team. Rather the engagement will be in a different way from those coming from collectivist societies. Research indicates that individualists often view the mission as primary and relationships among team members as secondary; collectivists view team relationships as critical to producing a viable team product. These culturally determined factors can influence the creation of teams from multinational contingents and result in the reinforcement of stereotypes and the development of negative attitudes towards others.

In the same vein, some cultures place greater value on hypothetical thinking while others emphasize concrete thinking. Team members coming from these varying perspectives can have problems comprehending others approaches to issues. This will impact the capacity of the group to form a cohesive team and to cement relationships between members based on mutual understanding.

9.2.4 Cultural Predispositions and Psychosocial Aspects

Whether through heredity or socialization, people from different cultures internalize different value systems, skills, habits, and tastes, all of which shape the expression of personality traits. Research indicates that people from the same culture show broadly similar personality traits in comparison to individuals from other cultures. This finding allows for greater awareness of some important points of potential conflict that may arise between members of various national contingents when in a multinational military operation.

For example, research shows that national cultures vary in activity orientation. Some cultures emphasize the importance of “doing” work or tasks with the priority on making sure that the work gets done.

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Other cultures place more attention on “being,” that is, on relationships and on the enjoyment of the activity. In the military context, this can present problems, as those from “being” cultures may regard as rude the way in which those from “doing” cultures approach a given task.

The ways in which people approach decision making may be impacted by cultural differences in reasoning. Some cultures avoid confrontation and seek ways in which to bridge the gap between two opposing viewpoints. Other cultures value argumentation and debate around options, highlighting differences rather than seeking to blur them. Furthermore, research shows that there are some cultures that value concrete thinking grounded in personal experience, whereas other cultures see utility in hypothetical thinking, developing “what-if” scenarios, and speculating on possibilities. In the military context, these culturally influenced ways of thinking can lead some commanders to feel that others lack decisiveness or, conversely, are impulsive. Either way, this can impact relationships and lead to difficulties in communication and in the building of trust.

Essential to the success of military operations involving multinational and multicultural contingents is the building of trust. This component of a successful operation can take time and requires understanding. Cultural differences may impede the development of a trust relationship as they may lead people to feel that they cannot rely on others as their behavior is too dissimilar to their own and too unpredictable. Overcoming the cultural hurdle becomes critical to the development of trust within a multinational team.

Research clearly indicates that some of the key components of trust relate to notions of professionalism and ethical behavior. Being ethical in one’s dealings with others and acting in a professional manner may mean different things to people of different cultural backgrounds. Dealing in the black market or handling prisoners in a certain way may be seen as ethical among one military contingent but as unprofessional and unethical by another military contingent. Such culture-related differences can cause tensions and misunderstandings among contingents and so affect mission success.

9.2.5 Communication

Communication is at the heart of multinational military operations. However, military personnel from different countries may bring diverse styles of communicating and understanding communications to their interactions, which can lead to problems. In addition to misunderstandings, other communication problems can include inability or unwillingness to share information, the stress and increased cognitive effort of communicating in a second language, degraded perception of one’s ability based on language fluency, and being overlooked for assignments due to lack of language fluency.

Cultural dimensions (e.g., Hofstede, 2001) can provide a useful framework for identifying, understanding, and dealing with cultural differences in communication. Each one of the dimensions has implications for how people communicate and understand communications. For example, a soldier from a high context culture would tend to use an indirect style of communication, with much of their communication coming from the context and common assumptions of his culture. In contrast, a soldier from a low context culture would tend to use direct, explicit communications, and may miss much of the contextual information because they are not looking for it. Knowing that the first soldier is from a high context culture would suggest to the second soldier to look for contextual information. Training on these cultural dimensions would give military personnel a framework for better understanding themselves and their multinational partners, and for avoiding and dealing with miscommunications.

Because the multinational component of military operations is only likely to increase, training in multicultural communication should be part of standard military training programs. Communication competence in multinational settings involves the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively with members of other cultures. These can be developed using a wide variety of techniques, including training, education, experience, and role models. Possible training approaches include pre-deployment

training and resources available during deployment for specific information. Joint or multinational training would help develop skills in working with those of other cultures. However, specific courses in multicultural awareness are not enough. Cultural issues must be integrated into all military training courses starting at the most basic levels. Consideration of cultural differences must become part of the thinking and operating of military personnel.

9.2.6 Technology

Technology from one nation may be incompatible with the technology of another nation. Or, the level of sophistication of one country's technology may be significantly higher than that of another country. Further, a contingent from a less technologically developed country may not be trained on the operation of the sophisticated technology used by a multinational team. All of these situations have the potential to hinder the smooth operations of the team in terms of their technology capabilities.

The previously mentioned cultural dimension of power distance also has implications for the use of technology in multinational operations. Low power distance countries would tend to share technology and expect others to share theirs. High power distance countries, on the other hand, would see sharing technology as based on power, including national status, economic advantage, and military authority. Multinational forces that include high power distance countries do not often share technology and information equally. Another cultural dimension, uncertainty avoidance, also has implications for the impact of technology on multinational operations. The distributed environment of multinational operations is uncertain and technologically complex. Team members in a multinational team that includes nations that are high on uncertainty avoidance may find such a technologically complex environment threatening. Further, their relatively lower level of technological knowledge may also degrade their influence within the team.

In short, technology has advanced to provide complex and sophisticated support for distributed, collaborative, and networked systems, including multinational military teams. However, technology by itself typically cannot provide the solution to the problems that may arise in such contexts. Rather, the role of the human and cultural differences in the implementation of these technologies must be addressed.

9.2.7 Societal Factors

In addition to the factors elaborated above, a number of broad societal factors may influence multinational military operations. These include whether a military is mobilized through conscription or through an all-volunteer force, societal attitudes towards casualties, and public opinion about military operations in general. For instance, the societal system from which a military force is derived, which includes its values, culture, and ideology, determines the size of a military force and its method of mobilization. Moreover, the ideological cultures from which the contingents in a multinational force are derived may have implications for the effectiveness of a multinational military operation if, for instance, contingents vary in their methods of mobilization. This difference may have implications for cohesion, morale, and military ethos, among other team processes. Similarly, culture-related differences in casualty tolerance may have implications for multinational military teams if some contingents have a high tolerance for casualties and other contingents have a low tolerance for casualties and thus decide to withdraw their troops or end their role in a mission. Indeed, casualty tolerance can play an important role in the decision making of nations. There is also a political dimension to the casualty factor, as it reflects public opinion and the foreign policy of a nation and, like casualty tolerance, public opinion is culturally contingent and changes over time. For a multinational force, differences in public opinion about military intervention could have serious implications for a mission. Once again, cross-cultural training can alleviate some of the tensions that may arise related to such societal factors, and once again, it is the task of the multinational leader or commander to resolve the issues that arise and strengthen cohesion, despite cultural and societal differences.

9.3 FINAL COMMENTS

Key to the success of future international missions involving a number of national contingents will be the increased awareness of all military personnel of important cultural differences. Research has shown that the assumption that all militaries operate in the same way and reveal a universal “military culture” is oversimplified and is unsupported by experience in multinational operations. National culture impacts military culture such that militaries from different nations function and act in different ways.

This report has attempted to identify some of the more important culture-related lessons learned from previous multinational military operations. There were a number of common conclusions from respective authors. One of the most compelling was the call for efforts to instill greater cultural sensitivity and awareness through pre-deployment programs and training for all personnel. This is perhaps nothing new for some countries, but it does not appear to be an integral aspect of the military training of all nations. That this training should include non-commissioned personnel as well as officers is also of importance, given the nature of interaction between military contingents and between military and civilian organizations. Centers of excellence in such training already exist, for example, in Mannheim, Germany, the Pearson Peacekeeping Center in Canada, and Fort Huachuca, Arizona. Other ways in which to provide hands-on training include Multinational Experiments (MNEs), which also serve to identify issues and problems in simulated operational environments (e.g., see Lichacz & Farrell, 2005).

It is important that commanders receive more specialized and detailed training prior to deployment than other personnel. Such training might usefully include development of communication skills to ensure that cultural bias does not enter into the transmission and flow of information. This training could also assist in helping commanders better understand nonverbal communication and cultural sensitivities around how, when, and where messages are relayed to other contingents. Commanders will also require more readily available information on each contingent’s conditions of employment and organizational rules and regulations.

However, it is clear that the current and future global security environment will demand a richer form of interoperability than technical interoperability or even cognitive or informational interoperability can provide. An understanding of interoperability that takes into account dimensions such as information systems, doctrine, and command and control still neglects those dimensions of interoperability such as language, ethics, and social beliefs that pertain more to culture and the human dimension of interoperability than the more technical and informational forms of interoperability do. Ultimately, it is cultural interoperability – the common ways that militaries do their work – that contributes to mission success. Given the reality of cultural differences, however, it is vital that cultural awareness of such differences becomes part of the thinking of military personnel who participate in multinational military operations, so that cultural differences can be bridged and integrated, and cultural interoperability may be possible within multinational military collaborations.

9.4 REFERENCES

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