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MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES RESEARCH PAPER

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURE IN CAPACITY-BUILDING OPERATIONS

By/par LCol M.J.C. Sullivan

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ABSTRACT

Culture is a somewhat “elusive” concept that is one of the “spongier words” in the social sciences. It provides the lens through which members of a society see and interpret the world around them. It is the main influence which shapes an individual’s sense of self. It enables a society’s members, who are generally unconscious of its influence, to function with one another without the requirement to continuously negotiate the meaning of symbols and events. This paper examines the significant dimensions and components of Afghan culture that are relevant to Canadian Forces’ capacity building operations in Afghanistan; where pertinent, the corresponding dimension of Canadian culture is examined. This paper proposes that the dimensions of Afghan culture that are particularly relevant to the issue under consideration are: power gradient; formality versus informality; individualism versus collectivism; tolerance for uncertainty; honour and shame; reciprocity; long-term versus short-term orientation; mastery versus fatalism; achievement versus relationship; and masculinity versus femininity. While building capacity in Afghanistan, Canadian and Afghan cultures are decisively interacting. These operations take place in an environment of counterinsurgency. Through a thorough review of military literature, this analysis suggests that an in depth understanding of culture acts as a force-multiplier. Finally, it is suggested that a comprehensive understanding of the significance of culture will ensure that the Canadian Forces will neither alienate the Afghan population through our efforts nor frustrate Canadian Forces’ soldiers through the selection of unachievable capacity building goals.

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INTRODUCTION

The defence section of the Canadian Government's most recent International Policy Statement, *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, articulates that the Canadian Forces (CF) will participate in a "spectrum of international operations, with a focus on the complex and dangerous task of restoring order to failed and failing states." The document goes on to say that such operations require the CF to possess the "tool" of "cultural sensitivity." In a later section, the Cabinet expresses its intent for the CF to "play a more active role in providing military training to foreign armed forces" as demonstrated by the expertise displayed in the recent training of the Sierra Leonean and Afghan armed forces.¹ Unquestionably, a detailed understanding of culture is central to the successful completion of these tasks of capacity building.

Given this stated importance of the understanding of culture to CF operations, it could be considered revealing when Brigadier-General David Fraser, former Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Multi-National Brigade Sector South, Kandahar, Afghanistan confessed, "I underestimated one factor – culture." He went on to admit, "I was looking at the wrong map – I needed to look at the tribal map not the geographic map. The tribal map is over 2,000 years old. Wherever we go in the world we must take into account culture." As Dr. Emily Spencer, assistant professor at the University of Northern British Columbia and a research associate with the Canadian Forces' Leadership Institute expresses: "This forthright acknowledgement from an

¹Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 2005), 26-27.

experienced and decorated warfighter [*sic*] is telling. It underscores the Canadian Forces' (CF) current lack of capability in what is quickly becoming the crucible of success in the modern battle space. . . ." She proceeds to explain the need to "effectively integrate" culture into modern operations.² This opinion about the importance of incorporating cultural planning into military operations was echoed by Lieutenant Colonel Ian Hope, the Battle Group Commander of Task Force Orion, Kandahar from February to August 2006 when he declares, "It's all cultural, in the end. . . ."³

In addition to these candid statements about the importance of culture to operations in Afghanistan by the two above Canadian military commanders is the suggestion by Graeme Smith of the *Globe and Mail* that the Canadian Forces and NATO, primarily for cultural reasons, misread the local situation prior its major military offensive Operation Medusa. In his article "Inspiring Tale of Triumph Over Taliban Not All That It Seems," it is suggested that what the military forces interpreted as an insurgent uprising, was in fact a localized tribal issue.⁴

Although the current focus on the significance of culture to military operations is a direct result of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, culture has had a role in previous CF successes and failures.⁵ General Romeo Dallaire,

²Dr. Emily Spencer and Major Tony Balasevicius, "Crucible of Success: Cultural Intelligence and the Modern Battlespace," *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no.3 (Autumn 2009): 40.

³Karen D. Davis and Major Brent Beardsley, "Applying Cultural Intelligence in the Canadian Forces," in *Cultural Intelligence and Leadership*, ed. Karen D. Davis, 97-117 (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 97.

⁴Graeme Smith, "Inspiring Tale of Triumph over Taliban Not All it Seems," *Globe and Mail*, 16 September 2006, 3.

⁵Davis and Beardsley, *Cultural Intelligence and Leadership*, ix.

following his involvement in Rwanda, expressed that modern military operations were demanding cultural skills that were not being provide in CF officer training.⁶ Dr. Donna Winslow in her analysis of the Canadian Airborne Regiment's failed mission in Somalia reported that the CF members felt that they were not adequately prepared to deal with "the culture they faced in Somalia."⁷ Another example of failure to employ cultural information during a CF operation transpired during the Oka crisis in Quebec in 1990. The CF was unaware of the respective role of women within the Mohawk culture and the extent to which women were integrated into tribal leadership.⁸ The importance of understanding culture in today's military operations continues. Recently, a senior Canadian officer has stated that in mentoring the Afghan National Army, "one must have a detailed understanding of many issues" foremost of which is a "grasp of their culture, history" and some Afghan language.⁹

The past and recent experiences of the CF on operations with respect to culture are not unique amongst militaries in the world. The British military in Helmand province Afghanistan bear witness to this operational cultural complexity when they report dealing with sixty tribes and an additional four hundred sub-

⁶Carol McCann and Ross Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts of Control and of Command* (Toronto: Defence and Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine, 1999), 11.

⁷Karen Korabik, Tom Oliver and Tammy Kondratuk, *Cultural Intelligence, 360 Degree feedback, and Development of Self Awareness among Canadian Forces Leaders: Review and Analysis of Available Tools and Measures*, Report Prepared for the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (Ottawa: National Defence, 2009), 4.

⁸Denise Kerr and Karen D. Davis, "Reflecting on Oka: The Legacy of Mission Success," in *Cultural Intelligence and Leadership*, ed. Karen D. Davis, 97-117 (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 123.

⁹Lieutenant-Colonel W.D. Eyre, "14 Tenants For Mentoring the Afghan National Army," *The Bulletin* 14, no.1 (March 2008): 4.

tribes.¹⁰ The US military reports offending local populations and detainees by inadvertently forcing prisoners to put their heads to the ground in a position forbidden by Islam except for prayer.¹¹ A senior Norwegian Army officer has stated that for mentors of the Afghan National Army, both character and “cultural understandings are relatively more important than professional technical and tactical skills. . . .”¹² Even the Russian Military General Staff indicate that many of their problems in Afghanistan in the early 1980s were due to the fact that they did not understand the country and the culture of the people.¹³ As Andre Brigot and Oliver Roy elucidate, the Soviet Army was not “well adapted” to deal with indigenous affairs.¹⁴ Around the world, Western militaries are studying the problem in an effort to develop unique and solid approaches to integrating culture into their operations.¹⁵

The important question that must be addressed is how is culture significant to Canadian Forces’ capacity building operations in Afghanistan? This is an

¹⁰Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture to the Military* (London: MOD UK, 2009), 1-1.

¹¹Ike Skelton and Jim Cooper, “You’re Not from Around Here, Are You?” *Joint Force Quarterly* 36, no.1 (Spring 2005): 12.

¹²Major Jan Erik Haug, “The Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team Program as a Model for Assisting the Development of an Effective Afghan National Army” (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2009), 59.

¹³The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost* (Lawrence, University of Kansas, 2002), xxi.

¹⁴Andre Brigot and Oliver Roy, *The War in Afghanistan: An Account and Analysis of the Country, Its People, Soviet Intervention and the Resistance*, trans. Mary and Tom Bottomore (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf Simon & Schuster, 1988), 80.

¹⁵Brian R. Selmeski, *Military Cross-Cultural Competence Core Concepts and Individual Development*, Report Prepared for the Centre for Security, Armed Forces and Society (Kingston: Royal Military College of Canada, 2007), 2.

important question. As Arthur Cebrowski, the Director of Force Transformation, Office of the US Secretary of *Defense* testified to the House of Representatives' Committee on Terrorism, “. . . an understanding of societies and culture is more important than military intelligence on current operations.”¹⁶ In essence, knowledge of the cultural terrain serves as a force multiplier to military operations.¹⁷ More importantly to Canada, it allows the Canadian Forces to understand and interpret the perspectives and views of various government and non-governmental elements of international operations as well as Canadian citizens and the enemy in an effort to predict how they may react to any given situation.¹⁸ Herbert Hirsch takes the importance of culture one step further when he demonstrates that the “data clearly indicate[s] that culture influences conceptions of self and that the use of national, racial, gender, or religious categories places these descriptions within a political context.”¹⁹ A final argument of why the above question of culture is important to capacity building operations in foreign countries is an ethical argument. A detailed understanding of a foreign culture can give us realistic and achievable foreign policy goals to aim for as well as the timelines in

¹⁶Montgomery McFate, “The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 38, no.3. (Spring 2005): 47.

¹⁷Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus, “Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq,” *Military Review* 86 no.1 (January 2006): 8.

¹⁸Karen D. Davis and Major Brent Beardsley, “Applying Cultural Intelligence in the Canadian Forces,” in *Cultural Intelligence and Leadership*, 98.

¹⁹Herbert Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory: Studying Death to Preserve Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 138.

which they might be accomplished. As Professor Rory Stewart states, “We have no moral obligation to do what we cannot do.”²⁰

It is evident that the Canadian Forces needs to understand the significance of culture to its capacity building operations in Afghanistan. To furnish such an understanding, this research paper will commence with background information giving a brief overview of what culture is and how it is composed. This will be followed by a review of the relevant literature about culture and its importance. Subsequently, the dimensions of general culture that are pertinent to capacity building and military operations will be examined in detail. These aspects will be illustrated using specific examples from the Afghanistan mission underscoring their significance, relevance and military importance.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It is necessary to frame the analysis of the significance of culture to CF capacity building operations in Afghanistan, with a brief overview. Culture has been described as the main influence which shapes an individual’s sense of self.²¹ It is vital because it enables a society’s members to function with one another without the requirement to continuously negotiate the meaning of symbols and events. Culture is both learned and forgotten, so notwithstanding its importance, individuals are generally unconscious of its influence on the way in which they perceive and interact with the world.²² Defence Research and Development

²⁰Rory Stewart, “Let’s do what we can,” *International Herald Tribune*, 30 March 2007, 6.

²¹Herbert Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory* . . . , 137.

²²Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, “What is Culture?” <http://international.gc.ca/cfsi-icse/cil-cai/whtisculture-questlaculture-eng.asp?Internet>; accessed 24 January 2010.

researchers Matthew Lauder and Keith Stewart state that culture has been defined in a variety of ways over time with 164 definitions of culture existing prior to 1950.²³ Researcher Brian Selmeski asserts that it is a “fool’s errand certain to take a long time while producing a result of both questionable validity and utility” to attempt a production of a precise definition of culture. Instead he suggests that it is more important to have an understanding of what culture is and how it works.²⁴

Culture consists of “patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting to various situations and actions” in everyday life. It is acquired and transmitted primarily “by symbols and the embodiment of symbols in artefacts. The essential core of culture consists of historically derived and selected ideas and especially their attached values” and meanings. The prominent researcher Geert Hofstede provides an often quoted definition of culture which articulates the following, “A set of programming for people within a nation – the “software” of the mind.”²⁵ It is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and artefacts that members of a society employ to cope with their world and each other.²⁶

Culture is not biologically inherited but rather is learned and acquired “mostly through habituation, or unconscious conditioning, often in subtle ways.” It

²³Matthew A. Lauder and Keith Stewart, *Cultural Matters: Examining the Application and Utility of Culture to Military Operations*, Report for informal publication of Defence R&D Canada (Ottawa: Defence R&D Canada, 2008), 5.

²⁴Brian R. Selmeski, *Military Cross-Cultural Competence . . .*, 3.

²⁵P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang, *Cultural Intelligence: Individual Interactions Across Cultures* (Stanford: Stanford Business Books, 2003), 63.

²⁶CFLI Project Team, *Broadsword or Rapier? The Canadian Forces’ Involvement in 21st Century Coalition Operations*, Report Prepared for the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy, 2008), 36.

discriminates the members of one group of people from those in another group and provides the “lens” through which members of a group see and understand the world around them. Culture is affected by past and present events and includes values, norms and beliefs. Culture shapes individual’s assumptions, attitudes, perceptions, expectations as well as intents, motives and behaviours. In summary, culture is the shared concepts that “guide what people believe, how they behave and how this behaviour is interpreted.”²⁷

Although culture is a complex concept, a number of characteristics can be identified which assist in the interpretation of a particular culture. All cultures are learned in a social environment. They are shared systems which produce patterned behaviour. Although culture cannot determine the precise action an individual or a group will take, it often will “shape” and “constrain” their actions. As culture is an immersion of experience, it becomes habitual. In fact, people will seldom notice the influence of their own culture on themselves and their actions. This is because individuals take for granted that certain actions are normal. Cultures are dynamic. Although they are slow to change, they are in a constant state of transition with unwritten rules susceptible to “shifting and amendment.”²⁸ Barnett Rubin, an expert on the cause of conflicts spells out, “Cultures are fields of conflict and contradiction, not of immutable unanimity. They are always changing through the reflection and action of participants as well as interaction with other cultures.” He

²⁷Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture* . . . , 1-1 to 1-2.

²⁸Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture* . . . , 2-1.

postulates that “bounded, permanent, and uniform national or civilizational [*sic*] cultures are political projects, not social realities.”²⁹

Culture is very symbolic with much of culture’s external expression dependant on symbols and symbolic meanings that can be attributed to objects, places and historical events. As such, we find that cultural symbols more often than not have both explicit and implicit meanings. Meanings and behaviours are contextually dependent and as such, different contexts can “prompt different behaviours” by the same individuals from the same culture. A further cultural characteristic complication is that individuals often belong to several subcultures. The subculture that a person identifies with at a particular time also is heavily dependant on context.³⁰

One of the key factors that shape culture is history. Cultures are often “anchored in their own” histories. In this regard, past events are often attributed with “particular meaning and value.” Past history and injustices can be used to provide reasons and justifications for present events. In this way, “deliberate reinventions” of history that are accepted as present truths are common. Significant injury or past success is often manipulated for political reasons by infusing the national memory with emotion making those events “rallying symbols” for people during times of conflict.³¹

²⁹Barnett R. Rubin, *Blood on the Doorstep: The Politics of Preventive Action* (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2002), 26.

³⁰Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture . . .*, 2-1.

³¹Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture . . .*, 2-3; and Susan L. Woodward, “Do the root causes of civil war matter?” in *Statebuilding [*sic*] and Intervention: Policies, practices and paradigms*, ed. David Chandler, 41-71 (New York: Routledge, 2009), 49.

With the Afghan society, collective memory is a “confused” and complex notion. Andre Brigot and Oliver Roy explain this complexity in that Afghan collective memory is “confused” because in an anthropological sense, the “legitimacy” of its “identity” may be “disputed or usurped.” Brigot and Roy articulate that Afghan collective memory is “a formal identity transmitted by tradition” and as such, “one does not really know whether it is a legend embellishing some objective reality situated in a distant past or a myth borrowed from other cultures.” Many Afghan “cultural elements” have been “mingled and exchanged between one people and another” over time but the collective memory has only highlighted “certain aspects” which are part of this formal identity. For this reason, Afghan communities have developed on two levels: “what they believe themselves to be (their formal identity) and what they are in fact.” This “may permit an infinite number of divergences from the very strict formal rules.” Collective memory theory states that in the case of a traumatic experience such as “aggression against it, a society tends to withdraw to the level of formal identity.” To Afghans, their formal identity of what they believe themselves to be is far more culturally significant than what their identity actually is.³²

Another key factor that shapes culture is religion. For some people, it provides the “framework” to understand their world. It often reflects and ideal system of behaviour and helps shape the norms of the given society. It can be a factor in leading to a conflict and can be a “pretext” under which individuals are motivated to participate in conflict. Fundamentalists often use this religious

³²Brigot and Roy, *The War in Afghanistan . . .*, 100-101.

dialogue and symbols for political ends.³³ For these reasons, religion is often a major part of a culture's identity.

In essence, cultures develop their own “cultural narratives” or “collective memories” to make their cultural boundaries stronger and influence the group's perception of their own “identity and expectations.”³⁴ Now that we have come to an understanding of what culture is, its major characteristics and how it can be shaped, there is value in an examination of the pertinent literature on culture and culture applied to capacity building operations. This will assist in the upcoming examination of the significance of culture to the Canadian Forces' capacity building operations in Afghanistan.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Standard Cross-Cultural Survey

The standard survey comparing cultures was developed in 1970 by George Murdoch and his associates. It includes an assessment of 186 societies using 22 categories of culture and almost a thousand coded variables that have been derived from “ethnographic sources.” The focus of this research is to enable an understanding of culture through analysis of comparisons.³⁵

Behavioural Perspective

The behavioural perspective sees culture as codes of conduct, tasks, and rituals which form behavioural rules and norms. This is essentially identifying and

³³Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture* . . . , 2-3.

³⁴See Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture* . . . , 2-4 and Herbert Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory* . . . , 1.

³⁵Defense Science Board Task Force, *Understanding Human Dynamics*, Report Prepared for the Under Secretary of Defense (Washington: Defense Science Board, 2008), 74.

linking culture with its “manifestations” and the collective behaviour it influences.

From this perspective, “joint actions, collective codes of conduct, rituals, and behavioural procedures” are seen as genuine components of culture.³⁶

Cognitive Perspective

The cognitive perspective identifies culture with people’s “perceptions, memories, shared understanding, beliefs, experiences, ideologies” and value systems. Academics who endorse this approach tend to define culture by “patterns of interpretation” and people’s mental attitudes.³⁷ Typically researchers from this discipline examine the cultural narratives, oral histories and collective memories of large groups of populations. The aim is to determine the cultural boundaries and the group’s perception of their own “identity and expectations.”³⁸

Cultural Dimensions Perspective

The influential Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede analyzed the interaction between national cultures and their associated organizational culture.³⁹ He conclusively demonstrated that there are both national and regional cultural groupings that influence the behaviour of organizations and societies. He further proved that these behaviours are “persistent across time” and space. His specific methods involved conducting extensive surveys of how cultures influence

³⁶Defense Science Board Task Force, *Understanding Human Dynamics* . . . , 75.

³⁷Defense Science Board Task Force, *Understanding Human Dynamics* . . . , 76.

³⁸See Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture* . . . , 2-4 and Herbert Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory* . . . , 1.

³⁹See Geert Hofstede, *Culture’s Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (California: Sage Publications, 1980); and Geert Hofstede, *Culture’s Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Cultures* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001).

workplace values and attitudes. He surveyed 115,000 IBM managers from 73 countries. This research demonstrated that there are five dimensions along which national cultures vary: power distance, masculinity-femininity, individualism-collectivism, long-term orientation and uncertainty avoidance.⁴⁰

Following on Hofstede's work, S.H. Schwartz added to the body of research by developing a framework of 41 cultural values which he applied in 38 nations.⁴¹ This framework included the cultural dimensions of conservatism, intellectual autonomy, affective autonomy, hierarchy, egalitarianism, mastery, and harmony.⁴²

In 2004, the Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness Research Program verified, updated and added to Hofstede's work on the cultural dimensions perspective. Robert House and his 176 associates conducted what could be called the "Manhattan Project" of research linking societal culture to behaviours. This inquiry was conducted with 17,300 managers in 951 organizations in 62 cultures. This research confirmed Hofstede's original work and added the cultural dimensions of performance, orientation and humane orientation.⁴³

⁴⁰Andi O'Connor, Linda Roan, Kenneth Cushner and Kimberly Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies for Improving the Teaching, Training, and Mentoring Skills of Military Transition Team Advisors*, Report Prepared for the United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioural and Social Sciences (Washington: eCrossCulture Corporation, 2009), 6.

⁴¹S.H. Schwartz, "Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries," *Applied Psychology* 50, no. 1 (1999): 1-65; <http://www.jstor.org>; Internet; accessed 27 January 2010.

⁴²O'Connor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 6.

⁴³Robert House, Paul Hanges, Peter Dorfman, and Vipir Gupta, *Culture, Leadership and Organizations: The GLOBE Study in 62 Societies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004), xv.

Military and International Organizations Perspectives on Culture

Commencing in 2004, a number of influential articles written by prominent US Military and political leaders were published in important US journals arguing the importance of considering culture on military operations. In “You’re Not from Around Here, Are You?” the Honourable Ike Skelton and the Honourable Jim Cooper, members of the US House Armed Services Committee made the case that failing to consider culture was alienating local populations in American Theatres of Operation.⁴⁴ This article was supported by the article “Culture-Centric Warfare” by Major General Robert Scales Jr., US Army (Retired). General Scales quoted the Commander of the Third Infantry Division in Iraq who said, “. . . I had perfect situational awareness. What I lacked was cultural awareness. Great technical intelligence . . . wrong enemy.”⁴⁵ The General successfully argued that in the “present cultural phase” of the war in Iraq, “knowledge of the enemy’s motivation, intent, will, tactical method, and cultural environment” is more important than high-tech military equipment. He continues the argument by suggesting that the British Military’s success in Iraq is primarily due to its “self-assurance and comfort” with foreign cultures “derived from centuries of practicing the art of soldier diplomacy and liaison” around the world.⁴⁶ These important articles demonstrated that culture was more than an academic consideration to modern militaries.

⁴⁴Ike Skelton and Jim Cooper, “You’re Not from Around Here, Are You?” . . . , 12-16.

⁴⁵Major General Robert H. Scales Jr., US Army (Retired), “Culture-Centric Warfare,” *US Naval Institute Proceedings* 130, no. 10 (October 2004): 32.

⁴⁶Major General Robert H. Scales Jr., US Army (Retired), “Culture-Centric Warfare,” . . . , 33-34.

These prominent articles were followed by an influential article by the noted American anthropologist Montgomery McFate. He argued that current operational environments required detailed cultural knowledge that the US military did not have. McFate asserted that al Qaeda is replicating the Prophet Mohammed's 7th-century process of "political consolidation through jihad, including opportunistic use of territories lacking political rulers as a base" in its present actions. McFate continues by arguing, "To confront an enemy so deeply moored in history and theology, the US Armed Forces must adopt an ethnographer's view of the world." This is because "it is not nation-states but cultures that provide the underlying structures of political life" in the modern world. This literature demonstrated the lack of information that the US military had available to prepare for Afghanistan by asserting that the military was forced to rely on 19th century British anthropological Afghanistan studies. McFate cites a Special Forces' Colonel assigned to the US Under-Secretary of *Defense* for Intelligence when he states, "We literally don't know where to go for information on what make other societies tick, so we use Google to make policy."⁴⁷

It was clearly evident that Google was not providing a sufficient framework to address the importance of culture to modern military capacity building operations. In an effort to address this, the American, British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Armies' (ABCA) Program produced an intelligence framework for cultural comparisons that unlike the research of Hofstede, Schwartz and House

⁴⁷Montgomery McFate, "The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture," . . . , 43, 46.

above, was not based primarily on research conducted in the workplace.⁴⁸ Based in part on this report, the British Military produced a rather generic training note outlining the importance of culture to military operations. It suggests comparing culture based on what is similar, what is different and what is hidden.⁴⁹ The US Army has produced an Arab and Iraq focused “cultural awareness” manual.⁵⁰ Unlike the area focused efforts of the US Army, the United States Marines have taken the approach of a general academic manual on culture that is not region specific but rather is most theoretical and academically based.⁵¹ The Finish Defence Forces have produced a general assessment of the varying cultures (Military, Host-Nation, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Organizations (IOs) involved in modern crisis management.⁵²

The Canadian Military has taken a fundamentally different approach to the issue of culture on operations. The CF approaches the topic from the perspective of leadership and cultural leadership competencies. Using the relatively recent concept of cultural intelligence, the CF has produced a number of reports identifying the leadership competencies that allows an individual to lead in

⁴⁸ABCA Program, *The Impact and Importance of Culture on the Conduct of Military Operations*, Report Prepared on the ABCA Program (n.p.: ABCA Program, 2008), 6.

⁴⁹Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture . . .*, 4-8.

⁵⁰William Wunderle, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: A Primer for US Armed Forces Deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, n.d.), 137p.

⁵¹Barak Salmoni and Paula Holmes-Eber, *Operational Culture for the Warfighter: Principles and Applications* (Virginia: Marine Corps University Press, 2008), 344p.

⁵²The Finish Defence Forces International Centre, *Varying Cultures in Modern Crisis Management*, ed. Susanne Adahl, (Helsinki, Puolustusvoimat, Puolustusvoimeien Kansainvalinen Keskus, 2009), 119p.

culturally complex environments.⁵³ This cultural intelligence concept refers to the motivation, knowledge, and behaviours that enable individuals to adapt effectively in such diverse and challenging environments.⁵⁴

Statement of the Question

The important question that needs to be answered, regardless of the perspective on culture taken, is what are the significant dimensions and components of Afghan culture that are relevant to CF capacity building operations in Afghanistan? This question remains unanswered. Brian Selmeski asserts that although the British, Dutch and French amongst other militaries are “re-studying their imperial pasts and multicultural presents in hopes of developing their own approaches to integrating culture into operations,” the Canadian Forces remain “somewhat ambivalent about the exercise.” He goes on to state that there is a lack of “buy-in” from senior uniformed and civilian defence officials.⁵⁵

It is not possible for the CF to simply use the cultural dimensions research data of Hofstede, Schwartz and House to guide capacity building operations in Afghanistan. Hofstede’s studies dealt with psychological dimensions of management styles and their relationship to “simplified schema” of national

⁵³See Karen D. Davis ed. *Cultural Intelligence and Leadership* (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009); Karen Korabik, Tom Oliver and Tammy Kondratuk, *Cultural Intelligence, 360 Degree feedback* . . . , 2-42; Kimberly-Anne Ford, Sarah Winton, and Karen Davis, *Measuring “Cultural Intelligence” and “Emotional Intelligence”: An Annotated Bibliography*, Report Prepared for the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (Ottawa: National Defence, 2009); Emily Spencer, *Crucible of Success: Applying the Four CQ Domain Paradigm: The Canadian Forces in Afghanistan as a Case Study*, Report Prepared for the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (Ottawa: National Defence, 2007); and Kimberly-Anne Ford and Karen Davis, *Cultural Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence and Canadian Forces Leader Development Concepts, Relationships, and Measures*, Report Prepared for the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (Ottawa: National Defence, 2007).

⁵⁴P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang, *Cultural Intelligence* . . . , 59-60.

⁵⁵ Brian R. Selmeski, *Military Cross-Cultural Competence Core Concepts* . . . , 2.

cultures. Hofstede's research is anchored in psychology rather than the anthropology or the sociology of foreign cultures. By itself, it is not able to adequately explain an entire culture but rather only specific management dimensions. As such, its research on Afghans has only limited applicability to military capacity building operations.⁵⁶ In addition, it does not address the concept that various organizations from the same societies may have different cultures. By way of example, although Canadian NGOs and the CF are both from Canadian society, they have different cultures. The cross-cultural and behavioural perspectives suffer the same fate. As models, they remain too abstract and broad to guide Canadian soldiers in their capacity building operations Afghanistan.

This question of the significance of culture to CF capacity building operations in Afghanistan must be conclusively answered. The CF is attempting to build the capacity of the Afghan National Army (ANA) through the work of the Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (OMLTs). Canadian soldiers train Afghan soldiers and help the ANA plan, sustain and conduct combat operations. In addition, through the mechanism of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), CF soldiers are working with the Provincial and Local Afghan governments in an attempt to rebuild the country. In both situations CF members are working closely with Afghans. As such, Canadian and Afghanistan cultures are interacting.⁵⁷ As the World Values Survey has demonstrated, the "basic values and beliefs of the

⁵⁶Barak Salmoni and Paula Holmes-Eber, *Operational Culture for the Warfighter: Principles and Applications* (Virginia: Marine Corps University Press, 2008), 20.

⁵⁷Craig Leslie Mantle, "How Do We Go About Building Peace While We're Still At War?" Report Prepared for the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (Ottawa: National Defence, 2008), 26-28.

publics of advanced societies differ dramatically from those found in less developed societies.”⁵⁸

Capacity building operations in Afghanistan take place in an environment of counterinsurgency. An understanding of culture is central to the conduct of counterinsurgency operations and acts as a force multiplier. In addition, the issue of culture must be addressed because CF soldiers have indicated that present cultural awareness training provided prior to deploying to Afghanistan is not sufficient.⁵⁹ These soldiers are putting their minds and hearts into building capacity in Afghanistan. As such, we owe it to them to answer the question of the significance of culture to their capacity building efforts. Answering this question will ensure that we do not alienate the Afghan population through our efforts. In addition, it will limit psychological stress by reducing the frustration of Canadian Forces’ soldiers through the selection of worthwhile, achievable goals and ensuring that we use culturally acceptable means to achieve these goals on the critical path to mission success.

PRESENTATION OF WORK

Culture is a somewhat “elusive” concept. In the words of a noted authority, culture is one of the “spongiest words” in social science.⁶⁰ Accepting this, an understanding of culture is essential in order to interpret the intent behind another society’s actions. Professor Rory Stewart makes this point in his book about his

⁵⁸Karen D. Davis and Justin C. Wright, “Culture and Cultural Intelligence,” in *Cultural Intelligence and Leadership*, ed. Karen D. Davis, 9-25 (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 19.

⁵⁹Dr. Emily Spencer and Major Tony Balasevicius, “Crucible of Success . . .”, 41, 45.

⁶⁰Dr. Bill Bentley, “Systems Theory, Systems Thinking and Culture,” in *Cultural Intelligence and Leadership*, ed. Karen D. Davis, 97-117 (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 1.

voyages in Afghanistan. He recounts a discussion with the headman of Barra Khana, Bismillah, who said, “British soldiers have chests as broad as horses. . . . Every morning they hook their feet over the bumper of their jeep, put their hands on the ground, and push themselves up and down two hundred times without stopping. I don’t know why.”⁶¹ To Afghan locals such as Bismillah, who lack a detailed understanding of British and Western military culture, the concept of burning unnecessary calories to conduct physical training is a concept that does not resonate. The example illustrates the role of understanding culture in perception and the attribution of intent behind actions.

In an attempt to understand and exploit culture in military capacity building operations, there are a number of academic and observed cultural dimensions or notions that are particularly relevant.⁶² These concepts include: power gradient; formality versus informality; individualism versus collectivism; tolerance for uncertainty; honour and shame; reciprocity; long-term versus short-term orientation; mastery versus fatalism; achievement versus relationship; and masculinity versus femininity. These relevant and significant dimensions of culture will now be examined individually using Afghan society capacity building examples.

Power Gradient and Afghan Decision Making

One of the most important aspects of local culture to understand in a capacity building operation is power. How a society views and understands power

⁶¹Rory Stewart, *The Places in Between* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2004), 172.

⁶²Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture* . . . , 2-8.

is central to the approach that can be used to build local military and political capacity. Power gradient or power distance is the perceived gap in authority between a subordinate and a superior and the importance of status in the society. Often this manifests itself in a contrast between consultative versus autocratic leadership and management styles.⁶³ Power gradient is a measure of human inequality in a society. It can be defined as the “extent” to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is not distributed equally. High power distance proposes that both the followers and leaders endorse this level of inequality. In low power distance countries, individuals prefer a consultative type of interaction whereas in high power distance countries subordinates tend to follow their superior’s directions without question. People tend to be respected and treated as equal in a low power distance culture. A high power distance culture is more concerned with status.⁶⁴

The power distance concept is especially important for military advisors employed in teaching and mentoring foreign forces and politicians. Much research has been conducted in the fields of business, diplomacy, health and education. Research is “abundant” with respect to teaching minorities in Western classrooms. There is little research that exists to support soldiers whose primary mission on operations is to teach foreign forces “across significant cultural boundaries” in adverse field settings.⁶⁵ Notwithstanding this, it is an important consideration

⁶³Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture* . . . , 2-8.

⁶⁴Wunderle, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness* . . . , 16.

⁶⁵O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies* . . . , 4.

because power and a society's view of power are central to the expected relationship between instructors and students in capacity building operations.

Those teachers, such as the CF soldiers, that come from low power distance cultures such as Canada are more comfortable with less formal relationships. Canada's power distance is "relatively low" having an index of only thirty-nine compared to the world average of fifty-five. This is indicative of a "greater equality" between levels of Canadian society inclusive of government, the military and families. A power gradient such as Canada's orientation "reinforces a cooperative interaction across power levels and creates a more stable cultural environment."⁶⁶ In high power distance cultures such as Afghanistan, students expect a significant distance between teachers and students. As well, in such cultures, learning tends to be teacher centric education in which teachers "transfer" knowledge to students.⁶⁷ The Afghanistan education system – the portion that survived years of war – is based on a "hierarchical teaching model" and primarily uses memorization, lecture and repetition as the central teaching model. When CF soldiers instruct on capacity building operations, this aspect of the society's view of power needs to be considered when choosing the most appropriate teaching method.⁶⁸

Other aspects of Afghans' views on power need to be clearly understood by capacity builders. Authority and power in Afghan society are bestowed on

⁶⁶Geert Hofstede, "Geert Hofstede – Cultural Dimensions,"http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_canada.shtml; Internet; accessed 17 November 2009.

⁶⁷O'Connor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 7.

⁶⁸Helen N. Boyle, *Memorization and Learning in Islamic Schools* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 178-179.

individuals by social factors. Such factors include: land ownership, religion, age and family status. The power distance of the culture reflects a society of status and privilege between and among ethnic groups. Unlike most Western cultures, age equals respect regardless of status or gender.⁶⁹ This status and privilege among ethnic groups is demonstrated in attitudes amongst ethnicities in Afghanistan. The Pashtuns often equate their ethnic identity with the state of Afghanistan. As such, they strongly believe that any ruler of Afghanistan must be from their ethnic group.⁷⁰ This issue was raised recently at the highest political levels in Afghanistan. In November 2009, after a “charade” election, Dr. Abdullah challenged Afghanistan’s leader President Karzai. As Dr. Abdullah was not of pure Pashtun decent, but rather of Pashtun – Tajik mix, he was not acceptable to Afghans to govern the country. As the *Economist* postulated, his continued leadership challenge would have risked political violence and open Pashtun – Tajik rivalry.⁷¹

Other evidence of this status and privilege between and among ethnic groups can be found in the Pashtun’s view on the Hazaras. Pashtuns believe that Hazaras are second class citizens. They also believe that the Hazaras’ Iranian identity and Shi’a religion make them untrustworthy. In essence, their religion

⁶⁹Centre for Intercultural Learning, “Cultural Information – Afghanistan,” <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=af>; Internet; accessed 18 September 2009.

⁷⁰Claus Anderson, “Afghanistan Cultural Field Guide,” www.sere.dk/country/Afghanistan%202.pdf; Internet; accessed 22 December 2009.

⁷¹*Economist*, “Last Chance in Kabul,” *Economist* 5 November 2009 [journal on-line]; available from www.Economist.com; Internet; accessed 20 March 2010.

along with the “generally poor land” that the Hazaras occupy put them at the bottom of the Afghan social and power scale.⁷²

This cultural dimension of the relative power amongst Afghan ethnic groups is important to consider when building the public capacity of the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police Force, Justice or Afghan political institutions. In the forming of Afghan National Army units, the Coalition has decided to use the “*CIA World Factbook*” figures to decide the distribution of positions amongst ethnic groups. As such, Pashtuns account for 42 percent of the unit, Tajiks 27 percent, Hazaras and Uzbeks 9 percent each. As such, situations develop in Army units where Pashtuns are under the command of Hazaras; culturally they do not trust each other. An American mentor of a Hazara Afghan National Army officer recounted this ethnic tension. He stated that the Hazara officer on the Afghan Army General Staff, due to traditional Hazara persecution, “made no decisions without thinking carefully about how it might affect his position” in the Army.⁷³ Further proof of this sensitive yet important aspect of power were evident in 2005 when Afghans viewed the preponderance of Tajiks in the Afghan National Army as “destabilising” and as “an attempt to perpetuate the unequal distribution of power” decided at the Bonn Conference following the end of the Coalition’s defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan.⁷⁴ In all, cultural aspects of

⁷²Brigot and Roy, *The War in Afghanistan . . .*, 104; and Anderson, “Afghanistan Cultural Field Guide.”

⁷³Scot D. Mackenzie, “Imperatives For Working With Afghan Security Forces” (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 2008), 8-9.

⁷⁴International Crisis Group, *Afghanistan: Getting Disarmament Back on Track*, Report No 35 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2005), 4.

the relative power amongst Afghan ethnic groups must be considered when building the public capacity in Afghanistan.

The high power distance aspect of Afghan culture must be considered in the strategic plans and methods that the CF employs during capacity building operations. This large gap in authority between a superior and a subordinate, along with the importance of status manifests itself in an autocratic management and leadership style in Afghan society. As such, efforts to win the support of the ordinary Afghan locals have little chance of changing the balance of power in a particular area. Research conducted for the European Network of Non Governmental Organizations in Afghanistan makes this point irrefutably. It states that, “Many actors . . . including PRTs [Provincial Reconstruction Teams] insist on viewing Afghanistan as an egalitarian society when designating [projects] or similar interventions, assuming that a project implemented for ordinary people will convince them to oppose the Taliban.” The research found that such actions did not convince locals to “participate in efforts to change the balance of power” in their communities. Western Coalition analysis that suggested such attempts to change the local balance of power [by winning ‘hearts and minds’] failed to appreciate the power distance dimension of Afghan culture where locals were “locked in a feudal system” and powerless to “act or influence” their local rulers.⁷⁵

Despite being constrained by a feudal system, Afghans are an extremely proud group who do not react well to condescension and are most “sensitive to

⁷⁵Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Mirwais Wardak, Idrees Zaman, and Annabel Taylor, *Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds: Exploring Afghan Perceptions of Civil-Military Relations* (London: British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group, 2008), 67.

perceived arrogance on the part of foreigners” and their military and government officials.⁷⁶ Culturally, this is because both condescension and arrogance are aspects of power. For this cultural reason related to power, it is best that the term “nation building” is avoided by Canadian Forces and government departments working in Afghanistan. The Afghans are “acutely aware that they were a coherent nation when Alexander the Great invaded them” in 330 B.C. Research indicates that they will accept aid as long as they do not view the aid as being dictated. By accepting the Western term of “nation building”, the Afghans are accepting a power differential that their proud culture will not accept.⁷⁷

The “charity paradigm” often at play by Western forces in Afghanistan is based on a similar power differential. The European Network of NGOs complains that, “Some Provincial Reconstruction Teams continue to promote the ‘handout mentality’ which NGOs have been working for many years to erase. . . .”⁷⁸ Charity is based on a power differential which is “patronising and sees the beneficiaries as disempowered victims” who should be thankful for the assistance. Because of the notions of power in Afghan culture, charity actions are complex and often have unintended consequences. The Western approach to Afghanistan, anchored in current counterinsurgency doctrine is based on “winning hearts and minds.” This “mindset is largely premised on a charity approach” that does not consider the complexity of the issue nor the local conflict that such an approach can create.

⁷⁶War on Terrorism Studies Group, “Report on the Cultural Intelligence Seminar on Afghan Perceptions,” (Quantico: CETO, n.d.), 2.

⁷⁷War on Terrorism Studies Group, “Report on the Cultural Intelligence Seminar on Afghan Perceptions,” (Quantico: CETO, n.d.), 3.

⁷⁸Azarbajjani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, and Taylor, *Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds* . . . , 37.

European NGOs state that Provincial Reconstruction Teams are unable to learn this lesson related to power differential. They cite an Afghan government employee in Uruzgan Province who states, “The problem we face with the PRT [Provincial Reconstruction Teams] is that they don’t consult us when selecting a project. They shun our priority projects”⁷⁹ It would seem that the Canadian PRT in Afghanistan may not have hoisted aboard this unintended consequence dimension of power and aid. This cultural dimension is demonstrated when a Canadian PRT official indicates that the provision of aid forged an “endearing relationship” between Afghan civilians and Canadian soldiers.⁸⁰

In terms of building capacity, it is important for Canadian government workers and military members to understand the power and authority of women in Afghan society. An investigation of Afghan perceptions found that women head “the real fabric of the household” and therefore have considerably more power than is often thought based on observations by foreigners.⁸¹ The Canadian Centre for Intercultural Learning determined that, “Afghan women do exert a strong influence within the household and on the opinions of the husband and family.”⁸² An important aspect of Afghan culture is that unlike many Arab countries, a female

⁷⁹Azarbajjani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, and Taylor, *Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds* . . . , 37.

⁸⁰Mantle, “*How Do We Go About Building Peace While We’re Still At War?*”, 33.

⁸¹War on Terrorism Studies Group, “Report on the Cultural Intelligence Seminar on Afghan Perceptions,” (Quantico: CETO, n.d.), 2.

⁸²Centre for Intercultural Learning, “Cultural Information – Afghanistan,” <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=af>; Internet; accessed 18 September 2009.

soldier from a Western society will be afforded respect based on her position of authority and rank.⁸³

Power gradient or power distance is a significant aspect of culture that is an important consideration to capacity building operations. The high power distance aspect of Afghan culture must be considered in the strategic plans and methods that the CF employs during capacity building operations. Afghan soldiers expect a significant distance between leaders and subordinates and between teachers and students. Relative power among ethnic groups is based on the status and privilege of the ethnic groups. Because of their views on power, Afghans do not react well to condescension and are most “sensitive to perceived arrogance on the part of foreigners. Charity is based on a power differential making charity actions complex, often having unintended local consequences that must be considered and mitigated.

Formality versus Informality

The concept of power distance is related to the concept of formality or informality in a culture. It is another of the significant aspects of culture for the CF to consider when engaged in capacity building operations. Formal cultures, such as that of Afghanistan, attach significant importance to ceremony, tradition, ritual, rank and social rules where informal cultures do not place such an emphasis. Formal cultures tend to be hierarchically structured, and individuals in the culture

⁸³War on Terrorism Studies Group, “Report on the Cultural Intelligence Seminar on Afghan Perceptions,” (Quantico: CETO, n.d.), 2.

are most aware of their status within that structure. Within informal cultures, people tend to be viewed equally.⁸⁴

When dealing with Afghan traditions and rituals, it is important for the CF to understand that based on Afghanistan being a formal society, they feel more importance for their rituals and traditions than Canadians do. Afghan rituals revolve around courtesy, dress and rank and they represent a respect and honour hierarchy. Importance is determined through bloodline, class, titles, ethnic group and landownership as few Afghans have academic credentials. The possible cultural clash that could take place in this area with Canadian capacity builders is evident when one considers the Canadian rating on the formality versus informality scale. Canadian culture is low on the formality scale. Canadians consider themselves most “approachable” and relaxed in both their personal and work lives. Canadians tend to be informal and modest and are mostly uncomfortable using rank or hierarchy in a social setting. This informality and modesty is closely related to the egalitarian values of Canadians. It is important for Canadians in Afghanistan to realize that Afghans prefer and expect to be treated in a formal manner.⁸⁵

When working in Afghanistan, it is vital to understand the importance and sacredness of their rituals. As Paul Connerton explains when discussing how societies remember, rituals have little potential for “variance” and in traditional and formal societies, rituals are often invariant. He goes on to say, “. . . many

⁸⁴Wunderle, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness* . . . , 16.

⁸⁵Centre for Intercultural Learning, “Cultural Information – Afghanistan,” <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=af>; Internet; accessed 18 September 2009.

traditional societies in which symbolism appears to be immutable act as though they had seen the risk of too rapid an evolution: they do everything to impede its change.”⁸⁶ As Afghanistan’s culture is highly formal, capacity building operations must incorporate the fact that Afghan rituals and traditions are sacred and their society is culturally adverse to rapid cultural evolutions.

Individualism versus Collectivism

Individualism versus collectivism refers to the degree to which a population reinforces collective achievement or individual achievement and interpersonal relations. Citizens in individualistic societies typically are emotionally independent from “groups, organizations, and/or collectives” in their outlook. In collectivist populations, families and kinship systems protect the individuals in exchange for loyalty to the group. The higher the ranking on the individualism versus collectivism scale, the greater the individual rights and individuality exhibited within the society. In addition, collectivist societies have a great respect for tradition.⁸⁷

Canadian society’s highest rated cultural dimension is individualism; rated at eighty, it is at least double every other dimension of Hofstede’s ratings for Canadian cultural facets. This means that in Canada, success is measured by “personal achievement” and “Canadians tend to be self-confident and open to discussions on general topics.” This rating is “indicative of a society with a more

⁸⁶Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 57.

⁸⁷O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 8.

individualistic attitude and relatively loose bonds with others.”⁸⁸ By contrast, Afghanistan is low on the individualism versus collectivism scale. This individualism versus collectivism dichotomy between Canadian and Afghan culture is important for the CF to recognize when teaching Afghan students. Collectivist cultures, such as Afghan society, do not emphasize competition or open praise of individual students. Instead, Afghan students derive greater satisfaction from working toward a collective rather than individual achievement. As these students have a strong connection to their community and families, Canadian military advisors, when building capacity, should stress how new skills or learning will improve the group’s performance or quality of life.⁸⁹

The high collectivism cultural dimension of Afghan society directly influences how decisions are made. Afghans are most comfortable with a “relatively democratic” pattern of “bottom-up consensus” decision making. Although a “one man, one vote, style of governing is rare for Afghans,” historically, most decisions have been arrived at through consensus. The *Loya Jirga* (Tribal Council) is the Pashtun tribal format for consensus decision making. This decision making body has typically existed at the local village level; however, the format has been used to validate decisions at both the national and regional levels.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Geert Hofstede, “Geert Hofstede – Cultural Dimensions,”http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_canada.shtml; Internet; accessed 17 November 2009.

⁸⁹O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 7-8.

⁹⁰Anderson, “Afghanistan Cultural Field Guide.”

The collectivism cultural dimension of Afghan society and the related Afghan tradition of arriving at a decision by consensus, most often make it difficult to arrive at a decision. Once a decision is taken, it makes it tough for any one individual to take responsibility for or be held accountable for the decision. Notwithstanding this, most leadership in Afghanistan is by “authoritarian politics” with the consensus process used to validate the decision in the minds of the people. This makes negotiations with Afghans by Westerners challenging.⁹¹

This notion of consensus decision making is important for forces engaged in capacity building operations to comprehend. The Coalition forces including the CF expend a great effort in training the Afghan National Army to NATO doctrinal tactical standards. This Western military doctrine is based on a strict chain of command with a single commander at each level of command being responsible for making the decision. This is unquestionably counter-cultural to Afghan natural consensus decision making style and as such, Afghan military leaders often engage in long group decision making sessions to the frustration of their Western mentors.⁹²

For Westerners attempting to build democracy in the Afghan Government, it is instructive to understand the level at which collectivism takes place in Afghan culture. Collectivism is at the local and regional / provincial level rather than the national level. The Russian General Staff assert that Afghanistan is a state with a “long tradition of resistance to central authority and foreign interference” where the

⁹¹Anderson, “Afghanistan Cultural Field Guide.”

⁹²International Crisis Group, *Afghanistan: Getting Disarmament Back on Track*, 3-7.

central government has had varying degrees of success in controlling the various districts and provinces.⁹³ With the exception of the period of Taliban and the communist rule, most Afghan leaders have allowed for a “large degree of decentralized authority” and autonomy. The character and ethnic diversity of the various ethnic groups cause Afghans to react “very negatively” to centralized power.⁹⁴ Andre Brigot and Oliver Roy argue that “state and national sentiment” have always been weak in Afghanistan.⁹⁵ Barnett Rubin demonstrates that traditionally, “the state ha[s] created hardly any institutions for interacting with society.” As such, he states that there was “little police presence except in the towns” and that there was no “civil or political society mediating between state and citizens.”⁹⁶ Rubin articulates that “prospects for democracy” are “slim in poor countries” with “authoritarian or non-Western cultures.”⁹⁷

The Western effort to build democracy in Afghanistan has proved challenging.⁹⁸ It has been suggested that many of the current challenges in Afghanistan are caused because the West has imposed a highly centralized national government on the country. As discussed above, this is counter-cultural. Recently,

⁹³The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War . . .*, xx-xxi.

⁹⁴Anderson, “Afghanistan Cultural Field Guide.”

⁹⁵Brigot and Roy, *The War in Afghanistan . . .*, 71.

⁹⁶Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 120.

⁹⁷Barnett R. Rubin, *The Search For Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, 11-12.

⁹⁸Michael Barnett and Christoph Zurcher, “The Peacebuilder’s Contract: How External Statebuilding Reinforces Weak Statehood,” in *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*, ed. Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk, 23-52 (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 41-47.

in November 2009, the *Economist* newspaper recommended that President Karzai decentralize his over-centralized powers to the provincial and district governors.⁹⁹ In doing so, this would better align powers with Afghan culture and likely provide increased chances of political democracy building success.

From an Afghan military cultural point of view, history reflects a decentralized command structure. As such, military commanders have always had to work hard to maintain the loyalty of their forces. As the International Crisis Group observes, “Loyalties of individual soldiers and low-level commanders [in Afghanistan] are generally highly personalized.”¹⁰⁰ Forces that were not happy with their leader would resist the leader’s commands or rebel against the Afghan commander. This has always made conflict in Afghanistan most unpredictable, with “factions pursuing multiple agendas, turning on one another, or even changing sides in a conflict.” Culturally, Afghan fighters may negotiate with the other side and there is no social stigma in “switching sides or surrendering” during a battle. To an Afghan being on the winning side is more important than their beliefs.¹⁰¹ Similar tendencies occur at the tribal group level where tribes “will not hesitate to change allegiance in accordance with its short-term interests.”¹⁰² As such, it is better to subordinate your beliefs and to be alive than to be on the losing side and dead. This aspect of Afghan culture is illustrated when the International Crisis

⁹⁹Economist, “Last Chance in Kabul,” *Economist* 5 November 2009 [journal on-line]; available from www.Economist.com; Internet; accessed 20 March 2010.

¹⁰⁰International Crisis Group, *Disarmament and Reintegration in Afghanistan*, Report No 65 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2003), 3.

¹⁰¹Anderson, “Afghanistan Cultural Field Guide.”

¹⁰²Brigot and Roy, *The War in Afghanistan . . .*, 79.

Group comments that, “Shifts in the allegiance of local commanders have become endemic, in response either to a commander’s perceived marginalisation from a faction’s power centre, or more commonly, offers of better remuneration from other factions.”¹⁰³ It is critical that the Canadian Forces’ members engaged in capacity building operations in Afghanistan understand this Afghan view of loyalty.

Individualism versus collectivism refers to the degree to which a population reinforces collective achievement or individual achievement. In collectivist societies such as Afghanistan, families and kinship systems protect the individuals in exchange for loyalty to the group. This is important to the CF when teaching Afghan students who culturally do not emphasize competition or open praise of individual students but rather derive greater satisfaction from working toward a collective achievement. The cultural dimension of individualism versus collectivism is complicated and complex in Afghanistan society. The Afghan tradition of arriving at a decision by consensus most often makes it challenging to arrive at a decision and once a decision is taken, it makes it tough for any one individual to take responsibility for or be held accountable for the decision. In Afghanistan, collectivism is at the local and regional / provincial level rather than the national level and Afghans historically respond negatively to centralized power.

Tolerance for Uncertainty

It is relevant for the CF to consider the uncertainty avoidance dimension of culture when employed on capacity building operations. Uncertainty avoidance

¹⁰³International Crisis Group, *Disarmament and Reintegration in Afghanistan*, Report No 65 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2003), 3.

measures the society's stance towards the "authority of rules."¹⁰⁴ This aspect of a culture is significant because it expresses the society's tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity and risk.¹⁰⁵ It expresses the degree to which a society encourages its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in "unstructured situations" that are "novel, surprising, different" or new. High uncertainty avoidance societies tend to be most intolerant of ambiguity, and thus are distrustful of new behaviours or ideas. As such, they stick "dogmatically" to "historically tested patterns of behaviour" which can become "inviolable" rules aimed at making the population feel less uncertain. Noted cultural researcher Jun Yan argues that, "In such societies, people find that it is important to conform to social and organizational norms and procedures to reduce ambiguity."¹⁰⁶ In such societies, organizations often adopt "structural formalization and centralization" thus reducing the amount of information sharing and minimizing the degree of delegation to and decision-making powers of subordinates. In high uncertainty avoidance societies followers expect their leaders to maintain and comply with tradition and to act according to historically accepted patterns. Any new initiatives by the leader, even if successful, tend to "bring a feeling of uncertainty" to the subordinates.¹⁰⁷

Ambiguity is avoided by the creation of laws and rules, as well the non-acceptance

¹⁰⁴Jun Yan and James G. Jerry Hunt, "A Cross Cultural Perspective on Perceived Leadership Effectiveness" *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 5, no. 1: 57.

¹⁰⁵Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture . . .*, 2-9.

¹⁰⁶Yan and Hunt, "A Cross Cultural Perspective on Perceived Leadership Effectiveness" *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 5, no. 1: 57.

¹⁰⁷Yan and Hunt, "A Cross Cultural Perspective on Perceived Leadership Effectiveness" *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 5, no. 1: 57.

of deviance from the societal accepted norms. In low uncertainty avoidance societies, the people are more open to new ideas and diversity of opinion and are less concerned about ambiguity. People in such a culture are less “rule-bound, more flexible and more accepting of risk taking and change than those in a high uncertainty avoidance cultures. Consideration of this dimension of culture in capacity building operations will indicate to the CF the expected challenge to be encountered in getting individuals in another society to modify their traditional methods.¹⁰⁸

Afghanistan is a country that is high in uncertainty avoidance. Former U.S. Army advisors in Afghanistan report that they were challenged by the Afghan National Army’s resistance to change. They report that the Afghan soldiers used military procedures that had not changed in many years. The U.S. mentors report that senior Afghan officers were often most reluctant to change their “time-honoured procedures” regardless of whether or not they were effective. This frustration is exhibited when one U.S. Army advisor who served in Afghanistan in 2007 stated, “They [the Afghan soldiers] really want our help, but they have a hard time doing things differently.”¹⁰⁹ U.S. Army Colonel Scot Mackenzie explains at length the centralized decision making model that he found frustrating in the Afghan National Army. He states, “In their world, [Afghan Army officers] information is power, and senior officers intent on keeping power often maintain a solid grip on information, paralyzing subordinates into doing nothing until

¹⁰⁸Wunderle, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness* . . . , 16-17; and O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies* . . . , 9.

¹⁰⁹O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies* . . . , 9.

specifically ordered.” He goes on to address risk avoidance by asserting that, “Taking risk or initiative has historically been seen as a good way to wind up in prison or dead.”¹¹⁰ Colonel Mackenzie explains that delegation and sharing too much information is seen as a sign of weakness in the Afghan culture. This is the reason that Afghan officers do not delegate the training of soldiers to their Non Commissioned Officers which is the method preferred in Western Armies.¹¹¹ It is explained that even “routine requisitions for basic office supplies” have to be approved by a senior leader and that “trivial daily tasks” are not delegated but rather are “handled exclusively by General officers.” Colonel Mackenzie attributes this behaviour to the “Soviet Leadership Model”¹¹² rather than the high uncertainty avoidance dimension of Afghan culture.¹¹³

Modern Western military tactics are based on trust between officers, non commissioned officers and soldiers denoted by successive levels of delegation of command. As such, considering cultural theory, Western military tactics are best suited for low uncertainty avoidance cultures, that is, Western cultures and Western armies. By way of illustration of this point, in Western Armies, during a section attack by assaulting infantry, command is delegated from a Senior Non

¹¹⁰Mackenzie, “Imperatives For Working With Afghan Security Forces” . . . , 13.

¹¹¹ See also Dr. Terry Tucker, “Training Afghan Soldiers: A Technique for Building Rapport With Your Counterparts,” *Infantry Magazine* (May 2009) <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Training+Afghan+soldiers%a+a+technique+for+building+rapport+with+your...-a0182124738> Internet; accessed 18 February 2010.

¹¹²Mackenzie, “Imperatives For Working With Afghan Security Forces” . . . , 13, 20.

¹¹³For a different explanation of Afghan decision making, see Eyre, “14 Tenants For Mentoring the Afghan National Army,” *The Bulletin* . . . , 5. Eyre explains that ANA senior leaders fill a role akin to tribal chiefs and as such, pass judgement on all “manner of issues” with “subordinates of all ranks” entering for decisions.

Commissioned Officer commanding the section, to the Junior Non Commissioned Officers commanding the groups, and finally to the soldiers commanding the fire teams of the platoons.¹¹⁴ Irrefutably, this amount of delegation required for an attack using Western and NATO tactics is counter-cultural to the Afghan National Army soldiers who come from a culture high on the uncertainty avoidance scale. There is no inherent reason why capacity building Coalition forces, including the CF, must insist the Afghan Army learn and use these techniques. After all, the U.S. military only adopted these techniques and broke the unitary squad - a section that attacked as a mass and did not break into smaller groups during the attack – sometime after the Civil War.¹¹⁵ Teaching the Afghan Army to attack using the unitary squad would be more aligned with the Afghan culture which is high in uncertainty avoidance. It is probable that such tactics would lessen frustration on both the part of Coalition capacity builders and Afghan soldiers and would result in a more effective Afghan Army.

The Afghan cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance affects loyalty in a manner important for CF capacity builders to understand. In an effort to avoid uncertainty and best position their interests, Afghan tribes will often wait to see which side is the conclusive winner before openly declaring support for that side. This behaviour was exhibited during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan when Pashtun tribes, “to hedge bets” would send a son to join the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan Army (serving the Communist government), other sons to join the

¹¹⁴Department of National Defence, B-GL-309-001/FT-001 *The Infantry Battalion in Battle* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1995), 9-3-1.

¹¹⁵John A. English, *On Infantry* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984), 1-7.

various *mujahedeen* groups, another son to a *madrasah* in Pakistan, and another son to the West to study or work.¹¹⁶ This desire to avoid uncertainty continues today with the Pashtuns who dominate the Pakistan Intelligence Agency. This cultural trait is illustrated by the comments of Richard Armitage, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State (2001-2005). He states that today, the Pakistan Intelligence Agency is supporting both the United States and the Pashtun Taliban because “they are not sure who is going to win in Afghanistan.”¹¹⁷ CF capacity builders working in Afghanistan must understand that due to the high uncertainty avoidance in Afghan culture, it is most probable that in order to hedge bets, certain tribes in Afghanistan will support both the Coalition and the Taliban.

Uncertainty avoidance measures the society’s tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity and risk. High uncertainty avoidance societies like Afghanistan tend to be most intolerant of ambiguity, and thus are distrustful of new behaviours or ideas. As such, they stick to historically tested patterns of behaviour, structural formalization and centralization. Those societies like Afghanistan expect their leaders to maintain and comply with tradition and to act according to historically accepted ways. Consideration of the uncertainty avoidance of Afghan culture by the CF on capacity building operations indicates the expected challenge to be encountered in getting Afghans and their Army to do things differently and change their traditional ways.

¹¹⁶Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture . . .*, 2-10.

¹¹⁷Frontline, “Taliban Lines,” : <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/talibanlines/>; Internet; accessed 24 March 2010.

Honour and Shame

Uncertainty avoidance is linked to the concepts of both honour and saving face. In simple terms, saving face means that neither party in a given exchange should suffer the embarrassment that is often caused by ambiguity or uncertainty.¹¹⁸ To the British Army, the notions of honour and shame are of such importance, they are treated as a separate cultural dimension doctrinal concept.¹¹⁹ In societies, such as Afghanistan, that attach great importance to tradition, ceremony, social rules, formality and rank, respect is extremely important. It is related to the concepts of honour and shame. When it is considered that honour is lost, the notion of humiliation and shame can be most powerful. At this point, feelings of intense resentment can result or possibly the desire for revenge that must be appeased before “dignity can be restored.” For an Afghan, “Honour is the rock upon which social status rests . . . Individual honour, a positive pride in independence that comes from self-reliance, fulfilment of family obligations, respect for the elderly . . . is a cultural quality most Afghans share.”¹²⁰ This concept of honour and face has practical relevance in Afghanistan that needs to be considered.

The concepts of honour and saving face are embodied in the Afghan concept of *Afghaniyat*. Although this word is difficult to translate, with the simplest translation being “Afghan-ness”, it is essentially an unwritten code of

¹¹⁸ Wunderle, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness* . . . , 17.

¹¹⁹ See Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture* . . . , 2-9.

¹²⁰ Nancy Hatch Dupree, “Cultural Heritage and National Identity in Afghanistan,” *Third World Quarterly* 23, no.5, <http://www.khyber.org/publications/001-005/culturalheritageafghan.shtml> accessed 15 January 2010.

conduct and honour that Afghans live by. The related Afghan notion is *namus* which is broadly translated as honour or face. The Taliban are able to use the concepts of *Afghaniyat* and *namus* against the Coalition. A Shura member in the Afghan province of Uruzgan explains, “Foreign forces always employ bullying tactics. They humiliate elders in front of their relatives; put a bag on their heads and body-search their female family members. It obviously benefits the Taliban [who] have photographs of such incidents and now send them via mobile to each and everyone.” The Shura member goes on to explain that when Special Forces kick down doors, this violates the principles of *Afghaniyat* and *namus*.¹²¹ U.S. Forces in Afghanistan have been criticized repeatedly by “both local media and political leaders for breaking down the doors of homes during raids, something that exposes pious Muslim women in a state of undress to the view of strange men.”¹²² Such acts put a man’s honour and “manliness” at stake. As he is duty-bound to retaliate, such incidents can easily be manipulated by opposition groups to coerce Afghans to act. In some communities, the concept of *namus* is so strongly socialized that house-to-house searches create “more ill will than civilian casualties caused by the military. In such communities, violation of honour has acute consequences for the capacity building force.”¹²³

For individuals in societies that place such emphasis on honour, as is the case with Afghan soldiers, admitting responsibility for an error can be shaming and

¹²¹Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, and Taylor, *Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds . . .*, 26.

¹²²Kimberly Marten, “Statebuilding and Force: The Proper Role of Foreign Militaries” in *Statebuilding and Intervention: Policies, practices and paradigms*, ed. David Chandler, 122-139 (New York: Routledge, 2009), 135.

¹²³Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, and Taylor, *Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds . . .*, 26.

lead to a loss of honour. As such, CF soldiers deployed on capacity building operations should expect Afghans to do everything possible to “negotiate” a wording that saves face and maintains their honour. Culturally, it can be expected that Afghan soldiers will do everything possible not to admit their mistakes. Furthermore, the Coalition soldiers should not expect the After Action Review process - an activity where soldiers and commanders publicly admit their mistakes to their peers - to be endorsed by the Afghan National Army. To the Afghans, such a process would most likely be a public humiliation.

One of the common assignments for the Canadian Forces when employed to build capacity in other countries is to train and teach the soldiers of that country’s military. In such a situation, when teaching soldiers from a culture where considerable importance is attached to honour and saving face, it is essential that this cultural dimension is considered and respected; neither the instructor nor the student should be placed in a situation where they might “lose face,” and instead, the instructor should strive to settle conflict by negotiation and compromise.¹²⁴ A further consideration related to the concept of face saving is the method that an instructor uses to verify comprehension. Coalition instructors often find it frustrating that if they ask an Afghan student if he or she understands a concept, they will always affirm that they do indeed understand. Often, if the Afghan student is asked to employ the concept, “they’ll do something completely wrong” even though throughout the entire period of instruction, the class aggressively nodded their heads and made eye contact. Coalition instructors often

¹²⁴O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 8.

become frustrated because they understand the situation as if the Afghan student has lied. More accurately, the higher Afghan cultural concept of saving face has manifested itself in the soldier not being entirely truthful about their understanding. To the Afghan, not being entirely truthful is preferable to public shame or embarrassing the instructor for lack of success in teaching the concept. The CF can employ an understanding of culture in such a society by checking for comprehension during instruction by asking a specific question that the students will get wrong if they do not understand the concept.¹²⁵

If shame or humiliation is felt on a regional or national scale, as would be the case in the situation of an occupation or defeat, it can be used as justification and motivation for the most extremes of behaviour.¹²⁶ This cultural concept was convincingly demonstrated during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s when they killed over a million Pashtuns. Rather than cause the Pashtuns to surrender, it increased the number of guerrilla fighters that the Soviets faced. Thomas Johnson, the Director of the Program for Culture and Conflict at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School advocates that this cultural dimension of revenge is why NATO cannot win using military kinetic (killing) force in Afghanistan. He suggests that killing is “counterproductive in a conflict involving an honour-based, revenge-driven Pashtun population.” Essentially, for every Pashtun fighter the Coalition kills, all of his male relatives have an honour-bound obligation to take up arms and revenge the fallen relative. This makes the killing of a Pashtun fighter,

¹²⁵O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 27.

¹²⁶See Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture . . .*, 2-9.

who are the majority of the Taliban, an “act of insurgent multiplication, not subtraction.” This idea of the Pashtun culture of revenge is evident in the Taliban saying, “Kill one enemy, make ten.”¹²⁷ In the 1970s, the Soviet Army in Afghanistan collided with this cultural concept. As Oliver Roy explains, for the Soviets, “every bombardment of a village produce[d] an influx of volunteers. . . . Nothing remain[ed] except to avenge themselves and to die, which they do willingly, gaining at least entrance to paradise in the next world.”¹²⁸ General Stanley McChrystal, the current Commander of NATO’s forces in Afghanistan, has internalized the importance of this Pashtun (Taliban) cultural concept of revenge killing. This is demonstrated when he articulates the “oddness” of “counter-insurgency maths.” As he suggests, “In a conventional war, killing two enemy soldiers among a group of ten leaves just eight to deal with. With insurgents, though, ten minus two could equal zero; [should they stop fighting] or, more often, it could equal 20 [if the dead men’s vengeful relatives join in the struggle].”¹²⁹ This cultural dimension of revenge is at least in part responsible for the growing insurgency in Afghanistan and the insurgency’s increased presence.¹³⁰

¹²⁷Thomas Johnson, Tribal Politics: Why We Must Understand the Human Terrain,” <http://www.vanguardcanada.com/AfghanTribalPoliticsJohnson>; Internet; accessed 15 November 2009.

¹²⁸Brigot and Roy, *The War in Afghanistan* . . . , 89; see also Beate Jahn, “The Tragedy of Liberal Diplomacy” in *Statebuilding and Intervention: Policies, practices and paradigms*, ed. David Chandler, 210-229 (New York: Routledge, 2009), 217-219.

¹²⁹Economist, “Obama’s Faltering War,” www.Economist.com; October 15 2009, Internet; accessed 20 January 2010.

¹³⁰Barnett R. Rubin, “Still Ours to Lose: Afghanistan on the Brink,” House Committee testimony on International Relations and the Senate Committee of Foreign Relations, 2006, available from http://www.cfr.org/publication/11486/still_ours_to_lose.html; Internet; accessed 15 April 2010; and Barnett R. Rubin, “Afghanistan’s Uncertain Transition from Turmoil to Normalcy,” Council on Foreign Relations, CSR no.12 (March, 2006); available from http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Afghanistan_CSR.pdf; Internet; accessed 15 April 2010.

Long-Term versus Short-Term Time Orientation

Anthropologists have long insisted that how a culture manages and thinks about time are clues to the meanings its members find in life and the nature of human existence. Primitive societies often ordered themselves by simple notions of time such as “before” and “after” moons, sunsets, sunrises and seasons. Running through our ideas of time are two contrasting notions: time as a “line of discrete events” and “time as a circle.” Time as a “line of discrete events” sees minutes, hours and days passing in a never-ending succession. Time as a circle sees time revolving so that the minutes, of the hour repeat as do the hours and the days.¹³¹ Attitudes towards time, - often referred to as long-term orientation or time orientation - determine whether a culture is focused on the past, present or future in making decisions and managing its affairs.¹³²

Long-term orientation is the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards such as perseverance and thrift. Short-term orientation is the fostering of virtues oriented to the past and present especially children, respect for tradition, preservation of face, and the fulfillment of social obligations.¹³³ The renowned researcher House, labelled a similar cultural dimension as future-orientation. This is the degree to which members of the society engage in such behaviours as planning, investing, and delaying gratification. The researcher Klein defined the “time horizon” cultural dimension as “describing how far in advance people will

¹³¹Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 123-124.

¹³²See Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture* . . . , 2-9.

¹³³Geert Hofstede, “Geert Hofstede – Cultural Dimensions,”<http://www.geert-hofstede.com>; Internet; accessed 17 November 2009.

set goals and justify their actions.”¹³⁴ An example of Middle Eastern focus on the present and past can be found in their languages. Glen Fisher notes that the Arab language is oriented in the past as the perfect verb form is past tense masculine and the language provides “little linguistic structure for talking about the future.” Essentially, the future is God’s concern and not man’s concern.¹³⁵ It is certain that a culture’s view of time will determine the relative prioritization of their daily actions and future goals and thereby have an effect on efforts to build capacity in host nation countries.

From the perspective of military capacity building operations, this relationship to time or long-term orientation dimension of culture is significant. It allows the CF soldiers to both manage their expectations of the host nation soldiers and to determine which of the NATO military techniques, tactics and procedures, may be culturally “mapable” [*sic*] onto Afghan military techniques, tactics and procedures. It is often helpful for capacity builders to understand whether the society they are working in is “time-conscious” and “very precise” about punctuality, or more “casual” about time “favouring long negotiations and slow deliberations.”¹³⁶ Differences in the view of time between U.S. as well as CF soldiers and Afghan soldiers have habitually caused frustrations and misunderstandings.¹³⁷

¹³⁴O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies* . . . , 9.

¹³⁵Glen Fisher, *International Negotiation: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Yarmouth: Intercultural Press Inc., 1980), 130 and Wunderle, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness* . . . , 41.

¹³⁶Wunderle, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness* . . . , 17.

¹³⁷See Mackenzie, “Imperatives For Working With Afghan Security Forces” . . . , 17-18; O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies* . . . , 9; and Maurice Poitras, “Adoptable

An inkling of the Afghan view of time can be perceived in the common Afghan saying, “You have the watches; we have the time”¹³⁸ and in the Afghan proverb “a river is made drop by drop.”¹³⁹ Although no detailed scientific data is yet available for the Afghan nation’s view of time and long-term orientation,¹⁴⁰ the manifestations of this cultural dimension of Afghan society are readily apparent to Western business interests in Afghanistan. The Canadian Centre for Intercultural Learning describing implications for commerce in Afghanistan explains that Afghans are extremely hardworking but notes that deadlines are not of a high importance. Although Afghans most often start at work thirty minutes late, they rarely leave on time often working several hours overtime without complaining or requesting compensation. The Centre explains that tribal cultures such as the Pashtuns “understand time to be cyclical and endless, something of which there will always be more. Time can be planned but the future is uncertain, and current action is dominated by consideration of the past.” In addition, the Afghan concept of time is shaped by “Islamic devotion and desire for happiness in the afterlife.”¹⁴¹

This cultural view of time affects Afghan behaviour. The manifestations and influence of this Afghan orientation toward time are readily apparent to

Afghan Customs or Practices in a Military Operations Environment” (Fort Leavenworth: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2009), 25-27.

¹³⁸See Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture* . . . , 2-10; for an instance of a Canadian soldier commenting on this Afghan saying about watches and time see Poitras, “Adoptable Afghan Customs or Practices in a Military Operations Environment” . . . , 25.

¹³⁹Eyre, “14 Tenants For Mentoring the Afghan National Army,” *The Bulletin* . . . , 4.

¹⁴⁰O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies* . . . , 9.

¹⁴¹Centre for Intercultural Learning, “Cultural Information – Afghanistan,” <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=af>; Internet; accessed 18 September 2009.

Western military forces in-country. Evidence of this view is presented by Norwegian Army Major Haug, when he quotes a Deputy Afghan National Army Corp Commander, Brigadier General Gul Aqa Naibi who states, “How can we possibly be able to worry about tomorrow? Our shoulders are not strong enough.”¹⁴² This can be seen in the fact that when advisors schedule training for Afghan forces, the Afghan soldiers are often late or fail to attend altogether, choosing to conduct other activities instead.¹⁴³

Dr. Ellen Feghali has described the Arab view of time as “polychromic” meaning that the development and maintenance of relationships is of a greater importance than “adherence to schedules, clocks or calendars,” and that multiple tasks are handled at the same time.¹⁴⁴ The Canadian Centre for Intercultural Learning spells out that there is “regular time” and “Afghan time” which is thirty to forty minutes subsequent to the designated time. The Canadian Centre explains that because of their “perception of time, Afghans may prefer to undertake many tasks at one time and may put less emphasis on planning and deadlines.”¹⁴⁵ Unlike Westerners, the length of time that it will take to complete a task is of “no importance to the Afghan”; Afghans are primarily concerned that the task is

¹⁴²Haug, “The Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team Program . . .,” 63.

¹⁴³O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 9.

¹⁴⁴Dr. Ellen Feghali, “Arab cultural communication patterns,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 21, no. 3 (August 1997): 365-367.

¹⁴⁵Centre for Intercultural Learning, “Cultural Information – Afghanistan,” <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=af>; Internet; accessed 18 September 2009.

accomplished. Also unlike most Westerners, Afghans can be “infinitely patient.”¹⁴⁶

Proof of this Afghan cultural dimension of time theory is evident in the observations of Canadian soldiers. Lieutenant-Colonel Wayne Eyre discerns, “It is a given that Afghans have a different sense of time. They think in terms of the past more than we do, and likewise we think of the future more than they. This has implications in terms of planning and meeting timelines.” He observes, “Report dates following leave are not generally firm . . . While we want to accomplish much in six months, for them this is a much longer-term endeavour . . .” The result is that the Afghans “often do not have the same sense of urgency” that NATO forces have when “prosecuting operations.”¹⁴⁷ Failing to plan and rigidly adhere to schedules does not denote laziness of the part of Afghan soldiers but rather it is a reflection of their long-term orientation and view of time.¹⁴⁸

Canadian and U.S. military advisors in Afghanistan report vexation at the Afghan soldiers “resistance” to planning.¹⁴⁹ U.S. Army Colonel Scot Mackenzie, after serving a one year tour as a mentor to the Afghan Ministry of Defence relates, “. . . time is not seen as a valuable resource in Afghan society. As a result, most events occur late or not at all, and certainly not according to a schedule. Planning is a major weakness that is inextricably linked to this outlook on time.” On this

¹⁴⁶Anderson, “Afghanistan Cultural Field Guide.”

¹⁴⁷Eyre, “14 Tenants For Mentoring the Afghan National Army,” *The Bulletin* . . . , 5.

¹⁴⁸O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies* . . . , 9-10.

¹⁴⁹For evidence of Canadian soldier see Poitras, “Adoptable Afghan Customs or Practices in a Military Operations Environment” . . . , 25-27; for U.S. soldier see Mackenzie, “Imperatives For Working With Afghan Security Forces” . . . , 17-18.

point, the Colonel expounds, “Unfortunately, until Afghans begin to value time as we do . . . many of the management and leadership techniques we espouse will go largely unheeded.”¹⁵⁰ This Western ethnocentric view perhaps underestimates the fundamental challenge of changing convictions and tenants that are deeply embedded in the Afghan national culture.

Canadian Lieutenant-Colonel Wayne Eyre, after serving as a military advisor to the Afghan National Army suggests a more pragmatic and culturally grounded view. He recognizes that: “Afghan military history spans thousands of years. It is integral to their culture, and their culture is central to the methods used by the ANA [Afghan National Army]. Due to this unique culture and history, they will never be a model of a Western army. Nor should they be.”¹⁵¹ The Canadian Lieutenant-Colonel emphatically underlines the role of culture when building capacity in the Afghan National Army when he articulates the following:

What this means is we must find culturally-relevant solutions that will endure after we depart. To blindly impose Western military doctrine without an understanding of its theoretical (and thus cultural) foundations is doomed to failure. Force structure, planning processes, personnel administration, and discipline all have historical and cultural underpinnings that do not readily accept the blind transfer [mapping] of a Western system. They [the Afghan National Army] require a military bureaucracy, just not necessarily ours. The solution is to find solutions that work for them while achieving the operational or developmental aim. This takes many mentors way out of their comfort zone, but our solution is not necessarily the right one.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰Mackenzie, “Imperatives For Working With Afghan Security Forces” . . . , 17-18.

¹⁵¹Eyre, “14 Tenants For Mentoring the Afghan National Army,” *The Bulletin* . . . , 4.

¹⁵²Eyre, “14 Tenants For Mentoring the Afghan National Army,” *The Bulletin* . . . , 4.

Currently NATO forces are teaching the Afghan Army a planning process that does not meet the above criteria.

The Western military methodology that is taught to the Army of Afghanistan is countercultural and not grounded in the Afghan orientation towards time. The Coalition is teaching the Afghan National Army the Operational Planning Process in both the Senior and Junior Command and Staff Course at the Afghan War College.¹⁵³ To facilitate this, it is reported that the Canadian Department of National Defence solicited retired graduates from the Canadian Land Forces Command and Staff College Army Operations Course or foreign equivalents. The intent is for them to serve as private security contractors training the Afghan National Army's Junior Officer Staff Course at the Afghan National Army Command and Staff College in Kabul Afghanistan.¹⁵⁴ The Operational Planning process is used to produce operational level plans. Matthew Lauder indicates that it is a "chronologically linear", "normative", "inherently rigid", "cumbersome" and "time-consuming" method to make a decision;¹⁵⁵ this is clearly

¹⁵³Samuel Chan, "Sentinels of Afghan Democracy: The Afghan National Army," *Military Review* 7, no.1 (January-February 2009): 29, 31 and Eric Musial, "Afghan War College – Open For Training," *The Phoenix Patriot*, 6 November 2006, 1, 3, available from http://www.oregon.gov/OMD/AGPA/docs/Patriot/Issue5-Phoenix_Patriot.pdf; Internet; accessed 24 October 2009.

¹⁵⁴David Pugliese Defence Watch, "Wanted By Canada: A Few Good Ex-Officers to Train the Afghan National Army," <http://communities.canada.com/OTTAWACITIZEN/blogs/defencewatch/archive/2009/12/23/wanted-by-canada-a-few-good-ex-officers-to-train-the-afghan-national-army.aspx>; Internet; accessed 22 January 2010.

¹⁵⁵Matthew Lauder, "Systemic Operational Design: Freeing Operational Planning from the Shackles of Linearity," *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no.4 (2009): 41, [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vo9/no4/doc/08-lauder-eng.pdf>; accessed 22 February 2010.

a process that is incongruous with the Afghan orientation towards time and planning.

Because of the cultural dimension of orientation towards time and planning, the Afghan way of war sees warfare as “a contest of endurance over time.” They do not conceptualize battle in terms of integrated military campaigns, but rather “fight in ebbs and flows” depending on the situation. Because of this Afghan view of war, they do not place great importance on planning military missions prior to the operation’s execution.¹⁵⁶ As such, from a capacity building point of view, it is unlikely that the NATO Operational Planning Process will have any more of a permanent influence on the Afghan Army than that of the Soviet planning process taught by the Red Army to Afghans from 1961 until 1979.¹⁵⁷

Attitudes towards time determine whether a culture is focused on the past, present or future in making decisions. It determines the society’s virtues and relative prioritization of their daily actions and future goals. This relationship towards the time dimension of culture is significant to military capacity building operations as it allows the CF soldiers to both manage their expectations of the host nation soldiers and to determine which Western processes are culturally “mapable” onto the other military. Because of the Afghan perception of time, Afghans prefer to undertake many tasks at one time, put less emphasis on planning and deadlines and are usually unconcerned with the length of time required to complete a task. A culturally grounded approach by CF capacity builders will produce culturally-relevant solutions that will endure after Canada and NATO leaves Afghanistan.

¹⁵⁶Anderson, “Afghanistan Cultural Field Guide.”

¹⁵⁷Chan, “Sentinels of Afghan Democracy: The Afghan National Army,” *Military Review* . . . , 26.

The Operational Planning Process is not aligned with the Afghan conceptualization of battle that sees warfare as a contest of endurance over time rather than an integrated military campaign.

Mastery versus Fatalism

Another dimension of culture that affects the perspectives and thinking of a society, and is therefore important to consider in capacity building operations, is the society's view on mastery versus fatalism. Although not one of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the earliest work on mastery and fatalism was conducted by the renowned researchers Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck in 1961. Their research distilled that some societies "accommodated to external events that controlled their lives" while some cultures were "driven to master" those events.¹⁵⁸ Cultures with a fatalistic orientation "tend to accept that external factors control their lives" and as such, they are more likely to "accept and adapt" to a situation rather than attempt to solve the issue. This cultural dimension in host national forces and government workers influences how they respond to threats. Fatalistic societies are often reluctant to plan for a crisis; capacity builders from mastery oriented cultures often perceive this reluctance as a lack of regard for the personal safety of the host nation's soldiers and government workers. Western capacity builders report confusion and frustration when dealing with societies with a fatalistic orientation.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸F Kluckhohn, *Variation In Value Orientations* (Evanston: Row and Peterson, 1961 n.p., quoted in O'Connor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 10.

¹⁵⁹O'Connor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 10.

The cultures of Canadians, Americans and most Western Europeans have a mastery orientation. Such societies tend to believe that they can overcome most obstacles with planning, adequate resources and hard work. The Arab culture and those cultures in the Middle East tend to be fatalistic. Those societies regularly “punctuate” planning discussions with *Insh’allah* – “Arabic for if God wills, as God pleases.”¹⁶⁰ Essentially the essence of this expression is that a person’s future health, wealth and safety are predetermined and “inevitable.” The cultural significance is that human actions are not expected to change this outcome so there is little point to planning ahead. Such societies tend to only act when crises or catastrophes happen. The common outlook of such societies is that if it is going to happen, than it shall indeed happen. Education lessens a fatalistic outlook somewhat; however, the educated in the Middle East remain more fatalistic than those in Western cultures.¹⁶¹

Afghan culture, like that of the Arabs, is fatalistic. Western capacity builders report that Afghans have a dim view of the future and often surrender their fate to Allah.¹⁶² An example from Iraq underscores the influence of such a perspective on the host national society’s motivations and actions. A capacity builder reported that Iraqi soldiers could not see the use in trying to save an injured soldier’s life “if God had willed them to die” during a traumatic incident. In Afghanistan, the European Network of NGOs report concern with the *Insh’allah*

¹⁶⁰Wunderle, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness* . . . , 41.

¹⁶¹F Kluckhohn, *Variation in value orientations* (Evanston: Row and Peterson, 1961 n.p., quoted in O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies* . . . , 10.

¹⁶²See Haug, “The Operational Mentoring and Liason Team Program . . .,” 63 and Mackenzie, “Imperatives For Working With Afghan Security Forces” . . . , 17-18.

culture in Afghans. They suggest that it is because in Afghan culture, “hospitality rather than security planning is of enormous importance.”¹⁶³ In Afghanistan, author Robert Kaplan observed that only Pashtuns “could have invented a game that requires a man to pick up a butterfly mine and toss it in the air without losing a hand” and only they could make walking through a minefield a “test of manhood.”¹⁶⁴ Although other cultural influences are inevitably present, it is evident that one requires a certain fatalistic view and belief in God to play with mines.

A United States Army Research Institute report for the *Behavioral and Social Sciences* presents a concept that could be most useful to Canadian Forces’ capacity builders coping with the notion of *Insh’allah*. The concept is based on a deep mastery of the host nation’s culture. The example given is of a U.S. capacity builder teaching a safety workshop in North Africa. During the class, a student relates that “incidents and accidents aren’t preventable,” as *Insh’allah*, they are God’s will. The report relates that a “respected tribal elder” explained to the class that the Koran states that if you have “scientific knowledge of hazards and you can prevent harm to your fellow man from that knowledge,” then Allah expects you to prevent that harm from occurring. It is reported that the students agreed with the logic.¹⁶⁵ The idea that notwithstanding the notion of *Insh’allah* in fatalistic

¹⁶³Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, and Taylor, *Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds . . .*, 40-41.

¹⁶⁴Robert Kaplan, *Soldiers of God* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 22.

¹⁶⁵O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 10, 26-27.

cultures, the Koran states that Allah expects mitigation when known hazards exist, is worthy of further study by Canadian capacity builders.

Another important consideration for Canadian Forces capacity builders is that fatalistic and collectiveness cultures do not follow Maslow's hierarchy of needs.¹⁶⁶ Maslow suggested that people in Western societies are motivated to fulfill their needs in the "following order: physiological needs, safety and security, belonging, achievement, esteem, and finally self-actualization." This is a significant theory, as Anthony Kellett explains, because it was "enshrined" in the leadership theory that indoctrinated the current generation of Canadian Forces' Senior leaders. The Canadian leadership theory about the motivation of soldiers relies heavily on Maslow's hierarchy of needs without revealing that the theory emphasizes "masculinity, Protestant work ethic, individualism, low power-distance, and a high tolerance or uncertainty." In brief, the theory works best for the North American culture with the cultural dimensions being: individualistic, masculine, and mastery-oriented. As we have seen above, the Afghan culture like Middle Eastern cultures in general, exhibits high power distance, low tolerance for uncertainty and a fatalistic outlook. As such, it is essential that CF capacity builders do not "assume" that Maslow's hierarchy of needs "based on Western cultures" applies in Afghanistan. Research indicates that in Middle Eastern cultures, contrary to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, building a relationship is more

¹⁶⁶The same could likely be said about any culture that differs substantially in its cultural dimensions from the Western culture Maslow based his theory on.

important than safety or the need for basic services.¹⁶⁷ Failing to understand this means that the cultural lens through which we are viewing host national actions is astigmatic; as such, our interpretation of the motivations behind the actions will not be focused or accurate.

Mastery versus fatalism is an important dimension of culture to consider in capacity building operations because it affects the outlook of a society. Fatalistic cultures tend to accommodate and accept events while cultures of mastery, tend to work to control and solve those same events. This cultural dimension in a host nation's forces often influences how they respond to threats. Fatalistic societies are often reluctant to plan for a crisis which is often interpreted by Western forces as a lack of regard for personal safety. Canadian culture is one of a mastery orientation which tends to believe that obstacles can be overcome with hard work and planning. Middle Eastern and Afghan cultures tend to be fatalistic with most planning dominated by the notion of Insh'allah – if God wills, where the future is both predetermined and "inevitable. Education lessens a fatalistic outlook somewhat; however, the educated in the Middle East remain more fatalistic than those in Western cultures. Fatalistic and collectiveness cultures do not follow Maslow's hierarchy of needs as it is based on: masculinity, the Protestant work ethic, individualism, low power-distance, and a high tolerance or uncertainty. The implication to capacity building forces in Afghanistan is that the building of a relationship is more important than the need for basic services or safety.

¹⁶⁷Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle* (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, 1982), 5; Department of National Defence, A-PD-131-001/PT-001 *Leadership Volume I: Junior Leaders Manual* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1978), 2-1 – 2-9; and O'Connor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 14.

Achievement versus Relationship / Masculinity versus Femininity

The achievement versus relationship dimension of culture is a further significant consideration for the Canadian Forces conducting capacity building tasks. This cross-cultural dimension quantifies the amount of time the society spends on tasks as opposed to building and maintaining relationships. It also refers to the importance of personal relationships in conducting business. This cultural dimension was referred to by Hofstede as the masculinity versus femininity dimension.¹⁶⁸ In relationship-focused cultures, people tend towards conducting business with family, friends and people who are well known to them. In such societies, people always “want to know their business partners very well before talking business.” In these cultures, the relationships are based on trust and networking is essential for task accomplishment.¹⁶⁹ Such cultures tend to “allow change to happen at its own pace” and find it “unwise” to try to force the “rate of change.”¹⁷⁰

By contrast to those in relationship oriented societies, individuals in “deal-focused” societies are open to doing business with strangers and tend to be more focused on the “qualities of the deal itself,” rather than the organization or person offering it. Research shows that individualist cultures tend to be deal and achievement focused¹⁷¹ It is worthy of note that seven countries in Hofstede’s research have individualism as their highest cultural dimension: United States

¹⁶⁸O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 8.

¹⁶⁹Wunderle, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness . . .*, 17.

¹⁷⁰O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 8.

¹⁷¹Wunderle, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness . . .*, 17.

(score of ninety-one); Australia (score of ninety); United Kingdom (score of eighty-nine); Netherlands and Canada (score of eighty); and Italy (score of seventy-six).¹⁷² Citizens of societies high in achievement often believe that they can control change by use of detailed plans, target dates, rigid priority setting, and by “making frequent reports.”¹⁷³

The task-oriented U.S. Army advisors in Afghanistan have been challenged by cultural differences in the emphasis placed on relationships versus achievements. U.S. soldiers “struggled to understand their counterparts’ perceived lack of task orientation.” Western capacity building forces are often upset by the priority that host national forces place on their families, personal obligations, and other perceived time-wasting activities such as conversation, eating and tea drinking.¹⁷⁴ The Canadian Centre for Intercultural Learning stresses to Canadians the Afghan preference for “developing relationships and trust” prior to conducting business. It also warns that while Canadians often build relationships by completing tasks together, Afghans may be mistrustful seeing this as “unnatural.”¹⁷⁵

A Canadian military advisor to the Afghan National Army supports this observation. Lieutenant-Colonel Eyre states, “The role of personal networks that sometimes supplants the chain of command is sometimes a source of frustration.

¹⁷²Geert Hofstede, “Geert Hofstede – Cultural Dimensions,”http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_united_states.shtml; Internet; accessed 17 November 2009.

¹⁷³O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 8.

¹⁷⁴O’Conor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 8.

¹⁷⁵Centre for Intercultural Learning, “Cultural Information – Afghanistan,”
<http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=af>; Internet; accessed 18 September 2009.

The Afghan culture is very much one of personal connections” He goes on to stress that building rapport is the most important thing as the Afghan culture is one where personal relationships have to be established before professional ones are considered. He stresses that it is a society where family is central to the culture.¹⁷⁶

Retired U.S. Army Lieutenant-General David Barno, the first Commander of Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan (responsible for training the Afghan National Army and Police Force) goes even further in his advice to Western capacity builders. He advises that, “Drinking tea and socializing is a fundamental part of Afghan culture that should not be rushed by an overbearing and impatient mentorship approach.” He goes on to suggest weaving business around Afghan “social rhythms.”¹⁷⁷

The relationship orientation aspect of society is linked to the concept of reciprocity. British military cultural doctrine separates this out for emphasis as it is foreign to both the British and Canadian sense of right and wrong. Obligations “to give, to receive and to reciprocate create social ties.” Acts that may seem to be an immoral practice in a Western culture such as bribery or corruption may to another culture represent legitimate and morally expected ways of developing social relationships.¹⁷⁸ Almost without exception in Canadian culture, although personal

¹⁷⁶Eyre, “14 Tenants For Mentoring the Afghan National Army,” *The Bulletin* . . . , 2-4.

¹⁷⁷Mackenzie, “Imperatives For Working With Afghan Security Forces” . . . , 22.

¹⁷⁸Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture* . . . , 2-9.

and professional relationships are important, rules and ethics have a higher priority.¹⁷⁹

In Afghan society, things are different as personal and professional relationships are more important. Nepotism and corruption are “to a certain degree” accepted in Afghan culture.¹⁸⁰ As one U.S. Army capacity builder explained, “lying, cheating, and stealing are accepted personal faults that are considered a personal weakness of the individual instead of an affront to the victim.”¹⁸¹ Canadian Lieutenant-Colonel Wayne Eyre clearly articulates that in Afghanistan corruption is “a way of life.” He observes that what Canadians might consider corruption is to the Afghan perspective the way that business is conducted. As such, there are differences in Canadian and Afghan “ethical boundaries.”¹⁸² Such differences need to be recognized when conducting capacity building operations in Afghanistan.

It is irrefutable that the Canadian Forces’ capacity builders in Afghanistan are working in a relationship oriented culture. In such an environment, military trainers will be most successful if they conduct interdependent, group-oriented instruction that allows for collaboration, “mutual problem-solving” and regular interaction. Any rewards or praise should be oriented towards the group (including

¹⁷⁹Centre for Intercultural Learning, “Cultural Information – Afghanistan,” <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=af>; Internet; accessed 18 September 2009.

¹⁸⁰The Finish Defence Forces International Centre, *Varying Cultures in Modern Crisis Management* . . ., 73.

¹⁸¹Colonel Steve Haustein, *CTC-A Information Paper Memorandum for Commander, US Central Command*, (Kabul: 17 April 2007) quoted in Mackenzie, “Imperatives For Working With Afghan Security Forces” . . ., 18.

¹⁸²Eyre, “14 Tenants For Mentoring the Afghan National Army,” *The Bulletin* . . ., 5.

the individual's family or clan) as opposed to individually focused praise as is the norm in Western cultures.¹⁸³ Reciprocity is important in Afghan society.

Obligations to give, to accept and to reciprocate fabricate social ties. Acts such as bribery or corruption represent legitimate and morally expected ways of nurturing social relationships in the relationship oriented culture of Afghanistan.

Incorporation and consideration of these cultural dimensions will enhance the Canadian Forces' effectiveness in building Afghan capacity.

Masculinity of the Culture

Although the Afghan culture is a relationship oriented, it is also very masculine. Notwithstanding the fact that little scientific data is available on this dimension of culture, a few points must be made about this issue as it affects capacity building efforts.

Afghan soldiers value courage, physical fitness, and resilience. From childhood, males are raised to use weapons. To be an Afghan military leader, it is necessary to have demonstrated both courage and bravery on the battlefield. Afghans also judge their leaders by their appearance and how they interact with their soldiers.

To an Afghan, the purpose of warfare is to gain recognition and glory for one's tribal clan; the Western measures of military success are secondary. These Afghan cultural nuances have practical ramifications. Several times during the 2001 U.S. led war in Afghanistan, Afghans were seriously injured after being so eager to claim glory that they rushed forward before the grenades they had thrown

¹⁸³O'Connor, Roan, Cushner, and Metcalf, *Cross-Cultural Training Strategies . . .*, 9.

exploded. Another repercussion of this aspect of Afghan culture is that the soldiers will refuse to attack targets, even if they are highly valuable strategic targets, if no opportunity for combat or glory is present. This was the case during the Soviet war in Afghanistan when Pakistani advisors tried without success to get the Afghan *Mujahideen* fighters to attack the Soviet oil pipeline along the Salang Highway to the Bagram Air Base. Although it was an above ground pipeline and clearly a strategic target, such an attack would offer no opportunities for glory. As such, the Afghan forces refused to attack the pipeline.¹⁸⁴

A final practical effect of this masculine aspect of Afghan culture can be seen in the fact that Afghan soldiers refuse to wear glasses “no matter how bad their eyesight is.” Despite having had eye refractions and having been provided with the glasses, the soldiers refuse to wear them because glasses are a sign of imperfection and weakness. In a highly masculine society, no “man” wants to appear weak to his peers.¹⁸⁵

Although limited data is available on the cultural dimension of masculinity, it is clear that it has a significant impact on a culture. For the Afghan National Army it affects who they see as leaders, the targets that they see as legitimate and even whether or not they will wear their glasses.

CONCLUSION

The Canadian Government’s International Policy sees the Canadian Forces conducting the complex task of providing military training to foreign armed forces.

¹⁸⁴Anderson, “Afghanistan Cultural Field Guide.”

¹⁸⁵Captain Carl Thompson, “Winning in Afghanistan,” <http://easterncampaign.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/winninginafghanistan1.pdf>; Internet accessed 4 January 2010.

Such a task requires an ingrained understanding of culture. Senior Canadian officers and soldiers have stated that the present cultural awareness training provided prior to deploying to Afghanistan is not sufficient. The Canadian Forces' leadership has stressed the importance of cultural understanding and incorporating cultural planning into military operations in the present and future battle space. Militaries around the world have been developing their own approaches to integrating culture and operations. Several modern Western militaries go so far as considering cultural understandings to be more important than technical or tactical skills.

Culture is an elusive and spongy concept. It is the main influence which shapes an individual's sense of self. It is vital because it enables a society's members to function with one another without the requirement to continuously negotiate the meaning of symbols and events. It is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and artefacts that members of a society employ to cope with their world and each other. Culture provides the lens through which members of a group see and interpret the world around them. Specific examples from the Afghanistan mission underscore the significance, relevance and military importance of understanding this lens of culture.

A society's understanding of power is central to the approach that can be used to build local military and political capacity. Power gradient is the perceived gap in authority between a subordinate and a superior. This cultural dimension addresses the expected relationship between instructors and students. In high power distance cultures such as Afghanistan, students expect a significant distance

between teachers and students. As well, in such cultures, learning tends to be teacher centric primarily using memorization, lecture and repetition as the central teaching model. Power in Afghanistan is based on social factors including land ownership, religion, age and family status. The large gap in authority between a superior and a subordinate in Afghan society manifests itself in an autocratic leadership style. Efforts to win the hearts and minds of the ordinary Afghan locals have little chance of changing the balance of power in a particular area as Afghan society is not egalitarian. Afghans are an extremely proud people who not react well to condescension and arrogance on the part of foreigners. Due to the notions of power in Afghan culture, charity actions are complex and often have unintended consequences.

Formality in a culture causes a significant importance to be attached to ceremony, tradition, ritual, rank and social rules. Formal cultures like Afghan society are hierarchically structured and for this reason Afghans prefer and expect to be treated in a formal manner. Afghans are slow to change; if Afghans perceive a rapid evolution, they will do everything possible to resist that change. Any capacity building operation must incorporate the fact that Afghan rituals and traditions are sacred and their society is culturally adverse to rapid cultural evolutions.

Individualism versus collectivism refers to the degree to which a population reinforces collective achievement or individual achievement. Afghanistan being a collective society, has a great respect for tradition and does not emphasize competition or open praise of individual students. Instead, Afghan students derive

greater satisfaction from working toward a collective achievement. Military advisors should stress how new skills or learning will improve the group's performance or quality of life. Afghans are most comfortable with a consensus decision making model. This tradition of consensus decision making, makes it challenging to arrive at a decision and makes negotiations with Afghans complex and complicated. Consensus decision making is counter-cultural to the command focused Western military tactics NATO is teaching to the Afghans. Conflict in Afghanistan is unpredictable as there is no social stigma in switching sides during a battle.

The uncertainty avoidance dimension of the culture measures the society's tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity and risk. As a high uncertainty avoidance society, Afghans tend to be most intolerant of ambiguity and are distrustful of new behaviours or ideas. They dogmatically cling to historically tested patterns of behaviour aimed at making the population feel more certain and reduce ambiguity.” Based on this motivation, Afghans share little information and minimize delegation. Afghan citizens and soldiers expect their leaders to maintain and comply with tradition and to act according to historically accepted patterns. Afghan officers use military procedures that have not changed in many years regardless of whether or not they are effective. The Western military tactics that Canadians are teaching Afghan soldiers are based successive levels of delegation of command; such tactics are counter-cultural to the Afghan National Army soldiers who come from a culture high on the uncertainty avoidance scale.

Uncertainty avoidance will also cause Afghans to wait to see which side is the conclusive winner before openly declaring their support.

Honour and saving face means that neither party in a given exchange should suffer the embarrassment that is often caused by ambiguity or uncertainty. When it is considered that honour is lost, the notion of humiliation and shame can be most powerful causing the desire for revenge that must be appeased before dignity can be restored. The Taliban are able to use the concepts of honour and shame against the Coalition when Afghans are bullied, elders are humiliated or homes are raided. Such acts put a man's honour at stake making him duty-bound to retaliate. For Afghan soldiers, admitting responsibility for an error can be shaming and lead to a loss of honour. As such, CF soldiers deployed on capacity building operations should expect Afghans to do everything possible to negotiate a wording that saves face and maintains their honour. It can be expected that Afghan soldiers will do everything possible not to admit their mistakes making the use of the After Action Review process questionable and akin in Afghan eyes to a public humiliation. If an Afghan student is asked if he or she understands a concept, they will always affirm that they do indeed understand. The higher Afghan cultural concept of saving face manifests itself in the soldier not being entirely truthful about their understanding of the issue. To the Afghan, not being entirely truthful is preferable to public shame or embarrassing the instructor for lack of success in teaching the concept. In such a situation, the CF needs to check for comprehension during instruction by asking a specific question that the students will get wrong if they do not understand the concept. Saving face makes killing counterproductive

in the honour-based, revenge-driven Pashtun population. For every Pashtun fighter the Coalition kills, all of his male relatives have an honour-bound obligation to take up arms and revenge the fallen relative.

The Afghan short-term orientation view of time fosters virtues oriented to the past and present especially children, respect for tradition, preservation of face, and the fulfillment of social obligations. The Arab language and Islamic religion are oriented in the past. As such, Afghans are neither time-conscious nor very precise about punctuality and they favour long negotiations and slow deliberations. They are extremely hard workers but deadlines are not of a high importance. The development and maintenance of relationships is of a greater importance than adherence to schedules, clocks or calendars. Afghans prefer to start multiple tasks at the same time putting less emphasis on planning and deadlines. The Western military methodology of the Operational Planning Process that is taught to the Army of Afghanistan is countercultural and not grounded in the Afghan orientation towards time. Afghans see warfare as a contest of endurance over time. They do not conceptualize battle in terms of integrated military campaigns, but rather fight in ebbs and flows. As such, Afghans do not place great importance on planning military missions prior to the operation's execution.

Afghans are fatalistic and therefore they make little effort to try to control events, accepting that external factors control their lives. They accept and adapt to a situation rather than attempt to solve the issue. Planning discussions are punctuated with *Insh'allah* – Arabic for if God wills as a person's future health, wealth and safety are predetermined and inevitable in Afghan eyes. Human actions

are not expected to change this outcome so there is little point to planning ahead. Afghan society tends to only act when a crisis or catastrophe happens. Fatalistic and collective cultures do not follow Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Research indicates that to an Afghan, contrary to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, building a relationship is more important than safety or the need for basic services.

Afghans value relationships over achievement and as such spend a significant amount of time building and maintaining them. In Afghan culture, people tend towards conducting business with family, friends and people who they know well. In Afghan society, relationships are based on trust and networking is essential for task accomplishment. Afghans place priority on their families, personal obligations, and activities such as conversation, eating and tea drinking. Capacity builders need to weave business around Afghan social agendas. In Afghan society reciprocity is important. Acts that may seem to be an immoral practice in a Western culture such as bribery or corruption represent to Afghans legitimate and morally expected ways of developing social relationships.

Afghanistan is a masculine society. Afghan soldiers value courage, physical fitness, and resilience. Males from childhood are raised to use weapons. To be an Afghan military leader, it is necessary to have demonstrated both courage and bravery on the battlefield. The purpose of warfare to Afghans is to gain recognition and glory. Afghan soldiers will only attack strategic targets if there is an opportunity for combat and glory. In this highly masculine society, no man wants to appear weak to his peers. This includes not wearing glasses when required.

This paper has conclusively demonstrated that there are significant dimensions and components of Afghan culture that are relevant to Canadian Forces' capacity building operations in Afghanistan. This analysis has added to the available knowledge by examining and relating the significant cultural dimensions of both Afghan and Canadian culture. Previously, no such structured and detailed analysis has been conducted. The dimensions of culture were examined individually using Afghan capacity building examples. The cultural dimensions that were determined to be particularly relevant include: power gradient; formality versus informality; individualism versus collectivism; tolerance for uncertainty; honour and shame; reciprocity; long-term versus short-term orientation; mastery versus fatalism; achievement versus relationship; and masculinity versus femininity. While building capacity in Afghanistan, Canadian and Afghan cultures are interacting. These capacity building operations take place in an environment of counterinsurgency where a detailed understanding of culture acts as a force multiplier. Understanding the significance of culture will ensure that we neither alienate the Afghan population through our efforts nor frustrate Canadian Forces' soldiers through the selection of unachievable goals and means to achieve those goals.

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