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CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE



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Introduction

This paper discusses cultural intelligence and its importance in understanding multinational partners from a military perspective. Cultural intelligence refers to an individual's ability to work effectively in diverse cultural settings. According to Claflin et al. (2010), cultural intelligence involves understanding better other people's culture and way of life to make the military actions less challenging and reduce potential conflicts that may be associated with the lack of cultural understanding of the military.¹ The multinational operating environment necessitates a deeper conceptualization and understanding of cultural intelligence between the multinational interagency and inter-service partners. Improved cultural intelligence will enhance the cooperation and foster an understanding that will lead to positive outcomes in the operational environment. The case study used in this paper will be the Gulf War in 1990-1991 otherwise called Operation Desert Storm and how cultural intelligence impacted on it.

How Multinational, Interagency and Multiservice Operate

According to Spirtas et al. (2008), multinational, interagency and multiservice operations need to involve group bonding during training to ensure that the individuals learn about each other's culture.² For example, Britain has been an ally of the United States of America since World War 2 and, thus, had a better understanding of each other's cultural background during the 1990-1991 Iraq invasion. The cultural understanding between both sides can only be realized by giving an opportunity to the military personnel to interact and learn the cultural values they have

¹ Claflin, Bobby, Dave Sanders, and Greg Boylan. *Improving Analytical Support to the Warfighter: Campaign Assessments, Operational Analysis, and Data Management*. Military Operations Research Society Alexandria VA, 2010. .pg.21

² Spirtas, Michael, Jennifer D. Moroney, Harry J. Thie, Joe Hogler, and Thomas-Durell Young. *Department of Defense Training for Operations with Interagency, Multinational, and Coalition Partners*. Rand National Defense Research Inst Santa Monica CA, 2008, Pg.59

in common, thus making it easy to command them.³ Consultations are another important thing to be adopted. As Spirtas et al. (2008) state, the joint coalition may have differing ideas on particular actions with each party pushing for their own opinion, but through consultations, interagency and multinational harmony is achieved.⁴ Without cultural intelligence, such consultations can be of little to no use due to misunderstandings during the communication.⁵

Negative Repercussions Due to Lack of Cultural Intelligence

Multinational operations involve militaries from different countries with different cultures. Different languages, for instance, can have a great impact on the success of a multinational military operation.⁶ For example, in the 1990-1991 war, communication with the local community was a challenge, thus limiting intelligence gathering. Also, few Arabs understood the English culture and vice versa and, when civilians were ordered to stop at road blocks, they could not understand both the spoken and sign languages and kept moving forward which resulted in the military opening fire to a friendly group as a result of ignored command caused by language and cultural barriers.⁷ According to Culhane et al. (2016), a better understanding of different cultures in multinational operations helps manage and improve

³ Papaargjir, Linda. "Role of US in the War in Iraq Case Study." PhD diss., Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 2008, pg.27

⁴ Spirtas, Michael, Jennifer D. Moroney, Harry J. Thie, Joe Hogler, and Thomas-Durell Young. *Department of Defense Training for Operations with Interagency, Multinational, and Coalition Partners*. Rand National Defense Research Inst Santa Monica CA, 2008. Pg.60

⁵ Ulrich, Uwe. "Intercultural competence in the Bundeswehr." 2012,pg.12

⁶ Guardia, Mike. *Bradley vs BMP: Desert Storm 1991*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016, pg. 45

⁷ Ibid

communication, thus enhancing cooperation and intelligence gathering between the military and the host community.⁸

Lack of cultural competence may lead to persistent conflicts. For example, during Operation Desert Storm in Kuwait, military men in the multinational army campaign invaded even the holy places, thus getting into conflicts with the locals who could have otherwise supported them. Cultural intelligence would have helped the military know what places to avoid bombing or setting up base in which, in turn, would have created a friendlier attitude from the locals.⁹

Recommendations

Several militaries around the world have adopted the policy of carrying out multinational trainings. According to Goldenberg and Dean (2017), multinational trainings help identify weak areas that the military commanders need to address, like coordinated communication in command centers. For example, if soldiers deployed in Iraq in 1991 had carried out multinational trainings before the actual war, deaths from friendly fire accidents would have been reduced, for example, during the battle of Norfolk in the Desert Storm operation.¹⁰

Language barriers make it difficult to relate with the local communities, thus leading to hostile reception.¹¹ For example, American and British forces experienced language barriers with Arab-speaking allied forces which made it necessary to have two commanders: General Schwarzkopf for the American and British forces and LTG Kahlid Bin Sultan for the Arab-allied forces.

⁸ Culhane, Elizabeth, Patrice Reid, Loring J. Crepeau, and Daniel McDonald. "Beyond frontiers: the critical role of cross-cultural competence in the military." *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist* 50, no. 2012, pg.33

⁹ Papaargjir, Linda. "Role of US in the War in Iraq Case Study." PhD diss., Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 2008, pg.28

¹⁰ Goldenberg, Irina, and Waylon H. Dean. "Enablers and Barriers to Information Sharing in Military and Security Operations: Lessons Learned." *In Information Sharing in Military Operations*, pp. 251-267. Springer, Cham, 2017, pg.19

¹¹ Deresky, Helen. *International management: Managing across borders and cultures*. Pearson Education India, 2017, pg.21

Communication is an important element in joint operations. Experience sharing among the officers should be encouraged to help create mutual learning environment and improve cultural competence.¹² In Operation Desert Storm, the majority of friendly fire deaths resulted from the poor communication on the battle field between the British, American, French and Arab forces caused by cultural and language differences. Military trainers around the world encourage communication and information sharing among allied militaries in order to better understand different multicultural environments and eradicate friendly fire deaths. Effective communication ensures orders are properly received and followed, thus reducing unnecessary deaths during multinational operations.¹³

Conclusion

Cultural intelligence is just as critical as military hardware. Joint operations rely on the cultural intelligence for the success to be achieved with minimal casualties from friendly groups and armies. Lack of cultural intelligence can have detrimental effects on the military activities in a war zone. Military formations around the world are encouraged to invest more in the areas that help in improving cultural intelligence. Improved cultural intelligence will enhance the cooperation and understanding that will enable positive outcomes in the operational environment.

¹² Meyer, Eric G., and Gary H. Wynn. "The Importance of US Military Cultural Competence." In *Military and Veteran Mental Health*, pp. 15-33. Springer, New York, NY, 2018, pg.18

¹³ Ibid., pg.18

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