

# Culture and Interoperability in Integrated Missions

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Integrated missions require people from diverse backgrounds to work together and to work with local populations with whom they may be unfamiliar. In both instances, cultural differences can present challenges or opportunities. This article extends a model of how culture affects interoperability among members of an integrated mission – horizontal interoperability – to the understanding of how culture affects an integrated mission’s work with local populations – vertical interoperability. The article identifies seven principles of action which allow integrated missions to take account of culture in engaging local populations.

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Participants in UN peacekeeping missions face difficulties both in relating to the people in the areas to which they are deployed and in working together effectively with others serving the mission, both military and civilian. This has been true since the earliest peacekeeping missions, which brought a wide array of actors into interaction with one another and with local populations.<sup>1</sup> Military observers, and later peacekeeping forces, have been supported by civilian field staff, have interacted with non-governmental organization (NGO) staff in the area, and have drawn on the efforts of UN specialized agencies. All of these institutions and organizations have also interacted with local populations. The ability to work with others in the mission and to work with local populations is essential to the mission working smoothly; in other words, to improving interoperability. In this article, we call the interaction that takes place among various kinds of international actors participating in peacekeeping ‘horizontal interoperability’, and the interactions of those people with local populations, ‘vertical interoperability’.<sup>2</sup>

While some early observers commented that many horizontal and vertical difficulties had cultural aspects, for the most part it was uncommon for culture to be mentioned in early analyses of peacekeeping, which instead tended to focus on the practicalities of peacekeeping or its geopolitical aspects. This began to change with the ‘multifunctional’ missions of the 1990s and later, which intensified interactions among military peacekeepers and various civilian organizations and agencies, and strained the coordination capacities of many missions. The difficulties experienced in the interactions among military, civilian humanitarian and UN agencies in the missions in Somalia, the former Yugoslavia and Cambodia raised issues of horizontal interoperability for explicit examination.

Nevertheless, early efforts at reconciling difficulties in horizontal interoperability continued to focus on strategic and technical, rather than cultural, factors.<sup>3</sup> The practical need to understand and overcome the difficulties in civil–military

interactions led to studies that highlighted the differences among military and non-governmental organization (NGO) actors,<sup>4</sup> analysed how these differences were problematic for missions,<sup>5</sup> or elaborated ways to overcome these difficulties.<sup>6</sup> The bulk of this work concentrated on describing or prescribing various mechanisms for smoothing civilian–military interaction through joint training, in-field coordination, and developing shared operating procedures to ease likely points of tension.<sup>7</sup>

A relatively recent development is the use of the concept of culture as an analytic lens through which to examine problems in horizontal interoperability, and account for the points of tension among actors in complex missions. Thus, for example, Donna Winslow identified cultural factors as being at the root of the breakdown in the Canadian Airborne's behaviour in Somalia, Robert Rubinstein discussed cultural considerations in understanding the challenges to coordination among military and civilian components of a mission, and Sandra Whitworth identified cultural factors which transform peacekeeping into organizations that are essentially masculine and militaristic in character.<sup>8</sup>

The main purpose here is to suggest a framework for approaching issues of vertical interoperability in integrated missions. We propose an approach to understanding how to take into account local cultural factors that affect coordination and cooperation among and between integrated missions and local populations. One principle upon which we base our analysis is that interaction with local populations and interaction among mission staff of all types are not isolated one from the other. Rather, we see these as linked in important ways, and approach the issue of vertical interoperability through the same cultural lenses that have been developed to advance horizontal interoperability.<sup>9</sup> Although examples are drawn from past missions, the purpose here is exploratory, programmatic and forward-looking. We propose both descriptive and normative ways of approaching the understanding of how local cultures affect integrated missions.

### Culture and Peace Operations

Cross-cultural encounters have always been a daily occurrence for peacekeepers, sometimes involving dramatic cross-cultural misunderstandings.<sup>10</sup> Yet, culture as an analytical concept has figured very little in scholarly and policy analyses of peacekeeping. Considerable efforts have been invested in developing doctrine and procedure for peace operations, but these do not take culture as a major component, if they treat it at all.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, textbooks that explicate peacekeeping as an instrument of international action devote attention to the geopolitical, economic, international law and military aspects of peace operations, but generally leave out culture.<sup>12</sup> Only in some instances has this omission begun to be rectified.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the few general texts that have noticed the importance of culture to peace operations, during the last decade several studies examining specific aspects of culture have appeared. Christopher Leeds, for instance, presented an extended case for considering culture in the training of peacekeepers, as did Betts

Fetherston.<sup>14</sup> Some studies examine relations between peacekeepers and local populations, and aspects of those relationships that make for success or frustration with the mission.<sup>15</sup> In this area, early pioneering work by Marianne Heiberg on the UN Interim Force in Lebanon showed that the relationship developed with local populations was critical for mission success.<sup>16</sup> Mohamed Sahnoun showed how developing food relief distribution systems consistent with local social understandings was critical to success in Somalia, and Martin Stanton showed that a lack of such understandings contributed to the failure of later efforts.<sup>17</sup> Tanja Hohe argued that the clash between local conceptions of political authority and the international community's making a fetish of 'free and fair' elections was problematic for the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET).<sup>18</sup> Although culture is not the major analytic perspective used by Béatrice Pouligny, her analysis of UN peace operations, focusing on the importance of the daily lives of peacekeepers and local populations, is an important study of these considerations.<sup>19</sup> Other studies elaborate on the way that culture affects the interaction taking place among members of peacekeeping missions, and how a broader cultural contextualization of peacekeeping is important for its success.<sup>20</sup>

There are many reasons why the cultural dimensions of peacekeeping are underdeveloped areas of analysis. Among these is the somewhat counter-intuitive situation in which the organizational culture of multilateral missions does not allow discussion of cultural challenges, but instead elaborates a kind of extreme cultural relativism in which all troops are seen as doing equally good jobs.<sup>21</sup> Reviewing these reasons fully is outside the scope of this article, and discussions of this situation can be found elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> It is sufficient to note here that patterns of interaction are framed by culture, and therefore even the material aspects of peace operations (which can be counted and standardized) are culturally constituted. As Marshal Sahlins states, 'In all its dimensions, including the social and the material, human existence is symbolically constituted, which is to say, culturally ordered.'<sup>23</sup> For this reason, it is difficult to fit culture into the standard categories used to plan or implement peace operations.<sup>24</sup> Culture cannot be easily fitted to the common distinctions among strategic, operational and tactical levels of information used in planning and evaluating missions. Rather, the cultural nature of actions at each level are importantly interlinked.<sup>25</sup>

An additional difficulty in considering culture is that it has been defined in a wide variety of ways for many purposes. Some of these definitions complement one another; others appear contradictory. We adopt the common anthropological conception of culture articulated by Roy d'Andrade, who sees culture 'as consisting of learned systems of meaning, communicated by means of natural language and other symbols systems, having representational, directive, and affective functions, and capable of creating cultural entities and particular sense of reality. Through these systems of meaning groups of people adapt to their environment and structure interpersonal activities.'<sup>26</sup> In this conception, culture is the framework within which people 'interpret their experiences and see their own and other's actions as proper or meaningful'.<sup>27</sup> It is a fluid pattern of beliefs that orients and constrains rather than determines behaviour. Culture is therefore not uniform for all members of a cultural group.

In the context of peacekeeping, in many respects a massive exercise in problem-solving, culture is important because it is the basis upon which people generate options for structuring their actions and creating solutions to problems. Another way of speaking about this understanding of culture is that it gives a frame of reference from which people gain an initial sense of their reality and develop their ideas about what is proper behaviour in a particular situation. It influences what people believe as real, and shapes their emotional reactions. Characteristically, culture, *qua* frame of reference, operates outside one's conscious attention. It orients and disposes people to particular actions and interpretations, but does not determine what those actions will be; and it affects all scopes of human action, from individual motivation to international attitudes. Indeed, as Marshall Sahlins writes, 'Just because what is done is culturally logical does not mean the logic determined that it be done – let alone by whom, when or why – any more than just because what I say is grammatical, grammar caused me to say it.'<sup>28</sup>

This symbolically based concept of culture helps to make sense of, and contextualize, the issues raised when integrated missions interact with local populations. Before considering some of those, however, we examine the cultural origins of integrated missions and some resulting implications relevant to both horizontal and vertical interoperability.

### **Integrated Missions and Horizontal Interoperability**

The push for integrated missions embodies recent developments in the arena of peace operations. An integrated mission is 'an instrument with which the UN seeks to help countries in the transition from war to lasting peace, or address a similarly complex situation that requires a system-wide UN response, through subsuming various actors and approaches within an overall political-strategic crisis management framework'.<sup>29</sup> Crucially, the idea of integrated missions thus enshrines in doctrine the conception that all 'stakeholders' at all levels of a mission will work together as equals from earliest planning through to implementation. This raises the cultural aspects of horizontal interoperability to the fore.

As noted above, since the earliest peacekeeping missions, military actors have interacted with a wide variety of civilian organizations. In some settings, military peacekeepers worked alongside civilian organizations, but each responded to their own imperatives. In other settings, such as Bosnia–Herzegovina, East Timor and Afghanistan, there has been greater investment in coordination among military and civilian components, reflecting an increasing normative focus on improving civil–military coordination.<sup>30</sup> Many of these efforts have focused on identifying organizational cultural differences between military and civilian actors – noting, for example, that militaries are hierarchical, closely controlled, and well resourced, while NGOs tend to be decentralized, operate independently, and be minimally staffed.

However, these efforts miss a deeper problem, which is that attempts at civil–military coordination frequently run up against disparate understandings of the meanings of partnership and cooperation. This has been exacerbated by the dominance of military concerns in mission planning. Both at the strategic and

tactical levels, these intercultural communication clashes have complicated the search for interoperability.

For example, during field research we frequently listened to conversations between civilian humanitarians and their military counterparts concerning the need for coordination. These conversations had a distressing commonality, regardless of location, as if following a script. The conversations always began with professions of respect for one another's concerns and an expression of a desire to work as partners. This was followed by a discussion of the practicalities of operating together, which inevitably revealed differing preferences and incentives. The stumbling points could be at any level, including the humanitarians' concern for the preservation of humanitarian space as a key symbolic component of their world view, the military's concern for unitary command and coordination also as a key symbol of their world view, and disagreements about the proper site for mission activities.<sup>31</sup> At this impasse, the earlier professions of respect and partnership were repeated. The conversation resumed with an examination of the practicalities involved, only to clash once again. Depending on the patience and will of the interlocutors, this pattern of profession of respect and partnership, followed by disagreement, returning to a profession of respect and partnership, could continue for some time. But, nearly universally, the conversations we observed ended with the parties failing to reach genuine agreement – reaching a false consensus, at best. Typically, the military interlocutor would communicate, directly or by indirection, the idea that 'yes, we want to partner with you, as long as you follow our lead and instructions' – not an expression of respectful partnership but an assertion of dominance and control.<sup>32</sup>

This interaction illustrates that, while it is relatively straightforward to describe and try to accommodate surface cultural differences between groups (e.g. hierarchical versus decentralized), it is much harder to harmonize deep cultural differences.<sup>33</sup> Yet these deep cultural differences – which particularly involve the ways in which people understand and feel about what they experience, and whether they believe and feel that they are being taken seriously or not – are significant complicating factors to horizontal interoperability. This is no less the case with vertical interoperability. Among the many different ways in which local culture factors into vertical interoperability, one of the most important issues is the perception of respect (or lack thereof) and partnership between local populations and international efforts. Deep cultural differences play a key role in this perception.

### **Integrated Missions and Local Culture**

One of the challenges inherent in achieving vertical interoperability is getting local people and members of a mission to share understandings of the meanings and rationales for the actions undertaken by the mission and by local people. We offer a framework for approaching the task of achieving vertical interoperability, rather than a case study. In this conception, what matters in cultural encounters is not so much the surface cultural forms that are common to a society, but the

underlying symbolic reasons for those forms and the cognitive and affective systems into which they are tied.

The surface cultural forms we have elsewhere called ‘travellers’ advice’, which provides a list of ‘facts’ about a group’s ways of dealing with the world, and a basic list of things a person engaging with them should or should not do. It focuses on things like how to count in the other group’s language, and advice about what gestures to make and postures to avoid: ‘Never show the sole of your foot’, ‘don’t eat with your left hand’, and so on. These are stereotyped instructions focusing on the surface elements of culture, and most often on those surface aspects that are different or exotic from the perspective of the person giving the instruction.

Although there is some use in describing the potential complications that can cause cultural mistakes at the surface, this must be done in a way that connects them to the deep culture level. Especially important in conflict and post-conflict situations, where people have experienced deprivation and trauma, is communicating in a way that allows people to understand themselves as valued and respected. This cognitive step can help align affective responses so as to avoid the incorrect attribution of motive.

Thus, achieving vertical interoperability in integrated missions hinges on peacekeepers’ ability to interact with local peoples in ways that communicate genuine partnership and respect for the key symbols of their world view. Moreover, if they are properly engaged, members of the populations served by the mission can assist as cultural instructors who have real responsibilities, and can serve as primary liaisons between the mission and the population. Respect and partnership are key symbols for interoperability, yet peacekeeping missions have generally failed to convey these values in their actions – and even in their intent, in terms of the kinds of normatively driven structures and institutions that peacekeeping missions construct and/or impose on local societies. This in turn has deleterious and cross-cutting impacts on several domains of social life, including law, politics, and conflict management; social stratification; gender roles; and economic and subsistence practices.<sup>34</sup>

In the remainder of this article, we examine in more detail how deep culture matters in peacekeeping operations, before concluding with a discussion of seven principles of action intended to improve vertical interoperability.<sup>35</sup>

### *Respect and Partnership: Key Symbols for Interoperability*

Local populations with whom peacekeeping missions interact have concerns stemming from their histories. Those in integrated missions thus need to be attuned to how issues of identity and memory affect the perception of the mission. These experiences and expectations affect how local people who encounter the mission respond to such questions as: ‘Is the person with whom I am speaking treating me with respect? Are they offering aid in good faith?’

These considerations go much beyond the interpersonal contact that may occur between peacekeepers and citizens. Instead, questions of respect and partnership apply, perhaps most acutely, to the structures, institutions, norms and consequences that come along with peacekeeping missions. These structures,

institutions, norms and consequences, if considered at all, are generally appraised according to operational or economic rather than cultural impact. This misses an important part of the interaction.

Two examples illustrate this. First, it is common for peacekeeping missions to place extra stress on already stretched physical and human infrastructures in the countries to which they are deployed. This comes in the form of the distortion of the economy, for example, from the hiring of local staff and in rents paid for space used by a mission.

Motivations for employing local staff may vary, from the simple need for practical assistance to a deliberate strategy to engage the local population and build local capacity. However, this may develop into a 'local hire syndrome', which has three elements. First, because of the better salaries offered by the peacekeeping mission, local people work in jobs for which they are over-qualified. Second, although they are paid better than they would be on the open market, they are relatively less well compensated for their work than internationals with similar qualifications (but who are not doing more menial jobs). Third, rather than build local capacity, an internal brain drain takes place. These three elements can generate feelings of resentment and create the possibility of strife between locals and internationals. During the UN mission in Kosovo, for example, antagonism and bitterness arose among the local professionals not working for the mission, whose salaries were much lower than unskilled labour working for UNMIK.<sup>36</sup> Donika Kaçinari describes this situation from the perspective of the local population:

Kosovar Albanians are adjusting themselves accordingly. They know that it is an artificial economy, and that it won't last forever. But they want to benefit from the situation as long as possible. There are waiting lists for English and computer courses. Many young people put off returning to their university studies in order not to lose their jobs. Meanwhile, the frustration grows of professors, teachers, and doctors, who are maintaining fundamental services for pitiful salaries. And the disappointment increases of experts placed in international agencies, who in most of the cases have no knowledge of the local situation.<sup>37</sup>

The second example is drawn from the mission in East Timor, but is not unique to that mission. UNTAET deployed after a period during which the Timorese had been disenfranchised and dominated by the Indonesian state. In interactions with the local population, it was essential both that local concerns and traditions were genuinely respected by the international community, and that the local population could perceive this respect. Yet, in its attempts to establish a judicial system, the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor displayed little regard for indigenous understandings of justice, reconciliation or respect. Instead, it applied a Western-style legal system, the underlying key symbols of which clashed with important elements in the indigenous systems for establishing social relations. Hohe notes:

In western criminal law, the perpetrator is accused by the state, and the prosecutor acts on behalf of the population. Here a victim becomes a pure witness. In the indigenous law, however, offenses are a matter between the families involved (except for the theft of public goods). The victim is on one side of the conflict and expects to be reimbursed.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, the drive for ‘free and fair’ elections in East Timor ignored traditional sources of Timorese political authority and became a contested issue shaped mainly by non-indigenous concerns.<sup>39</sup>

In both examples, the local construction of international actions is an understanding that the mission is not respecting the local population’s norms, traditions or past collective experience. Such an understanding clashes with the noble rhetoric and ‘real’ intent of the ‘international community’. Moreover, this understanding cuts across different domains of social life within the local population. The local hire syndrome shows how the structures and practices of peacekeeping missions directly affect (for better or worse) local social stratification, economic practices and vitality, and possibly gender roles insofar as women are preferred for administrative jobs in international offices and may therefore become their family’s primary breadwinners. The imposition of Western-style legal and political systems shows a lack of sensitivity to the local society’s own legal, political and conflict-management traditions, and elevates a specific normative ideal over exchange-based understandings that have more traction in and relevance to the affected society. When this happens, the result is to undercut the success of the mission. As this discussion suggests, at times the sense of disrespect experienced by locals is more than just a matter of ‘mere perception’. The dispatching of ‘experts’ with little or no knowledge about the local situation is not just perceived by locals as deeply disrespectful; it actually is deeply disrespectful.

### **Planning for Interoperability**

Successful vertical interoperability requires correct interpretation of social interaction and communication, of verbal and non-verbal messages, and of symbolism and perception.<sup>40</sup> Thus, for international actors operating in integrated missions, knowledge of language, symbols, rituals and behavioural models – while essential – is not all-inclusive. The seven principles of action listed below aim to elucidate how peacekeepers can better understand and use culture to improve the success of peacekeeping operations.

#### *Be Aware of Meaning*

Success in integrated missions hinges on peacekeepers being able to correctly interpret what they encounter and to interact in a culturally positive manner. At the start of an assignment, peacekeeping mission elements do not have all the answers needed to successfully navigate the foreign situations they find themselves in. They therefore need to be as flexible as possible to absorb and respond to the cultural cues they encounter. These can run the gamut from surface cultural elements, such as gestures for yes and no, to deep cultural understandings

about what is implied in negotiations and the contracts and agreements between parties that result.

For example, in 1992, a recently deployed detachment from Operation *Restore Hope* arrived in Wanwaylen, Somalia, to secure a Red Cross food warehouse that was being looted.<sup>41</sup> Initially, the force dispersed a large crowd around the warehouse with only minor injuries to the troops and the Somalis. After gaining control of the warehouse, the detachment faced a large, apparently unorganized crowd. Some people in the crowd explained that, rather than distributing the food fairly, the Somali Red Cross official in charge of the supplies had been giving food to his own people and selling what remained. The crowd increased in size as it was joined by curious onlookers, but showed no sign of belligerence. Soon, however, the officer in charge realized that his detachment was too small to hold off the crowd should disturbances erupt. The officer decided that the way to disperse the crowd was to distribute the food in an orderly and even-handed manner. The officer acted without knowing the local tribal patterns of competition and reciprocity that shape the distribution and sharing of resources in the area, and without understanding the local uses and meanings people there attached to relief aid during the crisis. As a result, the well-intentioned food distribution provoked rather than calmed the crowd, and rather than communicating respect, the actions were interpreted in just the opposite manner – as disregard for indigenous social relations. Ultimately, the unit withdrew from Wanwaylen having stacked the remaining food supplies outside the warehouse.

Furthermore, an exchange itself may have different meaning to the parties involved. For example, an agreement between peacekeeping administrators and a local vendor for services can easily be construed differently. Peacekeeping forces, with their public agency strictures of accountability and transparency, will necessarily consider signed, written agreements and their detailed instructions as the beginning of a series of actions, and expect complete and expedient fulfilment. Conversely, local vendors could see the agreements as an attainment of status and/or a livelihood that will sustain their family network. Their perception of timeliness and fulfilment do not take on any role of immediacy: it may instead be more desirable that the contract last as long as possible.

### *Pay Attention to Symbols*

The symbolic aspects of political and national cultural conflicts provide an additional layer of difficulty for vertical interoperability in integrated missions. Symbols take on particular meaning, and interpretation of them goes beyond the simple observances of peacekeepers. Yet, missing or misconstruing symbols can unintentionally create problems. For example, in some countries, symbols represent political parties so that citizens can vote knowledgeably without having to be literate. Often the symbols are common items such as flowers, birds or colours. Similar colours or symbols worn by outside entities may be construed as support for one or the other, and create misunderstandings and tension.

In relation to the Sudan, for instance, Jok Madut Jok notes that during the long North–South war peoples around the country developed high levels of

distrust of one another, both of the armies and of ordinary people from different regions.

To reconcile this mistrust, [interveners] have to pay attention to the power of symbols and symbolism. The question of Shari'a in Khartoum and the way non-Muslims have been treated will continue to give southerners a feeling of insecurity in what is supposedly their own country. Other symbols include the use of Islamic colors such as the color of the passport cover, or the names given to things and places such as the river the Arabs call Bahr-el-Arab and the Dinka call the Kiir. The use of these terms or applications of these colors may not have any ill intentions behind them, but they are usually read differently by different people. It is important to look for neutral symbols if all citizens of Sudan are to feel at home in every corner of the country.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, sensitivity is required concerning the meanings that the local populations attach to actions, objects and places as a result of their particular history.<sup>43</sup> This understanding can be difficult to achieve, yet not getting the understanding of these symbols right can have devastating effects on a mission, communicating just the opposite of the intended messages about power, respect and partnership. Thus, one of those we interviewed concerning international work in East Timor noted:

The situation began nose-diving after new year's [*sic*], and hasn't stopped since. Everyday it gets worse, leading to stones flying at the UN, and worse, deservedly so. They have written in blood red letters 'UNTAET' on the old Indonesian torture centre: but the human rights office doesn't even realize it was the torture centre, so the message will be lost on them.<sup>44</sup>

#### *Avoid Attributing Motive*

'One of the most common aspects of cross-cultural miscommunication is the supposition that others act with the same motives as we do.'<sup>45</sup> Peacekeeping mission elements encounter different parties on the ground that have wants and needs at odds with the mission and goals of the operation, and often with each other. It is difficult to discern the motives of the population served (which itself comprises many different constituencies), as communities necessarily have a longer outlook and need to position themselves for survival once the mission departs. This creates a complex situation in which short-term and long-term motivations may be in tension. For integrated missions to work effectively, they must carefully parse the motivations of local populations so as not to wrongly attribute negative or positive motivations for action – and be aware of how their own actions play into, promote or hinder these motivations.

#### *Conflict management and culture*

The methods of conflict management and adjudication of disputes indigenous to the area of operation may differ from those ordinarily used by the internationals. The discussion above of UNAMET's troubled attempts to establish a judicial

system in East Timor is one example of the difficulties that can arise in this situation.

On a daily basis, local populations and international actors may experience the 'rule of law' in diametrically opposite ways. For example, one interviewee noted that during her time in Kosovo there was 'a very strict divide between "internationals" and "locals" in Kosovo, and this is played out in every context. Thus, local cars sit in long lines at roadblocks and are searched thoroughly by KFOR, while UN or NGO vehicles drive to the front of the line to be waved through by soldiers.'<sup>46</sup>

Michael Bhatia gives a similar account in relation to international groups working in Afghanistan. He observes,

In addition to the over 30,000 soldiers deployed to Afghanistan as part of ISAF, NATO and the United States, there are thousands of expatriates in Afghanistan, predominantly concentrated in Kabul. Yet many foreign 'helpers' live sheltered from daily life in Afghanistan – rarely traveling outside of Kabul and only interacting with Afghans as colleagues, servants or beneficiaries. Closeness is prevented by guardposts, compound walls, restaurants and the closed doors of white landcruisers.<sup>47</sup>

Another consideration is the need to implement agreements and mandates in ways that engage local cultural understandings and institutions. In Somalia the decentralized clan system could be incorporated in the international community's implementation of their mandate, or it could be ignored. Efforts by the UN Operation in Somalia to create a secure environment concentrated on reconciling the two principal clans involved in conflict, rather than 'promoting the maintenance of traditional clan equilibrium and power-sharing'.<sup>48</sup>

### *Ensure Cultural Expectations Are Explicit*

Explicit understanding of expectations between mission elements is difficult because of professional cultural differences. Ensuring expectations are explicit in a vertical manner is more difficult still. From the outset, it is essential to communicate consistently with the local population to make mutual expectations known. In Somalia, the failure to clarify expectations with the Somali people on the part of the peacekeeping mission was clearly a contributing factor to its failure. Somalia has a long tradition of clan-based rule, yet UNOSOM did not consult the local clan elders in their decision-making process. The failure to include clan leaders in decision-making led to disasters in food distribution, safety and security, and the ability to navigate freely in the country.<sup>49</sup>

Although the Security Council resolutions authorizing peacekeeping missions are increasingly more detailed, the need to ensure that the objectives are clear with the local population is still a major undertaking. Coordination and genuine dialogue between mission elements and the local population will assist in this endeavour. This need can be filled with cultural liaisons and civilian affairs officers working closely together to ensure clear communication.

### *Avoid Creating In-Group/Out-Group Formations*

Interacting with local populations necessarily means encountering the divisions that exist in any community. Social distinctions are an important part of all human communities. Members of integrated missions must be aware that some of these distinctions can facilitate their work, while other distinctions can be pernicious. Understanding the boundaries between groups, and learning how flexible and permeable these boundaries can be, is important to vertical interoperability. Both the positive and the negative aspects of recognizing such groups were displayed during the missions in Somalia. At first the missions worked effectively with the social distinctions among clans to effectively deliver food and other aid.<sup>50</sup> Later efforts foundered when the mission contributed to creating and reinforcing pernicious distinctions between groups.<sup>51</sup> In general, it is critical to be aware of what differences make a difference for the local populations. In some settings, the significant differences will revolve around ethnicity or religion, but human societies draw social distinctions of consequence on all manner of differences including education, gender, social class, kinship and residence.<sup>52</sup>

### *Stay Apprised of Power Differences*

Other less overt hierarchies always exist within a community, simply as a matter of power concentration within that community. Difference can include the following: who in a social interaction has standing and legitimacy; who has the appropriate status to negotiate and give assurances; who has the power to intervene; and who should be called upon for counsel. In Somalia, the clan elders held power, and the failure to engage them in the peace negotiation process resulted in the collapse of that effort. Peacekeeping forces must understand not only the hierarchies within a society but also where the power and expertise lies. The aim of identifying the traditional loci and of understanding the dynamics of local power is not necessarily to reinforce those structures and processes. Rather, where those traditions disenfranchise groups that the international community desires to empower, such as women or youth, change requires effectively engaging those structures and processes.<sup>53</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Planning for interoperability is essential if integrated missions are to be successful. To achieve interoperability among themselves (horizontal interoperability), the organizational cultural differences among military, NGO, UN specialized agencies, and others need to be anticipated and harmonized in a way that results in mutually respectful and equal partnership in mission planning and implementation. In addition, however, integrated missions must translate the multiple organizational cultural preferences and understandings into actions and statements that the local population similarly understands. In addition to the important logistical and geopolitical considerations attendant to peacekeeping missions, this requires a focus on local culture.

We have suggested that the key aspect of deep culture about which to be aware is how to engage the local community so that its members feel respected and treated as equal partners in the rebuilding of their home communities, rather than perceiving themselves as demeaned and further disenfranchised. Genuine respect and partnership between international actors and local populations require that the former's actions be contextualized in the community's particular historical experiences. We concluded with illustrations of seven principles of cross-cultural interaction that members of integrated missions can follow to enhance their abilities to work effectively with local communities. By paying attention to these principles, integrated missions can promote the linkages among the strategic, operational and tactical levels necessary for integrated missions to succeed.

#### DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions in this article are those of the authors and do not represent the official position or policies of the US Department of Homeland Security.

#### NOTES

1. For examples of the difficulties of these interactions, see Robert A. Rubinstein, *Peacekeeping Under Fire: Culture and Intervention*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008.
2. The terms 'horizontal and vertical integration' are used in a metaphorical sense only. There is no intention to characterize either the mission or the local population as culturally 'above' or 'below', or 'better' or 'worse' than the other.
3. For example, in their analyses of lessons learned from the experience of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia, Michael Doyle and Nishkala Suntharalingam focus only in passing on issues of coordination and interoperability: 'The UN in Cambodia: Lessons for Complex Peacekeeping', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.1, No.2, 1994, pp.117–47.
4. See Francis Kofi Abiew, 'NGO–Military Relations in Peace Operations', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.10, No.1, 2003, pp.24–39.
5. See Thomas G. Weiss, *Military Civilian Interactions: Intervening in Humanitarian Crises*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999.
6. Marc Sommers, *The Dynamics of Coordination*, Providence, RI: Thomas J. Watson, Jr. Institute for International Studies, 2000; J.W. Rollins, 'Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) in Crisis Response Operations: The Implications for NATO', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.8, No.1, 2001, pp.122–9; Gerald Hatzenbichler, 'Civil-Military Cooperation in UN Peace Operations Designed by SHIRBRIG', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.8, No.1, 2001, pp.117–21; and Olga Oliker, Richard Kauzlarich, James Dobbins, Kurt W. Basseuner, Donald L. Sampler, John G. McGinn, Michael J. Dziedzic, Adam Grissom, Bruce Pirnie, Nora Bensahel and A. Istar Guven, *Aid During Conflict: Interaction between Military and Civilian Assistance Providers in Afghanistan, September 2001–June 2002*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004.
7. Hugo Slim, 'The Stretcher and the Drum: Civil–Military Relations in Peace Support Operations', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.3, No.2, 1996, pp.130–9.
8. Donna Winslow, *The Canadian Airborne Regiment in Somalia: A Socio-Cultural Inquiry*, Ottawa, ON: Canada Communications Group Publishing, 1997; Robert A. Rubinstein, 'Cross-Cultural Considerations in Complex Peace Operations', *Negotiation Journal*, Vol.19, No.1, 2003, pp.29–49; Sandra Whitworth, *Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping: A Gendered Analysis*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2004.
9. See Robert A. Rubinstein, 'Intervention and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Peace Operations', *Security Dialogue*, Vol.36, No.4, 2005, pp.527–44; 'Culture, International Affairs and Peacekeeping: Confusing Process and Pattern', *Cultural Dynamics*, Vol.2, No.1, 1989, pp.41–61.

10. On the beginnings of UN Truce Supervision Organization, see William D. Claytor, 'United Nations Truce Supervision Organization: History and U.S. Marine Involvement', Global Security.Org, 15 April 2007, accessed at [www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1990/CWD.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1990/CWD.htm). On how cultural misunderstanding led to UN Emergency Force troops shooting at a muezzin during the call to prayer in Gaza, see Brian Urquhart, *A Life in Peace and War*, New York: Harper and Row, 1987, p.136. For a discussion of possible cultural dimensions in Nasser's pre-1967 war rhetoric, see Robert A. Rubinstein, 'Cultural Aspects of Peacekeeping: Notes on the Substance of Symbols', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.22, No.3, 1993, pp.547–55.
11. For example, the Sphere Project, *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, 2004 Edition*, Oxford: Oxfam, 2004; International Peace Academy, *Peacekeeper's Handbook*, 3rd edn, New York: Pergamon, 1984; and Joint Nordic Committee for Military UN Matters, *Nordic UN Stand-by Forces*, 3rd edn, Stockholm: Norstedts Tryckeri, 1986.
12. Culture does not figure significantly in the analyses presented by the following: Anthony Verrier, *International Peacekeeping: United Nations Forces in a Troubled World*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981; John Hillen, *Blue Helmets: The Strategy of UN Military Operations*, Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1998; Indarjit Rikhye, *The Theory and Practice of Peacekeeping*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1984; Jatit Chopra, *Peace-Maintenance: The Evolution of International Political Authority*, London: Routledge, 1999.
13. Culture is briefly considered in general texts by A. B. Fetherston, *Towards a Theory of United Nations Peacekeeping*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1994, pp.164–73; and by Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, *Encyclopedia of International Peacekeeping Operations*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999, pp.63–5.
14. Christopher A. Leeds, 'Culture, Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeper Training and the D Mediator', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.8, No.4, 2001, pp.92–110; Fetherston (see n.13 above).
15. Marianne Heiberg, 'Peacekeepers and Local Populations: Some Comments on UNIFIL', in Indarjit Rikhye and Kjell Skjelsbaek (eds) *The United Nations and Peacekeeping: Results, Limitations, and Prospects: The Lessons of 40 Years of Experience*, London: Macmillan, 1990, pp.147–69. See also Tamara Duffey, 'Cultural Issues in Contemporary Peacekeeping', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.7, No.1, 2000, pp.142–68; Martin Stanton, 'A Riot in Wanwaylen: Lessons Learned', *Army*, Vol.44, No.12, 1994, pp.24–30; Mohamed Sahnoun, *Somalia: The Missed Opportunities*, Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1994. These all treat local cultural factors in relation to UN efforts in Somalia. On the importance of local culture to UNTAET, see Tanja Hohe, 'Clash of Paradigms: International Administration and Local Political Legitimacy in East Timor', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.24, No.3, 2002, pp.569–89; 'Totem Polls: Indigenous Concepts of "Free and Fair" Elections in East Timor', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.9, No.4, 2002, pp.69–88.
16. Heiberg (see n.15 above).
17. Sahnoun (see n.15 above) and Stanton (see n.15 above).
18. Hohe (see n.15 above).
19. Béatrice Pouligny, *Peace Operations Seen from Below: UN Missions and Local People*, Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006.
20. On the broad relevance of culture to peacekeeping, see Rubinstein (n.1 above) and Rubinstein 1989 (n.9 above); on cultural factors affecting the interaction among peacekeepers, see Rubinstein (n.8 and 10 above); Duffey (n.15 above) and Winslow (n.8 above).
21. This extreme cultural relativism is the official narrative. It creates blindness to cultural issues. Privately, in contrast, peacekeepers make comparisons in which some troops are more or less competent than others. Because there is no official way to deal with these observations, they can become sources of invidious comparisons and difficulties in interaction. See Rubinstein (n.1 above), ch.5; Efrat Elron, Nir Halevy, Eyal Ben-Ari and Boas Shamir, 'Cooperation and Coordination Across Cultures in Peacekeeping Forces: Individual and Organizational Integrating Mechanisms', in Thomas Britt and Amy Adler (eds) *The Psychology of the Peacekeeper: Lessons from the Field*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003, pp.262–82.
22. Rubinstein (see n.1 above), ch.3.
23. Marshall Sahlins, 'Two or Three Things That I Know About Culture', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol.5, No.3, 1999, p.400.
24. Rubinstein 1989 (see n.9 above).
25. Rubinstein (see n.9 above) refers to this linkage between levels of analysis and levels of action as theoretical and strategic scaffolding.
26. Roy G. d'Andrade, 'Cultural Meaning Systems', in Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. LeVine (eds) *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp.88–119, quote p.116.

27. Rubinstein (see n.8 above), p.36.
28. Sahlins (see n.23 above), p.409.
29. Espen Barth Eide, Anja Therese Kaspersen, Randolph Kent and Karen von Hippel, *Report on Integrated Missions: Practical Perspectives and Recommendations*, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2005, p.4.
30. Sommers (n.6 above); Hatzenbichler (n.6 above); and Oliker et al. (n.6 above).
31. Following the view that cultural considerations are encoded in a group's symbolic repertoire, we note that some symbols are more central than others in establishing meaning parameters for a group activity. Social theorists have variously identified those symbols most influential for a group by various terms, including 'root metaphors', 'dominant symbols' and 'key symbols'. See, e.g., Sherry Ortner, 'On Key Symbols', *American Anthropologist*, Vol.75, 1973, pp.1339–46; Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1942; Abner Cohen, *Two Dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Society*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974; David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988.
32. This characterization is drawn from interviews and observations made by Rubinstein during field research beginning in 1987. Something of the flavour of these discussions can be gleaned from the papers in Sarah Meharg, *Helping Hands and Loaded Arms: Navigating the Military and Humanitarian Space*, Clementsport, NS: Canadian Peacekeeping Press, 2007. The editor opens with the assertion, 'Humanitarian space no longer exists' (p.1), which would certainly be contested by many in the humanitarian community.
33. Deep culture refers to the cognitive and affective structures and processes that motivate action and shape the ways in which people react to their environments. It is these aspects of culture upon which attributions of motive are based. The distinction between surface and deep cultural differences mirrors that between surface structure and grammatical structure in language, and was described in Robert A. Rubinstein, "'Deep Culture" in Hybrid Peace Operations: Multidimensional Training Challenges', *Prepared for Peace?: The Use and Abuse of 'Culture' in Military Simulations, Training and Education*, Newport, RI: Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy, Salve Regina University, 2004, pp.6–7.
34. See, e.g., the discussion of how humanitarian efforts in Somalia were derailed in part because of Somali perceptions that the international community did not act in ways that indicated partnership and respect, in John Drysdale, *Whatever Happened to Somalia?*, London: HAAN Associates, 1994, pp.90–101.
35. Rubinstein (see n.8 above), pp.41–5.
36. Katarina Ammitzböll, 'The Unintended Consequences of Peace Operations in the Host Economy from a People's Perspective', in Chiyuki Aoi, Cedric de Coning and Ramesh Thakur (eds), *Unintended Consequences of Peacekeeping Operations*, Tokyo: UN University Press, 2007, pp.69–89.
37. Donika Kaçinari, *Cultural Awareness and Adjustment of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Kosovo*, MA paper, International Relations Programme, Maxwell School of Syracuse University, 2001.
38. Tanja Hohe, 'Justice Without Judiciary in East Timor', *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol.3, 2003, p.346.
39. Hohe (see n.15 above).
40. The major headings presented here are drawn from Rubinstein (see n.8 above), pp.46–7, where they are suggested as ways to approach horizontal interoperability. Here we use them to organize a discussion of vertical interoperability.
41. Stanton (see n.15 above), pp.24–30. It is also possible that, beyond not understanding cultural differences, they did not think one could react differently to the same situation.
42. Jok Madut Jok, 'Promoting Physical and Human Security', *Sudan at the Crossroad*, Medford, MA: Fletcher School, Tufts University, 2004, pp.3–4.
43. Generally, for instance, members of communities who have experienced repression at the hands of their national military, or from colonial militaries and administrators, may greet international humanitarian interventions with considerable scepticism or mistrust.
44. Personal communication to Rubinstein, anonymous by request.
45. Rubinstein (see n.8 above), p.47.
46. Similarly, a former aid worker for the American Friends Service Committee said to Adrienne Benson Scherger in 1999 that during a three-year span in Zambia, where he did not possess a valid driver's licence, he was on many occasions required to go to the local magistrate to

resolve a traffic violation. Each time, he was turned away, being told it was not a big deal and he should simply ignore it.

47. Michael Bhatia, 'Shooting Afghanistan—Beyond the Conflict,' *The Globalist*, accessed at [www.theglobalist.com/StoryId.aspx?StoryId=6417](http://www.theglobalist.com/StoryId.aspx?StoryId=6417). Michael Bhatia was killed in Afghanistan on 7 May 2008; he was an extraordinary humanitarian and humanist, a profound thinker about humanitarian intervention, and a cherished friend and colleague.
48. Duffey (see n.15 above) p.158.
49. Sahnoun (see n.15 above).
50. Ibid.
51. Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*, New York: Penguin, 2000.
52. E.g., see Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Fine Line: Making Distinctions in Everyday Life*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
53. See, e.g., Sandra D. Lane and Robert A. Rubinstein, 'Judging the Other: Responding to Traditional Genital Surgeries', *Hastings Center Report*, Vol.26, No.3, 1996, pp.31–40.